It was on March, 1978 that the Janata Government in Assam assumed office following the mandate given by the people of the state. It was headed by Mr. Golap Borbora. Endowed with blessings and genuine good will of the people the Janata Government declared itself committed to the task of fulfilling their wishes and aspirations. The rising expectations following the coming to power of the first non-congress Ministry in Assam after independence were not borne out and, by the summer of the 1978, several movement started in the state championing a variety of causes. But the problem of infiltration of Bangladesh nationals into Assam assumed new dimension. The Dainik Asom in its editorial on March 12, 1978 pointed out that tasks before the new Government were numerous and varied, but the economic issues were vital to the state and the problem of unemployment assumed a magnitude calling for greater efforts to mitigate it. It observed, "Monopoly over the economy of the state by the outsiders is detrimental to the interests of the local people. While unemployment problem is gaining momentum, the influx from outsiders is continuing - even hordes of non-Indian have settled in Assam as if they were Indians. The encroachment on land and Government reserves is without parallel in any State of India". On March 22, 1978, the same daily highlighted the gravity of
the influx of outsiders and of foreign nationals from Bangladesh and Nepal in view of its impact on the socio-economic condition of the indigenous people of Assam.

The editorials of the Dainik Asom were often devoted to the influx problem. On August 11, 1978 the paper expressed serious concern at the unabated flow of outsiders to the state and demanded some constitutional safeguards for the ethnic and cultural identity of the Assamese people. The same theme is repeated in another editorial and the state and the Central Governments were asked to take strong steps against the influx not only of foreigners but also of people from other states of India to Assam.

The Assam Tribune on August 24, 1978 did not lag behind in supporting the movement against the influx. According to the paper, the continued influx of Bangladeshi and other foreign nationals posed a threat to the peace, security and long-term interests of the strategic north-easern region. As the paper editorially remarked, "These influxes, by no means a new problem, have now created a serious strain on this region's subsistence economy and its slender resource complex and threatened to upset the delicately poised demographical balance between its diverse ethnic groups". The language Weekly 'Nilachal' complained that our national leaders were indifferent to the
explosive potentialities of the situation and advocated mass agitation against the illegal immigrants as well as outsiders and demanded special constitutional amendment for the purpose.\textsuperscript{5}

Meanwhile students started their agitation, demanding holding of the price rise, better employment opportunities and expulsion of foreign nationals. Atal Bihari Bajpayee, then External Affairs Minister of the Janata Government said in Parliament that it came to the notice of the Election Commissioner from time to time that large scale inclusion of foreign nationals in the electoral rolls, especially in the north eastern region had been taking place. The Election Commission also issued instructions to the Chief Electoral Officers of the state/union territory concerned that if it was found that a large number of foreigners had managed to get their names registered in the electoral rolls recourse should be had to the provisions of Section 22 of the Representation of Peoples Act 1950 for getting the names of such persons deleted from the electoral rolls on the grounds that they were not Indian citizens.\textsuperscript{6}

But it was seen that the questions of detection and deportation of foreign nationals, notably Bangladesh; nationals was made an issue by some political parties. There were various pulls and pressures to slow down the process and some political parties and leaders raised the issue of harassment of Indian
citizens. Neerja Chowdhury of Himmat aptly observed, "If there is one thing the Assam problem highlights, it is the traitorous way in which politicians of all hues have played with people's lives and allowed the problem to assume such alarming proportions". The Chief Minister of Assam, Srj Golap Borbora himself admitted the gravity of the problem. He wrote in the Assam Tribune "This influx to the state had been a continuous process which reached serious dimension in the year 1978 when the state had nothing but to resist any further infiltration and to deport the infiltrators staying on illegally in the state. This issue agitated the minds of the local people and the Janata Government had taken quick action with all sincerity to stop any further influx of foreign nationals and to deport all such persons staying illegally in Assam. The Government took utmost caution to see that not a single Indian national was harassed in the process. But unfortunately a section of the people with vested interests has been trying to politicise the issue for their own political benefits ignoring the greater interests of the state."

The day of reckoning was not far away. The voters' lists had to be revised in the Mangaldoi constituency which became vacant when Mr. Hiralal Patowary who had been elected to the parliament on the Janata ticket died on 28th March 1979. Within
a short space of time, as many as 70,000 complaints were registered against alleged foreigners. The Election Commission after a close scrutiny of the objections, rules that they were valid in more than 45,000 cases. If this was the case in single constituency, what about the remaining 13 parliamentary constituencies. This question began agitating the public mind. But observed Prafulla Mahanta, "neither the Union Government nor the State Government took any step considered essential under the law and the constitution. This left the AASU with no other alternative than to draw the attention of the Government to its inescapable duty to cut out this cancerous growth of infiltrators in the voter's list by resorting to legitimate, permissible Gandhian means." Thus June 8, 1979 was chosen as the date for the take off of a long, arduous struggle. On this day, the people of Assam demonstrated that they had their unstinted support to the cause of expulsion of illegal entrants from foreign countries. To facilitate the participation of all sections of the people in the struggle, the AASU decided to institutionalise the involvement of non-students. This is the genesis of all Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP). Accordingly the AAGSP was created by a resolution of AASU at its meeting at Dibrugarh on August 27, and 28, 1979.

In July 1979 the Janata Government of Prime Minister
Morarji Desai collapsed after Charan Singh defected with his supporters. Charan Singh formed a coalition Government with the congress party of Y.B.Chavan. He also won the support of Mrs. Indira Gandhi's Congress (I) party. Since the Congress politicians of Assam were back in power, they did everything possible to cripple the nascent movement and close all attempts to scrutinize the electoral lists. In any case the final electoral rolls for the Mangaldoi by Election were never published. Because of events in Delhi, arrangements for all bye-Elections to the Loksabha were cancelled on 22nd August. On January 7, 1979 at a meeting of the State Family Welfare Council, the Governor of Assam Sri L.P. Singh expressed deep concern at the alarming growth of population in this state.

All the local newspapers were of opinion that ways must be found to contain migration which apart from economic pressure created social, cultural and political pressure. They were highlighting the danger of inclusion of names of thousands of foreigners in the voters' lists. According to them, some elements and agencies were interested in getting these people enrolled to secure political gains. The Asom Bani, the Language weekly in its editorials pointed out the failure of the new Janata Government to win the confidence of the people of the state. The Government in its one year rule could not take any positive step towards solving the unemployment problem
and distribution of land among the landless indigenous people of the state. A clean administration, development of village economy and welfare of the weakest people of the society were declared to be the goal of the Janata Government. But its performance was so poor that general people found no difference between it and the previous Congress Government.\textsuperscript{11}

The influx of a gigantic scale was continuing and the governmental efforts in tackling the problem were ineffective. This evoked resentment. According to the government of India's norm only Bangladeshi's coming over to India after March 25, 1971 was to be treated as foreign nationals. But the crux of the problem was that many such infiltrators were given shelter by their relatives on this side of the border and they even claimed they had come over before that date. Again once an infiltrator managed to evade the border guards he mingled with his fellowmen and become difficult to detect. Many of the post 1971 infiltrators meanwhile entered their names in the electoral rolls thereby becoming Indian citizens. The Assam Tribune felt that the danger posed by the infiltrators to this state, economically, politically and socio-culturally, should not be minimised and every body in Assam irrespective of caste, creed or language must help the Government to tackle the problem effectively. While the paper was very sore about the fact that some people made too much of a nulla-
baloo at the alleged harassment of Indian citizens, it wanted that sufficient care should be taken to see that Indian citizens were not harassed and for this necessary instructions should be issued to the police but the checking of influx must not be allowed to be relaxed. In any event, the problem was a vital one concerning the economic, political and social life of the people of Assam and every step must needs be taken to tackle it effectively and efficiently.

The spring of 1979 saw cases of communal tension in some parts of the state. On 9th and 10th March there was rioting in Rangia after a police rounded up of Bangladeshi immigrants. There was widespread violence, including looting and arson and the police had to open fire. Many people were injured and a large number arrested. The Chief Minister Golap Borbora said in the Assembly that influx of people from Bangladesh and Nepal was assuming alarming proportion and that his government had taken sincere steps to check it. But the reported decision of the government to suspend the deportation work was felt by the press to be intriguing. The Assam Tribune wrote, "If the government yield to political pressure to suspend or withdraw the operation it would be doing a great disservice to the people and the state". Sri Borbora himself said that infiltration posed serious problems to the state-
socio-economic, political, linguistic, communal and in regard to security. The *Assam Tribune* felt that there was no land in Assam for the sons of the soil and unemployment posed a serious problem. It remarked, "If infiltration is allowed to go on unabated it would certainly create many a problem and a day will come when the local people's very survival will be at stake. From the manner in which infiltration in large batches is going on there is room for suspicion that there is a calculated move, mainly political, engineered by some quarters. The Government cannot afford to remain a passive onlooker and must go the whole hog to fail this sinister design".14

The *Assam Tribune* admitted that there would be pressure from political party espousing the cause of infiltrators to put off the operation of deportation. In this conte Sri Borbora's declaration that the Government intended to deport every foreign nationals was easier said than done. The steps taken so far, deportation, examination of the electoral rolls, scrutinisation of land records, strengthening of the border police force and river police no doubt sounded good, but they did not seem enough. The legal procedure involved in deportation was too inadequate and time-consuming and consequently ineffective. The amendment to the *Foreigner's Act* of 1946
was urgent and imperative and the centre must be immediately moved, the paper felt.\textsuperscript{15}

On June 7, 1979, Mr. Borbora was in Delhi and had a long meeting with the Prime Minister. He received promises of support in dealing with the administrative problems of the state. During his discussions at the centre, the Chief Minister had, with the support of the Assam Sahitya Sabha (ASS), wanted that all immigrants coming after March 71 should be pushed back. That was to be the first step to deal with the foreign nationals problem. Nothing however, came out of it (A result not surprising seeing the turmoil then on in Delhi).

The fruits of the emotion roused by the Mangaldai election were first seen in the Assam bandh of 8th June'79. The AASU (All Assam Students Union) called for a twelve hour hartal in the Brahmaputra valley, demanding stoppage of infiltration of foreigners, checking the rise in prices of essential commodities and employment opportunities for local people.

The \textit{Agradoot} warned the Janata government against its failure to Curb price rise, solve the unemployment problem and expel foreign nationals from the state. It took the government to task for press statement issued on June 12th that all attempts at disruption of public life by means of bandha and strikes would be severely dealt with. It was the duty of
the Government, the paper observed, to look into the causes of these bandha and agitations and solve them in proper manner through democratic means of negotiations.  

The Saptahik Nilachal published in its front page an article on foreigners issue by Nibaran Bora, the president of the P.L.P. He delineated how the people of Assam became restless over the grim possibility of being over-run by the contemplated and continuous invasion by Bangladeshi infiltrators with the convivance and encouragement of their protectors and vote-seekers on this side of the border. The problem of influx was not merely confined to certain questions of legalistic and constitutional provisions. But it had far reaching and deep implications stemming from linguistic and theocratic expansionism. Bora wrote that the present mass upsurge in Assam held the key to the very survival of the political personality of the state of Assam.

On June 24, 1979 Sri P. K. Mahanta, President of AASU in an open letter to the Chief Minister Golap Borbora accused the government of dismal failure in tackling the burning problems of the state. He pointed out that Assam paid heavily by giving shelter to streams of foreigners and as a consequence the indigenous people already reached a state of losing their Identity. Mr. Mahanta reminded the Chief Minister of Mr.
Sakdhar's warning and Mangaldoi revelation during revision of electoral rolls and wondered why the government was not taking any effective steps in stopping the flow of foreigners. A section of inhabitants along with the infiltrators, old and new, succeeded in creating pockets of their own. They sought to establish their linguistic right in the state and also nourished political ambitions. The AASU blamed the political leaders of Assam, old and new for such an ominous situation. Mr. Mahanta demanded protection of socio-economic identity of the indigenous people of the state as well.

On June 27, 1979 the editorial in the Assam Tribune expressed concern at the alarming problem of influx of foreign nationals notably from Bangladesh, into the states and union Territories of the North Eastern region. Though the problem was more or less felt all over the region, the anxiety of Assam and Meghalaya was acute in view of the fact the these states being contiguous to Bangladesh had to bear the brunt of the influx. The need in the circumstances to evolve a common strategy to deal with the menace was keenly felt and the proposal for a two-day seminar mooted by Yuva Janata in Assam with the blessings of the all-India forum was hailed by the paper. Despite the Union Minister of State for External Affairs Sri Samarendra Kundu's statement that influx abated to some extent, the threat was by no means removed. Besides
the damage already done by the influx that had taken place could not be wished away.

The situation in Assam could not stabilise. The sea-change taking place in the union government would not allow it. The Janata Government at the Centre was faced with a no-confidence motion on July 10, 1979. The Morarji Desai ministry resigned on July 15 and Mr. Charan Singh formed a new government on July 28th. But Charan Singh Ministry was unable to face the parliament and obtain a vote of confidence. The Coalition government resigned on August 20th and was asked to continue till alternative arrangements were made. On August 22, 1979 the Lok sabha was dissolved, new election ordered and the Charan Singh Ministry asked to continue as a caretaker Government.

According to the instructions issued by the Election Commission of India the same day, there was to be an intensive revision of the electoral rolls. The time-table was house to house enumeration between 1st to 20th September; publication of Draft Electoral Rolls by 5th October; filing of claims and objections by 20th October; and final publication of electoral rolls on 31st October. The Janata party in Assam found it difficult to orient itself in these difficult and uncertain days. The inner clashes within the Janata party in Assam made the
Government very weak. This was evident when the Prime Ministers Morarji Desai told a delegation of the Assam Yuva Janata at New Delhi that the state Government was not able to cooperate with the Centre in taking steps for deportation of foreign nationals. The Assam Tribune remarked, "It is surprising that the Assam Government has been compromising on the issue of deportation of illegal infiltrators whose number in the state is around 49 lakhs according to the memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister by the Assam Yuva Janata." It is true that illegal entry of foreign nationals into Assam and other states and Union territories of eastern India was as old as the partition of the Country, but why the Government of India in collaboration with the concerned states was not able to tackle this vital problem effectively passed one's comprehension. The paper expressed the suspicion that notwithstanding the Chief Minister, Sri Barbora's occasional statements that the influx of illegal nationals from Bangladesh and Nepal had posed a serious problem in the state, some members of his Ministry were reportedly not only opposed to expulsion of these nationals but were in fact, encouraging their stay in many places permanently enabling them to enter their names in the voter's lists.

Mr. Golap Borbora wanted to take a firm line on illegal immigration from Bangladesh. He dropped two Muslim Ministers
and appealed to all sections of the people in the state to extend their active co-operation to the enumerators in preparing the draft electoral rolls. The Lok Shabha elections was held in the middle of December. In the past frequent complaints were heard about omission of names of genuine voters, duplication of names and inclusion of names of persons who are not Indian nationals. This last aspect of the problem needed greater scrutiny, because there would be attempts by infiltrators to get their names included in the voters list in which case they would be able to claim themselves as Indian citizens. The Chief Minister praised the students and the youth of the state for their sense of the gravity of the problem and for their help in the detection of several thousand foreign nationals in the electoral rolls of Mangaldoi parliamentary constituency. The Assam Tribune found it "highly significant" that the Chief Minister Golap Borbora warned the people against disruptive forces bent upon creating chaos and disorder in the state. It observed very wisely, "At this stage with passions rising a small rumour can spark off an agitation. Hence all right-thinking people with the good of the region at heart must remain ever vigilant and discount all rumours and not allow themselves to be swayed by emotion." Some political parties raised a great hue and cry over the deletion of the names of these foreigners. Hence the Chief Minister wanted to avoid
repetition of such a situation. He said that it was incumbent on all citizens including the younger generation, to be vigilant and to help the enumerators. The enumerators must also see that they discharged their duties conscientiously and with responsibility. The Government machinery must needs be fully equipped and instructed not only to enrol the names faithfully but also to see that no pressure overt or covert can influence the enumerators. In some pockets police protection might also be necessary. Though people in general appreciated the Chief Minister for his timely appeal, he laid himself open to the charge of communal prejudice. On September 3rd '79 a no confidence motion was moved by Giasuddin Ahmed of the CPI along with other opposition members. The motion was admitted and discussion scheduled for 4th Sept '79. However, before the Assembly could take up the motion on that day, Mr. Borbora resigned. The Governor accepted the resignation and asked Borbora to continue as a caretaker Chief Minister.

On September 8, 1979 a new Government headed by Jagendra Nath Hazarika of Assam Janata Dal was announced by the Governor. Meanwhile, another development had taken place in Assam which was to assume significance as the days went by. The AASU leadership called a meeting of all the organisation which supported its demands to oust the aliens and revise the electoral rolls in an attempt to make the agitation more broad-based.
On August 27, 1979, the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad was formed consisting of AASU, the Asom Sahitya Sabha and the Purbanchahitya Lok Parishad. The Jatiyatabandi Dal, the Asom Jatiyatabandi Yuba Chatra Parishad, Asom Yubak Samaj and Young Lawyers' Forum were among those who also joined the AAGSP later. Of all the constituent members the AASU enjoyed much greater autonomy than the remaining units of the parishad. Many of the AASU leaders were naturally quite young. They ranged in age from 20 to 24 years. The three most prominent among them were AASU president Sri Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, general Secretary Bhrigu Kumar Phukan and Bharat Narah. There were also advisers of AASU Lalit Chandra Rajkhowa and K.N.Sarma. The main members of the other constituents were: Nibaran Bora of P.L.P., Nagen Hazarika, Girin Barua of Assam Jatiyatabadi Dal, Jatin Goswami of Asom Sahitya Sabha. The campaign against influx started as an AASU affair. On 5th September, 1979, the union announced that they would be observing a Gana Abasthan Dharmaghat on 6th and 7th September. Classes were to be boycotted and the students were to go out in processions to the nearest office of the Deputy Commissioner, the sub-divisional officer, the sub-Deputy collector or the Block Development officer and stage a sit-in-strike. Slogans in support of the AASU Charter of demands were to be raised during the sit-in strike. The Charter included among others, the immediate detection and deportation of all foreign nationals from Assam, steps to prevent influx from main-
land India, checking price rise, long-term policy to deal with floods, erosion as well as drought, proper utilisation of Assam's vast water resources and fulfilment of all other outstanding grievances of the people of Assam. The Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad supported the AASU campaign. During his first press conference after taking office the new Chief Minister, Mr. J.N. Hazarika, said that the agitation launched by the students was neither in their interest nor that of the state. The Chief Minister assured the students that their demands would be looked into. He appealed to students, workers, teachers and people of all walks of life to extend help and co-operation to the new Government.

The AASU called for mass picketing of all Government and semi-Government offices from 12 to 14th September. A press release issued by AASU said it was for detection and deportation of foreign nationals from Assam and other demands. The Chief Minister appealed to the students to give up the agitational approach and said that the Government was making sincere efforts to solve the problem of infiltration. There was a lathi charge in front of S.D.O, Golaghat's office at Sarupather and several students were injured. On 13th September, the agitation gained momentum. According to the Assam Tribune, work in all offices was paralysed in Sibsagar, Golaghat, Rangia and other places. There was a twelve hour bandh
of Golaghat sub-division. In Sibsagar sub-division students abstained from classes, staged a sit in strike in front of S.D.O's office and raised slogans. The Assam Jatyatabadi Dal demanded action against officers who assaulted student picketers outside the Dibrugarh Deputy Commissioner's office. There was in addition, a local bandh in Sorupather, causing a police lathi charge. On 14th September, all Kamrup Government offices were said to have closed down because of picketing. In Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Nowgong and Barpeta and other places also picketing had paralysed normal administrative work. In Nowgong Civil administration virtually collapsed. Dispur secretariat was deserted. Essential services like post and telegraph were affected badly. Normal work in Banks and LIC offices stopped. Five hundred and fifty people were arrested for violation of prohibitory orders, but released after 4 p.m. The All Guwahati Students Union criticised the police lathi charges on students picketing at Cotton College, at the Deputy Commissioner's office and at the Guwahati Jail.

Meanwhile the Chief Election Commissioner had asked the CEO, Assam on 10th September, to include all names from the earlier voters list in the Draft Electoral Rolls. On 15th September, the Chief Election Commissioner clarified that Electoral Registration Officers had wide powers to delete names from the Draft Electoral Rolls. The P.L.P. criticised the
September message of the C.E.C. On 20th September, Mrs. Rena Barkataki met the president and the Deputy Prime Minister and discussed the inclusion of foreign nationals in electoral rolls. The President said he would go into the allegations. Mr. Charan was initially sceptical but later said he would ask the Election Commission to use the 1971 electoral rolls as the basis; and if this was not possible, to use the 1977 electoral rolls as the basis.

The Assam Tribune wrote in anger, "In effect, therefore the new directive of the Election Commission gives everybody whose name is in the voters list irrespective of whether he is an Indian Citizen or a foreign national illegally entering and staying in India and managing to enter his name in the list by fraud or intimidation the right to use his franchise to elect the people's representatives who will ultimately rule the Country." It was evident that political pressure was brought to bear on the Election Commission to issue such a directive. The paper pointed out that the Election Commission's suggestion of starting the legal processes after the Election would remain a wishful thinking because persons elected on foreigners votes would oppose such moves. "So notwithstanding the Assam Government's Press Note clarifying the Election Commission's directive we are back to square one and have to live with the prospect of foreign nationals casting their votes in the Country's
midterm poll. Is there no remedy will the state Government suffer it in silence? "asked the Assam Tribune."

On September 23, 1979 representatives of different political parties and socio-cultural organisation here to-day placed their views on the revision of electoral rolls and deportation of foreign infiltrators before Sri K.M.L.Chabra, a senior official of the Union Ministry of Home affairs. A demonstration was staged by the Purbanchaliya Loka Parishad before Sri Chabra demanding deportation of foreign nationals. The demonstrators went to the Circuit House in procession and raised slogan like "No deportation, no election, we condemn Election Commission", "Down, down All India Political Parties", "Election Commission, withdraw latest Directives and so on. The demonstration was peaceful.

Representatives of the Gauhati' Lowers Association, Purbanchaliya Loka Parishad, Assam Jatiyatabad Dal, Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad, CPI, CPM, and Asom Sahitya Sabha met the union Home ministry officials. The Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal urged the Government to expunge forthwith the names of foreign nationals from the voters list. The Jatiyatabadi Dal said that if the Government failed to do this there would be great resentment among the people of Assam creating situations for which the Chief Election Commissioner would be fully responsible.
Sri Nibaran Bora suggested that if necessary the election should be postponed in Assam till February so that the foreign nationals could be detected and deported and their names taken out of the electoral rolls. Sri Bora also pointed out that a serious law and order situation has arisen in the state. Enumerators were threatened and assaulted in many of the areas alleged to be the habitants of the foreign nationals. If the situation continued like this even enumeration could not be held, not to speak about elections. On 24th September, 1979 AASU announced that mass rallies would be held all over the states against the Chief Election Commissioner's directive. Demonstration, abstaining from classes and hunger strike took place throughout the state. The AASU-AAGSP, Assam Jatiyatabadi Dal, Assam College Teachers Association and other organisations called for an all-Assam mass rally on 6th October '79, at Judges' field in Gauhati. An Olympic style torch was brought by runners from Sadiya to Gauhati and a portrait of Lachit Borphukan carried by the professionists. A resolution was passed at the meeting urging all national and other parties not to put up candidates and to abstain from taking part in the elections. If the AASU's demand regarding foreign nationals was not fulfilled, election campaigns were also to be disallowed.

The issue was raised by Smti Renuka Devi Borkatoki in the meeting of the Janata National Executive in New Delhi on
1st October 1979. She described why the student community felt that they had been let down by the political leaders on this matter and hence took up the matter themselves. The Executive urged upon the state Government concerned to screen the lists, exclude the foreigners illegally residing there and deport them. The Executive also suggested that these names should be communicated to the Election Commission to ensure that they were not allowed to exercise their franchise. It called upon the state and central Governments and the Election Commission to ensure that these foreigners were not allowed to vote in the coming elections because that would be preposterous. The state committee of the Janata party expressed grave concern at the problems of foreign infiltrators who enrolled as voters in 1977 and would be able to participate in the ensuing midterm poll. It felt that person found out to be foreign nationals after the process of law should not be allowed to enrol themselves as voters in order to participate in the election. The committee condemned the attempt made by certain political parties as well as certain reactionary forces to malign the erstwhile Janata Government of Assam in engaging police force to detect the foreign nationals. It pointed out that a directive to engage police force to detect and deport foreign nationals was issued by the Home Ministry of the then Congress Government at centre in 1975.
On 1st - 2nd November 1979 the Deputy Prime Minister Mr. Y.B. Chavan paid a brief visit to Assam but his discussion with the leaders of the movement failed. People resolved not to allow the holding of election in the state without correcting the electoral rolls. On November 9, the AASU-AAOSP announced a 'drive out foreign nationals' campaign with a state-wide general strike to follow. Violent clashes took place in several places. The Chief Minister of Assam Mr. Hazarika announced on 10 November that disturbances would be quelled and affected people resettled. AASU announced a new programme of a week-long Gana Satyagraha from 12th November onwards all over the state demanding detection of foreigners, deletion of their names from the electoral rolls and their final deportation. The P,L.P asked its members to support Satyagraha. The AGSP endorsed the call of the AASU. Mass-picketing in front of all central and state Government establishment and officials started from 19th November at the call of AASU-AAOSP. The Government warned processions and alerted the army. Hundreds of picketers were arrested. There was police firing, Stray cases of assault took place. The massive satyagraha after the manner of the freedom struggle was unique. The officials were struck with an unexpected problem: Where to keep the thousands of Satyagrahis who courted arrest daily. The existing jail accommodation was totally inadequate. So they devised a plan to meet
the situation. All the open spaces in the city were converted into temporary jail with magistrates sitting under Chamisans and telling batches of Satyagrahis, who violated official order banning the gathering of a more than four person, they were under arrest. After a few minutes, the detenue were allowed to go to make space for fresh Satyagrahis. At the beginning the atmosphere was festive with the Government even offering tea and snacks to the arrested groups. On November 25, The state Executive Committee of Janata party, Assam, observed that in view of the present extra-ordinary situation the election should be postponed till the correction of voters lists according to law. The Committee which reviewed the prevailing situation in course of a resolution said that entire atmosphere in the state was charged with emotion and agitation and in some parts the law and order situation was badly impaired; so the atmosphere was not at all fit and congenial for holding free and democratic election. It reiterated that preparation of correct electoral rolls was the duty and responsibility of the Government which was to see that no name of any foreign national entered in the voters list and that the names of eligible citizens were not omitted. The Government could not shirk or shift this responsibility. In the resolution the Committee demanded that preparation of the National Register be taken immediately and in order to stop further
foreign infiltration into Assam, border security measures be adequately strengthened. The Committee appreciated the dimension and peaceful nature of the mass-Satyagraha and picketing which were participated by various sections of the people in the state.36

The all India parties in the state except the Janata party did not favour postponement of the polls. They felt that difficulties would arise in holding the elections. As T.S. Murty describes the situation, "According to the union Government, the Chief Minister of Assam had assured the centre about defusing the situation and holding the elections as scheduled, and there was going to be no charge in the election schedule. However, the Hindustan Times thought that the Chief Minister privately sympathised with the proposal for the postponement of elections, and was agreeing that a congenial atmosphere for holding the election was lacking. His official statement was "I have not been able to come to the conclusion whether election can be held or not until the election machinery reports to me".37

While the Election Commission was determined to go through the election in the teeth of popular opposition, several student leaders from the different North Eastern State went to Delhi and requested the President to advise the Chief Election
Commissioner to hold elections only after correction of the voters’ list. On 27th November, 1979 the AASU and the AAGSP called for closing of all educational institutions and picketing state and central Government offices. On 28th November, Mr. Y.B. Chavana, Deputy Prime Minister held a multiparty meeting to discuss the Assam problem. But the representatives failed to arrive at a consensus mainly because the AASU and the AAGSP boycotted the meeting. The local press felt that the immediate need was to postpone the election to facilitate the deletion work so that electoral rolls could be corrected.

As the Assam Tribune editorially observed, “Considering the fact that the electoral rolls could not be published as per the deadline set for the purpose and that the Government will face tremendous difficulty in enlisting the cooperation of employees in election work the Government on their own should have asked for postponement. Again a Government which can be so oblivious to the hopes and aspirations of the people because its supporting parties do not want it to give in to a popular demand which has stirred the people into a mass upsurge of unprecedented scale is doing a positive disservice to its people in their hour of crisis. In the prevailing circumstances, the only rational and patriotic thing the State Government can do is to urge the centre to postpone the elections so that the other issues can be taken up in a cool and peaceful atmos-
phere. This will not show Government's weakness as some of the Ministers seem to think, but will only show its moral strength for reflecting the wishes of the people."  

At the direction of the Chief Election Commissioner the final electoral rolls without necessary deletions were published on 2nd December. The Central and the State Government appealed to the students and the youth of Assam to avoid the path of agitation in the greater interest of the state since postponement of elections would prevent Assam from sending its representatives to the Lok Sabha. Angry reaction was noticed in Assam. The Gauhati University Teachers Association, the Assam Technical Teachers association and Assam College Teachers association appealed to the people of the state to boycott the polls. On 3rd and 4th December, there was to be a thirty-six-hour bandh all over the state. From 5th to 8th December, there was picketing of Central and State Government undertakings and offices. The AGSP asked the Secondary Education Board to postpone examinations till the situation in the state became conducive to holding of examinations. The Parishad directed its volunteers to specifically work for preventing preparation for elections. Election offices, printing presses and all other places connected with election work should be picketed. Candidates intending to take part in the elections should be gazetted till the last date for the filing of the nominations.
On 5th December, the first day of the general strike, life in Assam was reported as almost brought to a standstill. By 7th December, no candidates had been able to file nominations in the Brahmaputra Valley and in many case intending candidates had been gheraoed. On 9th December, the AISP called for a state wide bandh the next day, 10th December, which was the last date for filing nominations. All air, water and road communications were blocked. Curfew was proclaimed, on 9th December, in Central Gauhati and, on 10th December, at Nalbari and Barpeta.

At Barpeta the police had to fire when a mob tried to stop Begum Abida Ahmed's agent near Bhabanipur, when the party was on way to Barpeta with police escort, for filing Mrs. Ahmed's nomination papers. One person was injured in the firing. The agitationists again blocked the convoy on the national high way between Chasari and Barpeta. A police lathi charge cleared the way. There was police firing and lathi charge at Barpeta itself, before the party could reach the election office and file Mrs. Ahmed's nomination. The Secretary of the Local students union at Barpeta, Mr. Khargeswar Talukdar, died of drowning either during or very shortly after these clashes.

In all, four candidates could file their nominations, including Begam Ahmed of congress-I and Apur Ahmed of the Congress-
ss-U, at Barpeta on 10th December, There were four more nominations filed in Silchar; four for the Karimganj reserved constituency; and three in Karbi Anglong. No nominations had been filed in the ten other constituencies. Because of haste and anxiety Mrs. Ahmed’s nomination papers contained some errors resulting into outright rejection. The Assam Tribune editorially observed, "Notwithstanding attempts by the interested quarters to dub the movement with sectarian hue, it has already established itself in the eyes of all objective observers in and outside the state as prominently a national struggle—a struggle for the preservation of the sanctity of the constitution and the purity of democratic processes." Holding election with foreigners on the electoral rolls amounted to allowing aliens the right to vote and determine the political future of the country. That a large number of foreigners have succeeded in enrolling themselves as voters obviously with the connivance and complicity of some people in authority including political parties was a fact admitted by no less a person than the Chief Election Commissioner himself. His volte face was viewed by the Assam Tribune as unmistakably an outcome of political pressurization though lately the CEC as also most of the political parties seemed to have realized the futility of holding the mid-term election in Assam, but not before some of these political parties stood unmasked. The State Government too left
no stone unturned to hold the election by hook or by crook, obviously following instructions from the Centre. The order to close all educational institutions till January 10, 1980, and ask the boarders to vacate the hostels was an instance of the Government's repression and naturally evoked widespread resentment. But the Sponsors of the movement the All Assam Students' Union and the Gana Sangram parishad remained calm and peaceful in the face of various strategies applied to thwart the movement.

The Hazarika Ministry's support had meanwhile been eroded. The CPI was already unhappy with him. Then, on 11th December 79, the Congress-U withdrew its support. Next, in a massive display of lack of confidence, eleven Ministers led by Dr. R.C. Gogoi resigned on 12th December, the Governor reported to the Centre that the constitutional machinery in the state had broken down. The political situation was so confused that it was not possible for any party to gain majority support in the Assembly. After an emergency meeting of the Union Cabinet, a presidential proclamation was issued, under, Article 356, placing the Assembly in a state of suspended animation, till an alternate Ministry was formed, and imposing President Rule in Assam.

"It is interesting to note," observers Sanjayya that in
the fall of the Borbora Ministry as well as that of its successor, the Jogendra Nath Hazarika Ministry, the same block of Muslim MLAS played a leading role. As a concession to the growing agitation, Hazarika reactivated tribunals for the detection and expulsion of foreign nationals. But hardly had they begun functioning when the MLAS who toppled his predecessor became active again. While the *Assam Tribune*, the *Dainik Assam*, *The Assam Bani* and the Nilachal were highlighting the gravity of the influx of people from other states of India as well as from Bangladesh and Nepal and were successful in making the public aware of the crisis of identity of the Assamese people, the Janamat, the mouthpiece of the C.P.I. pointed out inconsistencies in the number of foreigners alleged by the agitationists to be residing illegally in the state. It questioned the property of delivering a judgment on this sensitive issue without properly determining the number of genuine foreigners, for such sweeping observations would only aggravate the chaos and confusion. It demanded the judicial tribunals to settle the issue. The paper expressed concern at the systematic attempts made by the agitationists to malign the all India political party on the issue of influx of foreign nationals. According to the paper, regional parties might complicate the situation, as no all India political party denied the problem of foreigners but they were against any kind of harass-
The All Assam students union felt that the communist parties, and specially the C.P.I.(M), were trying to fish in the troubled waters. It alleged that when the Gana Satyagraha was launched, the intellectuals mostly, Marxists were in their ivory towers and tried to frustrate the movement by their deliberate attempts. The local press played a tremendous role in advocating the cause of AASU and maligning the All-India political parties. Rightly or wrongly, the left parties were alienated from the people and their papers had no impact on the general man.

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