HEAL THE WOUNDS

V. JAYAPRAGASH'S APPEAL
ON ASSAM TRAGEDY
TO THE PARLIAMENT

A B.J.P. Publication
Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee : Mr Chairman, Sir, the drama which was being enacted in Assam in the name of general elections has ended in a tragedy. The drama has ended, but the killings continue. I have received a report this morning and I quote.

"A large mob attacked some bustees near Tezpur resulting in the death of one hundred persons. Two thousand persons were injured in the attack and have been hospitalised."

The Prime Minister is in Assam today. I do not know which areas she is likely to visit. During her election tour she had gone to only those areas which are populated predominantly by people who have come from Bangladesh or East Pakistan.

Should the Prime Minister not have visited other areas? I would advise my friends on the Congress benches to go through her speeches she made during her election campaign and see what type of speeches they were. We are in the opposition, without any sense of responsibility, we want to set the country on fire, we are not patriots, because those who sit on the opposite benches claim the monopoly of patriotism. If that is so, they should have talked with a sense of responsibility in Assam!

PM's ATTITUDE

A reference has been made here to the type of speeches made by Shri Abdul Ghani Khan, Chowdhury. Was it imperative for the
Prime Minister to hold a meeting in Malegaon instead of the Judges' Field? Malegaon is predominantly a Bengali area. She was speaking presumably to the people of Assam but she started in Bangla and when she concluded, she did not say 'Jai Hind' as is her wont. The Prime Minister said 'Khuda Hafiz'! Why? What was the purpose behind this? I have no quarrel with the greeting 'Khuda Hafiz'. But to do what she did is hardly conducive to amity and communal harmony in Assam. The Prime Minister wore a Mekhala (an Assamese Skirt) in her election meeting. She wore a Mekhala, spoke in Bangla and bid good bye by saying 'Khuda Hafiz'. This is what the Prime Minister of our country is......

Prof. K. K Tewari : Does it behove you talking about the Prime Minister like this? This is a serious debate...

Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee : I am not yielding... (interruptions)

Mr. Chairman (Shri N. K. Shejwalkar) : All these interruptions will not go on record.

Shri A.B. Vajpayee : Don't you worry; I know how serious the debate is. Don't you interrupt me. I am not yielding ...(interruptions)

Mr. Chairman : Nothing is going on record.

Smt. Krishna Sahi : Mr. Chairman, I have a point of order. My submission is that the Hon. Member should keep to political issues and not bring in personalities.

Mr. Chairman : I have heard you. There is no point of order.

Shri A. B. Vajpayee : Mr. Chairman, when the patriotism of the members of the opposition was being challenged, no members from the Congress got up to object. Truth is always unpalatable to some people. The Prime Minister would herself reply. The Minister of Home Affairs is here...

Everybody knows that in Assam people speak different languages. People following different religions live there. There are
also tribals living there. But what did the Prime Minister say in her speeches. Here is a sample:

"Harijans, Muslims and women are being attacked by the opposition to embarrass the Government, as they are supporting me".

Who is attacking the Harijans? The opposition? Who is attacking the Muslims and women? The Opposition?

We are opposing the Prime Minister because she is spreading the canard that the women, Muslims and the Harijans in the country can be saved by the Prime Minister and by nobody else.

ARE THERE NO FOREIGNERS

The Prime Minister announced at an election meeting in Gauhati that nobody would be ejected from Assam. Let her deny that she said this. I have the edition of the Hindustan Times dated the 13th February. She said on the 12th February. I quote:

"Should we give a false promise that they will be removed, when we know that they will not be removed?"

It means that nobody would be removed from Assam, even if he happens to be a foreigner. Are there no foreigners in Assam? If there are no foreigners in Assam, What were you talking about, when you discussed the issue with the representatives of the people of Assam? Did the Government not agree that those who have come to Assam after 1971 will be identified and their names removed from electoral rolls? Are they not bound by that agreement? Or, does the Government not feel bound by it?

HISTORY WOULD HOLD HER GUILTY

The insistence on holding the elections on the basis of the 1979 electoral rolls—it was nothing short of obduracy—led to conflagration in Assam. Isn’t this obduracy behind everything that happened there? If the Prime Minister does not give up this
obduracy, the destruction of the country would be her responsibility and history would hold her guilty . . . (Interruptions).

What is the justification for holding the elections on the basis of the 1979 electoral rolls? Do they not include the names of those who came to Assam after 1971? Can foreigners vote in the national elections? The Assamese youth who reached the age of 21 years in 1980 and became entitled to vote — and their number is 8 lakhs cannot vote, but the foreigners can!

Can the elections held on the basis of such electoral rolls reflect the democratic will of the people or strengthen democracy? Throughout the election campaign it was being announced that the foreigners will not be evicted from the State.

Mr. Chairman I have toured many areas of Assam. Let our Congress friends not make it a party issue. The carnage, the holocaust that is going on in Assam reminds one of 1947. Hang us if we are guilty but don't think that it is a political party which made the people of Assam believe what they do.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR CARNAGE?

Prof. Samar Mukherjee admitted a little while ago that the Government employees in Assam were not prepared to do election duty. They are in danger of losing their jobs. They are afraid that their families are in danger of starving if they get thrown out of their jobs. They were assured full police protection, but the employees of the Government of Assam have put their jobs in jeopardy and are opposing the holding of elections in the State, because they know that if elections are held on the basis of the electoral rolls which include the names of foreigners, the identity of the Assamese as a people, their culture and their way of living will be destroyed.

What matters is not where the killings have taken place and who is responsible for the carnage. I never said that rivers of
blood will flow, but rivers of blood are flowing. The Minister of Home Affairs has been unable to inform the House about the number of people killed. The fact of the matter is that there is nobody to count the dead.

I had gone to Gohpur on the 16th. Riots had taken place there on the 12th. The Deputy Commissioner did not go to Gohpur. The Deputy Commissioner of the district did not visit the scene of murders; nor did the special S.P. go there. On the 16th when I asked the O.C., the additional Superintendent as to how many people had died, I was told that they did not have any information.

Shri Anand Gopal Mukhopadhyay: Excuse me, Vajpayeeji, what is your definition of foreigners.

Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee: I will come to it. Sir, he has put a very pertinent question.

Shri Anand Gopal Mukhopadhyay: For Assam and for Kashmir.

Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee: 'Foreigners' is not to be defined by me. A foreigner has to be defined according to the Constitution and according to the law. Who am I to define?

GOHPUR KILLINGS

Mr Chairman, let me deal with Gohpur first. I'll come to this question later. You posted about a hundred thousand people from the paramilitary forces so that the elections could be held. But all the hundred thousand jawans could not prevent the carnage in Gohpur. After the killings the O.C. was complaining to me that he had only 40 of them from the Border Security Force and they cannot save the people of that village. When the matter was brought to the notice of the Deputy Commissioner and he was asked why he did not go to the scene of the murders and told that hundreds of houses were burning and the bodies of the murdered innocents were strewn about in the jungle, he retorted
that his job was to hold the elections and that it was not the responsibility of the Government to save the lives of the people. I would like to ask if the only preoccupation of the ruling party was to build the edifice of the elections on the dead bodies of the innocents so that it could reach the seat of power?

Mr. Mukerjee does not probably know that what happened in Gohpur was not unique, it was one of the places where such murders took place. The trouble at Gohpur was not between those who wanted the elections and those who did not. These tribals did not have the vote. They were shouting slogans of “Udayachal Zindabad,” and “Indira Gandhi Zindabad.” The Congress leaders had told the members of the Cachari tribals that they should hold themselves in patience and that after the 20th of February, the Assamese would be pushed out beyond the railway line to the banks of the Brahmaputra.

**SLOGAN’S EXPOSE THE GAME**

Let’s take another example:

There was polling near Dispur for an assembly seat on the 13th., the Kshetriya village was set on fire. It continued to burn from 10 O’clock to 2 O’clock. The people of the village had apprehended trouble and had reported their misgivings to the police on the 11th, but no arrangements were made. The whole of the village was burnt down. Some persons were arrested by the police for incendiaryism after the incident but they were let off because the Congress candidate said that they were his voters. That is, they had declared that they would vote for the Congress candidate.

The tribals who were caught by the police on charges of arson—some of them were caught red-handed—were let off after they had been arrested and taken to the police station. I asked the police why they had been so lenient. I was told that the culprits had assured them (the police) that they would not repeat the offence. There was such a serious incident of largescale murders
and not one culprit was arrested! If we had inflamed the passions of the people, you should have arrested us. There was not a single culprit behind the bars of the police station.

The slogans being raised in Kshetriya, near Dispur were: "We won't let Indira die!", "We won't let the foreigners be removed from Assam". What does all this mean? When such things afoot, you held the elections. Well, I can understand why you went ahead with it. But what has taken place is not an election, but a massacre of democracy... (Interruptions).

FRAUD IN THE NAME OF ELECTIONS

A team of the Bharatiya Janata Party had gone to ten polling booths in the Hajo constituency—Hajo Higher Secondary School, Bercha Pureel Lower Primary School, Hajo Burta Lower primary School and others. When our team visited these polling booths at about 1 P.M., they found that there were no polling stations. They searched for them high and low thinking that they had been shifted. The presiding officers had their polling stations in their jeeps and buses—ballot papers, ballot boxes and the presiding officers all were in the buses and jeeps. When they were contacted and asked why it was so, their reply was that since nobody came to cast vote, it was not necessary for them to wait till 3.30 P.M. (the time when polling was to close) and that they had left. Was it an election, or a farce?

The doctors had been authorised to accept nomination papers. The police personnel reportedly went to collect these papers from the residence of the candidates.

The police was not there to protect the lives of the common man. But a large contingent of armed police had been posted outside the house of the Congress candidate in Gohpur. I have no quarrel with this: the candidate must be protected against attacks. But should the common citizen be left to the depradation of the mobs? Did the Assam Government not fail to do its duty to the citizens
by leaving them unprotected? Indiscriminate firing has taken place there. The elections have been held at the point of the bayonet. That is what you wanted: didn’t you?

TITABAR FIRING

Mr chairman, I had gone to Titabar near Jorhat. A day before my visit, there had been an incident of firing in which four persons lost their lives. One of them was Ataur Rehman. You are trying to paint the whole agitation as communal: it is just not true. He was with the agitators. There are a large number of Muslims who have been living in Assam for a long time and they feel that people who have come from Bangladesh and settled there should not have been permitted to do so. Why do you think that they are opposed to the people’s agitation in Assam? But I was talking on another subject. For forty hours, the police did not remove the dead bodies of those who had been shot down. Even in war—when two nations fight each other—the injured are looked after. Nobody wishes to dishonour the dead. But you were so much preoccupied with the election that the bodies lay where they fell, decomposing for days!

HOSPITALS WITHOUT MEDICINES

I visited the hospitals in Dibrugarh and Gauhati. The persons wounded by police bullets lay there in tiers. The doctors complained that they did not have anti-gangerene serum. I had informed the Minister of Home Affairs about this a week ago when a meeting of the Consultative Committee of his Ministry was held. If it is inevitable for the police to fire on the people, is it not equally essential that those who are injured in the firing are looked after and treated for the gunshot wounds? I have got a list of life-saving drugs which has been given to me by the attending doctors which are in short supply. People are dying because of this shortage.

Can any Congressman put his hand on his heart and say that this state of things should continue? You can suppose that
the agitators were in the wrong, or that the opposition parties had misled the people, but those who have been injured in police firing are citizens of this country! Would you wreak vengeance on those people merely because you think that they have taken to the wrong path? The Home Minister has said only today that the Government are rushing supplies of drugs to Assam. Could not they have been rushed earlier? You can send boxes full of bread for the Government employees, sent to Assam on election duty, but could you not send drugs? The people of Assam are our own people. We have expressed our grief today on the deaths in Assam, the Prime Minister has sent her condolences, but is there any justification for not sending the essential drugs?

You will be surprised to hear that the doctors in Dibrugarh told me that there had been firing in the villages nearby, but that the police had not brought the injured to the hospital. They said they had the ambulances and they wanted to send them to the affected villages so that the injured could be brought to the hospital, but the district officer told them that they could not send them to collect the injured. The doctors went to the Gauhati High Court and complained that they had been refused permission to go to the villages and the Court said that no such restrictions could be placed on the doctors. The next day when the doctors went to the villages, the authorities stopped them. They told the doctors: "Don’t go to the villages; let them die". Would the opponents of the Congress regime pay for their opposition with their lives? (Interruptions).

Mr Chairman, the prerequisites of an election is that it should be fair and free. Shri Shiv Shankar is here and he would tell you that a free and fair election is one of the basic features of our Constitution. Was the situation in Assam conducive to a free and fair election? Leave aside for the present the question that the electoral rolls of 1979, though even those rolls could have been revised. At one time Shri S. L. Shaktcher had raised the question of the rolls. When there was a scrutiny in Mangaldei,
it was found that in a Lok Sabha constituency, the rolls contained the names of 45,000 voters whose citizenship was in doubt.

Prof. Madhu Dandavate: For administrative failures, why are you asking them now?

FOR VOTE BANKS

Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee: Was it not necessary after that to have a fullscale scrutiny? Why were judicial tribunals not set up? Why was there no attempt to remove names of foreigners from the rolls? Here in Delhi, I found the name of a foreigner—a lady—among the voters’ list. If it could happen in Delhi, you can imagine what would have happened in Assam where there have been constant attempts for the past 35 years to bring in foreigners.

I wish to charge the ruling party: They are not concerned about the integrity of the nation. They are not worried for Assam. They are worried only about the votes they can garner. They want to protect and to increase their vote banks. Now, I am going to say something which will perhaps force you to shout.

In 1968, there was a riot in Gauhati. The trouble started on the question of an oil refinery. A lot of violence took place, arson was resorted to and the army had to be called in to quell the disturbances. After the army had been called in—one brigadier, Brig. Kale was in command of the troops—Justice Sen of the Calcutta High Court was appointed to inquire into the incidents. Brig. Kale appeared before the Inquiry Commission and made a statement to the effect that when he was in command of troops engaged in quelling the riots, he happened to overhear—when he tried to use the telephone in the discharge of his duties—a Minister of the state being told by a Minister at the Centre on the telephone that the riots should be allowed to continue for another two hours in Gauhati. This was the statement Brig. Kale made before the Commission. Justice Sen told him to write the names
of the two Ministers on a slip of paper which Brig. Kale did. The report of the Inquiry Commission was suppressed by the Government.

I demand that the report of the Commission appointed to inquire into the riots in Gauhati in 1968 be laid on the Table of the House. Who was that Minister of the Central Government? The charge was not made against him by a politician, but by an officer of the army—a brigadier to boot. Who was directing the riots from Delhi? Who was telling a Minister in Gauhati to let them continue for another couple of hours? Who was the Minister of the Assam Government who was dragging his feet in controlling the riots because a Minister at the Centre had told him to do so? Now, this trouble did not start today; its genesis lies in the past. There is a fear in the minds of the people of Assam. I do not want to go into the question whether the fear is genuine or not. But please for God’s sake stop thinking that the people of Assam—men, women, children and government employees—are doing what they are doing at the behest of somebody! Only then you would be in a position to reassure them.

DO NOT CALL THEM SEPARATISTS

As I said, it is not I who would define who is a foreigner. The Constitution and the law of the land would have to define that. But can you say that a foreigner has ceased to be a foreigner merely because he has succeeded in having his name included in the electoral rolls? I know that some assurances were given to the refugees from Bangladesh. But the assurances did not mean that all of them would be allowed to settle in Assam. The assurance was that India would help them and India is much more than Assam. The people of Assam complain about all the persons coming from Bangladesh, settling in their State. What would happen to us? The Assamese ask. Would they become strangers in their own home?

That is why they are raising the slogan of “Assam Mata.” It does not mean that they do not want to hail “Bharat Mata.”
They do raise the slogan of "Bharat Mata Ki Jai". We have diverse cultures and diverse people in the various states. I had gone to Andhra where the people call it a rashtra (nation) and not pradesh (state). In Telugu the word rashtra stands for state. But they do not claim to be a separate nation. Similar is the case with Maharashtra (literally the great nation) where the people say that they love their rashtra—Maharashtra. But they love India as they love Maharashtra.

Everybody knows about the situation prevailing in Nagaland. There is no peace in Mizoram. Manipur is slowly becoming a disturbed area with the influence of the subversive elements growing. There is no peace in Tripura either. But the Brahmaputra valley is still the abode of peace, where the people are gentle. They want to protect and preserve their culture and their language, but they do not want to secede from the rest of the country.

Please do not make an attempt to alienate them by calling them separatists. There may be some elements in Assam who have been forced to the conclusion that nobody would listen to them if they continue to act according to the principles of democracy. Some of them have also been forced to believe that the politicians care only for the votes and not for any part of the country or the country as a whole. Do you want that everybody in the valley of Assam gets into the clutches of such elements? Do you want that the extremists get an upper hand? What would be the result of such a course of action? We have told the leaders of the agitation that we are opposed to the use of violence. Chaudhuryji was here and he knows. I wish to refute the charge that we did not condemn violence in Gauhati. A large number of people had attended our meeting. When I had a talk with the Governor, he told me that we were the first people to come and tell the citizens that there should not be any violence and that we were doing what was needed to be done... (Interruptions).

1942 LIKE SITUATION

Do you know what has happened to the leaders of the Assamese? Do you know that when Shri Mahanta and Bhrigu Kumar
Phukan had flown back from Delhi after the talks they were arrested the moment they came out of the plane. They had not committed any crime in Delhi and there was no question of their having done anything illegal while they were travelling. Those who are invited for talks are never taken into custody like this. That is never done, but it was done. The people of the State became leaderless after those arrests. A situation similar to the one in 1942 was created.

Go into the reasons of the violence and also see when it started. The first incident occurred on the 12th in Gohpur. Who were the instigators? What were the feelings generated among the people of Assam by the speeches of the Prime Minister and Mr Abdul Ghani Khan Chowdhury? The Assamese felt that there was no future for them. Those who have come from Bangladesh and settled in Assam thought that nobody can turn them out because the Central Government, the Delhi durbar is behind them, the police is behind them. You have seen how the police have behaved. The clash between the police and the CRP is not something usual; nor can you dismiss it as of no consequence. Just tell the House how many were killed as a result of the clash. I have also brought some figures but I do not want to create any sensation by quoting them in the House. Who created the situation in which the clash took place? Did we instigate the CRPF? Did we instigate the Assam police to clash with a sister force? Can the CRPF beat up any person walking along the road? Can it take to indiscriminate firing?

IT WOULD NOT STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACY

Mr Chairman, there is a place in Assam in Nowgaon district. People of the place were not willing to vote in the election. The CRPF fired on them and many of them are still in hospital. We have brought their statements. This was the doing of the CRPF. I have photographs from Jorhat and I am prepared to lay them on the table of the House. One of the photographs shows a CRPF jawan dragging a person to the polling booth. Here is the photo-
graph: It is not a joke. You are laughing, my friends, but it is no matter to laugh at. You should weep when you hear or see such things. The voters were transported in Government vehicles. Is transporting the voters in this way not against law? If you force people to vote and if you resort to firing so that the people vote in the elections, would it strengthen democracy?

I have got a copy of the judgement of the Gauhati High Court. I would like to quote from it, to show how our security forces behaved. The judgement was given on the 28th January and not in the month of February. Somebody had gone to the Court and complained that the security forces were behaving as if they were occupation forces. I would like to tell you what the High Court said on this question:

"We find sufficient force in the contention of the learned counsel for the petitioners of the allegations made in the petition that it is in fact a kind of aggression by the forces of the Government against the innocent members of the public. Those who wield so much force and power in performing their duties, we feel that it is the obligation of those in charge and responsible for ensuring that the personnel perform their duties, to keep them under check, control and restraint by issuing necessary, appropriate and proper direction and in all contingencies they should specifically be told to honour human dignity".

The Home Minister may well argue that the High Court and the Supreme Court had dismissed the case against the elections. You were yourself not ready to put off the elections, even though you could have done it. The Constitution could have been amended to postpone the elections. We were prepared to support such an amendment. You may say that you had taken a decision to have the elections and not to postpone them, but do not allege that the
opposition parties were not prepared to cooperate with the Government on this issue. You have to seek further cooperation from us. If this is your attitude, the opposition parties too can consider whether they should enter into a dialogue with you in future or not.

You claim that you consult the Opposition on every issue. We are prepared to advise you, also to cooperate with you but, please for God’s sake, do not say what is not true. Accept your responsibility for whatever wrong things are happening. If something good comes to pass, the Prime Minister is there to claim the credit but who would accept the blame for the rivers of blood flowing in Assam? Who would pay for this sin? The Opposition? We are bearing the burden of your misdeeds, but the people of Assam won’t.

EC DID NOT DO ITS DUTY

Mr Chairman, the 1979 electoral rolls were challenged in the High Court. It was contended that elections could not be held on the basis of those rolls. The High Court asked for the rolls. The Advocate General was asked to produce them by four in the afternoon. At 4 P.M. he told the Court that he would produce them the next morning at 10 O’clock. The next day when the High Court assembled at 10 O’clock, the notification about the election issued the night before was produced. The High Court then found that its hands were tied and neither they, nor the Supreme Court could act in the matter.

I am sorry to have to say that it is not for the Election Commission to see whether there is a constitutional vacuum or not. The Commission did not do its duty. It issued the notification before the High Court bench could give its judgement on the matter. If there is apprehension that the elections will not be free and fair, it is for the Election Commission to move in the matter. If it comes to the conclusion that the situation is such that free and fair elections are not possible, it was the duty of the Commission to say that elections should not be held. The Commission is
an autonomous authority under the Constitutions. I do not like if somebody criticises the Election Commission. But you are attacking and undermining our democratic institutions one by one. Such persons are being appointed to the Supreme Court about whom the Government think that they would give judgements suited to the Government and the ruling party. You have also made the Election Commission a subject of controversy... (Interruptions).

Shri Jamilur Rahman: Sir, I am on a point of order. Nothing should be said against the Supreme Court which is a party here... (Interruptions). He has cast aspersions on the Supreme Court. He has said:

"Such persons are being appointed judges of the Supreme Court who will side with the Government."

Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee: Mr Chairman, the way a judge of the Supreme Court accepted the ticket of the Congress (I), hurts the prestige of the Supreme Court. Does it not?

Shri Jamilur Rehman: Mr. Vajpayee, I have great respect for you but it does not behove you to say this. That will not be good on your part to say that.

Shri Jagdish Tytler: Sir, I am on a point of order. The reference about the kind of judges who have come to the Supreme Court... (Interruptions)...should be deleted. Mr Chairman (Shri N.K. Shejwalkar) I will examine it.

Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee: Mr Chairman, all I had said was that the Government are trying to appoint such persons to the Supreme Court about whom they think that they would favour the Government in their judgements. How can exception be taken to this remark? Haven’t I the right to raise questions about Mr Justice Bahrul Islam who gave a clean chit to Jagannath Mishra? Mr Chairman, he used to be in the Congress, then he got appointed
to the Supreme Court and now he has gone back to the Congress (I).

Now, Mr Chairman, I would come to another point. An independent judiciary is the bedrock on which the edifice of democracy stands... (interruptions). Is he on a point of order? He is not an ordinary member. He is a Minister.

Shri H.K.L. Bhagat: I am a Parliamentary Minister also.

His reference to the Supreme Court judges who are working is a reflection on them and criticism of those judges is not fair. He is not expected to raise this matter. And from a man of his stature, from Mr Vajpayee, I did not expect that. It is very unfair.

Unfair on the part of Mr Vajpayee to say this. Supreme Court judges, the first thing for you to criticise them! You can say many things of Dr Mishra, anything you like, but for you to make reflections on the Supreme Court judges is not correct, not fair. You know the rules.

Shri A.B. Vajpayee: I did not cast any reflections on the judges. I am criticising the Government.

Shri Rashid Masood: Mr Chairman, Shri Vajpayee has said only this (Interruptions)...that the Government want to appoint such persons... (Interruptions)...He did not say that the Supreme Court judges were bad.

Shri H. K. L. Bhagat: It is very wrong. It is absolutely against law. You know the rules. It is very unfortunate..... (Interruptions).

Mr Chairman (Shri N. K. Shejwalkar): Mr Bhagat, if there is anything wrong, it will be taken out of the proceedings.

Prof. Madhu Dandavate: If a Cabinet Minister starts raising points of order, the next stage will come when points of order are raised from the Chair.
Mr Chairman: I can assure you I would not be there.

(Mr Deputy Speaker in the Chair)

Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee: Mr Deputy Speaker, I am going to conclude. My submission is that by foisting elections on Assam the Government have created a situation which is entirely of its own making. The Government have invited the situation, as it were. Repression can neither help in elections, nor in running a government. It is the type of election in which the opposition parties were not permitted to hold election meetings.

Shri Acharya Bhagwan Dev: You have just now told the House that you had held a largely attended meeting. Didn't you?

Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee: Yes, I did. But that was at one place. I am now talking of the other places where the meeting was not allowed.

Shri Acharya Bhagwan Dev: Mr Deputy Speaker, he is trying to mislead the House.

Shri H. K. L. Bhagat: Mr Deputy Speaker, I raised a point of order.

While speaking, Shri Vajpayee cast aspersions on the Supreme Court judges. That must not go on record.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I think that the Chair has already ruled that he will go through the proceedings.

Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee: I did not cast any aspersions on any Supreme Court judge. I am within my rights to criticise Bahrul Islam. He is a candidate in the election.

Shri H. K. L. Bhagat: You made a reference to the Supreme Court judge.

Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee: Yes, he is a judge.
Mr Deputy Speaker: We will go through the record... (Interruptions) ...In such a discussion, instead of replying every now and then, the next speaker from the ruling party, I think he may be Shri Tiwari, will note down all the points and if you do not agree he will counter them. That will be proper procedure. Yes, Mr Vajpayee ...(Interruptions).

Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee: What I wanted to bring to your attention is that the parties fighting the elections in Assam...

Shri P. Shiv Shankar: I hope what my hon. friend has said while sitting has gone on record.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Any remark by a Member while sitting will not go on record. That is our rule.

Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee: They won't go on record. But why do you pay any attention to such things?

Mr Deputy Speaker, I was submitting to you that one of the prerequisites of an election is that the voters should be able to exercise their right to franchise without fear. That right has been challenged on both sides, but the question is that the Government took a decision and was it not the responsibility of the Government to see that it was implemented?

We were permitted to hold a meeting in Gauhati, but the permission was denied in Tezpur, and also in Dibrugarh. I am quoting from the letter of the District Magistrate of Dibrugarh:

"With reference to your above mentioned application, I regret that it is not possible to give permission for the public meeting on the 17th February in view of the present law and order situation."

The letter was addressed to the Vice-President, Dibrugarh BJP. Now, the meeting cannot be permitted because of the law and
order situation. But that situation does not stand in the way of the elections. We had boycotted the elections and it was our right to inform the people why we had taken this decision. We also had the right to tell the people which were the parties who did not boycott the elections. And those parties who were fighting the elections, I would ask their leaders to tell the House what difficulties they had to face in the elections.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT WAS POSSIBLE

I would again ask whether it was inevitable to hold elections? Could they not have been postponed? It was this Government which had extended the life of the Lok Sabha to six years during the Emergency. Not with our advice, but after putting us in the jails. When the life of the Lok Sabha was extended, nobody asked why the Opposition had not been consulted.

The Prime Minister says and the Minister of Home Affairs repeated it this morning, that the Opposition is divided. Yes, we are divided. That is why we have separate identities. But we were prepared to give you the two-third majority in the Rajya Sabha which you needed to amend the Constitution. You did not amend the Constitution and after having decided not to amend it, you foisted the elections on the people of Assam. And the carnage, the holocaust which has followed your decision is your responsibility. The hands of this Government are soiled with the blood of the innocent Assamese ......... (Interruptions)

You cannot escape the guilt by making allegations against the Opposition. I do not know what would happen in Assam. The hearts of the people of Assam are bleeding, you cannot heal them. But, even so, let us try to assuage their feelings. One method of doing this is to cancel the elections which have just now been concluded. I do not know how it can be done, but done it must be.
The elections have not brought the solution to the problem of foreigners any closer. As a matter of fact, the problem has become more intractable. I have, therefore, suggested through an amendment that an all-party committee of the House should visit Assam. Let us forget our differences. Let us assess what has happened in Assam. If we are in the wrong, we would admit our fault, but if the Congress Party and the Prime Minister are guilty, let them be frank enough to admit it.

I know the people of Assam. A section of the people are Bangla speaking and there are also people who sought refuge when they came from Bangladesh. As I said, the international commitment of the Government is not that all refugees would be allowed to settle in Assam or that they would immediately be accorded Indian citizenship. Nor does the commitment mean that they are allowed to vote before they become Indian citizens.

Shri Satyasadhan Chakraborty: This is a dangerous statement. What do you mean? Are the refugees not the citizens of India? ...(Interruption).

Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee: I am talking the sense which you may not understand.

Shri Satyasadhan Chakraborty: Are the refugees not Indian citizens? Can they be dispersed like cattle? ...(Interruptions).

Shri Jagdish Tytler: Tomorrow about all those people who have come from Pakistan and West Pakistan like us, he will say they are foreigners......(Interruption).

Mr Deputy Speaker: He is going to conclude now. Order, please. Acharya Bhagwan Dev has taken more time than him.

Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee: Did not Pakistanis from Sindh come to Rajasthan after 1971? Did we not legislate for their citizen-
ship? Can you confer citizenship on a person through an executive order? Hon'ble Shri Shiv Shankar, an executive order was issued in 1965 which said that anybody who comes from East Pakistan would become an Indian citizen. That is not valid under the Constitution. We know that those who are in distress, have no place but India where they can find refuge.

An Hon'ble Member: That was a policy decision.

Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee: Then amend the Constitution to implement that policy decision. How can you issue such an order without amending the Constitution? Those who came were assured of refuge. The assurance was not that Assam alone will bear the whole burden.

Shri Chitta Basu: That was a policy decision.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Let him express his own views. If you want to oppose his views, you can reply to him when your chance comes after he completes his speech.

Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee: Mr Deputy Speaker, my contention is that the only way to solve this problem is through negotiations. There is no other alternative.

Mr Deputy Speaker: It is time to conclude now. If you are going to conclude, they are not going to interrupt. That is why I am asking you to conclude.

Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee: Sir, they have disturbed my train of thought many times. Now, I'll conclude, Mr. Deputy speaker.

HEAL THE WOUNDS

In the end, I will like to make an appeal. Let there be an attempt to heal the wounds which have been inflicted on the soul of Assam. We have to wipe every tear from the eyes of the Assamese people.
Today, what we are doing is only a postmortem. My view is that the elections could have been postponed. The hon. friends on the other side believe that they could not have been put off. But, what next? That is all I ask. You held the elections, but look at the huge cost that had to be paid. What would happen next? Would the elections help in finding a solution to the problem of foreigners? Will those who boycotted the elections accept the Government that would now be formed? They would not. There has been a total non-cooperation by the people. You just cannot imagine the totality of the rejection by the people. It is not the curfew imposed by the Government which is accepted by the people. It is the janta curfew that is accepted.

I would reiterate what I said in the beginning; The Government employees in Assam are in the agitation despite the jeopardy in which their jobs have been put. The young men are prepared to die; the women and the children are prepared to fight. After all, there must be something behind their resolve, some strong feeling which has pushed them to the path of agitation. Accept and recognise that feeling, do not mock at it. Do not call them disruptionists or secessionists. Start negotiating with them again. If all of us, this House and all the parties are prepared to come together in this endeavour, I, on behalf of my party, assure you that we will offer our cooperation.