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P O S O O W A

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Table of Contents:

Jayanta Hazarika Memorial concert at the Nehru Centre in London 2

সোৱাদ. 5

Ulfa's Turning Point.6

Jayanta Hazarika

Memorial concert at the Nehru Centre in London



On this day (15/10/77) 29 years ago, Jayanta Hazarika suddenly left us all in tears and left for the Heavenly Abode. Devastated as we were then, today we remember his scintillating personality with great fondness and a sense of loss.

Time has proved over and over again that the void left by the sudden premature demise of Jayanta Hazarika (Rana) at the age of 34 on 15 October, 1977, can never be filled. The memories of his face with childlike innocence and the heart, big enough to shower love on everybody, still fill me up when I think of him. Leaving his young wife Manisha and his son – Mayukh at a very early age, he created a big void in his family as well.

With the passing of years – that mellifluous voice and his absence are being felt more and more, particularly, in the context of the present musical scenario in Assam, and we are all left in utter regret imagining the height his achievements could have reached had divine providence let him complete his normal quota of years.

How I remember Rana:

The name Jayanta Hazarika, ‘Pragati Silpi Sangha’, ‘New Art Players’, ‘Kristi Bikash Sangha’ are a sweet memory for all the music lovers of Guwahati like myself. Known as Rana Bhaiti in the family circle, in my mind, he is still the 34 year old the handsome, fair complexioned, young legend and the music icon of yester years. Bhupen da’s moromor Rana Bhaiti.

I remember Rana, with his disarming smile and charming manner. In those days Uzan Bazar and Panbazar were the heart of cultural activities in Guwahati. In 1959, the Diamond Jubilee of Panbazar Girls High School was celebrated with a week long program in the month of May or June (I do not remember the exact month).

Rose Hazarika and Ruby Hazarika were also students of Panbazar Girls High School; so they asked their brother Rana to organize the musical programme for the Diamond Jubilee. We were all excited and practiced every afternoon at 3:00pm for the main chorus with Rana playing the

harmonium. I still remember a few lines we rehearsed:

*Ro-od jilmil akaxhoti, Daworore dhemalite,
Amar monor nijanoti, Xopone jai umoli,
Ro-od jilmil, Ro-od jilmil, Ro-od jilmil..*

Rose Baideu, Ruby, Anjali Baideu (Anjali Medhi), Monti Baideu (Mridula Das), Ramen Choudhury, Dost, Ara Baideu, Niva Choudhury, Pretishree Barkataki—all took part. During the rehearsal period, I remember one day he was crossed with me and Niva and said “Osorot thoka manuhbore xodai derikoi ahe”; we were punctual after that day.



I fell for his voice and his charm since that time. Never missed any of his functions during my teens until I left Guwahati in 1972. On behalf of Cotton College Union Society in 1964, when we invited him to perform during “College Week”, I became close to him. The entire Union Hall was moved by listening to him. He sang the song “Agoli botahē kopale kolore pat” for the first time on that day.

Fortunately or unfortunately, I happened to visit home in the month of September 1977 to attend a family wedding. On that fateful morning October 15, 1977 the sad news was announced on the All India Radio News Bulletin that Jayanta Hazarika had passed away in Kolkata.

We were all shocked. I cried like a little girl. The day his lifeless body was carried from Borjhar Airport to his Nizarapar residence we somehow managed to catch a glimpse of his face in the back of the truck. Standing in tears, at the Panbazar Sukleshwar Ghat, we tried to reach out to throw a few flowers at the truck from among the vast crowd of men, women and children.

His thirty-four crowded years of meaningful existence added significantly to uplift the rich culture tradition flourishing in Assam for ages. He followed the prompting of his heart to initiate the formation of the Sur Bahini, a mobile musical brigade which was committed to work selflessly for the welfare of the poor, the helpless and the distressed, especially victims of natural calamities. His artistic excellence and qualities of head and heart set the perfect example of an artiste in the true sense of the term.

Jayanta Hazarika followed the pioneering style of Jyoti Prasad Agarwala of synthesizing the elements of Assamese folk, Indian classical and Western music to weave out a distinctive form, intimate and recognizably Assamese in character.

He could play quite a number of musical instruments, e.g.,



the guitar, the dumra, the mandolin, the accordion, the tabla, and the mouth-organ. His dexterity on the

harmonium with his fingers spread over two octaves was an awe-inspiring sight. Standing before his audience with all solemnity coupled with humility, the artist in him could exert influence upon all sections of the people. He accompanied



Dr. Bhupen Hazarika to the International Conference on Political Songs organized by the October Club in Berlin on February 1972 and overwhelmed the German audience.

The feelings of culture-oriented music lovers today can be expressed in the following quote: “There have been quite a number of tributes to the legendary artiste through his songs but some of them have been unimaginably careless and irresponsible ventures. There are glaring errors in the lyrics above the mishandling of notations and musical accompaniment. The preludes and interludes deviate to a simplified solo pattern from the superb original orchestrations the background scorings are substandard and the extra doses of individualist treatment only contribute to mar the original excellence”.

Therefore, the Government needs to take serious steps for the preservation of and research into the legendary songs and music of the state. This may be done by constituting authorized panels of personalities connected with the respective form of music, initiating and sponsoring frequent workshops under able exponents and strictly prohibiting imperfect recordings

Last year when I met Mithu bou (Manisha Hazarika) at her residence we were both in tears. In the sitting room, I saw Rana’s old guitar, the one that used to enliven many cultural functions in Guwahati. Each chord has his finger’s touch immortalizing the passionate and mellifluous rendering of Mrityu xaboti xomadhi tolit, Tomar morome mor and Xurat magan.

It reminds me of that touching tune of Elton John.

*“Now you belong to heaven
And the stars spell out your name...
Your candles burnt out
Long before your legend ever will.”*

This year the Jayanta Hazarika Memorial Concert was held at the Nehru Centre (Cultural Wing of High Commission of India) on 18 October, 2006. The invited artists were: Manisha Hazarika, Mayukh Hazarika & Laili Dutta Hazarika.

“A woman will always sacrifice herself if you give her the opportunity. It is her favorite form of self indulgence.” This quote of Somerseset Maugham somehow reflects so truly in someone like Manisha Haharika, the wife of late Jayanta Hazarika; she is a woman of substance.

Born and raised in a respectable Bengali family with a rich musical background in Kolkata, Manisha lost her husband at a very young age. In no way did she want to be a pitiable woman; neither did she want to go back to her birth place in to the comfortable and privileged surroundings of her parents’ house. Instead this courageous woman started to begin from scratch striving to survive and made every effort to give the best to the couple’s only child, Mayukh. She has promised herself to keep those memorable songs of her husband alive and make him feel comfortable where ever he is. She is an inspiration and a role model for every women.

Mayukh Hazarika can be easily mistaken for A.R. Rahman by his disarming smile and charming manner. Of course, he was born and raised in the Hazarika gharana – an illustrious family of several gifted artists



and doyens of Asom musical world. He saw and heard his family of musicians, most notably his father and uncle Dr. Bhupen Hazarika sing and interact as he grew up. He lost his father when he was only seven year old. His mother taught him to sing those immortal songs with the same depth of feelings and sincerity that his father once sang and became famous with. Mayukh relivens the voice of Jayanta Hazarika once again.

Laili Dutta Hazarika would always wake up to the sound of the swaras. Having herself learned from the legendary Padmabhusan Ustad Ghulam Mustafa Khan, her mother Shikha Dutta took it upon herself to pass on the nuances of the Rampur Sahaswan Gharana to Laili at a very young age. Since then music has been one of the most significant and a religious aspects of Laili’s life. This tradition found further expression when she married Mayukh Hazarika. She is qualified from Bhatkhande Music University, Lucknow as a Bachelor of Music.

The accompanying pictures are Late Jayanta Hazarika with Late Dr. Zakir Hussain, President of India; Manisha Hazarika; Late Dr. Nirmal Prabha Bardoloi, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, Mrs. Ila Bosewith Manisha Hazarika after their wedding; Mayukh Hazarika their only son and

Laili Dutta Hazarika – daughter-in- law.

Rini Kakati, London, UK

সোৱাদ

আজি বহুবছৰ অসমৰ বাহিৰত কটাই ইয়াৰ খোৱা-বোৱাৰ সৈতে অভ্যস্ত হৈ পৰিছো। আজিও মোৰ আগত কটোৱা সেই প্ৰথম বছৰটো মনত আছে। ঘৰৰ পৰা প্ৰথম বাহিৰলৈ আহিছো, না বাহিৰৰ খোৱা-বোৱাৰ সৈতে জ্ঞাত না খাদ্যবস্তুৰ প্ৰতি কিবা আগ্ৰহ। অতিপাত গৰম, গন্ধযুক্ত পানী আৰু হোটেলৰ খানাৰ তেল-মচলাই মোক সম্পূৰ্ণ এমাহ বিচনাতে ৰাখিলে। তেতিয়া যে ঘৰত মাৰ হাতৰ ভাতকেইটালৈ ইমান মনত পৰিছিল। কচুৰ খোৰি দিয়া মচুৰ দালিকন, ঔ-টেঙা নাইবা থেকেৰা নাইবা বিলাহী দিয়া মাটিদালীৰ লগত ৰঙালাওৰ ভাজিকন, মাছ আৰু ভেদাই-লতাৰ জোলকন, হালধি পাতত দিয়া সৰু-সৰু মাছৰ পিটিকাকন, পকা কোমোৰা বা কেচা অমিতা দিয়া হাঁহৰ মাংসকন অনবৰতে চকুৰ আগত ভাহি উঠিছিল। হোটেলৰ শুকান জলকীয়া গুৰি আৰু মচলা দি তেলত ডোবাই ভজা কেচা-ৰঙালাওৰ ভাজিখন দেখি মোৰ বৰ দুখ লাগিছিল। মনতে ভাবিছিলো এই মখাই ৰঙালাওটোতো পকিবলৈটো নিদিলেই তাৰোপৰি ইমান গাল মা-মচলা দি তাৰ সোৱাদ একেবাৰে নাইকিয়া কৰি পেলালে। তেতিয়াৰে পৰাই মোৰ কি হঙ্কল কব নোৱাৰো অসমীয়া খোৱা-বোৱাৰ প্ৰতি লোভ বাহি গঙ্কল। এতিয়াও মোৰ মনত আছে আগতে মায়ে আমি পাচোজনী ছোৱালীক তিল, সেউজীয়া ঝক-পাচলী চকু আৰু চালৰ বাবে ভাল বুলি কৈ একপ্ৰকাৰে জোৰ কৰি খোৱাইছিল। আমিও চকু-কাণ বন্ধ কৰি একে ঝহতে গিলি থৈছিলো। তাৰ সোৱাদ কেনে আছিল ভাবিবলৈ সময় নাছিল, আৰু বহুবাৰ ঝক-পাচলী ৰান্ধিলে ভোক নাই বুলি অনেক বাহানা বনাইছিলো। তেতিয়া একপ্ৰকাৰে লাই, পালেং, কচু, ঢেকিয়াক অবজ্ঞাই কৰিছিলো। এইবোৰ আৰু খোৱা বস্তু নেকি? কিন্তু অসমীয়াত এষাৰ কথা আছে নহয় বোলে থেকা পালেহে সেকা। মোৰো ক্ষমা পোৱাত বেচি দেৱী নহঙ্কল। ইয়াৰ পিচত ঘৰলৈ গলে দুদিনমান আগতেই এখন চিঠি লিখি মাক জনাই থও মই কি খাবৰ ইচ্ছা কৰো। নতুনকৈ হোৱা পালেং ঝকৰ লগত জীয়া মাছৰ সেই ধোৱা উলাই থকা তৰকাৰীৰ লগত গৰম-গৰম ভাতকেইটাৰ সোৱাদ বাক কোন অসমীয়াই পাহৰিব পাৰিব?

সৰুতে ভেলা-ঘৰত খোৱা সেই ভোজটোতলৈ কিন্তু মোৰ কেতিয়াবা বৰ মনত পৰে। কিমান দিন আগৰ পৰাই যে ভেলা-ঘৰ সজাৰ প্লেণ। এফালে মাৰ ঝসন্ড একো ভোজ-ভাত খাব নোৱাৰিবহঁত। বাইৰাহঁতক ভেলা-ঘৰত ভোজ-ভাত নোখোৱাকৈ এঘৰে-এঘৰে উলিয়াই দিলো, এতিয়া তহঁত সৰুকেইজনীয়ে মিলি মোৰ মূৰটো গৰম নকৰিবহঁত। বৰমাহঁতৰ ঘৰলৈ যাওঁ-যাওঁ বুলি কৈয়েই ওচৰৰ লন্ধৰা-ছোৱালীৰ লগত মিলি ভেলা-ঘৰ সজা হৈ যায়। আৰু সময়ত দেওতাৰ সহায়ত মাৰ পাৰমিশ্চনো পাওঁ। প্ৰায়েই কণীৰেই আমি খানাটো খাইছিলো। চাউল-দালি, আলুটো প্ৰত্যেকৰে ঘৰৰ পৰাই গোটাইছিলো। মাথো পিয়াজ,

কণীৰ বাবেহে পইচা তুলিছিলো। কণীবিলাক বইল কৰাৰ পিচত সকলোকে বাকলি গুচাবলৈ দিয়া হৈছিল। মই গুচোৱা কণীটোৰ মঙহ সদায় এৰাইছিল আৰু প্ৰতিবাৰেই খোৱাপাতত বহি ভগবানকে খাতি কৰিছিলো মোৰ ভাগত যেন মই গোচোৱা সেই কণীটো নপৰে। কিন্তু বাইদেউকেইজনীয়ে ইমান মনত ৰাখিব পাৰিছিল যে বাচি-বাচি সেই কণীটোকে মোক দিছিল। অকণ-মান বটা আদা-নহৰু, জিৰা-জালুক আৰু সৰহকৈ পিয়াজ দি বনোৱা সেই কণী তৰকাৰীকণেৰে যে ভাতকেইটা ইমান জুটি লাগিছিল আজিও মনত পৰিলে লোভৰ পাৰি পৰিবলৈ ধৰে। এতিয়া যিমনেই যত্ন কৰি নবনাও কিয় সেই সোৱাদ পোৱা নাযায়।

এতিয়াও কেতিয়াবা গাৱৰ সেই ৰাজহুৱা ভোজ-ভাতলৈ বৰকৈ মনত পৰে। পকা ঔ-টেঙা বা বিলাহী দিয়া মাটি-দালি, মটৰ দিয়া ৰঙালাওৰ ভাজিৰেই এই ভোজৰ আয়োজন কৰা হয়। কেতিয়াবা আকৌ সকলো সজী মিলাই যেনে বেণেগা, ওলকবি, বন্ধাকবি, ৰঙালাও, মূলা, স্কুৱাচ, আলু আৰু মাছৰ লগত মিলাই বনোৱা সেই ভাজিৰ লোভ বাক কোনে এৰিব পাৰে? সৰুকালৰ এটা ঘটনা মনত পৰিলে মোৰ এতিয়াও বৰ হাঁহি উঠে। এদিন আমাৰ ঘৰৰ সনুখৰ খুড়াৰ ঘৰৰ সিফালৰ ঘৰত ডাঙৰ ভোজৰ আয়োজন। ৰাতিপূৱাৰ পৰাই হুলস্থূলীয়া পৰিছে। মোৰো মনত যথেষ্ট আনন্দ লাগি আছিল। কিন্তু দূপৰীয়া গা-পা ধোৱাৰ পিছত গম পাওঁ আমি ভোজলৈ নিমন্ত্ৰিত নহয় কাৰণ আমি বেলেগ খেলৰ মানে আমি ঝকৰী সংঘৰ। দূপৰীয়া খোৱা-বোৱাৰ পিছত যেতিয়া সকলো জিৰণি লবলৈ ললে মই মনে-মনে গৈ ভোজৰ চোতালত পৰা চাৰিত বহিলোঁগৈ। মাটিদালী আৰু ৰঙালাও ভাজিৰ সেই ভাতসাজ যে কিমান তৃপ্তিদায়ক আছিল তাক বাৰো কেনেদৰে বুজাম। সেইসাজে আজিও মোৰ মনত সাজ বহুৱাই গঙ্কল।

সৰিয়হৰ খাৰলি, বাঁহগাজৰ খৰিছা, ল্ৰালীফুলৰ তিতাজোল, শুকান চৰুত দিয়া মছন্দৰীপাতৰ পিটিকাকন, পকা তেতলী দিয়া পদিনাৰ চাটনী, মাছ আৰু মানিমুনী ৰসৰ জোল, দোৰোণ ঝকৰ ভাজি, কলপচলা, কেচা অমিতাৰ খাৰ, কেচা পিয়াজ, আদা, জলকীয়া ধনিয়া আৰু কেচামিঠাতেল দি বনোৱা শুকতিৰ চাটনী, পকা কোমোৰা দি বনোৱা হাহৰ মাংস, বাহৰ চোঙাত বনোৱা বৰাচাউলৰ লগত হাঁহৰ মাংসৰ সোৱাদ এবাৰ পোৱা জনে সাত-সাগৰ তেৰ নদী পাৰ হৈ হলেও অসমলৈকে চাপলি মেলিব তাৰ সোৱাদ বিচাৰি।

ডা: নীলাম্বী ফুকন নেওগ, নৰ্থ কেৰোলাইনা

Ulfa's Turning Point

For a while now, negotiations between PCG and GOI for starting a direct dialogue between GOI and ULFA have naturally heightened Assamese expectation for an early end to the more than a quarter century of insurgency initiated by ULFA. How dearly the people of Assam harbor the dream that a new chapter of peace and prosperity will begin soon. Shortly after the announcement of cessation of hostilities by ULFA in return for GOI's unilateral ceasefire, before August 15, 2006, CM Tarun Gogoi aptly expressed the public sentiment by saying that with peace, a prerequisite for progress and development, a new era will begin in Assam. Everyone in Assam is anxiously holding on, hoping that the long awaited peace will soon return.

It would not be an exaggeration to state that what has transpired thus far in the process of discussions is very promising. Hopefully, the temporary cessation of hostilities will be a lasting one. It's true that the process has now paused with a bickering about the modalities regarding release of five jailed ULFA leaders and one hopes that that too will clear up and real direct talks will begin soon. Even if that materializes, let no one expect a smooth sailing of the process by any means. It may take months, if not years, of complicated negotiations. Notwithstanding the uncertainty due to the unknown details of discussions and the state of collective psychology and stratagem of ULFA and GOI, one hopes and prays for the best at this time.

Without a doubt, both GOI and ULFA have propelled themselves into a very critical juncture of time. Any misstep by either side has the potential of wreaking havoc and reversing the process. Public faith in both GOI and ULFA will erode precipitously. If that happens, the present euphoria will give way to frustration and pessimism. The net effect of all that on Assamese society will be nothing less than disastrous. The imperatives for peace dictate that a cautious, far-sighted, pragmatic, and constructive approach be taken by either side rather than even outwardly arrogant and selfish postures for which there will be temptations on both sides. Especially for ULFA, it is a moment of reckoning. They must realize that they have a historical responsibility of immense gravity. They are perhaps ordained for a role for uplifting the Assamese people for whom they have suffered so long.

Media references to their alleged tactics in the face of a formidable opponent, if true, surely are reprehensible and utterly despicable: generations of extortion culture, piggy-back rides on ISI, and personal gains etc.. That has brought it at loggerheads with many a sober intellectual who are not their enemies and forms a direct confront with civility. But one can pass that as an act of irrational defiance in the face of adversity or desperation and an aberration if a genuine effort is made for a early resolution of the conflict.

The fact of the matter is that the ULFA insurgency stemmed from a sense of being shortchanged, ignored, and ill-treated by the Indian state. The demand for sovereignty (that was innate in the Assamese psyche long before ULFA articulated it) followed as a cause. An unrealistic sense of invincibility after thwarting the Mughul attempt to subjugate Assam seventeen times somehow reinforces an Assamese desire for independence.

On a personal note, as former president of the Assam Society of America (ASA), I remember leading an Assamese delegation to Ambassador K.R. Narayanan, who later became president of India, after a demonstration outside the Washington D.C. embassy. This was at the height of the student movement of the early eighties led by Prafulla Mahanta and the Late Bhriгу Phukan. In my still un-faded youthful zeal, I undiplomatically told the Ambassador that we wanted to be independent. When he asked me who was going to help, I promptly replied without much thinking: "China." He frowned on that. Later, I realized I was too emotional. With this, perhaps I can claim that I was the only one who demanded Assam's sovereignty on a foreign soil to a representative of GOI! The point here is that a desire for independence is inextricably intertwined with the Assamese mind, but then one has to be realistic. An understanding of history reveals that it inexorably moulds the human society almost in a preordained fashion. To thrive, one must negotiate the twists and turns of history with whatever flexibility and adjustment needed with a pragmatic and beneficial goal. It would not make sense to try to bring back the pre-Yandaboo Chandrakanta Singha's kingdom in Assam. All that is gone with the wind. The meaning of the word "sovereignty" itself is nebulous. Philosophically, there is no absolute sovereignty in the present day world. The entire wired and wide world is interdependent. Even the hands of the only superpower in the world today, the USA, are tied to the institution of the United Nations and individual nations. It is foolhardy for a

sub-nationality of twenty-five million people to dream about a nation on the face of the earth, and survive and make a mark. Mere existence of adequate mineral and other resources is not enough. Any sovereign government of such a nation will only be an exercise in puppetry and a quick trade study with respect to all aspects only leads one to conclude that most can be gained within the umbrella of a revised Indian constitution. Commonality of history, culture, ethos all point to that same conclusion.

It is very difficult to understand the parameters that drive ULFA's actions. In the post 9-11 world, it is conceivable that they are changing and so will ULFA. But ULFA must not make the mistake of being lulled into a sense of invincibility by association with a foreign power that inherently works against the well-being of the harmonious monolith of the heterogeneous Assamese society that includes all indigenous people irrespective of linguistic, religious, ethnic or tribal denominations. I am sure that in the deepest of their hearts, ULFA leadership understands the predicament of standing up to GOI and at the same time be faithful to their *Axomiyatta*. They may even feel as if they are riding on a mythical tiger and unable to dismount. It is in this context that GOI must cautiously play its cards right and ease them out of emotional hang-ups by acquiescing to their reasonable demands for the sake of the Assamese people and not be ruthless and dogmatic.

ULFA's demand for an independent Assam free from constitutional bondage with the rest of India is certainly a very tall order on the existing Indian state of which Assam now happens to be a constitutional part. Those who hold the reins of power under the oath of defending India's constitution are not expected to put an about face on the constitution to which they have pledged their allegiance. They will not stand for the dissolution of the Indian state. That does not mean that the demand for sovereignty of Assam is totally unjustified or uncalled for. Winston Churchill did not want to preside over the dissolution of His Majesty's empire by granting India independence. But the history unfolded against that notion and Gandhi's movement steered India into freedom. So with mass public awakening, it is possible to achieve the righteous goal and become successfully against seemingly impregnable adversities. However, the situation with respect to ULFA is not the same. ULFA's situation today is similar to that of Chechens. So the point here is that there is need to be pragmatic. The media reports that ULFA is

backed in terrorist tactics by a foreign agency who have their own agenda. If that is true, ULFA views an enemy of a perceived enemy as a friend. Nothing can be more short-sighted than that. In that context, it is tempting to see a part of Assam's history repeating itself. In the last twenty seven years, the world has changed in a dramatic way mainly because of advancements in science and technology, and Assam has been left behind on the way side in the dust bin of history because of its preoccupation with an unsettling socio-political environment. If twenty-seven years have not been enough to achieve its goals, how long more will be needed? Certainly ULFA can not demand a millennium of Assam's history to achieve the results. Waiting indefinitely is not the choice because the Assamese sub-nationality will not be existent if the present state of affairs continues much longer. In twenty-seven years, ULFA has not made any significant headway in the matter of achieving its cherished goal. People are rather disillusioned and rightfully so.

ULFA has two choices: either continue with the path of demanding severing constitutional ties with India and try to declare Assam as an independent sovereign nation *ad infinitum*, or sit down with GOI for a special deal to redress all the grievances under a possibly amended constitution of India. Whereas it is questionable how much popular support there is for course one, I feel almost everyone will support the second choice.

Lastly, the phenomenon of ULFA is a very unique and significant one in the entire history of Assam. Whatever else, one must admit that ULFA has achieved something that no one else has achieved in post-independent India. It brings into sharp national focus the fact of injustices meted out to Assam by the Indian state. ULFA's movement has catapulted the Assamese identity and awakening to a level achieved never before. ULFA has already succeeded in their mission. Because that awakening of the people of Assam will remain an asset to proclaim Assam's preponderance in the greater Indian society in years to come and even long after ULFA is gone. ULFA's legacy will take a quantum leap if it now comes to terms with reality, sit down with GOI and from their strong position, negotiate as much out of GOI as possible and set the course of an unprecedented renaissance of the Assamese people.

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