



The Assam Eviction Drive: A Fear That Gained Currency

Following India's independence, Assam has consistently experienced religious, linguistic, ethnic, and sub-regional differences. The most polarising debate has been between the indigenous and the Miya, a pejorative term for Muslims with roots in Bangladesh.



Historical Roots of the Divide

This divide is rooted in the fear that Bangladeshi nationals will take over Assam. This fear gained currency during the Assam agitation (1979–85), which led to the signing of the Assam Accord of 1985.

The accord prescribed the detection, deletion from electoral rolls, and deportation of foreigners who entered Assam on or after March 25, 1971. It also included constitutional safeguards for the Assamese people and restrictions on property acquisition by foreigners.

Electoral Politics and the Bangladeshi Issue

1983 Election

Bengali-speaking Muslims participated despite boycott calls by pro-agitation groups. They are dominant voters in at least 35 of Assam's 126 Assembly seats.

1985 Election

Won by the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), comprising mostly agitation leaders. This birthed the United Minorities Front, stoking perceived demographic threats.

The issue became an election staple, with the All India United Democratic Front later taking up the minorities' space.

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BJP's Rise and the 'Jaati, Maati, Bheti' Promise

The Bangladeshi or 'illegal immigrants' issue was in the sub-text of the promise to protect 'jaati' (race), 'maati' (land), 'bheti' (hearth) that helped the BJP form its first government in Assam in 2016.

The party's allies were the AGP and the Bodoland People's Front. The BJP-led government showed it meant business by carrying out the first eviction drive in three fringe villages of Kaziranga National Park in September 2016, killing two people during the eviction of mostly migrant Muslims.



Himanta Biswa Sarma's Aggressive Approach

2021: Gorukhuti Eviction

Eviction drive in Darrang district claimed two lives.
Drive was paused after a few more operations.

1

2

June 2024: Renewed Drive

Drive restarted across several districts of western and north-eastern Assam under Chief Minister Sarma.

The former Congress leader maintains that the BJP doesn't need Muslim votes to win elections, while distinguishing Bengali Muslims from khilonjia Assamese Muslims.

The Scale of Evictions

1.29L

Bighas Cleared

**Land cleared of squatters so far
according to official documents**

29L

Still Encroached

**Bighas of land still under
encroachment in the state**

2041

Demographic Shift

**Year by which Assamese people would
become a minority, according to Sarma**

Sarma called encroachment of land a "jihad to finish the State", linking it to an impending demographic shift.

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Corporate Interests and Political Strategy

The Corporate Angle

Detractors say eviction is being carried out to clear land for corporate houses, including the Adani Group, which is eyeing a thermal power project in western Assam. People have been moved out of at least 49,000 bighas where indigenous communities resided.

Political Polarisation

MLA Akhil Gogoi said evicting minorities paves the way for polarisation politics so that Hindu voters back the BJP, especially in Upper Assam where the party faces challenges.

Looking Ahead: Elections and Implications

While eviction of other communities has been low-key, those against Muslims have had more traction. The targeting appears strategic, as state elections are less than a year away.

The eviction drive represents a continuation of fears that gained currency during the Assam agitation, now being leveraged for electoral advantage whilst potentially serving corporate interests in land acquisition.

 **The pattern suggests that historical anxieties about demographic change continue to shape contemporary politics in Assam, with significant implications for minority communities.**

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