

# **The Assam Tribune**

## **ULFA(I) steps up recruitment drive**

After keeping a low profile for some time, the United Liberation Front of Asom (Independent) has started a fresh move to recruit youths from upper Assam districts. On the other hand, the outfit has also launched an extortion drive and interestingly, the outfit is aided by a few businessmen in its move.

Highly placed security sources told The Assam Tribune that the ULFA(I) has been making efforts to recruit youths from the districts of Tinsukia, Dibrugarh and Sivasagar. The effort of the outfit came to light after five militants, including four new recruits, were arrested.

Sources said that one hardcore militant, Raju Asom, was entrusted with the responsibility of recruiting youths to increase the strength of the outfit and he managed to rope in around 25 to 30 youths. Raju, along with four new recruits were arrested when they were on their way to the main bases of the outfit in Myanmar.

From their questioning, the police and security forces came to know that Raju, who was in constant touch with the commander-in-chief of the outfit, Paresh Baruah, managed to recruit more than 25 youths and efforts are now on to nab the others. However, sources admitted that it is not known whether any other hardcore militant has been engaged by the senior leaders of the outfit to get fresh recruits and a close watch on the situation is being maintained.

Meanwhile, at the same time, the outfit has been trying to step up extortion drive after facing severe financial crunch. Two contractors, who were in touch with senior leaders of the outfit, Drishti Rajkhowa, have been arrested in Guwahati city. The contractors were allegedly involved in providing phone numbers of businessmen to Rajkhowa, following which, they received calls from Paresh Baruah and Rajkhowa with demands for money. However, it is not known whether any city based businessmen, who received calls from the ULFA(I) leaders, paid the demanded amount.

Sources admitted that a number of owners and managers of the tea gardens in upper Assam also received such calls with demands for money from the ULFA(I).