

# LOST OPPORTUNITIES

50 YEARS OF INSURGENCY IN THE  
NORTH-EAST AND INDIA'S RESPONSE

Brigadier (Dr) SP Sinha, VSM



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North-east and India's Response



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# Contents

Foreword	XV
Preface	XXV
Acknowledgements	XXVI
Abbreviations	XXIX
Overview	XXXIII

## PART 1

1. Geo-Strategic Significance of North-east India	1
Historical Background	1
Physiography	4
The Meghalaya Plateau	7
The Brahmaputra River and Valley	7
Surma or Barak Valley	8
The Imphal Valley	8
Communications	8
Mineral Resources	10
Geo-political Significance of North-east India	11
Interplay of Ethnicity along India-Myanmar Border	13
A Brief Historical Perspective of Burmese Insurgencies	15
Chittagong Hill Tract	18
Insurgent Linkages Across India-Bangladesh Border	20
Appraisal	21
2. The Ethnic and Demographic Composition	24
The Ethnic Profile	24
The Demographic Profile of Assam	27
The Role of Saadulla	28
The Aftermath of Partition	29
The Exodus of 1971	31
Situation after Emergence of Bangladesh	33
Demographic Changes in Tripura	37
Muslim Population	38



Demographic Changes in Nagaland	39
Nepali Migrants	40
The Arrival of Bengali Immigrants	41
Immigration of other Indians into Assam	41
Analysis of the Migration Pattern	42

## PART 2

3. Nagaland	48
Early History	48
The Formation of Naga Club	51
The Formation of Naga National Council	
Clause 9	52
The Beginning of Insurgency	55
The Army is Called Out	56
Phizo's Escape to East Pakistan	57
Sixteen Point Agreement and Formation of Nagaland	
Overground Politics	57
Peace Mission and Cessation of Hostilities	59
• Role of Michael Scott	60
Ministerial Talks	61
Split in the Underground	62
Capture of Mowu Angami	63
The Shillong Accord	64
Formation of National Socialist Council of Nagaland	65
The NSCN Manifesto	66
Split in the National Socialist Council of Nagaland	66
Admission to the Unrepresented Nations and	
Peoples Organisation	67
Drift in Naga Movement	67
A Fresh Peace Initiative	68
Demand for Greater Nagaland	71
Appraisal	71
4. Mizoram	80
Historical Perspective	80
Physical Geography	81
The British Period	81
Period Prior to the Transfer of Power	82
Political Scenario after Independence	84

Formation of Mizo National Front	85
MNF Prepares for Revolt	86
The Beginning of Insurgency: Operation Jericho	87
The Insurgent Plan	88
Strikes by the Indian Air Force	88
The Army is Called Out	89
Grouping of Villages: Operation Accomplishment	90
Overground Politics: Mizoram becomes Union Territory	91
The Aftermath of 1971 War	92
Mizo National Army Regroups and Strikes Back	92
Peace Moves and 1976 Agreement	94
Progress of Talks under the Janata Government	95
Rift in Mizo National Front	96
Sailo's Victory in 1978 Assembly Elections	96
Resumption of Talks after Return of Indira Gandhi to Power in 1980	97
Events after the Assassination of Indira Gandhi: Memorandum of Settlement	98
Appraisal	99
 5. Manipur	 103
Physiography	103
Historical Backdrop	104
The Defeat of the Burmese and the Treaty of Yandaboo	106
Annexation of Manipur	106
Politicisation of Manipur Politics	109
Radicalism of Hajjam Irabot	110
Events Immediately Prior to Independence	110
The Growth of Secessionist Movement and Insurgency	111
The Genesis of Insurgency	112
Spread of Insurgency	113
Formation of People's Liberation Army	113
Resurfacing of United National Liberation Front	116
Formation of Indo-Burma Revolutionary Front	116
Restructuring of People's Liberation Army	116
Upsurge in Violence and Political Instability in the 1990s	117

## **X    Lost Opportunities**

The Naga-Kuki Conflict	120
Political Mobilisation of Kukis	120
The Beginning of Naga-Kuki Clashes	
Present Situation in Manipur	121
Appraisal	122
<b>6. Tripura</b>	<b>127</b>
Physical Features	127
Historical Background	128
Independence and Merger of Tripura with India	131
The Early Tribal Unrest and the Communist Revolt	132
Advent of Electoral Politics	135
Formation of Tripura Upjati Juba Samity	137
The Return of Sengkrak (Clenched Fist)	137
From Sengkrak to Tripura National Volunteers	138
The Formation of Amra Bengali and	
Polarisation of Tribals and Non-Tribals	140
Formation of All Tripura People's Liberation	
Organisation	141
The Accord	142
Post Accord Scenario	142
Appraisal	143
<b>7. The Quest for Swadhin Asom</b>	<b>147</b>
Historical Backdrop	147
Pragjyotisa and Kamrup	148
The Origin of the Name Assam	149
Early History	149
Assamese Nationalism and the Growth of the	
Idea of Swadhin Asom	155
Centre-State Relations: Genesis of Assam's	
Alienation	158
Assam Students Movement (1979-1985)	161
The Nellie Killings	163
The Assam Accord	164
The Rise of United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA)	164
Operation Bajrang	166
Operation Rhino	167
Split in ULFA	168



Shift in ULFA's Ideology	169
Recrudescence of ULFA Violence	169
Illegal Migrants Detection Tribunal Act (1983)	170
The Unified Command	170
Assam Gana Parishad in Crisis	171
The Current Scenario	172
Destruction of ULFA Camps in Bhutan	173
Emergence of Islamic Fundamentalism in Assam and North-east India	175
The Bodo Insurgency	176
Appraisal	186
<b>8. Meghalaya</b>	<b>195</b>
Background	195
Areas of Discord	197
Pattern of Militancy	197
Present Scenario	198
<b>9. Arunachal Pradesh</b>	<b>199</b>
Background	199
Political Evolution	199
Rumblings of Discord	202
<b>PART 3</b>	
<b>10. The External Dimension</b>	<b>204</b>
Background	204
The Idea of a Crown Colony	204
The Western Perception of North-east India	205
Pakistan's Support to Naga Rebels	206
China's Support to Naga Rebels	208
Pakistan's Support to Mizos	212
Situation after Emergence of Bangladesh	213
China's Support to Mizos	213
Pakistan's Support to Meitei Insurgents	214
China's Support to Meitei Insurgents	215
Pakistan's and Bangladesh Support to Insurgents of Tripura	215
Pakistani and Bangladeshi Support to ULFA	217

Sanctuaries in Myanmar and Bhutan	218
Appraisal	218
<b>11. The Religious Dimension</b>	<b>221</b>
Background	221
Christianity in Nagaland	222
Spread of Christianity in Manipur	223
Phenomenal Success in Mizoram	223
Christianity in Meghalaya	224
Arunachal: A Different Story	224
Exposure to Hinduism	225
Situation after Independence	226
The Impact of Christianity on Tribal Societies	227
Charge of Encouraging Secessionist Groups	229
<b>12. The Role of Narcotics and Arms Trafficking</b>	<b>234</b>
Kuomintang (KMT) and the American Connection	235
Linkages Between Narcotics and Arms Smuggling	236
Narcotics Trade and the North-east	236
Acetic Anhydride Seizure in India	238
Trafficking Routes in the North-east	239
Drug Abuse in the North-east	240
Arms Trafficking	241
Appraisal	242
<b>13. The Ethnic and Linguistic Factors</b>	<b>245</b>

## **PART 4**

<b>14. Counter-Insurgency Operations</b>	<b>252</b>
Background	252
Evolution of Counter-Insurgency Strategy	255
Minimum Force	257
Isolating the Populace from Insurgents:	
Grouping of Villages	258
Nature of Counter-Insurgency Operations	259
Employment of Air Power	259
Political and Diplomatic Initiatives	260
Re-organising of Infantry Battalions for	

Counter-Insurgency Operations	
Composition of the Assam Rifles	261
Civic Action: Winning the Hearts and Minds	262
Psychological Operations (Psy Ops)	263
Human Rights	265
Media Policy	267
Unified Command	269
Formation of North-eastern Council	270
Counter-Insurgency Operations in Nagaland	271
Counter-Insurgency Operations in Mizoram	284
Counter-Insurgency Operations in Manipur	288
Counter-Insurgency Operations in Assam	295
Appraisal	299

## PART 5

15. Future Prospects	306
Illegal Immigration	306
Islamic Fundamentalism	307
Rise of Terrorism	308
The Demand for Nagalim	308
Narco-Terrorism	309
Pakistan's Alternative Proxy War	309
The Chinese Shadow	309
16. The Way Forward	312
Background	312
Reintroduction of Indian Frontier	
Administrative Service	312
Economic Development	312
Special Package for the North-east	313
Border Trade	314
Curbing Illegal Immigration	315
Reorganisation of Assam	316
Control of Trafficking in Narcotics and Small Arms	317
Rebuilding the Shattered Communications with Bangladesh	317
India-Myanmar Cooperation	318
India-Bangladesh Relations	319



#### XIV Lost Opportunities

Shift in Counter-Insurgency Strategy	319
Legal Framework	321
Intelligence	322
<i>Appendix 'A'</i>	324
Nagaland Accord (1975)	324
Supplementary Agreement of January 5, 1976	326
<i>Appendix 'B'</i>	327
Memorandum of Settlement with MNF	327
Preamble	327
Restoration of Normalcy	327
Legal, Administrative and other Steps	328
Other Matters	329
Sequence of Events	331
<i>Appendix 'C'</i>	332
Memorandum of Understanding with TNV (1988)	332
Preamble	332
Rehabilitation of Undergrounds	332
Measures to Prevent Infiltration	333
Reservation of Seats in the Tripura Legislative Assembly for Tribals	333
Restoration of Alienated Lands of Tribals	333
Redrawing of the Boundaries of Autonomous District Council Area	333
Measures for Long-term Economic Development of Tripura	334
<i>Appendix 'D'</i>	335
Memorandum of Settlement on Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC)	335
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	343
<i>Index</i>	351



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## FOREWORD

India is perhaps the most diverse country in the world with wide diversity of religion, language and ethnicity. Yet, there is an underlying unity in the country based on geography, history and culture. This has enabled the Indian Civilisation State to survive from the dawn of history. In fact, ours is the only surviving ancient civilisation of the world. As India is the most diverse country of the world, her North-eastern Region is the most diverse part of the country. The religious, linguistic and ethnic divides here are sharper and the bonds of history, geography and culture not so strong. The several insurgencies that have erupted in this region have to be seen against this backdrop.

Politically independent and economically affluent societies enjoying good governance do not get afflicted by insurgency. The people in such countries are naturally interested in the maintenance of *status quo*. Developing societies harbouring a feeling of neglect or discrimination, and having a large unemployed youth population, provide a breeding ground for insurgency. These conditions are to be found in ample measure in the North-east and hence the mushrooming of different insurgencies in that region.

The five requirements for an insurgency movement are, an Ideal, a Charismatic Leader, a Popular Base, a Favourable Terrain and Outside Support. These have been available to insurgency movements in varying degrees in the North-east. They fuel the secessionist agenda of the insurgents. We have had different types of secessionist movements in the country

like linguistic, tribal, cultural and religious. On the whole, we have been battling against them successfully keeping our national frontiers inviolate. The linguistic secessionism in Tamil Nadu was successfully tackled through a democratic process and without resort to force. The other South Indian States did not join the anti-Hindi movement and the 1962 war generated a nationalist upsurge, throughout the country. Our economy improved due to the ushering in of the Green Revolution. All these factors helped us in tackling linguistic secessionism in Tamil Nadu. On the other hand, linguistic secessionism succeeded in Pakistan. Democratic process had been thwarted there and military committed numerous atrocities. This led to a people's movement for freedom and armed rebellion. Thus, Pakistan got dismembered. Tribal insurgencies erupted in Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura. In Nagaland it has been in suspended animation for the last ten years through a cease-fire but the source of conflict has not yet been resolved. The tribal insurgency in Mizoram, was resolved through a political settlement, with Laldenga, the undisputed Mizo insurgent leader, joining the Nation's political mainstream. This has been a success story and Mizoram is now the most peaceful State of the North-east. Manipur continues to boil and is today the most violent State in the North-east. The situation there is compounded by conflict between different segments of the population on the basis of ethnic differences. Insurgency in Tripura is more of a "civil war" between the tribal population and the post-1947 Bengalee immigrants, who have reduced the original population of the State to a minority. Assam is the most important State in the North-east, strategically, economically and demographically. Although tribal insurgency notably that of Bodos has taken place in that State, the insurgency there has been mainly cultural with the bulk of the population being men of the plains, seeking a separate cultural and historical identity. Religious insurgency as such has not erupted in the North-east. Large-scale conversions have taken place in that region post



Independence. This has been a continuation of the process started in the pre-Independence era. Apart from a few incidents, and inclinations of some elements on the basis of religious identity, religion as such has not been a major factor motivating insurgents. However, we have had to contend with religious insurgency in the North, first in Punjab and then in Jammu and Kashmir. We successfully managed to combat insurgency in Punjab, through firm Police action supported by the Army and the cooperation of the people. Normalcy was restored in that State. Religious secessionism in Jammu and Kashmir has been an ongoing militancy movement with a vicious mix of insurgency, terrorism and proxy war. Vigorous efforts are being made towards both conflict management and conflict resolution. There is a marked improvement in the situation but daily killings, albeit on reduced scale, and occasional incidents of high profile violence, continue.

Insurgency which is also for good reason, called People's War, is primarily a post Second World War phenomenon. No doubt there have been innumerable previous instances of irregular bands operating in mountains and forests against regular armies. Tsi Yao of the Ming race engaged Emperor Huang in a long drawn war in fourth century BC. The Old Testament describes the guerilla campaign of Macabes against the Syrian armies. Fabius Maximus adopted this tactics in Italy against Hanibal. In early nineteenth century, the Spanish guerillas wore down the army of Napoleon. In fact, the word 'guerilla' is derived from the Spanish word 'gorilo' meaning little warfare. Guerilla tactics may have often been practiced in the past, but the concept of insurgency is a modern phenomenon, requiring irregular bands to wear down regular armies through guerilla tactics and preventing them to bring to bear their superior military strength, securing a sanctuary to build conventional military power and finally delivering a coup de grace in a crushing defeat on the occupying/ruling power in a conventional

battle. Mao demonstrated the successful culmination of this process in China leading to driving out the US supported Chiang-Kai-Shekh's Army from the Chinese mainland. Ho Chi Minh did the same when he ultimately inflicted a stunning defeat on the French at Dren Bien Phu in a conventional battle. Although this form of insurgency is essentially a post Second World War phenomenon, it would not be out of place to mention that this concept was perhaps pioneered, centuries earlier, by the great Shivaji. Starting with irregular bands, he wore down the armies of first Bijapur Sultan and then the Mughal Emperor in the hills of the Western Ghat. His victories against overwhelmingly superior forces demonstrated the success of the weak against the strong. What he lacked in military strength, he made up with surprise and mobility. Thus he managed a sanctuary ringed by hill forts which became virtually impregnable. His one reverse at Purandar led to his being taken a prisoner and he had to suffer the ignominy of having to appear in the Mughal court at Agra. His dramatic escape from Agra had an electrifying effect on the people of Maharashtra. He now renounced the Purandar treaty imposed on him. At the height of Mughal imperial power, he could celebrate his coronation at Raigad with priests coming from far away Varanasi, making it a landmark national event of the time. This was followed by a victorious advance at the head of a large Army, over a distance of 1000 Kms across the Deccan, from the West Coast to the East Coast.

Till the Second World War, insurgency or people's war, was hardly a problem. Fate of nations was decided mostly in conventional battles. Exceptions apart, like mobilisation of people's power as in the case of operations by Shivaji, the common man showed little concern and was generally apathetic. He did not consider it necessary to combat the enemy. This was considered 'the exclusive domain of soldiers'. No role was visualised for the people who had to resign themselves to



the outcome of battles. Thus, the fate of India was repeatedly decided on a frontage of a few thousand yards at Panipat with the people resigning themselves to accepting the outcome of the battle. This was so even in Europe, even though Nation States had got established there from sixteenth/seventeenth centuries and large national armies were being raised through conscription. Thus as at Panipat, so at Waterloo the fate of Europe was decided on a frontage of about 3000 yards without any subsequent popular upheaval by the people. Moreover, in the past there was little awareness among the people. With improved communications and higher level of public consciousness, the situation got altered in the twentieth century and more so as we advanced to the present Information Age.

With the process of decolonisation starting after the Second World War, greater awareness and consciousness among the people, promotion of Communist philosophy as also nuclear balance of terror, low intensity conflicts like insurgencies have become the order of the day. A few hundred such conflicts have taken place in different parts of the world since 1945. Mobilising the people to fight an occupying/ruling power has become common. Major colonial powers like the French in Indo-China and Algeria, the Dutch in Indonesia, the British in Malaya and Kenya, the US in Vietnam and the Soviets in Afghanistan, had to pull out from those countries, withdrawing their regular Army. Currently we see the strongest military power in the world which won a spectacular victory in a conventional war in Iraq with its overwhelming military power and shock and awe tactics, mired in the quagmire of insurgency in that country.

The British devised a strategy for counter-insurgency operations in Malaya based on trying to win the hearts and minds of the people. The organisation and strategy devised by them in Malaya, became a role model for fighting insurgency. No doubt they succeeded in Malaya in dealing with "Communist terrorists" but at the end of the day, the solution of the problem



was found in their withdrawing their imperial hold on that country.

In India we have been combating insurgency in our country, with certain sections of our own people, wanting to secede through armed rebellion. Our imperative need is to counter these armed uprisings using minimum force, winning the hearts and minds of the people and finding an acceptable political solution. I recall that in the fifties, a view was held in Army circles, that we should counter Naga insurgency demographically. The Naga population at that time was only 5 lakhs. There were plenty of open spaces there in which we could settle people from our mainland, particularly ex-Servicemen, to neutralise the Nagas. The Chinese tried this technique successfully in Tibet. We decided not to do so and seek a value-based democratic solution. The Inner Line was imposed restricting movement of population from the mainland to preserve Naga culture and identity. Political concession was given. A region with a population of much less than half of any major city in the country, was made a full-fledged State with all the trappings of Statehood at the expense of the Indian taxpayer. I do not propose to sit in judgment over this approach. The fact remains that despite various insurgencies we have kept our borders inviolate in North-east as in the rest of India. This was achieved despite the insurgents managing outside support in a fair measure. Initially, China and East Pakistan supported insurgencies in this region but after the 1971 war, this changed. Pakistan was now not in a position to do so and Chinese for their own reasons, generally gave up doing so. However, in the case of our other neighbours, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh, the case has been different. The former two have not been supportive of Indian militants operating from their territory but were not in a position to prevent them from raiding Indian territory. After some years, Bhutan geared itself to destroy Indian militant camps in its territory and carried out a

successful operation in 2004. Today, Bhutan stands cleansed of Indian militant camps. Myanmar is not in effective control of its Northern region and Indian militants continue to have their bases in that area. However, in 2001 Myanmar Army successfully cooperated with the Indian Army in operations against Nagas in their territory. So far as Bangladesh is concerned, the position has been getting increasingly worse. Apart from unabated influx of illegal migration from that country, militant leaders and militant camps are being provided asylum in that country. It is unfortunate that no curb is put in Bangladesh to anti-India activity and of late 151 has become very active in that country.

During my tenure as Governor in Assam from 1997 to 2003, we worked on a three pronged strategy of unified command, economic development and psychological initiatives. Despite our efforts to have a unified command in the North-east starting with the outbreak of Naga insurgency in the fifties, it took us over forty years to set up a unified command for the first time in 1997. This helped in coordinating the operations of the Army, the Para Military and the Police and ensuring that they worked as complimentary rather than competing forces. Thus, we could inflict heavy attrition on the militants, almost breaking their back, even though during this period, militants were operating from their havens inside Bhutan, which were beyond the reach of our Forces. Some 2500 militants were killed in encounters, about 3500 surrendered, 3000 weapons were recovered and so was over one crore in cash. The second prong of the strategy of economic development was also a great success. Here we hit a jackpot. Assam was dependent upon the monsoon for agriculture and used to have only one crop a year and even that got damaged due to annual floods. Assam was a food-deficit State. The water table in the Brahmaputra Valley is very high. We installed one lakh shallow tube wells in a year enabling us to have two to three crops a year. Assam now became a food



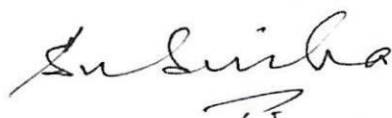
surplus State. The third prong of our strategy of psychological initiatives became the real success story of our counter-insurgency operations in the State. Apart from various civic action programmes undertaken by the Army under Operation Samaritan like free medical camps, road construction, vocational training and so on, we decided to touch the emotional chord of the people of Assam. We utilised religion, history and local sentiments for this purpose. The militant propaganda of Assamese being a separate Nation was effectively countered on the basis of historical facts. Vashishta near Guwahati was given a face lift and made into a tourist spot. Guru Vashishta of Ramayan era is supposed to have had his Ashram there. I went to Dwarka and first paid obeisance at the temple of Rukmini, the consort of Lord Krishna. Rukmini was from Sadiya District in Assam. All this was done to underscore the religious, historical and cultural unity of Assam with the rest of India. The three great heroes of Assam, Mahapurush Sankaradeva, Lachit Borphukon and Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi were projected as national heroes. Documentary films were prepared on them and telecast on the television. A large painting of Mahapurush Sankaradeva was put up as a backdrop of a tastefully constructed new Durbar Hall at Raj Bhavan like Gautam Buddha's statue at Ashoka Hall in Rashtrapati Bhavan. The guns used by the great Assamese military leader Lachit Borphukon were placed at the gate of Raj Bhavan and a replica of his victory pillar was put in the foyer of Raj Bhavan. Lachit had decisively defeated the nearly one lakh strong Mughal Army of Aurangzeb at Saraighat in 1670. Lachit Park was developed in Guwahati where Lachit's victory day started being celebrated with much fanfare every year. A statue of Lachit was installed at National Defence Academy in Pune and a gold medal instituted in his name for the best passing out cadet in officer like qualities in every batch. As for Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi, we had the Guwahati airport named after him and got Government of India to confer a posthumous award of Bharat

Ratna on him fifty years after he had died. We also had his life size bronze statue installed in the Lok Sabha at Delhi. Besides these measures with a high emotional content in Assam, as Governor, I submitted a 42 page printed special report to the President of India on illegal migration into Assam from Bangladesh. This report was serialised in every newspaper in Assam. This took the people of Assam by storm. Among the measures recommended was the repeal of the IMDT (Act) which appeared to have been designed more to facilitate illegal migration rather than prevent it. Ultimately, the Supreme Court repealed the IMDT (Act) quoting extensively from my report. The result of these initiatives was that the Governor started being referred to in the Press and among the people as "our man in Raj Bhavan" and his being called "a true son of the soil of Assam". Thus, a mind change came about among the people of Assam and this helped to bring them into the national mainstream. It is pertinent that towards the end of my tenure, 81 militants were apprehended by the Assamese people in the villages. A few of them were lynched and the remainder handed over to Security Forces. Recently, there has been a spurt in violence in Assam but there appears to be no popular support for it. This is almost like incidents of terrorist violence taking place in the rest of the country.

I have had a long association with the North-east, as a Company Commander in the fifties, as a Brigade Commander in the Sixties, as a Divisional Commander in the seventies, as the Chief of Military Intelligence also in the seventies and finally as Governor of Assam in nineties and in early years of this century. I have found that this book is a *magnum opus* on North-eastern States and insurgencies in that region. Brig SP Sinha has produced an exhaustive treatise giving in-depth and very extensive information about history, geography, demography, economy and insurgency in that region. The large bibliography and numerous quotes from various sources in the



text of the book, bear testimony to his extensive and painstaking research. The strategic importance of this region has also been well brought out. I am one of those who feel that our strategic thinking has been much too West and North centric with a tendency to overlook the North-east. Our decision-makers cannot afford to ignore the North-east. This region is of vital strategic importance and its problems must be addressed suitably in our national interest. I consider this book a must for anyone studying the North-east and working on the strategy to deal with the threats that we face in that region.



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15 June, 2006

## PREFACE

**E**ven after more than half a century of Independence, the Indian polity has failed to satisfy the aspirations of the people of North-east. The Nagas revolted soon after the Independence followed by Mizos and today more than fifty years later the whole of North-east is in grip of some form of insurgency or the other. There are a large number of scholars who have attempted to find the reasons for their alienation, chart the course of insurgencies and suggest ways to overcome the problem. In fact, the literature on the North-east is growing at a fast pace; on an average one or two books are published every year on some aspect of 'North-east Insurgency.'

What then is the purpose of this book? I was posted in the North-east for many years in the seventies as a young company commander in my Battalion. The Battalion took active part in counter-insurgency operations, mainly in Nagaland and Khonsa area of Arunachal Pradesh, and won many laurel, and awards and made many friends. But when you are 'jungle bashing' there is hardly any time to think about the larger picture - the genesis, the undercurrents of hopes, aspirations and frustrations of the many tribes and the consequences of your actions. It was only much later after I left the North-east, did I realise that all of us in the Battalion knew so little about the North-east. In retrospect I would have responded quite differently had I been more knowledgeable about the region's past. This book is an attempt to present the North-east in its totality. Though each state has its own personality, to analyse the many insurgencies for their genesis, aspirations of tribal groups, ideological persuasions of insurgent groups and administrative response to them, I have purposely avoided tactical aspects of counter-insurgency operations that I took part in with my Battalion.

The study of North-east has been a rich experience. The abiding impression is that of people who have zest for life, love for music, dance and rejoicing. Even though living in troubled times, people haven't lost their optimism and zest for life; boys and girls in their colourful dresses, their smiling faces and carefree demeanour, which no doubt also camouflage their frustrations, are images that at once uplift your spirits. In contrast, travelling in north India, the images are stark; faces burdened with the grind of daily life, young girls exposed to motherhood much before their time and young boys in groups moving aimlessly without hope, but mimicking the cricketing style of Sachin, which makes their hopelessness more heart rending.

The book, however, is not a personal narrative. It is written to fill a personal void but with the hope that military, police and civilian officers who serve in the North-east, may derive some benefit from it. If this book helps their understanding of the region 'a little more', it would have served its purpose.

The book is divided into five parts. Part 1 deals with the geo-strategic significance, ethnicity and demography. Part 2 reviews the state of insurgencies in the seven states of the region. The review of the major insurgencies concludes with an appraisal. Part 3 analyses the factors that fuel insurgencies and Part 4 deals with the counter-insurgency operations by the security forces and the political and administrative response by the State and Central government. Part 5 looks at the crystal ball and suggests ways to move forward.



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## ABBREVIATIONS

AAGSP	All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad
AAPSU	All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union
AASU	All Assam Students Union
ABSU	All Bodo Students Union
ABUSS	Asamiya Bhasha Unnati Sadhani Sabha
ADG	Army Development Group
AGP	Asom Gana Parishad
AJYCP	Asom Jatiyabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad
ALMA	Achik Liberation Matgrik Army
ANSAM	All Naga Students Association of Manipur
APHLC	All Party Hill Leaders Conference
APLA	Assam People Liberation Army
ASDC	Autonomous State Demand Committee
ATPLO	All Tripura People's Liberation Organisation
ATTF	All Tripura Tiger Force
BAC	Bodoland Autonomous Council
BdSF	Bodo Security Force
BPAC	Bodo People Action Committee
BSF	Border Security Force
BSPP	Burma Socialist Programme Party
BTC	Bodoland Territorial Council
CEC	Chief Election Commissioner

### XXX Lost Opportunities

CHT	Chittagong Hill Tract
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief
Congress (I)	Congress (Indira)
CPB	Communist Party of Burma
CPI	Communist Party of India
CRPF	Central Reserve Police Force
DGFI	Director General of Field Intelligence
DIG	Deputy Inspector General
EITU	Eastern India Tribal Unit
ENRC	Eastern Naga Revolutionary Council
FGN	Federal Government of Nagaland
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GOC-in-C	General Officer Commanding-in-Chief
GR	Gorkha Rifles
HALC	Hynniewtrep Achik Liberation Council
IAF	Indian Air Force
IB	Intelligence Bureau
IBRF	Indo-Burma Revolutionary Front
IMDT Act	Illegal Migrants Detection Tribunal Act
IPFT	Independent People's Front of Tripura
IPKF	Indian Peace Keeping Force
ISI	Inter Service Intelligence
J&K	Jammu and Kashmir
JCO	Junior Commissioned Officer
KNU	Karen National Union

KIA	Kachin Independence Army
KMT	Kuomintang
KNF	Kuki National Front
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MCPU	Mizo Common People's Union
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs
MNF	Mizo National Front
MHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MNA	Mizo National Army
MNFF	Mizo National Famine Front
MoD	Ministry of Defence
NDF	National Democratic Front
NEFA	North East Frontier Agency
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHTA	Naga Hill Tuensang Area
NLD	National League of Democracy
NNC	Naga National Council
NNO	Naga National Organisation
NPC	Naga People's Convention
NSCN	National Socialist Council of Nagaland
NSCN (IM)	National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isac-Muivah)
NSCN (K)	National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang)
OBC	Other Backward Classes
PLA	People's Liberation Army



## XXXII Lost Opportunities

PREPAK	People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipok
PPV	Protected and Progressive Village
Psy Ops	Psychological Operations
PTCA	Plain Tribal Council of Assam
RAW	Research and Analysis Wing
RBA	Royal Bhutan Army
RGM	Revolutionary Government of Manipur
RGN	Revolutionary Government of Nagaland
SLORC	State Land and Order Restoration Council
TLR & LRA	Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act
TNVF	Tripura National Volunteer Force
TTADAC	Tripura Tribal Areas District Autonomous Council
TUJS	Tripura Upjati Juba Samity
UDF	United Democratic Front
ULFA	United Liberation Front of Asom
UMFO	United Mizo Freedom Organisation
UMPP	United Mizo Parliamentary Party
UNLF	United National Liberation Front
UNPO	Unrepresented Nations and People's Organisation
UPDS	United Peoples Democratic Solidarity
USI	United Service Institution
UT	Union Territory
VGC	Voluntary Group Centre

## OVERVIEW

People who are ethnically different from rest of India inhabit the North-east predominantly. The tribal population, both in the hills and the plains, is of Mongoloid origin, whose culture, language and life style is quite apart from the rest of the country. Before the advent of the British, Assam which in effect constituted the major part of the North-east, was conquered by the Ahoms in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. They ruled over Assam for nearly 600 years and in the process got assimilated in the Assamese society. The British absorbed Assam in the British Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century after the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826; the consolidation of British rule over the North-east was, however, a gradual process spread over time. Assam plain was annexed in 1826, the Cachar plain in 1830, Khasi Hills in 1833, Jaintia in 1835, Karbi Anglong in 1838, North Cachar in 1854, Naga Hills between 1866 and 1904, Garo Hills between 1872 and 1873 and finally Lushai Hills in 1890. The tribes of NEFA along India's border with Tibet were left undisturbed until much after the agreement on McMahon Line in 1914.

At the time of Independence, Assam incorporated almost whole of North-east except the princely states of Manipur and Tripura. The Ministry of External Affairs administered North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), which was technically under Assam, from Shillong much in the same way as the British had done before Independence until August 1, 1965 when the administration was transferred to the Ministry of Home Affairs at the Centre. Today the North-east consists of what is commonly known as 'Seven Sisters', namely, Assam, Arunachal, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura. Sikkim has recently been included in the North East Council. North-

east less Sikkim has a total area of 2,55,083 sq km i.e. 7.76 percent of the geographical area of India. The total population of North-eastern states as per 2001 census is 3,84,95,089, which is 3.75 percent of the population of India. With the inclusion of Sikkim, the population of North-east will rise to 38.8 million i.e. 4.1 percent of India's population. (Sikkim's population as per 2001 census is 5,40,493) There are as many as 209 schedule tribes in the North-east speaking as many as 420 different dialects. It has aptly been described as "Miniature Asia" a place where the brown and yellow races meet.

The British interest in the North-east was primarily commercial; the development of tea and oil industries and exploitation of forest resources were their main concerns. To advance these interests, the British developed the road and rail communications and established administrative infrastructure in the hill areas. Their concern with the tribals was limited; as long as the hill tribes did not interfere with the British commercial interests, they were left alone to live as they liked. The extension of tea plantation during the period 1869-73 caused friction between the tea planters and Nagas, which resulted in British enacting the *Inner Line Regulation* in 1873. The regulation enacted that no outsider could go without an official pass beyond a certain line that was drawn along the foothills of the whole northern and North-eastern tribal areas; the line was by no means confined to Assam. It served twofold purpose; one, it prevented encroachment on tribal land, and the other, it protected the tea planters and their labour from raids by tribesmen. Its principal aim was not to isolate but to protect the tribes from exploitation by planters.

The words 'Backward Areas', 'Excluded Areas', and 'Partially Excluded Areas' often crop up in any discussion on development of the North-east. In pursuance of the policy of least interference in the affairs of the tribes, the British enacted the Scheduled District Act of 1874, which removed remote and



backward areas from the operation of General Acts and Regulations. Later, the Government of India Act of 1919 empowered the Governor General in Council to declare any territory to be backward and deny application of any legislative act in the areas so declared. Subsequently, the term backward was omitted and the same areas were re-grouped under 'Excluded and 'Partially Excluded Areas' in keeping with the provisions of Government of India Act of 1935. Thus North East Frontier to include erstwhile Sadiya, Lakhimpur and Balipura Tracts (which became NEFA and later Arunachal), Naga Hills (present Nagaland), Lushai Hills (present Mizoram), and North Cachar Hills were grouped under excluded areas and the Garo Hills, the Mikir Hills (present Karbi Anglong) and the British portion of Khasi and Jaintia Hills less Shillong municipality became partially excluded areas. The governor himself administered the excluded areas in his discretion whereas partially excluded areas were to be special responsibility of the governor. The basic point of governance of these two groups was that the power of the provincial legislature was not extended to these areas. Nari Rustomji, one of our ablest administrators, who implemented the tribal policy in the early years after Independence was to record that throughout the British period there was deliberate and determined endeavour to restrict the administrative apparatus to rock-bottom minimum.

At the time of framing of the constitution, the Constituent Assembly had appointed a sub committee headed by Bordoloi to examine and recommend the constitutional arrangements, which would fulfil the aspirations of the tribes of the North-east and thus set at rest the fears of their unique identity being lost in the vastness of India. The recommendations were extensively debated in the Assembly, which resulted in the incorporation of the interests of the tribes in the Sixth Schedule. No law passed by the Parliament or the Assam Assembly would have effect in the tribal areas unless the district council passed it. The



underlying intention was to allow the tribes to administer themselves without the least outside interference.

But as events unfolded, hopes were belied. The Nagas revolted soon after India gained Independence. Although there is a cease-fire in Nagaland since 1997, the rebellion has not been called off; the final solution is nowhere in sight and has the potential to erupt again any time in the future. Manipur was gripped by insurgency at its peak in early eighties and at the moment of writing (October 2004) Manipur is in flames and the law and order situation there is the worst among the North-eastern states. Tripura keeps regressing into ethnic violence even after the accord with the insurgent Tripura National Volunteer Force (TNV) in 1988. Many militant groups have mushroomed since then.

The Assamese are rightly concerned by the growing influx of illegal Bangladeshis, which they fear erodes their distinctive identity. As time passed, their hope that Assamese distinctive culture and language will find its rightful place lay shattered. One by one, the hill districts of Assam became separate states or union territories. Assam had shrunk beyond recognition. The diminution of Assam's size and status and the spectre of being overwhelmed by illegal immigration made the Assamese so fearful of losing their identity that it found expression in the students' movement in 1979 and then in the rise of ULFA. The 1985 Assam Accord was signed with great hope but its provisions were never implemented. In due course, another insurgency, this time spearheaded by the Bodos, was born.

Why did things go wrong? Surely, there was no lack of goodwill for the tribes among the leaders of independent India. Nehru was eager to protect the uniqueness of tribal societies and was against interfering with their way of living. And yet, some form of insurgency plagues the whole of North-east. Indians from other parts of the country who travel to North-east or reside

there for work are baffled and offended when they are called *Vais* in Mizoram, *Dhakars* in Meghalaya or *Mayangs* in Manipur. These terms are used for foreigners or outsiders. Some are so sensitive as to cite this as proof of tribal ingratitude to India, which has done so much for their development. Ironically, the same Indians fail to see either the offence or surprise of a Mizo or a Naga or a Meitei who is asked in Delhi or any other north Indian city if he is a Thai or a Vietnamese. Clearly, there is a wide communication gap between the plainsmen and the Mongoloid people of the North-east; and regrettably the gap is not seen in historical perspective. After all, the hill areas of the North-east were neither part of Assam nor of any kingdom of north India before the advent of the British.

North-east is vital to India's security. 99 percent of its external boundary represents international border. Contrary to popular perception, our political leaders were aware of the strategic importance of the North-east. A committee headed by Maj Gen Himmat Singhji was constituted soon after Independence, which *inter alia* looked in to the administrative set up for Sikkim, Bhutan, NEFA and the eastern frontiers bordering Myanmar. For Naga Hills, Manipur and Lushai Hills, all of which had borders with Myanmar, the committee suggested the unification of administration under one directing head, and opening new police stations and road communications.<sup>1</sup> Ram Manohar Lohia had propagated that India should extend its frontiers to Brahmaputra (Tsang Po) in Tibet; it is only then that Indian troops could meet the Chinese claim on equal terms so far as physical condition and acclimatization were concerned.<sup>2</sup> The threat from China was clearly foreseen. BN Mullick records: "China could react in several ways; firstly by inciting, training and arming the tribal population in India's frontier region; secondly, by fostering armed revolutionary movement inside the country; thirdly, by carrying hostile propaganda against India;



fourthly, by arming and inciting countries hostile to India; and fifthly, by an outright aggression."<sup>3</sup>

Both Nehru and Sardar Patel had recognised the importance of the North-east. In a letter to Deshmukh, Nehru wrote: "They live near the frontier of India and some of the same tribes live on the other side of the border, like the Nagas in Burma. They occupy thus a strategic position of great importance, which has grown in many years."<sup>4</sup> Sardar Patel was equally concerned about the situation in the North-east and was kept informed about the happenings there by the Governor. In a letter addressed to Sardar from Shillong dated June 29, 1950, Jairamdas Daulatram warned: "But in the meantime the situation in Tripura has deteriorated and the latest secret report shows that they (communists) have set up a kind of parallel government in Khowai and they are as good as administering the country on the lines of Telengana. - - - Conditions for guerrilla action are almost ideal for our opponents in Assam and neighbouring states on account of hills and other inaccessible areas."<sup>5</sup> Ironically, having realistically assessed the situation in the North-east, no long-term view was taken to meet the threats to India's internal and external security. The British, on the other hand, had recognised the strategic importance of the North-east and the role it could play in containing communism. There was that Coupland Plan, which envisaged the formation of Crown Colony comprising hill areas in India and Myanmar.

1962 was a watershed in the contemporary history of North-east India. The Chinese attack resulting in the fall of Sela and Bomdila and the rout of the Indian Army left a deep wound not only on the psyche of Assamese but all Indians. But there was a silver lining to the traumatic defeat. The hostile Nagas did not attempt any hostile activity during the war. The opposition of the Naga church leaders to communism, which denied the existence of God, may explain this. The tribes of NEFA helped



the Indian Army in movement of supplies and evacuation of wounded. The defeat also led to an appraisal of the security of northern borders and spurred the government to build border roads and improve communications.

Of the many rebellions, the Naga rebellion attracted worldwide attention, mainly because the Nagas had played a key role in defeating the Japanese forces in the epic Battle of Kohima in the World War II, and partly because it started so soon after India's Independence. The exposure of the Nagas to the Japanese invasion and the wind of change that was blowing over the whole of South-east Asia in the wake of the collapse of colonial powers left an indelible impression on them. There was lurking fear among the Nagas, reinforced by imaginative propaganda by the rebels, that they will loose their ethnic identity in the vastness of India. In fairness to the Government of India it went out of its way to allay their fears, but failed in the absence of a coherent long-term policy. On reflection, the Naga problem would have been resolved by now had it not been for the obduracy of Phizo.

Over the last fifty years many myths have been formed, which obscure the correct understanding of the many biases, prejudices and perceptions that have cropped up. Naga secessionist leaders seldom fail to put forward the argument that the Naga Hills was, till it was annexed by the British between 1866 and 1904, an independent entity. This claim is not based on historical facts. The Ahom policy towards Nagas was marked by a combination of conciliation and force. Having realised that the conquest of Nagas would serve no great purpose, the Ahoms were content to receive their submission and allowed them to enjoy tribal autonomy. Nonetheless, they treated the Nagas as their subjects and took taxes from them in the form of slaves, elephants, spears and hand woven cloth.<sup>6</sup> According to Mackenzie, the British historian, Manipur exercised some sort of authority over the southern portion of

Naga Hills. Raja Gambhir Singh of Manipur had ambitions of permanently conquering Naga Hills. In 1832-33, he marched through Naga territory and reduced many villages to submission including Kohima, at which place he stood upon a stone and had his footprint sculpted on it as a token of conquest.<sup>7</sup> The distortion of history, mainly by Phizo and his associates, is illustrated by this correspondence by Phizo in the *Times*, published from London: "It should perhaps be more widely known that Nagaland consists of two parts; Free Nagaland in the north [Tuensang] which the British never sought to conquer or administer and the Naga Hills Excluded Area, which from 1879 to 1947 were to a limited extent administered by the British Governor of Assam as the agent of the Crown, but the civilian and criminal administration over the people has always been under the control of the Naga Assembly and the British never interfered." JH Hutton, an authority on British administration of Naga Hills, replies: "The civil and military control of the Naga Hills was exercised by the deputy commissioner (DC) appointed by the Governor of Assam. No Naga Assembly, nor anything like one, existed before 1947, nor was there any common language spoken among the Naga tribes...except in cases of serious crime, which were dealt with under the Indian Penal Code, the Nagas were administered by the DC and his assistants according to their own (Naga) customs, which varied from tribe to tribe and even from village to village; but to write of a Naga National Assembly with which from 1879 to 1947 the British never interfered is more completely nonsense than I could have expected to read from anyone literate enough to write a letter to you, sir."<sup>8</sup>

Much has been written about the alleged atrocities of the army in counter-insurgency operations in Nagaland. But the humiliation and human rights abuses inflicted on security forces by the underground have been glossed over. Early in 1956, armed Nagas attacked the few police posts established



by Assam State, captured the bewildered policemen, stripped them of all clothing and ordered them to march to the plains in nude. In Satakha, 72 policemen were stripped by the rebels and asked to start walking to the foothills.<sup>9</sup> The dissenters in the underground set-up were liquidated; many were tortured to death. In January 1956, the supporters of Phizo assassinated Sakhrie, general secretary of NNC and one of the moderate leaders in the rebel camp. It is alleged that Phizo had personally signed the order of execution (*Azha*). He was pinned to a tree, tortured for two days before he died. Dr Inkongliba Ao, who was the chairman of Nagaland Interim Body, was killed in Mokokchung on August 22, 1961 for supporting the creation of a separate State of Nagaland. Kaito Sema, one time chief of the underground army, was shot dead in broad daylight in Kohima on August 3, 1968 after he parted with Phizo and formed a parallel underground government. An assassin killed Kevichusa, who was at one time the general secretary of NNC, in his house in Dimapur on January 4, 1996. The political assassinations (*Azha*) hardly testify to the democratic credentials of the underground. The assassinations continue even after the split in the underground movement. Dolly Mungro, general secretary of NSCN (K), was assassinated in August 1999.

In the beginning the Naga rebels received a good deal of support. But as taxes were levied and extortions of money, clothes and food were done at gun point, the villagers began resenting and put up some resistance. To secure compliance, the rebels adopted more violent measures. For example, a body of rebels attacked Pangsha village in 1955, but the villagers put up stiff resistance and drove them off with heavy casualties. The villagers of Thevopesimi were less fortunate. A part of village, which had refused to pay taxes, was attacked by a gang of 200 rebels; 48 villagers were killed, whose widows were looked after by the government.<sup>10</sup> The depredations of the rebels extended



to the plains, where in a raid on a Cachari village, on either side of Dhansiri River, they set fire to houses rendering some 500 people homeless.<sup>11</sup>

There has been no lack of initiative on the part of the government to find a solution of the Naga problem. The merger of Tuensang Division of NEFA with Naga Hills in 1957, the formation of a separate state of Nagaland in 1963, the peace initiative that led to the cessation of hostilities in 1964 and ministerial level talks with the underground and the Shillong Accord of 1975, were all initiatives directed towards achieving a lasting peace. The Shillong Accord failed because a section of Naga underground, which split from Phizoites and formed NSCN, repudiated it. NSCN itself split into two factions, both of which are at loggerheads with each other.

The rebel Nagas lost a historic opportunity to arrive at a solution when during the ministerial level talks in October 1966, Indira Gandhi made a significant concession by offering complete autonomy and was prepared to consider a settlement, which would not necessarily be within the present constitutional framework, meaning thereby that the constitution could be amended to accommodate the Naga's aspirations. Dinesh Singh, the then Foreign Minister, went so far as to tell the rebel delegation that the Nagas could have complete autonomy apart from communication, defence, external affairs and currency. The Nagas rejected the offer. Looking back at the negotiating stance of the rebels, their inflexibility, arrogance, the self-created myth that the Nagas were a nation from the earliest times, their obsession of equating the so called Federal Government of Nagaland with the Government of India and unrealistic and at times naïve demands of protocol cost them decades of strife and bloodshed.<sup>12</sup> The tragedy of Naga intransigence was expressed in eloquent words by JH Hutton and Keith Cantalic, both former British administrators of Naga Hills and known friends of the Nagas, in a letter to the *Times*, London, dated

January 27, 1965, commending to the Nagas the status and powers conferred on the State of Nagaland in 1963, thus:

*"In effect this means that Nagaland is completely independent in all matters except those of foreign relations and external defence. Obviously, India could go no further than this most generous offer. Nagaland lies along the natural frontier of the North-east and from the North-east she has been only recently threatened with invasion. Nor is it easy to conceive how in any other way the Naga tribes could thus have the best of the two worlds, complete self-government for themselves; as much or as little, administrative isolation from the rest of India as they wish; and the backing of India, of which their country is essentially a geographic entity after all, in the case of aggression from outside. Indeed the dissidents have gained not only all they could have hoped, but more. To refuse a settlement on such terms would be worse than a blunder, it could be a crime against their own people for it is they who will suffer most if peace be not now be achieved."*<sup>13</sup>

The Mizo rebellion was the result of disaffection of people caused by the total failure of the Government of Assam to provide adequate relief during the famine of 1965. The counter-insurgency did succeed in establishing the writ of the government but measures like the grouping of villages alienated the villagers further. The turning point of the Mizo insurrection came after the creation of Bangladesh: The Mizos lost their bases in CHT and the freedom of movement and the advantage of safe sanctuaries, which are crucial in running an insurgent war over a long period.

The Mizo rebels correctly read the writing on the wall and opted for peace and signed the Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of India in 1986. The main reason for the success of the Mizo Accord when other similar accords failed



to end hostilities was the supremacy of Laldenga in the underground set-up. He was able to persuade his followers to lay down arms and return to civilian life. There were dissenting voices but Laldenga was a shrewd man and was able to out-manoeuvre his opponents. The other reason was that amongst the Mizos there always were two shades of opinion - one in favour of Independence and the other for a negotiated settlement. Those who favoured negotiations were called *Dumpwal*; *Dum* means black and *Pawl* meaning blue. Although in the beginning the rebels had a large following, there was an equally influential section, including church leaders, who were opposed to violence.<sup>14</sup>

There were some important differences between the Naga and Mizo insurgencies. At the ideological level, the main problem in the Mizo Hills was economic than political. It was the demand for Independence that triggered the rebellion in Nagaland, whereas in Mizoram it was the acute deprivation of the people that was the main cause. The Naga insurgency was jungle-based, whereas in Mizoram it was urban-oriented. The post of town commandant for Aizwal was unique to Mizo insurgency. The MNF carried out many terrorist acts in the town.<sup>15</sup> There was a special cell to carry out assassinations. Unlike Nagaland where the local administration was manned by and large by local people, Mizoram's total administration was in the hands of non-locals (outsiders), which explains the antipathy towards the outsiders.<sup>16</sup>

KPS Gill has drawn comparison between insurgencies in Nagaland, Mizoram and Punjab. Initially both Naga and Mizo insurgencies enjoyed wide support, but petered out as more and more people came in contact with people in Shillong and Delhi and saw the opportunities there and realised the narrowness of the objectives of the insurgents. In Punjab the support came from the fringe elements and never more than one or two percent of the population. In Punjab sub-nationalism



did not take root because there were more Sikhs outside Punjab. The majority in Punjab saw the propagation of Khalistan as fascism. The strength of the terrorists in Punjab never exceeded 10,000 of which nearly four to five thousand were active. At the height of insurgency there were 2,500 AK rifles, mostly given by Pakistan's ISI. In the North-east by contrast, the comparable number of hostiles was not as large nor were they equipped as well as their counterparts in Punjab. Pakistan and China did give them some modern small arms in the sixties, but the Lee Enfield .303 was the basic weapon.<sup>17</sup> In Mizoram, the insurgents did not lack trained men, for 2nd Battalion of Assam Regiment had been disbanded a couple of years earlier for collective indiscipline while serving in Kashmir, and the bulk of who were Mizos, joined the rebel ranks. Naga and Mizo lack of numbers in insurgent ranks as compared to Khalistanis was made by favourable terrain. The external support system was also different. The Nagas had safe haven in Kachin territory and the Mizos in CHT in East Pakistan and later Bangladesh.

Religious fanaticism marks the difference between the Kashmir and North-east insurgencies. Religious fanaticism has defined the character of the militancy in Kashmir, but the insurgencies in the North-east have by and large had some sort of ideological orientation. Nagaland and Mizoram are both Christian majority states, yet religion was not the driving force of separatism, even as the separatists in Nagaland claim "Nagaland for Christ". Ethnicity was the prime mover accentuated, of course, by Christianity.

The rise of Meitei sub-nationalism, which took a violent turn in late seventies, was an expression of Manipur's sense of neglect and discrimination, largely justified, by the Centre. Manipuris were deeply hurt that despite their long and distinctive history, it was granted statehood only in 1972, a decade later than Nagaland, over part of which Manipur had

exercised suzerainty in the past. Similarly, the Manipuri language was included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution in 1992 after a prolonged agitation.<sup>18</sup> When insurgency in the hills of Manipur and Naga Hills was at its peak in the sixties, the Nagas were given many concessions in order to appease them at the cost of Hindu Meiteis. As a protest many have lately renounced their *Vaishnav* faith and gone back to their original *Sanamahi* faith. In a wider sense, Meitei look upon themselves as inheritors of a glorious past and are animated by the historic memory of an empire, which extended to the Chindwin River in Myanmar; the past glory playing upon their present, when they find themselves marginalised.

Ironically, the occupation of the Kangla Fort at Imphal by the Assam Rifles since Independence was resented by Manipuris of the valley, who saw the occupation as symbol of foreign rule. The British occupied the fort in 1891, which marked the subjugation of Manipuris. The fort has been the focus of Meitei pride and a symbol of a lost empire; and the Assam Rifles, which has occupied it since Independence, had done nothing to desecrate the symbolism. In fact, they have taken as much pride in Manipur's past as Manipuri themselves and many acknowledge that the fort complex was maintained well by the Assam Rifles. In the face of persistent demand, the Prime Minister, Shri Manmohan Singh, handed over the fort to the Chief Minister of Manipur on November 20, 2004.<sup>19</sup>

Insurgency in Tripura has spread mainly due to the large influx of refugees initially from erstwhile East Pakistan and later illegal infiltration from Bangladesh. The refugees who poured into Tripura in the decade after Independence were mainly Hindu Bengalees who fled to escape from the communal riots. The migrants who have been illegally infiltrating after the creation of Bangladesh are predominantly Muslims. This large-scale influx of refugees and illegal immigration has dramatically changed the demographic profile of the state, resulting in the



tribal population becoming a minority. The pressure on land has resulted in alienation of tribal land, which is at the root of insurgency in Tripura.

The insurgency has been aided and abetted by Bangladesh. Tripura is almost entirely surrounded by Bangladesh, the only opening to the rest of India by land being through Assam extending to 288 km, while its boundary with Bangladesh is 839 km. The geographical proximity to Bangladesh has been a boon for the insurgents of Tripura, who have found safe haven in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh. The active support given by Bangladesh to Tripura insurgents to counter the support given to Chakmas of CHT by India was another important factor in the growth of insurgency. The present militancy in Tripura is not an outcome of any secessionist demand but is the result of sectarian tribal versus non-tribal hostility. In the recent years, criminal gangs have been operating in the guise of insurgent groups, whose main purpose is to make quick money and increase their influence.

The Assam situation is quite different from the other insurgencies of the North-east. Unlike the hill areas, the Assamese took an active part in the struggle for Independence from the British rule and are proud of their Indian heritage. The problem in Assam is not of integration but provides an excellent case study of how a proud people, endowed with abundant natural resources have been alienated over a period of time due to neglect and the fear of the loss of their identity due to Bengali cultural imperialism and illegal immigration from Bangladesh. Their fear found expression in the agitation launched by AASU to detect and deport illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, which began in 1978 and culminated in the Assam Accord in 1985. But the provisions of the accord remain largely unfulfilled. The rise of ULFA began on anti-foreigner plank directed against illegal immigrants, but as it so often happens in most insurgent movements, ULFA has not only abandoned



its original ideology but now considers Bangladeshi immigrants as comrades in the struggle against Indian hegemony.

A number of Muslim fundamentalist organisations were formed, trained and armed in Assam in the closing decade of the last century by Pakistan's intelligence with the connivance of Bangladesh. The initial aim of these organisations was self-protection from Hindu depredations in the 1990s, particularly after the destruction of the Babri Masjid in December 1992. However since 1994, in keeping with Bangladesh philosophy of '*Lebensraum*', and egged on by Pakistan, the emphasis has shifted to building a support base for a Muslim majority areas of North-east and West Bengal to secede to Bangladesh.<sup>20</sup>

According to an official estimate the figure of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh has crossed the 15 million mark out of which five million have settled in Assam, where they are in a position to influence state politics in a decisive way in around 50 of the 126 assembly constituencies. When this problem is seen from a larger national perspective, the situation is alarming. Lt Gen SK Sinha, the former Governor of Assam, in his official report to the President in 1988, had drawn attention to the danger thus: "The silent and invidious aggression of Assam may result in the loss of strategically vital districts of lower Assam. The influx of these illegal migrants is turning these districts into a Muslim majority region. It will only be a matter of time when a demand for their merger with Bangladesh may be made." Assamese fear of being rendered minority in their own backyard is not recent but is rooted in pre-independence days. Mr Jinnah is reported to have made a remark to his private secretary, Shri Moin-ul-Huq Chaudhury on the eve of partition: "Wait for ten years, I will present Assam on a plate to you."<sup>21</sup> Similar sentiments were expressed by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in the book titled '*The Myth of Independence*': "It would be very wrong to think that Kashmir is the only dispute that divide India and Pakistan, though it is undoubtedly the most important. One at

least is nearly as important as the Kashmir dispute - that of Assam and some districts of India, adjacent to East Pakistan. To these, East Pakistan has very good claim, which should not have been allowed to remain quiescent."<sup>22</sup> The rapid Islamisation of Bangladesh in the recent years and the unabated infiltration of Bangladeshi Muslims, which is slowly giving rise to Muslim militancy in Assam point in the direction envisaged in the past.

The Bodo insurgency is the result of Assamese chauvinism. The callous disregard of Bodo grievances by both Congress and AGP governments, alienation of tribal land and Assam's language policy all added to a situation in which the Bodos took up arms. The creation of Bodo Territorial Area in 2004 has been welcomed but it has not satisfied all sections of Bodo militants. The tribes of Meghalaya also agitated for separation, but separation from Assam and not India. The steady increase of Nepali and Bangladeshi migrants in Meghalaya has made the tribes feel uneasy and insecure and passions have been raised against the so-called foreigners in the past. Arunachal is the only state in the North-east, which has remained peaceful. But this idyllic scene may change if the resentment against the Chakma refugees is not addressed soon. In the recent past the national political parties have encouraged permissiveness and political defections, a game in which the winner can only be Naga insurgents - either NSCN (IM) or NSCN (K); both have considerable stake in sensitive Arunachal districts of Khonsa and Chaglang, which fall on the shortest route to camps in Myanmar.

The external support given to the insurgents initially by East Pakistan and China and by Bangladesh after its creation in 1971 has been a major factor in the spread of insurgency in the North-east. Although China stopped giving support to the insurgents sometime after 1978, some analysts speculate that China has continued to give occasional support clandestinely using



Pakistan's ISI as proxy. It was hoped that with the emergence of Bangladesh the support given to North-east insurgents would stop, but that hope has been belied. As events have unfolded, all insurgent groups have found safe haven in Bangladesh. The ideal guerrilla terrain across the border in CHT in Bangladesh and Myanmar's Naga Hills, which are home to ethnically similar tribes, have facilitated insurgents easy access to safe camps across the border.

The arrival of Christianity, its rapid spread in the hills of the North-east and the impact on the social, cultural and political life of the tribes is controversial. Christianity gave the tribes a distinct identity and introduced many reforms, forbade perpetual feud, head hunting and curtailed appropriation of evil Gods. It pushed Nagas out of seclusion and isolation into open ideas and other civilisations of the world. It also brought education and modern medical facilities. In the process, however, it destroyed many positive elements of tribal life. A Naga intellectual has written that conversion to Christianity required abandonment of indigenous cultures and practices. The loyalty of the converts was divided towards their own groups; non-converts were regarded as sinners.<sup>23</sup> Another negative was the excommunication carried out against unfaithful church Nagas who used to break the Sabbath and participated in traditional dancing and singing of folk songs. The effect has been ruinous in many ways. The art of weaving suffered since generally the convert took to wearing European mill made clothes. Verrier Elwin has expressed it thus; "the activities of the Baptist mission among the Nagas have demoralised the people, destroyed tribal solidarity and forbidden the joys and feasting, decorations and romance of community life". JH Hutton, an ICS officer posted in Mokokchung, was of the same view that the 'role of the Baptist Mission among the tribals in general and Nagas in particular has been injurious and disruptive to their culture.' There is a



common refrain among scholars such as JH Hutton, JD Mills, Verrier Elwin and Furer Haimendrof that 'Christianity will eclipse the distinct tribal culture.' The converts adopted western dress and a taste for everything western.<sup>24</sup> The criticism forced the missionaries to change the method of proselytising. In the words of Sir Robert Reid: " But methods of proselytising had become modified as the years passed, and latter day missionaries sensibly tried to preserve all that was good in old tradition."<sup>25</sup>

Another charge levelled against the Church is that it sowed the seeds of separatism amongst the tribes of the North-east. There is some truth in the allegation. Christianity widened the barrier, tension and conflict between the people of the hills (predominantly Christians) and plains (predominantly Hindus). In their zeal to convert the tribes, the missionaries painted Hinduism in a very negative way, which perpetuated the chasm between the Christians and Hindus.<sup>26</sup> After Independence "the aim of an influential part of the church was to carve out states, or areas within states in which Christians could be in majority as Christians or, at the least areas in which persons running the governments would be amenable to the influence of the church. The effort has proceeded furthest in the North-east."<sup>27</sup>

In the recent years, the North-east has emerged as the major transit route for narco-trade and gunrunning. An indicator of the scale of illegal narcotic trade is the high incidence of drug abuse mainly in Manipur and Mizoram; the malaise is now spreading to Assam and Arunachal.<sup>28</sup> The Naga-Kuki internecine feuds are a direct consequence of insurgent groups trying to control the road from Moreh, on the Indo-Myanmar border, to Imphal to facilitate illegal trade. The demand for money to finance the many insurgencies in the North-east will fuel illegal trade in narcotics in future in a big way.

How have the army, the civil servants, the insurgents, the Church and the politicians responded to the insurgencies in

the North-east, particularly in Nagaland, which is regarded as the fountainhead of North-east insurgencies? The discourses that Ved Mehta had with a cross-section of Indian and Naga officers and his observations reinforce author's own perceptions formed during long military service in the North-east and subsequent travels and study, are quoted here verbatim: "I listen to the Prime Minister of the Naga Federal Government (If the Indian government doesn't recognise Nagaland to be a separate nation, we will fight... We are not the Naga hostiles, we are the Nagas. The state Government of Nagaland is a stooge of the Indian government.), to the Chief Minister of Nagaland (I say to hostiles, "Now that you have got a state, why ask for trouble? Let's have peace."), to a leader of the Naga Baptist Christian Convention, the association of all Naga churches ('We don't want any part of heathen India, Nagaland is for Christ. We are intellectually and spiritually a part of the west, not of India at all'). I also listen to an Indian military leader who is a hardliner (I was here at the time when we were asked to solve the problem of Nagaland. We had started a programme of regrouping all the people in Nagaland from three thousand villages into two hundred villages with stockades around them. We had told the people that anyone seen outside the stockades at night would be shot. .... In time, we would have made them happier by converting the regrouped villages into modern villages with schools and hospitals. For some months they might have disliked living in regrouped villages, but then they would have got used to it. But just when we were getting somewhere, our politicians stopped us. The military solution has never really had a fair trial in Nagaland) to an Indian military leader who is a softliner ('The Naga hostiles are always using military atrocities as propaganda. Some are imagined, some are real. But how do these real military atrocities come about? Once, the guerrillas not only killed some recruits but also mutilated them in order to steal their guns – the guns were chained to the recruits' bodies. The comrades of the recruits couldn't trace



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the murderers, so they simply razed all the villages where they thought the murderers were hiding. If their superiors had tried to stop the retaliation, they would have a mutiny. But we know now that the guerrillas can never be defeated, because the conditions in all the tribal areas are such that the guerrillas can strike and vanish and live in the jungles indefinitely. The tribal problem requires a political solution.'), to an Indian civil servant who is a pessimist ('everything here is mad and impossible. Some of these Nagas are so westernised that they think we Indians are backward. Others are more backward than any other savages in the world. If we had done certain things in Nagaland – for instance, given the Nagas statehood in the union in 1948, when they first asked for it – may be they would have accepted the idea of staying with India, or enough of them would have done so to deprive the guerrillas of means of support. Our relations with the Nagas have always been a story of our missing the bus.'), to an Indian civil servant who is an optimist ('I know that from the outside this still looks like a boiling pot. But, perhaps because we are in the middle of it, we don't feel that it is a boiling pot. A general of the Naga Federal Republic who used to march forty-five miles a day in the jungle – he married a girl who used to be my office assistant; it was love marriage, and now they lead a very bourgeois town life – recently came and asked me to help him to get a priority for a Fiat – and he is only one of many from the Naga Federal Government who are constantly asking me for cars and petrol – I think something has changed.'), and, finally to a visiting Indian politician ('Suppose we agree to give the Nagas Independence. It might not be a great loss to us. You could cut off Nagaland from India without creating any geographical anomaly. But then what are we going to do with the Lushais, who, as it happens, look like Europeans? May be we could let them make a separate nation out of the Mizo Hills; this would mean only cutting off the tail of Assam. But then how are we going to stop other tribes – other regional and linguistic groups

- from seceding? Ultimately, everything is going to depend on our ability to deal with the guerrillas in Nagaland and Mizo Hills.'").<sup>129</sup>

India has travelled a long way since above observations were made. It has approached the counter-insurgency operations in the North-east as exercises in nation building. Unfortunately, the military initiatives have not been exploited by timely political initiatives, resulting in loss of momentum. Paradoxically, the growth of democracy in the region has helped the insurgents.<sup>30</sup> The political parties at the centre in the race to capture power have, lamentably, indulged in such divisive politics, which can only be termed adventurism. "Most political parties have their dirty trick department. The technique is to first create clandestine fundamentalist armed groups with their own ethnic agenda; provide them with weapons, funds and the aim of causing serious law and order problem, which state government cannot control. Should the game plan succeed, the state government is dismissed citing constitutional breakdown, followed by the imposition of President's Rule, followed some months later by fresh elections, which can be steered to victory of the favoured party by ample funds and benign civil administration. This has resulted in the country being saddled with a number of terrorist organisations, especially in the North-east."<sup>31</sup> Gen VN Sharma, the former army chief, has described an incident, which illustrates this phenomenon: " In 1988 Bodos became active in North Bengal. They decided that no rail move would be allowed between North Bengal and Assam until their demand for autonomous Bodoland was met. They proceeded to ambush vehicles and trains, which disrupted and adversely affected life in Assam. An army goods train carrying ammunition supplies for troops in Assam and the Bhutan Government was ambushed and three men of military escort were killed. Two selected officers were sent to find out from the Bodo chief for the outrage on the pain of immediate army action.



The (Bodo) chief was apologetic and offered full monetary compensation of any amount demanded. He was only obeying orders of agents of the Central Government, who had instructed to carry out such action, paid crores and provided weapons and training. The aim was to destroy Assam trade through Siliguri Corridor in North Bengal to cause riots in Assam. The AGP government was dismissed in due course and came under President's rule for not being able to control lawlessness. Some weeks later the Bodos went on rampage, occupied large tracts in protected game sanctuary, felled trees and hunted wild animals. Army was asked to take control, but refused." <sup>32</sup>

"The constitution of tribal districts into states with the administrative and legislative trappings and other paraphernalia of larger states may have been satisfying to the tribal ego, but it also resulted in the disintegration of the core values of the tribal communities, a fundamental in their value judgements and ever widening gap between the villagers and the leadership. Soon the perks of office infected the tribal leadership who proved themselves equal to the image of dirty politicians in the rest of the country. There were few who could see the long-term implications of a primitive village-based tribal community being transformed into a parliamentary system of governance without any preparation." (Nari Rustomji: *Imperilled Frontiers*).

It is often argued that enough economic investment has not been made in the North-east. The charge is only partially correct. The Centre has pumped in thousands of crores of rupees year after year as central assistance to special category states. Unfortunately, over the decades a nexus between politicians, bureaucrats and contractors has developed resulting in misappropriation of developmental fund. The Centre's policy of softening up the tribal communities with funds has proved counter-productive. Niketa Haralu sums up the situation well: " Fifty years of fruitless confrontation



characterised by carrot and stick by Delhi to secure compliance of the Nagas has resulted in Nagas being addicted to carrot without acquiring respect for the stick."

There are other disturbing trends that have emerged in the North-east. The dividing line between overground and underground politics is becoming increasingly blurred. Lt Gen VK Nayyar candidly brought this out in his report to the President when he was the Governor of Manipur and Nagaland. Even more worrying is the withering away of the duly elected state governments. The insurgents in Nagaland, Manipur and some parts of Assam are running parallel governments. Taxes are levied not only on villages but also on private industries. In Nagaland and Manipur government employees with the exception of armed forces pay regular taxes to one or the other insurgent group. In Assam tea gardens and other industrial houses pay taxes to ULFA, euphemistically called 'protection money.'

The North-east is at its most vulnerable point at the moment. Neighbours whose domestic politics adversely affect our North-east region surround it. Bangladesh is slowly transforming into a fundamentalist Islamic state. Slogans like *'Amra Hobo Taliban, Bangla Hobe Afghan'* (We will be Taliban, Bangladesh will be Afghanistan) are raised in the countryside. The Maoist insurgency in Nepal has equally negative fallout for North-east insurgencies. Intelligence reports suggest that the Maoists are already in touch with ULFA and other groups. Our relations with Myanmar are cordial and have improved. Practical geopolitical considerations favour cooperative approach with the Military *Junta* but India's diplomacy will be put to hard test to strike a balance between the practical considerations of maintaining friendly relations with the Military *Junta* and extending support to pro-democracy groups led by Aung San Swu Kyi. The external events are more likely to influence the internal situation in the North-east in future.

## Notes and References

1. BN Mullick, *My Years with Nehru: The Chinese Betrayal*, (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1971), p 126
2. Ibid, p130
3. Ibid, p 620
4. Letter dated January 29, 1953 addressed to Deshmukh, *Selected Works of Jawahar Lal Nehru*, vol 21, second edition, (1 January-31 March 1953, a project of Jawahar Lal Nehru Memorial Fund, p 158
5. Durga Das, ed, *Sardar Patel Correspondence 1949-50*, Vol 9, (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Trust, 1974) pp 200-202
6. Verrier Elwin, *Nagaland*, (Research Department, Shillong, 1961), p 18
7. J Johnstone, *Manipur and Naga Hills*, (New Delhi: Gyan Publishers 2002), p 41
8. Quoted by Ved Mehta, *Portrait of India*, (England: Penguin Books, 1973) p 228
9. Nirmal Nibedon, *The Night of the Guerrillas*, (New Delhi: Lancers, 1978), p 74
10. Verrier Elwin., n.6., p 59
11. Ibid, p 60
12. YD Gundevia, who headed the delegation on behalf of the Government of India, has highlighted the inflexible negotiating stance of the underground delegation during the peace talks in 1964. See YD Gundevia, *War and Peace in Nagaland*, (Dehradun: Palit and Palit, 1975) Chapter viii, pp 130-145
13. Quoted in DR Mankekar, *On Slippery Slope in Nagaland*, (Bombay: Manaktala, 1967), pp 16-17
14. Nirmal Nibedon., n.9, op cit., p 100. Zairema and his colleagues expressed strong disapproval of the violence.
15. SC Dev, *The Untold Story*, (Calcutta: 106 Regent Estate, Mrs Gauri Dev, 1998), p 133. SC Dev was the Commissioner of Nagaland for seven years. In his book Dev analyses the differences between the two insurgencies in some detail.
16. Ibid
17. KPS Gill, 'The Dangers Within: Internal Security Threats' in Bharat Karnad (ed), *Future Imperilled: India's Security in the Nineties and Beyond*, (New Delhi: Viking, 1994), pp 117-119
18. Tribals of Manipur also speak Meiteilon, the Manipuri language. About 10 lakhs in India and nearly 5 lakhs outside speak the language. On the other hand there are only 9 lakhs Sindhi who speak that language



and there is not a single village in India where Sindhi is spoken, and yet, Sindhi was included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

19. The house in which Field Marshal Slim, the legendary Commander-in-chief of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army, lived during the campaign in Burma in the World War II, is located in the Kangla Fort.
20. Lt Gen JR Mukherjee, "A Perspective on the North-east" in Shankar Basu Roy, ed, *New Approach: Our East and North-east*, published by the editor, Hastings Garden, 5, Hastings Park Road, Kolkata, 700 027. Lt Gen Mukherjee was the Chief of Staff of Eastern Command, based at Kolkata.
21. Quoted by Bhanu Pratap Shukla, *What ails India's North-east*, (New Delhi: Suruchi Sahitya, 1980), pp 20-21. Ironically Moin-ul- Huq opted for India, joined Congress and became a minister in Assam Government.
22. Ibid, p 22
23. P Moasosang, "The Naga Search for Self-Identity" in Rathin Mitra and Barun Dasgupta, (ed.), "A Common Perspective for NE India", (Calcutta, 1967). Quoted "Hill politics in NE India", (Hyderabad: Orient Longman updated 1999 Edition,.) p 43.
24. Ved Mehta describes a visit to a Naga Christian household for dinner thus: " The house is cosy. The drawing room is filled with Naga guests, all wearing western-style clothes – suits and frocks – and all very friendly. There are sofas and chairs in the room, a log fire in the fireplace, whisky in the glasses, Mozart on the gramophone, a Bible on the side table." See Ved Mehta, *Portrait of India*, (USA, Penguin, 1973), p 230
25. Sir Robert Reid, *Years of Change in Bengal and Assam*, (London, 1966) p 109. Quoted by Asoso Yonuo, *The Rising Nagas*, (New Delhi: Vivek Publishing, 1973), p 170
26. Ved Mehta describes a conversation he had with an influential elderly Angami gentleman in Kohima while writing his book 'Portrait of India'. The Naga gentleman recounts how an Indian official was set upon by ordinary Nagas many times. The gentleman ends the conversation with the remark, "He (Indian official) should go. Naga and Indians can never live together.' Majority may not share the remark, but it gives an idea of the estrangement. See Ved Mehta, *Portrait of India*, (USA: Penguin Books, 1973), pp 230-232
27. Arun Shourie, *Missionaries in India*, (New Delhi, Asa Publications, 1994), p 205
28. When I (the author) travelled to Imphal in 1998 I had the opportunity to visit a privately run drug de-addiction centre, *Kripa*, which had more than 30 addicts, mostly addicted to intravenous injections of heroin. Most were HIV+ adult males in their early thirties



29. Ved Mehta, n. 26, pp 232-234. Many in the army, who have served in the North-east, share the observations by Ved Mehta.
30. Ved Marwah in Yonah Alexander, ed, *Combating Terrorism*, (New Delhi: Manas, 2003), p 315. Ved Marwah, a former police officer, was the Governor of Manipur for several years.
31. The above *modus operandi* has been described by the former Army Chief, Gen VN Sharma, in an article titled 'North-east Imbroglio' in Shankar Basu Roy (ed), *New Approach: Our East and North-east*, published by the editor, Hastings Garden, 5, Hastings Park Road, Kolkata.
32. Ibid, p11. Also see Gen VN Sharma's, *India's Defence Forces: Building Sinews of a Nation* (USI National Security Papers, Number Thirteen, USI of India, New Delhi, October 1994) pp 25-26. Gen VN Sharma was the GOC-in-C Eastern Command based at Kolkata prior to taking over as the Army Chief.

# 1

## GEO-STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF NORTH-EAST INDIA

**N**orth-east India as a geographical region is a colonial construct, the concept of North-east Frontier Region evolved during the British period for administrative reasons.<sup>1</sup> Prior to Independence North-east India consisted mainly of Assam and the kingdoms of Manipur and Tripura. After Independence North-east India as a distinct geographical region having its own identity, aspirations and problems took shape. The term North-east also came to be widely used in official texts and correspondence.

The early history of North-east India is very obscure. "But in the main, the region drew its earliest inhabitants from the Mongolian race in Western China, which in very ancient times threw off a series of swarms that afterwards found their way into frontier lands of India; some went along the Northern slopes of Himalayas; some to the South, down the courses of Chindwin, Irrawady, Salween and Mekong rivers, peopling Burma and adjoining countries; and some to the South-west descending the Brahmaputra to Assam. Those who found their way to the South-west probably moved along the Brahmaputra; and as each swarm was forced to yield to the pressure from behind, it either moved Westwards or turned aside into the hills of the Assam Range."<sup>2</sup>

Some scholars believe that Khasis and Jaintias appear to be descendants of proto-austroloids of ancient Assam. They were

## 2 Lost Opportunities

probably of Austic stock and were its earliest inhabitants. They are called so because they are said to have migrated from the Australian and some other islands of the Pacific Ocean. The beautiful megaliths or pillars of stones, which they created over the graves of the dead, are found in Meghalaya. They spoke Mon-Khmer language and introduced cultivation.<sup>3</sup>

After the Austrics, the Mongolians had migrated to Assam from the North and North-east. The larger group had migrated from China and Tibet; some had, however, entered from Myanmar. The Mongoloids are referred to as Kiratas in Aryan literature. Among the Mongolians the great Bodo tribe had established over the Brahmaputra Valley fairly early. The Bodos had extended into North and East Bengal and into North Bihar. North of Brahmaputra Valley is even today occupied by the Bodos.<sup>4</sup> Other branches of this great tribe are Cacharis, Meches, Garos, Rabha, Tipra, etc. The North Assam tribes of Akas, the Daflas, Abors, Miris and Mishmis, all Mongolians, appeared to have come later and established themselves to the North of the Brahmaputra plains. Other tribes of the same stock are Nagas, Kukis, Mikirs and Mizos.

Some historians speculate the time of the first Mongolian migration to have taken place long before 1000 BC. Next came Aryans. In the early Vedic literature Eastern India is referred to as Mīecha country. But the later Vedic literature in the Brahman period i.e. 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, the Aryans are believed to have migrated to the North-west of Karatoya River, which in ancient time was the Western boundary of Assam.<sup>5</sup> The Aryan settlement in ancient Assam is hinted in the legends of Naraka. It is generally admitted that Aryans were not very numerous in ancient Assam, which is racially the land of non-Aryans, but the Aryans established their cultural supremacy over the country. Aryanisation was, however, never complete or total: many non-Aryans lived in the hills preserving their way of life. Before the coming of the Aryans the inhabitants of Assam



practiced animism, magic, ancestor worship and Sakti (fertility cult). After the advent of Aryans, Hindu religious beliefs were intermixed with the prevailing tribal cult. Before the coming of the Ahoms in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Tantricism (worship of the Mother Goddess or Sakti) was prevalent in Assam in a debased form. Tantric rituals included the sacrifice of ducks, pigeons, goats, buffaloes and even men, to Sakti or Durga. Magic rites where drinking and dancing by naked women were striking features of Tantric worship. Assam was known to the outside world as the land of magic.<sup>6</sup> At such a critical stage in Assam's history, Sankaradeva (1449 AD - 1568 AD) came as deliverer. He condemned the practice of sacrificial rites and brought the message of Bhakti; the religion taught by him was known as Vaishnavism.

Reliable history of this region was first recorded in the narrative of the Chinese pilgrim Huien Tsang, who visited the country then known as Kamrupa, about 640 AD during the reign of Bhaskarvarma (594-650 AD). Bhaskarvarma was contemporary of Harsha of North India. Nothing very definite is known about rulers before or after Bhaskarvarma till the advent of Ahoms in 1228 AD. But the discovery of several inscribed copper-plates, which appear to have belonged to the period between the latter part of the 10<sup>th</sup> century and the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century throw more light on its history. It would seem that soon after Huien Tsang's departure the country fell into the hands of aboriginal chiefs, who were subsequently converted to Hinduism.<sup>7</sup>

In the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century before the advent of Ahoms in Assam, the Bodo-Cacharis ruled over the Brahmaputra Valley from Cooch Behar to East Bengal extending up to Naga Hills, with its capital at Dimapur. The Ahoms, a Shan tribe whose ancient kingdom was situated in the upper portion of Irrawady Valley, invaded Assam in 1228 AD and slowly expanded their empire and ruled for nearly 600 years, longer than any other empire in India.

#### 4 Lost Opportunities

Manipur and Tripura existed as independent kingdoms. The Mughals never succeeded in annexing the North-east in their empire. But what the mighty Mughals could not do, the British achieved, taking advantage of palace intrigues and the decadence of the kings. Hinduism spread in the North-east in the Brahmaputra and Surma valleys and the Vaishnavite cult took roots in the Imphal Valley. The surrounding hills, however, retained their animist faith and each tribe developed according to its own genius till the advent of Christianity, which rapidly spread in the hills in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **Physiography<sup>8</sup>**

The administrative divisions of the North-east include the states of Assam, Arunachal, Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland, popularly known as the Seven Sisters.<sup>9</sup> The total area is 2,55,083 sq km, which is 7.76 percent of the geographical area of India. 70 percent of the region is hilly and mountainous terrain and 30 percent constitute valley lands mainly of three rivers; Brahmaputra, Barak and Imphal with related wetlands. The total population of North-east states is 3,84,95,089 (2001 census), which accounts for 3.75 percent of the population of the country.

The North-east has approximately 4200 km of India's international boundary with China (Tibet), Myanmar, Bangladesh and Bhutan. It is connected with the rest of the country by the narrow strip of land, known as the Siliguri Corridor-just 20-km wide at its narrowest, which is also referred to as the Chicken's Neck. The Northern frontier of the North-east region from Sankesh River in the West to the entrance point of the Brahmaputra into Assam in the east is guarded by the Assam Himalayas. The McMahon Line separates North-east India from China (Tibet). The region is bounded by Bhutan in its North-east, autonomous region of Tibet and China in the North, Myanmar in the East and South and Bangladesh in the South.

The North-east has varied physical features. It has mountains, hills, rivers, valleys, plateaus, and riverine islands (Majuli Islands)



and can thus be divided into three major groups: hills and mountains, plateaus and plains. The physiographic divisions of the region are: North-east mountain ranges, South-eastern hill ranges, Assam plateau, Assam Valley and Cachar plains.

The North-eastern mountain ranges extend from Tista River in Sikkim to Namcha Barwa (7756 m) peak in Mishmi Hills. Here the Brahmaputra (known as Tsang Po in Tibet) makes a hairpin bend and cuts across the mountains before flowing into the plains of Assam. The total length of this region is 720 km. The Namcha Barwa is the highest peak in this region.

The region has many hills named after the tribes, which occupy these hills. In the North-east the Mishmi Hills are occupied by Mishimis; further to the East on the frontiers of Arunachal is the Khamati Hills occupied by Khamatis, who are of Shan origin; Singpho Hills lying South-east of Lakhimpur district of Assam are occupied by Singphos; the Aka Hills, which lie North of Darang district of Assam between Dhansiri and Dikali rivers are named after the Akas; the Daffla Hills North of Darang and Lakhimpur districts of Assam between Ranganadi in the North-west and Bhareli River in the West are occupied by Daffla tribes; the Abor Hills between the Sion River on the West and Dibang on the North-west are occupied by Abors; the Miri Hills which lie North of Lakhimpur district of Assam and North-west of Ranganadi are inhabited by Miri tribes. A large number of Miris have settled down in the plains of Assam as well. Many of these hills have high altitudes.

The Southern hill ranges (South of Brahmaputra) include the Patkai, the Naga, the Barail Hills, the highlands of Manipur and Lushai (Mizo) Hills. With the exception of Manipur basin, the entire region is undulating. The general elevation of the ranges is 3145 m above sea level. Narrow, steep sided valleys separate the ranges from each other. The location and importance of these hills are described below.



- **Patkai Range:** It lies to the North-east of Assam. This is the range, which has influenced the history of Assam the most. More about the importance of this range is discussed subsequently.
- **The Naga Hills:** The Naga Hills is a continuation of the Patkai Range towards the South and divides India from Myanmar. The highest peak in the Naga Hills is Saramati (3826 m). To the North-west of Naga Range is Kohima Hills, the highest peak of which is Javpo (2995 m). Tizu is the only river that cuts through the Naga Range and flows North-west to join the Chindwin in Myanmar. These hills are home to various tribes. Naga Hills was constituted into a new state of Nagaland in 1963.
- **The Mizo Hills:** This is also known as Lushai Hills. These now constitute the area of Mizoram. The important features of these hills are six parallel ranges running North to South with five deep river valleys between the ranges. Several tribes that are together called by the generic term Mizo inhabit Mizo Hills.
- **The Barail Hills:** It lies in the North Cachar district of Assam running east to west and connects the Naga and Jaintia Hills. The hills are densely forested and several peaks rise to 6000 feet.
- **The Manipur Hills:** The North-western boundary of Manipur Hills runs along the frontier between India and Myanmar and the Western boundary abuts against the Cachar plains and hills. The central part is a large basin 50 km long and 30 km broad surrounded on all sides by high mountains. This appears to be the bed of an old lake, a remnant of which occupies the South-east corner of the basin and is known as the Loktak Lake, 12 km long and 8 km broad, having centripetal drainage. The Barak is the largest river in the Manipur Hills. It rises from the Javpo peak and flows South-west for 180 km.
- **The Tripura Hills:** Tripura Hills comprise long ranges alternating with valleys. This range and valley type of topography has rendered communication very difficult and

the transport problem has been accentuated since the creation of Pakistan (now Bangladesh), which almost encircles it. Tripura Hills can be divided physiographically into four valleys, named after the towns of Dharamnagar, Kailashahar, Kamalpur and Khowai, and one upland named after Agartala.

### **The Meghalaya Plateau**

The Meghalaya plateau includes Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The length of the plateau from the River Dhansiri in the North-west and Singaimari in the West is approximately 420 km and the width is 40 km. It lies between the valleys of Brahmaputra and Barak. The range of these hills combined together now constitute the territory of Meghalaya.

### **The Brahmaputra River and Valley**

The Brahmaputra River is the chief geophysical feature of the region. The river flows out of Mansarovar, under its Tibetan name Tsang Po, and then flows North-west passing through the highlands of Tibet. At the extreme corner of North-east India, it pierces through the Himalayas and makes a right about turn to the West and passes through Assam and Bangladesh, where it meets the River Ganga. It is 2,880 km in length, of which approximately 1,600 km is in Tibet, 870 km in India and 410 km in Bangladesh. After crossing the Himalayas, the river takes the name Dihang. Downstream it is met by another river Dibang. It then enters Brahma Kunda, which is a sacred religious spot for Hindus. Emerging out of this lake it takes the name of Brahmaputra.<sup>10</sup> In Assam the river flows through length of 720 km, creating the Brahmaputra Valley around which the history of Assam has been built.

The valley is approximately 600 km long and 75 km wide. It extends from Sadiya in the North-east to Dhubri in the West where the river takes a turn towards the South, round the spurs of Garo Hills. The valley is heavily populated and may be divided



## 8 Lost Opportunities

into two parts – upper and lower Assam – each about 75 km wide. The Brahmaputra flows through the centre of this valley. The fertility of the soil attracted hordes of Muslims from the overcrowded districts of Bangladesh, even during the period when East Bengal was part of India.

### **Surma or Barak Valley**

The other valley in Assam, which is not so well known, is the Surma or Barak Valley named after Barak River. The valley covers the district of Cachar in Assam and extends to the district of Sylhet in Bangladesh. The valley is about 185 km long and 200 km wide.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Imphal Valley**

The valley is approximately 50 km long and 30 km wide, with hills on all sides. It lies about 790 m above sea level. The Meitei population of Manipur is concentrated in the valley.

### **Communications**

The North-east was well linked to markets at home and abroad by river and rail links through Calcutta and Chittagong. But the partition of the country disrupted the existing communication links to such an extent that the region was practically cut off from the rest of the country. The only railroad connection with the heartland was the tenuous metre gauge rail link and the National Highway (NH) 31 through the Siliguri corridor. The Brahmaputra was bridged only in 1962 at Saraighat near Guwahati but the low-lying North bank remains vulnerable to floods during monsoons. The Saraighat Bridge is a road cum rail bridge, 1.43 km in length.

The NH 31 is the lifeline to North-east. The neglect in building frontier roads was highlighted at the time of the Chinese invasion in 1962. It is only after that tragic event that frontier roads were developed in the North-east, particularly in Arunachal. The main artery of communication, the inland water



transport, was severed by partition and continued fitfully until altogether suspended after 1965 war with Pakistan.<sup>12</sup>

During the World War II supplies were moved to China via Stilwell Road from Margherita to Kunming or by air across the Hump to Chunking.<sup>13</sup> The availability of a large number of airstrips all over North-east facilitated air communication. After Independence, non-scheduled airlines flew passenger and cargo to NEFA and elsewhere, a task since taken over by the Indian Air Force (IAF), which operates possibly the largest air maintenance operation anywhere in the world to far flung inaccessible areas.

After 1962 war with China, communications in the North-east have been improved. The Kalia Bhomara road bridge over the Brahmaputra near Tezpur (3.01km) followed in 1987 and a third railroad bridge, the Narnarayan Setu at Jogighopa (2.21km) near Goalpara was commissioned in 1996. The Jogighopa bridge will provide flood proof routing along the South bank. The conversion of rail line to broad gauge up to Guwahati was completed in 1984. The entire South bank line from Guwahati to Tinsukia and Dibrugarh was also converted to broad gauge by 1997. Another road cum rail bridge is under construction at Bogibeel, 17 km downstream of Dibrugarh, which may take eight years to complete. The construction has been inordinately delayed due to non-availability of funds. The project was initially to be funded by the World Bank but due to large investments required and non-availability of funds they backed out. The gauge conversion of Rangia-Murkong-Selek section was also linked to the Bogibeel bridge. Both projects are important for linking remote areas of Assam and Arunachal and would also help in flood control (*The Indian Express*, New Delhi, August 15, 2005 p6)

185 km long Lumding-Badarpur line, which traverses Mikir and North Cachar Hills, is still metre gauge. This rail link connects the Brahmaputra and the Barak valleys. The gauge

conversion has not yet taken place mainly because of extensive tunnelling involved, which is very costly and time consuming. The Central Government in 2005 agreed to fund projects that were not financially viable but required for socio-economic development of the region. These include Jiribam-Imphal Road, Kumarghat-Agartala rail link and Lumding-Silchar-Jiribam gauge conversion. The Ministry of Defence has agreed to fund Senchoa-Silghat gauge conversion on strategic considerations.

The air link to North-east has also been upgraded. Guwahati is being developed as an international airport. The airports at Dibrugarh, Agartala and Silchar are being upgraded. Two new airports at Lengpui in Mizoram and Tura in Meghalaya have been sanctioned.

The IAF flies civil ferry and air maintenance sorties in Arunachal, Nagaland and Sikkim and other inaccessible hill areas. In the early 1950s it was Dakotas, Caribous and Otters aircraft and MI 4 helicopters, now it is AN 32 aircraft and MI 8/17 helicopters operating to and from 179 helipads, 14 advance landing grounds, 50 dropping zones for AN 32 and 180 dropping zones for helicopters at altitudes ranging from 3,200 feet to 1,6200 feet.<sup>14</sup>

### Mineral Resources

Assam produces 5.25 million tonnes of oil annually, which is 60 percent of India's production and 80 percent of on-shore domestic production. There are three refineries located in Assam viz. Digboi having a capacity of 0.58 million tonnes, Guwahati 0.77 million tonnes and Bongaigaon 0.46 million tonnes per annum. A new refinery is being set up at Numligarh with a capacity of 3 million tonnes of crude oil per annum. Assam has an estimated 1180 million tons of gas and oil resources. It has 25 percent of hydrocarbon potential of the country. (Source: *Mineral Year Book: Task Force Report*; Ministry of Mines, 1997).



Tea is the major agricultural product, which is exported from Assam. Out of 4,32,876 kg tea produced in the entire North-east in 1997, 4,25,430 kg was produced in Assam. Assam itself produces more than 50 percent of the total tea production in India. Tea is a major foreign exchange earner for the country. (Source: *Tea Board, Kolkata*). Regrettably, the production of tea in the North-east has declined. Assam including Cachar produced 34,1,586 kg in 2003 and 32,2,227 kg in 2004. (Source: - *J Thomas & Co*).

The North-east has a vast forest resource, which has been exploited, regrettably, to the extent of leading to ecological imbalance in many parts. Assam provides timber to many factories in Kolkata. Assam also exports timber, bamboo, cane, paper pulp and agar oil.

### **Geo-political Significance of North-east India**

It is not only natural resources, which make North-east an area of strategic importance but also its geographical location. India regards the McMahon Line as the border between India and China (Tibet), though the Chinese claim this line to be further South. India has 4,200 km long international border with China of which 1,500 km lie in North-east India. In 1962 war, China had captured areas upto Bomdila in Kameng district and Walong in Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh. China claims the entire Arunachal Pradesh to be part of China and does not recognise the sanctity of McMahon Line. It has recognised Sikkim as part of India only recently. The Chinese deleted Sikkim from their list of independent countries in 2003.

The partition of the country in 1947 altered the geo-strategic situation of the whole of the North-east India in a profound way. All communication channels that once passed through that region were disrupted and India's North-east was cut-off from the rest of the country; connected only by a narrow strip of land near Siliguri, the famous 'Chicken's Neck', which is a strategic



passageway, just a few kilometres from Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal as well as the Indian state of Sikkim. The defence of this strategic corridor has been and will remain the major concern of the Indian Army. Recent reports that Bhutan might make territorial adjustments in the sensitive Chumbi Valley with China to the detriment of India have rung alarm bells in the security establishment of the country.<sup>15</sup> In military terms, the Chumbi salient is a dagger pointed at the Siliguri Corridor that links India with the North-east and lies in the gap between Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet to the North and Bangladesh to the South. The Western shoulder of the valley lies along India's Sikkim and the Eastern shoulder along Bhutan.

The Brahmaputra flows through the heart of India's North-east. Its history is woven round this river. Its source is in Tibet, where it is called Tsang Po River. The Chinese in fact control the upper course of the river, thus having a bargaining chip against India. Defence analysts suspect Chinese hand behind flash floods in North-east.<sup>16</sup>

The other geographical area, which is of great significance, is the Patkai Range. This forms the watershed between India and Myanmar and has dramatically influenced the history of North-east India. The passes through the Patkai Hills have proved to be as significant as the Khyber Pass in the North-west of India. It was through Patkai Hills that the Ahoms came into the then Kamrup and laid the foundation of a kingdom, which lasted 600 years till the arrival of the British.

The Patkai Range was surveyed in 1896 for the construction of a railway line connecting Ledo in Lakhimpur district of Assam with the Taungni station in the Mu Valley of Burma via Hukwang Valley. It was planned to blast through a 5,000 ft long tunnel through the Patkai Range for the construction of the railway line, which was never built.<sup>17</sup> It was again through this pass that during the World War II, the British built the famous

Ledo Road, also called the Stilwell Road connecting North-east India with Burma Road, which runs from Myanmar to China. During the World War the Stilwell Road was a strategic highway for the movement of troops and equipment.<sup>18</sup>

### **Interplay of Ethnicity along India-Myanmar Border**

The borderland between India and Myanmar is of great military significance. During the British rule, the administration of the Northern and Western borders of Myanmar with India was minimal as was the case in the hills of Assam. Various ethnic groups of Myanmar, namely the Kachins, Shans, Was, Karens, Mons, Chins, and Rohingyas rose in revolt (many are still rebellious) against the Burmese rule soon after its Independence from the British as did the Nagas, Mizos and Manipuris in India.

There are many linkages between the insurgencies on both sides of India- Myanmar border. The border between India and Myanmar has been porous for most of history. There is no major natural obstacle to movement except the hills, which do not prevent free movement of tribals. The post-colonial era saw the emergence of artificially formed nation states. For example, a large Naga population exists in Myanmar with close ethnic ties with Nagas in North-east India. The Naga ethnic group is spread extensively beyond the existing boundary of the state of Nagaland into the neighbouring states of Manipur, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and, especially, into Myanmar's territory - Sagaing Division and the Kachin state.

Kachin state<sup>19</sup> in the extreme North of Myanmar is inhabited by Kachins who account for about three percent of the total Myanmar's population. They were converted to Christianity in the nineteenth century by missionaries and are ethnically closer to their neighbours to the South - the Nagas. The Nagas, caught between the Kachins in the North, the Chins to the South and the Burmans to the North-west inhabit the Patkai regions,



between the Brahmaputra plains and the bed of the Chindwin River in Myanmar. They too were converted to Christianity in the nineteenth century, as were the Chins forming a Christian cordon along the Indo-Myanmar border.<sup>20</sup> The Chins living in Myanmar have much in common with Mizos across the border in India. They occupy the Chin Hills in Western Myanmar, along the boundary with India's Mizoram. They are of Mongoloid origin and have much in common with Kuki, Lushai and Lakhar tribes and speak related Tibeto-Burman language. Many Chins were ruled by council of elders and others by hereditary chiefs, as was the custom in the Mizo Hills. The first British expedition into Chin Hills in 1889 was soon followed by annexation, which brought to an end the raids by Chins on the Burmese plains.<sup>21</sup>

To the extreme South, in the foothills of the Arakan range on the Bay of Bengal, live the Rakhines or Arakanese, as the British colonialists called them, a majority of whom have been Buddhists. The Sultans of Bengal in the 15<sup>th</sup> century converted a small minority of Arakanese to Islam - the Rohingyas, many of whom have fled to Bangladesh in recent times to escape alleged persecution by the Myanmar regime, thus souring relations between Myanmar and Bangladesh.

It was the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), which gave shelter and support to Naga and Manipuri rebels in the formative years of insurgency. Khaplang, a Burmese Naga, formed the Eastern Naga Revolutionary Council (ENRC) in 1965 and cooperated with the Naga National Council (NNC) of Nagaland. In 1963, KIA helped Kaito, then a self-styled General in the underground Naga Army, in establishing a base in the Somra tract in Myanmar.

The KIA, founded in 1961 with a strength of 8,000 to 10,000 men, have long controlled the extreme North of Myanmar as well as the Myanmar's part of Naga country, particularly the famous Stilwell Road, now densely covered by thick jungle, which makes it ideal for clandestine flows that have kept the



Kachin and Naga guerrillas well supplied, making them financially and militarily autonomous<sup>22</sup>. Both the factions of NSCN have received help from KIA, and in return Kachin rebels often found refuge in the Naga areas of Arunachal, which are difficult to reach. Further South, the Chins continue to support the Indian Mizos and Kukis, upholding their kinship. The UNLF of Manipur, on their part, has bases in the vicinity of Tamu and Kalemyo.

### **A Brief Historical Perspective of Burmese Insurgencies**

In order to fully understand the significance of the interplay of factors that fuel insurgencies in India's North-east and its linkages with the rebellions and insurrections by the ethnic minorities of Myanmar, an understanding of the colonial and post independence history of Myanmar will be instructive. The British had annexed Burma in stages: the two maritime provinces of Arakan and Tenaserrin (East Burma) were annexed in 1826 as a result of the First Anglo-Burman War and so was Assam after the Treaty of Yandaboo. The whole of lower Burma fell into British hands after the Second Anglo-Burman War of 1852 and finally the Burmese Kingdom came under British rule in 1886 after the Third Anglo-Burman War. Burma was made a province of British India in 1897, and remained so till April 1, 1937 when it was separated from British India. The continuous occupation of Burma by the British till its independence in January 1948 was interrupted by the Japanese occupation from 1942-45.<sup>23</sup>

The British had tried to confine Burma to the territory largely inhabited by Burmans. All of lower Burma and most of upper Burma came to be called Burma Proper, which was also referred to as Parliamentary or Ministerial Burma. The region of indirect rule came to be known by various names, such as, Frontier, Excluded or Scheduled Areas. The areas occupied by Wa and Nagas in the North-west were called "Backward Areas." As in the frontier region of North-east India, the British

administration in the excluded or backward areas of Burma's North, North-west and South-east was minimal. The similarity of administration of frontier areas on both sides of Indo-Burma border is, therefore, significant.

Ethnic minorities inhabit the excluded areas, measuring around 113,000 sq miles, which is about 43 percent of Myanmar's territory, one-third of its 48 million population. They are principally Shans in central and Northern Myanmar, the Kachins in the North-west, the Chins in the West, and the Karens and a subgroup Kareni in the lower reaches of Shan plateau along Salween River. Chins and Kachins held on against British pacification as late as 1894-95.

After independence in 1948, the ethnic minorities were organised into Shan, Kachin, Karen and Chin Special Division, each having a degree of autonomy. Political violence erupted in Burma in 1948 with the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) revolting and taking up arms. Soon many ethnic minorities also began armed struggle of their own but some adopted communist ideology and fought on the side of the communists. The CPB was at its most powerful in North-east Burma where it was backed by China. The rebellion by the communists and the ethnic minorities forced the Prime Minister U Nu to transfer power to a caretaker government headed by General Ne Win in 1958. U Nu returned to power after the general elections in 1960, but in a reversal of fortune General Ne Win staged a military coup and captured power. General Ne Win had promised peace but ironically renewed insurgencies became the major problem of his regime. Constantly changing alliances and military expedients have characterised the politics of Burma since then. By 1980s the insurgencies could be divided into two main groupings – those allied with CPB and those in the National Democratic Front (NDF)<sup>24</sup>, which sought the formation of a federal Burma. In short, guns remained dominant in post independence Burma. Over 20 armed opposition groups



including the CPB, the Karen National Union (KNU) and the NDF and its allies remained in control of vast regions of the country, principally in the ethnic minority states.

The pro-democracy protests that erupted in 1988 precipitated three events in short succession that dramatically rearranged Myanmar's political landscape. Firstly, the demise of Ne Win's Burma Socialist's Programme Party (BSPP) in 1988 and assumption of power by the supporters of Ne Win in the newly formed State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) headed by General Saw Maung in September 1988; secondly, the collapse of CPB in 1989 which was brought about by the mutiny of its ethnic minority troops who entered into peace talks with SLORC; and thirdly, general elections of 1998 in which the National League of Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Swu Kyi won a landslide victory.<sup>25</sup> Despite the victory of NLD, the military rule continued.

The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) superseded the military government of SLORC in November 1997. Since then three-cornered struggle has marked the political scene in Myanmar - the SPDC government, the NLD led by Aung San Swu Kyi and the ethnic minorities.

After decades of conflict the situation has begun to change. A new cease-fire movement began in 1989 prompted by the sudden collapse of CPB. Unlike the previous cease-fire the present cease-fire is generally holding mainly because the SLORC allowed the insurgent groups to keep the weapons and exercise control over the territory but cooperate with the government in regional development initiative.

Ironically, at a time when almost entire population had turned against the regime, scores of former insurgents rallied behind the Military *Junta*. The KIA, which was Burma's most powerful ethnic army controlling most of Kachin State in the far North, bordering North-east India, entered into an agreement with



SLORC in 1993 and signed a formal cease-fire in 1994. The Chin National Front and Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front that are active in areas bordering Mizoram have not accepted the cease-fire. Interestingly, NSCN, both Muivah and Khaplang factions, which are active on both sides of India-Myanmar border, have not declared cease-fire with the Burmese forces.<sup>26</sup> The linkages between the insurgent groups operating in India's North-east and Myanmar's North and North-west have been discussed in some detail in the chapter on external dimension of insurgency.

### **Chittagong Hill Tract (CHT)**

CHT in Bangladesh having common borders with both India and Myanmar is another tract of land, which is strategically significant for its relevance and influence on insurgencies in the North-east. It is situated in the extreme South-east of Bangladesh, bounded in the North and North-east by the Indian states of Mizoram and Tripura and in the South and South-east by Myanmar. It comprises of the districts of Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachhri and has a significant population of minorities who belong to Mongoloid group and live in a compact area. The minorities in CHT constitute 0.45 percent of the total population of Bangladesh.

The area formed by the hill tracts east of Bangladesh port city of Chittagong and the Indian states of Tripura and Mizoram, which Subir Bhaumik calls the 'Triangle', has vast stretches of tribal population. The tribes in this region have a long history of enjoying ethnic independence or effective autonomous existence. But by the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the 'Triangle' had come under British control except the kingdom of Tripura, which retained its autonomous existence by accepting British suzerainty.

The partition of the subcontinent in 1947 has shaped events in this troubled area. As CHT had a population, which was 97 percent non-Muslim, it was logically assumed that it would go to India. But the Radcliffe Award dealt the Chakmas an unjust

blow by giving the CHT to Pakistan. The Chakmas raised the Indian tri colour at Rangamati on August 15, 1947 in anticipation of the award going in favour of India. As a result, on 21 August, Pakistani troops pulled the Indian flags down. The raising of Indian flags by Chakmas has remained etched in the Bengali psyche as an expression of Chakma betrayal. They remained as suspect even after the birth of Bangladesh.<sup>27</sup>

After independence, a large number of Muslims were rehabilitated in the sparsely populated CHT. The Pakistanis followed a policy of internal colonisation to facilitate with the help of which the special status of CHT was abolished in 1964. The problem was aggravated by the submergence of nearly 40 percent of cultivable land within the Chakma homeland due to the construction of Kaptai Dam on Karnfuli River in 1964. The displacement occurred without any compensation or rehabilitation. Thousands of Chakma refugees took shelter in the neighbouring Indian states of Tripura and Mizoram.

CHT is inhabited by thirteen Buddhist, Christian and Hindu tribes who lived in seclusion as the tract was designated excluded area by the British, much as was the case with hill areas of North-east India. The liberation of Bangladesh in 1971 did not change the situation. Zia-ur-Rehman continued the policy of internal colonisation and in fact encouraged settlement of Bengali families in the hilly tracts. Zia-ur-Rehman settled nearly 30,000 Bengali Muslim families in 1980. The internal colonisation over the years has changed the demography of the area against the Chakmas, as the two tables below will show.

**Table 1: Total Population in CHT 1951-91<sup>28</sup>**

	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991
Tribals	91%	69%	73%	59%	51%
Non-Tribals	9%	31%	27%	41%	49%



**Table 2: Religious Composition in CHT 1991 Census**

Muslims	44.12%
Buddhists	43.65%
Hindus	9.01%
Christians	2.28%
Others	0.94%

The change in the demographic profile of CHT has caused tension and introduced ethnic strife. An ethnic insurgency broke out under Prabattya Chattagram Jansanghati (PCJSS) and its armed wing, the Shanti Bahini. Social strife forced more Chakmas to take shelter in neighbouring Tripura as refugees. After much negotiation an agreement was finally reached in 1997 ending the insurgency. But the situation has still to normalise.

### **Insurgent Linkages Across India-Bangladesh Border**

The governments of erstwhile East Pakistan and later Bangladesh have provided sanctuary in CHT to nearly all the insurgent groups of North-east India at sometime or the other. Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan in connivance with Bangladesh intelligence has been very active in this region since 90s and has given covert aid to United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA).

After the assassination of Sheikh Mujib in 1975 and the installation of an anti-India government, a decision was taken by India to assist the Chakma rebels with arms, supplies and training. As a way of getting even with India, Bangladesh tacitly supported Bijoy Hrangkhawl's Tripura National Volunteer Force (TNVF).<sup>29</sup>

The linkages between ULFA, the main insurgent group of Assam, with the ISI of Pakistan and the Director General of Field Intelligence (DGFI) of Bangladesh have profound implications



for the security of North-east. The ULFA-ISI nexus had, in fact, begun way back in 1990 and since then has acquired a sinister dimension; ULFA has already abdicated its original ideology which was rooted in illegal immigration from Bangladesh, now calls the same immigrants as Assamese of East Bengal origin.

### **Appraisal**

The North-east has a long porous border with Myanmar and Bangladesh. Many of the tribes of the North-east have ethnic linkages with the tribes of Myanmar along India-Myanmar border. The similarity of administration evolved by the British in the hill areas, the rise of ethnic insurgencies on both sides of the border, the flourishing illegal narcotic trade from Golden Triangle through the North-east are factors that have combined to give rise to a situation which is ideal for insurgencies to flourish. Similarly, the CHT in Bangladesh has a population, which is ethnically closer to the hill tribes in Mizoram, Assam and Tripura. After the partition of the country in 1947, there has been massive internal migration of Muslim population from other parts of East Pakistan/ Bangladesh to CHT, which has changed its demography in their favour vis-a-vis Buddhists. On the other hand, the demography of Tripura has changed initially due to large-scale influx of Bengalis, mainly Hindus, from erstwhile East Pakistan to escape the communal riots, and later after the creation of Bangladesh, the illegal immigrants have been from both communities. Between 1951 and 1991, the number of Muslims in CHT has increased by 41.84 percent, which was above the state's average rate of increase of 34.30 percent. The concentration of a large illegal immigrant Muslim population along the Indo-Bangladesh border is an ideal condition for fomenting disaffection.

The CHT along with the hill areas of Mizoram and Tripura, aptly called the 'Triangle', is of great importance for India to fight insurgencies in the North-east. The rise of Muslim militancy in Assam in the recent years is yet another dimension

which flows directly from the changing demography and geo-political milieu obtaining in this region.

### Notes and References

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2. *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, (London: Oxford., 1908), p23
3. NN Acharya, *Brief History of Assam: From earliest times to 1983*, (Guwahati: Osmos Publication, 1987) pp 10-14
4. This is borne out of the names of places and rivers. Ti or Di in Bodo language stands for water. Thus, Dikhu, Dikrong, Digaru and Dibru in Assam and Tista, Koroti, Reti, Kunti, etc. in North Bengal bear testimony to this. See Chandana Bhattacharjee, "Bodoland Movement: Issues and Lessons" in PS Dutta (ed), *North-east and the Indian State: Paradoxes of a Periphery*, (New Delhi: Vikas, 1995), p194
5. NN Acharya, n. 3, p 11
6. Ibid, pp. 60 and 105-106
7. *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, n. 2, op cit., p24
8. The physiography of the North-east has been compiled from the Gazetteer of India and Baljit Rai, *Demographic Aggression against India*, (Chandigarh: BS Publishers, 1993), pp 55-62
9. Sikkim is the latest addition to the North-east region. But the demographic details and physical characteristics of Sikkim have not been included in this chapter.
10. RK Chatterjee, *India's Land Borders*, (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1978), pp 63, 64. Also see KK Bhattacharjee, *North-east India, Political and Administrative History*, (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1983), p.8.
11. Baljit Rai, *Demographic Aggression against India*, (Chandigarh: BS Publishers, 1993), p. 57.
12. BG Verghese, *India's North-east Resurgent*; (New Delhi: Konark, 1996), p. 335.
13. In 1944, as Allied forces from Assam advanced into Northern Burma, they constructed a supply road from Ledo (India), which finally connected with Burma Road. The Ledo or Stilwell Road, as it was called, was opened in 1945. Burma Road was the highway linking Lashio (Eastern Burma) with Kunming in Yunnan province (China), a distance of 1,154 km. Completed in 1939 but closed by the Japanese in April 1942 at its source at Lashio. See *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol 2.,



- 15<sup>th</sup> edition., (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc, 1987), p. 658.
14. BG Verghese; n. 12., p.35.
  15. C Raja Mohan, "Bhutan King in Delhi, Focus on Chumbi Trade Corridor", *The Indian Express*, New Delhi, August 4, 2005.
  16. Rediff.com quoted by Renaud Egretreau, *Wooling the Generals*, (New Delhi: Authorspress, Centre De Sciences Humaines, 2003) p 46
  17. Baljit Rai, n.11., p. 60.
  18. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. n. 13. op.cit, p. 658.
  19. Seven ethnic minorities are marked by states on Burma's political map under 1974 Constitution: The Chin, Kachin, Karen, Kareni, Rokhini and Shan. Among the other larger minorities are Nagas. There are other substantial ethnic Chinese and Indian minorities throughout the country, but other than Rohingya Muslims, they are not associated.
  20. Renaud Egretreau, n. 18, op cit, p. 58.
  21. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, n. 18., pp. 218-219.
  22. Renaud Egretreau, n.16, p. 62.
  23. After the World War II Burma gained independence on January 4, 1948. The name Burma was changed to Myanmar by the then ruling Military Junta in 1989. Here Burma is used for the period before 1989 and Myanmar thereafter; Burman for the major ethnic group and Burmese for the citizen of Burma/Myanmar.
  24. National Democratic Alliance was formed in 1976 and consisted of fluctuating alliance of upto a dozen ethnic insurgent groups.
  25. Martin Smith; "Burmese Politics after 1988" in Robert H Taylor, ed, *Burma: Political Economy under Military Rule*, (London: A Hurst Company, 2001), p.17.
  26. Ibid., p. 34.
  27. Sanjoy Hazarika, *Strangers of the Mist: Tales of War and Peace from India's North-east*, (New Delhi: Penguin, 1995,) pp. 279-280.
  28. BP Barua, *Ethnicity and National Integration in Bangladesh; A Study of Chittagong Hill Tracts*, (New Delhi: Har Anand, 2001), p 90
  29. Sanjoy Hazarika, n. 27, pp. 280-283..



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