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# India's Northeast: The Frontier in Ferment



JSOU Report 08-4

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Prakash Singh

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September 2008



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**On the cover.** Yimchungru Naga tribe members in traditional dress at the Hornbill Festival in Kisama, Nagaland, in May 2005. Photo Zumapress, used by permission of Newscom.





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## Foreword

**P**rakash Singh's monograph on the threat that insurgencies in north-east India present to the national government provides an excellent insight into a significant security challenge to the Indian state. The troubles in the eight northeastern states highlighted in Mr. Singh's work are frequently overlooked in the West when people assess India's security concerns, which often focus on other more widely known security challenges, both internal and external. These are usually discussed by focusing on Pakistan and China as external threats and terrorists or insurgents as internal challengers to the state. This work clearly elevates the fractious northeastern region as a region of concern and challenge for the central government.

Upon the modern Indian state's independence from the British Empire in 1947, the members of the tribes and ethnic groups in the northeast clamored for various degrees of autonomy. The underlying factors behind these issues and desires are the differences between the region's citizens and the majority of Indian populace. The northeast's citizens differ in ethnicity, religion, and culture from "mainstream" India and for some of them, independence just transferred "colonial" rule from the British to the Indians.

From the central government's perspective, it is paramount to maintain control of this geo-strategic region that borders upon the People's Republic of China and, until 1971, its archrival Pakistan. However, India's perspective on needing to maintain control of all its territory cannot separate the northeast's call for independence or autonomy from other areas, most notably the Jammu and Kashmir region. If India were to relent and grant independence to any of the northeastern states, it could open the floodgates for a deluge of forces that challenge the central government. Would the Muslims in Kashmir avoid reaching a settlement with the Indian government? Would other minorities push for independence or greater autonomy from the central government? The answer may be yes.

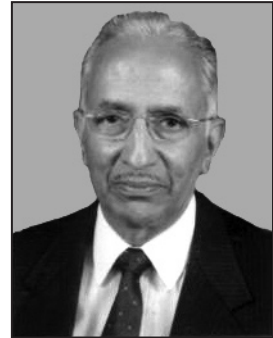
The government of India was fashioned and envisions itself as a secular, parliamentary, democratic state. Failure to accommodate an ethnic or religious minority group threatens the very nature of the Indian state. As conflict continues widely in the South and Central Asian region, how India accommodates minorities and can reach accommodation with insurgents is

a critical element for long-term regional stability and is of critical concern to the United States and the international community.

Michael C. McMahon, Lt Col, USAF  
Director, JSOU Strategic Studies Department

## About the Author

**M**r. Prakash Singh is a distinguished police officer of India. He served—and occupied the highest positions—in the most turbulent areas of the country: Nagaland, Assam, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Kashmir. Mr. Singh dealt with the insurgents in Nagaland, tackled the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) rebels in Assam, fought against Sikh terrorism in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, and contributed to combating militancy in Kashmir. The Government of India, in recognition of his contribution to national security, awarded him the *Padma Shri* in 1991.



Mr. Singh joined the Indian Police Service in 1959 and held the following key positions:

- a. Director general, Border Security Force (1993-1994) during which time BSF played a stellar role in combating terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir
- b. Director general of police, Uttar Pradesh (1991-1993), which was marked by a relentless campaign against the mafia, and terrorism in the Terai area was crushed
- c. Director general of police, Assam (1991), which was a special assignment to ensure that elections were held peacefully in the state in the context of ULFA rebels' threat to disrupt the democratic exercise; elaborate arrangements were made and polling was conducted without a shot being fired
- d. Additional director general/inspector general, Border Security Force, Punjab (1987-1991) where he served when terrorism was at its peak; he effectively secured the borders by raising fencing/lighting and organized operations that broke the backbone of the secessionist movement.

Apart from the prestigious *Padma Shri* award, Mr. Singh has received the President's Police Medal for Distinguished Services and the State Award by the Government of Uttar Pradesh.

Mr. Singh lectures frequently in India and abroad on various topics—for example, insurgency, terrorism, Maoist movement, communal problem, police reform, and the role of paramilitary forces in venues such as Police Training Colleges, National Police Academy, Internal Security Academy, Academy of Administration, Defense Services Staff College, National Defense College, and the Center for Policy Research.

Mr. Singh's educational experience includes an M.A. in History from the University of Allahabad (1957). He also served as assistant professor, Department of History at the University of Allahabad (1958-59). His publications include the following books:

- a. *Nagaland* (National Book Trust, India, Fourth Edition)
- b. *Naxalite Movement in India* (Rupa & Co), its French translation published by Les Nuits Rouges, Paris)
- c. *Disaster Response in India* (Center of Excellence and U.S. Foreign Military Studies Office), written in collaboration with two American authors
- d. *Kohima to Kashmir, On the Terrorist Trail* (Rupa & Co.), a best-seller in India.

Mr. Singh has also written about 150 articles on political and security matters that were published on the editorial and op-ed pages of Indian Express, Financial Express, Times of India, Pioneer, Economic Times, Hindustan Times, and in journals published in India and abroad.

Mr. Singh is also the architect of Police Reform in the country, and he is a JSOU associate fellow. He remains very active in community support activities serving nonprofit humanitarian organizations, research foundations, and public interest matters.

# 1. Prologue: The Backdrop

Its northeastern states are to India what the Balkans are to Europe. There are currents and cross-currents, tribes fighting against each other, ethnic groups making a wide range of demands from autonomy to secession, states confronting each other, and political formations challenging the writ of the Government of India. The region is indeed in a state of ferment.

The political flux is to be attributed essentially to the policy pursued by the British who kept these areas distinctly separated from the rest of the country. With the dawn of independence in 1947, the various ethnic groups found themselves exposed to the pulls and pressures of mainstream politics. They were not able to comprehend or cope with the fast moving changes. They were apprehensive; they feared losing their identity, that they may be overwhelmed by the plains people, and that politically they may cease to be relevant. These misgivings and fears found expression in diverse ways with some ethnic groups taking recourse to arms, rebelling against the authority of the government and even taking the help of neighboring countries in their struggle against the central authority.

The northeastern region of India comprises the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura. The states are popularly known as the *Seven Sisters*. In due course, another state, Sikkim, was added to the family.

## India's northeastern states



Left: map courtesy Ministry of Development of North-eastern Region and Northeast Council.

Below: inset shows map region.



A peculiar feature of the region is that it is surrounded by China in the north, Myanmar in the east, Bangladesh in the southwest and Bhutan in the northwest. The borders with these countries stretch over a distance of 4500 kilometers (kms). On the other hand, the area is linked with the rest of India by a narrow 22-km-long corridor passing through Siliguri in the eastern state of West Bengal. It is a legacy of the partition, when the boundaries between India and Pakistan were drawn in a great hurry without any regard for the geographical features. The damage could have been undone to some extent at least when Bangladesh was liberated in 1971, but the Indian leaders did not have the foresight to do that.

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*... the area is linked with the rest of the country by a narrow 22-km-long corridor passing through Siliguri in the eastern state of West Bengal.*

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The northeastern region accounts for 8.06 percent of the total land surface of India and, as per the 2001 census, it has a population of 3.88 crores (1 crore being 10 million), which is 3.78 percent of the total population of the country. The area and population of the constituent states are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Constituent Demography

| States            | Area (sq. km)  | Population (persons) | Density (per sq. km) |
|-------------------|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Arunachal Pradesh | 83,743         | 1,097,968            | 13                   |
| Assam             | 78,438         | 26,655,528           | 340                  |
| Meghalaya         | 22,429         | 2,318,822            | 103                  |
| Manipur           | 22,327         | 2,293,896            | 103                  |
| Mizoram           | 21,081         | 888,573              | 42                   |
| Nagaland          | 16,579         | 1,990,036            | 120                  |
| Sikkim            | 7,096          | 540,851              | 76                   |
| Tripura           | 10,486         | 3,199,203            | 305                  |
| <b>Northeast</b>  | <b>262,179</b> | <b>38,984,857</b>    | <b>149</b>           |
| All India         | 3,287,263      | 1,028,737,436        | 313                  |

Source: Office of the Registrar General of India



## Early History

About 200 categories of different tribes inhabit the northeastern region. They mostly belong to the Indo-Mongoloid family. According to Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, these Indo-Mongoloids are none else than the *Kiratas* frequently mentioned in the old Sanskrit literature. The earliest reference is to be traced in the *Yajurveda*, where we find the following lines:

*Guhabhyah Kiratam; sanubhyo Jambhakam  
Parvatebhyah Kimpurusam*

—The *Kirata* is for the caves, the *Jambhaka* (long-toothed man) for the slopes, and the *Kimpurusa* (a wild man) for the mountains

The *Atharvaveda* also mentions a *Kirata* girl digging medicinal herbs from the mountains:

*Kairatika kumarika saka khanati bhesajam;  
Hiranyayibhir abhribhir girinam upa sanusu*

—The young maid of *Kirata* race, a little damsel, digs for the herbs; digs with shovels wrought of gold on the high ridges of the hills

In the *Mahabharata*, the *Kiratas* are the hill men living in the eastern Himalayas. After Duryodhana ascended the throne, having sent the Pandavas into exile, he sent his generals in different directions to subjugate the kings of the outlying provinces. One of these generals was Karna, the great warrior. He is mentioned in the epic as having invaded *Batsabhumi* or grazing country and defeated Keroli, Mrittikavati, Mohana and Pattana, Tripura and Kosala, and made them all pay tribute. In the great battle of Kurukshetra, almost all the kings were aligned either on the side of Kauravas or on the side of Pandavas. One of these who fought under the leadership of Bhishma, the commander-in-chief of the Kaurava army, was Vrihatbala who had in his division the kings of Melaka, Tripura, and Chichila.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Chatterjee summarized his observations on the *Kiratas* as follows:

The ways of the *Kirata* were simple. They lived mostly on fruits and tubers, dressed themselves in skins, wore their hair in a pointed top-knot, and were a pleasant-looking people, but terrible with their weapons, and cruel in war ...

It would appear that during the centuries immediately before Christ, and in the early Christian centuries, the *Kiratas* were known to the Hindu world as a group of peoples whose original home was in the Himalayan slopes and in the mountains of the East, in Assam particularly, who were yellow in color and presented a distinct type of culture. They had spread all over the plains of Bengal up to the sea and appear to have penetrated as far as West Bengal. They were rich with all the natural wealth of minerals and forest produce with which the mountains and hills and jungles where they lived abounded, but they were adept in the art of weaving cloth (as their descendants still are), the cotton and woolen fabrics they made being very much in demand...<sup>2</sup>

The *Buranjis* or the chronicles of the Ahom kings who ruled over Assam for nearly 600 years from the early 13th century throw more light on the northeastern tribes' historical evolution. Frequent clashes occurred between the Ahoms and the tribes, but on the whole the Ahoms were able to keep them under their control. During the reign of King Gadadhar Singh (1681–1696), the Nagas, presumably Lothas, committed depredations in the Doyang Valley. An expedition was sent under Tamcheng Chinghai Phukan to chastise the culprits. The Phukan searched the villages and when he did not find the culprits, set fire to their houses. The local Nagas then approached the Phukan and said:

We are your slaves, do not know what is right and what is wrong. We are *abors* (i.e., ignorant). We have given the king cause of offense. Now we shall offer two girls to the king with two female slaves, and other articles. We hope the Phukan will save us.<sup>3</sup>

The Phukan accepted their surrender. The Nagas generally paid tribute to the Ahom kings in the form of *mithuns*<sup>4</sup> and other commodities. The Ahoms, in return, granted to the Nagas revenue-free lands and fishing waters on the understanding that they would desist from making any predatory raids into the plains.

The Naga tribes were looked upon as subjects, as stated by Verrier Elwin, by the successive Ahom kings who collected taxes from them in the form of slaves, elephant tusks, spears, and hand-woven cloth and cotton. Summing up Ahom-Naga relations, Misra says that “while the Nagas submitted to the

strength of the Ahom rulers, the latter respected the Nagas' love of freedom and desisted from interfering in their internal matters.”<sup>5</sup>

The process of what has been called Sanskritisation and Aryanisation of Assam was a steady one. It gathered momentum during the time of Sri-manta Sankardeva (1449–1568), the reformer-saint, whose liberal brand of Vaishnavism brought thousands of tribal people of the Brahmaputra Valley into the fold of Hinduism<sup>6</sup> and reached a peak during the 17th and 18th centuries. The Ahom kingdom started showing signs of disintegration in the early 19th century. The Moamaria rebellion had sapped its strength. The British, who annexed Assam in 1826, initially followed a policy of non-intervention in the affairs of the tribals. However, the same was abandoned in the course of time in favor of one of steady penetration into the hills. As the chief commissioner wrote in his letter of 8 August 1901:

Where there is an ethnological boundary it will be said that a further extension is necessary in order to secure a good natural and geographical boundary. When the boundary is a natural one, an ethnological frontier is declared to be the best. When the boundary is a stream, it is proposed to push it on to the top of the mountain ridge beyond. When the watershed has been reached, it will be found that political considerations require an extension to the bed of the next river below and so on *ad infinitum*.<sup>7</sup>

*Pax Britannica* thus gradually established its sway over the entire north-eastern region. The areas now known as the states of Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh were originally part of Assam. The Government of India Act of 1935 introduced the concept of excluded and partially excluded areas:

- a. An *excluded* area was beyond the pale of Provincial and Federal Legislatures, and its administration was vested exclusively in the governor.
- b. A *partially excluded* area was administered by ministers subject to the overriding authority of the governor.

The Naga Hills district, Lushai Hills district, and the North Cachar Hills subdivision were classified as excluded areas, while the Garo Hills, Mikir Hills, and Khasi and Jaintia Hills were categorized as partially excluded areas.

Christianity made its presence felt in the northeast under the protective umbrella of the British rule. It was so arranged that different areas in Assam were parceled out among different missions. Thus, Naga Hills fell to the share of the American Baptist Foreign Mission. The missionaries made their impact by spreading education, providing medical relief, and engaging in evangelical work. The Christian population in the northeast (excluding Assam and Sikkim) was hardly 2.22 percent in 1901. It jumped to 22.35 percent in 1951 and was at 38.96 percent in 1991. In two states, the missionaries achieved phenomenal progress. In Nagaland, the Christian population in 1991 stood at 88 percent, while in Mizoram it was 86 percent.

## **Post Independence**

After independence in 1947, various hill tribes demanded regional autonomy and a better constitutional status for themselves. The Government of India, sensitive to the aspirations of the tribals, appointed a subcommittee of the Constituent Assembly called The North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Committee under the chairmanship of Gopinath Bardoloi, chief minister of Assam. The committee recommended the abolition of excluded and partially excluded areas and suggested the setting up of district councils in the tribal areas to ensure their participation in the management of matters relating to the tribals. The recommendation was accepted and incorporated in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The Bardoloi Committee also recommended regional councils for tribes other than the main tribe. The idea was to have an autonomous administration comprising district and regional councils in the hill areas of Assam so that the tribals could be assured that their traditional way of life would be preserved and their customs and traditions safeguarded. The district and the regional councils were constituted in 1952 and 1953, respectively.

The district councils were given exhaustive legislative, executive, and judicial functions. Thus, they were given powers to make laws regarding use of land other than reserved forests for purposes of agriculture, grazing, and other residential and nonresidential purposes, management of unreserved forests, use of water channels and canals for agriculture purposes, regulation of shifting cultivation, establishment of village councils and town committees, administration of public health and sanitation, succession of chiefs or headmen, inheritance of property, marriage, divorce, and social customs.

They were also given executive powers to construct or manage primary schools, dispensaries, markets, cattle pounds, ferries, fisheries, roads, and waterways and the power to adjudicate or try cases relating to customary laws if both the parties were tribals. The governor was made head of the district council. The district councils and the regional councils provided a fair degree of autonomy to the tribal people living in Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, and Mizoram.

The first Prime Minister of the country, Jawahar Lal Nehru, had a vision of the northeast; and he wanted the tribals to develop according to their own genius. He enunciated the following five fundamental principles:

- a. People should develop along the lines of their own genius, and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture.
- b. Tribal rights on land and forests should be respected.
- c. We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will, no doubt, be needed especially in the beginning. However, we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory.
- d. We should not over-administer these areas or overwhelm them in a multiplicity of schemes. Instead we should work through and not in rivalry with their social and cultural institutions.
- e. We should judge results not by statistics or the amount of money spent but by the quality of human character that is evolved.

The district council was an administrative innovation to meet the political aspirations of the tribals by giving them a decisive role in their development through the instrumentality of district planning. The experiment, however, was not very successful, apart from the fact that there was resistance from bureaucracy to the sharing of power with the district councils.

The apprehension and grievances—some real, some perceived—of the tribals found expression in separatist and secessionist movements in several parts of the northeast. Broadly speaking, these could be attributed to the following reasons:

- a. A feeling of alleged neglect by the central government
- b. False propaganda by leaders of the area

- c. Changes in the demographic pattern caused by the influx of people from across the borders
- d. Availability of sanctuaries in Myanmar and East Pakistan (later Bangladesh)
- e. Assistance to rebel groups by countries inimical to India
- f. Inept handling of the problems by the central government.

The Nagas were carried away by the propaganda that Nagas had always been independent, that they were conquered only by the British, and that therefore after the withdrawal of the colonial rulers, they had *ipso facto* become independent again. About 10 years later, in 1966, the Mizos also rebelled. Successful counterinsurgency operations, followed by political dialogue leading to the formation of the separate state of Mizoram in 1987, restored peace in that area. Insurgency erupted in Manipur in the late 1960s and in Tripura in the late 1970s. Manipur nursed a feeling of step-motherly treatment by the Central Government, while in Tripura the tribals rebelled because they found themselves being overwhelmed by the Bengali migrants from what was then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Assam started having disturbances in the early 1980s with the United Liberation Front of Assam demanding that the state be liberated from the Indian “colonial regime.”

While stirrings of trouble occurred in Meghalaya also, these have been largely contained. Arunachal Pradesh has generally been quiet, though its Tirap and Changlang districts bordering Nagaland have been infiltrated by rebel Naga groups.

This monograph seeks to give a panoramic view of the ongoing insurgencies in India’s northeastern states—the secessionist movement in Assam, the Naga imbroglio, the Manipur conundrum, and the tribal disaffection in Tripura.

## 2. Assam: A Flickering Insurgency

Indian epics are replete with references to Assam, which is described as Pragjyotisa in the *Mahabharata* and as Kamrupa in the *Puranas*. The boundaries of Pragjyotisa, during the *Mahabharata* period, extended southwards as far as the Bay of Bengal. The *Kalika Purana* states that Kama-khya temple was at the center of Kamrupa, while the *Vishnu Purana* mentions that the country extended around the temple in all directions for 100 *yojanas* (about 450 miles). The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang's accounts confirm that the country now known as Assam "attained considerable power and a fair degree of civilization."<sup>8</sup>

The 13th century saw a band of hardy hill men—an offshoot of the Tai or Shan race of Upper Burma—entering the eastern parts of the Brahmaputra Valley. They were integrated into the mosaic of Indian people and came to be known as Ahoms. During the reign of Suhunmung (1497–1539), one of the greatest Ahom rulers, the kingdom extended in all directions: the Chutiyas were subjugated, the Kacharis were defeated and their capital Dimapur was occupied, the Nagas raids were put down, and repeated Muhammadan invasions were repulsed. Firearms were introduced. The Saka era of Hindus was adopted, and Sankardev's brand of Vaishnavism spread over large areas of Assam.<sup>9</sup> The Ahoms ruled over Assam for about 600 years. They had a good administrative setup and they improved the economy of the region. Trade and commerce flourished during their period. The Burmese conquered Assam in 1821–1822, which brought them into conflict with the ill-defined British frontier in the northeast. The Anglo-Burmese War occurred, which ended in victory for the British. The Treaty of Yandaboo was signed on 24 February 1826, whereby the Burmese agreed to abstain from interference of any kind in Assam, Cachar, and Jaintia and recognized Manipur as an independent state. Political control over the region passed on to the British.

### Break-up of Assam

The composite state of Assam was a conglomerate of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups. Its complex demographic pattern generated, at different periods of time, separatist trends leading to the Naga tribals getting Nagaland in 1963; the Khasis, Garos, and Jaintias getting Meghalaya in 1970; and the Mizos getting Mizoram in 1972. Arunachal Pradesh, which

was earlier known as North-East Frontier Agency, was carved out as a union territory in 1972 and given full statehood in 1987. Unfortunately, however, even after these concessions to regional aspirations, Assam continued to suffer from tensions and rumblings—for example, the issue of large-scale infiltration of Bangladeshi nationals, *... even after these concessions to regional aspirations, Assam continued to suffer from tensions and rumblings...* linguistic tensions between the Assamese and the Bengalis, demand for a separate political status by the plains tribals, and boundary disputes with the neighboring states.

The large-scale influx of foreigners into Assam led to an agitation by the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP). The Assamese were apprehensive that they would be overwhelmed by the sea of humanity that was flooding their territory from across the international borders. In a memorandum presented to the Prime Minister on 2 February 1980, the AASU expressed its misgiving that the continuing influx of foreign nationals would have a very adverse effect on the political, social, cultural, and economic life of Assam. Prolonged agitation occurred for 6 years (1979–1985); it was marked by widespread violence and communal upheaval. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi’s initiative led to the signing of the Assam Accord on 15 August 1985 whereby it was agreed:

- a. For purposes of detection of foreigners, 1 January 1966 shall be the base date and year.
- b. Those who came to Assam on or after that date and up to 24 March 1971 shall be detected and their names deleted from the electoral rolls.
- c. Those who came on or after 25 March 1971 shall be detected and expelled in accordance with the law.

The Government of India renewed its commitment to the speedy and all-round economic development of Assam and undertook to secure the international border against future infiltrations by the erection of physical barriers.

The AASU and the AAGSP thereafter called off the agitation. Elections were held in Assam, and the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) led by Prafulla Kumar Mahanta came to power in December 1985. It was the most youthful party that had ever been voted to office in any State. No wonder it



aroused great expectations. But, unfortunately, the party soon lost much of its popularity. The lifestyle of its leaders, factionalism in its ranks, and the widespread corruption of its ministers eroded its credibility.

## United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) Challenge

The ULFA had meanwhile been formed on 7 April 1979 with the avowed aim of liberating Assam “from the Indian colonial regime” through “armed struggle” and to bring about a “radical transformation of the Assamese society through scientific socialism.”

The objectives of ULFA were defined as follows:

- a. Achieve the sovereignty of Assam through armed revolution.
- b. Safeguard the interests of Assam and its contiguous areas—that is, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Arunachal, and Tripura.
- c. Have full control over the resources of Assam—like oil, natural gas, and the forest wealth.
- d. Gain public support against Indian and non-Indian exploitation.
- e. Take a stand against any suppression and repression of the Assamese masses.<sup>10</sup>

The ULFA developed a well-structured organization to carry out its activities on different fronts. At the apex, a Standing Committee comprising the Chairman (Arabinda Rajkhowa), Vice Chairman (Pradip Gogoi), General Secretary (Hirak Jyoti Mahanta), and Commander in Chief (Paresh Barua). The Standing Committee itself was part of a larger body known as the Central Committee, which was selected for a period of 3 years. The organization was divided into a civil wing and a military wing. The civil wing was headed by Chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa and the military wing by Paresh Barua.

In the 1980s, ULFA was involved in different kinds of illegal, violent activities leading to a deep sense of insecurity among the people, particularly among those from outside Assam and those opposed to its ideology. Its activities followed this pattern:

- a. Extortion from the affluent sections of society, particularly the industrialists, and those in the tea industry

- b. Murder of political opponents, police officials, and others opposed to its program
- c. Snatching/collection of arms from the license holders
- d. Harassment of people, especially of non-Assamese origin, residing in Assam
- e. Dacoities, robberies, and looting of banks
- f. Forcible occupation of lands and buildings.

The ULFA ran virtually a parallel administration in certain areas by collecting taxes from the people, holding “courts” to settle disputes of civil or criminal nature, imposing sentences, and taking up populist causes like organizing *shramdan* (voluntary labor) to repair village roads and giving financial help to social and cultural institutions. Its leaders established contacts with their counterparts in the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) at the latter’s headquarters in the Somra tract of Upper Burma for mutual help and assistance. The ULFA thereafter started sending cadres for training in weapons and tactics with the Naga insurgents. They sent about 300 personnel to Burma (now Myanmar) between 1982 and 1986 for training.

The ULFA maintained close relations with the AASU and even managed to infiltrate its ranks. Important ULFA members were office bearers of AASU Central Committee, and the ULFA activists dominated some of the district committees of AASU. The interrelationship between these organizations was appropriately described as “AASU by morning, AGP by noon, and ULFA by night.”

The ULFA gradually grew into a full fledged, well equipped and highly motivated terrorist organization with a solid mass base and close links with the other secessionist outfits of the northeast. Its violent activities reached a peak in 1990. The ULFA cadres launched a massive fund collection drive and extorted huge sums of money from members of the business community, industrial houses, tea gardens, government officials, and other civilians. The total collection was estimated to be over Rs. 100 crores (1 billion). The ULFA extremists also snatched away more than 1,900 guns of different descriptions from the license holders. A large number of persons, about 150, were kidnapped and most of them were let go only after they had parted with handsome amounts of money. The most sensational kidnapping was that of the general manager of Guwahati Oil Refinery, his son, and the driver

who were later released in exchange for the release of three hard-core ULFA activists lodged in jail.

Those gunned down by ULFA included a superintendent of police, D.S. Negi, his personal security officer (PSO), and the driver. Some of the victims were buried in mass graves. The killings by the ULFA created panic among the people and a general sense of insecurity. Some members of the business community moved out of Assam during that period.

The law-and-order situation in the entire Brahmaputra Valley had taken a nose dive. The Government of India, therefore, imposed President's Rule in the state on the night of 27/28 November 1990. The Assam Disturbed Areas Act and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act were invoked, and the Army and the paramilitary forces started operations against the ULFA.

## The Crackdown

The Army's crackdown on ULFA was code named *Operation Bajrang*. It was quite successful. The ULFA cadres were flushed out from their known camps. Their organizational network was broken, and their training camps—including the ULFA headquarters at Lakhpathar in Tinsukhia district—were smashed. A large number of activists were arrested and a sizeable quantity of arms and ammunition were seized. Those arrested included the regional commander of Northern Region, commander of Dhemaji district, chairman of Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur districts, a couple of district secretaries, and about 169 hard-core party members. About 1,170 weapons of different descriptions were seized. A number of cars and two wheelers, which the ULFA had snatched from their owners, were also recovered. Cash worth more than Rs. 6.40 crores, looted and extorted from different sources, was retrieved. The top leaders of the ULFA and the bulk of the hard core, however, managed to escape, possibly because they were tipped off by sources within the administration.

The ULFA suffered a setback, but it started reorganizing itself by the end of the year. Its commander-in-chief issued orders to the cadres to strike at those figuring in the party's hit list. Members of the Congress (I),<sup>11</sup> police and army informers, businessmen not supporting the party, executives of the tea industry, and other political adversaries were particularly targeted. The ULFA also gave a call for boycott of the Republic Day on 26 January 1991 and issued an ultimatum to members of all national political parties

to resign from their respective organizations by 30 March 1991 or else face the consequences. Several Congress (I) members tendered their resignation or dissociated themselves from party activities.

With elections to be held in the state in 1991, the government called off *Operation Bajrang* on 20 April 1991; that would facilitate the restoration of the democratic process. The Congress (I) was voted to power. The popular government headed by Chief Minister Hiteshwar Saikia was installed in the state on 30 June.

On 1 July 1991 the ULFA, in a meticulously planned operation, kidnapped 14 officials from Guwahati. The state government succumbed to their pressure and announced general amnesty for all the ULFA detainees held under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Act (TADA). Violence reached a peak in 1998 with 273 incidents involving 139 killings. The outfit was particularly active in Dibrugarh, Kamrup, Tinsukia, Barpeta, Nalbari, Sibsagar, North Lakhimpur, and Naogaon districts. In August 2000, however, 287 militants—including 242 belonging to the ULFA—surrendered. Those surrendered included Lohit Deuri, a senior leader of ULFA, who claimed that the outfit had been reduced to a mere lackey of the Pakistan Intelligence Agency. Deuri disclosed that China was also supplying arms to ULFA.



August 1998, firemen try to extinguish a blaze at the Indian Oil Corporation fuel depot in Nagaom, Assam, after an attack by ULFA militants. AFP photo, used by permission of Newscom.

The northeastern rebels—including the ULFA, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), and the Kamtapur Liberation Organization (KLO)—suffered a serious setback in December 2003 when the Royal Bhutan Army, in a well-organized campaign, destroyed their camps on its territory. “There is a limit to our patience” as Yeshey Dorjee, director of the Bhutan Foreign Ministry, said. “We cannot allow armed militants to



December 2003, Bhutanese guards secure a gate following a crackdown on illegal separatist camps in the small Himalayan kingdom. Some 120 Indian rebels were killed and many Bhutanese soldiers injured in the operation. AFP photo/Biju, used by permission of Newscom.

open a parade on our soil flouting the law-and-order machinery.”<sup>12</sup> It was reported that about 120 insurgents were killed and over 500 injured. Some important leaders were arrested.

Interestingly, the ULFA and the NDFB asked the Chinese government for shelter and medical facilities for the extremists fleeing Bhutan. The Chinese government, of course, ignored their plea. The United States, in its Country Reports on Terrorism 2004, placed ULFA on the list of Other Selected Terrorist Organizations

(OSTO). The report described ULFA as “northeast India’s most prominent insurgent group,” which conducted hit-and-run operations on security forces in Assam, selective assassinations, and explosions in public places.

The ULFA, however, gradually recovered the lost ground. Its 28th Battalion is the premier strike force that has been launching attacks in the Upper Assam districts. The outfit has also entered into strategic alliances with peripheral extremist groups like the Karbi Longri North Cachar Hills Liberation Front (KLNLF) and the All Adivasi National Liberation Army (AANLA). During August 2007, the KLNLF carried out a violent campaign against the Hindi-speaking trading community of the Karbi Anglong district. The campaign was inspired and supported by the ULFA, which also participated in the mayhem at certain places. The AANLA, emboldened by its alliance with the ULFA that gave it sophisticated weapons, carried out an explosion in the New Delhi Rajdhani Express in Golaghat district of Assam on 13 December 2007, killing 5 people. During 2007, there were a total of 500 incidents of violence in the state resulting in 439 insurgency-related fatalities. Assam, in fact, turned out to be “the most violent theatre of conflict in India’s northeast in 2007.”<sup>13</sup>

## Prospects of Peace

The government has been able to negotiate a Suspension of Operations Agreement with the splinter groups active in Assam:

- a. United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) active in Karbi Anglong district
- b. Dima Haram Daogah (DHD) active in North Cachar Hills district
- c. National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) active in parts of Lower Assam.

The prospects of peace with the major insurgent outfit ULFA, however, appear rather dim. A People's Consultative Group (PCG) formed in September 2005 and comprising leaders from the civil society held three rounds of talks with the Government of India with a view to facilitating negotiations between the rebel leaders and the government. The Government of India went out of its way to announce a unilateral cease-fire on 13 August 2006 to facilitate the rebels coming over ground and holding fruitful consultations. However, when it was found that they were using the period to step up their violent activities and commit extortions, the cease-fire, which had lasted only 6 weeks, was called off.

The ULFA has from time to time made difficult conditions for coming to the negotiating table. At one stage, they wanted the talks to be held outside the country, a United Nations observer to be associated in the deliberations, and five of their jailed Central Committee leaders to be released. The government did not agree to the first two conditions, but was inclined to release the leaders being held in detention. The ULFA then came up with an impossible demand—that the government should agree to discuss the issue of “restoration of Assam's sovereignty.” On 31 December 2007, the ULFA clarified that the release of their leaders would not be sufficient to start the process of negotiations. No wonder the government rejected the suggestion. Evidence indicates that the ULFA leaders are being held captive and wire-pulled by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) based in Bangladesh. The ISI's game plan is to destabilize India's northeast; therefore it makes ULFA put forward demands that no government worth its salt could concede.

### 3. Nagaland: Groping for Peace

The Nagas, who were classified under the generic term of *Kiratas*, are mentioned in the ancient literature. There is, however, no satisfactory account of their history during the intervening centuries. The chronicles of the Ahom Kings of Assam, the *Buranjis*, throw light on their relations with the Ahoms. Frequent clashes occurred between the Ahoms and the Nagas, but the Ahoms were able to keep the bordering tribes under control and even establish their authority, howsoever undefined, over the Nagas. Sukapha (1228–1268 AD) committed such frightful atrocities on the Nagas that “the other Nagas of the neighborhood hastened to make their submission.”<sup>14</sup>

The British relations with the Nagas fall into three periods:

- a. 1832 to 1850, when the British undertook “military promenades” into the Naga Hills
- b. 1851 to 1865, when the British followed a policy of nonintervention with regard to the Naga tribes
- c. 1866 to 1922 during which period the British extended and established their control and authority over the entire Naga Hills.

As recorded by Sir Robert Reid (governor of Assam, 1937–1941), “the process of penetration went on, inexorably if irregularly.”<sup>15</sup>

Inter-village wars, culminating in chopping off the heads of enemies, were part of everyday life in the Naga Hills. Head-hunting was not only the cause and effect of fights but also the inspiration for the Naga works of art. Much of the traditional Naga carvings and patterns on textiles had head-hunting as their motif. The last recorded incidents of head-hunting were 1969 in the Tuensang area.

#### Genesis of Insurgency

“The Naga disturbances are unique in having an almost entirely political foundation.”<sup>16</sup> There was no economic exploitation of the Naga tribes, no interference with their religious practices, no attempt to change their social structure or cultural traditions.

Angami Zapu Phizo and his followers systematically propagated that Nagaland was never a part of India, that it was an independent territory



between India and Burma, and therefore after the withdrawal of the British, the Nagas had become independent again. The propaganda, based on a facile and distorted interpretation of history, wrought havoc.

As early as 1918, an organization known as the Naga Club was formed in Kohima with British patronage. It comprised mainly government officials, village headmen, and elders. In 1929, when the Simon Commission visited Kohima, members of the Naga Club submitted a memorandum, praying that the Naga Hills be kept beyond the ambit of proposed reforms and placed directly under the British government. The Naga elders expressed their apprehension about the “introduction of foreign laws and customs to supersede our own customary laws,” and desired to be left alone “to determine for ourselves as in ancient times.”<sup>17</sup>

In 1946, a body known as the Naga National Council (NNC) was formed “for the solidarity of Naga tribes.” In a memorandum, the NNC suggested that “the Naga Hills should be constitutionally included in an autonomous Assam, in a free India, with local autonomy and due safeguards for the interests of the Nagas.” Its tone, however, soon underwent a change. In a memorandum submitted on 20 February 1947, the NNC expressed its misgivings that “a Constitution drawn up by the people who have no knowledge of the Naga Hills and the Naga people will be quite unsuitable and unacceptable to the Naga people.”

Phizo, who belonged to the Gwizantsu clan of the Angami tribe and had at one stage served in the Indian National Army of Subhash Chandra Bose, nursed political ambitions. Feeling that the situation was propitious, he decided to capture the NNC and use it as an instrument to further his political agenda. In 1948, however, he resigned from the NNC because he could not reconcile his radical outlook to its then moderate policies.

In 1951, Phizo organized what he called a “plebiscite” on the issue of independence. He claimed to have visited all the villages, obtained the signatures or thumb impressions of the people, and administered them



Yimchungru Naga tribe members in traditional dress at the Hornbill Festival in Kisama, Nagaland, in May 2005. Photo Zumapress, used by permission of Newscom.



oaths in the traditional Naga fashion to fight for Naga independence. Phizo claimed that 99 percent of the people had voted for an independent Naga state. A falsehood repeated *ad infinitum* acquires the ring of truth. Phizo's plebiscite also acquired the dignity of a popular verdict because the tall claims made by him were allowed to go unchallenged. In actual fact, the so-called plebiscite covered only Kohima and Mokokchung districts. The Tuensang area, which was not a part of the Naga Hills district then, was left completely untouched. Besides, even in the Kohima and Mokokchung areas, only the men were asked to exercise their franchise; women were not considered politically intelligent enough to give their choice on such a sensitive matter.

The claim that Phizo himself visited all the villages was factually incorrect. He went only to some important villages, while the other villages were covered by his aides. The issues were also never properly explained to the people. Phizo would generally ask the villagers if they wanted their lands to remain with them or were willing to surrender them to India. It was a dangerously misleading over-simplification. No wonder the villagers voted for independence, which alone seemed to guarantee land to them. Phizo played on the psychology of the Naga people—their attachment to land. The claim that 99 percent of the people had voted for independence was absurd on the face of it. A plebiscite is a highly organized affair. To say that Phizo and his followers were able to conduct such an exercise in 1959 when communications in the area were so very difficult is to make an exaggerated claim; it does not stand the test of scrutiny.

On 11 March 1952 a three-member Naga delegation met Prime Minister Nehru in New Delhi. The interview was stormy. The Prime Minister is believed to have said that even if the heavens fell or India went to pieces, the Nagas would not be given independence! Phizo then decided to organize armed rebellion in the Naga Hills. He formed what was called the "Hongkin Government" in 1954, subsequently renamed as "Naga Central Government." An armed wing called "Naga Home Guards" was also formed, and over time it evolved into the Naga Army. The youth were mobilized under the banner of the "Naga Youth Movement" and "Naga Women's Society." A campaign of violence was unleashed. The Naga Home Guards collected the dumps of arms and ammunition left behind during World War II, supplemented these with whatever arms could be locally manufactured, and reinforced their arsenal by over-running the isolated police posts and

looting whatever weapons and ammunition they could lay their hands on. Numerous incidents of loot, arson, intimidation, murder, and attacks on police posts occurred. The situation deteriorated beyond the control of the Assam Police and the Assam Rifles. In April 1956, the Government, therefore, entrusted the responsibility of law and order in the Naga Hills to the Army. This action was the first time that the Indian security forces were called upon to undertake counterinsurgency operations against a well-organized outfit operating within the country in a terrain ideally suited for guerilla warfare. Mistakes were no doubt committed and excesses occurred. Gradually, however, the counterinsurgency doctrine was refined.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile the moderate Nagas realized the futility of Phizo's demand for independence. They organized the first Naga People's Convention at Kohima from 22 to 26 August 1957 and appealed to the insurgent Nagas "to give up the cult of violence." The Convention demanded that the Naga Hills district of Assam and the Tuensang Frontier Division of NEFA be constituted into a single administrative unit and assured that they were in favor of a "satisfactory political settlement within the Indian Union." The Government accepted the Convention's demand for carving out a new administrative unit, and the Naga Hills-Tuensang Area was ushered in on 1 December 1957.<sup>19</sup>

The second Naga People's Convention was held at Ungma in Mokokchung district from 21 to 23 May 1958. This event was followed by yet another, the third Naga People's Convention at Mokokchung from 22 to 26 October 1959. The NPC demanded the formation of a new state to be known as Nagaland within the Indian Union comprising the territories heretofore known as Naga Hills-Tuensang Area with executive powers vested in a governor who would have special responsibility with regard to law and order. It sought the cooperation of every tribe to bring normalcy and appealed to the underground to stop all violent activities.

## **Government Meets Naga Aspirations**

The Government of India accepted their demand for the formation of a separate state of Nagaland within the Indian Union. Speaking in the Parliament on 1 August 1960, Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru said:

I take this opportunity to express our satisfaction at the agreement reached with the Naga leaders. We have always regarded the Nagas

as full Indian citizens: I have said to the Naga people several times in the past that there could be no question of independence for the Nagas. India achieved her independence 13 years ago, and the Nagas are as independent as other Indian citizens. We have not the slightest desire to interfere in the tribal customs and usage of the Nagas or in their distinctive way of life. The Nagas have been anxious to have a separate state within the Indian Union. The agreement now reached with them should enable them to find the fullest opportunity of self-expression, and we sincerely hope that the new agreement will result in the rapid restoration of normal conditions in the area.”

In 1962, the Constitution (Thirteenth Amendment) Act was passed. It laid down, among other things, that

No Act of Parliament in respect of

- a. Religious or social practices of the Nagas
- b. Naga customary law and procedure
- c. Administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Naga customary law
- d. Ownership and transfer of land and its resources

shall apply to the state of Nagaland unless the legislative Assembly of Nagaland by a resolution so decides.

This provision was incorporated in Article 371A of the Constitution.

It may be emphasized that no other state of the Indian Union enjoys such special safeguards for the protection of the religious practices, customary laws, and economic interests of its people. Referring to these provisions, a well-known expert on Naga tribes, J. H. Hutton, said:

It seems to me that by the formation of the State of Nagaland, protected as it is by clauses in the Constitution of India, the Nagas have in fact got more than might have been expected or even desired—complete internal home rule financed by the Indian government; indeed, they have won their war, but to take advantage of their victory the underground must be persuaded to surrender their arms, and order in the hills must be restored.<sup>20</sup>

On 1 December 1963, the separate State of Nagaland was inaugurated by President Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. Speaking on the occasion, he said that the

Indian society has always been multilingual, multiracial, and multireligious and expressed the hope that normal conditions will rapidly return to the State and that all sections of Naga people shall come forward to participate in the development of Nagaland.

The extremist Nagas, however, remained adamant. They did not resile from their demand for independence and continued violent activities of kidnapping, extortion, looting, murder, sniping, and ambushes in Nagaland and the adjoining areas of Assam and Manipur.

## **Pakistan Fuels Insurgency**

Pakistan's abetment of insurgency in Nagaland added fuel to fire. Phizo had crossed over to Pakistan on 6 December 1956 with a view to seeking arms aid from that country and from there moved on to the United Kingdom to raise the Naga issue in various international forums. The first big gang to Pakistan was led by Kaito Sema, commander in chief of the Naga Home Guards, in 1962. Kaito raced across the plains of North Cachar with about 200 men, eluding the unsuspecting police and the security forces. While the gang was being trained in Pakistan,<sup>21</sup> Phizo visited that country to satisfy himself that they were being trained on the proper lines.

Another formidable gang of about 500 Naga Army personnel went to Pakistan in October 1963 under the leadership of Dusoi Chakhesang. The gang took the longer but safer route through the Burmese Chin Hills. Yet another gang, about 300 strong, went to Pakistan under the leadership of Yeveto Sema. The biggest and the most successful expedition to Pakistan was led by Zuheto Sema in October 1964. It was about 1,000 strong and received training on the most modern lines in Pakistan. The gang returned to the Somra tract in Burma opposite the Pochury area of Nagaland in March 1965.

Subsequent efforts to send gangs to Pakistan were not so successful. Mowu Angami, chief of the Naga Army, attempted to take a 1,000 strong gang to Pakistan in November 1965. The gang crossed over to Burma, but the Burmese intercepted and forced them to re-enter India. In December 1965, the underground attempted to send a gang to Pakistan through the Churachandpur area of Manipur, but the expedition failed. In June 1966, Nedelie Angami was able to take a gang of 200 Nagas to Pakistan, although with great difficulty.

Between 1962 and 1968, at least ten gangs of Naga Army personnel crossed over to what was then East Pakistan. They were supplied with a wide range of weapons and ammunition including light machine guns, sten guns, rifles, mortars, medium machine-guns, rocket launchers, and various types of ammunition. About 2,500 Naga Army personnel were equipped and trained by the Pakistani authorities during the period.

The liberation of Bangladesh in 1971 changed the entire complexion, albeit for a few years only. It ended the period of Pakistan's direct and proximate involvement in the northeast. The Pakistani forces surrendered before the Indian Army at Dacca on 16 December 1971. Naga Army "Commander in Chief" Thinuselie Angami and "Brigadier" Nedelie Angami were also taken into custody by the Indian Army. These arrests were a great setback to the Naga rebels.

## China Fishes in Troubled Waters

Meanwhile, China also started fishing in the troubled waters of the northeast. Pakistan's help had been substantial, but the rebels found it necessary to turn in another direction due to a combination of factors. They wanted the support of a big power, which would increase their bargaining capacity *vis-a-vis* the Government of India. Besides, the journey to Pakistan was becoming difficult because the known routes were effectively sealed by the security forces. Phizo was a trifle disenchanted with the West also. In a statement, he admitted that the Nagas were "despairing about the lack of moral support from the West in their struggle for freedom."

The first gang to China, about 300 strong, was led by Thinuselie and Muivah. It crossed the Tuensang border in November 1966 and returned in January 1968, laden with arms, ammunition, and other equipment. They were camping at a secret hideout in a deep jungle near the village of Jotsoma in the Angami area. The camp was raided by the security forces in the early hours of 7 June 1968. A fierce encounter ensued at the end of which the security forces captured 25 rebels together with a large quantity of arms and ammunition. The equipment seized included 60-mm mortars, 7.62-mm self-loading rifles with folding bayonets, stenguns, and .303 rifles. A number of documents, papers, and diaries that gave conclusive evidence of the underground's collusion with China were also seized. The Government of India lodged a strong protest and expressed its regret that the People's

Republic of China was “master-minding this covert scheme in order to stir lawlessness against the legally constituted authority in India.” The Peking Radio indirectly admitted China’s involvement when it said (in a broadcast), “neither armed suppression nor political deception can curb the development of the armed struggle of the Nagas, Mizos, and Kukis.”

A number of gangs, big and small, continued to trickle out of Nagaland on their way to China in the following years. They were trained at Teng Chung and Fukung in the Yunnan province. Taiwan’s Foreign Minister, Dr. Wei Tao-ming, told the United Nations Assembly on 22 October 1968 that China was training thousands of underground Nagas in Yunnan and sending them back to India to fight against the Government of India. According to official estimates, a total of 1,650 Naga rebels went to China during 1967 and 1968.

The Government meanwhile sustained its pressure on the rebel gangs coming back from China. The security forces located a formidable gang under the leadership of Mowu Angami in the Sema area. It was surrounded, and their supplies of food, water, and other essential commodities were cut off. The rebels were asked to surrender or face action. The show of force had the desired effect and on 28 March 1969, one hundred and sixty eight China-trained Nagas surrendered before the security forces. A huge consignment of Chinese arms and ammunition was also seized. Another gang led by Issac Swu was also hounded, and 90 of its members were captured. The Government claimed in the Parliament on 1 April 1969 that they had been able “to break the backbone” of the misguided Naga hostiles who had sought help and inspiration from foreign powers.

The arms traffic with China nevertheless continued. In April 1971, a gang of about 100 underground Nagas slipped into the adjoining Chin Hills of Burma in two batches *en route* to the Yunnan province of China. Yet another gang of 200 Naga Army personnel crossed over to Burma in July 1971. Towards the end of 1974, a gang of about 60 rebel Nagas, including a few girls, crossed over to Burma in the month of November. Thuingaleng (Th.) Muivah was described as leader of a “goodwill mission” to China. Another group of about 140, including 15 girls, led by “Colonel” Vedai Chakhesang started trekking to China in December, but was badly mauled by the security forces. About 110 of them were captured and at least 6 killed. In early 1975, another group of about 75 underground Nagas led by “General” Viyalie Metha went to China. The documents captured from the rebels

during this period clearly show the rebels' determination to seek the help, financial and military, of foreign countries like China. In one of the letters, the President of the "Naga Federal Government" even suggested a "Friendship Treaty" to the Chairman of the People's Republic of China.

The Chinese involvement in the northeast, however, gradually tapered off. This gradual decrease was partly because the Chinese were disappointed with the reverses suffered by Naga underground in the face of operations undertaken by the Indian security forces. They also realized that the rebel Nagas, who were devout Christians, would never accept Marxist-Leninist principles, and therefore they could not look forward to a Maoist ally in India's northeast. Besides, in the post-Mao era, the Chinese were not keen to "export" revolution; they were more interested in economic reforms. And so they gradually washed their hands off the secessionist movements in the northeast.

Latest reports, however, indicate that the Chinese are conniving at, if not directly encouraging, the supply of weapons to the insurgent groups in the northeast. Yunnan in China is said to have "emerged as a center for procurement of arms by the militant groups" in recent years. This subject was reportedly discussed at a meeting of police chiefs from all over the country in October 2007.<sup>22</sup> It is suspected that cheap China-made weapons are smuggled from Yunnan by gun runners either through Myanmar or by sea in the trawlers across the Bay of Bengal, their ultimate destination being India's northeast.

## Peace Initiatives

A section of church leaders, who saw the futility of armed confrontation, initiated moves that led to the formation of a Peace Mission comprising Jaya Prakash Narayan, a Gandhian leader; B. P. Chaliha, Chief Minister of Assam; and Rev. Michael Scott, a missionary. The Peace Mission held discussions with the underground leaders, which eventually led to the suspension of operations starting at midnight of 5 September 1964. This period was followed by six rounds of talks (1964–1967) between the rebel Naga leaders and the Prime Minister of India. The rebels were led by Kughato Sukhai, *Ato-Kilonser* (Prime Minister) of the "Naga Federal Government." However, there could be no agreement because the rebel Nagas continued to harp on "sovereignty" and insist that there could be no solution within the framework of the Indian Union.



The Peace Mission proposal, submitted on 20 December 1964, struck a brilliant compromise between the opposing stands of the two parties. It stated that the rebel “Naga Federal Government” could “on their own volition, decide to be a participant in the Union of India and mutually settle the terms and conditions for that purpose,” and on the other hand, “the government could consider to what extent the pattern and structure of the relationship between Nagaland and the Government of India should be adapted and recast, so as to satisfy the political aspirations of all sections of Naga opinion.” The proposal, to this day, remains the best formula to resolve the impasse. The Government of India, in its reply, said that while they did not agree with “the line of reasoning and a series of postulates” on which the proposal was based, they welcomed the overall conclusion that a peaceful solution of the problem in Nagaland could only be found within the Indian Union. The rebel Nagas gave an evasive reply, saying that as the Nagas had every right to decide their future, a plebiscite should be held under the supervision of a neutral agency.

A split in the underground movement meanwhile seriously weakened it. The Semas were not happy with the Angami hegemony over the “Naga Federal Government.” Kaito Sema, the firebrand Sema leader, ransacked the Naga Army Headquarters at Gaziphema and carried away the bulk of arms, ammunition, wireless equipment, and all the money kept there. The Sema tribesmen set up their own government and weaned away sizeable chunks of armed personnel from the underground Naga army. The Angamis were not prepared to tolerate this internal convulsion; they assassinated Kaito in the heart of Kohima bazaar on 3 August 1968. The crime boomeranged and led to a polarization of all the anti-Phizo groups under the leadership of the Semas. At a meeting held near Khuivi on 1 and 2 November 1968, which was attended by representatives of the Sema, Rengma, Pochury, Kuki, Shepoumaramth, and even Angami tribes, the formation of the “Revolutionary Government of Nagaland” was announced. The Semas had their pound of flesh when, in a masterly stratagem, they abducted Mhiasiu and Ramyo, the President and the Home Minister, respectively, of the Federal Government and kept them in captivity for over 8 months in one of their camps.

The peace talks had already failed, and the underground were observed as not complying with the conditions of the Suspension of Operations Agreement. They even made an abortive attempt on the life of Hokishe Sema, Chief Minister of the State. The Government, therefore, called off the



suspension of operations and issued an order on 1 September 1972 banning the underground organizations. The Naga National Council, the Naga Federal Government, and the Naga Army were declared unlawful associations under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

## Shillong Agreement

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited Nagaland in December 1973. Her visit was followed by fresh initiatives to restore peace in Nagaland. The church leaders formed a peace council, which was able to prevail upon the representatives of the rebels to abandon their secessionist demand. The deliberations ultimately led to the signing of the Shillong Agreement on 11 November 1975. Its salient features were as follows:

- a. The representatives of the underground organizations conveyed their decision, of their own volition, to accept, without condition, the Constitution of India.
- b. The arms, now underground, would be brought out and deposited at the appointed places. Details for giving effect to this agreement will be worked out between them and representatives of the Government, the Security Forces, and members of the Liaison Committee.
- c. The representatives of the underground organizations would have reasonable time to formulate other issues for discussions toward a final settlement.

The Government released the rebels held in detention and gave them rehabilitation grants. The underground, on their part, deposited over 100 weapons and about 4,000 rounds of ammunition, although this was only a fraction of their total holding of arms and ammunition.

Phizo, who was in London, did not approve of the agreement and gave a call to his followers to revive the insurgency. In a joint statement, Issac Swu and Th. Muivah (who were on what was euphemistically described as a “goodwill mission” to China) denounced those who had signed the agreement as “arch traitors” and said that “the people of Nagaland flatly refuse to be a party to any accord that entails loss of their sovereign existence.”

In retrospect, one could say that the Government of India was quite accommodating in meeting the demands of the Naga people and satisfying their political aspirations. The Naga People's Convention had demanded

that the Naga Hills district of Assam and the Tuensang Frontier Division of NEFA be constituted into a single unit: the demand was conceded, and the Naga Hills–Tuensang Area was formed in 1957. The Naga People’s Convention again demanded that a separate State of Nagaland be created: the demand was conceded, and Nagaland was carved out in 1963. Then in 1975, the Shillong Agreement was signed whereby the representatives of the underground organizations agreed to surrender their weapons and accepted unconditionally the Constitution of India. They went back on this agreement also. The process of having a political settlement could not be stretched *ad infinitum*.

### **Rise of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN)**

The extremist Nagas stuck to their political agenda. They formed, in 1980, the NSCN and followed it up with the formation of the Government of People’s Republic of Nagaland. The NSCN, however, suffered a split following a bloody clash between the rival factions of Khaplang and Muivah on 30 April 1988. Khaplang’s men attacked the General Headquarters of Muivah’s group and killed about 140 men; about 230 others including women and children managed to escape, but most of them perished in the jungle. This intertribal clash was the worst one in the history of the Naga tribes. Henceforth, the Khaplang group was supported by Konayks of both India and Burma, Aos of Mokokchung area, Phoms and Yimchangers of Tuensang area, Pochuris of Phek district, and sections of Semas and Lothas. Muivah, a Tangkhul Naga from Manipur, and Issac, a Sema from Nagaland, were supported by the remaining Naga tribes of Nagaland and the Nagas from the bordering areas of Manipur. The Issac-Muivah (IM) faction has gradually emerged as the dominant rebel group of Nagaland.

The NSCN (IM) has developed linkages with a section of the ULFA, the Bodo Security Force, the Hmar People’s Convention of Mizoram, and the All Tripura Tribal Front. Its leaders made repeated trips to Bangladesh, Pakistan, Thailand, Singapore, and the European countries, shopping for arms and seeking international support. Issac and Muivah visited Pakistan in October 1990. They also attended a meeting of the United Nations Sub-commission on Human Rights at Geneva in August 1992 and managed to get membership of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) in January 1993. Pakistan agreed to extend all possible help to the

insurgents,<sup>23</sup> and Bangladesh, which owed its liberation to India, is tragically providing sanctuary and other facilities to the insurgent groups of the northeast the same way as Pakistan did in the 1950s and 1960s. A contingent of 200 Naga rebels under the leadership of Markson Tangkhul went to Bangladesh in 1991 and returned with sophisticated weapons.

The NSCN was banned in November 1990, but inadequate follow-up action made no difference to its violent activities. The rebels took advantage of the thinning out of forces from the eastern frontier to deal with the insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir. The state administration was ineffective in handling the situation. It has been rightly said that the “handsome subventions and rehabilitation benefits have made rebellion lucrative, encouraged widespread corruption, and created a ‘creamy layer’ that flourishes in disturbed conditions.”<sup>24</sup>

Actually, the Naga rebels have devised a very elaborate system of tax collections. Funds are collected through the village headmen openly. Money is extorted from government servants also, and departmental heads have made payments directly to the insurgents. According to an estimate, they collect, through various means, a sum of not less than Rs. 50 crores every year.<sup>25</sup>

## An Unstable Peace

Meanwhile the Government of India sent feelers to the NSCN (IM) about coming to the negotiating table. Issac and Muivah laid down three conditions: the negotiations should focus on security, the talks should be held outside the country, and the talks should include a third party mediator. The Government of India conceded the first two demands but did not agree to the presence of a mediator. Subsequent discussion led to a cease-fire agreement effective 1 August 1997. The agreement stipulated that the NSCN (IM) would not indulge in any kidnappings or extortions, would maintain camps at designated places, and would not move about with arms. The Government, on its part, agreed not to undertake any military operations against the insurgent group. A cease-fire monitoring group was set up, and the ground rules were formulated. The insurgents, however, did not observe the ground rules and there have been numerous complaints of their indulging in extortions and killings.

There were rounds and rounds—not less than 50—of negotiations within India and abroad, but no agreement could be reached on the substantive issues mainly because of Nagas’ insistence on their sovereignty. In an interview, the text of which was released in April 2005, Muivah said:

Sovereignty of the Naga people belongs to the Naga people and to the Naga people alone. There cannot be otherwise. So long as that is there, adjustments can be made.<sup>26</sup>

The NSCN (IM)’s insistence on Greater Nagaland has queered the pitch further. They want the Naga-inhabited areas of Assam, Manipur, and Arunachal Pradesh to be merged into Nagaland. The neighboring states vehemently oppose this idea. The Prime Minister, during a visit to Guwahati in April 2006, categorically stated that the territorial integrity of the north-eastern states could not be compromised.

Ironically, resentment is building among the Naga tribes of Nagaland over the Tangkhul dominance of the NSCN (IM). Being a Tangkhul, Muivah



General Secretary of the NSCN Thuingaleng Muivah (R) and NSCN Chairman Isak Chisi Swu (L) pay tribute to Mahatma Gandhi at his mausoleum in New Delhi, 9 January 2003. The two exiled separatist leaders were due to hold peace talks in the Indian capital. AFP photo/Prakash Singh, used by permission of Newscom.

has appointed persons of his tribe to key positions in the rebel hierarchy. This practice has led to unpleasant confrontations. On 22 April 2007, following the abduction and torture of three Sumi tribesmen by the NSCN (IM) cadres, a mob of about 5,000 people attacked the Wungram colony where NSCN (IM) leaders stayed, destroying 47 houses and several vehicles. About 300 Tangkhul tribesmen had to be evacuated and shifted elsewhere. The incident may have been only a straw in the wind, but the possibility of fragmentation in the militants' ranks on account of intertribal rivalries could not be ruled out.

On 1 August 2007, the cease-fire agreement between the Government of India and the NSCN (IM) was extended for an indefinite period. The cease-fire with the Khaplang group was also extended for 1 year on 26 April 2007. Internecine clashes between the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (IM) and the Khaplang faction is the most troubling aspect of the present scenario in Nagaland. During the year 2007, militants comprised 81 percent of the total 108 militancy-related casualties.<sup>27</sup>

What is actually happening is a turf war for dominance. A church leader, Rev. Zhabu Terhuja, blamed the two NSCN factions for bringing "chaos and destruction" to Nagaland. Attempts to bring about rapprochement have occurred between the two groups. A truce agreement was signed by *Kilonser* (Cabinet Minister) C Singson of the NSCN (K) and *Kilo Kilonser* (Home Minister) Azheto Chophy of the NSCN (IM) at Hovishe in Dimapur district on 23 November 2007. However, the higher echelon of the NSCN (IM) did not approve the unity move. Subsequently on 7 December 2007, the three major factions—the NSCN (IM), the NSCN (K), and the NNC—in a rare show of unanimity, agreed to end interfactional bloodshed, pledging immediate cease-fire between themselves for the next 6 months.



A Sema Naga Girl. Photo courtesy of Directorate of Information and Publicity, Government of Nagaland.

The Naga insurgency has now lasted nearly 50 years. It was looked upon as the mother of insurgencies in the northeast. Undoubtedly, the Naga example inspired the other tribes to make similar demands for autonomy/independence. The Naga rebels also played some kind of a directing and coordinating role *vis-a-vis* the other separatist and secessionist movements. However, with the passage of time, the NSCN (IM) has been reduced to the position of just another insurgent outfit in India's northeast. Its demand for a Greater Nagaland has antagonized the rebel formations of the neighboring states. Besides, the prolonged period of peace since 1997 has softened them, and it is most unlikely that the Naga rebels would be willing to go back to the jungle and fight another war with the Indian security forces. They know that they cannot break away from India. While their leaders keep harping on "sovereignty," the rank and file understand it as just a bargaining counter with a view to getting additional political concessions.

## 4. Manipur: Rebellion Sans Ideology

The early history of Manipur is recorded in the State Royal Chronicle called the *Cheitharol Kumpaba*, which mentions a total of 74 kings ruling the State. Nongda Lairen Pakhangba (133 AD to 154 AD) was the first king and Kulachandra (1890–1891 AD) the last.

Manipur lost its independence to the British in 1891. Thereafter, it was a princely native state as part of British India. The British paramountcy continued until 1947 when India became independent.

### Early History

The chronicle throws light on the early history of Manipur, especially its inimical relations with Myanmar. From the 17th to the 19th centuries, there was “a terrible relationship of plunder and devastation operating from both sides, to the damage of both peoples.”<sup>28</sup> The kings of the two countries would attack each other periodically. The first recorded invasion goes back to 1562 AD, when Bayinnaung, a powerful ruler of the Toungoo dynasty, defeated Manipur and made it a vassal state. Manipur, however, asserted its independence and in the 17th century when Toungoo dynasty and empire were beginning to decline, made forays into Myanmar.

During the reign of Raja Gharib Niwaz, who ascended the throne of Manipur in 1714 AD, Manipur undertook offensive campaigns against Myanmar. Gharib Niwaz defeated the Myanmar forces in 1725 at the mouth of the Maglung River. In 1735 again Gharib Niwaz's forces crossed the Ningthi River and destroyed the town of Myedu on the banks of the Mu River. Gharib Niwaz was one of the ablest kings who ruled over Manipur. He was influenced by the Vaishnav missionary, Shantidas Adhikary, and declared Vaishnavism to be the state religion. Vaishnavism thereafter spread all over Manipur, particularly in the Imphal Valley. The indigenous faith, named after deity *Sanamahi*, however, did not disappear. It survived, and there is an attempt to revive it now.

In the subsequent years, it was the turn of Myanmar rulers to commit depredations in Manipur. In 1758, Alaungpaya defeated the Manipuris in the battle of Pulel (now Palel) and massacred thousands of people during his 2-week stay in Imphal. “The invasion of Manipur by Alompra (Alaungpaya) must have been most disastrous to the inhabitants of that country as



they then, for the first time, sought external aid and appeared a few years afterwards as supplicants for British protection.”<sup>29</sup>

British help was sought by the Manipur princes either to remain in power or by way of assistance in their fight against Myanmar. The British naturally took advantage of the situation. In 1762, they signed a treaty of alliance with Manipur whereby the latter agreed to give rent-free land at a suitable place in Manipur for a fort and also facility for the promotion of trade with China. In return, the British agreed to provide a contingent of troops to Manipur. It was Trojan-horse tactics. The British took advantage of the fratricidal conflicts among the Manipuri princes and started interfering in its internal affairs. At one stage, when the Manipuris under Tikendrajit Singh offered resistance and even executed some British officers, open confrontation occurred. The British thereafter launched a full scale invasion of Manipur in 1891. The Manipur Maharaja, however, was “not prepared to yield to the mightiest and the invincible until his forces had been defeated.”<sup>30</sup> The Manipuris put up a brave resistance, but they were no match to the British forces. On 27 April 1891, the Union Jack was hoisted in Imphal, and Manipur became a part of British India.

## Political Awakening

The first political stirrings in Manipur were noticed in 1934 with the formation of “Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha.” Its sessions were held in Silchar, Mandalay, and Imphal. At the fourth session held at Chingamathak on 29–30 December 1938 in Imphal, the organization was renamed Nikhil Manipur Mahasabha. The Mahasabha passed a resolution demanding “full administrative power” for Manipur and a “combined administrative unit of Hills and Plains.” World War II saw Subhash Bose’s Indian National Army penetrating Manipur. Mahatma Gandhi’s noncooperation movement also had its reverberations in the State. Thousands of Manipuris were arrested and put behind bars for participating in the freedom movement. Hijam Irabot Singh, a brother-in-law of the Maharaja, was deeply influenced by the political developments of the time and was determined to “liberate” Manipur from the shackles of foreign domination. He appealed to the people not to use foreign goods and set a bonfire of such items in front of the court in Imphal. He toured extensively—visiting Dacca, Burma, and Assam—and mobilized the people against the British.



On the eve of India's independence, the Maharaja of Manipur signed the Instrument of Accession on 11 August 1947, entrusting defense, communications, and foreign affairs to the Government of India. A Standstill Agreement was also signed in respect of other matters. At the initiative of the Manipur State Darbar, the Constitution of Manipur was drafted and Assembly elections were held in 1948. Significantly, this was the first election held in any part of the country on the basis of adult franchise.

The Manipur Congress adopted a resolution on 29 April 1949 stating that "the Congress views with deep concern the present international situation specially the communist uprising in the neighboring state of Burma (Myanmar) and feels that the consolidation of the Government of India through integration and merging of native states, especially Manipur State which is an eastern gateway to India and which is now administered by a pro-communist and inefficient government, is urgently required."<sup>31</sup> On 21 September 1949, Maharaja Bodhchandra Singh signed the agreement on merger of Manipur with India at Shillong, and the State was formally merged with the Indian Union on 15 October 1949. Irabot, who had developed leftist leanings, fled to Myanmar following the crackdown on Communist members. He tried to form a united front with the Communist parties of Myanmar but could not make any headway. He breathed his last on 26 September 1951.

It has been rightly said that "the revolutionary seed had not fallen on barren ground" and that "it hibernated in a seedbed of growing discontents that gradually germinated an injured Meitei sub-nationalism."<sup>32</sup> It was alleged that except for the Manipur State Congress Party, the other political groups were not in favor of merger; besides, the issue of merger was neither discussed nor approved by the elected government of the day. The Government of India was accused of having arm-twisted the Maharaja to sign the merger agreement. A number of other factors contributed to deepening the sense of hurt. Manipur was classified as a Part C state and it became a full fledged state in 1972 only after prolonged agitation. The Nagas, who had rebelled against the government, were on the other hand given statehood as early as 1963. The Manipuris had also to agitate for the recognition of their language; the same was included in the Eighth Schedule only in 1992.

Presently, the people of Manipur are greatly concerned over the NSCN (IM)'s demand for Greater Nagaland including *inter alia* the hill areas of Manipur. In 2001, the Government of India, under pressure from the Naga

Flames engulf the Manipur state assembly 18 June 2001. Thousands of protesters rioted in the streets of Imphal, burning down the state assembly, political party offices, and official residences. AFP photo, used by permission of Newscom.



rebels, announced the extension of cease-fire to the Naga-inhabited areas of Manipur, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh. The Meiteis became apprehensive. They thought the extension was a prelude to the dismemberment of their state and thus mounted a fierce agitation. The Meiteis even burnt down the State Assembly. The police opened fire on the protestors, killing 18. The government realized its folly and announced that the truce would be limited to the boundaries of Nagaland only; however, the damage had been done.

## Insurgent Groups

The injured Meitei subnationalism expressed itself in the form of insurgent movements in the region. An intellectual Pan Mongolian movement eventually led to the founding of the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) in 1964 under the leadership of Arambam Somorendra. It claimed the “right to national self-determination” and decided to fight for an “independent Manipur.” In 1969, a group of about 200 Meiteis crossed the international border and managed to reach Sylhet in what was then East Pakistan with a view to seeking assistance from that country. The Pakistani leaders were lukewarm in their response because they were afraid of antagonizing India. The Meitei youths were lodged in a jail for about a month. The expedition was a failure, but the disgruntled youth did not give up. One of them was Nameirakpam Bisheshwar, who later played an important role in forging the international links of the Meitei insurgents. Meanwhile, the youth formed a Consolidation Committee of Manipur (CONSCOM) and eventually set up a Revolutionary Government of Manipur with headquarters in Sylhet. The

liberation of Bangladesh in 1971 proved a setback to the insurgents, many of whom were apprehended by the Indian security forces.

The internecine squabbles within the UNLF led to Bisheshwar parting company and setting up his own separate organization. In the early 1970s about 20 Meitei insurgents made an abortive attempt to go to China. Another attempt was made in 1975, when they were able to reach Lhasa. The Chinese put them through an ideological training course, which the Meitei did not particularly relish. The group later returned to Imphal and embarked on a mass contact program. In 1978 they formed the People's Liberation Army (PLA) with Bisheshwar as its first chairman. The PLA's objective is to organize an armed struggle for the liberation of Manipur, and they want to establish a society based on socialistic principles. Towards the end of the 1970s and in the early 1980s, the armed cadres of the PLA were involved in several lootings, killings, and encounters with the security forces.

Other insurgent groups were also formed around this period. In fact, there has been a proliferation of militant groups in Manipur. The important outfits other than UNLF and PLA that are presently active include

- a. People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK)
- b. Kangleipak<sup>33</sup> Communist Party (KCP)
- c. Kanglei Yaol Kanba Lup (KYKL)
- d. Manipur People's Liberation Front (MPLF)
- e. Revolutionary People's Front (RPF).

The activities of these insurgent groups have undergone four distinct phases, as shown in Table 2:<sup>34</sup>

Table 2. Phases of the Insurgent Groups

| Phase | Description  |
|-------|--|
| 1     | Marked by the formation of the UNLF, the Meitei State Committee, and the Revolutionary Government of Manipur, all of which petered out by the end of 1970  |
| 2     | Witnessed the birth of the PLA in 1978, Chinese assistance to the rebel groups, and a high trajectory of violence in the Imphal Valley followed by an anticlimax in the reverses suffered by the PLA |
| 3     | Marked by realignment of these groups and redefinition of their political objectives followed by revival of insurgency in the Imphal Valley between 1988 and 1998                                    |
| 4     | Began with the formation of the MPLF, which brought together several Meitei groups on one platform in 2003   |

UNLF has a strength of about 2,500 men and is currently led by Rajkumar Meghen. The outfit is active in all the districts of the Imphal Valley and also in Assam's Cachar district. It has camps in Bangladesh and Myanmar and has nexus with the NSCN (K) and the ULFA.

PLA has a strength of about 1,500. It is organized in four divisions for carrying out operations—Sadar Hill West area of the Imphal Valley, Sadar Hill Eastern area of the Valley, the hill areas of Manipur, and the Imphal area. The PLA has been issuing populist diktats from time to time—for example, imposing restrictions on the sale of alcohol and drugs and ban on the consumption of betel leaf. The outfit is clandestinely patronized by the politicians of the State. It has camps in Bangladesh and Myanmar.

PREPAK is one of the oldest militant groups of Manipur. It demands the establishment of an independent Manipur state sans the migrants. The outfit has strategic linkages with UNLF and PLA. In October 2007 the outfit set 2015 as the deadline for achieving its objective; if it failed, it would abandon the path of armed revolution.

KCP is concerned primarily with the preservation of Meitei culture. It wants the Manipuri script, *Meitei Mayek*, to be introduced in the educational institutions. In September 2005 the outfit banned the shooting and exhibition of digital movies and music albums. It has a strength of about 100 only and is active mostly in the Valley areas of Manipur.

KYKL was formed in 1994 with the objective of setting up a utopian Manipuri society, which would be free of all the vices. The outfit issued a fatwa against corruption in public offices, reform of the educational system, stoppage of the drug trade from Myanmar and prescribed a dress code for the women. In August 2003 the organization clamped a ban on restaurants and cafes having dimly-lit cubicles on the grounds that these encouraged premarital sex among young lovers. In 2006 the KYKL, along with UNLF and PREPAK, issued a joint statement banning the sale and consumption of heroin and opium.<sup>35</sup> The KYKL maintains close links with other militant outfits operating in the Valley and has a nexus with the NSCN (IM).

MPLF is an umbrella organization of the UNLF, PREPAK, and PLA. The RPF is the political wing of the PLA.

In the mid-1990s, the leaders of the underground outfits felt the need to join hands. The NSCN (Khaplang), UNLF, and ULFA formed the Indo-Burma Revolutionary Front (IBRF) on 22 May 1990 with a view to building up “a united struggle for the independence of Indo-Myanmar.” The

IBRF issued a joint declaration, regretting that the struggles for national independence of the various ethnic groups of the region had made little headway. The declaration was signed by NSCN Chairman S.S. Khaplang, ULFA Chairman Arabindo Rajkhowa, and UNLF General Secretary Sana Yaima. The IBRF, however, proved to be a nonstarter.

The combined strength of all the insurgent groups is estimated to be around 10,000. A stepping up of militant activities in the recent past is shown in the figures within Table 3.

Table 3. Manipur, Militancy-Related Fatalities

| Year   | Civilians | Security Forces | Militants | Total |
|--------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|-------|
| 2001   | 70        | 25              | 161       | 256   |
| 2002   | 60        | 54              | 125       | 239   |
| 2003   | 50        | 27              | 128       | 205   |
| 2004   | 88        | 36              | 134       | 258   |
| 2005   | 158       | 50              | 202       | 410   |
| 2006   | 96        | 28              | 187       | 311   |
| 2007   | 130       | 39              | 218       | 387   |
| Total: | 652       | 259             | 1,155     | 2,066 |

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India

## Government Response

The Government, in view of the activities of the insurgents, declared the Imphal Valley a “disturbed area” in 1980 and passed the Armed Forces (Assam and Manipur) Special Powers Act, giving the security forces personnel special powers to operate and immunity from prosecution. The PLA, PREPAK, and KCP were declared unlawful institutions. In 1981, the Army was able to apprehend Bisheshwar and liquidate seven of his top aides. The new PLA leader, Kunjabihari, and eight others were also killed in another encounter a few months later. The Tibet-trained cadres were almost completely wiped out. Bisheshwar was disillusioned. He tried to enter mainstream politics and contested the elections, but his colleagues did not forgive him for this turnaround and annihilated him.

Counterinsurgency operations undertaken by the Army and the paramilitary forces produce results, but in the absence of civil administration taking appropriate follow-up action or consolidating its hold over the region,

the insurgent groups are able to reestablish their authority in the area. Major incidents happen now and then. On 31 December 2005, Manipur Inspector General of Police (Intelligence), T. Thangthuam, was killed in an ambush by PLA militants in Bishnupur district. On 23 November 2007, there was an attempt on the life of Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh himself when the security forces recovered an explosive device at the Langthabal Hao-Lamkhai junction along National Highway 39 in Imphal West district, minutes before the chief minister's convoy was due to pass through the route. Three days later, on 26 November 2007, Manipur State Legislative Assembly Deputy Speaker Th. Shyamkumar Singh's convoy was ambushed by militants under Lamlai Police Station in Imphal East district.

## Present Scenario

Credible reports give a nexus between the political leadership and insurgents. The Army alleged in December 2005 that Chief Minister Ibobi Singh had contributed Rs. 15 million to two insurgent groups operating in the State.<sup>36</sup> Earlier, in the late 1980s, the Governor of the State had accused the then Chief Minister, Rishang Keishing, of contributing Rs. 3 million to the coffers of the then undivided NSCN. On 11 August 2007 police raided the official residences of three Manipur MLAs and apprehended 12 militants. Eight of them, who belonged to the outlawed KYKL, were arrested from the house of the ruling Congress Party MLA, Brajabidhu Singh. One M16 rifle, one 9-mm pistol, live ammunition, and extortion notes were also seized. Four other rebels were arrested from the residences of Bijoy Kojiam and K. Meghachandra, also Congress MLAs. The politician-militant nexus frustrates to a great extent the efforts of the security forces to neutralize the insurgents.

Manipur has “one of most comprehensive networks of terrorist extortion in the country.”<sup>37</sup> Huge sums of money are collected from practically all sections of society including the government servants. The insurgents describe these as *voluntary contributions*, but the fact is that the demand for contributions is always backed by the threat of action. On 2 March 2005 the militants shot and injured Th. Kulachandra—principal of the Manipur Institute of Technology, Takyelpat, at Mongsangei in the Imphal West district—for refusing to meet an extortion demand of Rs. 500,000. On 25 October and again on 26 November 2005, employees of the Manipur government

who were stationed in Thoubal district conducted a silent rally at the district headquarters to protest against the extortion demands of the militant outfits and the abduction of some of their colleagues for nonpayment of “dues.” In fact, with the passage of time, self aggrandizement through collection of money has become an end in itself. The ideological content is gradually fading.

Some Kuki militant outfits have entered into cease-fire agreements with the Army. However, none of the major insurgent groups have expressed any desire to engage in dialogue with the Government of India. On the contrary, the UNLF reiterated its demand for a plebiscite under the auspices of the United Nations on 24 November 2007 on the occasion of its Raising Day.

The civil society in Manipur has been agitating for the repeal of Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, which vests the security forces with special powers in view of the prevailing insurgency. The Government appointed a committee headed by Justice Jeevan Reddy to review the law. The committee found that the law had become “a symbol of oppression, an object of hate, and an instrument of discrimination and high-handedness,” and recommended its repeal. The Prime Minister promised that he would either have the law repealed or give it a human face.

Manipur is the worst affected state of the northeast from the point of view of insurgency, but the militant groups in the state have gradually lost their political moorings. Whatever political objectives they had set for themselves have either been forgotten or just dumped because those are not considered achievable. “The survival of the groups at current or marginally augmented strengths, the defense of their ‘spheres of influence’ and ‘dominance’ against sporadic Security Force onslaughts and internecine strife, and the ‘management’ of the networks of extortion, have become ends in themselves.”<sup>38</sup>





## 5. Tripura and the Other “Sisters”: On the Road to Peace

**T**ripura finds mention in the earliest Indian epic of *Mahabharata*. Sahadeva, the youngest of the Pandavas, was sent to conquer the “immeasurably effulgent Tripura.”<sup>39</sup> Later when the Pandavas went into exile, Duryodhana sent Karna, the Indian Achilles, to subjugate the eastern kingdoms that included Tripura. In the epic battle of Kurukshetra, where all the kings from different parts of India fought on either side, the King of Tripura extended his loyalty to the Kauravas. Tripura Raj thus has an ancient history.

The recent history of Tripura is chronicled in *Rajamala*, which was written by the Brahmin officials of Raja Dharma Manikya (1430 to 1462), a great patron of arts and literature. He was succeeded by Dhanya Manikya (1463 to 1515), the greatest of the kings of Tripura, who extended his kingdom to the borders of Burma, annexed Chittagong, and defeated the Pathan Army of Hussain Shah near Comilla. Dhanya Manikya was a devout Hindu ruler. Many temples were built by him, the most famous being the Tripureshwari temple of Udaipur. The Tripura kingdom reached its zenith during the rule of Vijay Manikya (1528–1570). He finds a very honorable mention in *Aai-ne-Akbari*, which was recorded during the time of Mughal Emperor Akbar. Tripura is described as an “extensive country” with an army that had an infantry of 200,000 men and a thousand elephants.

The disintegration of the Tripura kingdom started in the early 17th century. During the time of Mughal Emperor Jahangir, King Yasodhar Manikya was taken prisoner for failing to present elephants, for which Tripura was famous, to the Emperor. However, as recorded by the British, Tripura was never subjugated by the Mughals. The British relations with Tripura were somewhat anomalous in the sense that the British did not annex the hill territory, although they interfered in its affairs now and then. No treaty existed between the British Government and the Raja of Tripura. Regarding the tradition and usage that continued until the last ruler, Maharaja Bir Bikram Manikya (1923–47), Aitchinson has recorded the following observations:

The State pays no tribute but is nominally subject to the *nazarana* rules. Both as regards its own constitution and its relation with the

paramount power, Tripura holds a position quite unique, as the Ruler holds *Zamindaries* under the British Government side by side with a sovereign state of comparatively large area with full powers of legislation... There is no written treaty with the paramount power, the relations being governed by recognized usages and customs... The State is now in direct political relation with the Government of India, and His Excellency the Governor of Bengal is in position of agent to the Governor General.<sup>40</sup>

On the eve of independence, Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya contemplated joining the Indian Union in 1947, but he died and was succeeded by a minor. A Council of Regency was formed with Queen Kanchan Prava Devi as the regent ruler of the state. The Maharani signed the Instrument of Accession on 13 August 1947 with the Indian Union. Subsequently, on the advice of the Government of India, the Regency Council was dissolved and a Dewan was appointed on 21 March 1948 to carry on the day-to-day administration. On 9 September 1949, the Maharani signed the Agreement for the Merger of Tripura with the Indian Union. A chief commissioner was appointed to run the administration of the State. In 1950, Tripura was classified as a Part C State of the Indian Union. Eventually Tripura became a Union Territory and on 21 January 1972 was given the status of a full fledged state.

## Demographic Changes

Refugees continually flowed into Tripura following the partition of the country from what was earlier East Pakistan. The tribal population registered a steady decline, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Demographic Changes

| Year | Population | Tribal Population | % of Tribals |
|------|------------|-------------------|--------------|
| 1941 | 513,010    | 256,991           | 53.16        |
| 1951 | 639,028    | 237,953           | 37.23        |
| 1961 | 1,142,005  | 360,070           | 31.50        |
| 1971 | 1,556,342  | 450,544           | 28.95        |
| 1981 | 2,053,058  | 583,920           | 28.44        |
| 1991 | 2,754,205  | 853,345           | 30.95        |

The Bangladeshis occupied large chunks of land. The Tripura psyche was hurt “by loss of dominance to plains people from ‘outside,’ the transfer of power from tribal to nontribal, consequent land alienation, and the ethno-linguistic erosion of Kokborok and a Mongoloid ethos by things Bengali and Aryan.”<sup>41</sup> Great resentment occurred among the tribals, and their anger expressed itself in acts of rebellion. According to Rabindra Debbarma, General Secretary of the Tripura Upajati Juba Samity (TUJS), most militants were from “impoverished tribal families who have lost their land to Bengali migrants, giving rise to a sense of deprivation and injustice that fuels the present insurgency in Tripura.”<sup>42</sup>

## Tribal Unrest

The government acquired lands of thousands of farmers to rehabilitate the refugees. Political organizations like the Mukti Parishad and the Communist Party opposed this move, but their protests were disregarded. It has been said that “such a large-scale rehabilitation of refugees in the rural areas of Tripura broke to pieces last remnants of isolation enjoyed by the Jhumias.”<sup>43</sup> The tribals formed an organization called *Sengkrak* (Clenched Fist), which expressed its unequivocal opposition to the settlement of refugees in Tripura and carried out violent activities to terrorize the refugees so that they leave the state. The outfit developed links with the Mizo National Front and was active until the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971. Another organization, Tribal Union, with similar objectives was also formed.

In the early 1960s, the leftist tribals formed the Gana Mukti Parishad under the leadership of the Communist Party (Marxist) while the rightist tribals formed the Upajati Yuba Samiti under the inspiration of the Congress Party. Tribals of all hues were opposed to the influx of Bengalis. The Bengalis, by virtue of their better educational qualifications, gradually started capturing key positions in the administration. This tendency widened the chasm between the communities. Meanwhile, a chauvinistic organization, *Amra Bangalee* (We are Bengalis), was also formed at the behest of the followers of Ananda Marg. The end result was a communal polarization in the state. As observed by Suchintya Bhattacharya, “the large-scale exploitation of the tribals carried out by the non-tribal peoples in all aspects of their life and activities is the primary cause of the discontent with and anger

towards both the government and the non-tribal, particularly the Bengali community, who constitute the majority in the State administration.”<sup>44</sup>

The tribals were getting desperate. A convention held under the aegis of the TUJS in March 1978 adopted a unanimous resolution to drive all foreigners out of the state. The TUJS in fact adopted an 11-point charter of demands, seeking *inter alia* extension of the fifth schedule to Tripura, introduction of Kokborok language as the medium of instruction for tribal students, and restoration of the alienated tribal land. An armed wing, Tribal National Volunteers (TNV), was constituted by Bijoy Hrangkhal, a tribal leader of the Halam community, in 1979 with the objective of establishing an independent tribal state of Tripura. Hrangkhal sent a small batch of TNV volunteers to Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh for training in weapons under the guidance of Mizo National Front insurgents. The beginning of the 1980s saw organized attacks by TNV volunteers on the non-tribals. In a major incident, the TNV massacred more than 200 non-tribals including women and children in the Mandai village of West Tripura on 6 June 1980. The Chief Minister of Tripura conceded that the primary objective of the mass killings was to terrorize the Bengalis to leave Tripura. On 13 June 1980, Hrangkhal was arrested.

The government was able to persuade Hrangkhal to return to the mainstream. The extremists were angry at his turnaround and on 14 August 1982, a militant group called Army of Tripura Peoples Liberation Organization (ATPLO) kidnapped Hrangkhal and his wife. Hrangkhal, however, was rescued by his erstwhile lieutenants. In a letter that he wrote to the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, on 17 March 1983, Hrangkhawl said:

Armed insurgency was necessary to reach your heart ... Either you deport all foreign nationals who infiltrated into Tripura after 15 October 1947 or settle them anywhere in India other than Tripura. Restore tribal majority interest. It may not matter to you much, but delaying implementation of our demands means the TNV will fight for total self-determination. We demand a free Tripura.<sup>45</sup>

The TNV volunteers, however, realized that independence was an impossible proposition and it would be better to seek a peaceful settlement within the framework of the Indian Constitution. Consequently, Hrangkhal and five other leaders representing the TNV signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of India in 1988. The TNV agreed that

its cadres would surrender and not extend support to any other extremist group in any manner. The Government agreed to take stringent measures to prevent infiltration from across the border, promised to reserve 20 seats out of 60 in the state assembly for the tribals, frame an employment scheme for the tribal youths, and resettle the families that depended on shifting cultivation.<sup>46</sup> The TNV activists who surrendered were absorbed in government jobs or inducted in the Assam Rifles.

Tribal disaffection, however, continued to simmer. The extremist fringe of the TNV formed in 1989, what came to be called the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT). The establishment of an independent Tripura through armed struggle and promotion of indigenous languages and culture are the main objectives of the NLFT. The outfit, comprising about 90 percent Baptist Christians, has pronounced fundamentalist leanings. The NLFT cadres have been frequently attacking Hindu priests and Hindu temples. In late 2000, the party leadership issued a statement directing the tribals to boycott the Hindu festivals of Saraswati puja and Durga puja.<sup>47</sup> The NLFT targets primarily three groups:

- a. Bengali Hindus who are said to have grabbed the land of tribals
- b. Hindu religious institutions and symbols
- c. Communist Part of India (Marxist)—CPM cadres.<sup>48</sup>

The outfit, however, has lost much of its strength and following in recent years. It presently has a cadre strength of about 250 men and weapons holdings of about 150 including about 80 AK rifles.

Another outfit, All Tripura Tigers Force (ATTF), was formed by the tribal activists of the Left in 1990. It demands expulsion of all “foreigners” who entered Tripura after 1949, removal of their names from the electoral rolls, and restoration of alienated land to the tribals. The organization has a nexus with Assam’s ULFA. The ATTF has a strength of about 200 men who are in possession of about 300 weapons including about 200 AK rifles.

The numerical strength of the insurgents may be small, but what gives them teeth is the sanctuaries and the logistic support that they get in Bangladesh, their links with Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and nexus with the other insurgent outfits of the northeast like the ULFA and the NSCN (IM).

It is alleged that the NLFT was formed at the instance of the Congress party to challenge CPM’s base among the tribals. On the other hand, the

Congress accuses the Left Front of backing the ATTF. Both outfits were on a rampage from 1999 to 2003, when incidents of killings, abductions, and attacks on police posts and Bengali settlements occurred. The State Chief Minister, replying to a question in the State Assembly on 15 June 2004, admitted that 952 people had been killed and over 1,200 abducted by terrorists during the last 5 years.<sup>49</sup> The tide, however, turned in 2004. Well-planned counterinsurgency operations by the security forces produced results. The trajectory of violence came down sharply. Civilian casualties fell from 207 in 2003 to 67 in 2004, 28 in 2005, 14 in 2006, and again 14 in 2007.

It has been said that the “time is ripe to work out and implement a strategy of ethnic reconciliation in Tripura.”<sup>50</sup> Land alienation has been at the root of tribal insurgency and therefore the government must find ways and means to return land to the tribal people.

The improved security scenario in Tripura is reflected in countries like China, Japan, Germany, and Thailand showing interest in investing or in providing financial assistance to Tripura. The Chief Minister of Tripura, Manik Sarkar, recently claimed that China had agreed to provide technology to set up bamboo-based industries and livelihood opportunities to farmers and tribal people and that the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) was going to provide Rs. 3.66 billion as a soft loan to the State. Besides, Germany was giving Rs. 1.12 billion for ecological conservation projects and the development of livelihood resources for tribals and other forest dwellers. A Thai delegation, besides, had expressed interest in investing in tourism, infrastructure, food processing, and agro-based industries.<sup>51</sup>



August 2001, a tribal woman sells bamboo shoots, a local delicacy available year-round, in Mandai market 28 kms from Agartala, the capital of Tripura. Tripura’s rich forests abound with many varieties of bamboo used by the tribal community for many purposes including food. Photo AFP, used by permission of Newscom.

These are hopeful portents and show government's success in containing the tribal insurgency in the State.

## The Other Sisters

A brief reference to the other sisters—Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Mizoram—completes the picture of the northeast.

**Arunachal Pradesh.** Arunachal Pradesh, the largest of the north-eastern states, was earlier known as the Northeast Frontier Agency. It was carved out of Assam in 1972. The State faced no problems of militancy for about 20 years. The NSCN (Khaplang faction) was the first to make an inroad into the virgin territory in the early 1990s following the split in the NSCN. Later, some disgruntled politicians of the state invited the NSCN (IM). The Tirap and Changlang districts have ever since been a hunting ground for both the factions. The IM faction, however, is numerically stronger and better equipped. They carried out *Operation Salvation* with the ostensible object of spreading consciousness about health and hygiene, but their real objective was to dislodge the Khaplang group and spread Christianity. The NSCN (IM) has managed to entrench itself in the two districts bordering Nagaland.



Tribal people from Arunachal Pradesh perform a traditional dance during a festival in Maio, some 700 kms from the state capital Itanagar, in January 2007. AFP photo/Parthajit, used by permission of Newscom.

**Meghalaya.** Meghalaya, “the abode of the clouds,” was carved out of Assam on 21 January 1972. Its major tribes are Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo. Violent incidents were first noticed in the Garo Hills. “Injustice and corruption were at the root of the conflict.”<sup>52</sup>

The Achik Liberation Matgrik Army (ALMA), which was a vigilante group to start with, was “lured to the gun” by the NSCN (IM).<sup>53</sup> The ALMA surrendered in 1994, but its extremist fringe combined with the radical elements of the Khasi Students Union to form Hynniewtrep-Achik Liberation



Council (HALC). The outfit was active for a couple of years, but it later split into its Khasi and Garo versions. The Khasi outfit came to be known as Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC), while the Garo outfit called itself the Achik National Volunteers Council (ANVC).

The ANVC was engaged in a hit-and-run campaign against the security forces, demanding the creation of a separate “Achik Land” comprising the two Garo Hills districts of Meghalaya and a large chunk of Kamrup and Goalpara districts in adjoining Assam. The outfit had a nexus with the ULFA. On 23 January 2004, the ANVC signed a cease-fire agreement with the Government of India. The ANVC General Secretary expressed his group’s “full faith in the country’s Constitution.”

The HNLC, which has been banned, is now the only significant insurgent group in the state representing the Khasi tribe. During 2007 several leaders of the group surrendered. These included Julius Dorphang, chairman of the outfit, and four of his colleagues. The so-called “commander in chief” Bobby Marwein and the “general secretary” Cheristerfield Thangkhiew, however, are still in Bangladesh. Militancy in the state is nevertheless on the decline.

**Mizoram.** The Mizos became apprehensive about their identity when the Government of Assam introduced legislation in 1960, making Assamese the official language of the state. However, what really antagonized the Mizos was the alleged indifference to their plight during famine in the district. The general impression was that the state government had failed to take the warning of famine seriously and initiated relief measures only after the damage had been done. An organization called Mizo National Famine Front, formed by Mizo ex-servicemen to cope with the disaster, later converted itself into Mizo National Front. It assumed the character of a political party and contested the elections in 1963, winning two of the three Mizo seats. The extremist Mizos, however, had other ideas. They established contacts with East Pakistan and at midnight of 28 February, launched Operation Jericho, capturing 11 towns in a lightning strike. The available government forces barely managed to hold on to the capital city of Aizawl. The Indian Army had to be inducted to recapture the towns. The guerillas thereafter retreated to the hills and their leaders fled to East Pakistan.



Intense fighting occurred between the security forces and the insurgents of the Mizo National Front. The insurgency, which lasted two decades, went through three distinct phases:

- a. A rising crescendo of violence from 1966 to 1971
- b. Decline in the wake of the liberation of Bangladesh during the period 1972 to 1976
- c. Sporadic violence and periodic negotiations from 1977 onwards, leading to the final settlement in 1986.<sup>54</sup>

The Memorandum of Settlement between the Government of India and the Mizo National Front involved a power-sharing arrangement between the Congress, which was then ruling Mizoram, and the Mizo National Front and ensured the grant of full statehood to Mizoram. The Mizo National Front agreed to abjure violence and desist from supporting any armed group against the Government of India. The Government agreed to rehabilitate the Mizo cadres and conceded the Mizos' right to adopt "any one or more languages in use in the state" as its official language. A special provision was also added in the Constitution of India as Article 371G which stated that



November 2003, Mizo people sing at a church service in Aizwal in mainly Christian Mizoram state. Photo AFP, used by permission of Newscom.

No Act of Parliament in respect of

- a. Religious or social practices of the Mizos
- b. Mizo customary law and procedure
- c. Administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Mizos customary law
- d. Ownership and transfer of land

shall apply to the State of Mizoram unless the Legislative Assembly of the State of Mizoram by a resolution so decides.

The Mizo Accord of 1986 has been the best of all the political settlements in the northeast. It has stood the test of time, and today Mizoram is perhaps the most peaceful and stable state in the region. It has a literacy rate of 88.80 percent, which is second highest for the country.

## 6. External Factors: Stoking the Flames

**A** peculiar feature of India's northeast is that it is connected with the rest of the country only by a 22-km corridor, and its borders are almost entirely with the neighboring countries of China, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Bhutan. Nepal, though not contiguous, is close to the western tip of Assam. Pakistan's eastern wing was always willing to provide sanctuaries to the insurgents of the northeast and equip them with weapons to create problems for the Indian State. After the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, it was expected that this phase would end. Unfortunately, Bangladesh also started playing the same game after a few years. China also fished in the troubled waters until they found that the tribals would never accept Marxist-Leninist ideology; besides, after Mao, China concentrated on its own economic development rather than on exporting revolution. Some current reports state that the Yunnan-based mafia is passing on weapons obtained from China's ordnance factories to the northeastern rebels. It is not clear yet whether it is happening with the knowledge or connivance of the Chinese government. Myanmar and Nepal have been friendly to India, but their internal problems prevent them from exercising full control over the disaffected elements within their own countries. The northeastern rebels strike a nexus with these elements and with their help, establish sanctuaries in those countries. Bhutan has always stood by India, and it effectively flushed out the insurgents from its territory.

### **Role of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI)**

Pakistan's ISI has been playing a devastating role in India's northeast. Its strategy has been as follows:

- a. Provide arms, ammunition and explosives to the rebel groups
- b. Arrange sanctuaries for the insurgents
- c. Extend training facilities
- d. Provide financial support
- e. Ensure coordination among the rebel formations.

The ISI played a sinister role in fuelling terrorism in Punjab in the 1980s. Subsequently, it aided and abetted insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir in the 1990s. It opened a third front against India in the northeast and has struck a close nexus with the ULFA of Assam and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Issac-Muivah group). The Pakistanis facilitated the visit of several ULFA leaders including Paresh Barua to Afghanistan and even arranged their meeting with the Afghan warlord, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who promised to supply weapons to ULFA.<sup>55</sup> The ISI has also been pumping in fake Indian currency notes into the country with a view toward destabilizing its economy.

The Chief Minister of Assam, making a statement in the Assembly on 6 April 2000, said that the police had gathered evidence to prove that the ISI was fomenting violence and militancy in the State by either creating new outfits or actively supporting the local ones. The ISI, he added, was also promoting fundamentalism and insurgency among the Muslim youth.<sup>56</sup> The intelligence agencies recorded the emergence of several Muslim organizations in Assam:

- a. Islamic Revolutionary Army (IRA)
- b. Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA)
- c. Muslim Liberation Front of Assam (MLFA)
- d. Muslim Security Force (MSF)
- e. United Muslim Liberation Front of Assam (UMLFA)
- f. Muslim United Liberation Army (MULA)
- g. Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HUM)
- h. Peoples United Liberation Force (PULF).

The professed aim of these organizations is to safeguard the interests of Muslims, but most of them have already started showing fundamentalist traits. The Jamat-e-Islami of Pakistan has been providing financial help to the Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA) through the Jamat-e-Islami, Bangladesh. Evidence also exists that the Bangladesh JEI deputed some MULTA members to Afghanistan for training. On 6 August 2007, Assam Forest and Environment Minister, Rockybul Hussain, replying on behalf of the Chief Minister, stated that *jihadi* groups including the HUM and the MULTA were active in the State.

On 26 March 2008, the National Security Advisor, MK Narayanan, said that there is “no change in ISI’s attitude to mentor terror groups like

Lashkar and Jaish” and “attacks on India from Pakistan’s soil are likely to continue.”<sup>57</sup>

Bangladesh’s military intelligence—the DGFI—has developed close links with the ULFA, the NDFB, the PLA, and the UNLF of Manipur. Meghalaya’s rebel groups such as the Achik National Volunteers Council and Tripura’s insurgent outfits ATTF and NLFT also have bases in Bangladesh. India’s Border Security Force has been giving a list of the insurgents’ camps in Bangladesh to the Bangladesh Rifles year after year—more than 100 such camps exist—but the Bangladesh authorities deny their existence.

Weapons are smuggled through Bangladesh in huge quantities for delivery to the northeastern rebels. On 2 April 2004, the Bangladesh police and Coast Guard stumbled upon what was perhaps the largest ever consignment of sophisticated illegal arms and ammunition when they raided the Government-controlled Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited. Weapons and explosives were being unloaded from two fishing trawlers on the east bank of the Karnafully River; examples of the seizures follow:

- a. 690 7.62-mm T-56-I submachine guns (SMGs)
- b. 600 7.62-mm T-56-2 SMGs
- c. 150 40-mm T-69 rocket launchers
- d. 840 40-mm rockets
- e. 400 9-mm semiautomatic rifles
- f. 100 Tommy guns
- g. 150 rocket launchers
- h. 2,000 launching grenades
- i. 25,020 hand grenades
- j. 6,392 magazines for SMG bullets
- k. 739,680 rounds of 7.62-mm caliber and 400,000 rounds for other weapons.

Most of the arms and ammunition were of Korean, Italian, Chinese, and American make. The weapons were enough to arm an infantry brigade. According to Jane’s Intelligence Review (August 2004), the shipment involved two insurgent groups of India’s northeast—ULFA and the Issac-Muivah faction of the NSCN—and the purchases were financed by “a foreign intelligence service seeking to destabilize India’s northeast.”

The apparent collusion between Pakistan’s ISI and Bangladesh’s DGFI is of particular concern. In fact, “the two organizations undertake anti-

India operations in eastern India almost in tandem.”<sup>58</sup> A report published in *Time* magazine (21 October 2002) stated that agents of the DGFI maintain contacts with the ISI and have “a long history of supporting rebels fighting Indian rule across the border, including providing safe houses in Dhaka for the leaders of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA).” Jaideep Saikia, who has written extensively on the northeast, has made the following observations on the matter:

Pakistan’s Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) and its surrogate, Bangladesh’s Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), are presently utilizing a plethora of militant organizations in the North East to bleed India with a ‘thousand cuts,’ seeking the severance of the region from the rest of India by tying down Indian security forces in the region and away from Kashmir, where the real battle is being waged.<sup>59</sup>

The DGFI has, in fact, extended its operations even to the Indian territory. DGFI-sponsored *jihadi* modules have been set up in Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, and Tripura. According to a U.S. think-tank, Stratfor, Pakistan’s ISI, in cooperation with Bangladesh’s DGFI is investing considerable resources “in solidifying India’s militant corridor.” It goes on to say that “there are growing indications that these two agencies are working clandestinely in Bangladesh to bring all the northeast based insurgent outfits and *jihadi* elements under one umbrella.”<sup>60</sup>

## Fundamentalism

A mushroom growth of mosques and *madrassas* has occurred all along the borders with Bangladesh. These institutions have come up even at places where there is very small or negligible population of the minority community, and they have come up on both sides of the border as if they were being set up according to a plan. Table 5 shows the result of a government survey conducted in the year 2000.

Table 5. Mosques and *Madrassas* in the 10-km Belt on Either Side of Indo-Bangladesh Border

| State       | Indian Side |           | Bangladesh Side |           |
|-------------|-------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|
|             | Mosques     | Madrassas | Mosques         | Madrassas |
| West Bengal | 458         | 208       | 523             | 302       |
| Assam       | 236         | 157       | 204             | 38        |
| Meghalaya   | 17          | 2         | 103             | 38        |
| Tripura     | 194         | 72        | 130             | 71        |
| Total:      | 905         | 439       | 960             | 469       |

Religious instructions in the *madrassas* are given in Arabic rather than in Urdu, and that alienates the Muslim children from their Indian moorings. Of particular concern is that the boys are being indoctrinated with fundamentalist ideology in these institutions. The Border Management Task Force felt that “these institutions could be construed as Islamic infrastructure which have a potential for intelligence encirclement of India.”

According to Maloy Krishna Dhar, an officer who served in the Intelligence Bureau, Muslim clerics and ulema belonging or affiliated to the following institutions visit the mosques and madrassas in Muslim-dominated areas of Assam, especially the Tanjim-ul-Madaris at Hojai and the Markazul Ma’arif Education and Research Center:

- a. King Faisal University, Dhaka
- b. Jahangirnagar University, Savar
- c. Darul Ishan University, Dhanmondi, Dhaka
- d. Islamic Foundation, Dhaka.

They have also established contacts with several Muslim organizations in Manipur including the People’s United Liberation Front, Darul Uloom, Rabeta Madaris-e-Arabiya, and the Madarasa Alia. The DGFI also promotes formal and informal movements of the Tablighi Jamaat activists between Bangladesh and the northeastern states.<sup>61</sup>

## Demographic Invasion

One of the biggest problems facing the country and having a direct bearing on national security, particularly of the northeastern region, is that of the illegal migration of Bangladeshis into India.

This process of migration had started well before the partition. A large number of cultivators, primarily Muslims, came to Assam in the 1930s and 1940s. They were encouraged by the Sadullah regime in Assam for the “Grow More Food Campaign,” though as Viceroy Lord Wavell said, Sadullah was more interested in “Grow more Muslims rather than grow more food.” The availability of large tracts of cultivable fertile area in Assam was an incentive to migration.

In the wake of the partition of the country, a large number of Hindus crossed over to the states of West Bengal, Assam, and Tripura. Eventually when the Pakistan Army started persecuting the Bengalis, a large number of Muslims also crossed the borders into India. With the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, it was expected that the new regime would ensure communal harmony and tackle the social and economic problems of its teeming millions in a manner that would eliminate, or at least reduce, the factors contributing to migration. However, that did not happen and both Hindus and Muslims continued to pour into India in large numbers. The assassination of Sheikh Mujib in August 1975, lifting of the ban on communal parties by General Zia-ur Rehman, and declaration of Islam as the State religion by General Ershad were accompanied by intensified attacks on the minorities—the Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and the tribals. Thousands of Hindu houses were destroyed, hundreds of Hindu women raped, and Hindu temples desecrated or destroyed. The Hindu population of Bangladesh, as a result, registered a sharp decline. It dropped from 28 percent of the total population at the time of independence to less than 10 percent in 1991.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, which were the traditional abode of the Buddhist Chakma and other tribes, underwent a complete metamorphosis due to the forcible occupation of tribal lands and the settlement of thousands of Muslims thereon. The entire area was ethnically cleansed. The Chakmas fled to India where they were rehabilitated in Mizoram and in the Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh. The parliamentary elections of October 2001 in Bangladesh were followed by yet another wave of persecution of the minorities because of their suspected support to the Awami League, which lost at the hustings. A British journalist, John Vidal, in an article published in *The Guardian* on 21 July 2001, commented that “dozens of people were killed, more than 1,000 women from minority groups were raped, and several thousand people lost their land in 3 months



around the election.” The Refugees International called upon the Bangladesh government to protect the minorities and ensure that land of Hindus confiscated was returned to them “within a well-defined timetable.”<sup>62</sup> The Amnesty International also criticized the government of Bangladesh for the large-scale attacks on the country’s minority communities.

The Government of Bangladesh, however, turned a blind eye to the atrocities on the minorities and allowed the culprits, mostly Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) followers and the Jamaat cadres, to go scot-free.

The Muslims have been moving into India primarily for economic reasons. They constitute nearly 70 percent of the infiltrants. The factors that have been contributing to the influx from the Bangladesh side are as follows:

- a. Steep rise in population with increasing pressure on land and the resultant unemployment
- b. Recurring natural disasters (e.g., floods and cyclones), uprooting large segments of humanity
- c. Better economic opportunities in India
- d. Religious persecution of Hindus and discrimination of tribals
- e. Islamic interests encouraging the overflow of population
- f. Porous and easily negotiable international borders.

The Bangladesh government hardly makes any efforts to stop these exfiltrations. A section of intellectuals in Bangladesh has even been legitimizing the theory of *lebensraum*—living space for the people of Bangladesh. In the early 1990s, Sadeq Khan, a former diplomat, recorded the following views:

All projections, however, clearly indicate that by the next decade, that is to say by the first decade of the 21st century, Bangladesh will face a serious crisis of *lebensraum* ... there is no reason why regional and international cooperation could not be worked out to plan and execute population movements and settlements to avoid critical demographic pressure in pockets of high concentration ... The natural trend of population overflow from Bangladesh is towards the sparsely populated lands in the South East, in the Arakan side, and of the North East in the Seven Sisters side of the Indian subcontinent.<sup>63</sup>

Several thinkers and economists of Bangladesh have been articulating the idea of free movement of people across the international borders. Professor Amena Mohsin of Dhaka University expressed the view that “migration is a normal and natural phenomenon and cannot be stopped; the need today is to evolve ways to legalize it.”<sup>64</sup>

The net result is that waves of Bangladeshis have been flooding eastern India. It is interesting that, according to Sharifa Begum of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies in Dhaka, nearly 3.5 million people “disappeared” from East Pakistan between 1951 and 1961, and that another 1.5 million possibly entered India between 1961 and 1974. The records of the Election Commission of Bangladesh also make an interesting study. In 1991 the electoral roll of Bangladesh had 62,181,745 voters, but during their revision undertaken in 1995, the Commission had to delete the names of 6,165,567 voters from the electoral rolls, apparently because these people were no longer living within Bangladesh. Again, in June 1996, the Commission removed the names of nearly 120,000 Bangladeshi citizens from the country’s electoral rolls. These people were not disappearing in thin air; they were moving toward the contiguous states of India.<sup>65</sup>

The Task Force on Border Management estimated (in August 2000) the total number of Bangladeshis in India to be about 1.5 crore. The sparsely populated states of the northeast have been flooded with the arrival of Bangladeshis. Assam’s population increased from about 15 million to about 23 million during the 20-year period from 1971 to 1991; while the non-Muslim portion grew at the rate of 45.39 percent, Muslims rose at the rate of 77.42 percent. The Supreme Court of India also took notice of the illegal migrations and while striking down The Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act in July 2005, recorded that “there can be no manner of doubt that the State of Assam is facing ‘external aggression and internal disturbance’ on account of large-scale illegal migration of Bangladesh nationals.”

Table 6 shows the growth of the Muslim population in the other north-eastern states from 1981 to 1991.<sup>66</sup>

Table 6. Growth of Muslim Population

| Muslim Population |         |         |            |
|-------------------|---------|---------|------------|
| State             | 1981    | 1991    | Growth (%) |
| Arunachal Pradesh | 5,073   | 11,922  | 135.01     |
| Manipur           | 99,327  | 133,535 | 34.44      |
| Meghalaya         | 41,434  | 61,462  | 48.34      |
| Mizoram           | 2,205   | 4,538   | 105.80     |
| Nagaland          | 11,806  | 20,642  | 74.84      |
| Tripura           | 138,529 | 196,495 | 41.84      |

The tribals are not happy with the presence of these Bangladeshis in their midst. In Tripura, they rose in rebellion because the demographic balance was upset in the state. The Group of Ministers, in their recommendations on the *National Security System* (February 2001), stated that “the massive illegal immigration poses a grave danger to our security, social harmony, and economic well being.”

The government has decided to fence the border with Bangladesh to stem the tide of migrations. The total length of the border is 4096.7 kms. Out of this total, the plan is to fence 3286.87 kms; the remaining stretch is either riverine or has population within 150 yards of the border. So far, 2535.80 kms have already been fenced.<sup>67</sup> The project is encountering hurdles, but is nevertheless being pushed through. Border roads over a stretch of 3250.60 kms have also been constructed for patrolling by the Border Security Force personnel.

These external factors—subversive role of Pakistan and Bangladesh’s intelligence agencies, growth of fundamentalist institutions along the borders, and surreptitious and steady demographic movements from Bangladesh—are all adding to the complexity of India’s problems in the northeast.



## 7. Epilogue: Looking Ahead

The northeast has suffered insurgencies for nearly 50 years. The Naga Hills were the first to witness a rebellion. The prairie fire spread to the Mizo Hills and later to Manipur and Tripura. Assam also witnessed turbulence. Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya have been comparatively quiet.

The Government of India cannot be said to have dealt with these problems with great competence or foresight. Its approach has generally been ad hoc. Experts have been very critical of the government for having been soft and even indulgent towards the insurgent outfits. The criticism is perhaps not misplaced. However, the fact remains that these insurgencies have been contained, and no possibility exists of any of the rebel formations achieving their objective of secession.

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*... the fact remains that these insurgencies have been contained...*

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B. G. Verghese has beautifully summed up the government's handling of the northeast in the following words:

Although many Indians are prone to criticize what they read as failures of the Indian state, a look around the world must compel admiration for India's comparative success in nation building. Astute political management and constitutional accommodation have harmonized many diversities, despite visible turbulence and confrontation. It would be mistaken to interpret the sharpening of ethnic and other identity differences as spelling disintegration. This is a manifestation of growing political and social consciousness among a heterogeneous but hitherto 'dormant' mass and the competing pulls and pressures this generates. This process has yet to exhaust itself, and nowhere as much as in the Northeast.<sup>68</sup>

The government never had a well formulated policy for the northeast. Its paramount consideration was to maintain the unity and integrity of the country and within that framework, meet the legitimate aspirations of the diverse ethnic groups to the extent possible. However, if we take an overall

view of the last five decades, the following would appear to have been the salient features of the government's policy:

- a. Assure the tribals that their rights on land would be protected and their social customs and cultural traditions would not be interfered with
- b. Take counterinsurgency measures, wherever appropriate
- c. Implement schemes for the economic development of areas even if these are witnessing insurgency
- d. Engage the separatist/secessionist groups in political dialogue
- e. Enter into suspension of operations agreements with the insurgent groups
- f. Meet their legitimate aspirations by granting them autonomy or even statehood
- g. Have understanding with neighboring countries (Bhutan, Myanmar) so that the insurgents do not get any shelter there.

The policy, even if its contours appeared inchoate or ephemeral, would appear to have paid off in the long run. All said and done, India has been more successful than Russia or China in dealing with its ethnic minorities. Russia has been going hammer and tongs against the Chechen separatists ever since 1992 without much success. China continues to have a serious problem with the discontented Uighurs; a fairly big demonstration occurred against the Chinese authorities in Khotan in the Xinjiang province on 23 March 2008. Fresh rumblings of unrest are also seen with demonstrations by Tibetan monks and students in Tibet, Sichuan, Gansu, and Qinghai. It is true that incidents continue to happen in India's northeast, but these are easily absorbed in the numerous currents and cross-currents, which are integral to the body politic of a nation containing more than a billion people.

The Naga insurgency is gradually tapering off. It may have been the mother of all insurgencies in the northeast, but today it is no more than one of the insurgencies. The insurgent outfits of both Assam and Manipur have been antagonized by the NSCN (IM)'s demand for Greater Nagaland including the contiguous Naga-inhabited areas of the two states. ULFA has said that the NSCN's claim over Assam districts as part of *Nagalim* has "neither credibility nor any historical basis." Besides, an insurgency fatigue seems to have set in. The present generation of Nagas have become used to a comfortable life, and it is most unlikely that they would be willing to go back

to the jungle. The NSCN (IM) faction would be happy if some face-saving formula could be found, which they could flaunt as their achievement. The ULFA has become a proxy of the ISI and although it is still able to perpetrate violent incidents now and then, it has lost much of the ground support. In Manipur, insurgency has become an instrument of extortion, and the outfits are bereft of any ideology. Tripura has been able to turn the corner, and the rebel formations there are virtually gasping for breath.

Meanwhile, the Government of India has embarked on a program for an “integrated and holistic development of the region.” It is true that the northeast has intrinsic bottlenecks: the area is geographically remote, the terrain is difficult, infrastructure is poor, capital formation is weak, and the spread of technology is slow. However, the area has its positives: huge deposits of minerals, abundant natural resources, potential for agro-forestry and horticultural sectors including bamboo plantations, vast water resources, proximity to Southeast Asia’s fast growing economies, a highly literate population, rich heritage of handicrafts, and a strong community spirit. The effort is to develop these potentials. A Vision Northeastern Region (NER) 2020 for the northeast has been drawn up. The plan aims to develop all sectors of the region’s economy by exploiting its resource potential. It



A Chinese army officer (L) exchanges greetings with his Indian counterpart at Nathu La pass on the border between Sikkim and Tibet in July 2006. Formal trading was due to begin at the 4,545-meter pass along the historic Silk Route. Photo Deshakalyan Chowdhury/AFP/Getty, used by permission of Newscom.

lays emphasis on the constituent states working as a single entity for the accelerated socio-economic development of the region instead of competing among themselves. Huge investments are slated to develop energy, aviation, agriculture, infrastructure, and commercial sectors.

The government also initiated a Look East policy in the early 1990s to change the economic profile of the region and break its isolation. What was thus far considered to be a disadvantage—the fact that the frontiers of the region are contiguous mostly to the neighboring countries and it is linked only with a corridor to the rest of India—is now being sought to be turned into an advantage. As stated by the Prime Minister, the ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) markets “provide big opportunities for the northeastern region” and that “affinity in the cultural background will make our products acceptable and saleable once the land connectivity is improved.”<sup>69</sup> Significantly, the Ministry of External Affairs is also being involved in the development of the northeast as a strategic extension of India’s foreign policy objectives.<sup>70</sup> Transit and trade agreements with China, Myanmar, and Bangladesh would henceforth be in sync with the development of the northeast. The proposed Trilateral Highway from Moreh in Manipur to Mae Sot in Thailand through Bagan in Myanmar, which is expected to be completed by 2011, is going to play a crucial role in India’s trade with the far-east and southeast regions. The objective is to have a new paradigm of development in which the foreign policy initiatives blend with the projects for economic development.

What was so far a dormant economic powerhouse shackled by militant movements appears to be on the threshold of emerging as a bridge with the economies of Southeast Asia. The seven states are in the process of combining to form a rainbow on the northeastern horizon. ↑



## Endnotes

1. E. F. Sandys, *History of Tripura* (Tripura State Tribal Cultural Research Institute and Museum, 1915), p. 3.
2. Dr. S. K. Chatterjee, "Kirata-Jana-Kriti, the Indo Mongoloids: Their Contribution to the History and Culture of India," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XVI, No. 2, Cal, 1950, pp. 21-22.
3. Ahom Buranji, p. 268, cited by Lakshmi Devi in *Ahom-Tribal Relations: A Political Study* (Guwahati: Lawyer's Book Stall, 1968), p. 68.
4. A species of Indian bison, domesticated variety of *Bos frontalis*.
5. Udayon Misra, *The Periphery Strikes Back* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Rashtrapati Nivas, 2000), p. 19.
6. *Ibid.*, p 5.
7. Sir Robert Reid, *History of Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam from 1883-1941*, (Shillong: Spectrum Publications, 1942), pp. 100-101.
8. Sir Edward Gait, *A History of Assam* (Guwahati: Lawyer's Book Stall, 1905), p. 21.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
10. A leaflet *The Voice of Asom* [Assam] released by the ULFA stated as follows:  
 ULFA is a revolutionary mass organization, with the goal of 'A sovereign Asom' with 'A society free from all kinds of exploitation and inequality.' ULFA believes in the path of armed struggle because against the ruthless character of the Indian state peaceful demonstrations are totally ineffective. ULFA firmly believes in the equality of all religions, and is committed to religious neutrality as an organization. The international policy of ULFA is guided by the principle of mutual cooperation and non-interference. ULFA's national policy is guided by the principle of equal status and rights for all ethnic groups of Asom irrespective of numerical strength. Every ethnic group of Asom shall enjoy autonomy in political and economic cum cultural spheres.
11. Congress (I) is Congress (Indira)—that is, the Congress faction led by Mrs. Indira Gandhi.
12. *The Hindu*, 19 December 2003, available at [www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/fr/2003/12/19/index.htm](http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/fr/2003/12/19/index.htm).
13. *South Asia Intelligence Review* (SAI), Weekly Assessments & Briefings, Vol. 6, No. 27, 14 January 2008; available from [www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/).
14. Sir Edward Gait, *A History of Assam*, pp. 77-78.
15. L. W. Shakespear, *History of Upper Assam, Upper Burma and North-Eastern Frontier* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1914), p. 225.
16. Verrier Elwin, *Nagaland* (Shillong: Spectrum Publications, 1961), p.70.
17. Prakash Singh, *Nagaland* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1995), p. 79.

18. Kenneth Kerhuo, field director of the Angami Baptist Mission, in a statement published in *Naga Khabar*, Vol. 1, No. 6 said: "Thanks to the Army, confidence has returned to the villages, and the peaceful Nagas are able to look after their affairs unafraid... I have heard nothing but the highest praise of Army officers and men in general from several Nagas of different tribes." In another statement published in *Nagar Khabar*, Vol. 1, No.7, a group of Nagas including Jasokie, Kenneth, Khieya, Lucy Dino and others said: "No Armed Force in the world could have behaved better than the Indian Armed Forces have done in Naga Hills."
19. Referring to the Prime Minister's acceptance of NPC's demands, the *New York Times* of 28 September 1957 observed: "This is a realistic phase of approach. It is not possible to conceive of a really viable independent Naga State. The tribesmen are vigorous and liberty loving, but they are not in a position to assume full responsibilities of self-government except upon a limited local scale. Economically, their position, completely landlocked, would be impossible to improve. Politically, while they may rightly desire to have a sense of freedom, they have not the equipment with which to conduct the affairs of an independent State. The Indian approach to the question at this point seems a wise one."
20. *Assam Tribune*, 18 August 1966.
21. References to Pakistan here mean what was then East Pakistan, which is now Bangladesh.
22. R. K. Singh, "China abetting insurgents in Northeast," *The Pioneer*, 15 October 2007.
23. A report, *The New Islamist International*, prepared by the Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare of the U.S. House of Representatives stated that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) expanded its activities to northeastern India in the 1990s and fuelled ethnic separatism.
24. Sunanda K. Datta-Ray, "North-East in Turmoil," *The Indian Express*, 17 July 1993.
25. *Asian Age*, 19 March 2006.
26. *The Pioneer*, 29 April 2005.
27. The State Home Minister Thenucho disclosed in the Legislative Assembly on 25 March 2007 that 270 lives (NSCN-IM -101, NSCN-K - 110, Naga National Council -25 and the remaining civilians) had been lost in a total of 378 factional clashes in Nagaland, and 159 persons had been injured between March 2003 and 19 March 2007.
28. W. S. Desai, *A Pageant of Burmese History* (Calcutta: Orient Longmans, 1961), p. 109.
29. E. W. Dun, *Gazetteer of Manipur*, (Delhi: Manas Publications, August 1996), p. 39.
30. Phanjoubam Tarapot, *Insurgency Movement in North-Eastern India* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1996), cited on p. 24.
31. Lt Col H. Bhuban Singh, *The Merger of Manipur*, (Imphal, 1988), p. 97.

32. B. G. Verghese, *India's Northeast Resurgent: Ethnicity, Insurgency, Governance, Development* (Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1996), p. 116.
33. Kangleipak is the ancient name of Manipur. Revivalist units use this expression.
34. Subir Bhaumik, *Insurgencies in India's Northeast: Conflict, Co-option & Change*, East-West Center Washington Working Papers, No. 10, July 2007, p. 17.
35. *The Pioneer*, 8 September 2006.
36. *Outlook*, 12 December 2005.
37. *South Asia Intelligence Review*, Weekly Assessments and Briefings, Vol. 6, No. 21, 3 December 2007.
38. Ibid.
39. E. F. Sandys, *History of Tripura*, pp. 2-3.
40. *Tripura District Gazeteers* (1975), p. 111. Sandys' *History of Tripura* has a similar entry on p. 37:
 

The British Government has no treaty with Tipperah. The Raja of Tipperah stands in a peculiar position in as much as in addition to the hill territory known as 'Independent Tipperah'; he is the holder of a considerable *Zemindary* in the district of Tipperah in the plains; he receives his investiture from the British Government and is required to pay the usual *nazarana* ... Independent Tipperah is not held by gift from the British Government, or its predecessors, under any title derived from it or them, never having been subjected by the Mogal.
41. B. G. Verghese, *India's Northeast Resurgent*, p. 166.
42. *The Pioneer*, 2 September 2001.
43. J. B. Ganguly, "The economic content of the state formation process in Medieval Tripura," p. 151.
44. Suchintya Bhattacharya, *The Halams of Tripura* (Kolkata: Kreativmind, 2003), p.368.
45. Phanjoubam Tarapot, *Insurgency Movement in North Eastern India*, p. 175.
46. Shifting cultivation is a form of cultivation practiced in northeastern India. It is also called "jhumming." In practice, the field cultivated in one season is left out in the following season, and another plot is cultivated in the next season. This practice enables soil in the first field to recuperate its fertility.
47. Separatist Group bans Hindu Festivities, BBC News South Asia, 2 October 2000.
48. Subir Bhaumik, "Ethnic Conflict and Militancy in Tripura," *Frontier in Flames: North East India in Turmoil* edited by Jaideep Saikia, (Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 2007), p. 108.
49. *South Asia Intelligence Review*, Weekly Assessments & Briefings, Vol. 2, No. 49, 21 June 2004.
50. Subir Bhaumik, op.cit, p. 113.
51. *The Pioneer*, 24 January 2008.
52. Patricia Mary Mukhim, "Turbulence in the Abode of Clouds," *Frontier in Flames* edited by Jaideep Saikia, p. 7.

53. Ibid., p.7.
54. Subir Bhamik, "Insurgencies in India's Northeast: Conflict, Co-option & Change," East-West Center Washington Working Papers, No. 10, July 2007, p. 14.
55. Wasbir Hussain, "Cross-border Links and Strategic Alliances," *Faultlines*, Vol. 17, p. 108.
56. ISI Activities in Assam, statement laid on the table of the house of Assam Legislative Assembly under item No. 12, 6 April 2000.
57. *The Times of India*, 27 March 2008.
58. M. K. Dhar, "Fulcrum of the Eastern Dark: Motivational Mechanics of the ISI and DGFI," *Frontier in Flames* edited by Jaideep Saikia, p. 81.
59. Jaideep Saikia, *Frontier in Flames: North East India in Turmoil* (Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 2007), pp. xviii-xix.
60. *The Times of India*, 25 April 2007.
61. M. K. Dhar, op.cit. p. 78.
62. *Deccan Chronicle*, 10 December 2003.
63. *The Holiday* (Dhaka), 18 October 1991.
64. Wasbir Hussain, "Demographic Invasion. Anxiety and Anger in India's Northeast," *Faultlines*, Vol. 7 (November 2000), p. 128.
65. Hiranya Kumar Bhattacharyya, *The Silent Invasion* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 2001), p. 84.
66. Prakash Singh, "Demographic Movements: The Threat to India's Economy and Security," *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring 2002), pp. 94-115.
67. Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, Annual Report, 2007-2008, p. 145. The state-wise break up of border length and fencing completed along the Indo-Bangladesh border as of 31 December 2007 follows.

| States      | Border Length | Fencing Completed |
|-------------|---------------|-------------------|
| West Bengal | 2,216.7       | 1,181.05          |
| Assam       | 263.0         | 200.71            |
| Meghalaya   | 443.0         | 378.25            |
| Tripura     | 856.0         | 668.04            |
| Mizoram     | 318.0         | 107.75            |
| Total:      | 4,096.7       | 2,535.80          |

68. B. G. Verghese, *India's Northeast Resurgent*, p. xviii.
69. *Outlook*, 6 March 2006.
70. *The Times of India*, 25 September 2007.

## Appendix A. Statement of Violent Incidents in the Northeast (2005–2007)

| States            | Incidents |      |      | Extremists Arrested/Killed/Surrendered |       |       | Security Forces Personnel Killed |      |      | Civilians Killed |      |      |
|-------------------|-----------|------|------|--|-------|-------|----------------------------------|------|------|------------------|------|------|
|                   | 2005      | 2006 | 2007 | 2005                                   | 2006  | 2007  | 2005                             | 2006 | 2007 | 2005             | 2006 | 2007 |
| Assam             | 398       | 413  | 474  | 544                                    | 752   | 759   | 7                                | 32   | 27   | 173              | 164  | 287  |
| Meghalaya         | 37        | 38   | 28   | 108                                    | 112   | 85    | 0                                | 0    | 1    | 1                | 6    | 9    |
| Tripura           | 115       | 87   | 94   | 212                                    | 196   | 303   | 11                               | 14   | 6    | 28               | 14   | 14   |
| Arunachal Pradesh | 32        | 16   | 35   | 58                                     | 23    | 53    | 1                                | 0    | 5    | 3                | 0    | 12   |
| Nagaland          | 192       | 309  | 272  | 141                                    | 203   | 211   | 1                                | 2    | 1    | 28               | 29   | 44   |
| Mizoram           | 4         | 5    | 2    | 210                                    | 848   | 21    | 0                                | 0    | 0    | 2                | 0    | 2    |
| Manipur           | 554       | 498  | 584  | 1,186                                  | 1,097 | 1,443 | 50                               | 28   | 39   | 158              | 96   | 130  |

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, Annual Report 2007–2008



## Appendix B. List of Major Militant/Insurgent Outfits Active in the Northeast

### Assam

- United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA)
- National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB)

### Manipur

- People's Liberation Army (PLA)
- United National Liberation Front (UNLF)
- People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK)
- Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP)
- Kanglei Yaol Kanba Lup (KYKL)
- Manipur People's Liberation Front (MPLF)
- Revolutionary People's Front (RPF)

### Meghalaya

- Achik National Volunteer Council (ANVC)
- Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC)

### Tripura

- All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF)
- National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT)

### Nagaland

- National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak Muviah)-NSCN(IM)
- National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang) NSCN(K).

### Notes

1. All the militant outfits except the two factions of National Socialist Council of Nagaland have been declared *unlawful associations* under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (37 of 1967). These outfits in respect of Assam, Manipur, and Tripura have also been listed as terrorist organizations in the schedule of the said Act.
2. In addition, other militant groups—for example, Dima Halam Daogah (DHD) and United Peoples Democratic Solidarity (UPDS); DHD (Jole faction), Karbi Longri NC Hills Liberation Front (KLNLF), Kuki National Army (KNA) and Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA); and Naga National Council (NNC)—are also operating in the northeast.

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, Annual Report 2007–08.







