



# North East Insurgency

## Introduction

- North East India is the region situated in the eastern-most part of India comprising of the eight states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim.
- It is linked with Indian heartland through the 21 km. wide **Siliguri Corridor**, which is commonly known as the **chicken neck**, created by the Radcliffe line. The corridor is flanked by Bhutan, Bangladesh and Nepal.
- The Northeast borders on four countries, namely, China and Bhutan on its North; Myanmar on its East; and Bangladesh on its South and West. It has an area of 2.6 lakh sq. km. (7.6% of India's land area) while its population is 39 million plus (3.6% of India's population). It has 475 ethnic groups and 400 languages/ dialects are spoken here.

## History of conflicts in NE

- According to the **Report of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Administrative Reforms Commission** the Northeast represents a state of stable anarchy where the rule of law and other institutions of governance are subverted directly or through collusive arrangements to serve personal or partisan ends of the militants.
- **Regional issues:** The inter-tribal conflicts, the youth unemployment and the inability to compete with non-tribal businesses, illegal migration from neighbouring States and countries leading to the competition of resources and land have led to various conflicts and demands of secession/ autonomy.
- **Gaps at national level:** The **broad racial differences** between India and its Northeast and the tenuous geographical link (the chicken neck Siliguri Corridor) contributed to a sense of alienation, a feeling of 'otherness' that subsequently gave rise to a political culture of violent separatism.
- **Ethnic tensions:** Northeast India is home to more than 50 ethnic rebel groups – a few demanding complete secession from India, others fighting for ethnic identities and homelands and some running the insurgency as an industry to spin easy money without any political ideology.
- Militants in their formative years voiced genuine grievances of the people such as poor governance, alienation, lack of development and an apathetic attitude from the central government in New Delhi. However, with time and opportunist motives, these have taken forms of insurgencies across the region.

The factors that led to the emergence of the different insurgent groups in the region.

## Nagaland

- Being a part of the larger state of Assam, it was the first to experience militancy in pursuit of a grant of autonomy. Under the leadership of the Naga National Council (N.N.C.), headed by **A.Z. Phizo, Nagas** declared independence around 1951.
- The N.N.C. split to form National Socialist Council of Nagaland (N.S.C.N.). The N.S.C.N. further broke into two factions: **Isak-Muivah faction (N.S.C.N.-I.M.)** and **the Khaplang faction (N.S.C.N.-K.)**.

## Mizoram

- It was a part of the state of Assam before it was granted statehood in 1987, experienced militancy after the Union government failed to respond positively to its demand for assistance during the massive "**Mautam famine**".
- The **Mizo National Front (M.N.F.)**, led by the legendary leader **Laldenga**, demanded independence for Mizoram in 1966.

## Tripura

- Migration of Hindus from the British-ruled East Bengal is believed to have been responsible for reducing the indigenous tribal people in the state to minority status; this development sparked a violent backlash among the indigenous people.
- Militant groups sprang up in the state demanding the restoration of the tribal rights from the Bengali population.

## Assam

- A movement that started demanding the deportation of the illegal migrants also witnessed the birth of the militant outfit the **United Liberation Front of Assam (U.L.F.A.)** in 1979.
- The other groups that formed are **Bodo Liberation Tigers**, **National Democratic Front of Bodoland (N.D.F.B.)**, the **United People's Democratic Solidarity (U.P.D.S.)**.

## Manipur

- Militancy originated in protest against the forcible merger of the former Manipur Kingdom with India.
- **United National Liberation Front** formed in 1964, with an objective of ending the discrimination against Manipur, which was accorded statehood only in 1972 nearly 23 years after its merger.

## Meghalaya

- The Meghalaya state was carved out of the Assam state, with an aim to address the unique needs of the major tribes in the region: **the Garos, the Jaintias and the Khasis**.
- The rise of aspirations of tribal autonomy led to the emergence of several insurgent groups in the state, like **Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA )** and **Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLCC)**.

## Arunachal Pradesh

- The state remains under peace more or less in history but the proximity of state with Myanmar and Nagaland border is gradually being afflicting insurgency in recent time.
- The only case of indigenous insurgency movement in Arunachal Pradesh was the rise of the **Arunachal Dragon Force (ADF)**, which was rechristened as **East India Liberation Front (EALF)** in 2001.

## Military operations and AFSPA

- Special powers under **AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act)** were bestowed on armed forces to deal with emergency conditions. It is there in the whole of Assam, Nagaland, most of Manipur, and some areas of Arunachal Pradesh.
- Military operations in Mizoram, where the army reportedly launched air strikes to neutralize the M.N.F. cadres, resulted in several fatalities and displacement among the civilian population.
- In Assam, at the beginning of the 1990s, two military operations, **Operation Rhino** and **Bajrang**, were launched against U.L.F.A. militants.
- **Assam rifle** has been given the task to deal with insurgents in Assam.
- The security scenario in the North East is constantly improving. While there is almost no insurgency left in Tripura and Mizoram, there has been a marked improvement in the security situation in other States of the region.
- The lifting of the AFSPA from all areas of Meghalaya on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 is an illustration of the

vast improving security scenario in the NER. In Arunachal Pradesh also, areas under AFSPA have been reduced from 16 PS/Outposts areas bordering Assam to 8 Police Stations, besides Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts.

## Peace talks

- Dialogue with the M.N.F. remains the only example of the culmination of a successful peace process that ended militancy in Mizoram in 1986.
- Other peace deals such as the **Shillong Accord in 1975** with the N.N.C. in Nagaland, the 1988 agreement with the **Tripura National Volunteers** in Tripura and The **Bodoland Autonomous Council agreement** of 1993 with the Bodo militants in Assam are also in effect, but with limited success.
- Union government has ongoing ceasefire agreements with six militant groups with different actors like **NSCN (IM), UPDS, Achik National Volunteer Council**.

## Role of the Neighbours

- Neighbouring countries like China and Myanmar are accused of promoting insurgency in the region.
- Pakistan, through its intelligence agency the I.S.I., is believed to have assisted the militant groups in terms of training and finance.
- China has provided some assistance to groups such as the N.S.C.N. in the 1980s.
- Militant camps in Nagaland, as well as Manipur, exist in the bordering areas of Myanmar. Outfits like U.L.F.A. and the N.D.F.B. have reportedly used the facilities.
- Bhutan remains the only country that successfully dislodged several militant camps of the northeastern groups through a military operation launched in December 2003.

## Consequences of Violence

- According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, severe fatalities have been reported from northeast including both civilians and security forces.
- In the oil-rich Assam, militants have periodically targeted oil and gas pipelines for sabotage, alleging that India is exploiting the natural resources of the state.
- National projects such as the extension of the rail lines have either been stalled or have moved with a tardy pace after militants attacked the construction sites and abducted workers.
- Militancy has also stalled the prospect of linking the economy of the northeast with the neighbouring Southeast Asian countries.
- Tourism, which could have flourished in the scenic northeast, has suffered a lot due to instability in the region.
- The education sector too has been affected by militancy. A number of schools in states like Tripura's interior areas have been shut as teachers avoid the areas due to fear of militant strikes.
- Extortion by the militant groups on the national highways that connect the different states with mainland India has shot up the prices of essential commodities.

## Administrative arrangements

- **Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER)**
  - It is responsible for the matters relating to the planning, execution and monitoring of development schemes and projects in the North Eastern Region, to accelerate the pace of socio-economic development of the region.
- **Inner Line Permit (ILP)**
  - Restrictions are imposed on the entry of outsiders to maintain the original identity of indigenous people of Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh entry of outsiders are not allowed without ILP.
- **Constitutional provision**

- **Article 244 (1)** provides that – Provisions of the 5th schedule shall apply to the admin. or control of scheduled areas and scheduled tribes.
- **Article 244 (2)** provides that – Provisions of the 6th schedule shall apply to the admin. or control of schedule areas, in the states of **Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura** and **Mizoram** to create Autonomous Districts Councils in these states.
- In pursuance of these provisions, the various autonomous district has been created to contain the demands of various ethnic groups like Karbi Anglong, Khasi hill district, Chakma district etc.
- **Under Article 371 (A)** Nagaland has been accorded special status.

## Current Situation

- The state response has effectively curbed violence in North-east.
- The political nexus have helped them carry out their illicit works. In return, run extortion rackets and all types of other illegal trades and get right to operate within limits with impunity.
- This results in dismal law and order situation in these areas. It is this absence of rule of law that these groups are still operating. Chances of a political settlement are bleak because of the kind of diversity it holds.
- While the government's military options have achieved only minimal results, lack of development continues to alienate the people of the region further from the mainstream.
- The region has also received little attention from either the national or the international media. Achievements by a separate ministry created by the Indian government for the development of the region remain minimal.

## Suggestions

- Enhance communication and connectivity, infrastructure improvement for better integration of the region with the mainland.
- Stringent law and fast criminal justice system for quick disposal of insurgents attack cases.
- Greater coordination between central forces and state forces for better tactical response.
- Greater cultural interaction with the rest of the country and socio-economic development that includes a holistic inclusive development.
- Decentralization with alertness, Improving administrative efficiency, pro-people governance and coping up with regional aspirations

## Conclusion

The ceasefire agreements have led to a reduction in the militancy-related fatalities in their respective states, a road map toward a situation of a **permanent agreement** is desired from GoI. It will develop a conducive environment for investments in the region and will solve the socio-economic backwardness of the region.