

## Unit 6. North East India – Insurgency and Other Issues



The Northeast region of India comprising of eight states – Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Tripura and Sikkim. North East India is a region poorly connected to the Indian mainland by a small corridor – Silghuri Corridor (also known as Chicken Neck – with a narrow width of only 23 kilometers.). North Eastern India has been facing problems of insurgency for near 5 decades, but things are now settling down and peace started to prevail.

### What is insurgency?

An insurgency is an armed rebellion against a constituted authority when those taking part in the rebellion are not recognized as belligerents. In case of Indian scenario it can be seen as armed rebellion and violent protests against Indian Government or authority.

### Insurgency in North East India

Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Tripura had been witnessing conflict since 1950-60 period, but since 1990, the intensity of conflicts started to decrease. Now the only state where prominent insurgency exist is Manipur. But in this region several armed factions operate. Some groups call for a separate state, others for regional autonomy while some extreme groups demand complete independence.

### Reasons for conflict in North East India:

- Historical reasons – loosely administered under British India.
- Tensions between these states and the central government.
- Tensions between tribal people, who are natives of these states, and migrant peoples from other parts of India.
- Geographical reasons – not well connected with present Indian mainland.
- Developmental reasons – Poorly developed due to lack of fund from Center/States.
- Environmental reasons.
- Military reasons – AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Power Act).

- Foreign Policy – Look easy policy and market changes bought.
- External support – China and Myanmar.

## Insurgent Groups in North East India

### Nagaland

- NSCN-IM
- NSCN-K

### Manipur

- Peoples Liberation Army
- PREPAK

### Assam

- ULFA
- NDFB
- KLNLF
- UPDS

### Tripura

- National Liberation Front of Tripura
- All Tripura Tiger Force

### Meghalaya

- ANVC
- HNLC

## Recent Observations about North East India

### Insurgency & Ceasefire

1. The basic ingredient of insurgency i.e. popular support is drying up in the region. Insurgency is active only in Manipur. There are around 50 insurgent groups in Manipur.
2. Ceasefire and Suspension of Operations with militant groups allows them to indulge in extortion and kidnapping, which in turn help them in maintaining their clout over the people of the region.
3. There exists deep nexus between all the insurgent groups in the Northeast. The CPI (Maoist) is also in touch with the North east insurgents primarily to source weapons. Arms were given by the United Liberation Force of Asom (ULFA) to the CPI (Maoist) in West Bengal.
4. The biggest challenge to the North East is extortion carried out by various insurgent groups. Extortion has become meticulously organised activity in the region and is one of the major sources of funds for the militants.

## Political

1. It is important to understand the culture and psyche of the people of North East while framing policy alternatives.
2. The perceived threat to the political identity of the Assamese people from the illegal migrants from Bangladesh lies at the core of the Assam problem. The indigenous people of Assam feel that in future the illegal migrants will become the majority population and they will lose political power.
3. The ceasefire agreements and peace negotiations have resulted in reducing the violence levels and given the civil societies of the region space to talk.
4. One of the ways to contain insurgency in the region is to delegate powers to the ethnic minorities through the Autonomous District Councils so that they can fashion their own development.
5. The implementation of Sixth Schedule in Assam has not benefited the tribal communities of the state. Following the 73rd and 74th amendments, the Central and state governments are providing huge amounts of financial resources to the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) and municipalities. Since, the scheduled areas do not fall under the purview of the PRI and municipalities, they do not receive any share of these funds and as a result they lose out.

## Development

1. Security situation in the region has improved considerably in Assam and Meghalaya in particular facilitating conducive atmosphere for investment and development. The Northeast Industrial Policy initiated by the Government of India further contributed in encouraging investment and industries in the region.
2. However, the Northeast will not attract big industries because the region is resource deficit, and does not have economies of scale to match. Moreover, the security situation in the whole of the region has not improved uniformly.
3. The North East Council (NEC) and the Ministry for the Development of the North East Region (DoNER) have become fund disbursing agencies instead of strategic planning agencies. At present approximately Rs. 11,000 crore is lying idle with the Ministry of DoNER.

## Look East Policy

1. The North East still remains inward looking focussing primarily on internal conflicts. There is no discussion on the benefits that could accrue to the region from the Look East Policy.
2. If the North East Region is opened up there is a fear of being swamped by cheap Chinese goods, which would spell disaster for the local manufacturing units.
3. Apprehensions exist that the development of communication links could result in developing strong links between the people of the North east with the people of China, Myanmar and ASEAN countries, which would undermine the unity and integrity of India.

## Border issues

1. The international borders in the North east are extremely porous. Thus, cross border infiltration of militants, and smuggling of arms are rampant in the region.

2. China has differing claim in Arunachal Pradesh. Along the westernmost corner, Chinese claim line lay 20 kms south and in the eastern most extreme of Arunachal Pradesh it lay 30 km south.
3. International boundaries in the North East have not crystallised into lines separating sovereign countries on the ground.

## **Recommendations to solve North East India Problems**

### **Insurgency**

1. Thorough background check of all insurgents groups should be carried out before the central government enters into any Ceasefire or Suspension of Operations Agreements with the insurgents.

### **Political**

1. Political solutions to the Assam problem should be discussed openly as widely as possible to avoid backlash from the tribal and the minority population of the state.
2. A system of work permit should be issued so that the illegal Bangladeshi migrants do not end up as Indian citizens.
3. The Autonomous District Councils should be empowered.
4. Governance should be improved in a step by step manner. Strict supervision by senior officials should be initiated to improve the delivery system of the government.

### **Development**

1. The Ministry of the Development of the North East region (DoNER) be merged with the North East Council (NEC) for better strategic planning and coordination of various developmental projects in the region.
2. Focus of the Ministry of DoNER and NEC should be on investment in mega-projects which will make big difference to the development of the region.
3. Institutional capacities in the North east should be developed urgently.
4. Pragmatic land use policy should be formulated for attracting industries in the region. Micro, small and medium enterprises should be encouraged.
5. Local tourism should be promoted. Tourists residing in the eight North Eastern states should be encouraged to travel within the region.
6. Niche tourism or high end tourism should be encouraged. Medical and higher education tourism should be encouraged.
7. The North east should become a single economic unit without disturbing the political boundaries of the states. No internal traffic barriers in the region. Exclusive five year plan for the North east focusing on development of infrastructure.

### **Look East Policy**

1. Greater awareness about the Look East Policy and its benefits to the North East should be generated among the policymakers and the intelligentsia of the region.
2. Ties with Myanmar should be deepened by exploiting Myanmar's anxieties about China as well as existing deep civilization and spiritual ties.
3. The North East region must be included in the India-ASEAN Vision for trade and cooperation. Development Plan for the North East should factor India-ASEAN strategic cooperation.
4. Integrated and bottom up approaches are required for integration of the North east in the Look East Policy. The North East should formulate plans as to how it can engage with the ASEAN. Better coordination of efforts by all the Northeastern states should be ensured.

5. Visa offices of Bangladesh and Myanmar should be located in the North East.
6. Centres/Departments for the studies of neighbouring countries like Myanmar, Bangladesh, Tibet, Bhutan and Nepal in Universities should be set up in universities to understand India's neighbours better.

#### Border issues

1. Special economic zones along India-Bangladesh border, especially in Meghalaya and Assam should be set up.
2. States should focus more on the development and security of the border areas.
3. Sentiments of the people of Arunachal Pradesh should be taken into consideration by the central government while discussing the frameworks for resolution of the border dispute with China.
4. Matching infrastructure and military capability should be build to ensure peace and enable negotiations from a position of strength.



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