

# Insurgency in the North-East

## ► 4.1 Historical Background of the North-East

### ► 4.1.1 Pre-Independence Era

There are more than 100 tribal groups in the entire north-east region of India. They have a rich cultural heritage with a variety of languages and customs. During the British era, they constituted an overwhelming majority of the population in most of the areas they inhabited. Non-tribals had not penetrated these areas to any significant extent. The British gave a special administrative status to these areas. The British government did not disturb their socio-political structure and followed a deliberate policy of excluding the outsiders. Outsiders were not allowed to acquire land in the tribal areas.

At the same time, the British government also supported the Christian missionaries to move in and establish schools, hospitals and churches. The missionaries introduced remarkable changes in the north-eastern society and modern progressive ideas prevailed amongst the tribal youth. It also helped the Britishers in keeping the nationalist (pro-independence) influence out of the tribal areas. This policy resulted in their isolation from the rest of India.

There was a virtual absence of any political, cultural, social, geographical, religious or business contact of the tribals in the North-east with the rest of India. So India's freedom struggle had very little impact on the tribals.

Thus, they never experienced the feeling of being part of a free country called India. Their main experience of outsiders was that of British officers and Christian missionaries only.

### ► 4.1.2 Post-Independence Era

After Independence, the Government of India focused on people-to-people contact and gave special attention to tribal policy. The Sixth Schedule of our Constitution is exclusively for this region and it provides for self-rule, autonomy and decentralization. Thus, district and regional councils were created.

Initially, there was only one state of Assam and one Union Territory, NEFA (North East Frontier Agency) covering the whole of the north-east. Later on, NEFA was named Arunachal Pradesh and granted the status of a separate state in 1987. While NEFA was developing comfortably and in harmony with the rest of the country, problems developed in other tribal areas which were part of Assam administratively.

In the mid-fifties, Phizo raised the banner of revolt in Nagaland and, later on, it spread to Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura and Meghalaya.

In 1960, Assamese was made the sole official language of the state. It led to an immediate and strong reaction in the tribal districts. Various political parties of the hill's tribal population began to feel alienated from Assamese and Bengali residents of the plains. The tribals were afraid of losing their identity and being assimilated by the policy of Assamization in government jobs and other professions, like doctors, traders, etc.

### ► 4.1.3 All Party Hill Leaders Conference

Representatives of hill areas merged into the All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) in 1960 and demanded a separate state within the Indian Union. APIILC fought elections and secured 11 out of 15 seats in Assam Legislative Assembly reserved for autonomous hill districts.

There were demonstrations and a major agitation developed. In the 1962 elections, an overwhelming majority of the Assembly seats from the tribal areas were won by the advocates of a separate state, who decided to boycott the State Assembly.

In 1969, Meghalaya was carved out of Assam as 'a state within a state' which had complete autonomy except for law and order, High Court, Public Service Commission and Governor. Finally, Meghalaya, Manipur and Tripura were granted statehood in 1972.

Meanwhile, secessionist movements developed in Nagaland and Mizoram. Nagaland was granted statehood in 1963 itself, while Mizoram became a state in 1987.

#### ► 4.1.4 Present Situation of North-East Insurgency

The security situation in some of the north-eastern states has remained complex for a long time because of a number of militant outfits and their diverse demands. Assam, Manipur and Nagaland have continuously been a point of worry.

Lower Assam areas and KarbiAnglong regions are prone to ethnic and communal tension. The mistrust between tribals and non-tribals in Bodo areas has been growing. Garo insurgency in Meghalaya continues and Non-Manipuris are being targeted increasingly in Manipur.

Mizoram and Tripura have shown remarkable success in controlling insurgency and now they are largely peaceful for quite a long time. Government has signed ceasefire and Suspension of Operations (SoO) with most of the insurgent groups in the region. Government has steadily pursued the policy of dialogue and negotiations with any outfit which agrees to forgo the path of violence and come forward for peace-talks within the constitutional framework of India. In general the security situation in most of the north-eastern states has shown considerable improvement during the last five years.

Block year	Number of incidents	Number of terrorists killed	Number of security forces personnel killed	Number of civilians killed
1999-2004	8931	3099	884	3465
2005-2009	7043	2525	313	1930
2010-2013	3086	709	82	346
2014 (31.03.14)	200	38	04	36

#### ► 4.2 State-wise Status

##### ► 4.2.1 Nagaland

The first and the most significant insurgency started in Nagaland under the leadership of Phizo in the early 1950s.

The Nagas are the inhabitants of the Naga Hills in the eastern Himalayas, along the Burma border. Nagas consist of many tribes speaking different languages. After taking control over Assam in 1826, Britain steadily expanded its domain over Naga Hills by 1892.

During the British era, the Nagas were cut off from social and political developments in the rest of India. The British administered them with a soft iron as compared to their approach in the rest of the country. Outsiders were kept out. Their tribal culture and practices were not disturbed by the British administration. However, Christian missionaries successfully converted several tribes to Christianity. Due to continuous presence of Christian missionaries, Naga society is relatively more educated and aware than the other north-eastern states.

In April 1945, the Naga Hills District Tribal Council was established as a forum of the various Naga groups in the district. In February 1946, it was

reorganized as a political organization called Naga National Council (NNC). NNC's objective was to work out the terms of relationship with the Government of India after the British withdrawal. NNC was against grouping of Assam in Bengal and wanted the Naga Hills District to be included in an autonomous Assam in independent India. It further emphasized local autonomy for the Naga Hills District, and a separate electorate for the Naga tribes.

### ***Nine Point Agreement***

After several rounds of negotiations, the Governor of Assam reached a Nine Point Agreement with the Naga leaders on June 26, 1947. It was decided that the Nagas would be granted judicial, executive and legislative powers, as well as autonomy in land-related matters. There was a ten years guarantee of these provisions at the end of which the Nagas could choose between extending the agreement or a new agreement. The Naga leaders were also promised unification of Naga territories from nearby districts into the Naga Hills District. However, the Constituent Assembly refused to ratify this accord. The Naga leaders envisaged a sovereign state with India as a 'guardian power' for ten years, while the Indian Constituent Assembly concluded that the Nine Point Agreement guaranteed only 'district autonomy within the Indian Constitution'.

### ***Beginning of the Secessionist Movement***

After independence, the Government of India started the integration of Naga areas with the state of Assam, and India as a whole. The hardliners led by A.Z. Phizo opposed this integration and rebelled under the banner of Naga National Council. Nagas demanded a separate sovereign state. They were also encouraged by some British officials and missionaries. In 1955, the separatists declared the formation of an independent government. They launched an armed rebellion. The Government of India sent the army to Nagaland in early 1956 to restore peace and order. By following a policy of suppression and non-negotiation, the government firmly opposed the secessionist demand for the independence of Naga areas.

On the other hand, the government also realized the need for reconciliation and winning over of the Naga people. As total physical suppression was neither possible nor desirable, the government followed a 'friendly approach' by encouraging the Nagas to integrate with the rest of the country in mind and spirit. The central government also made it clear that Nagas' right to maintain their autonomy in cultural and other matters would be respected by India.

Meanwhile, the Centre refused to negotiate with Phizo or any other separatists until they did not give up their demand for independence or armed rebellion. Simultaneously, it started negotiations with the more moderate, non-violent and non-secessionist Naga leaders headed by Dr Imkongliba Ao.

The armed rebellion was contained by the middle of 1957. Then the moderate Naga leaders under the leadership of Dr Imkongliba Ao negotiated with the Indian government for the creation of the state of Nagaland within the Indian Union. The Government of India accepted their demand through a

prolonged negotiation and the state of Nagaland came into existence in 1963 as the 16th state of the Indian Union. This step not only strengthened national integrity and security but also restored people's faith in democratic values enshrined in our constitution. Non-violent means were seen with greater hope in the rest of India. Rebels lost their popular mass support. Though insurgency had been brought under control, sporadic guerrilla war was launched by Naga rebels in 1964 and it continues till date without any progress towards a political settlement. Instead, the present situation may be better understood as a very complex set of relations between a number of parties who have differing objectives, strategies, and capabilities. As a result, a precarious stability has been maintained over the last fifty years while cease-fire violations keep occurring routinely and almost continuously.

### ***Major Terrorist Groups Operating in Nagaland***

**Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN)**—The Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) is a Naga nationalist group operating in Northeast India. The main aim of the organization is to establish a sovereign state, "Nagalim" unifying all the areas inhabited by the Naga people in Northeast India and Burma.

The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) was formed in January, 1980 by Isak Chishi Swu, Thuingaleng Muivah and S.S. Khaplang opposing the Shillong Accord signed by the then Naga National Council (NNC) with the Government of India. Later, misunderstanding surfaced within the outfit leaders over the issue of commencing negotiation dialogue with the Indian Government and the NSCN split in 1980 into two factions; the NSCN-K led by S S Khaplang, and the NSCN-IM, led by Isak and Muivah. The split triggered a spate of violence and factional clash between the factions.

The objective of both the factions of NSCN was to establish a Sovereign State by unifying all the Naga-inhabited areas in the North East of India and Northern Burma which the organization and the people of the area proposed as Nagalim. Unification of all Naga tribes under one administration and 'liberating' Nagalim from India is listed as one of the main objectives of the organization.

### ***Current Developments***

- NSCN-Isaac Muivah (NSCN-IM) signed a ceasefire agreement with the Government of India in 2001, but insurgency continues by other groups
- Frequent ceasefire violations
- Presence of underground groups that deal in extortion, arms, drugs smuggling, etc.
- Clashes among different tribal groups, factions
- Tensions mainly between NSCN/K, NSCN/KK
- Public protest against underground activities of the rebels
- Parallel government

### ► 4.2.2 Manipur

The people of Manipur include the Meitei tribe, the Kuki tribe and the Naga tribe. Meitei forms about 60% of the total population. Meitei are Hindu tribes following Vaishnava tradition. Some of the Meitei are Muslims and Christians, too. Meiteis live in the plains, while Nagas and Kukis are in the hill districts.

A separatist insurgency began in 1964; Manipur was made a separate state in 1972. A more violent phase did not occur until 1978 when the separatists demanded secession from the Union of India on the ground of lack of development, plundering of local resources, and a general discontent. Alleged human rights violations by Indian security forces have only fuelled the insurgency.

There are currently 34 groups, including non-violent ones that demand independence from India. In 1999, some of these groups coalesced into an alliance organization called the Manipur People's Liberation Front. Of these, the three most prominent ones are the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), and People's Liberation Army (PLA) of Manipur. The UNLF is estimated to have 2,500 active militants, while the PREPAK has 1,500, and PLA 3,000. As of today, Manipur is the worst case scenario in the north-east as far as militancy is concerned. Apart from the fact that there are more militant groups in the state than anywhere else, the rivalry between these outfits often leads to greater violence.

The Kuki insurgent groups want a separate state for the Kukis to be carved out from the present state of Manipur. The Kuki insurgent groups are under two umbrella organizations, Kuki National Organization (KNO) and United Peoples Forum.

The situation is further complicated because insurgent groups are not united for the same cause. The Nagas wish to annex part of Manipur and merge with a greater Nagaland or Nagalim, which is in conflict with Meitei insurgents demands for the integrity of their vision of an independent state. There were many tensions between different tribes and the region has witnessed numerous clashes between Nagas and Kukis and Meiteis and Muslims.

Insurgent groups are demanding alternative arrangement, reintroduction of inner line permit to remove non-local population.

There is reported nexus between Maoist and Manipur insurgents; especially PLA blockade of the NH-37 highway is a usual feature due to continuous fight with Nagaland. PLA has assisted Maoists by imparting training to cadres and supplying weapons and communication equipment.

### ► 4.2.3 Mizoram

Among the ethnic and secessionist conflicts, the resolution of the Mizoram issue was a notable success. Armed insurrection had persisted in Mizoram for more than two decades. The movement by the Mizo National Front had racial and religious overtones, and its declared aim was secession of Mizoram from the Indian Union. There was an armed uprising in 1966 and violent conflict

continued well into the 1980s. The Mizoram Accord of June 1986 succeeded in bringing the violent conflict of the past decades to a satisfactory conclusion. Three factors may be said to have contributed to this historic conflict resolution: firstly, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's sincere and positive gestures were greatly appreciated by the people of Mizoram and its leaders, which laid the initial foundation for negotiations, secondly, the maturity of the two Mizo political personalities of the time, namely, the undisputed insurgent leader Pu Laldenga and the then Chief Minister Pu Lal Thanhawala's unilateral offer of stepping down in favour of Laldenga as the chief minister and finally, the moderating influence and pressure of the Mizo civil society, especially the women who had been the most aggrieved and affected during the periods of violence.

In June 1986, the Government of India signed a peace agreement with Laldenga, leader of the Mizo National Front (MNF). By its terms, the MNF rebels laid down their arms and were granted amnesty against prosecution. The government agreed to grant full statehood to Mizoram, and Laldenga himself assumed office as chief minister, taking over from the Congress incumbent.

The model here was the Kashmir Agreement of 1975, when Sheikh Abdullah had returned to power in a similar fashion.

The agreement raised the prospect of the return of peace to the state of Mizoram. The leaders of MNF made a spectacularly successful transition; once insurgents in the jungle, they are now politicians in the Secretariat put there by the ballot box. Peace brought its own dividend in the form of water pipelines, roads and, above all, schools. By 1999, Mizoram had overtaken Kerala as India's most literate state. The integration with the mainland is proceeding apace; Mizos are learning the official language, Hindi, and watching and playing the popular game, cricket. Since they also speak fluent English (the state's own official language); young Mizos, men as well as women, have found profitable employment in the growing service sector, in hotels and airlines in particular. Mizoram's chief minister, Zoramthanga, spoke of making his territory the 'Switzerland of the East'. In this vision, tourists would come from Europe and the Indian mainland while the economy would be further boosted by trade with neighbouring Burma and Bangladesh. The Mizos would supply these countries with fruits and vegetables and buy fish and chicken in exchange. Zoramthanga is also canvassing for a larger role in bringing about a settlement between the government and the Naga and Assamese rebels. It is easy to forget that this visionary had once been a radical separatist, seeking independence from India when serving as the defence minister and vice-president of the Mizo government-in-exile.

#### ► 4.2.4 Meghalaya

Meghalaya is perhaps the least affected by insurgency in the north-east region. Problems in Meghalaya arise from the divide among various tribes as well as the divide between tribal and non-tribal settlers, identity issues and growing corruption, besides the sharp changes in demography due to Bangladeshi infiltrators. There is also fear of being reduced to minority by the native tribal population.

The main extremist groups operating in Meghalaya are:

**Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA)** GNLA aims to establish a separate Garoland for the Garo people. It was formed in 2009, and consists of 70 members, most of whom are ex-members of Achik National Volunteer Council (ANVC), Liberation of Achik Elite Force (LAEF) and National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). GNLA has been involved in extortion, attacks and bombings. Meghalaya has witnessed an upsurge in violence due to the activities of GNLA, remains the main active group in Meghalaya.

**Achik National Volunteer Council (ANVC)** ANVC was formed in 1995 with the intention of forming an Achik Land in the Garo Hills. As of now, a Suspension of Operations Agreement between the Government and ANVC has been in force since July 23, 2004.

**Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC)** HNLC is a militant organization operating in Meghalaya. It was formed in 1992. It claims to be a representative of the Khasi-Jaintia tribal people, and its aim is to free Meghalaya from the alleged domination of the Garos and the non-tribal outsiders (the "Dkhars"). It was banned by the Centre in 2000.

Over the years, the HNLC built ties with the other secessionist organizations operating in north-east India, including the NSCN-IM of Nagaland, the NDFB of Assam and the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and ULFA. The NSCN provided HNLC with moral, physical and financial support in its initial days. HNLC runs several businesses in Bangladesh.

The militant outfit Garo Hills Liberation Army, formed by deserting police personnel, have been launching guerrilla attacks against police and army personnel. Kidnapping and ransoms have become a norm in the western districts of the state. Extortion is being carried out by militants from the wealthy members of the state particularly, the coal barons. Also, ethnic tension is simmering between illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and the local indigenous tribal population. It is worth noting that these tensions are mainly due to ethnic issues and not related to religion. The clashes are between the locals and the illegal immigrants. However, criminal activities are a major concern. Trafficking of drugs like ganja, cocaine, opium, etc. is rampant as is smuggling of weapons, narcotics, black marketeering, etc. The state lies in a major smuggling route between Bangladesh and India.

## ► 4.2.5 Tripura

Tripura witnessed a surge in terrorist activities in the 1990s. The area under control of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council was increased after a tripartite agreement between New Delhi, the state government and the Council. The government has since brought the movement under control, and the government of Tripura has so far succeeded in limiting the extremist activities. There has been a steady decline in violence since 2003.

The evolution of insurgency in Tripura can be traced to the formation of the Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti (TUJS) in 1971, followed by the Tripura National



Volunteers (TNV) in 1981. The National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) was formed on March 2, 1989 and its armed wing, the National Holy Army and All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) were formed in July 1990. NLFT seeks to secede from India and establish an independent Tripuri state. NLFT is currently proscribed as a terrorist organisation in India. The two outfits came up with secessionist agenda, disputed the merger of the kingdom of Tripura with the Indian Union, and demanded sovereignty for Tripura, along with deportation of illegal migrants, the implementation of the Tripura merger agreement and the restoration of land to the tribal people under the Tripura Land Reform Act, 1960.

Between 1990 and 1995, the insurgency remained low-key. But it grew in extent and magnitude between 1996 and 2004 and then started waning. The success of the insurgency during the initial stages was due to the advantages of the rough, rugged terrain, and the porous and extensive trans-border corridors with Bangladesh. Safe havens in Bangladesh, logistic support from the then supportive Bangladesh establishment and the external intelligence agencies based there, and networking with potential insurgent outfits aided it. A build-up of weapons, explosives and wireless communication systems, and extortion and 'levies', went into the making of the volatile insurgency.

This high voltage insurgency and an orgy of violence disrupted civic life and communications, and led to the closure of many educational and financial institutions, threatening the authority of the State. The state government took on the problems in a strategic and resolute manner under the sagacious and visionary leadership of Chief Minister Manik Sarkar. It formulated a multi-dimensional and fine-tuned strategy to respond creatively to the situation. The control mechanism was subsumed in counter-insurgency operations intent on swift area domination and ascendancy, as well as psychological operations and confidence building measures. An accelerated development thrust, management of the media, civic action programmes of the security forces, and the political process were additional factors.

Tripura scripted a story of triumph over insurgency and conflict-resolution, and demonstrated that insurgency was not an insurmountable phenomenon. What was needed to tackle it was a well-crafted, multi-dimensional strategy, resolute will, right vision and direction, honest and credible leadership, creative responses to the challenge and the growth and socio-economic-infrastructure dispensation to all sections of society. Also, the well calibrated and humane combat operations combined with psychological approach to the issues ensured that the local population was not alienated.

#### ► 4.2.6 Arunachal Pradesh

The people of the three eastern districts of Arunachal Pradesh, namely Tirap, Changlang and Longding live in perpetual fear due to the presence of cadres of the two NSCN factions in the area, who resort to kidnapping, extortion and factional feuds. These three districts are part of NSCN-IM's projected State of Nagalim (Greater Nagaland).

Apart from these two Naga outfits, ULFA-I has strong presence in the region. ULFA-I cadres use the Lohit, Changlang and Tirap districts for infiltration into Myanmar, where the base camps of the outfit are located. The outfit uses these areas extensively for temporary transit camps while on the move as well as to escape counter insurgency operations in Assam.

Meanwhile, another emerging concern is the presence of CPI-Maoist cadres in the state. Movements of CPI-Maoist cadres had been reported from the Lohit and Lower Dibang Valley districts of Arunachal Pradesh.

The presence of the 53,000 strong Chakma and Hajong refugees in Arunachal Pradesh as well as influx of other foreigners, have also raised concerns among locals from time to time. According to All Arunachal Pradesh Student's Union (AAPSU) memorandum to President Pranab Mukherjee, 'The illegal settlement of Chakma and Hajong refugees has resulted in marginalization of indigenous tribes in the eastern-most part of Arunachal, while in the western part of the state, the Tibetans, Bhutanese and Nepalese are exerting their dominance over indigenous tribes and in central part of the state, there is a floating population of Bangladeshis which has created tension among various local tribes.'

Traditionally, the south-western districts of Tirap and Changlang, in the proximity of Nagaland, have been a happy hunting ground for both factions of the NSCN. While the Khaplang faction (NSCN-K) made its first inroads into the virgin territory in the early 1990s, the NSCN-IM faction soon made its move and carved out separate areas of influence in the district. In recent times, both the districts have witnessed occasional factional clashes between the outfits. Both outfits are known to run wide extortion network in these districts.

Arunachal Pradesh has also been used as a transit route by the ULFA. While the movement of the ULFA cadres between the eastern-most districts of Assam and the outfit's facilities in the Sagaing division in Myanmar through Arunachal Pradesh can be traced back to the late 1980s, the State's strategic importance for the ULFA has grown manifold after the outfit's December 2003 ouster from Bhutan, following a military crackdown. The outfit's dependence on its 28th battalion headquartered in Myanmar, for its hit and run activities in Assam, has become almost irreversible. There has, however, been a setback for the ULFA after two of the main strike units of the group's 28th battalion entered into a ceasefire agreement with the government in June 2008, diminishing the outfit's fire power to a great extent. ULFA cadres traversing the Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar route had set up transit camps and safe houses in the Manabhum Reserve Forest spread over 1,500 square kilometres in the Lohit district.

#### ► 4.2.7 Assam

After Nagaland, Assam is the most volatile state in the region. Beginning in 1979, the indigenous people of Assam demanded that the illegal immigrants who had emigrated from Bangladesh to Assam be detected and deported. The movement led by All Assam Students Union began non-violently with satyagraha, boycotts, picketing, and courting arrests.

Those protesting frequently came under police action. The election conducted in 1983 was opposed by the movement's leaders. The election led to widespread violence. The movement finally ended after its leaders signed an agreement (called the Assam Accord) with the central government on 15th August, 1985.

Under the provisions of this accord, anyone who entered the state illegally between January 1966 and March 1971 was allowed to remain but was disenfranchised for ten years, while those who entered after 1971 faced expulsion. A November 1985 amendment to the Indian citizenship law allows non-citizens who entered Assam between 1961 and 1971 to have all the rights of citizenship except the right to vote for a period of ten years.

There are several organizations that advocate the independence of Assam. The most prominent among these is the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA). Formed in 1979, the ULFA has two main goals: independence of Assam and establishment of socialist government.

The ULFA has carried out several terrorist attacks in the region targeting Indian military and non-combatants. The group assassinates political opponents, attacks police and other security forces, blasts railroad tracks, and attacks other infrastructure facilities. The ULFA is believed to have strong links with the NSCN and Naxalites.

It is also believed that they carry out most of their operations from the Kingdom of Bhutan. Because of ULFA's increased visibility, the Indian government outlawed the group in 1986 and declared Assam a troubled area. Under pressure from New Delhi, Bhutan carried a massive operation to drive out the ULFA militants from its territory.

Backed by the Indian Army, Thimphu was successful in killing more than a thousand insurgents and extraditing many more to India while sustaining very little casualties. The Indian military undertook several successful operations aimed at countering future ULFA terrorist attacks, but the organization continues to be active in the region. In 2004, ULFA targeted a public school in Assam, killing 19 children and 5 adults.

On 14 March, 2011, militants of the Ranjan Daimary led faction ambushed the BSF patrolling party on the way from Bangladoba in Chirang district of Assam to Ultapani in Kokrajhar, killing 8 jawans. Recently, Paresh Barua, leader of ULFA (anti-talks), has been arrested and sentenced to death in Bangladesh.

Of late, Maoists have been engaged in recruitment, training and extortion activities in upper Assam (Tinsukia and Dibrugarh) and Arunachal Pradesh.

The Central Government also gave special administrative autonomy to the Bodos in the state. However, the Bodos demanded a separate Bodoland, which led to a clash between the Bengalis, the Bodos, and the Indian military resulting in hundreds of deaths.

#### **4.2.7.1 Bodoland Issue and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB)**

Bodos, the largest plains tribe of Assam started an armed struggle for a separate state in the mid-1980s. This armed struggle led to ethnic cleansing of the non-

Bodos along the north bank of the Brahmaputra. The Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) Accord was signed in 1993 and the Bodoland movement became more violent during the later part of the 1990s. In February 2003, the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Accord was signed to end the one-and-a-half decade long Bodo movement. This was opposed by non-Bodos including Bengali speaking Muslims who have emigrated from Bangladesh. Non-Bodos allege that they have often been subjected to assaults, intimidations, killings, abductions and extortions by the Bodo militants and elements.

The heart of the Bodo problem is the ancient rivalry between the ancient Bodo tribes settled for ages on the northern banks of eastern Brahmaputra and the relatively recent arrival of Bengali-speaking immigrants. The Bodos speak their own language. There have been cycles of violence between the Bodos and the Bengalis who have migrated over years largely from Bangladesh and because of their agricultural skills taken over the Bodo lands slowly.

But the Bodos' demand for statehood had only distanced the non-Bodos from them. The creation of BTC in the face of a series of protests by non-Bodos is a pointer. The Bodos, who have already been outnumbered in BTAD, view the alarming rise in Muslim population – Bengali-speaking Muslims to be precise – as a potential threat. The Muslims are scattered partly on forest land and largely on the sandbars.

One of the negative fallouts of the present situation in the Bodo Territorial Areas District (BTAD) areas has been the idea of an exclusive 'ethnic territorial homeland'. The BTC, as an ethnically oriented territorial council, has failed to provide security to people other than the Bodos.

### ***The Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC)***

The 2008 violence against 'outsiders' occurred in the aftermath of the 2003 Bodo Accord which committed to safeguard Bodo language, land, socio-cultural rights, and ethnic identity. The Accord clearly stated that an autonomous self-governing body will be constituted, known as BTC within Assam in order to "fulfill the economic, educational, and linguistic aspirations and the preservation of land-rights socio-cultural and ethnic identity of the Bodos". Despite these provisions, the Bodos continue to feel insecure with regard to their land, ethnic identity and language vis-à-vis the minority communities.

The area under the BTC jurisdiction is called the Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD). BTC constitutes 70% of Non Bodo people who are against the creation of Bodoland. They are demanding cancelling villages having less than 50% Bodo people from BTC.

The BTAD consists of four new contiguous districts — Kokrajhar, Baksa, Udalguri and Chirang covering an area of 27,100 km<sup>2</sup> (35% of Assam).

The main provisions of the Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) relate 'to creation of the BTC, an autonomous self governing body within the State of Assam and under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India to fulfill economic, educational and linguistic aspirations, socio-cultural and ethnic identity of the Bodos; and to speed up the infrastructure development in BTC area'. The BTC comprises of 3,082 villages in four districts. The BTC

has 40 elected representatives and the Assam Government would nominate six more. Of the elected representatives, 30 seats are reserved for tribals, five for non-tribals and the remaining five are open for general contest.

### **The National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB)**

NDFB is an armed separatist outfit which seeks to obtain a sovereign Bodoland for the Bodo people in Assam, India. It is designated as a terrorist organization by the Government of India. NDFB was formed in 1998. NDFB claims to be a representative of the Bodo people, who form around 10% of Assam's population. The main grievances of the group are the under-development in the region and the influx of immigrants. It aims to address these issues by seceding from India, and establishing a sovereign Bodoland.

The group carried out several attacks on civilians in Assam, targeting non-Bodo civilians as well as the security forces. In May 2005, it signed a ceasefire with the Government, but some of its factions continue to indulge in militancy. Recently in May, 2014 thirty-two people were killed, many others injured and thousands were rendered homeless in two districts of Assam after recent attacks by militants belonging to the anti-talks IK Songbijit faction of NDFB-S. The Assam government handed over the probe to NIA. It is allegedly the Bodos' fear of losing political clout that led to the latest wave of attacks on immigrants in BTAD in Assam.

#### **4.2.7.2 Karbi Anglong Issue**

Karbi Anglong district is the largest amongst the 27 administrative districts of Assam. Diphu town is the administrative headquarters of the district. Karbi Anglong is one of the country's 250 most backward districts (out of a total of 640). It is one of the eleven districts in Assam currently receiving funds from the Backward Regions Grant Fund Programme (BRGF). A number of indigenous people reside in this district. The Karbis are the most prominent amongst them. Other indigenous people residing in this district include the Dimasas, the Rengmas, the Kukis, the Garos, the Tiwas, the Khasis, Hmars, the Mizos and the Chakmas.

There were violent clashes between the ethnic insurgent Karbi People's Liberation Tigers (KPLT) and the Rengma Naga Hills Protection Force (RNHPF) in Karbi Anglong district of Assam in December 2013 and January 2014. Over 3,000 people from the Karbi and Rengma Naga tribes were forced to leave their homes.

The KPLT is a breakaway faction of the ethnic insurgent Karbi Longri N.C. Hills Liberation Front (KLNLH). The KLNLH is demanding a separate State comprising two hill districts — Kabri Anglong and Dima Hasao. KLNLH is now engaged in talks with the Centre and the State government. When the KLNLH signed the Suspension of Operation agreement with the Centre and the Assam government, about 20 cadres of the outfit parted ways and formed the KPLT in 2010. The KPLT has been demanding the creation of self-ruled homeland for the Karbi people.

The RNHPF was formed in 2012 for protection of the Rengma Nagas from KPLT attacks. The outfit has been demanding creation of a regional council for the Rengma Nagas of Karbi Anglong.

### ► 4.3 Factors Responsible for Insurgency in the North-East

The factors responsible for insurgency in the North-east are given below:

- Feeling of alienation and deprivation among the tribal population
- Similar ethnicity across the border on Myanmar side
- Porosity of the border with Myanmar due to difficult terrain
- Change in demographic pattern due to infiltration from across the border
- Disconnect with the other parts of India and fellow Indians
- Widespread corruption among the ruling elite
- Lack of visionary leadership among the tribal communities
- Lack of development and basic amenities
- Easy availability of arms and ammunition
- Political support from various factions
- Instability in Myanmar

Many of our neighbouring countries are being used by insurgent groups for shelter and training. Naga groups and Assam-based insurgency groups operate from Myanmar, militant groups of Meghalaya and Tripura from Bangladesh. Arms are also procured from across China. Their main source of funding is extortion and arms and drugs smuggling.

### ► 4.4 Government's Response to North-East Extremism

A composite strategy is being followed by the Government in the North East. It includes holding peace talks with those who abjure violence and dealing strictly with violent activities. Government has signed ceasefire and suspension of operations (SOO) with most of the insurgent groups (numbering 17-18) in the region. Government has steadily pursued the policy of talks / negotiations with any outfit, which agrees to forego the path of violence and come forward for peace talks within the constitutional framework of India.

The basic guiding principles of Government have been:

- Special Schemes for development for North-East
- Special packages for infrastructural development of North-East region
- Proportionate use of force
- Dialogue and negotiations
- Structural changes to give political autonomy
- Decentralisation and protection of tribal rights
- Improving road and rail connectivity in entire region
- Look East Policy viz-a-viz North-East region

- Business Summits to attract investment in North-East region
- Exhibitions and Seminars

Some of the major developmental initiatives taken for North-East region are:

- In October 1996, the then Prime Minister announced "New Initiatives for North Eastern Region" and stipulated that at least 10% of the Budget(s) of the Central Ministries/Department will be earmarked for the development of North Eastern States.
- The Government of India had decided to create the Non-Lapsable Central Pool of Resources for the North Eastern States and Sikkim from the year 1998-99 onwards.
- The Department of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) was created in 2001 and was accorded the status of a full fledged ministry on May 2004. The ministry is mainly concerned with the creation of infrastructure for economic development of India's North-Eastern region.
- Special category status since 11th Plan: In order to mobilize financial resources, a policy decision was taken to earmark at least 10% of the Plan Budget(s) of the Central ministries/departments for development of the North Eastern states. And earmark at least 10% of the gross budgetary support (GBS) for the north-eastern states.
- In 1971, North Eastern Council was set up by an act of Parliament. It was restructured in 2002 as the regional planning body for the North Eastern Region.
- Social and Infrastructure Development Fund (SIDF) – Finance Minister's Package for NER, 2008-09
- Monitoring of mandatory expenditure of 10% of Gross Budgetary Support (GBS) for the North Eastern Region by the 51 non-exempted Central Ministries/Departments.
- Plan Scheme of 'Advocacy & Publicity' and Plan Scheme of 'Capacity Building & Technical Assistance (CB&TA)'
- Asian Development Bank assisted North East State Roads Investment Programme and World Bank assisted North East Rural Livelihood Project (NERLP)
- North East Industrial Investment and Promotion Policy, 2007
- Border Area Development Project (BADP)
- Hill Area Development Programme in the North East Region.

#### ► 4.5 North-East Insurgents and their Foreign Links

The biggest foreign link of north-east insurgents are believed to be with Myanmar. India has a long international border shared by four states, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram, with Myanmar. Difficult terrain and ethnic linkages of population on both sides of the border make it easy for the Indian insurgent groups / underground groups (IGs / UGs) in the movement across the border as well as establishing camps, including training of fresh recruits, weapon procurement and their transfer to India.

Usually arms are procured from arms market in Thailand and finally brought to these four states.

The diplomatic and political initiative with the Myanmar government has yielded some results and Myanmar Government has signed a ceasefire agreement with NSCN (K) and given a deadline to MEIIL insurgents of Manipur. But, because of their ethnic proximity and political compulsions, these groups have relocated themselves closer to the border which makes it easy for them to carry out attacks on Indian security forces.

With the cooperation of the Bangladesh Government, many IIGs (Indian insurgent groups) have been pushed out of Bangladesh. Therefore, these groups have now concentrated more in these four states.

#### ► 4.5.1 Other North-east Neighbours

Apart from Myanmar, Bangladesh has been used by north-east insurgent groups as a hide-out, especially in Chittagong hills. However, after the takeover of the Sheikh Hasina Government, it is on the decline and many members of such groups have been arrested and handed over to India.

Nepal is being used as a hideout and transit to other countries adjoining China. Kathmandu airport is the transit point. Bhutan is also used by many of the Assam based underground groups like ULFA and NDFB. There are inputs which suggest moral support of the Chinese to the north-east insurgent groups.

#### ► 4.6 Counter-Terrorism — Steps being Taken

Multi-pronged approach is required.

- Communication and connectivity
- Infrastructure improvement
- Talks with insurgent groups
- Co-ordination between central forces and state forces resulting in a much better tactical response
- Stringent law and fast criminal justice system for quick disposal of terrorist attack cases
- Zero-tolerance policy towards violence
- Greater cultural interaction with the rest of the country
- Socio-economic development that includes a holistic inclusive development
- Presence of government to be felt everywhere
- Decentralization with alertness
- Improving administrative efficiency
- Pro-people governance
- Setting up High Courts in Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura
- Coping up with regional aspirations



## ► 4.7 Key Issues

### ► 4.7.1 Feeling of Alienation / Racial Discrimination Amongst Residents of North-East

- They feel that they are not treated at par with other citizens of India.
- They feel that their culture is not promoted and properly highlighted in the right perspective in the rest of the country.
- They also feel that because of their distinct facial features they are compared to the Chinese and other similar ethnic communities. The recent murder of a north-east student in Delhi has again highlighted this sensitive issue. The government has seized the issue and has formed a special committee headed by an MP from the North-east to see how such discrimination can be avoided.

### ► 4.7.2 Should AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Power Act) be Repealed?

Although the Indian armed forces have been working in very arduous conditions but sometimes, due to stress, their behaviour also comes under the scanner. In the process, some innocent people may have suffered but the Army has also paid a heavy price through the loss of its soldiers and officers in guerrilla attacks.

There has been a long and continuous demand from the North-east that the special powers given to the armed forces in the Northeast and AFSPA should be withdrawn. Irom Sharmila Chanu has been on hunger strike for 10 years on this single issue.

It is true that, at times, security forces are accused of alleged human rights violations but with so many insurgent groups active in the whole of North East, the removal of AFSPA now is not advisable. If the armed forces are deployed without the power of search and seizure, then their deployment is meaningless. Therefore, there is a need to continue with AFSPA but the forces must also be wary of human rights violations and must be accountable for their actions and behaviour towards the public.

### ► 4.7.3 Bodo-Muslim Clashes of 2012

The Bodos have been fighting for separate Bodoland since 1986 under NDFB and ABSU. This was opposed by non-Bodos including Bengali speaking Muslims who have emigrated from Bangladesh.

In July 2012, there were communal clashes between Bodos and Muslims, which claimed many lives and displaced more than four lakh people. The violence initially started from Kokrajhar and Chirag and spread to all districts of Bodoland and lower Assam. Bodo organizations upped the ante on the illegal immigration issue demanding updating of citizens verification of Muslims and their citizenship status.

The violence in 2012 followed ethnic tensions between the indigenous Bodo people and Bengali-speaking Muslims. While the Muslims state that they are descendants of East Bengali Muslims brought to Assam during the British Raj, local communities allege that the Muslim population has increased, boosted by refugees from the erstwhile East Pakistan prior to the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971 and by subsequent illegal migration from Bangladesh.

The situation was further vitiated due to circulation of certain provocative SMSs, MMS and internet based messages triggering exodus of North-East people from the southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala under the fear of being attacked by Muslims.

As a counter to this, the Muslim students' organizations came together on one platform under United Muslims Front for People's Rights (UMFPR).

The situation was further vitiated due to circulation of certain provocative SMS, MMS and internet based messages triggering exodus of North-east people from the southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala under the fear of being attacked.

#### ► 4.7.4 Exodus of Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar

Rohingya Muslims live in north of Rakhine state of Myanmar and their population is about 8-9 lacs. They have not been recognised as citizens by Buddhist dominated Myanmar. They face persecution in Bangladesh and Thailand as well.

Bangladesh has refused them entry because

- (i) Bangladesh is already overpopulated
- (ii) Rohingya Muslims are a burden on the economy of Bangladesh
- (iii) Bangladesh does not agree to the claim that Rohingyas are of Bangladeshi origin.
- (iv) Bangladesh is already sheltering more than 3 lac Rohingya Muslims.

It is now trying to push them to India.

The exodus of Rohingya Muslims started after riots between ethnic Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in northern Rakhine state of Myanmar in June 2013. Violence between Muslims and Buddhists broke out again in late October. It resulted in at least 80 deaths, displacement of more than 20,000 people, and burning of thousands of homes. The outburst of fighting brought the total number of displaced since the beginning of the conflict to 1,00,000. Rohingyas have also suffered enforced segregation, are not allowed to leave their settlements, and are the subject of a campaign of commercial boycott led by Buddhist monks with serious threats against those who trade with Muslims. The UN has described the Rohingyas as among the 'world's most persecuted minorities'.

Over the past two years, the number of Rohingya Muslims coming into India has increased considerably. Most of them are reportedly taking shelter in Muslim-dominated areas in the country.

According to observers, the refugees have nothing in common with the Indian Muslims apart from their religion. Their way of life is completely different and hence they do not adjust too well over here.

The rising Buddhist-Muslim tensions originating in Myanmar are causing political repercussions at the regional level, raising India's security concerns.

It is a cause of worry for India that at least 1,500 Rohingya Muslims, escaping from the violence-prone Rakhine province, West Myanmar, are believed to have entered the country illegally. At least 20,000 'stateless' Rohingyas, unclaimed either by Myanmar or Bangladesh, have escaped in the aftermath of one-sided riots and other outbreaks of ethnic violence that left about 1,50,000 people displaced. It is believed that in 2013 alone, nearly 30,000-40,000 Rohingyas have infiltrated our country using the Bangladesh transit. The Bangladesh government has confirmed to New Delhi that terror groups like the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) have instigated Rohingyas to avenge last year's sectarian violence in Myanmar.

The LeT is believed to be recruiting Rohingyas, offering to help them to seek revenge against the Buddhists through terrorist acts. The Union Home Ministry has decided to conduct a fresh census on the Rohingya Muslims following these reports.

LeT and Jamaat-ud-Dawah created an outfit known as Difa-e-Musalman Arakan (Burma). This outfit was assigned to tie-up with Islamic organizations in Myanmar and Bangladesh. There are several other terror groups that are involved with the Rohingyas. While the Rohingyas are receiving funds from Saudi Arabia, weapons are apparently being sourced from Thailand.

There are sizeable Rohingya populations in Aligarh in Uttar Pradesh, in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and even Jammu and Kashmir. Rohingya refugees are often seen protesting in Delhi outside the United Nations Human Rights Commission asking for UN refugee status. Our intelligence agencies have been on the alert ever since LeT supremo Hafiz Saeed issued a statement in Lahore accusing India of assisting the Myanmar regime in its persecution of the Rohingyas.

It is believed that the terror attack in and around Mahabodhi temple in Bodh Gaya on July 7, 2013, was targeted at international Buddhist tourists to avenge the killings of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar.

With the arrest of 107 Rohingya Muslims over the past three months for illegally trying to enter West Bengal through Bangladesh, the Border Security Force (BSF) has taken up the matter with the Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) and urged the BGB 'not to push them' into India.

#### PROBABLE QUESTIONS BASED ON THIS CHAPTER

1. 'Invariably, identity crisis lies at the core of most forms of extremism in India's north-east.' What are the various identity factors which fuel extremist tendencies in the north-eastern states of India? What could be done to resolve the identity crisis?

2. How did a porous border with Myanmar give an impetus to insurgency in the North-east?
3. What are the main factors responsible for extremism in North-east?
4. How has the Government of India responded to insurgency in the North-east?
5. "The continuation of AFSPA is a classic example of a Victorian era law to deal with modern era problem." Discuss the circumstances which necessitate AFSPA and suggest changes in the Act to assuage people's sentiments.
6. Write a short note on each model that deals with the issue of extremism:
  - a. Tripura Model
  - b. Mizoram Model