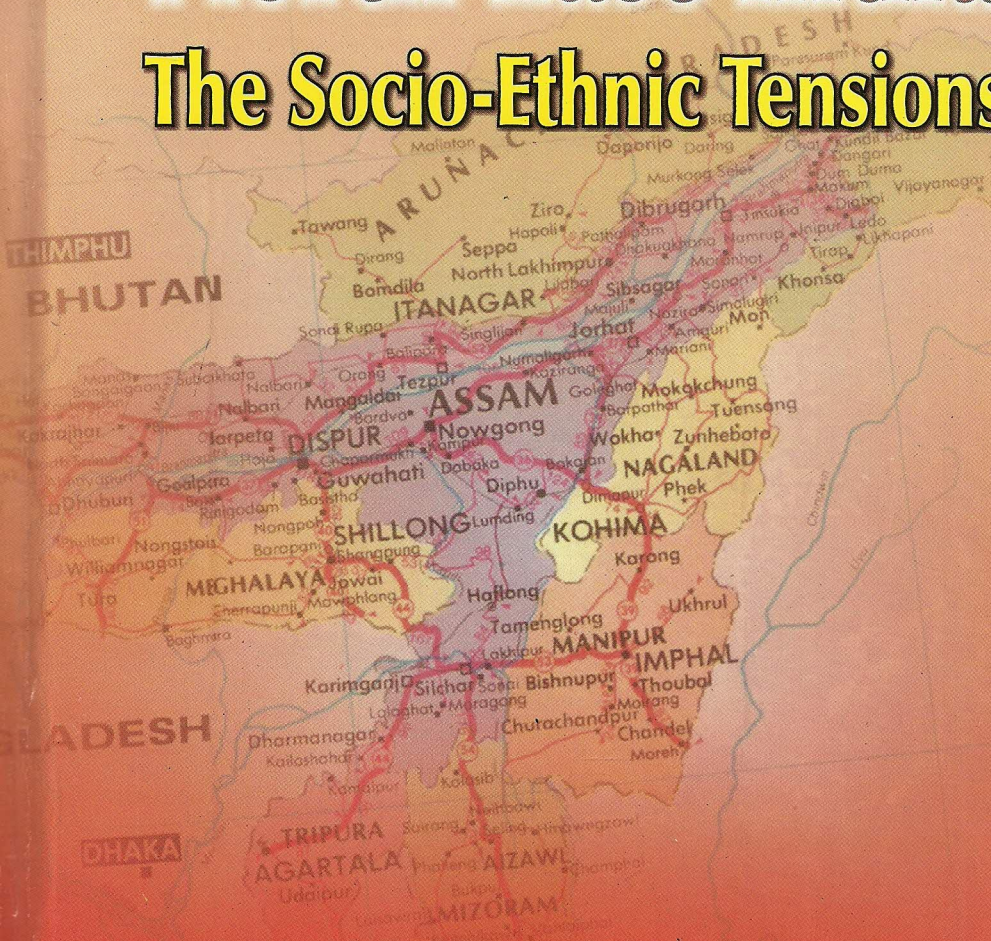


Security Threats to North-East India

The Socio-Ethnic Tensions



Lt Gen N S Narahari, PVSM

The North-East Region is a crucible where Aryan, Dravidian and Mongoloid races are intermixed. This region is about 2,65,000 sq. km. in area with a population of forty million. It is enveloped by Bhutan, Nepal and China in the North and North-East, and in the South by Bangladesh and Myanmar. It is connected to the rest of India by the sole 20 km wide Siliguri corridor through which all lifelines to North-East pass. This region is therefore very sensitive from the point of view of national security and national integrity.

The remoteness of this region and its ethnic mix is further complicated by the influx of refugees and illegal Bangladeshi Muslims in large numbers. It has created socio-ethnic tensions, identity crisis and dilution of political power to indigenous people. These factors with the additive of lower economic growth and development have resulted in serious discontentment, insurgency and demands for secession. Some of the neighbouring states have aggravated this problem that has now been raging for four decades or so.

This book traces the genesis of the problem that each state of the North East is going through and how they impact on national security. Certain options have been suggested to bring peace and prosperity to the region.

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Lieutenant General NS Narahari is an engineering graduate from Bangalore. He obtained his M.Sc (Defence Studies) from Madras University after obtaining 'Distinction' for his dissertation "Sino-Indian Border Dispute: Historical and Legal Aspects". He has a couple of dozen articles published in professional journals and newspapers.

In his 37 years of service in the Army, he has served five years in the North-East, which took him to various corners of the region in the sixties and the eighties. After retirement he has toured North-East extensively, meeting people from a large cross section of the North Eastern society.

Lieutenant General Narahari has held several important command and staff appointments and retired as the Commandant of College of Combat, Mhow (MP). He has also served as a faculty member of Defence Services Staff College, Wellington (Nilgiris), Tamilnadu.

The USI awarded him the Field Marshal K M Cariappa Chair to carry out research on the socio-ethnic tensions in North-East India; a historical perspective and the effect of these tensions on national integrity and security. This book is the outcome of that research.

(Map not to Scale)

Security Threats
to
North-East
India

The Socio-Ethnic Tensions

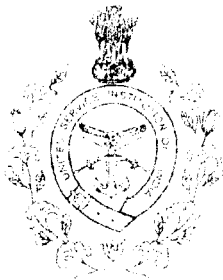
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Security Threats to North-East India

The Socio-Ethnic Tensions

Lt. Gen N S Narahari, PVSM (Retd)



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Preface

The North Eastern Region makes a fascinating study of diversified people, of fauna and flora. It is an anthropologist's dream and a statesman's nightmare. This Region is dominated in the North by the snow capped Himalayan ranges 5000 to 6000 meters high, which gradually come down to 1000 to 1500 meters on its Eastern rim i.e the Patkai Bum ranges. The mountain slopes are steep, interspersed by narrow and deep valleys, covered by thick tropical forests. Three major valleys, Brahmaputra, Barak and Surma, are named after the three-river system, which drain the region. These have attracted immigrants on a large scale for several years, and influenced the course of the history of this region.

The North East Region has been the eastern gateway into the Indian Subcontinent. The earliest known large-scale immigration was of people of Austeric stock, speaking Sino-Tibetan languages and this took place in and around 5 BC. These were, probably, the progenitors of the present day Bodos, who settled down in Brahmaputra Valley. These were followed by other tribes from South West China via Northern Burma over the Patkai mountain ranges, who settled down in the hill areas, bordering the valleys. The Bodo tribes gradually pushed westwards along the valley and their presence extended into North Bengal and Eastern Bihar. Around the first millennium BC Aryan movement and Sanskritisation of the Gangetic plains started. As the Aryans moved eastwards, they overwhelmed the Bodos and pushed them further eastwards. This contact was the beginning of the Aryanisation of Indo-Mongoloid stocks, who were then known as Kirats and Mlechhas by Aryans. Last of the major migrations, then, took place in Thirteenth Century AD, when militarily better organised and

equipped Tai-Ahoms came in from South Western China via South East Asia. North Eastern India is thus a crucible, in which Mongoloid races are intermixed with Austero-Indians, Aryans and Dravidians. Subsequent migrations, ie, after Seventeenth Century till date, of Bengalis, Nepalese and tribals (Tea labour) from Chota Nagpur plateau, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, have added to the diverse mosaic of the population of this region.

North East India was the last region to be subjugated by the East India Company. The East India Company got entry through a commercial treaty with the Ahom King in 1793 and were gradually drawn into the vortex of internecine royal squabbles. By the end of Nineteenth Century, the entire North Eastern Region was under British suzerainty, as was the rest of India. They encouraged internal migration to facilitate their local administration, productive exploitation of natural resources of the region and building up of surface communications. By the time India became independent, major demographic changes had taken place in the Brahmaputra Valley. Post-Independence Hindu diaspora from East Pakistan took place into Brahmaputra Valley and Tripura. Illegal East Pakistani/Bangladeshi Muslim immigration also took place, and continues to take place, due to internal economic problems and political turmoil in Bangladesh. This has affected adversely the entire North Eastern Region including the Hill States of Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh. This demographic invasion into North Eastern India is creating economic, cultural, linguistic problems in this region. Appendix A to Chapter 3 will give the demographic details and comparisons between North Eastern States and the States of rest of India. Population movement, not termed as immigration, when Nation State concept and sanctity of International Boundaries were not enforced rigidly, was a common phenomenon. Large scale movements by people, looking for greener pastures or following on the heels of successful discoveries and invasions, have taken place for centuries, viz. Americas (North and South), India, South Africa and so on. Natural

growth of population, when mixed with immigration, puts pressure on the available resources. It creates social, economic and, in some areas, ethnic tensions. When nation states adopt democracy as their political way of life and voting becomes a means to power, the demographic invasions then take a more critical turn, because indigenous people feel the fear of dilution and even loss of their political power. In extreme cases this might lead to balkanisation of nation states, viz Yugoslavia.

Effective British Indian administration, exposure to gradually expanding school system, pro-independence movement, and the Second World War, which necessitated improved surface communication, created an awareness in the people of the North Eastern Region. They felt that their cake, whose size had increased due to increased productive activity in different sectors, is being claimed by more and more people, who did not belong to the North Eastern region. Concurrently with this, the Inner Line Regulation of 1873 was legislated by the British Indian administration, firstly, to reduce their administrative costs and, secondly, ostensibly to protect the isolated and alienated hill people from being exploited by the people from the rest of India. The Inner Line Regulation, however, did not affect the gradual expansion of Christian missionary work in the hill regions. Thus, the influence of the missionaries grew rapidly in most hill areas, with the exception of Imphal Valley, Tripura and the present day Arunachal Pradesh.

The Independence movement compelled Britain to send in Simon Commission, Cripps Commission and the Cabinet Mission. During these commissions, there were representations from a number of tribal areas for separate independent states, viz Nagaland and Manipur; besides claims for autonomous districts and hill states separated from Assam. Assam province at that time consisted of the entire North Eastern region, barring Arunachal Pradesh and the princely states of Manipur and Tripura, under its administrative umbrella. This was the beginning of sub nationalism.

The growth of sub nationalism was due to the combination of several factors; firstly, a sub national group, not identifying itself with the rest of the nation, because of its historical and geographical isolation from the so called mainstream of the nation. (This is not surprising in a diversified Nation State like India); secondly, due to the perceived social, cultural and economic injustice actually or likely to be heaped on them; thirdly, due to elite groups in the sub nations seeing themselves out of the centre stage of power. These fears grew after independence, despite the Indian Constitution and its Sixth Schedule giving special status to the Schedule Castes/ Schedule Tribes (SC/ST) of the North Eastern region. These fears and subregional aspirations gave rise to several separatist movements, starting with Nagaland, followed by Mizoram, Manipur and the tribal belt of Tripura. All these movements slipped into militancy and then on to insurgencies. It is a pity, that only after considerable loss of lives and property due to hostilities, the Central Government yielded to create the States of Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram. The state of insurgency and feeling of bitterness and alienation continues in Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura.

The case of Assam, which has been adversely and seriously affected by demographic invasion, is slightly different, though militant activities there are quite virulent. The state of affairs in this Region, which has 99 per cent of its external boundaries with foreign nations and only a narrow 20 kms contact with the rest of India, is not conducive both from the point of view of national security, as also from the point of view of national integrity, especially because of separatist movements. We shall study these aspects in detail, State by State, in the subsequent chapters.

The North Eastern region's sensitivity with regard to its geographical location became critical after the partition of the subcontinent and its inadequate assimilation with the rest of India. Despite this, the Indian political leaders and the media, who should have educated the leaders and public, remained uninterested and

ill informed, barring a few exceptions. This can be illustrated by a letter written to Nehru by none other than Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in 1950, quote "Our Northern or North Eastern approaches consist of Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Darjeeling and tribal areas of Assam. From the point of communication they are weak spots. The contact of these areas with us is by no means close and intimate. The people living in these areas have no established loyalty or devotion to India. Even Darjeeling and Kalimpong areas are not free from Pro-Mongoloid prejudices." unquote. (MD Agarwal (ed), *Ethnicity, Culture and Nationalism in North East India*) If this sort of attitude existed in the nation's top leadership, it would permeate to others, especially to the top bureaucracy. This was probably responsible for so many ethnic and secessionist movements in North East India; as well as the inadequate attention it received in the earlier five-year plans. The so-called 'Main Stream' is wholly responsible for it. It is only the Sino-Indian War of 1962 that gave a jolt to our leaders, but by then, the psychological and socio-political damage had already been done.

The Pakistan Syndrome and 'Threat from North West mindset' has affected the national leaders and the media. Hence, the North East gets very little mention even now in national newspapers with rare exceptions. The price the nation has paid in terms of human lives and material damage has been no less than in Jammu and Kashmir. The scope of this study includes all areas East of Easting 88 degree, i.e East of North Bengal and Sikkim, which is the only gateway to the North Eastern region; and its socio-ethnic problems are similar to those of rest of North East India.

I have deliberately not gone into details of agitation and insurgency movements, because they are the offshoots of socio-ethnic tensions. This book, however, analyses the historic development of socio-ethnic tensions, causative factors contributing to the present state of affairs in the North - Eastern region, and their effect on national security and national integrity. I have concluded this study with my humble suggestion for its solution.

NS Narahari
Lt. Gen.(Retd.)

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Geo-Politics of the Region

The Region under study includes North Bengal, Sikkim, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and Meghalaya. All these are linked with the rest of India through a 20 kms width of a narrow corridor at Siliguri. The corridor extends from the Eastings 88 degree to 90 degree, i.e. a distance of about 150 kms, with an average width of 50 kms, flanked on the North by Nepal, Bhutan and China. This border region is heavily forested at lower altitudes and by snow capped mountains at high altitudes in the North. In the South it is flanked by the erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, and Myanmar. The border region with Bangladesh is riverine with shifting river courses. Chumbi Valley of Tibetan Autonomous Region (Chinese) projects into the Indian side like a dagger and it is barely 50 kms as the crow flies, from the Siliguri corridor.

Before partition of the Indian subcontinent, the major surface communications, including inland water transport, to North Eastern region was mainly through undivided Bengal. After partition, this region is connected to the rest of India only by rail and road communications, passing through the narrow land corridor between Kishanganj (Bihar) and Cooch Bihar (North Bengal). There lies the sensitivity of this corridor to the survival of North East India in peace, and it is essential in a war situation. Even the oil pipeline, from the oil fields and refineries from Assam has to pass through this sensitive corridor.

North East India borders five foreign states, i.e. Nepal, Bhutan, China in the North, Myanmar and Bangladesh in the South; nearly 50 per cent of India's external boundary! Most of this border

region is underdeveloped and peopled by different tribes, many of whom have transborder tribal affinities. Before partition, many of these border regions had easy trade relations with the neighbouring countries and now because of transnational trade restrictions, there is an inbuilt inhibition for this economic activity. This will be analysed subsequently.

Having seen the geography of this region, let us look into India's relations with the countries bordering this region.

India is territorially and demographically very large compared to the other nations in the region, barring China. Its national power and its potential for growth are considerable and it is, at present, outmatched only by China. Smaller, economically and militarily less strong states of this region, fear and suspect India's hegemonistic possibilities. Its post independence militaristic record in the creation of Bangladesh, eviction of Portuguese from Goa, absorption of Sikkim into its Nation State, its military assistance to Sri Lanka and Mauritius does not make things any easier for India's smaller neighbours, despite its record in democracy and proclamation on 'Panchsheel'. It causes concern to them.

India vis-a-vis Nepal

Nepal is a land locked country. It is the last of the surviving Hindu Kingdoms with a fledgling democracy, where the King's powers are more than just constitutional. Nepal has had for centuries, strong cultural, historic and economic ties with India. Nepal's umbilical cord is embedded in India and it is sensitive to this.

Indo-Nepal relations are governed and guided by the Indo-Nepalese Treaty of 1950. She does not want to live with it, at least some political parties want it renegotiated, but she cannot live without it in some form or another. There is always the fear of the big brother. Most of the Indian Army's Gurkha Regiments recruit men from Nepal, and Army pensioners, to an extent, help Nepal's economy. Close to a million Gurkhas are employed in various Indian States, albeit in lower level jobs. Similarly, there is a strong Indian presence in Nepal's terai region. Of late, probably more, by default than by intent, Pakistan's ISI activities aimed at India,

have grown strong and taken roots in Nepal. India cannot afford to go soft on this issue. Their activity includes induction of agents trained in terrorist activities, smuggling of arms and ammunition and fundamentalist religious teachers mostly into UP, Bihar and North Bengal. Nepal also harbours inadvertently many fugitives from the Indian side. This was one of the major subjects for discussion during the visit of Prime Minister of Nepal to India, in August 2000. The border is very porous as it is elsewhere in the North East.

India and Bhutan

Bhutan is another land-locked small country, whose umbilical cord rests with India. In the North, Bhutan borders China. China has territorial claims inside West Bhutan, i.e. on the eastern shoulder of Chumbi Valley. For the time being, China is not pressing for it, but the fear is always there.

India supports 85 per cent of Bhutanese development plans, buys power from Bhutanese Power Project, paid for by India, and provides training facilities for its civilian technical and military personnel. Bhutan was made a member of UN by India's assistance, but by the 1949 Treaty, India maintains an advisory capacity in Bhutan's foreign policies.

Bhutan has serious problems with regard to the immigrant Nepalese (called Bhupalis or 'Ngolopolas') many of whom are recent settlers, post 1959, without permission. All these people are in the terai region of Southern Bhutan bordering North Bengal. They did contribute considerably by their hard work, for development of this terai belt. In early nineties, Bhutan Government took stern unilateral action to evict the illegal Bhupali settlers. Bhutanese hostility forced even legal settlers out, due to insecurity. A total of 1,20,000 to 1,30,000 are believed to have fled Bhutan in early Nineties. Out of these evicted Bhupalis, about 95,000 are living in seven refugee camps in Jhapa (Eastern Nepal), close to the Indo-Nepal border, opposite the Siliguri corridor. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees is looking after these camps. The balance, an estimated 20,000 to 30,000, are in North Bengal, creating problems for tea estates, for relatives, and friends with

whom they have moved in. Groups of these take part in attacks on villages across the border into Bhutan (Sanjoy Hazarika, *Strangers of the Mist*). They are also creating law and order problems in Duars area of North Bengal. The Bhutanese concern was about the influx of Nepalese, who probably would have formed one sixth of the total population of Bhutan. They draw a parallel between themselves and Sikkim, where indigenous Bhutias and Lepchas were overwhelmed by the influx of Nepalese in about 100 years. Talks between Nepal and Bhutan are going on to settle the problem of Bhupalis. But the Indian concern would be the state of tension in an already sensitive Siliguri corridor and ability of these marauding Bhupali's for mischief, and they are available as mercenaries.

A number of militant/secessionist organisations like the United Liberation Federation of Assam, Bodo Liberation Tigers and National Bodo Liberation Front, finding the Brahmaputra Valley too hot for them, due to security forces' action, have taken sanctuary in the jungles of Southern Bhutan as uninvited guests for the past few years. Despite requests from Indian Government, Bhutan government was unwilling and unable to take effective action to drive them out due to several factors; firstly, due to their inadequate capability to tackle these well-trained and organised cadres, who could turn their ire against the local inhabitants, living in scattered villages. Secondly, main means of communication for people from Eastern Bhutan to Western Bhutan or to India is through NH 31, passing through Bodo and ULFA infested areas in Lower Brahmaputra Valley and they could be targeted. Thirdly a nexus has surfaced recently between some Bhutanese officials and these militant groups (*Asian Age*, 5 May 2000). The King of Bhutan had to shift some educational institutions from Eastern Bhutan out of fear for their security.

Due to pressure from Indian Government and their own internal security perceptions, Bhutanese government seems to have taken a formal decision to oust these militant organisations from their soil. Indo-Bhutanese relations need to mature, for their mutual benefit and security requirements.

Indo-Bangladesh Relations

North Eastern Region is geographically and historically connected more with the erstwhile East Bengal/East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, than rest of India. Bangladesh (East Pakistan) was liberated from Pakistan, aided and abetted by India. Bangladesh touches North Bengal (Besides West Bengal), Assam, Meghalaya and envelopes Tripura from three sides. India is the upper riparian state for all rivers flowing through Bangladesh. Invasion into parts of North East India in the past by Turks and Moguls and the entry of the British East India Company was from the erstwhile East Bengal, and so too has been the migration from Nineteenth Century onwards. The road, rail and inland water transport to North East India was also from East Bengal and hence the trade ties were through East Bengal. Bangladesh now continues to play its part in this region, directly as well as indirectly, covertly and overtly.

It will be harsh to brand Bangladesh as a 'Basket case'. Because of its geographic position, it is subjected to floods, cyclones and even droughts, which envelopes most of the country. If India, as the bigger country, could be a bit more generous then with Bangladesh's cooperation, some of these problems could be reduced. By helping Bangladesh to develop border districts, immigration problems may be reduced. This may be a cheaper political and social price. But India has not done so. Indian intelligence agencies had developed an active interest in the late sixties in forming bases of influence in student wings of erstwhile Pakistan, which eventually helped in forming the underground movements like Mukti Bahini, before the 1971 Indo-Pak War. Indian security forces, especially the Indian Army, shed its sweat and blood to create 'Sonar Bangla'. These sacrifices were soon forgotten, amidst internal dissensions, more so, after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rehman. India gave covert support in the mid seventies to Chakma tribals in their struggle to protect their living space in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and, probably, to reduce the Chakma exodus to North Eastern India. Bangladesh, in turn, is turning a 'Nelsonian eye' towards anti Indian activities from Bangladesh soil by Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Tripura

originated underground (UG) movements. These UG groups have training camps, bases inside Bangladesh and transit routes for smuggled weapons, from Chittagong Port, into their hideouts in North East India. All these activities are backed by Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) Organisation. The top leaders, most prominent among them being Shri Paresh Barua of ULFA, are staying and operating from Dhaka since a decade. The right wing fundamentalist political parties and religious groups are facilitating, with the active assistance from Pakistan's ISI, indoctrination of fundamentalism to immigrant Muslims in Indian border districts, especially in North Bengal and Assam where Bangladeshi illegal immigrants are in large numbers.

Bangladesh politics is forever in turbulence. They have had military rule for a long time. Democracy seems to have taken shaky roots; it is more agitation politics decided on the street than the normal political disagreements in their Parliament. Fundamental political parties, whose share of votes is increasing in every election, supplement the agitational politics. Lakhs of Bengali Muslims had migrated to Assam and Tripura during the first half of the Twentieth Century and more have illegally migrated into India after 15 August 1947. The former have assimilated more or less into Assamese society, while the latter are not welcome at all. Successive Prime Ministers of Bangladesh have denied the presence of illegal Bangladesh immigrants on Indian soil. This has had an adverse affect on demography. The basic cause for agitation in Assam and Tripura has been the issue of illegal immigration. This will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

In any political dialogue between India and Bangladesh, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, if he or she is accommodating, treads on sensitive ground. They get branded as 'India lovers' by the opposition and rightist political parties. The present PM, Shaikh Hasina, suffers from this problem and the latest reports indicate active ISI interest in destabilising her government. On the other hand, India being a bigger country has not shown much accommodation and sustained will power to promote better Indo-Bangladesh relations. There has to be more 'give' than 'take' at appropriate times.

Sino-Indian Relationship

India and China are the two Asian giants with nearly matching territorial size, demography, resources and potential for growth. They are both likely, in the next few decades, to look towards South East Asia for markets and political influence. China has an edge in this region, because of the large ethnic Chinese population in this region, with better economic base.

India and China share about 4000 kms of boundary between them out of which about 1500 kms lie in the North Eastern region. In India's perception, the McMahon Line, delineated at the tripartite Shimla Conference, attended by Indian, Chinese and Tibetan representatives, forms the boundary between India and China in this region. But the Chinese, declined to recognise this line and even its delineation and, disputed India's claims in the area of Khinzamane, Bumla and Longchu in Arunachal Pradesh. There are similar border disputes in Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Himalayas and Ladakh division of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).

Relations between the two countries soured after China's forcible takeover of Tibet, to which India acquiesced and Dalai Lama fled Tibet to take shelter in India. In 1954, India discovered a Chinese strategic road, linking Chinese province of Xinjiang with Tibet Autonomous Region, in the Aksaichin Plateau, which India claims to be inside her territory. It is outside the scope of this study to go into the details of Sino-Indian border dispute. The 1962 Sino-Indian War was fought over this dispute and China is in occupation of about 33,000 sq kms of Indian territory in Ladakh region of J & K. In the North East, Chinese forces withdrew to their side of the McMahon Line after capturing areas up to Bomdila in West Kameng District and Walong in Lohit District of Arunachal Pradesh. China claims the entire Arunachal Pradesh, about 90,000 sq kms, as hers. In June 1986, Chinese forces infiltrated up to about 3 kms into Sum Do Rang Chu Valley in Khinzamane area and established a post, following which the Indian Army took up a forward posture along the entire Sino-Indian border in North East and developed road communications to back up their forces. A warlike situation developed in 1987, which quietened down after the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Beijing. India

and China have agreed to reduce the presence of their armies in the forward posture and established a Joint Working Group to reduce tension in the border areas. They have also agreed to set aside the border dispute and move forward for co-operation in other fields. In recent years, top leaders of both countries have visited each other.

India's May 1998 nuclear tests, and the subsequent hasty statements made by India's top leadership, soured relations again. Since then, Presidents and Foreign Ministers of both countries have visited each other to keep the contentious issues under control.

From all this, one can fathom how sensitive Sino-Indian relations are, in that it could blow up, if not into a full-scale war, but into a tense situation. The recent escape of a Buddhist religious leader from China, who claims to be Karmapa Rimpoche of Sikkim's Rumtek Monastery, and its follow up incidents, is one such example.

In the sixties and the seventies, during the days of Mao-Tse-Tung, China was actively exporting peoples' revolution to many underdeveloped countries. Indian insurgents in North East also sought and got assistance from China in the seventies. This stopped in the eighties because of changed Chinese strategy and also probably they found that India's political resilience, will power and military power could keep these insurgency movements at tolerable levels, though at a high cost. There seems to be some change in their strategy of late. A top level ULFA functionary, when captured recently, seems to have confessed that the Chinese supply them with arms in private ships through Chittagong Port.

China protested when the State of Arunachal was formed, because of its claims in this area. China has also not accepted Sikkim's absorption into the Indian Union in 1974.

So long as border disputes and territorial claims remain, there will not be too much cordiality between these two Asian giants, despite improved relations in other spheres. Pakistan and China have maintained close economic and military relations since 1963. China has helped buildup Pakistan's armament industry and has also transferred nuclear and missile technology to it. It has also transferred nuclear capable short-range missiles to Pakistan. China

has followed Kautilya's philosophy of befriending neighbour's neighbour. In any external security assessment, Indian security planners have to take into account the Sino-Pakistan Axis. It is in China's strategic interest to keep disputes and claims going; and to keep India strategically imbalanced, China maintains its ability to materially support secessionist movements and insurgencies in the North East, which would form a logistic base for India in any security oriented operations in North East India.

India and Myanmar

Myanmar's independence closely followed that of India. There was a close relationship between the top leaders of both countries especially, Pandit Nehru and Mr. Aung San, who led Myanmar's independent struggle. After the assassination of Aung San and his colleagues in 1948, political power passed on to military rulers, interspersed with brief spells of civilian rule. There is lukewarm but pragmatic relationship between the two countries. Young student leaders who favour democracy and supporters of Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of Mr Aung San, have been given humanitarian shelter in India, but are not permitted to carry out any political activity yet. This probably finds favour with the military Junta in Myanmar, because it keeps those many hostile people off their back.

The international border between India and the erstwhile Burma (Now Myanmar) were formalised after the Yandobo Treaty in 1826. It was further confirmed in a meeting between Nehru, Prime Minister of India and U Nu, the Prime Minister of Myanmar, in 1953. It stretches from Namkia mountains (bordering Arunachal Pradesh), Patkai Bum (bordering, Nagaland), Hamolin (bordering Manipur) down to Chin Hills (bordering Mizoram), all continuing segments of Eastern Himalayas. The administration of the border belt was minimal or even non existent, during the British colonial days. After Independence, India extended its administration over these areas fairly satisfactorily, despite Nagaland problem, which became violent in mid fifties. Myanmar, however, was plagued by separatist movements all along its mountainous rim, (in an arc from North to East) by Kachins, Shans, as well as the Burmese

Communist Party. There is tribal affinity astride the Indo-Myanmar border. Myanmarese Army's inadequate and non-continuous efforts have facilitated the formation of a strong base for Kachins and their Kachin Independent Army (KIA). They control the area and have been providing assistance to several Indian insurgent groups, operating in Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Assam. They also control drug traffic through its area. In end 1999, Myanmar under political pressure from India took effective military action against various Indian UG groups' camps in Myanmar.

Indo-Myanmar relations have never been very warm after MrAung San's assassination. Thousands of Indian settlers (Traders, officials and plantation labour) were forced out of Myanmar in the sixties. India was one of the nations, which condemned the take over of Myanmar by the military Junta in 1980. India vetoed Myanmar's attempt to join the Non-Aligned Movement at Jakarta Summit in 1992. Of late, 'Real Politic' has resulted in exchange of visits by the foreign ministers of the two countries and there have been two accords in January 1994. One was on border trade and increase of contact between civilian authorities on both sides; and the other was to improve the border checks for control of contraband trade including narcotics, which reportedly amounts to several crores. The Indian Border Roads Organisation has built a motorable, all weather road from India's border town of Moreh to Kalewa on River Chindwin inside Myanmar. These confidence-building measures would go a long way to reduce problems originating from this border region. China, despite UN sanctions, is giving military aid to Myanmar. It is also building road communications between Northern Burma and the Chinese Yunan province. Development of this road and China's cordial relationships with Chin insurgents, and through them with the Chin people, will provide the Chinese an additional avenue for operations against India in a hostile environment. India's strategic planners will have to take this into their consideration. In July 1963, a Chinese brigade reportedly appeared opposite Tirap in north eastern Burma, as a pointer of things to come. (Nirmal Nibedon, *The Night of the Guerrillas*). China, reportedly, has built a Naval

servicing station on a Myanmar inland in the Bay of the Bengal, thus facilitating Chinese Naval presence in the Bay.

From the preceding analysis of India's foreign relations in this part of the subcontinent, it is obvious that this region is sensitive and susceptible to foreign influences. These will be discussed in greater details subsequently.

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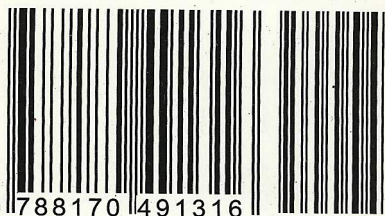
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