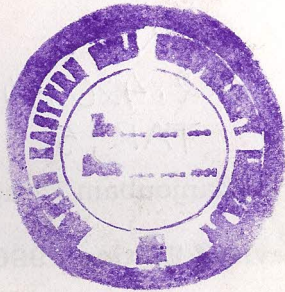


INSURGENCY MOVEMENT IN NORTH-EASTERN INDIA



PHANJOURBAM TARAPOT



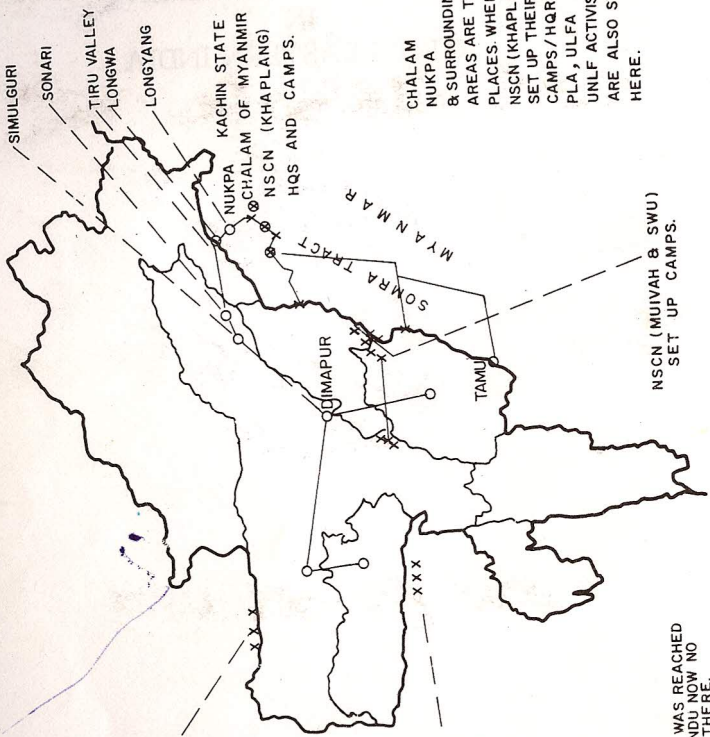
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IMPHAL — DIMAPUR — SIMULGURI — SONARI — TIRU VALLEY (TRIUNJUNCTION OF ASSAM, NAGALAND AND ARUNACHAL PRADESH)
 BY BUS BY TRAIN ON FOOT
 — PHUMCHING — LONGWA (INDO-BURMA BORDER) — LONGYANG — LUE — CHALAM — PHUMCHING — NUKPA — NUKPA
 (9 DAYS ON FOOT)

ONE ROUTE MOSTLY USED ON FOOT
 IN INSURGENTS BODO SECURITY FORCE HAS MADE SAFE SANCTUARIES IN N.E.

OTHER ROUTES ARE NOT GIVEN.

INSURGENCY-AFFECTED STATES
 ASSAM
 NAGALAND
 TRIPURA
 MANIPUR



CHALAM NUKPA & SURROUNDING AREAS ARE THE PLACES WHERE NSCN (KHAPLANG) SET UP THEIR CAMPS/HQRS. PLA, ULFA UNLF ACTIVISTS ARE ALSO STAYING HERE.

NSCN (MIVAH & SWU) SET UP CAMPS.

CHOTADAMAI, ADAMPUR AND OTHERS IN BANGLADESH'S SYLHET DISTRICT WHERE PLA, ULFA, NSCN, UNLF ACTIVISTS SET UP CAMPS.

LHASA (TIBET) WAS REACHED FROM KATHMANDU NOW NO MORE CAMPS THERE.

Cjeu

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... IN THE MEMORY OF MY UNCLE, PHANJOU BAM
MAIPAK.

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Preface

After the first edition was brought out in February 1993, a lot of new things have happened in India's sensitive north eastern region. The factional fights within different underground organisations and ethnic clashes caused serious concern, among various communities inhabiting the region. The heavy deployment of security forces at different places particularly at insurgency-affected areas and "coordination" of various security agencies to deal with the situation did not produce desired results. Apart from trying to find out the origin of insurgency movement, the book also seeks to trace out the cause of the fights within different factions of the underground outfits.

This edition has added two chapters—Chapter 11 and Chapter 12. While Chapter 11 deals with factional feuds within the insurgent set-ups, Chapter 12 deals with the origin and cause of the ethnic clashes in the region. The additional chapters, like the previous ones, are based on interviews with concerned people and historical materials.

I have added some new points in the introductory pages also, and the Appendix-M and Appendix-N are enclosed at the end of the book for general information. This, I think, may help readers understand an overall view of what is happening in the region.

As pointed out in previous edition, I have consulted some history books. While some books say the British declared war against Myanmar on 5 March 1824, history

of Manipur by J. Roy says it was on 24 February 1824. It should not be a point of controversy at least in this book as the story in the book gives the background of Manipuri princes' attempt to drive out Myanmars from Manipur.

It appears to me that the issues confronting the north eastern region have not been properly understood, and the book I hope, will help readers understand to some extent the problems and insurgency movement in north eastern India. As for solution to the problems, I leave the matter to wiser minds. Lastly, I would very much welcome any suggestion for improvement of the book.

Phanjoubam Tarapot

Introduction

Quite for sometimes, various insurgent outfits have been waging an armed struggle in the north-eastern region of India. There are at least 18 underground organisations (some of them self-confessed revolutionary organisations) operating in the region but only five or six of them are active.

While the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) has launched an "armed revolution for an independent Assam," the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) of Manipur and Revolutionary People's Front, political wing of People's Liberation ^{PLA} Army), are fighting for an "independent Manipur." The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), fighting for a "sovereign and independent" Nagaland, had been split in April 1988. While the NSCN (Isaac and Muivah) has been active in Manipur, Nagaland and parts of Assam, the NSCN (Khaplang), based in upper Myanmar, has formed Indo-Burma Revolutionary Front (IBRF) along with UNLF and ULFA. The IBRF's avowed aim is to "liberate" what it calls Indo-Burma region (the north-eastern region of India and north-western part of Burma).

The All Tripura Tribal Force (ATTF) is now considered as the only active underground organisation in that State after the Tribal National Volunteers (TNV) had signed an accord with the government in 1988. But, the ATTF, unlike the other extremist outfits in the region, is demand-

ing a separate tribal homeland. The United People's Volunteer of Arunachal Pradesh (UPVA), the sole underground outfit in Arunachal Pradesh, has already run out of steam in its early stage following the surrender of its supremo, Chau Empu Choupu. The demands of the Achik Liberation Matgrik Army (ALMA) and Hyniewtrept Volunteer Council (HVC) in Meghalaya and Hmar People's Convention (HPC) in Mizoram, are within the framework of the Indian Constitution.

Towards the close of 1992, the main secessionist organisations—ULFA, UNLF, NSCN (Isaac and Muivah) and PLA—in the region had become very active causing serious concern among the law-enforcing agencies in the area. The spurt of a series of violent and secessionist activities brought all the top security authorities of the seven States together for a joint action against the ultras. The present indications reveal that the entire north-eastern States are likely to reel again under the spree of the violent activities unleashed by the insurgents in the years to come. Although these organisations have suffered serious setbacks on earlier occasions, they have regrouped all the scattered extremists at their camps in Bangladesh and upper Myanmar around the end of 1992. The ultras' nexus with some foreign countries has also caused concern among the national leaders. The crossing of about 200 NSCN (Isaac and Muivah) activists over to Bangladesh in July and August 1991 to seek arms training and purchase of sophisticated weapons was the main topic in the meeting of Chief Ministers, Governors and senior political leaders at Imphal on 11 August 1991. How the ultras crossed over to Bangladesh without being detected by any intelligence network caused a flutter in top-security circles.

While the politicians attribute the cause of insurgency movement as the direct result of unemployment of educated youths and economic backwardness of the region, the problems are also connected with the historical background coupled with the sense of alienation prevailing in

the minds of younger generation. The feeling of negligence by the Centre, rampant corruption in public life and geographical location of the region have also contributed to the factors that led to cause the problems, particularly in Manipur and Nagaland.

In spite of its abundant natural and human resources, the economic imbalance, feeling of utter negligence by the Centre, frustration among educated youths and sense of insecurity in their own land are taken to have caused insurgency in Assam. The north-eastern region is rich in natural resources. Even after forty years of Independence, the entire region is yet to break out of economic backwardness. The progress of development is very slow in the region. There is no industry worth mentioning in most parts of the States in the region except those of tea industries and oil refineries in Assam. Barring the Loktak Hydro Electric Project, (this too a project of the National Hydro Electric Power Corporation), there is no major project which is noteworthy and functioning well in Manipur. There are some projects which are yet to be completed even after several years of commencement of the construction. Manipur's economy is agriculture-based. But, there is no proper irrigation system. The schemes and development programmes are not implemented effectively and one can make out how far the funds allocated for the development have reached their target by driving a few kilometres away from Imphal in any direction. The conditions prevailing in Manipur are not much different from those in other neighbouring States. Although more and more youths are passing out of Colleges and Universities every year, there is not much scope for employment of these graduates and post-graduates. Manipur might not have witnessed the present problems had the provisions of the merger agreement been implemented effectively. There should have also been ways to solve the Naga issue instead of relying too much on use the force.

The uninterrupted infiltration of Bangladeshis and

people from big States to the small States like Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and even Assam had caused serious concern in the minds of the natives in these places. The people in the region feel that their ethnic identity, customs, land and traditions may be eroded one day by the continuing influx. The youths in the region feel that their economic opportunities have been taken over by the outsiders.)

Apart from trying to get the credibility, sincere attempts should be made by all concerned in trying to bring the armed guerrillas to the negotiation table for peace talks. The Centre had earlier signed peace accords with Naga National Council, Mizo National Front and Tribal National Volunteers (TNV) in the past.

But, the former underground members are not happy over the non-implementation of the provisions of the accords particularly those belonging to the TNV. Practical actions are necessary to prove to the hardcore underground members that the government is determined to extend all kinds of help provided the insurgents abjure violence. This can be shown to the hardliners by properly rehabilitating the insurgents who surrendered, implementing the provisions of the earlier accords effectively and completing the on-going economic development schemes within the stipulated time. (The frequent arrests of extremists, lack of proper rehabilitation and sense of insecurity among the insurgents who surrendered indicate that there is no proper policy to deal with the insurgency problem in the region. Of course, force is necessary to contain the abatement of violence but is it the ultimate solution to the issue? The two-day north-eastern regional security coordination conference on 22 and 23 September 1992 at Kohima decided to pool intelligence and operational resources and exchange information to tackle crime and insurgency in the region. True, this is a positive step. But, it should be backed up by effective political campaign to end the insurgency in the region.

Every leading politician has said that there should be a political solution to the insurgency problem while the region was lagging far behind in economic development. The Centre alone can not be blamed for economic backwardness although the Government of India should pay attention to the development in the region. It seems that the funds allocated for development schemes do not reach the intended targets as this can be discerned from lack of proper roads to connect interior areas with towns (or inter village roads), inadequate drinking water supply even in town areas, erratic electricity supply, lack of irrigation system, etc. The number of persons living below the poverty line is increasing day by day and beggars who were not earlier seen, at least in Manipur, are now a common sight.

✓ Economic factor seems to be the origin of all problems in the region although the underground leaders whom I had interviewed do not subscribe to this view. (There is a sense of insecurity among the common people who feel that they will be aliens one day in their own lands.)

✓ On the other hand, the common people are sandwiched between the government forces and armed insurgents. A number of innocent civilians were killed during the counter-insurgency operation. The violation of human rights has also been reported quite often in different parts of the region.

✓ In the recent past, the once well-known underground organisation appears to be losing its past image very fast because some of its members were indulging in extortion of huge amount of money from government employees and people. The use of hijacked vehicles by the underground members have also annoyed the people several of whom have lost their vehicles to the militants. But some of the "young Meitei revolutionaries" are committed to their ideology and the government finds it difficult to tackle them.

✓ It appears that the north eastern India is heading for bad days. Various underground organisations have

intensified their armed struggle resulting in the heavy deployment of security forces at different places. A question has come up on why has the government failed to tackle the insurgents. Is it lack of political will of the leaders or do they want to capitalise on the issue of staying in power? It is a well-known fact that the movement can not be suppressed by using force. Using force is only a temporary solution.

Robert Taber in his book "The War of the Flea" says, "there is only one means of defeating insurgent people who will not surrender, and that is extermination. There is only one way to control a territory that harbours resistance, and that is to turn it into desert. Where these means can not, for whatever reason, be used, the war is lost".

The above citation is totally irrelevant and can not in any way apply to the present situation prevailing in India's sensitive north eastern region. What is relevant is, what will happen if the problem drags on for years and years together?

On the other hand, have the troubled regions already become killing fields? The present indication does not appear to be pointing to the right way. The fights among the underground members at present are confined within the rival factions. What will happen if the underground organisations start fighting among themselves? Can anyone rule out this possibility.

In Manipur, the NSCN (I-M) is very active in the Hill areas. Of the eight districts in the State, five districts—Churachandpur, Ukhrul, Senapati, Chandel and Tamenglong—are in the Hills. When NSCN(I-M) refers to "Nagaland", it includes four Hill districts of Manipur—Ukhrul, Senapati, Tamenglong and Chandel. Meitei underground organisations like UNLF, PLA, KCP and PREPAK are waging an armed struggle for an "independent Manipur." What will happen if the Valley and Hill underground organisations develop "misunderstanding" over the issue of the territory? It is a

far-fetched idea, but, hardly anyone had earlier thought that Kukis and Nagas would lock themselves in fierce clashes by the beginning of 1990s.

Manipur's area is about 22, 327 Sq Km and out of this, valley area is about 2238 Sq Km. As per provisions of the existing land laws, majority Meiteis are not allowed to settle in Hill districts. This has, to some extent, led to widening the gap between the Hill and Valley people. Before the advent of Hinduism and Christianity, the two people lived as members of one family. But, the religion seems to have set apart the two.

It may be recalled that the late former chief minister R K Jaichandra Singh was the only leader who had initiated steps for extension of the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act 1960 to Hill districts. The intention was to do survey in Hill areas and bring more revenues for the State government. But his efforts were scuttled by some groups having vested-interest, wanted to wedge the Valley and Hill people for some narrow personal gains. There is lack of interaction between the Valley and Hill people. Majority of the Meiteis should also change and adopt friendly and brotherly attitude towards Hill people and the latter should also develop positive response towards the Valley people. A point which can not be overlooked is that the widening gap affects both the inhabitants. It is necessary that both people work earnestly to erase any ill-feeling and remove any misunderstanding. With the education spreading far and wide in the region, it would not be a difficult task to do.

Manipur's population is about 18,26,714 (according to 1991 census). While over 12 lac persons inhabit Manipur's Valley (about 2238 Sq Km), the remaining over 6.50 lac persons settle in Hill areas (about 20,089 Sq Km).

Unfortunately, Manipur has not been able to produce "good leaders" whose names are worth mentioning. The State lacks leaders who could put all resources into effective use and guide it in the right direction. The

development in different sectors has been painfully slow. Corruption was rampant in government departments, and major chunk of funds allocated for development were pocketed by few privileged.

The continuing infiltration of "foreign nationals" into north eastern region from neighbouring Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal resulted in the agitation launched by the students. The All Manipur Students Union (AMSU) had, after years of anti-alien stir, signed an agreement with the State government on 22 July 1980 for finding a solution on the "foreigners' issue". The agreement says: "it was agreed that the Government (Manipur) starts processing identification of the foreigners with the cooperation of the representatives of the AMSU and AMSCOC (All Manipur Students Coordinating Committee) from the 1st of August 1980. The Government and the representatives of the students agreed to identify the foreigners under the Constitution and the law etc..." The agreement and proceedings of the 22 July 1980 meeting also say, "the electoral rolls starting from 1948 should be taken into account by comparing with the succeeding electoral rolls of the successive years, as one of the measures. However, the identification of foreigners should be based from the date of the enforcement of the Constitution viz 1950, 26th January." The agreement could not be implemented and the AMSU resumed its agitation from July 1994. The AMSU's resumption of the stir followed the Government's plan to issue photo identity cards to voters. There was utter discontentment among youths who felt threatened by the unceasing inflow of "foreigners" in the tiny State. Who is to be blamed? The delay in solving or tackling such issues will worsen the situation and anti-national elements will exploit the situation.)

The Kuki-Naga conflict in Manipur also depicts a grim future in the State. Intelligence sources pointed out that militants belong to both tribes had amassed weapons for a series of showdown. Why can not the leaders belonging

to both the communities come above board and sincerely work for a rapprochement between the two tribes. Instead of issuing appeals or press statements, they should go to the affected areas and interior places (where most of the killings are taking place), and convince the villagers or armed persons of the futility of clashes and mutual destruction. Hardly few leaders have done this. It is also unfortunate to note that armed persons are killing the unarmed persons. The question, 'why not the armed persons kill among themselves?' still remains unanswered.

Although the Kuki-Naga feud has spread to neighbouring Nagaland and Assam, it is not as serious and dangerous as in Manipur. "It may not be proper to say the clashes were taking place between the two communities because it was a section of Nagas who were involved," said many Naga leaders. Leaders belonging to Angamis, Aaos, Semas etc. expressed 'extreme unhappiness' over the continuing feud between Nagas and Kukis in Manipur in private conversations with the author in Kohima in May and June 1994.

In Nagaland, surprisingly, no major violence connected with Kuki-Naga conflict was reported after signing the agreement between the two communities on 16 May 1994. The agreement says, "Zeliangrongs (a Naga community) and Kukis unequivocally declare that they disassociate themselves with the present conflict that is going on between Nagas and Kukis of Manipur State and pledge to live like brothers. Zeliangrong villages namely old Peren, old Jalukie, old Beisumpuikam, old Nkio and concerned Kuki villages shall respect and honour the traditional customary rights with respect to land ownership existing between them at the time of establishment of villages. There shall be no fresh efforts by any community to impose new tax or conditions on either community for these villages. On recognition of traditional land ownership between Kukis and Zeliangrong, Zeliangrongs shall extend security and protection to the Kuki villages. In case of any dispute

over customary rights between villages, the joint meeting of peace committees under Chairman of Deputy Commissioner, Kohima shall adjudicate and decide which shall be binding on all concerned." The agreement was signed by leaders belonging to both the communities in presence of Chief Minister, who also signed it as witness. The Chief Secretary and the Deputy Commissioner (Kohima) also appended their signatures. Why such agreements between the two communities have not worked in Manipur?

In Assam, armed Bodo militants started killing non-Bodos. The armed Bodo activists felt that their land and forest were being "grabbed" by 'outsiders' who continued to infiltrate their lands. (Over the past decades, Bangladeshi muslims and others have infiltrated to Bodo-inhabited areas but citizenship rights were conferred on majority of the settlers a few years ago.) The senseless killings have taken a heavy toll in 1994 and most of the major incidents occurred in Barpeta, Kokrajhar and surrounding districts.

In Tripura, insurgency-related crimes kept multiplying in 1994 with reports of encounters coming from interior parts of the state between security forces and insurgents, and kidnappings. The main insurgent organisations operating in Tripura in 1994 were, All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) and the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT). There were also less-known insurgent organisations and hardly a day passed without reports of an incident involving insurgents in the middle part of 1994.

With the Naga issue being known in different foreign countries, the region appears to be drifting towards an uncertain future. The NSCN(I-M) Chairman, Isac Chishi Swu, at Geneva UN Conference on 27 July 1993, said, "for a nation like ours (Nagaland), being choked up without any outlet to the outside world, this would also mean the finest of opportunities to enable us to speak out against the flagrant violation of our inalienable right

of self-existence and subjection of our people to untold bitter State of affairs for the past 40 years on account of preposterous occupation of our homeland by the Indian and Burmese (Myanmar) armed forces." "We come from free Nagaland," he said adding "it is situated in between China, India and Burma (Myanmar). We are distinct Mongoloid race who migrated to this present Naga-inhabited compact areas from the east, a few thousand years ago. We are the first settlers of the land. Our population is about 3 millions. The size of the Naga inhabited area is approximately 100,000 Sq Km..... Thus the Indo-Naga issue is neither a question of 'separation' nor 'secession' from India. But it is a war of resistance against invasion." What is new is that the Flemish Support Group for Indigenous Peoples, KWIA, has 'supported' the Naga issue. (Please see the Appendix).

The Meitei underground members have also intensified their activities in the recent past. A number of security and police posts were attacked. The forces deployed everywhere in the State could not effectively tackle the situation. Even after heavy deployment of security forces, reports of killing of both Naga and Kuki villagers continue to trickle in. On the other hand, underground members continued killing among themselves during factional fights, extorted money from civil population and government employees, attacked isolated security posts and roving patrols, and ambushed security party. Killings in encounters with security forces also increased.

A question which has come up is how long these things will go on. Intellectual circles in the region feel that the main reasons of students' unrest and other problems are owing to continuous inflow of 'foreign/nationals' and lack of economic development. The youths in the region feel that their economic opportunities are being taken away by those who have come from outside. In spite of abundant natural resources, the region has been lagging far behind other States in economic development.

Accords have been signed between the Government and organisations like MNF (Mizo National Front), TNV or Bodo Organisation. But the signing of the accord is not as difficult as implementation of its provisions. By all accounts, it appears necessary that confidence should be restored in the minds of the youths. One way to achieve this, many intellectuals feel, is by solving "foreigners' issue" and taking up proper precautionary measures to prevent further infiltration. This is only one example. There are many. It would be advisable to study every problem from different angles. But, only question which remains unanswered is how far are we sincere in tackling a problem.