

A Mittal Publication

Peace and Development in Northeast

A Virtuous Spiral

Sikkim

Arunachal Pradesh

Assam

Nagaland

Meghalaya

Manipur

Tripura

Mizoram

P L Sanjeev Reddy • P C Shekar Reddy

The book is the outcome of a multidisciplinary study undertaken jointly by the Indian Institute of Public Administration and the North-Eastern Council.

The study provides a comprehensive interface between a violence-free milieu and socio-economic development. The remote location of the North-East from the rest of the country and certain contingencies of history and geography have led to a sense of deprivation and alienation among the people who feel that the region has not gained the fruits of development proportional to the resources available.

The responses from the Police departments have brought out a very unique fact that over 71% of the villages in the region have not reported any incidence of crime for the last couple of years. While focusing on crimes of a violent nature in this region, the book underscores several admirable features obtaining here which are worthy of emulation. The social fabric is still intact. Respect for elders and consideration for women are very much in vogue. Democratic institutions at the grassroots level are very vibrant.

The book brings out that the people of the region expect greater transparency, accountability and monitoring in governance, strict control on corruption and freedom to determine the developmental priorities since they know the local needs better. The key to improving the quality of life of the people of the region lies in shifting the focus from charity to promoting creativity and fostering confidence and capacity building.

The book outlines several strategies which can help foster a holistic development of the region. The key message coming out of the exercise is that not only is the North-East tranquil and beautiful but also most of it is safe and secure.

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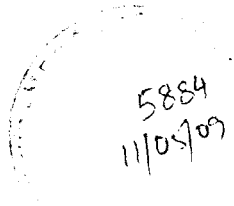
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INTRODUCTION

1. NEC: A Regional Planning Body

The North Eastern Council (NEC) was constituted in 1971 by an Act of Parliament. The constitution of the Council has marked the beginning of a new chapter of concerted and planned endeavour for the rapid development of the Region. Over the years, the NEC has metamorphosed itself into a Regional Planning Body. The NEC has now also been mandated to ensure security and public order since it was felt that a climate of permanent peace would facilitate faster and equitable development of the region and the people.

Sub-section 4 of Section 4 of the NEC Act, 1971, as amended in 2002, reads as under:

“The Council shall review, from time to time, the measures taken by the States, represented in the Council, for the maintenance of security and public order therein and recommend to the Governments of the States concerned further measures in this regard.”

The Report of the Committee on Revitalisation of NEC (2004) has made the following significant recommendations:

- ❖ Since security continues to be the NEC’s mandate, after the amendment in 2002, it should receive due attention.
- ❖ The linkages between security and development may be suitably flagged by NEC.
- ❖ NEC may devote a Special Session for consideration of security. This Session could be chaired by the Home Minister. The National Security Adviser may be invited to this Session.
- ❖ Steering Committee, chaired by the Home Secretary, may determine the issues to be considered by the NEC Session.

2. Genesis of the Study

Dr. Kamal Taori, IAS, was on one-year study leave with the IIPA to identify areas of disaster and grassroots governance in different regions of India while serving as Additional Secretary, Inter State Council, Ministry of Home Affairs. During his study, he found that there were several villages in Azamgarh and Mau districts in Uttar Pradesh where no crime has been reported in the last

50 years. Thereafter a brain-storming session was held under the chairmanship of Director, IIPA, with senior officials of the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Inter State Council. It was decided that the matter merits deeper analysis - both diagnostic as well as prescriptive.

It was believed that the NER would also be having such villages which deserved to be studied and documented not only for their insularity but also for the key lessons they hold for all of us. There was a need for a comprehensive study, which could address special problems of violence with reference to women and socially and economically excluded/deprived communities like SCs/STs. It was also to be examined whether freedom from violence is because of education, prosperity, socio-economic profile, self-employment, local leadership, livelihood systems, socio-cultural factors, strong value system and strong sway of religion. It was felt that useful lessons could be drawn from "violence-free villages amidst turbulence". We can re-formulate and fine tune policies for holistic development, which would recognise and reward such violence-free areas and impart a healing touch to the NE society which is experiencing stress and strife.

3. Broad Purpose of the Study

Projecting Northeast in True Light: It is also noted that sensational news driven national media is prone to be negative towards the Northeast. Negative aspects of the region are only projected but positive aspects like the following are totally ignored:

- 1. Social Development:** Northeast is more socially developed than the rest of the country. Here, there is greater respect for women and elders who exercise a very positive moral influence on the local society. It is very safe for women to move about even late at night. There is also a strong community and family bonding. Tribal loyalty is strikingly strong. It is no wonder that cultural and traditional values are still intact despite the winds of Westernization. In States like Sikkim, 33% reservation for women in all departments, including the police, is enforced.
- 2. Patrolling by Women:** A remarkable feature of the region is the patrolling by women groups in the nights to protect the youth from being abducted by insurgents and armed forces personnel.
- 3. Insurgent Groups:** These groups have never targeted tourists and till now there is no record of tourists being killed by insurgents.

If incidents of killing by (i) insurgents in Northeast, (ii) Naxalites in Andhra Pradesh and (iii) organised criminals in Mumbai occur on the same day, in all probability, for reasons unknown, incidents of the first category will be first page item, incidents of the second will be small news items in the middle pages and the rest may not be reported at all. One has to realise the fact that IPC crime rate (incidence of crime per lakh population) in 2003 in Delhi was 319.7 whereas more than half of the districts of the Northeast reported less IPC crime rate than the national average of 160.7. IPC crime rate of some of

the so-called peaceful cities is as follows: Bhopal (809.6), Jaipur (498), Hyderabad (366), Bangalore (514.50), and Vijayawada (997.40). (*Source: Crime in India 2003, NCRB*). The Northeast cannot, therefore be faulted for any high crime incidence.

Media Needs to be Sensitised on the Issues of Northeast

Tyranny of Distance: Another reason for the relatively low level of development, as compared to other States of India, is the distance – physical, psychological and emotional - from the rest of the country. While even the remotest corners of the rest of the country are accessible from Delhi by air in a few hours time, the NER faces the formidable problem of connectivity. Here, it is not merely the question of physical distance but the time and hassle required to reach a particular city and the physical and mental strain involved in the process. For instance, if the flight carrying a senior official from Delhi is unable to land at Imphal/Dimapur/Agartala, the next visit may materialise after a long gap.

Inadequate Voice in the Corridors of Power: The NE has no national level political leader or towering personality who can effectively articulate the issues of the Northeast like Pandit Nehru for Kashmir, Y.B. Chavan for Maharashtra, NTR for AP, C.N. Annadurai for Tamil Nadu, Y.S. Parmar for H.P. or Biju Patnaik for Orissa who effectively fought for the best interests of their States. The entire Northeast elects only a total of 25 MPs to the Lok Sabha (of which 14 are from Assam alone). Even in these days of coalition governments at the Centre, this number of MPs is not sufficient to effectively influence the Central Government in major policy matters and effectively counter/alter the policies, which are unfavourable to the Northeast States. Also, there are hardly any senior level bureaucrats hailing from this region in the Central Secretariat, who can effectively project the aspirations and unique problems of the people of the NER. The industrial/corporate lobbies are also absent. Civil society organisations are also few and far between to raise the issues pertaining to the Northeast. Thus four influential groups that can project and lobby for the region are not visible and effective.

Hence, the common perception about the NER remains as a region inhabited by

- ❖ Agriculturists/tribal groups
- ❖ Government employees
- ❖ Contractors
- ❖ Unemployed youth
- ❖ Insurgents and militants.

This needs to be immediately corrected.

Why the 'Seven Sisters' be given Special Priority?

At the time of partition, the erstwhile Chittagong Hill Tract was primarily inhabited by Buddhists who had supported the inclusion of this area in the Union of India. Had this area remained with India, the present situation of the

Northeast, for that matter, the entire development profile of Northeast would have been different. This could have facilitated a seaport for the Northeast (the lack of which has constrained the development of maritime trade of the region). It is ironic that while the rest of the country was celebrating our Independence in 1947, the people of the Northeast were lamenting over the fact that while it took them four hours to reach Calcutta/rest of the country, as a result of partition of the country, it would now take them 48 hours of travel over very difficult hilly terrain. An opportunity was missed to set right this anomaly in 1971 when Bangladesh was liberated by India. The farthest corner of Tripura is only a few kilometers from the Bay of Bengal but it takes more than 48 hours to reach the nearest port in India. Diplomatic, political, administrative and social initiatives are necessary so that the NE has access to ports in India, Bangladesh and Myanmar to reap the benefits of a littoral State. Access controlled expressway connecting the Northeast with rest of the country, through Bangladesh, should be an immediate priority. These are tasks, which have to be achieved for the accelerated and holistic development to the full potential of the Northeast.

In no way should one feel that by emancipating and empowering the people of the Northeast, one is doing an act of charity. On the other hand, it is a moral duty, social necessity and a recompense for the hardships imposed on them by the forces of history and geography.

4. Critical Objectives of the Study

The study primarily aims to identify violence-free villages in the States of the Northeast and to examine the underlying causes for the same. It has the following objectives:

- ❖ Study the existence, reasons and milieu of violence-free villages in the Northeast.
- ❖ To study the conflict resolution and grievance redressal system in these villages.
- ❖ Explore better systems of governance especially with reference to containment of violence, promotion of adjudication, social policing, etc. for replication.
- ❖ Explore good governance practices like better policing, transparency in governance and capacity building of the community to ensure harmony and sustained peace.
- ❖ Facilitate better understanding of local disputes, their causes and means to resolve these speedily and peacefully at local level itself.
- ❖ Explore fresh avenues for investment, employment and livelihood.
- ❖ Identifying missing links and gaps for non-optimal performance in regard to policy-making, funding, execution, monitoring and course corrections.
- ❖ Study the efficacy and the working of Panchayati Raj Institutions and explore means of greater participation and involvement of the people in the development process.

- ❖ Explore the effective use of technologies in the overall development of the region by leveraging the information and communication revolution, and the opportunities unleashed by liberalization, public-private partnerships, operationalization, etc.
- ❖ Effective community participation in the decision-making processes.

5. Methodology

The study has relied on the following sources for data collection:

Primary Sources: Information obtained from field visits and detailed interviews with key players like senior bureaucrats, both at the Centre and in the eight States, village chiefs and members of women's and youth groups and responses to the detailed questionnaire as well as extensive visits to crime-free and also crime-prone areas.

Secondary Sources: The data on violence-free villages was provided by the Police Departments of the all the States. Information was also obtained from publications of the UNDP, Planning Commission, Ministry of Rural Development, newspapers, magazines, internet as well as official reports.

Data regarding incidence of crime has been provided by NCRB, population figures were obtained from Registrar General, Census of India, for the purpose of calculating crime rate (incidence of crime per lakh of population). Various statistical techniques like time series, multiple regressions, correlations, etc. have been employed to establish relationship and causality among various dependent and independent variables (like per cent of rural population, literacy rates, migrations, etc.) with crime rate and also to extrapolate crime rate up to the year 2008. (Please refer to Chapter 5, Para 4 and also Annexure I.)

Based on data gathered through the above methods, the study has sought to proceed further in the following manner:

- ❖ **Integrated Policy Framework for the Northeast:** Here the cultural and socio-economic profile of the region, including that of individual States is discussed. Thereafter, the plan of action to achieve holistic development of the region is suggested.
- ❖ **Diagnostic:** Here a comprehensive study on violence-free villages in the Northeast is made. Various factors, which have contributed to the present scenario, are brought out. The cultural and socio-economic profile of the region, including that of individual States, is discussed.
- ❖ **Prescriptive:** Modalities, policies for developing and getting the best out of the villages, communities through good governance policies and participatory programmes, executing sustained capacity building of the key players, and effective and monitoring mechanisms, have been suggested.
- ❖ **Organisational Framework**

Hypothesis Testing: A broad hypothesis was made that crime is related to composition of ethnicity, percentage of rural population, literacy rate, unemployment, feeling of alienation and deprivation, etc. The hypothesis was

formulated based on our extensive tours to the Northeast, interviews with key policy-makers (including police officials), civil society and also various get-togethers, seminars (involving various stakeholders), State-wise crime reports and responses to the questionnaire from the respective police departments. The hypothesis was tested for authenticity with credible and dependable statistical data from various sources, using the latest techniques. Based on this, recommendations have been made and suggested plan of action drawn.

6. Questionnaire

The following questionnaire was circulated among the police departments of the NE States and a representative sample of villages in these States to elicit broadly the following information:

- (i) What are the reasons for these villages being violence-free?
- (ii) How can other villages emulate them?
- (iii) What are the policy support, incentives, rewards, recognition, etc. that can be given by the Government, press, policy-makers, civil society, etc.?
- (iv) The role of the community, women, social organisations, dry policies, and traditional system of governance, church/temple/other religious institutions or any other social factors that help in keeping the villages violence-free.
- (v) What are the socio-economic factors and profile of the people in these violence-free villages?
- (vi) The role of family/community/dignity/honor/respect for values and elders.
- (vii) How can training modules be developed to bring the best out of the people, groups and society to ensure sustained development?
- (viii) What could be the preventive, curative and promotional measures to curb contain violence and promote harmony?
- (ix) HRD issues, employment, CMP etc.
- (x) How can the optimum utilisation of existing infrastructure like Community Information Centres (CICs), and other ICT platforms be used?
- (xi) The role of Panchayati Raj institutions, and clusters in development.
- (xii) How can 'Social and Community Policing' aid in development?
- (xiii) What is the coherent and holistic action required for ensuring peace dividend?
- (xiv) What are the issues of simplification, transparency and overall accountability for better output and outcomes to match the outlays?
- (xv) Attitudes, mindset reorientation issues.
- (xvi) Methods of operationalising credible strategies for optimal utilization of resources to achieve the desired objective covering broadly:

1. What needs to be done?
 2. What is the strategy and action plan?
 3. What is the time frame for achieving this?
 4. Why is the action required?
 5. Who are the agencies and the partnerships under each head?
 6. How will we ensure effective operationalisation and sustainability?
 7. Where and when these policies and programmes have to be implemented to ensure best value for time and money?
- (xvii) Methodology adopted for grassroots capacity building and empowerment.
- (xviii) Any other relevant information and data.