



India's **NORTH EAST**

New Vistas for Peace

Editors

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Namrata Goswami

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India's North East presents a bewildering picture to the policy makers, outsiders as well as to the local population. On the one hand, the natural beauty and rich cultural mix offer a touristic paradise. On the other, innumerable insurgent movements raging in the region deter people from exploring and investing in this region. However, the tired narrative of exclusivist ethnic homelands propagated by the insurgents appears out of sync with reality in an era of growing inter-connectivity and globalization. New Delhi's efforts to develop the region coupled with the realization amongst North Eastern societies that ethnic insurgencies based on nostalgic interpretation of the past are creating enormous obstacles for rapid development of the region also reinforces this thinking. The example of Mizoram as a peaceful and prosperous state amongst the other insurgency infested states like Assam, Manipur and Nagaland demonstrates that peace, development and security are possible in this region.

This book is an attempt to suggest a way towards peace and development in the North East. The authors, mostly belonging to the region, have provided valuable insights on the issue of insurgency, development and security and have also suggested concrete measures to tackle the myriad problems afflicting the region. They assert that local participatory initiatives are extremely important not only to counter the exclusive narratives of rebel groups but also to lead the region on its path to peace and prosperity. They also emphasize that the media and the security forces should contribute positively towards this effort. Only when all the actors of the society work towards the common goal of peace and development, this region could be unshackled from the bonds of underdevelopment and recurring violence.

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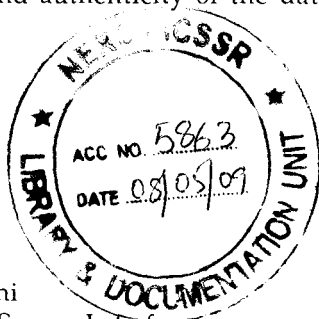
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IDSA's Focus on North East

Dr. Pushpita Das

The North East of India has always been the focus of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), as may be seen from its extensive topical publications on the region. The Institute's mandate being to provide policy options for the government on topics related to defence and strategic issues, most of these publications deal with the security of the region and the country.

The inaugural issue of the Institute's journal *IDSA Journal* itself had carried an article by Prof. B.K. Roy Burman, "Perspectives from Nagaland".¹ Analysing the Naga insurgency the author advocates understanding the problem first in the context of South East Asia and then of India. He argues that in olden times the tribes of North East India and South East Asia functioned as buffer or bridge between two large politically organized societies but with changing times and improvement in the means of communication they

lost this important function. When colonial rule ended in the region these tribal units were included within different nation-states based on colonial boundary demarcation. Insurgency witnessed in the North East is a manifestation of the readjustment that these tribes are undergoing vis-à-vis the nation-state. The author refutes the commonly held view that the Naga insurgency is being fomented by Christian missionaries and the educated Naga middle class. For solution of the problem he suggests a broad-based people's participation in the decision-making process and greater interaction between the people of the North East and the rest of India.

Roy Burman's next paper, "Modernisation Processes in the Hills of North-East",² describes the modernization process in the Autonomous Hill Districts of Assam, North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), Nagaland, and Manipur. Modernization has been brought about by both exogenous and endogenous factors: the exogenous factor is the introduction of advanced technology and complex socio-political organizations; the growth of culture through massive interaction between different tribes is an endogenous factor. The uneven pace of the modernization process in the North East, in his view, is a major cause of social tensions in the region.

The decade of the eighties was sparse in publications on the region, with only three papers that focused on the India-China boundary dispute and the Chinese claim on Arunachal Pradesh. Two of these were by T.S. Murthy. In "The Eastern Himalayas in Sino-Indian Relations" (1982)³ Murthy presents a detailed analysis of the treaties signed between India, Tibet, and China at different points in history. Examining the trans-border religious ties between the people of NEFA and Tibet, the author concludes that the Sino-Indian boundary problem is a territorial dispute. The claim by China that NEFA is a part of its territory does not hold ground as the people residing on this side of the border are different from the Tibetans in terms of language, race, and religion.

In his second paper, "The Chinese Claim of Arunachal" (1983),⁴ Murthy argues that the Chinese were ready to negotiate the boundary with India and did not wish this issue to create any hurdles in developing cordial relations with India. He asserts that if India agrees to the Chinese proposal of swapping of territory, India has to forgo its desire to have access to Central Asia, which would imply a denial of Indian history before 1947. He argues that the Chinese claim on Aksai Chin is generally seen as its desire to have good communication lines to administer western Tibet but in reality the road is just a consequence of its territorial claim and not a cause of it. He refutes the argument that the map used in the Simla Agreement signed between India and Pakistan in 1973 was in any way crude. A competent cartographer, in his view, would have no difficulty in interpreting the line on the ground as shown in the 1914 map. He also indicates that India's acceptance of Tibet as a part of China should not be seen as a strategic blunder because it was the reality.

The third article, by Sahdev Vohra, "The north-eastern frontier of India and China's claim" (1989),⁵ states that China first laid its claim on Arunachal Pradesh in 1960. The author draws heavily on the accounts of knowledgeable travellers and officials to refute the Chinese claim. He also presents an analysis of how the area was administered over different periods of time. He concludes that independent India followed two approaches that were different from that of the British, in that it recognized the sovereignty of China over Tibet, and started an all-round development of Arunachal Pradesh and successfully integrated it into the Indian mainstream.

The North Eastern region came into better focus of the Institute after 2000, with the recruitment of area specialists, though most of the publications dealt with insurgency in the region. In 2000, Sreeradha Dutta in "North East Turmoil: Vital determinants"⁶ attempted to explore and analyse certain factors which contributed to the unrest in the North

East. She argued that comparative isolation and poor integration of the region with the Indian mainstream are the causative factors of this unrest. The immediate cause, in her view, is illegal migration from Bangladesh. The isolationist attitude of the people of the region is partly to blame for this alienation and underdevelopment, as also their reluctance to change their traditional socio-economic structure. It is her view that the central government's policy of doling out grants has proved counter-productive, filling the coffers of terrorist organizations on account of the nexus between politicians, bureaucrats, and insurgents.

In "Security of India's North East: External Linkages" (2000),⁷ Sreeradha Dutta highlights that factors like trans-border ethnic ties and linkages of insurgent groups operating in the North East with neighbouring countries have jeopardized India's security. Because of their cross-border ethnic, socio-economic and cultural links, there have been demands for redrawing the international border in this region. External agencies interested in destabilizing India, particularly the Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan, exploit these trans-border ethnic ties.

Dinesh Kotwal in "Assam in Flames" (2001)⁸ draws attention to the spurt of violence by terrorist organizations against non-Assam residents in Assam. In his view, terrorist organizations such as the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) are in league with the ISI. Their acts of violence bear resemblance to the patterns of violence carried out by the militant organizations in Jammu and Kashmir. He concludes that violence against civilians is a sign of desperation of the terrorist organizations. Suggesting a review of the counter-insurgency strategy in the state, he advocates fighting terrorism at village level, with the active cooperation of the local population; at the operational level the troops should be reinforced and intelligence gathering strengthened and fine-tuned. Kotwal also suggests eliciting

the active cooperation of the neighbouring countries to fight the menace of terrorism in the state.

In "The Contours of Assam Insurgency" Dinesh Kotwal (2001)⁹ traces the genesis and growth of insurgency, especially that of the ULFA, in Assam. He ascribes the insurgency mainly to three factors: lack of proper integration of the North Eastern region with the Indian mainstream; the demographic profile of the region, comprising myriad tribes; and the hijacking of the intractable issues by the extremist forces. Both because of the government's counter-insurgency strategies and its own strategic blunders, the ULFA has become debilitated but militancy in the state has taken the form of growing Islamic fundamentalism.

In "Policing the Indo-Bangla Border"(2001),¹⁰ focusing on the clashes between personnel of the Border Security Force (BSF) and Bangladesh Rifles (BR) along the border, Kulbir Kishan argues that incomplete demarcation of the boundary, enclaves, and adverse possessions are challenges to policing of the border. Illegal migrants, insurgent groups, drug traffickers, and smugglers exploit the porosity of the border. For better policing the author recommends double-fencing the border and suggests that each battalion should be responsible for guarding a 40-60 km stretch of the border. He also stresses the need to educate the BSF about the border and the people living along it: to achieve this objective, one company of the BSF should consist of armed local police. Local people should be engaged in guarding the border. If the National Citizenship Register, based on the 2001 Census, is compiled and identity cards issued, illegal migration could be minimized substantially.

Professor Atul Sarma in "Economic Development of the North Eastern Region" (2001)¹¹ flags certain reasons for the region remaining industrially backward. In his view, resources from this resource-rich region are poorly utilized. Where resource-based industries were established, the government failed to set up forward and backward linkage-based industries and the industries could not bring

substantial prosperity to the region. In addition, partition of the country disrupted the traditional trade links but the government failed to develop alternative trade routes. Lack of infrastructure denied the entry of industrial revolution to the region and the people ended up paying higher prices for procuring goods and services. The other causes of underdevelopment in the region in his view are illegal migration, traders' vested interests which hamper the growth of local entrepreneurs, unemployment, insurgency, and unaccountable governance. Prof Sarma suggests to develop industries that have very high forward and backward linkages and sectors like hydroelectric power, tourism, and encouraging mercantile capital to establish forward and backward linkage-based industries in the neighbouring Bangladesh, Myanmar, and South East Asian countries.

Dr. Gurudas Das in "India's North East Soft Underbelly: Strategic Vulnerability and Security" (2002)¹² argues that India's neighbouring countries, especially China and Pakistan, have been trying to exploit the diversity of the North East, with its myriad ethnic tribes, religions, and languages, to dismember India along the fault lines. He maintains that the geo-strategic vulnerability and security threat were two important factors that impelled India to intervene in the East Pakistan crisis but India's policy of supporting one regime against another in Bangladesh has pushed that country towards the USA-Pakistan-China axis. The author takes note of the "Brahmaputra Project" of the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) to balkanize India and also points out to the increasing presence of Dutch non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the North East region, especially in Tripura. These NGOs, the author maintains, are reported to be supporting the insurgent groups. Since the USA and China are using other countries to destabilize India, Dr. Das recommends that India needs to clear any ambiguity with these countries on this matter.

Manoj Nath in "Bodo insurgency in Assam: New accord and new problems" (2003)¹³ assesses the Bodoland Council

Accord of 2003. He is of the view that to make this accord successful it should be implemented in letter and in spirit and must have the cooperation of both Bodos and non-Bodos. On account of the Accord, changes had been introduced in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and had given the Bodos a homeland within Assam even if they comprise only 25 per cent of the population of the state. He is apprehensive that such discrepancies in the Accord may give rise to new ethnic tensions in the state.

N.S. Jamwal in "Border management: Dilemma of guarding the India-Bangladesh border" (2004)¹⁴ focuses on the nature of the border and the problem it poses for effective management, while offering solutions. In his view, domestic politics, especially a government in Bangladesh that is not amicably disposed towards India is, to a large extent, responsible for aggravating the problems along the border. He recommends building roads along the border, modernizing the BSF, and establishing a lead intelligence agency for effective border management.

Praveen Kumar in "Karbi-Kuki clashes in Assam" (2004)¹⁵ studies the clashes between two militant organizations, the Kuki Revolutionary Army and the United People's Democratic Solidarity. He argues that the militant groups clash to take control of the public resources even at the cost of the rights of the local tribal or ethnic community they claim to be defending. For solution of the problem he suggests attempts to redress the socio-economic and political grievances of the people.

Praveen Kumar in "External linkages and internal security: Assessing Bhutan's Operation All Clear" (2004)¹⁶ analyses the network formed by terrorist organizations against the backdrop of "Operation All Clear" carried out by Bhutan. He argues that various extremist groups in South Asia have developed linkages among themselves as also international linkages. For effectively curbing the menace of terrorism he recommends the generation of local response

as the first and immediate strategy, followed by addressing socio-economic development of the region. The disruption of linkages should be supplementary to the overall counter-terrorism strategy.

Anil Kamboj in "Manipur and the Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA) of 1958" (2004)¹⁷ states that the AFSPA has been misused by the security forces on many occasions but its repeal may demoralize the security forces involved in counter-insurgency operations and give the militants an upper hand. To minimize the abuse of AFSPA, the security forces should focus on minimizing the use of force and be honest in their dealings with the civilians. Also, the security forces and the state police should be properly trained to handle all types of situations with professional competence.

Sreeradha Dutta in her book, *The North East Complexities and its Determinants* (2004),¹⁸ published by IDSA, examines the root causes of the turmoil in the region and inadequate economic development. In her view, reawakening of ethnic identity and economic backwardness are some of the contributory factors for the unrest. Analysing the regional implications of protracted violence and instability, the author highlights the role of the external forces and their links with the insurgent groups. It is her view that effective administration of autonomous councils could significantly mitigate the identity consciousness of various ethnic groups. Strengthening of police forces and infrastructural development are other policy options to bring peace and prosperity to the region.

It is observed from this listing of publications that most of them deal with terrorism and insurgency in the region, Assam receiving most of the attention. The problem of insurgency in Nagaland and Manipur has also been discussed. Issues related to the nature of the borders, the challenges they pose to the security of the country, and recommendations for their effective management have also been covered. The role of neighbouring countries in fuelling

the insurgency has also been highlighted. Earlier the writings focused on historical analysis of any given topic but there has been a gradual shift towards focusing more on the contemporary facts and providing policy recommendations. An overwhelming number of scholars have recommended encouraging people's participation for solving the various problems of the region.

IDSA has been conscious of the immense importance of the North East for the security of the country. At present, the internal security cluster in the Institute focuses primarily on the key security issues emanating from the region. It has undertaken projects dealing with border management and insurgency in Nagaland and Manipur. The scholars from the Institute have also undertaken field visits to the North East to acquire a better understanding of the region. It is hoped that, through such endeavours, IDSA would be able to bring out relevant issues confronting this sensitive region, generate public debate, and provide alternative policy recommendations to the government. The organization of this seminar, away from New Delhi, may be seen as a modest step towards achieving this objective.

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