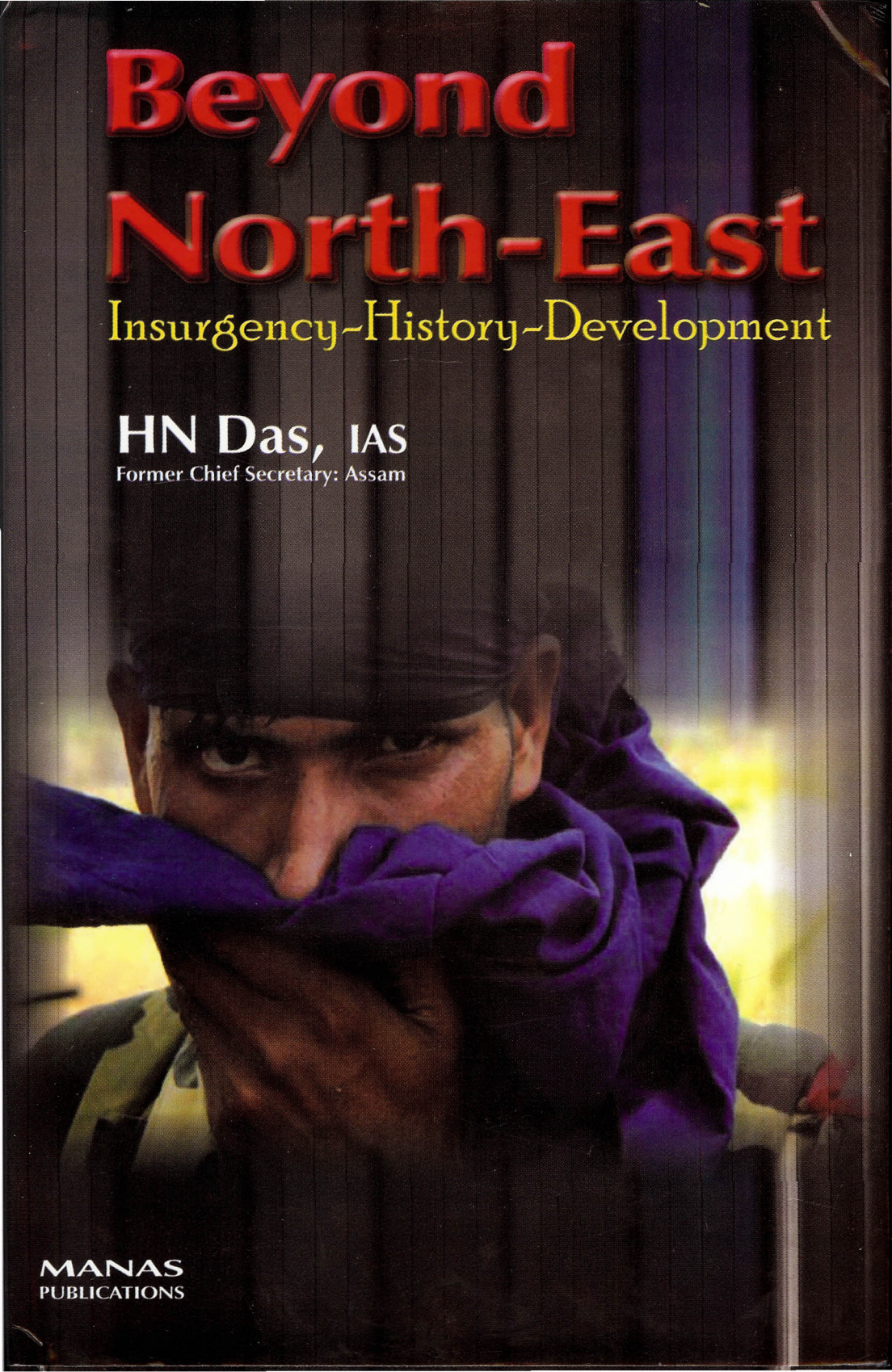


Beyond North-East

Insurgency-History-Development

HN Das, IAS
Former Chief Secretary: Assam

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my dear wife - Arati Das - who had to suffer equally with me during the difficult days that I passed through in the 1990s, and earlier, in the service of the country and the state. She had endured serious threats from insurgent leaders and my uncertain schedules of work.

PREFACE

During the past half a century I have published a large number of articles on different subjects in the local and national newspapers and magazines. I have also published books on Disaster Management, Rural Development, Grameen Bank of Bangladesh and Tourism in the North East. I have now collected my ideas and information on insurgency, terrorism and the recent incidents to write the chapters in the first part of this book. The second part contains small and revised essays on certain important events particularly in the North Eastern Region of India. It also contains a few reviews of books on insurgency, terrorism, infiltration of Bangladeshis and related matters. Two chapters—one on Bangladesh and the other on the Look East Policy—are added in the hope that readers would be interested in the countries covered where NE terrorists find shelter and training grounds and from where they obtain smuggled commodities including drugs and arms. This book is offered to the general public with the hope that it would help cultivate a better understanding of the issues and problems in the disturbed areas of India's North Eastern states.

HN Das

CHAPTER - I

Ethnicity and Insurgency in the North-Eastern Region

Insurgency is rising against established authority. This has happened innumerable times all over the world ever since the dawn of civilization. A large number of insurgencies have been caused by the identity crisis. To quote Amartya Sen, "Many of the conflicts and barbarities in the world are sustained through the illusion of a unique and choiceless identity. The art of constructing hatred takes the form of invoking the magical power of some allegedly predominant identity that drowns other affiliations, and in a conveniently bellicose form can also overpower any human sympathy or natural kindness that we may normally have. The result can be homespun elemental violence, or globally artful violence and terrorism."¹

Terrorism has been used as an instrument of violence in order to force compliance to the wishes of its perpetrators. This particular word "terrorism" was coined during the great French Revolution of 1789-1795 to describe the actions of the Jacobins who organized a "Reign of Terror" during 1793-1795. Of course, such acts were present "as a form of non sanctioned violence in response to perceived injustice" for centuries. But the word terrorism was not used earlier. It appears that 109 definitions of terrorism have been formulated during the period between 1936 and 1981 and more were added later². Among the various definitions I feel that the one offered by Jessica Stern is the most acceptable. According

to Jessica, terrorism is "an act or threat of violence against noncombatants with the objective of exacting revenge, intimidating, or otherwise influencing an audience."³

Terrorism has taken many different shapes. Terrorists have adopted quite a few methods. They have come to use a number of sophisticated weapons. The latest among the weapons which have become susceptible to such use are the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) that may be biological, chemical, nuclear or radiological. Terrorism can be considered to have graduated into insurgency when it is organized with the support of a community of people and the organization has an ideology backed by certain popular grievances. In India, such insurgencies have been organized by the Naxalites, the Mao extremists, the feudal armies of North India and the ethnic and religious outfits of Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and NE. There are many other smaller outfits also.

Actually ever since the Second World War insurgency has become very common all over the world and particularly in the developing countries. Malayasia, for example, was in the grip of insurgency immediately after the War. How insurgency was rooted out in that erstwhile British colony is an epic story. Similar is the case with Philippines. Earlier there were quite a few outfits which used to strike terror through violent acts in a large number of countries. Many advanced countries such as Japan and the United States have been victims of such insurgencies.

A new development has been the appearance of countries whose governments give direct or indirect support to terrorism and insurgency. The United States has dubbed them as rogue states. According to the US Government, Lybia, Cuba, South Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Iran and North Korea, among others, are such rogue states, India would like that the US include the Pakistan also in

the list. The US did not agree with it. In their self adopted idea of global policing the US has mounted a war against Iraq in the hope to curb terrorism.⁴ All the countries, cited above, have supported and sponsored insurgent outfits to settle political scores. They do not seem to believe in using the diplomatic channels.

Moreover, easy means of travel, specially by air, is now facilitating many insurgent groups to perpetrate violent acts abroad. The exploits of Abu Nidal of al-Fatah, the Berlin Olympic bombings and the Japanese Red Army's shoot-outs have passed into history.⁵ In more recent times the destruction of New York's twin towers and the bombing of London's underground railways are incidents which will be remembered for a long time. The Mumbai carnage of November 26-28, 2008 and the Guwahati bomb blasts of October 30, 2008 are dealt with in subsequent chapters. A host of similar incidents can be cited to show the worldwide spread of terrorism and insurgency and the destruction that it has wrought in many countries. In India terrorism has been used extensively in ancient and modern times. In modern times the period between 1900 and 1910 is considered to be important because of the rise of the revolutionary movement, particularly in Bengal.⁶

Nation States

The idealism of nation states first made its impact felt in the late eighteenth century Europe. Two big nation states were created through the Italian and the German unifications. Then the break up of the Holy Roman Empire (aka Austrian Empire) and the Ottoman Empire gave birth to several nation states particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. In the cases of Italy and Germany, a number of feudal states were cemented together to form the new nation states on linguistic basis. In the rest of Europe new nation states emerged out of the old universal empires. The Asian and the African nation states started

coming up as the aftermath of the two world wars of the twentieth century mainly as a consequence of the fall of the British and other smaller empires which the European powers had built in the earlier centuries.

Arnold Toynbee's rather esoteric definition aptly describes "the spirit of nationality" as a "sour ferment of the new wine of democracy in the old bottles of tribalism".⁷ Practically, a nation is "a group of people who believe they are related ancestrally. It is the largest grouping that shares that belief."⁸ Simply stated a nation state is a nation matched with territory.

India had a chequered history before the advent of the British rule. There were times when great empires brought substantial portions of the Indian sub-continent under control of one imperial power. But at other times different parts had independent kings and feudal potentates. Their territories did not always conform to the idea of nation states. Even during British times considerable areas remained outside the day-to-day administration of the Central Government. These were the princely states. But most of these states were fully covered by the principle of suzerainty of the British Empire till the paramountcy lapsed after transfer of power in 1947. When independence came, India was divided and Pakistan was created. Later Bangladesh became independent after the Indo-Pak War of 1971. But in the Indian Union all the princely states were merged by the Instruments of Accession.

Reorganisation of States

Within independent India itself fissiparous tendencies were always discernible side by side with the centripetal forces of common culture and shared values. All Indians harked back to the same traditions. It was through a tenuous process combined with great political acumen and the vision of a strong united India that late Sardar

Vallabhbhai Patel (first Union Home Minister) brought all native states and union of states within the fold of the Indian Union immediately after independence. Except for Hyderabad, Junagadh, and Jammu & Kashmir, where Army had to be deployed, the entire process was peaceful.

Soon, however, problems started arising due to revival of agitations over local languages. These movements were inspired by the influence of the European idealism of nationhood on the local intelligentsia. The death of Potti Sri Ramalu after long fasting over statehood for Andhra Pradesh also added fuel to it. This and a few other incidents elsewhere in the country necessitated the setting up of the Boundary Commission in 1952. Sardar KM Panikkar was the most active member of this Commission. On their recommendations radical changes of boundaries of states were made in 1956 on linguistic lines. Their recommendations were implemented through the States Reorganisation Act, 1956. The only exceptions were the erstwhile Bombay Presidency and Punjab. Both of these were, however, ultimately partitioned within a few years. The Bombay Presidency was partitioned on linguistic lines into Gujarat and Maharashtra. The erstwhile Punjab was partitioned on linguistic and religious lines into Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Haryana.⁹

Soon after the above mentioned states re-organisation was carried out, discordant voices were heard in some parts of India. There were sporadic disturbances also. Some people were not satisfied with the re-organisation. The sub-nationalities wanted their own states. On the other hand, patriotic Indians were genuinely concerned about the unity and integrity of the country. One American journalist Sellig Harrison wrote a book titled "India - the Most Dangerous Decades" and predicted that the country would face chaos and would break up soon. But India remained united thanks to the vision and foresight of our leaders and the strong bond of the ancient civilization which has continued for five thousand years

and which inspires every Indian wherever he or she may reside. The leaders were also clear about their mandate and did not hesitate to follow a strong arm policy whenever necessity arose. This provoked the American historian Paul R. Brass to remark that : "The one consistent principle, however, that emerges strongly in both the Nehru and the post-Nehru periods is that no secessionist movement will be allowed to prevail and that massive force will be used to suppress insurrectionary activity".¹⁰

In recent years, three more states were created - Uttaranchal (later renamed as Uttarakhand) out of Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand out of Bihar and Chattisgarh out of Madhya Pradesh. In the wake of the agitation launched by a section of people, the Government of India suddenly agreed to the separation of Telengana from Andhra Pradesh in late 2009 and decided that 10 backward districts of Telengana region including the city of Hyderabad will form the new state. This was opposed by the coastal Andhras. Violent agitations and disturbances ensued and the Government decision was stalled temporarily. Meanwhile, demand for new states was raised by many people all over India and specially in the North-East (NE).

It will be relevant to mention here that while the Boundary Commission of early 1950s was grappling with its gigantic task, in Assam considerable heat was generated against the demand by the Bengali Hindus for transfer to West Bengal of the earstwhile Goalpara district which then consisted of the present districts of Goalpara, Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon and Chirang. Led by Sarat Chandra Sinha (later Chief Minister of Assam) along with Rupnath Brahma, Prakritish Chandra Barua, Khagen Nath, Muhammed Umaruddin and others, a big movement was mounted against this demand. Ultimately, the earstwhile Goalpara district was retained in Assam. When I joined as a young Deputy Commissioner of that

huge district, with headquarters at Dhubri, in 1967 the embers of the fire stoked by the decade old movement had not fully died down.

Meanwhile, in the process of re-organization of states on the basis of language, the pent-up feelings and grievances of ethnic and tribal groups and sub-groups were unleashed. This happened all over India. But it happened in a more intense manner in Assam which was then the only state encompassing the entire NE barring Tripura and Manipur which were earlier princely native states and had become union territories after independence. Later they achieved full statehood. Prolonged insurgency in the Naga Hills district, since independence, led to its separation from Assam and formation of the union territory of Nagaland. Similarly, insurgency in the Lushai Hills district led to its separation from Assam and formation of the union territory of Mizoram. Both these territories achieved full statehood later. In the 1970s, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills district and the Garo Hill district of Assam were joined together to form the autonomous state of Meghalaya, under Article 244 A (1) of the Indian Constitution. It achieved full statehood within a short time.

The erstwhile North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) was only formally with Assam. It had a separate existence, very strangely, under the Ministry of External Affairs. (This probably strengthened China's demand for the merger of Arunachal Pradesh with that country). The Government of India converted it into a union territory and later transformed it into the full state of Arunachal Pradesh.

In order to achieve co-ordination among the sub-federating units of NE, the North East Council (NEC) was constituted in 1972 after passing the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971 which created a common platform for the NE Region's seven distinct states. Sikkim was the eighth state to join NEC.

The North East : Insurgency and New States

The North Eastern Region (NER) consisting of the state of Assam and some other areas formed a separate geographical entity linked to the Indian mainland only by a narrow corridor of 26 kms in West Bengal. Here the linguistic reorganization formula could not be applied in the same way because of the existence of a very large number of small tribes and languages and territorial intermixture of such tribes. Therefore, differences arose among the various ethnic and linguistic groups which had small populations, but strong sub-regional and racial sentiments. Popular movements all over the Region and some violence and insurgency ultimately resulted in the formation of separate states. In the process, far reaching political changes were made and seven separate states emerged : Manipur, Tripura, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.

As the "Advanced History of India" remarked at that time "the reorganization of territories in north-east India was effected to enable the diverse ethnic and linguistic groups who inhabit the area to shape their own destinies without interference and to remove the feeling that they were being exploited by others."¹¹ This hope was belied, however, when smaller ethnic groups and sub-groups started demanding further vivisection of some of the states. Insurgent outfits also emerged demanding full independence for this or that part of the eight states and threatening to secede from the Indian Union.

It is important to realize that before independence, the British Government's policy was to keep the hill people isolated. They did not allow the hill people to be integrated with the mainstream of Indian life. This was exemplified by the Inner Line Permit system which quite successfully prevented the hill people from being swamped by others. However, this also prevented any real relationship between the hills and the plains in economic, social and cultural fields.

After independence, Prime Minister Nehru adopted a policy framework for the tribals influenced by the well-known anthropologist Verrier Elwin. In fact, Nehru wrote the foreword to Elwin's famous book "*A Philosophy for NEFA*". NEFA became Arunachal Pradesh later. Nehru wrote "the problem of the tribal areas is to make the people feel that they have perfect freedom to live their own lives and to develop according to their wishes and genius. India should signify to them not only a protecting force but a liberating one. Any conception that India is ruling them and that they are the ruled, or that customs and habits with which they are unfamiliar are going to be imposed upon them, will alienate them"¹² Elwin's philosophy has been criticized as romantic. Adverse comments have also been made about his 1939 book "*The Baiga*" where he had advocated for some sort of "National Park" for the tribals in a wild and largely inaccessible part of the country. Later, Elwin regretted this and said that his suggestion was "badly put" and that "I should have realized the unfortunate connotation of the expression National Park".¹³ Elwin explained, "there was no idea of keeping anything static and, in actual fact, there is continual creative development in all these fields".

Elwin emphasized that he was misunderstood. He retorted back at his critics in very strong words, "The main reason why it (Elwin's NEFA philosophy) was believed to have failed was that I was supposed to have advocated a policy of isolation, to have urged the separation of NEFA from the people of Assam". He further said that "In fact, I had not supported any policy of isolation of NEFA people but had devoted several pages of this book to condemning it. As for the Assamese people, for whom I have great affection and respect, I had included in my book the suggestion that every scheme of

development, progress or welfare in NEFA should be submitted to the test whether it would help integrate the tribal people with Assam and, of course, with India as a whole".¹⁴ It would probably be wrong to accuse Elwin for any mis-statement or wrong-statement. But in practice his so-called philosophy created a schism between the Assamese and the Arunachalis and it was Elwin who was primarily responsible for the lop-sided development of the tribal people. While translating these ideas into action the then Advisor, NEFA, late Nari Rustomji, worked under the conviction that "The hillman has, essentially, a clean, direct and healthy outlook; he is free, happily, from the morbid complexès induced by the unnatural life of city folk". Rustomji, therefore, condemned the "reckless talk of uplifting and civilizing the tribes. Officials and social workers must go to the people not as masters who dictate but as elder brothers who have suffered themselves and wish through their experience to spare others the pains they have had to endure".¹⁵

When the Indian Constitution of 1950 was drawn during the years following independence the then Chief Minister of Assam Bharat Ratna Gopinath Bordoloi personally ensured that the Constitution contained special provisions in the sixth schedule relating to the hill areas. He also initiated actions for inter-mixing of the hills and the plains through various socio-cultural activities.

In spite of all these attempts at integration, however, fissiparous tendencies appeared as mentioned earlier. Many factors were responsible for these developments. The desire for self expression, the perception of discrimination and injustice, aspirations of small time politicians, better economic development of neighbouring small states and a host of other factors were responsible for the rise of sub-national and ethnic movements all

over Assam and the NER. Some of these are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The Naga Insurgency

In the wake of India's independence in 1947 the Nagas were the first to raise the flag of revolt. They were a fiercely independent people. Even during British days many interior parts of the Naga inhabited area remained unadministered by the imperial power although the British had annexed most of what is now called Nagaland around 1832.

In 1918 the Naga Club came into existence. It became the platform for Naga unity. On January 10, 1929, the Naga Club submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission in which it pleaded, on behalf of the Nagas, to the British Government "to leave us alone to determine for ourselves as in ancient times".¹⁶ When India became independent the Nagas demanded their own independence. Earlier they had formed the Naga National Council in 1946, which marked the beginning of political movement by the Nagas in search of their identity. Their struggle was based on the premise that the "Nagas had no affinity with India whether racially, historically, politically, culturally, religiously or any otherwise. Therefore Nagaland is not part of Indian territory, neither are Nagas Indians".¹⁷ Insurgency began under the leadership of AZ Phizo.

It was in the Shillong Accord of November 11, 1975, that "the representatives of underground organisations of the Nagas first conveyed their decision, of their own volition, to accept, without condition, the Constitution of India". Later events showed that this promise was not carried out, in letter and spirit, by all the Naga outfits. Violence continued till the Government of India drew an agreement with the Isaac Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) for a ceasefire.

Even after the formal ceasefire and intermittent talks, sporadic incidents of violence have been recorded.

It is true that the underground Naga got divided into various groups, some of which fought against each other. But most organizations continued to demand an independent and greater Nagaland or *Nagalim*. They were not satisfied with Nagaland as a full state of India. They were certainly not happy that some Naga inhabited areas of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh had been left out of Nagaland. The basic fact is that these Naga outfits consider Nagas to be ethnically different from other Indians and they want their right of self-determination outside India. Several rounds of talks have taken place in recent years, but a lasting solution to this vexed problem, which has plagued NE for more than half a century, is not yet in sight.

It was the last British Deputy Commissioner of the erstwhile Naga Hills district of Assam, CR Pawsey, who established the Naga Hills District Tribal Council in April, 1946, with the objective of uniting all Naga tribes under one banner. Pawsey also reported to have played a pivotal role in the formation of the Naga National Council whose policy was to establish a sovereign independent Naga country and to develop it according to the genius of Naga democratic customs and culture. That was the beginning of insurgency in Nagaland. To quote the distinguished Anthropologist, Dr. DN Majumdar, "During the British period may be due to encouragement from British officers like Charles Pawsey ethnic identity organizations grew up among many of the major tribal communities of North-East India". In fact, the ground had already been prepared by the feeling among the hill tribes that "ruling class, be it the British or Indian, tended to adopt a policy of ethnic discrimination towards the hill people."¹⁸

The Mizo Rebellion

In the erstwhile Lushai Hills district of Assam a similar role was played by the then Superintendent (same as Deputy Commissioner) McDonald who convened a meeting of the tribal chiefs in January, 1946 and got a constitution called the McDonald *Roral Khawl* drafted for Lushai Hills which provided for a separate legislature and a Ministry. Later, the Mizo Union was formed as a political party. They demanded, like the Nagas, that all areas with Mizo population in the neighbouring Manipur, Tripura and Chittagong Hill tracts should be included in the Mizo district as proposed by them.¹⁹

It was, therefore, the British administrators who planted the ideas of separation and independence in the minds of the concerned ethnic groups and organizations. It later metamorphosed into insurgencies in both Nagaland and Mizoram. The British officials named above were obviously unhappy with the decision of their home government to leave India. They made every effort to scuttle the proposal. Failing that they prepared the tribes to cause confusion and pandemonium after India's independence. But it was ethnicity which they capitalized on. The feeling was so strong in Mizoram that some secessionist groups wanted to merge with Burma (present Myanmar) because they were ethnically closer to the tribes of Upper Burma.²⁰

For almost two decades after independence, the tribes of Lushai Hills district simmered with discontent over many issues. They felt deeply hurt by the alleged discriminatory treatment by the Government of Assam particularly during the 1959 "*Mautam*" (famine) in the wake of large scale flowering of wild bamboo and the 1960 introduction of Assamese as the official language. The Mizo National Famine Front, formed in 1960 to help the famine victims, converted itself into the Mizo National

Front (MNF). The MNF raised the banner of insurgency when on February 28, 1966 it attacked several important government installations, looted the Aizawl Treasury and kidnapped the Sub-Divisional Officer, Lungleh. On March 1, 1966 the MNF, under the leadership of Laldenga, formally declared independence from India.

Insurgency continued for twenty long years till the Mizoram Accord was signed on June 30, 1986. The insurgent leader Laldenga was sworn in as Chief Minister on August 21, 1986. Mizoram, which had been made a union territory on January 21, 1972, became a full-fledged state on August 29, 1988. Laldenga's Ministry lasted only for eighteen months. But since then Mizoram has been peaceful.

Tripura's Transformation

Tripura has been the homeland of 19 different tribes. It was a peaceful princely state under the British. For a thousand years Tripura was ruled by a dynasty of tribal origin. Its ethnic problem started with the partition of India in 1947. Hundreds of thousands of Bengali Hindus from erstwhile East Pakistan (present Bangladesh) came rushing into Tripura and swamped the indigenous tribals into a hopeless minority. Later even Muslim illegal migrants from Bangladesh came and swelled the ranks of non-tribal population. This created a crisis of identity for the tribals.

The Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti (TUJS) was formed on June 10, 1967 to fight Bengalee chauvinism as well as the neglect of the tribals. The tribals resented the consequences of their economic deprivation and political eclipse. About the same time, the leader Hrarangkwal revived the *Sangram* Union which had been formed earlier. This started the insurgency in Tripura. The main demands of TUJS included the creation of an autonomous district council under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian

Constitution for the tribal people, restoration to the tribals of their land which had been illegally transferred to non-tribals, recognition of tribal *Kakbarak* as a state language and adoption of Roman scripts for *Kakbarak*. The violence that was unleashed by TUJS and some of other insurgent outfits rocked Tripura for a long time resulting in the death of large number of Bengalee people and damage of property belonging to individuals and institutions. It also gave birth to the opposing organization - *Amra Bengali* - which killed a number of tribals beside fuelling the tension among the communities.

In 1977 CPI(M) came to power in Tripura. Led by an able and considerate Chief Minister Nripen Chakravorty, the Communists initiated certain reforms in order to assuage tribal feelings. *Kakbarak* was recognized as the second official language of Tripura beside Bengalee. *Kakbarak* was also made the medium of instruction in the primary schools of the tribal areas. Restoration was ordered to the tribals of whatever land that had been earlier appropriated by the Bengalis without permission of District Magistrates. Necessary steps were taken towards fulfillment of tribal quotas in employment. Enabling legislation was passed for constitution of autonomous district councils under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, similar to those in Assam, and various other welfare steps were initiated for the benefit of the tribals. An Accord was signed with Hrangkhawl, the insurgent leader, at New Delhi in August, 1988. Sporadic violence, however, is still continuing. In the past few years, Tripura has achieved tremendous progress in the economic field specially during the enlightened leadership of the present Chief Minister Manik Sarkar. The tribals have been enabled to share in this prosperity.

Manipur's Woes

Ethnicity is more in evidence in the insurgencies in Manipur. Here the Meiteis in the plains and the two main tribes of *Kukis* and *Nagas* in the hills are perpetually fighting. The *Meiteis*, who converted themselves to Vaishnavite Hindus in the seventeenth century and who form the majority community, feel neglected and discriminated against by the Centre. In fact, "the average Manipuri blames New Delhi for most of his woes. This sense of grievance has fanned separatist sentiment".²¹

Based on this feeling of neglect the insurgent movement took concrete shape in Manipur. N. Bisheshwar, an educated leftist extremist who had spent years in jail because of earlier terrorist activities, organized the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the mid seventies of the last century. The other insurgent organizations which sprung up about the same time were the People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) and the Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP). They all believed in violence for getting a fair deal from the Centre. They wanted the outsiders (*Mayangs*) to leave Manipur. They practised and propagated pan-mongoloid sentiments. As a reaction against Hinduism they prescribed revival of the old *Meitei* religion of *Sanamah*. And all of them were basically secessionists.

In the hills the *Nagas* and the *Kukis* fought against the Centre and against each other. Each had its own insurgent organization. They also had problems with the neighbouring states because the Manipuri Nagas believed in greater *Nagalim*.

The violence is still continuing. But the scale is much less. The insurgencies in Manipur, both in the hills and the plains, are based on ethnicity as in the other states of NE.

Meghalaya's Xenophobia

In Meghalaya ethnicity has been the dominant factor beside neglect and lack of economic development. Ethnicity was the basis in the very emergence of the state. What is significant, however, is the fact that three principal ethnic groups - *Khasis*, *Jaintias* and *Garos* - decided to live together in Meghalaya. They have had their conflicts and problems but still continue as the same state. The dominant tribe - *Khasis* - is extremely conscious of their exclusivity. They like to be left alone. Their dislike of outsiders can be described as xenophobia. Meghalaya is normally peaceful. Some sporadic violence, particularly in Shillong, against outsiders do erupt from time to time. But it is not very serious compared to what is happening in Tripura or Manipur.

Peaceful Arunachal

In Arunachal Pradesh, different tribes have different aspirations. There are pockets of dissatisfaction and many grievances. Insurgent outfits from outside cause trouble sometimes. But there has not yet been any major insurgencies or violent incidents.

Complicated Assam

Assam is bigger than other states of NE in terms of population. The problems are also multifarious. With scores of tribes living in the plains and the hills, Assam has a long history of agitation over this or that issue. Separation of Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh made erstwhile Assam much smaller in area. But the problems did not diminish in rump Assam. The past Assamese majority, which is fast becoming a minority, has all along been dissatisfied with the Government of India. The other tribes harbour grievances against the Assamese as also the Government of India. These became more intense in the last three

decades of the twentieth century. The influx of millions of foreigners from Bangladesh, and some from Nepal, complicated the situation so much that the crisis of identity, which spawned insurgencies in Tripura, made its ugly appearance in Assam also.²² The rich mosaic of cultural variety turned into a nightmare of political maze which engulfed the state in a spate of insurgencies and consequent violence.

The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), the first Assamese insurgent outfit, was born on April 7, 1979 in the playfield of the Ahom Kings in Sibsagar. It demanded freedom for Assam and separation from the Indian Union. The violence it unleashed in the late eighties and the early nineties has no parallel in the North East. The damages it wrought can be compared with those in Jammu and Kashmir and Sri Lanka by their own insurgent outfits.²³ ULFA has gone through several phases of transformation during the past quarter of a century. Its popular support base has been eroded mainly due to the violence against the civil population, and ironically, its aligning with Pakistan's ISI as also its tacit support to the Bangladeshis. ULFA's cadre strength has been decimated by surrenders, arrests and deaths. It has lost its bases in Assam and it has been flushed out from its hideouts in Bhutan.²⁴

Meanwhile Islamist militants have gathered enormous strength and are posing great danger to Assam's remaining with the Indian Union. The state and the central governments seem to have been duly warned. But action taken so far does not appear to be enough. (see Endnotes 24, 25 and 26). ULFA's overall power, however, seem to be declining fast with its leaders and ranks getting distanced from each other. That is why ULFA had joined talks with the Government albeit indirectly through the

People's Consultative Group (PCG) which ULFA formed with some of the leading citizens who seem to support ULFA's cause. But even then sporadic violence was being perpetrated by its hardcore elements particularly against soft targets. Further developments in recent times are discussed later in this book.

The Bodos have been giving vent to their grievances for a long time. But actual insurgency started only in the late eighties mainly as a reaction to the short-sighted, narrow minded and haphazard actions of the Assam Gana Parishad Government. In fact, the AGP Government did not have any proper Bodo policy at all. The Bodo insurgent outfits did tremendous damage to life and property. But they hurt themselves more in the process. The Bodos have now achieved the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts (BTAD). It is doubtful, however, whether they will remain satisfied. They will probably try ethnic cleansing in the BTAD area although ethnic Bodos are a minority in a number of Blocks. The issues are discussed in detail in a later chapter.

Reorganisation of the North East

In order to arrive at a solution of the problem a couple of experiments have been tried in the past few decades including creation of separate states to satisfy the smaller sub-nationalities. The sub-federal structure of the North East Council was devised to co-ordinate the development and common affairs of these states. Then the Ministry of DONER (Department of North Eastern Region) was set up. Both of these are pumping in more money to the Region for economic development. Within Assam, several measures for democratic decentralization have been taken after the Constitution was promulgated on January 26, 1950. These are discussed in the next chapter.

Endnotes

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4. About Iraq many books are available. The following books written before the second Iraq War appear to be useful:
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 - (ii) Judith Miller and Laurie Mylroie: *Saddam Hussain and the Crisis in the Gulf*. Times Books. New York. 1990.
 - (iii) John Bulloch and Harvey Morris: *Saddam's Wars*. Faber & Faber. London. 1991.
 - (iv) Samir al-Khalil: *Republic of Fear*. Pantheon Books. New York 1989.
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6. Peter Heehs: *The Bomb in Bengal, The Rise of Revolutionary Terrorism in India, 1900-1910*. Oxford University Press. Delhi. 1993. Also see: S. H. Subba Rao : *Terrorism and Crimes in India*. Gangarams Publications. Bangalore. Karl A. Seger. *The Anti-Terrorism Handbook*. Lancer International. New Delhi. 1991. Also see Afsir Karim: *Counter Terrorism, The Pakistan Factor*. Lancer International. New Delhi. 1991.
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8. Walker Connor, *From Tribe to Nation, History of European Ideas*, Vol. 13, No. 1/2, 1991.

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15. CL Imchen, *Naga Politics : Regionalism or Non-State Nation*. In "Regionalism in India," ed. B. Pakem, Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi: 1993.
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17. DN Majumder, *Ethnicity and Regionalism in North-East India*, ed. B. Pakem *Regionalism in India*, Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi, 1993.
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21. Myron Weiner, *Sons of the Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India*. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1988.
22. Ved Marwah, ... p. 14.
23. Jaideep Saikia, *Bhutan's Tryst with ULFA*, Aakrosh, July 2004.

24. For a brilliant exposition of ULFA's shenanigans with the ISI, see Jaideep Saikia, *ISI Reaches East, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, USA*, 25, no. 3 (May-June 2002) pp. 185-197.
25. Jaideep Saikia, *Terror Sans Frontiers: Islamist Militancy in North East India*, Vision Books, New Delhi, Mumbai. Hyderabad, 2004.
26. Lt. Gen. (Retd.) SK Sinha, in his foreword to Jaideep Saikia's paper on "Terror Sans Frontiers" included in the University of Illinois' Occasional Papers. USA July, 2003.

The socio-political history of the North-East (located in the outskirts of the eastern and northern parts of India) remained under the dark shadows of mysteries, for long. Today the region is insurgency prone where numerous anti-national elements are causing serious threats to its development and national integrity. Because of a variety of tribes and subtribes and their cultural and social diversities, there is very little common among them except their wilderness and profound distrust and antipathy towards outsiders. Moreover, porous international borders have caused large-scale infiltration disturbing the regional demographic pattern and cultural mix.

The need of the hour is to strive to understand the political processes, reasons for ethnic conflicts and developmental and administrative measures undertaken and required to be undertaken in order to arrive at a sustainable solution to the problems that afflict the region. These issues have important policy implications since the North-East region can serve as an important base in the national quest for improving relations under the "Look East" policy with China, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Bhutan – the countries in the eastern neighbourhood.

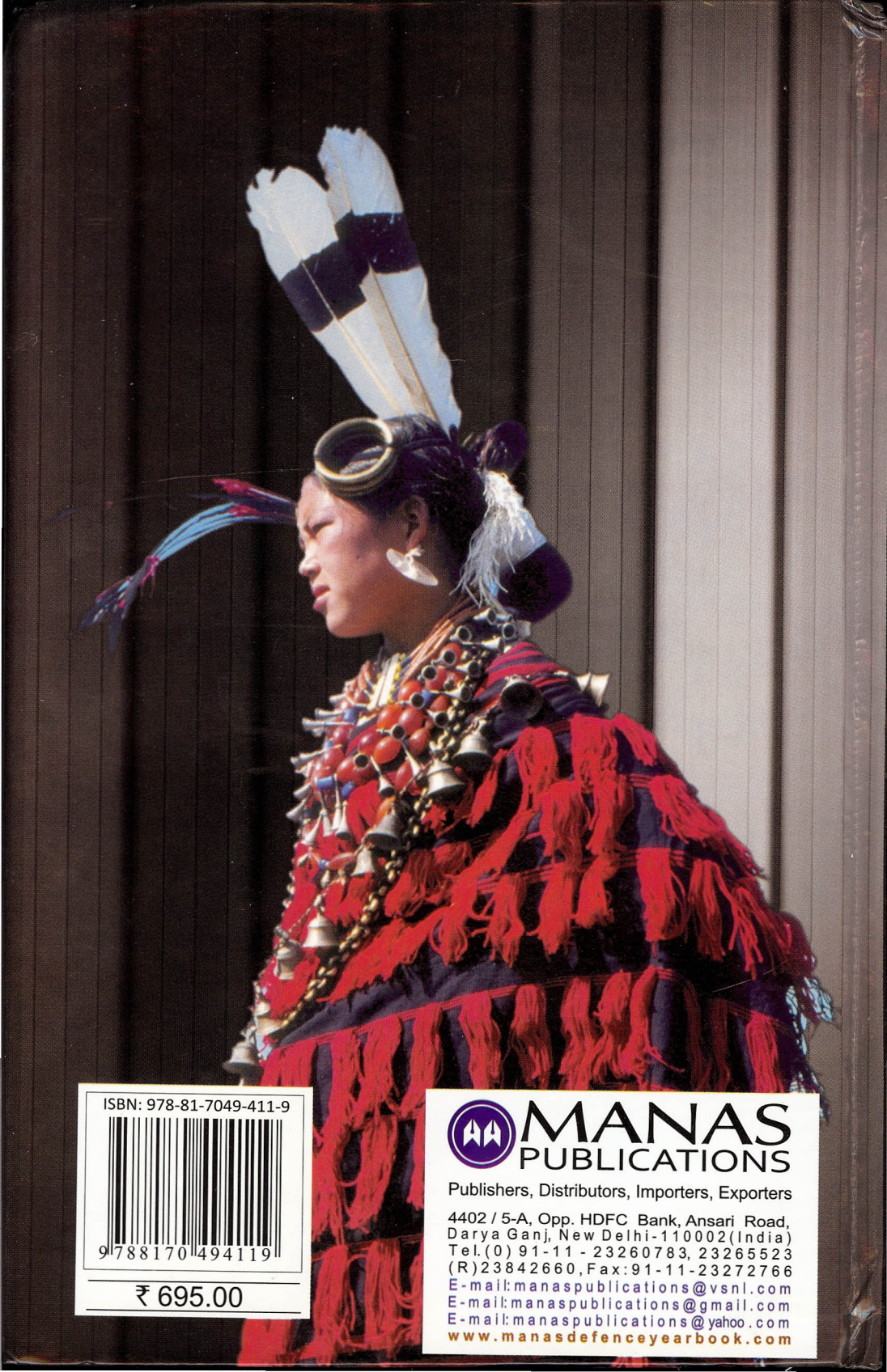
Drawn on his rich service career in North-East Region (NER), the author has traced the history of discontent in Assam and the NER in its political, economic, sociological and cultural contexts providing rare glimpses into the working of the government and the reactions of civil society. Since the author was the first Chairman of the Unified Command consisting of Army, Police, Para-Military forces and civilian administration, he had an intimate knowledge about the insurgent outfits and their anti-national activities.

The book is replete with exhaustive information which the political leaders, civil and defence activists will find very useful. It will help cultivate a better understanding of the issues and problems of India's North-Eastern states.

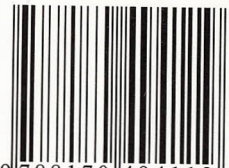


After a brilliant academic career and a brief stint as lecturer of Economics, HN Das joined the Indian Administrative Service in 1961. He served the Government of India as a Director in the Ministry of Finance and the Government of Assam in various capacities including a crucial five year period (1990-95) in the highest post of Chief Secretary. During mid-career, Das spent two and a half years as a Research Scholar in the University of Adelaide (1975-77). After retirement he served the Reserve Bank of India as Banking Ombudsman. He was Chairman of various committees and commissions and worked in various Public Sector Undertakings as Chairman and Director. He took great interest in economic development as one of the ways of controlling insurgency. He has given expression to his ideas in numerous articles and three books *Disaster Management*, *Rural Development in Assam* and *The Grameen Bank of Bangladesh*.

Born on March 1, 1937 in Guwahati (Assam), Das has lived an active social life along with fulfilling his bureaucratic responsibilities. He has, therefore, associated himself with many civil society organizations and widely travelled all over the world.



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