



NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUES: A PERSPECTIVES OF NORTHEAST INDIA

Dr. Priyanath Adinath Ghosh

**Head, Department of Defence and Strategic Studies,
Bhonsala Military College, Nasik.**

ABSTRACT

Security issues of NER have been a great concern in many national and internal conferences, seminars and television shows. Because, NER is vulnerable to various kinds of traditional and non-traditional security threats such as insurgency, food insecurity, environmental damage due to various projects like mining and hydroelectricity dams, human trafficking and illegal immigration. The region is characterised by extra ordinary ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity, with more than 160 scheduled Tribes belonging to five different ethnic groups, and a large and diverse non-tribal population as well. Organised crime and insurgency are the biggest threat to our national security. The frequent blasts have proved existence of local criminals and cardinal components to peace and stability to NER.



KEYWORDS : *Ethnic conflict, geostrategic, geo-politics, border management, Frontier, Regional integration, military aggression, individual freedom, Tran's border crime, illegal migration, insurgency, terrorism, organised crime*

INTRODUCTION

National security is an overriding priority for all nations. National security is a condition in which states consider that there is no danger of external military aggression, political pressure or economic coercion, so that they are able to pursue freely their own development and progress. Security consists not only of military aspect, but also political, economic, social, humanitarian and human rights and ecological aspects. On the other hand underdevelopment and declining prospects for development as well as mismanagement and waste of resources, constitute challenges to security. The security of individuals and communities of which states are constituted is ensured by the guarantee and effective exercise of individual freedom, political, social, and economic rights as well as by the preservation or restoration of a liable environment for present and future generations. Moreover, security also implies that essential human needs, notably in the field of nutrition, education, housing and public health are ensured on a permanent basis. Therefore, the way and means to attain security may be defined in national, intergovernmental, non-governmental, regional or global terms.

The North-eastern region has remained one of India's soft underbellies. The external powers inimical to India have always taken a special interest in this region. The modus operandi of the external powers is to utilize the ethnic, religious and linguistic cleavages in the societies of the region lies politically, economically and culturally at the extreme periphery, it has been considered as soft targets

all along. Even if dismemberment is not possible, the purpose is, at least, to bleed Indian military machinery and her economy to the highest possible extent that will considerably weaken the Indian state.

The North-eastern region (NER) with its vast cultural diversity and ethnic division is prone to violence in the form organised crime and insurgency. NER being surrounded by a long international boundary of 4,800 km which she shares with Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and Myanmar, has an exceedingly strategically sensitive more so when its fragile link with the main land of the country rests on a bottleneck of about 20km width constituting only 0.41 percent of its total boundary. This geographical predicament exposes the region to security threat of grave import when considered from the perspective of external danger posed by some of the non-friendly neighbours. But the security crises created by internal forces in the region are graver than the external troubles anticipated. The operative domains of the forces working against the country are invisible and indistinguishable from the common masses. ¹

Internal security environment in the north-eastern region are very fragile, unpredictable and lack cohesion. Security threats mainly arise due to secessionist movements in the form of cross border terrorism, insurgency and organized crime. Internal security environment in the northeast region recently has become more unpredictable and complicated. Today, the violence in the form of insurgency and extremism is widespread and became the main tools for many ethnic groups to resolve social, political, ethnic differences in the region. Violence in the form of organised crime has affected the prosperity and stability of the region. The insurgency in the northeast has a reflection in socio-cultural, political, economic milieu and the geo-political environment of the area. Security challenges to the northeast crop up from the sources of enemies within and outside the country, as they are dependable to each other. Hence, if the internal security problems are resolved, the external forces inimical to India's national interest will have hardly any opportunity to interfere in the domestic affairs of India.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER:

Against above setting, the paper analyses various facets and enormity of India's national security in terms of individual, group and national harmony. In this context, the study also examines how internal security issues of a state are interwoven with its internal structures as it largely determines its external environment.

HYPOTHESIS AND METHODOLOGY:-

Against such backdrop, the study has been structured based on the hypothesis that continued reliance on the security forces for maintenance of law and order for short term peace settlements do not produce desired environment and results. While doing so, the present study followed the historical, geographical, descriptive and analytical approaches. In this study the logic from particular to general are used to understand antagonism amongst different ethnic groups.

OVERVIEW OF NORTHEAST REGION

Northeast region comprises of eight states namely, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. The entire hill and mountain sector forming 70% of the region is generally covered with forests and is dissected by a large number of major rivers with deep gorges flowing into the main river systems. The region has rich natural resources and the geographical location carries a lot of vibrant economic capabilities with each state having an international border. The statistical figure of the 8 North East states has been given in table I. Northeast region is identified as one of the world's biodiversity hotspots due to its adaptable environment for flora and fauna in this mountainous and riverbed region. Being home to species-rich tropical rain forest, the region supports diverse flora and fauna and several crop species.

Table 3.1: Statistical figure of North East states

State	Area	Population	Districts	Literacy
Assam	78,438sq. km	31,169,272	27	73.18
Arunachal Pradesh	83743 sq. km	13,82,611	16	66.95
Manipur	22327 sq.km	27,21,756	9	79.85
Meghalaya	22,429sq. km	29,64,001	7	75.48
Mizoram	21081 sq. km	10,91,014	8	91.58
Nagaland	16579 sq. km	19,80,602	11	80.11%
Sikkim	7096 sq. km	6,07,688	4	82.20
Tripura	10486 sq. km	36,71,032	4	87.75

Source: Ministry of Development of North Earth Region (MDoNER) <http://www.mdoner.gov.in/>

North East states have much diversity in origins and cultures with different ethnic groups, speaking different languages. The region has been the meeting space for many races and cultures. The presence of various population groups with diverse backgrounds, introduced complex inter-relationships that made the definitions of the concepts of territory and territoriality a matter of necessity. The people of this region are also rapidly adapting to modern education. As per 'Basic Statistics of North Eastern Region, 2015' on literacy rate of North East region; Arunachal Pradesh has 65.38%, Assam 72.19%, Manipur 79.21%, Meghalaya 74.43%, Mizoram 91.33%, Nagaland 79.55%, Sikkim 81.22%, Tripura 87.22% and all India has 74.04%. Thus, almost the entire states, except Arunachal Pradesh, have crossed the average of all India literacy rate. ²

One of the characteristics features of North East region is that it shares just 2 per cent of border with the mainland of the country and about 98 per cent of its border is share with international border. North-East is located between 29 N and 22N latitude and 89°46 and 97°6 E longitude and constitutes 8 per cent of the total Indian geographical size and represents only 3 per cent of the population. The region is vulnerable in two senses- the tiny geographical connection with the rest of the country in which almost the entire region is covered by different countries and the very existence of numerous ethnic groups. Northeast states are connected by a piece of land with the rest of the country, often denoted as 'chicken neck' corridor. This corridor is surrounded by three countries- Bangladesh and Nepal lying on either side of the corridor and Bhutan in the northern side. The encroachment of any external aggression in an area of this corridor can create havoc for the region, in fear of cutting-off the region from the rest of the country.

SECURITY ISSUES

Historical perspectives:

NER, at the time of independence, was a conglomeration of two valleys—Bhramaputra and Barak, where most of the people lived, two princely states- Manipur and Tripura, and numerous hill areas inhabited by hundreds of tribes of different origin and dialects. NER was never a part of any great Indian, be it Gupta or Mughal Empire. During the British period, the Governor of Assam administered the tribal areas. Except British officials no outsiders was permitted to visit these areas. Devoid of contact with the rest of the country the tribal's' were not influenced by India's freedom struggle. British did not want to meddle in the affairs of the frontier tracts and allowed them to rule themselves in their own tribal homeland as long as they did not interfere with the British business interest in oil, tea, coal and timber. The states of Manipur and Tripura were princely states, like the six hundred odd princely states of the British period. During the British period, Assam was developed to some extent, due to the potential it had of oil, tea and forest wealth. The area of Meghalaya was more developed than the other peripheral states, as Shillong was the capital of undivided Assam; and also because it had tea gardens. During the Second World War, due to the Japanese invasion, the area of Nagaland and Manipur received some attention, particularly in the way of development of communications.

For reasons of security the British had a system of inner Line Regulations, whereby, nobody could enter the tribal area, known as the Excluded Area without prior permission. Further, the British

generally left the tribal's to themselves and comparatively little development of the area was undertaken. However, they maintained general control of the area, by slowly extending the administration, with the help of a Para-military force specifically raised for the purpose, known as the Assam Rifles. Further, whenever the tribal's carried out any depredations into the plains area, particularly the oil installations and tea estates, or otherwise misbehaved by defying the administration, the British used to mount punitive expeditions with the army and subjugate the people. While many of the tribal's were animists to start with, considerable conversion to Christianity took place over a period of time. Many of the foreign missionaries, apart from preaching religion, carried out a great deal of social work, such as spreading literacy, providing medical attention, wearing away tribal's from the practice of head hunting and so on. However, some of them indulged in mischievous political activities, such as promoting separatism by misleading the simple and ignorant people that they were different from the other Indian people, and fostering secessionist tendencies in them. The freedom struggle that took place in the rest of the country, did not reach out to many of these areas, owing to constraints on contacts with the people resulting from inner line regulations and lack of adequate effort on the part of the leaders of the nationalist movement in the country. The consequences of all these factors were that the people of this region generally remained aloof from the mainstream of political life in the country. Apart from lack of development there was also feeling of neglect and deprivation among the people of the region. ³

HUMAN SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN NER

On the basis of findings, many people have lack of sense of security in their mind due to many reasons. Genesis of insurgency in the northeast has its root in historical, political and socio-economic content and in few cases these have developed due to geo-political complexion. While political distortions, economic disparity, poor governance are common ingredients towards dissatisfaction of section of people. The sense of sub-nationalism based on ethnic identity and rejection of "outsiders", coupled with the poor governance are the root causes to the emergence of insurgency in the region. With the emergence of this sense of sub-nationalism among many indigenous people has further destabilized the region. Unfortunately, the rise of contentious politics based on sectarian, ethnic, linguistic or other divisive criteria is primarily responsible for breeding insurgency in the region.

However, most of the insurgents group have transformed themselves as merely extremist group by adopting unscrupulous strategy to gain administrative and economic power. Eventually, easy availability of sophisticated small arms, light weapons and money has helped them to become as gun running bandits. Hence, today just they run an unlawful organisation that make the most of the political disorder in the region, fully organised to harvest easy money (through abduction, extortion, robbery, trafficking etc) threatening both the government and the civil population. Particularly among the tribal, the sense of alienation was the result of economic stagnation and negligence, lack of physical and emotional links with the mainland of India. All this coupled with demographic invasion, smuggling of arms and explosives, narcotics and counterfeit currency notes and the involvement of external powers has complicated the problems.

Security and human development have a symbiotic relationship –without security there can be no development and without economic development security has no meaning. Development is an overarching term encompassing economic growth through agricultural improvement, industrialisation and national integration. Anything that comes in the way as a hindrance of such development is a threat to the human security. In turn, the government has to deal with variety of challenges in this region including border security management, law and order problems of economic development to proxy war and low intensity conflicts, and evolves adequate responses to deal with insurgency and terrorist violence. Economic development is considered to be the foundation of a society. As a constituent unit of Indian society, NER has been facing problems of economic development. Development is highly barred in absence of peace and security. One of the regions of underdevelopment is due to lack of stability. Most of the problems in the region are due to the unhealthy politics. Many non-state actors gain strength through clandestine support from the politicians. While economic development is vital for

successfully combating insurgency, it is the growth of extremist organisations and their nexus with political parties, contractors and bureaucrats that impedes the development. As a result of the disturbed situation, foreign companies are reluctant to invest in NER. ⁴

ECONOMY OF THE REGION

At the time of independence, NER was one of the most prosperous, due to its rich natural resources; the per capita income was higher than the national average, particularly state of Assam. The rich resources mainly petroleum and tea were exported to many nations before the partition. The better accessibility into this region makes the region an economically strong during this period. Also, there have been centuries of mutual exchange of ideas, goods and services between the communities across the political boundaries. The partition has altered the economy of the Northeast region. With the discovery of petroleum and tea in the region and the introduction of railways boosted the economy development of the region. Apart from the two most lucrative commodities during the British trade-petroleum and tea, cultivation of rice was practice predominantly. Even today, agriculture remains the main occupation of the northeast people. Tea still holds an important economic contributor from the region with 52% of the tea leaves produced in the country annually, other crops are rubber, Areca Nut (betel nut), banana, pineapple, citrus fruits, cashew nut, litchi, coconut and temperate fruits like apple, pear, plum and peaches.¹As far as industrialisation of is concern, the region is far less developed than most part of the country. Based on the availability of raw material and connectivity, few industries like tea, petroleum, petroleum refineries and petroleum products, chemicals, and fertiliser, plywood, pulp and paper, cement and thermal power-generating units; besides the region has cottage industry like silk yarn and cloth and other forest-based industries like bamboo products, furniture and a variety of domestic utility goods.

NER has been gifted with large quantity of natural resources, rich in natural resources, minerals and ores, crude oil and natural gas. Every state of the region is endowed with horticultural products, plantation crops, vegetables, spices, herbs and medicinal plants and governs a competitive advantage in one or more products. Generally, these products are low in value addition but if properly pooled within a value chain as an intermediate input or product have the potential to increase competitiveness and, hence, access to markets. The growth of infrastructure, transportation and communication are not adequate, till date. The overall growth rate of Northeast region has never been at par with the Indian growth story. Within Northeast States, the contributions of individual states also vary, with a clear trend of a declining contribution by Assam vis-a-vis other states in the region. The best example to be drawn while considering the economic prosperity of NER was during colonial period. It was possible due to the accessibility to the region, without political boundary is one of the advantages that the trading with other part of the world was possible. Cutting off the trading routes has caused the region immensely. Today, considering the political relationship with the neighbouring countries in the region, the actual realization of trade potentials is constrained. There is a host of other constraints as well. The most important among them are policy environment at home and enabling conditions such as supporting trade infrastructure and transport and communication connectivity with the possible trading partner. As far as trade with neighbouring countries in the India's North East is concern, Bangladesh and Myanmar holds an important place. ⁵

CONCLUSION:

Peace and security in NER, being cardinal components of all round progress for its citizens, have always been a nagging concern and burning discourse on the 'Indian National political Dias'. NER comprising eight states has been one of the most impulsive and sensitive regions in the country since long. This has been overwhelmed with multiple problems like political violence, ethnic conflict, migration pressure, inter-state disputes, under development have become vital to the thoughtful of the political process and economic development causing lost of peace and security of the region. In spite of several autonomy packages from the central government, adoption of a policy of political accommodation and receiving regular relief out of economic concessions, violence has been prevalent

in the area. The region has always been in the news only for all negative reasons: agitation, violence, abuse of human rights and corruption. The management of our country sees the problem from a law and order perspectives and treats it as a minor conflict which may be turned into an internal peace and security hazards at any time. Sociologists perceive it as a clash between the traditional social structure and the changes and challenges of development and modernization whereas separatist and insurgents blame the extractive and colonial policy of the Union Government for the miseries of the region. For many of these groups, denial of the right of self determination of the native people as well as political restraints is responsible for the massacre in the region.

END NOTES

1 Randeep Singh. "Insurgency and counter insurgency": A case study of Manipur and Nagaland, APH publisher, New Delhi, 2001

2 Basic statics of North eastern Region 2015, North Eastern Council

http://necouncil.gov.in/sites/default/files/uploadifiles/Basic_statics_2015.min.pdf and Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, government of India

3 J.R. Mukherjee, "An insider's Experience of Insurgency in India's North East", Anthem, London, 2005

4 Somayeh Ghanbari, Development and Human Security, Bookmark publication, Pune, 2011

5 Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, government of India

<http://mdoner.gov.in> Accessed on 27.02.2019
