

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 General

The term 'North East' refers to the seven small states, which lie at the Eastern extremity of the Indian mainland (Refer Map 1). Connected to the rest of the country by a narrow strip of land<sup>1</sup>, the North East covers an area of 262,000 sq. km. and borders China, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh. It consists of just 7.9% of India's area and 3.8% of its population<sup>2</sup>. It is a hilly region of charming beauty and amazing biodiversity. It is also an area with an equally rich multiplicity of tribes, ethnic groups, languages and religions.

However, the seven North Eastern states, namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura, have been troubled by insurgent movements ever since independence. While the conflict has ebbed in some of the states, others continue to be partly or wholly affected. The demography and geography of the region is such that unrest in one state invariably affects the others. As a result, the region as a whole has remained unstable.

These insurgent movements are partly the result of historical factors that have their roots in British colonial policies and partly the result of lack of strategic vision

---

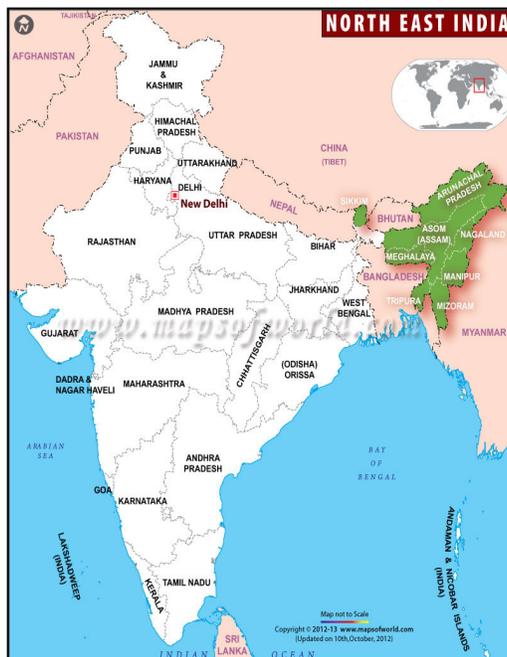
<sup>1</sup>This strip is called the Siliguri Corridor. It lies between Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh and is just 22 km wide at its narrowest point.

<sup>2</sup> India's total area is 3,287,240 square km and population (as per 2011 census) is 1.24 Billion. The population of the North East is 3.9 million. [www.censusindia.gov.in](http://www.censusindia.gov.in)

and good governance post-independence. Nagaland was the first state where armed groups seeking secession surfaced in the 1950s. This was followed by Mizoram in the 1960s, Manipur in the 1970s, Assam and Tripura in the 1980s and parts of Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya in the 1990s. A striking feature about these groups is that they are invariably drawn along tribal and ethnic lines. In some of the states, there are as many armed groups as the number of tribes or sub tribes, with each group claiming to be the legitimate voice of its people. Preservation of 'identity' in a multi-ethnic environment is the common theme which is indicative of deep rooted tribal differences and an overall trust deficit. While some groups are fighting for secession from India, others are seeking a better socio-political arrangement within the constitutional framework. Thus they represent incomplete socio-political and economic assimilation both within the region as well as with the larger Indian society.

Map 1.1

North East India (Source: Maps of the World – India Maps. 2012. [www.mapsofworld.com/india](http://www.mapsofworld.com/india) Accessed April 10, 2013)



The Army was first called out for counter insurgency operations in the 1950s and its footprint over the region has kept increasing over the decades. But the government has not been averse to talking to the insurgents. Its policy has been a mix of military force along with political accommodation, economic largesse and socio-cultural concessions. But the conflicts have persisted. Whenever an agreement is reached with a group, disgruntled elements sprout a new organization to keep the movement alive. Thus the history of the region is marked with splits among armed groups and their morphing into new entities. In the process the region has never witnessed normalcy and has lagged behind rest of the country in all indices of human development and economic growth. A cursory look at statistics would reveal the disparity between the North Eastern states and other Indian states with comparable size and resources.

The North East is strategically important. It borders five countries and has close to 5,200 km of external borders, some of which are still unsettled. China lays claim to the entire state of Arunachal Pradesh and does not recognize the existing boundaries. As both India and China grow and compete, the border dispute remains a potential flashpoint. Seen in this context, internal instability in the North East is a major strategic vulnerability. The North East is also the gateway to the ASEAN countries and is central to India's 'Look East' policy.<sup>3</sup>With its abundance of natural resources and hydroelectric potential it can become an important driver of the national economy. But violence

---

<sup>3</sup>India's Look East policy seeks closer economic integration with the ASEAN region through Myanmar, which is one of the ASEAN countries. For more on the policy see website of the Ministry of External Affairs <http://www.mea.gov.in>.

and instability are preventing it from attaining its potential. The North East thus presents both weaknesses and opportunities.

India takes pride in its democracy, secularism and pluralism. It is endowed with a large size, abundant natural resources and an important geostrategic location. It has a diverse and rapidly growing economy, a youthful population and a stable polity. It is also a nuclear power with the fourth largest military forces in the world. Riding on the wave of these factors, India is rightfully acknowledged as a major regional power. As it grows and aspires for a greater say in the world stage, India cannot afford to have lingering internal wars that remain unresolved for decades. The separatist sentiment in India's peripheral states strikes at the very concept of Indian nationhood i.e. "*unity in diversity*". Together with the threats of terrorism and religious fundamentalism, it threatens the multicultural fabric of the country. Thus for a rising nation, the challenges in the North East assume a national priority.

In the past decade the violence levels in the North East have fallen dramatically.<sup>4</sup> Relentless military operations have weakened the major insurgent groups making most of them sign ceasefire agreements and come forward for talks. Though this has spawned anti-talk factions in many cases, it has definitely improved the situation. This has led to the region further receding from the national discourse. But it would be a fallacy to assume that the conflicts in the region are nearing

---

<sup>4</sup>For comparative figures on violent incidents and casualties in the North East over the past 10 years, see Annual Report of the Ministry of Home Affairs. [www.mha.gov.in/annualreports](http://www.mha.gov.in/annualreports).

resolution. On the whole, the separatist sentiment may have dimmed but lasting peace and prosperity is still a far way off.

The contentious issues in each state are different. The nature and intensity of violence is also different. Today, Arunachal Pradesh (except two districts), Meghalaya and Mizoram are by and large peaceful and the Army is not deployed for counter insurgency operations. Upper Assam and Tripura are limping back to normalcy. In Lower Assam, the Bodo conflict for a homeland continues, but it is sub-national in nature. That leaves only Nagaland and Manipur as the two states where the insurgency is still alive and strong.

In Nagaland there is a ceasefire with the two main groups, but notwithstanding the on-going talks, there is no let up in efforts at subversion and secession. Manipur is the most violent state with scores of armed groups with conflicting demands. It is a case of a three way split in the society between the majority Meiteis and the lesser Nagas and Kukis. It throws an ideological challenge to Indian democracy and pluralism.

The Naga insurgency being the oldest is also called the 'mother insurgency'. The two main groups, namely the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, NSCN – Issac Muivah (IM) and the Khaplang (K) factions, are potent organizations. They wield considerable influence outside Nagaland owing to the spill over of Naga population in other states and neighbouring Myanmar. Most armed groups in other states have been inspired and have tried to fashion themselves along similar lines. The situation in Manipur is closely linked to Nagaland on account of the sizable Naga population

that inhabits the Northern half of the state. Thus a breakthrough in Nagaland and Manipur will have a cascading effect across the region.

As a research scholar, I believe that Nagaland and Manipur hold the key to the entire region. Insurgency in the North East is no more ideologically driven. The aspirations of the younger generation are markedly different from those earlier. The situation can be turned around by expanding economic opportunities for the youth and through good governance. The armed groups will become redundant when all sections of the society grow and prosper equally. For this the beginning must be made from Nagaland and Manipur.

## **1.2 Issues for Consideration**

Insurgency, political instability and ethnic conflict are inimical to economic development. Widespread and prolonged socio-political conflict results in economic destruction and social disorganization. But this is only one side of the picture. Economic factors also play a role in generating and perpetuating internal conflicts. They impact negatively on the regional and national economy but often benefit a section of the population and power elites. Political power and economic clout therefore become the bone of contention between different societal groups. When wealth, jobs and resources are unequally distributed, they aggravate the existing ethnic or historical fault lines.

Most analyses of separatism and militancy in the North East identify economic backwardness as the root cause of the problem. But it is a moot question whether

unrest in the North East is the result of economic backwardness or is the region economically backward as a result of unending internal unrest?

Democracy is considered the most responsive form of government. All the North Eastern states have democratically elected state governments. Each state is represented in both houses of the parliament. Free and fair elections have regularly been held to the state assemblies and the parliament with a high voter turnout. In multitude of the cases the governments have been voted back to power. Yet insurgency has persisted. This is a paradox. If the peoples' will is expressed through the ballot, then who do the insurgent groups represent? Why have the State and Central governments failed to subdue these groups? Is it that they are not working in sync?

One line of thought is that in a milieu where politics is 'identity based' instead of being 'issue based' the people have reconciled to the socio-political equilibrium. Thus insurgent groups have become parallel power centres and adapted to a symbiotic relationship with the elected governments. In the process the governments are under no compulsion to deliver and governance suffers. It would need an extraordinary mass movement cutting across tribal lines to bring about a change. What can be the impetus for such a movement? Does the growing population of the youth and their aspirations hold the key to a new beginning?

At the same time it is important to note that nature of the conflict in the region is transforming. While the line between crime and insurgency is getting blurred, new

threats in the form of Left Wing Extremism (LWE) and ethnic strife (as a result of demographic imbalances due to unabated illegal immigration from Bangladesh) are looming large over the region. The current lull in insurgency and shift in public mood offers a window of opportunity to solve the conflicts before the situation becomes more complex.

### **1.3 Scope of the Study**

The problem in each North Eastern state is different though they are linked by common underlying factors. The focus of this study is restricted to Nagaland and Manipur due to the following reasons:-

Insurgency in its true sense endures only in Nagaland and Manipur. In other states, it has degenerated into heightened law and order problems.

Naga insurgency is the oldest and ideologically the strongest. The NSCN factions are the most potent armed groups in the North East and enjoy a close nexus with groups in other states.

Naga tribes inhabit parts of other North Eastern states. Solution of the Naga problem will have a cascading effect across the region and automatically help in resolving other smaller problems.

Any solution in Nagaland is linked to the Naga inhabited areas of Manipur. The Meitei & Kuki insurgency are both inspired by and a counter to the Naga cause.

The problem in Manipur is the most complex. If a solution is arrived for this problem, the conflict resolution model in Manipur can be replicated in other states as well.

#### **1.4 Hypothesis**

H<sub>0</sub> Governance deficit and socio-economic inequities are not the main reasons for persistence of insurgency in the North East, particularly in the states of Nagaland and Manipur.

H<sub>1</sub> Governance deficit & socio-economic inequities aggravate tribal fault lines and are the reason for persistence of insurgency in the entire North East and particularly in Nagaland and Manipur. The situation in these two states holds the key to conflict resolution across the region. If left unresolved, this stalemate poses a strategic security risk to the entire country.

In order to study the above hypothesis qualitative and quantitative study was carried out. Based on the questions which lead us to the hypothesis, questionnaires were sent to various stake holders. These included a number of sub hypothesis which have been stated and discussed in the relevant chapters. In the end a qualitative analysis of arguments has been undertaken based on the research carried out and the hypothesis validation has been undertaken.

## **1.5 Importance of the Study**

The national security discourse in India is mainly dominated by cross border terrorism, Left Wing Extremism and the situation in Jammu and Kashmir. The North East seldom makes it to the national debate. There is also limited understanding of the nuances of this complex region. At a time when violence levels are down and the situation appears to be getting normal, the underlying problems can easily get swept under the carpet.

The North East is a strategic area. Internal unrest presents a critical vulnerability that can be easily exploited by our adversaries. At the same time unresolved insurgencies diminish India's stature as an emerging regional power. This study seeks to serve as a reminder of the challenges that lie ahead which merit national priority and focus.

## **1.6 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study are as follows:-

To explore the origin and dynamics of the problem in Nagaland and Manipur.

To critically analyse the government response at the Central and State level and identify the shortcomings. What are the current drivers of the conflict?

To explore the aspirations of the people (especially the youth) in these States?  
How do they see their future under the shadow of the gun? How do they see themselves in relation to rest of a rising India?

To examine whether the military weakening of the insurgent groups marks the beginning of their demise or is it a passing phase? What or who do they represent? Is there any point in talking to one faction of an outfit when another faction remains belligerent?

To examine how the regional and international environment is evolving? What is the role of external powers in influencing the present situation? What are the geo-strategic and security dimensions of the problem?

To recommend practical measures to break the impasse and usher lasting peace in the area.

## **1.7 Research Design**

The research is in the form of comparison of conclusions drawn from primary and secondary sources. First I have looked at secondary sources and tried to analyse the causes of the problem in the North East in general and Nagaland and Manipur in particular. Through published material and statistics I have identified the drivers and current dynamics of the insurgency. Thereafter I have taken a first-hand feedback from primary sources and matched it with the empirical conclusions. Analysis of the

conclusions has suggested courses of action available to the government to address the problem.

I started by a review of the existing literature on the North East in general and Nagaland and Manipur in particular. I have tried to analyse how other researchers have viewed the problem.

Thereafter I have looked at how historical factors have shaped the psyche of separatism in the region. I have then narrowed down on Nagaland and Manipur and looked for the underlying reasons of insurgency. Simultaneously I have examined how the Indian Government has responded to the problem. This includes an analysis of the attempts at political accommodation, economic development and socio-cultural autonomy.

This is followed by analysis of the geo-strategic importance of the region. It includes India's relations with Bangladesh and Myanmar, the two neighbouring countries, which have maximum bearing on the security situation in the North East. Developing enduring relations with these countries has a direct bearing on external support for the insurgent movements.

Thereafter I have looked at the socio-economic dimensions of the problem. How insurgent groups have got entrenched into the fabric of the society and how insurgency has become an industry. How systematic extortion and corruption is siphoning off funds meant for development and what can be done to stem the rot.

I have done a qualitative analysis of the feedback from all the stakeholders. This is in the form of questionnaires sent to the population of the states including students, teachers, business persons, government officials and others and Security Forces personnel working at the grassroots level.

### **1.7.1 Primary Data**

Primary data has been collected through questionnaires from different stakeholders. To critically analyse the strategic dimensions of insurgency in North East India, as part of primary research, a detailed questionnaire was prepared to analyse the response by a cross section of population of the two states of Manipur and Nagaland and from defence and paramilitary personnel deployed in the states. Analyses of the responses was carried out to factor it in the recommendations.

Three separate sets of questionnaires were prepared, one each for Nagaland and Manipur and one for the defence and para military personnel posted in these states.

The primary research also includes interviews with key government officials to include elected leaders, senior bureaucrats, Army officers, Police & Intelligence officers as well as eminent scholars. I have made use of Government reports and statistics.

### **1.7.2 Secondary Data**

Secondary data has been extracted from review of existing literature. I have studied a large number of literature on the historical context of insurgency in the North

East. The previous researches carried out on the insurgency in the North East have also been studied. I have studied the past and present trends in the socio-economic-political developments of these areas to validate my hypothesis and these have been incorporated in my research work.

In addition I have referred to published works in form of books, newspapers, journals, on-line sources and debates in the print and electronic media. I have served extensively in the North East and have therefore also relied on my own first-hand experience. However there is no reference to any classified matter. All material is from open source.

### **1.7.3 Population**

The population for the purpose of survey consists of the population of the states of Manipur and Nagaland and the Security Forces deployed in the area. The research involves measuring attitude of the stakeholders in the states. These were grouped into strata consisting of students, teachers, individual businessmen / self-employed personnel, government servants and others.

### **1.7.4 Sample Size**

Samples comprise 588 people with 245 from Nagaland, 272 from Manipur and 71 from Security Forces (SF) personnel.

### **1.7.5 Sampling Technique**

Two stage Stratified sampling has been adopted for the purpose of collecting primary data. Questionnaire and schedules based on Nominal Scales for population of

Manipur and Nagaland and on Likert Scale for SF personnel were circulated to various categories of stakeholders.

### **1.7.6 Data Collection Method**

Convenience sampling for the sub populations was resorted to. Questionnaires were sent by post. All stake holders in the society from the population of the two states of Nagaland and Manipur were covered. A sample group of Security Forces personnel who operate in the area and had first-hand experience in the management of security situation in the states were approached. In addition interviews were conducted with a large number of eminent personalities having in-depth knowledge of the subject.

### **1.7.7 Data Analysis**

Descriptive as well as inferential statistics has been used. SPSS was used for data analysis. KMO and Bartlett's test was applied to determine the sphericity and measure of sampling adequacy of the data. Factor analysis using Varimax Rotation was carried to find the underlying dimensions of the questionnaires. Chi Square analysis and ANOVA were used towards Hypothesis testing of sub hypothesis.

### **1.7.8 Period of Study**

The primary data has been collected during the years 2012 to 2014. The literature review and secondary data collection work has been carried out since the year 2011.

### **1.7.9 Limitations of the Study**

Since the study is based on the sample, the findings of the study may have the limitation of generalization to whole population. Sometimes, the respondents may fail to articulate the responses. Therefore, the in-articulation error may creep in to the study. Since the study is on the population, sometimes, the subjects may not respond as they may not be inclined to do so due to various reasons. Hence, Non Response error is bound to be present. Another limitation of the study may be the respondent's attitude toward completing a questionnaire, or otherwise participating in a study that has little intrinsic or extrinsic reward. While members of the sample were solicited as volunteers, no compensation for their time or effort was offered.

### **1.8 Discussion on the Terms Used**

The term 'North East' denotes the seven states of North East India namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. But it excludes Sikkim, which is often included as part of the region.<sup>5</sup>

The term Security Forces is collectively used for all the uniformed services. It includes the Army, the Police and the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) deployed for Counter Insurgency Operations.

The term militancy is used interchangeably with insurgency in many of the readings on the North East. They denote all kinds of activities carried out by armed

---

<sup>5</sup>Sikkim forms part of the North East in the North Eastern Council (NEC) and the Ministry of Development of the North Eastern Region (DONER).

groups and include violent as well as non-violent action. Both terms will be used in this study. Similarly, the term militant groups, armed groups and insurgent groups are used interchangeably by many scholars and will so be used in this study as well.

The insurgents in the North East have been called by different terms over the years. The literature on the subject uses these terms interchangeably. They were called 'hostiles' in the 1950s and 60s. This changed to 'rebels' in the 1970s and 80s. The groups being clandestine in nature were also called 'Underground Groups' or UGs. The term 'militants' caught on in the 1990s and is still widely used. After the 9/11 attacks and growing international intolerance for politically motivated violence, the term 'terrorists' has been used. All these terms, wherever used in the study, would mean insurgents.

Terrorists and insurgents both use violence as a weapon. The difference is that, for insurgents, violence is one way among many other lines of effort; thus it is a method of action. While for terrorists it is the only line of effort; thus making it a logic of action (Marks, Gorka and Sharp 2010). Though the government has labelled most secessionist groups in the North East as terrorist organizations, the term is not truly reflective of their mass base and their discriminating nature of violence.

However, many small groups seeking better accommodation within the Indian constitution, as opposed to secession, are not officially classified as 'banned organisations'. Even among the larger groups, those that have a secessionist ideology but have come forward for talks have been removed from the 'banned' and 'terrorist'

list, for instance the NSCN(IM) and NSCN (K) are no more banned.<sup>6</sup> The term ‘cadres’ is a commonly used term for members of all groups, irrespective of their legal status.

The terms tribe, community and ethnic group are used interchangeably in the North East and the convention will be followed in this study. The term ‘native groups’ is commonly used for communities that pre-date the arrival of the British in the region, vis-à-vis more recent settlers.

The term ‘Jihadi groups’, ‘Islamist’ groups and ‘Muslim Fundamentalist Organizations (MFOs)’ are interchangeably used for those groups, which profess their goal as an Islamic Caliphate and governance under Sharia law. This study will use the term MFOs.

The term ‘Ceasefire’ refers to a written agreement between the Government and an insurgent group. Any ceasefire is governed by the ‘ground rules’ agreed upon by both sides. The term ‘Suspension of Operations’ or SOO is a local ceasefire between the Security Forces and an insurgent group. It is a temporary arrangement usually as a prelude to a formal ceasefire and commencement of negotiations.

---

<sup>6</sup>For list of banned groups see the website of the Ministry of Home Affairs. <http://mha.gov.in/banned-organizations>.