

Emergent North-East India

A way forward

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Preface

Although this book is intended for the student of college and university level but it can be helpful for researchers, pedagogue and other reader of sociology and anthropology. North east region is situated in - between the two great traditions of the India Asia and Mongoloid Asia. North east comprises the seven sisters' states-Arunachal, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. This region is officially recognized as a special category of states. The North East Council (NEC) was constituted in 1971 as the nodal agency for the economic and social development of the eight states, the North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd (NEDFC) was incorporated on August 9, 1995 and the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DONER) was set up in September 2001.

North-east region, a vital entity of great Indian land has been in the limelight in spite of being geographically in the extreme corner of the country. In the recent times by virtue of being a major source of oil, tea, forest product and medicinal herbs, the region has acquired special importance for India. Dominantly mountainous, North-east forms natural walls separating India from adjacent lands.

This book with nine chapters gives fair account of origin, history, and rich cultural heritage of various tribes now settled in different parts of North-East. The author has paid well deserved attention to various segments of the region and concentrated on past researches, the land, the life, economic conditions, occupational patterns, arts and crafts, traditional dormitories and inherent concepts, dresses, entertainment and rapidly changing cultural and economic scene of the North-East.

(x)

I cannot close these prefatory remarks without thanking those who have helped me write this book. I am grateful to Professor T.K. Oomen, Professor Dipankar Gupta, Professor M.N. Panini, and Professor K.L. Sharma for their inspirational teaching over the years. I would like to pay my sincere thanks to the publisher for his cooperation to publish this book.

Himansu Charan Sadangi

Introduction

North-east India is the easternmost region of India consisting of the contiguous Seven Sister States and the state of Sikkim. Seven states commonly known as the “Seven Sisters”. They are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura.

The North-east is a true frontier region. It has over 2000 km of border with Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh and is connected to the rest of India by a narrow 20 km wide corridor of land. One of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse regions in Asia, each state has its distinct cultures and traditions.

From times immemorial, India’s North East has been the meeting point of many communities, faiths and cultures. A place renowned for its magical beauty and bewildering diversity, North-east India is the home for more than 166 separate tribes speaking a wide range of languages. Some groups have migrated over the centuries from places as far as South East Asia; they retain their cultural traditions and values but are beginning to adapt to contemporary lifestyles. Its jungles are dense, its rivers powerful and rain, and thunderstorms sweep across the hills, valleys and plains during the annual monsoons.

The lushness of its landscape, the range of communities and geographical and ecological diversity makes the North-east quite different from other parts of the subcontinent. In winters, mist carpets the valleys but swirls around the traveller in hills during summer rains, thus creating an enchanting and romantic atmosphere. The region has borders with Myanmar, Bhutan and Bangladesh.

The festivals and celebrations in the North-eastern states of India are a colourful reflection of the people and their lives. Throughout the year, different people celebrate festivals with lot of fanfare in different ways, most of them centring around their modes of living and livelihood.

Each state is a traveller's paradise, with picturesque hills and green meadows which shelters thousand of species of flora and fauna. In addition, the states provide scope for angling, boating, rafting, trekking and hiking. Besides, there are a number of wildlife sanctuaries and national parks where rare animals, birds and plants which will surely provide fascinating insight to the visitors.

Before Independence this entire area was known as Assam Province. Time to time seven different states have been separated from the same area. The region is also known as the land of seven sisters.

The North-eastern states are very different in many ways from the other parts of India. These States have the maximum number of tribes living within. Many tribal languages are spoken throughout these seven states. The North-eastern states have the highest percentage of Christians. Territory-wise this region is the most sensitive region touching many countries like China, Tibet, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh. Permits to visit the states of Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura are no longer required. Permits to other states are to be obtained from the local office.

The states are famous for their scenic beauty. The states also have many other tourists attractions like Kaziranga wildlife sanctuary where one can see one horned Rhinoceros and the famous Tawang Gompa.

<i>States</i>	<i>Capital</i>	<i>Area in sq.kms</i>	<i>Languages</i>
Assam	Dispur	78,438	Assamese, Bengali
Arunachal Pradesh	Itanagar	83,743	Tribal
Nagaland	Kohima	16,579	English
Manipur	Imphal	22,327	Manipuri

Mizoram	Aizwal	21,081	Mizo
Tripura	Agartala	10,492	Bengali, Tribal
Meghalaya	Shillong	22,439	Khasi, Garo

Of these, Sikkim became an Indian protectorate in 1947 and a full state in 1975. The states border Nepal, Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh. However, they share only 21 km common border with the rest of India via the Chicken's Neck.

Origin of the Sobriquet: Seven Sister States

The sobriquet, the Land of Seven Sisters, had been originally coined, coinciding with the inauguration of the new states in January, 1972, by Jyoti Prasad Saikia, a journalist in Tripura in course of a radio talk. Saikia later compiled a book on the interdependence and commonness of the Seven Sister States, and named it the *Land of Seven Sisters*. It has been primarily because of this publication that the sobriquet has caught on.

The Seven Sister States are a region in North-eastern India, comprising the contiguous states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura. The region had a population of 38.6 million in 2000, about 3.8 per cent of India's total. The ethnic and religious diversity that characterizes the seven states distinguishes them from the rest of India. For most of their history, they were independent, and their complete integration with India came about only during the British Raj.

The reference Seven Sisters is symbolic of their relative isolation from mainstream Indian culture and consciousness.

The Number Seven

When India became independent from the United Kingdom in 1947, only three states covered the area. Manipur and Tripura were princely states, while a much larger Assam Province was under direct British rule. Its capital was Shillong. Four new states were carved out of

the original territory of Assam in the decades following independence, in line with the policy of the Indian government of reorganizing the states along ethnic and linguistic lines. Accordingly, Nagaland became a separate state in 1963, followed by Meghalaya in 1972. Mizoram became a Union Territory in 1972, and achieved statehood - along with Arunachal Pradesh in 1987.

ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS COMPOSITION

Except for Assam, where the major language, Assamese, is the easternmost of the Indo-European languages, the region has a predominantly tribal population that speak numerous Tibeto-Burman and Austro-Asiatic languages. Hinduism is the predominant religion in this region. The proliferation of Christianity among the Seven Sister States sets it apart from the rest of India. The work of Christian missionaries in the area has led to large scale conversion of the tribal population. Christians now comprise the majority of the population in Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya and sizable minority in Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. The bigger states of Assam and Tripura, however, have remained predominantly Hindu, with a sizeable Muslim minority in Assam.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Main industries in the region are tea-based, crude oil and natural gas, silk, bamboo and handicrafts. The states are heavily forested and have plentiful rainfall. There are beautiful wildlife sanctuaries, tea-estates and mighty rivers like Brahmaputra. The region is home to one-horned rhinoceros, elephants and other endangered wildlife. For security reasons, including inter-tribal tensions, widespread insurgencies, and disputed borders with neighbouring China, there are restrictions on foreigners visiting the area, hampering the development of the potentially profitable tourism industry.

INTERDEPENDENCE

The landlocked North-eastern region of the country comprises eight separate states whose geographical and

practical needs of development underscore their need to thrive and work together. A compact geographical unit, the North-east is isolated from the rest of India except through a slender and vulnerable corridor, flanked by alien territories. Assam is the gateway through which the sister states are connected to the mainland. Tripura, a virtual enclave almost surrounded by Bangladesh, wholly depends on Assam even for bare existence. Nagaland, Meghalaya and Arunachal depend on Assam for their internal communications. Manipur and Mizoram's contacts with the main body of India are through Assam's Barak Valley. Raw material requirements also make the states mutually dependent. All rivers in Assam's plains originate in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and western Meghalaya. Manipur's rivers have their sources in Nagaland and Mizoram; the hills also have rich mineral and forest resources. Petroleum is found in the plains.

The plains depend on the hills also on vital questions like flood control. A correct strategy to control floods in the plains calls for soil conservation and afforestation in the hills. The hills depend on the plains for markets for their produce. They depend on the plains even for food grains because of limited cultivable land in the hills.

DEVELOPMENT IN NORTH EAST

North East Council

This region is officially recognized as a special category of states. The North East Council (NEC) was constituted in 1971 as the nodal agency for the economic and social development of the eight states, the North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd (NEDFi) was incorporated on August 9, 1995 and the Ministry of Development of Northeastern Region (DONER) was set up in September 2001.

To provide a forum for collaboration towards common objectives, the Indian government established the North Eastern Council in 1971. Each state is represented by its Governor and Chief Minister. The Council has enabled the

Seven Sister States to work together on numerous matters, including the provision of educational facilities and electric supplies to the region.

The North Eastern Council was constituted in 1971 by an Act of Parliament. The constitution of the Council has marked the beginning of a new chapter of concerted and planned endeavour for the rapid development of the Region. Over the last thirty five years, NEC has been instrumental in setting in motion a new economic endeavour aimed at removing the basic handicaps that stood in the way of normal development of the region and has ushered in an era of new hope in this backward area full of great potentialities.

Formation

The North Eastern Council (NEC) came into being by an Act of Parliament, the North Eastern Council Act, 1971 to act as advisory body in respect of socio-economic development and balanced development of the North Eastern Areas consisting of the present States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. The NEC started functioning in the year 1972.

Organisation

The members of the NEC consist of the Governors and the Chief Ministers of the Eight Member States including Sikkim. Apart from the Chairman and three Members nominated by the President of India.

Functions

The North Eastern Council was constituted for performing the following functions:

- To discuss any matter in which some or all of the States represented in the Council have common interest and advise the Central Government and the Governments of the States concerned as to the action to be taken on any such matter, particularly with regard to

- (i) Any matter of common interest in the field of economic and social planning;
 - (ii) Any matter concerning inter-State Transport and Communications;
 - (iii) Any matter relating to Power or Flood-control projects of common interest.
- To formulate and forward proposals for securing the balanced development of the North Eastern Areas particularly with regard to
 - (i) A unified and coordinated Regional Plan, which will be in addition to the State Plan, in regard to matters of common importance to that area;
 - (ii) Prioritizing the projects and schemes included in the Regional Plan and recommend stages in which the Regional Plan may be implemented; and
 - (iii) Regarding location of the projects and schemes included in the Regional Plan to the Central Government for its consideration.

Where a project or a scheme is intended to benefit two or more States, to recommend the manner in which such project or scheme may be executed/implemented and managed, the benefits there from may be shared, and the expenditure thereon may be incurred.

- To review, from time to time, the implementation of the projects and schemes included in the Regional Plan and recommend measures for effecting coordination among the Governments of the concerned States in the matter of implementations.
- To review progress of expenditure and recommend to the Central Government the quantum of financial assistance to be given to the States entrusted with implementation of any project included in the Regional Plan.
- To recommend to the Governments of the States concerned or to the Central Government the undertaking of necessary Surveys and Investigations of projects to facilitate inclusion of

new projects in the Regional Plan for consideration.

- To review, from time to time, the measures taken by the States represented in the Council for the maintenance of security and public order and recommend to the concerned State Governments further measures necessary in this regard.

About NEDFC

North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd. (NEDFi) was incorporated under the Companies Act, 1956, on August 9, 1995 with its registered office at Guwahati, Assam, for the development of industries, infrastructure, animal husbandry, agri-horticulture plantation, medicinal plantation, sericulture plantation, aquaculture, poultry and dairy in the North-eastern states of India.

NEDFi has been promoted by All India Financial Institutions - Industrial Development Bank of India, ICICI Ltd., Industrial Finance Corporation of India, Small Industries Development Bank of India, Insurance Companies - Life Insurance Corporation of India, General Insurance Corporation and its subsidiaries, Investment Company - Unit Trust of India and Bank - State Bank of India.

After the creation of DONER, NEDFi has come under the administrative control of this Ministry.

Genesis

The States in the North-eastern region of India comprising Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura are endowed with rich natural resources such as oil, natural gas, limestone, coal, other minerals and nearly one-third of the country's hydro power potential (84,000 MW).

The Region, however, is yet to experience industrial development on a scale achieved by other regions of the country. Reasons are not far to seek. Large infrastructure deficiency, basic service backlog, high educated unemployment and fluid law and order situation has crippled economic development initiatives in the region.

For historical reasons and also for the reasons mentioned above, the North-East region has lacked entrepreneurial success stories in the past. But in the recent years, a new breed of entrepreneurial class is emerging, who are well educated and well informed and who want to do something on their own.

Hence, the need for a regional development financial institution having grass root knowledge of the region was felt so that financial assistance as well as professional guidance can be provided to the local entrepreneurs. It was also felt that a special financial institution would go a long way in solving some of the problems mentioned above, if not all.

The Borthakur Committee Report in 1994 conceptualized the formation of a North-Eastern Development Bank to cater to the needs of the North-Eastern Region and to mitigate some of the problems of the region as discussed above.

Birth of an Institution

Quite befitting the ardent need of the region, the then Finance Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, in his budget speech for the year 1995-96 announced setting up of a development bank for the North East Region.

Pursuant to this, the North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd. (NEDFi) was incorporated under the Companies Act, 1956, on August 9, 1995 with its registered office at Guwahati, Assam. The Corporation was formally inaugurated by the then Prime Minister, Shri P.V. Narashima Rao on February 23, 1996.

NEDFi is the premier financial and development institution of the North East of India. The main objects to be pursued by NEDFi as per its Memorandum of Association is:

To carry on and transact the business of providing credit and other facilities for promotion, expansion and modernisation of industrial enterprises and infrastructure projects in the North Eastern Region of India, also carry on

and transact business of providing credit and other facilities for promotion of agri-horticulture plantation, medicinal plantation, sericulture plantation, aquaculture, poultry, dairy and animal husbandry development in order to initiate large involvement of rural population in the economic upsurge of the society and faster economic growth of different parts of the North Eastern Region.

NEDFi with its aims to be a dynamic and responsive organization catalyzing the economic development of the North-east of India.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES OR CONTINUING STAGNATION

The North-eastern region of India has often been visualised as the remote landlocked backward region of a dynamic economy on the march. The difference between the potential and actual economic performance is most startling for the region that has large international borders with several neighbours like Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and Myanmar and is close to Nepal and Indo-China. It has the potential to serve as the *entrepot* for the entire Indian hinterland. Yet, the reality is vastly disappointing.

Is this gap between potential and achievement due to the backward nature of the economy of the North-eastern region or does it have anything to do with the process of incorporation of the region into Indian Union? Did India's economic and foreign policy impose costs on the region that were significantly different from those borne by the rest of the country?

In the recent decade, India has opened its economy to international trade and has launched initiatives to forge closer trade and economic ties with immediate neighbours. We look at the economic opportunities for the states of the North-east in India's emerging trade strategy in the region, especially its 'Look East' policy and the spate of preferential trading arrangements (PTA) and the free trade arrangements (FTA) with neighbouring countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand. If isolation

was the cause of economic backwardness, will not these treaties benefit the North-east? Or are there constraints or policies due to which North-east will once again be left in the lurch.

Historically, the North-east had extensive links with the neighbouring region of Tibet, Bhutan, Burma and Indo-China. It formed the southern trail of the silk road. However, as India became an important colony for Great Britain, barriers were erected between Bhutan and Assam, while traditional links with other countries acquired a strategic hue. Soon Burma and Tibet became the Empire's buffer against the French in Indo-China and Russia in the north, disrupting economic ties.

Despite this legacy, prior to 1947, the region comprising the North-east had substantial economic and social intercourse with the neighbouring countries. East Bengal (later called East Pakistan and ultimately Bangladesh) was well integrated with the North-east. There is evidence that trade and migration into territories today comprising Tibet, Myanmar, Yunnan province of China, Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim were important to the economy of the region.

However, partition and independence ended whatever remained of this intercourse. The partition transformed the region at the crossroad of emerging Asia, into a landlocked outpost of a large continental economy. The huge landmass comprising the seven states (Assam, Arunachal, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura), approximately 225,000 sq. km., was now cut off from its hinterland by the creation of East Pakistan. Linked by 37 km. wide Siliguri corridor with the rest of India, it soon lost its natural advantage as its integration with the economy in the south and the west was disrupted by trade and industrial policies pursued by independent India.

The partition of the country and the slow decay of rail, road and river links with the territories of East Pakistan, due to increasing hostilities, further disrupted trade and economic activity in the North-east. This isolation was accentuated during the mid-1960s as war on Kashmir,

communal violence in East Pakistan led to tearing of rail lines and closure of bus routes.

In the first two decades of planned development, the region was transformed from being a potential outpost for trade with neighbouring countries emerging from colonial rule and war, into a small captive market for the produce of the Indian hinterland. Its exports of tea and forest produce, though an important source of export earnings initially for India, soon lost their importance as Indian exports diversified towards manufactures. Its petroleum, whether in crude form or processed, ultimately found its way to the major markets in the north and western states of India.

Though there is little research on the link between the effect of isolation and trade disruption on the extent of poverty in the North-east, there is little doubt that the impact on the region was highly regressive.

Today, the region also has very high levels of absolute poverty, measured as number of persons with income below US\$ one per day. The eastern region of India has poverty levels ranging between 41% for West Bengal to 58% for Bihar while the North-east states fall in between this range. In other words, the eastern region has absolute poverty ranging between 42-58% making this one of the most backward regions in India. Its per capita income too is far below the national average, with Assam having a per capita income of Rs 10,000 in 2001-02, compared to Rs 18,000 for India.

The structure of the economy in the region resembles the economy of the least developed parts of the globe, with the primary sector accounting for 55-60% of the income, and underdeveloped secondary and tertiary sectors. The secondary sector constitutes only a meagre 11-16% of the total income, making it India's industrially most backward region.

The human development indicators (HDI) too are equally dismal. In terms of infant mortality the states of the North East are ranked far below the national average. States like Arunachal and Tripura have child mortality rates above 100.

In terms of HDI, the only exception to this dismal situation seems to be the high rates of literacy in many of the states of the North East. It would not be unfair to say that the social and economic trends in the North-east diverge radically from the rest of the country.

The fact that North-east is today the most backward region in the country is fairly well known. That this backwardness is the direct result of policies pursued by the Central Government is inadequately appreciated. The impact of the development strategy followed by independent India was highly regressive to the region. India's industrialization strategy during the period of 1956-1991 was based on import substitution and was biased against exports. During this period India erected high tariff walls and quotas were put in place under the import licensing regime to foster industrial growth.

The border conflict with China in 1962 and the deterioration in India's relations with Pakistan led to a disruption of rail, road and river links between the North-east and other eastern states and the neighbouring countries. Here was the North-east region with a 37 km. link with India, but with 4500 km. of border with the newly emerging nations of Asia, comprising, of China, Burma (Myanmar), East Pakistan, Bhutan, and Nepal. Yet the trade and industrial policies failed to use these links and potential access to its advantage.

The policies promoting import substituting industrialisation and high tariff walls and regime of strict import licensing not only shut out so-called non-essential imports from western countries, but also barred simple consumer goods from traditional neighbours. India's economic ties with the smaller neighbours like Nepal, Bangladesh, Burma and Tibet dwindled significantly, with regressive impact on economic agents engaged in such trade. The impact on states of the North-east varied, but all were affected negatively.

In other words, the government of India's policies on trade and industry and its inward looking economic strategy

deprived the northeastern states of their natural markets and access to products produced in the neighbouring countries just across the border. All products consumed in the North-east came to be imported from distant manufacturing regions in India. The cement came from Orissa and Madhya Pradesh while chemicals came from Gujarat and Maharashtra, adding substantially to the landed cost. A World Bank study estimated that costs of logistics and damages added 60% to the cost of a bag of cement and 14% to general cargo, moved from Calcutta to the North-east.

The Central Government has tried to compensate for this high transport and logistic costs by providing some transport subsidy. Thus the railways were asked to carry goods at a marginally concessional rate while products produced in the North-east were offered similar transport subsidy. These subsidies have, however, failed to offset the disadvantage of the region. The northeastern states could easily procure many of these goods from across the border at a fraction of the cost goods transported from distant Indian sources. But the policy induced isolation that barred access to the neighbouring sources of commodities and markets for its produce subjected the region to very high economic cost.

The Indian government also offered backward area subsidies and concessions for locating new industries in the states comprising the North-east region. Given the fact that the neighbouring markets were cut off, all produce (e.g. refined petroleum products from refineries at Digboi, Guwahati and Numaligarh) had to be shipped at high cost and delays to the markets in the Indian hinterland. In the presence of free trade and open borders, the North-east would have attracted industry to cater to the emerging markets in Bangladesh, south-west China, and Indo-China. With closed borders, there would be little economic justification for locating industry in this remote corner as local markets were small and consumer spending too low to provide economies of scale.

It is hardly surprising that though India has made rapid industrial progress, the entire northeastern region has remained largely an agrarian economy. The only industries that came up were set up by the public sector. The North East's ties with the Indian hinterland have been expensive and regressive.

However, even more significant is the social and political tension nurtured by isolation and lack of economic opportunities amongst the youth. The North East was soon transformed into a troublesome region, with fissiparous trends that needed to be curbed with the armed might of an emerging Indian state; a region whose future did not fit into the vision India had set for itself. Economic engagements with the neighbouring countries came to be based on the strategic and military posture of the governments in New Delhi, rather than a development paradigm.

The successive regimes in Delhi have been unable to appreciate the consequences of their isolationist policies as they curtailed social and economic links of the North-east region with its neighbours. To disinterested regimes consolidating power in the remote centre of Delhi and with grand designs of independent industrialization, the North East was best left to army and police to manage, while the only development objective seemed to be to build infrastructure to militarily secure its frontiers.

As mentioned above, from 1991 the Indian state made a radical shift in its economic policies. Trade barriers have been dismantled, import licensing abolished and foreign investment welcomed in most sectors of the economy. In addition, India has tried to promote Preferential Trade Arrangements (PTAs) with the neighbouring countries, even by going outside the SAPTA/SAARC framework and entering into bilateral trade agreements. India is also committed to regional trade through initiatives like South Asia Growth Quadrangle (SAGQ), South Asian Subregion for Economic Cooperation (SASEC), Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-Sri Lanka-Thailand-Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), etc. India is trying to link up with the Greater Mekong Subregion

of which China is a partner along with Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, and has renewed its trade ties with Myanmar.

Will these initiatives open up a new chapter for the North-east? Or, will these initiatives once again result in economic trends that will bypass the North-east? To answer these questions we need to review India's recent experience with regional trade initiatives and the result this has had on India's trade with its neighbouring countries and the impact of this trade on the backward region of eastern and north-eastern India.

During the 1990s, India offered Preferential Trade Arrangements (PTA) to all the member countries of SAARC/SAPTA. Under this the SAPTA members were required to pay only 50 per cent of the custom duty levied on imports. However, given the high tariffs and numerous non-tariff barriers there was little increase in exports to India under the PTA. There were also a large number of non-trade barriers and transit restrictions that aborted possibilities of rapid expansion of trade. The most significant of the non-tariff barriers was the restrictions on transit, visas and custom regulations. Local content requirements (stipulation that at least 30 per cent value addition in domestic market) and quarantine regulations on agriculture commodities meant that the so-called PTA was a smoke screen behind which India protected its market from even its weak neighbours.

However, from the mid-1990s, the government led by I.K. Gujral made a serious attempt to promote regional trade. India offered unilateral trade concessions to its neighbours and encouraged them to export to India. Indian firms were encouraged to invest and source from these countries. Nepali goods were granted duty free access to the Indian market in 1996 and Sri Lanka in 2000. Other members of SAARC were offered lower tariffs and possibilities of FTA if they signed bilateral treaties with India.

In 1995, India made attempts to improve its political and economic ties with the military regime in Myanmar.

The Indo-Myanmar border trade was inaugurated in April 1995 with the opening of the border trade along the Tamu (Myanmar)-Moreh (Manipur) sector. Recently, more trading routes, especially at Longwa, Rih and Pangsau Pass, have been opened.

A developed trade across Indo-Myanmar border will be of advantage mainly in reduced costs while accessing the market of South East and even East Asian countries. Despite this potential, the trade through the Manipur-Myanmar route has remained small and insignificant, amounting to a few crores per year and with little impact on the regional economy.

For the first time, India has initiated FTA with Thailand and is in the process of negotiating similar agreements with Singapore and Malaysia. In other words, India is keen to expand its free trade initiative to countries outside the SAARC region. FTA with Thailand is likely to facilitate Indian access to the Indo-China region and become a partner in the Greater Mekong Subregion initiative as well as the rapidly growing ASEAN region.

The PTAs, on the other hand, have failed to foster trade as shown by the Indo-Bangladesh and Indo-Myanmar experience. The slow progress in economic ties with these countries is due to the military and security establishment playing a major role in shaping India's foreign policy to these two countries. Trade with both these countries has been stagnant and there seem to be differences with Bangladesh over transit arrangements that India seeks for its links to the North-east, about the existence of training camps for insurgents in their territory. Similarly, trade with Tibet and Yunnan provinces of China have been totally absent, though India and China have agreed to initiate border trade through the Himalayan pass between Tibet and Sikkim. It needs to be noted that trade routes between Arunachal Pradesh and Tibet are still closed in the absence of a border agreement and links to Yunnan through Manipur, Mizoram or via Myanmar is not on the horizon.

This dramatic expansion of India's trade and economic ties with Nepal and Sri Lanka, where with FTA trade has

expanded several fold, points to the potential gains from trade that were undermined by restrictive policies. It also points to the gains that North-east states can reap if they too are encouraged to tap neighbouring markets across the border rather than manufacture for the distant Indian consumer.

It is clear that in the days to come India is willing to pursue closer trade and economic ties with its eastern neighbours, and there are possibilities for the entire north-eastern region to seize its place as India's eastern *entrepot*.

We have argued above that the closure of the borders between the North-east and the neighbouring countries to the north, east and south (Tibet/China, Myanmar and Bangladesh) has been regressive on the economy and society in the North-east. The question to ask is: Will the North-east gain from India's opening to the neighbouring countries in the east? In other words, will India's 'Look East' policy usher in a new era of economic growth and increasing trade and commerce in the region?

The accompanying table provides data on India's direction of trade during the last 15 years. It needs to be emphasised that with outward looking policies, India's foreign trade, which was below \$ 40 billion in the early nineties, has risen dramatically to US\$ 140 bn. by 2003. Foreign trade as a ratio of Indian GDP has risen from 12% in early '90s to more than 23 per cent by 2003, pointing to increasing openness of the economy.

There has also been substantial progress in India's trade with other developing countries and with Asia, thanks to the 'Look East' policy. The share of developing countries has doubled to about 30 per cent of India's trade, while Asia's share has doubled to 24.2 per cent. In other words, about a quarter of India foreign trade now comes from its Asian neighbours.

India's immediate neighbours in South Asia too have found easier access to the Indian market and have trebled their share, though it is still very small and far below the

potential. India's trade with countries bordering the North-east has seen the most dramatic expansion, with the share going up more the five times (from 1.7 per cent to 8 per cent). This dramatic expansion of trade with India's eastern neighbours has had little or no impact on the North East. Most of this trade expansion has taken place through the seaports. It would not be incorrect to argue that the North East has once again been marginalised. India is Looking East, but not through its contagious borders!

It needs to be emphasised that the physical infrastructure for facilitating trade and economic links between the North-east and the neighbouring countries is largely absent. Indeed, one can argue that the links are weaker today than they were in 1947. The Stilwell Road is now a mere muddy track and the rail links with Bangladesh stand severed. Infrastructure bottlenecks and delays at border points add substantially to the transaction cost in international trade. It is hardly surprising that with closed borders and open ports, the North-east is not part of India's trade expansion strategy with eastern neighbours.

Hence, in all probability the bulk of trade with the Greater Mekong Subregion, Bangladesh and ASEAN is likely to move through the international sea lanes, completely bypassing the North East region. The regions gaining so far are the hinterlands of Chennai, Vizag and the Calcutta port on the eastern flank. It would be reasonable to argue that given the state of infrastructure and the poor state of road, rail and air links with the neighbouring countries in the North East, the bulk of the trade is likely to move through the sea ports of India.

For the North-east to gain from India's PTA and FTA with the economies of the east, the key variables are transit arrangements, proliferation of trade routes and custom check post, easy visa regime making it possible for traders, businessmen and transport operators to move in and out of the region. For this to be possible would require substantial investments in infrastructure, construction of highways and bridges, re-establishment of rail links and communication facilities. The Shukla Committee on

'Transforming the Northeast', estimated such investment to exceed Rs 25,000 crore.

However, it is not the investment that is the key issue. It is coloured glasses through which policy-makers perceive the region and its problems that is the main road block. India's entire policy towards the North-east region has been heavily coloured by the security establishment and the armed forces in the name of fighting insurgency and securing its eastern frontier. They are suspicious not only of the region's economic, but also ethnic and social ties with the neighbours. Not only is India's Look East policy totally devoid of any plans to seriously end the isolation of the North East and open up the region to the neighbouring countries, its policy-makers are downright suspicious of such links. Yet, in the absence of such an initiative to open borders with neighbouring countries, it is unlikely that the North East will gain in any material sense from India's Look East policy.

A serious attempt to integrate the North-east provides innumerable possibilities of economic transformation. The vast hydroelectric resources can be harnessed to export electricity to the neighbouring countries. An integrated plan of harnessing hydrocarbon resources with a grid of pipelines to move gas and petroleum products into the entire region is another possibility. Harnessing the vast river networks to move goods cheaply in and out of the region would substantially add to its attractiveness as an investment destination. Investment in large plants catering not only to the North East but to the neighbouring markets in Bangladesh, Nepal, Tibet-Yunnan are also possible. But so far there seems to be no such initiative on the horizon.

POLITICAL ISSUES AND INSURGENCY

India's 'troubled Northeast' has become a permanent stereotype, and most outsiders imagine a vast region of unending disorders and violence. Patterns of violence have, however, been showing continuous decline over the past years and, more significantly, the residual violence is now

substantially concentrated, principally, in Manipur and Assam. The total fatalities in insurgent and terrorist violence for the region stood at 1515 in 2000 and have shown a continuous annual decline – with an aberrant spike in year 2003 – to 462 fatalities in 2006 (till October 6). Manipur remains the worst affected, accounting for over half (235) of all militancy-related fatalities in the region. Assam, with 96 dead, accounted for another 20.77 per cent of annual fatalities, and 60 deaths (12.98 per cent) in the fratricidal conflict between the two factions of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) in Nagaland.

Fatalities in the Northeast: 2000-2006

Year	Civilian	Security Force Personnel	Terrorist /Insurgent	Total
2000	839	144	532	1515
2001	724	131	614	1469
2002	302	148	460	910
2003	463	82	548	1093
2004	352	109	371	832
2005	332	69	314	715
2006*	160	76	239	475
Total	3172	759	3078	7009

* Data till October 6, 2006.

Source: Institute for Conflict Management

State-wise Fatalities in the Northeast – 2005-06

States	2005			2006*			Total
	Civilian	SFs	Terrorist	Civilian	SFs	Terrorist	
Assam	149	10	83	51	30	28	109
Nagaland	9	0	31	8	1	51	60
Meghalaya	2	1	26	7	0	16	23
Manipur	138	50	143	83	35	117	235
Tripura	34	8	31	11	10	27	48
Total	332	69	314	160	76	239	475

* Data till October 6, 2006.

Source: Institute for Conflict Management

Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Sikkim remained entirely peaceful, and there was significant improvement in the overall law and order situation in Tripura and Meghalaya. Nagaland's relative clam was disturbed essentially by turf wars and bidding for control over extortions networks between the NSCN-IM and NSCN-K, and factional clashes accounted for six civilian and 48 militant deaths. Assam, the region's most populous and strategically important State, has witnessed a dramatic decline in violence, though killings, extortion and intimidation by the United Liberation Front of Assam remain a problem.

According to the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, during the current year (till June 30) as compared to the corresponding period in 2005, the number of violent incidents had declined by eight per cent (from 688 to 638) and the combined number of security forces (SF) personnel and civilians casualties had declined by 15 per cent (from 185 to 159). So also, during, 2003 and 2004, militancy related fatalities came down by 24 per cent (1093 to 832) and 14 per cent (832 to 715) in 2004 and 2005. Other aspects of the trends in violence include:

- Manipur topped civilian fatalities contributing to 51.87 per cent of the total 160 civilian fatalities in the region. Assam stood second with 31.87 per cent.
- Manipur again topped SF fatalities contributing to 55.55 per cent of the total 63 SF fatalities in the region. Assam stands second with 39.47 per cent.
- Manipur further topped the list of militant fatalities, contributing to 48.95 per cent of the total 229 militant fatalities during the period. Nagaland stood second with 21.33 per cent, principally due to the continuing clashes between the two NSCN factions.

The demands of various groups engaged in violence in the Northeast have varied from autonomy to secession. In view of the nature of the violence in the region, exacerbated by external manipulation and support, the society and politics of the region have been victims of a sustained culture of violence. This culture of violence has assumed an

autonomy of its own and entrenched a subversive pattern of politics across the region.

The militant groups operating across the North-east have usually found refuge and safe haven in neighbouring countries, principally Bangladesh and Myanmar. Fencing along the 4,095 kilometre-long border with Bangladesh, suggested as a remedy to the problem of militancy, has not been completed and militants have easy routes to access and exit their area of operation. Similarly, a number of militant organisations in Nagaland, Manipur and Assam take shelter in Myanmar, which shares a 1,643 kilometre-long porous boundary with India. On September 16, 2006, during the Home Secretary-level talks with Myanmar at New Delhi, India provided a list of 15 camps of the ULFA, the People's Liberation Army, the United National Liberation Front and the Khaplang and Isak-Muivah factions of the NSCN, on Myanmar territory.

None of the major militant groups in Manipur has shown any inclination to eschew violence. Instead, militancy acquired a new impetus on August 16, 2006, when unidentified terrorists bombed the crowded Krishna Janmashtami celebration (a festival that marks the birth of Lord Krishna) held at the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) temple complex in capital Imphal, killing six civilians, including two children, while over 50 others, including five Americans and two French nationals, were wounded. This was the first major attack on a place of worship in the history of the militancy in the State. Talking to reporters at the Leimakhong Army Headquarters in Imphal on September 19, 2006, the General Officer Commanding of the 57 Mountain Division, Major General E. J. Kocheikkan, stated that insurgency in Manipur is more complex than in Jammu and Kashmir and that "Unlike in Jammu and Kashmir, where most ultras were from foreign territory, insurgents in Manipur are from its own territory, making it tougher to deal with them."

In Assam, the ULFA continues its subversive agenda targeting SF personnel and civilians, bombing markets, oil and gas pipelines and various State establishments and

installations. The peace initiative to facilitate direct talks between the ULFA and Union Government has remained a non-starter. The Union Government suspended Army operations against ULFA on August 13, 2006. However, the "suspension of operation" was called off on September 24, following continued violations of the truce by the militant group. The final provocation came when ULFA killed a tea estate manager, Harendranath Das, at Digboi town in the Tinsukia District on September 23. A day earlier, a policeman was shot dead at Than Gaon village in the Dibrugarh District. On September 24, one ULFA cadre was killed, while three soldiers were wounded during an encounter at Majmamoroni Gaon in Tinsukia District. The slain ULFA cadre was suspected to have been involved in the killing of Harendranath Das on September 23.

In Nagaland, the two NSCN factions continue to train their guns against each other, but barring this fratricidal war, the State is relatively calm. 2006 has already seen 61 incidents of factional clashes in Nagaland (till October 6) in which at least 55 militants were been killed – 32 of the NSCN-IM, 17 of the NSCN-K and three of the Naga National Council (NNC), and three unidentified. These incidents occurred primarily in the Zunheboto, Peren and Districts.

Tripura, in the meanwhile, is carving out a success story in its counter-insurgency campaign, as its Police force reorganizes radically to evolve a counter-insurgency strategy that has left entrenched militant groups in disarray.

In Meghalaya, counter-insurgency operations have marginalized the Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council to a great extent. Following the cease-fire agreement between the Government and Achik National Volunteer Council and the subsequent confinement of the ANVC cadres in designated camps, the Garo Hills in Meghalaya has been relatively peaceful.

The major incidents of militant violence in the Northeast in 2006 include:

- January 3: Three SF personnel were killed and five others sustained injuries during an encounter with

UNLF cadres in Longpi village in Manipur's Tamenglong District.

- April 29: National Liberation Front of Tripura militants killed three SF personnel and injured eight civilians in an ambush at Karnamuni Para in Tripura's Dhalai District.
- June 9: At least five persons were killed and 16 persons wounded in a powerful explosion triggered by the ULFA at Machkowa vegetable market in Guwahati city, Assam.
- August 11: At least six police personnel were killed after suspected ULFA militants ambushed a police convoy at Ratanipathar in Assam's Tinsukia District.
- August 14: Three persons were killed and seven others wounded when suspected ULFA militants triggered a grenade explosion targeting security convoys near Lifecare Nursing Home at Duliajan town in Assam's Dibrugarh District.
- August 16: At least five civilians were killed while over 50 others, including five Americans and two French nationals, sustained injuries when suspected terrorists lobbed a powerful grenade at a crowded temple in Manipur's capital, Imphal.
- September 12: Four SF personnel belonging to the Assam Rifles were killed, while three others sustain injuries when a column of Assam Rifles was ambushed by PLA cadres at a spot between Leisiphou and Oksu in the Imphal West District of Manipur.
- September 20: Five NSCN-IM cadres were killed in a clash with rival cadres of the NSCN-K at Old Chalkot village in the Peren District of Nagaland.
- October 6: Thirteen Railway Protection Force personnel were killed in an ambush by the Black Widow faction of the Dima Halim Daogah in Assam's North Cachar Hills District.

Significant counter-insurgency operations yielded:

- January 4: Four NSCN-K cadres were killed by the SFs near Chandraman bridge under Kangpokpi Police Station in the Imphal West District of Manipur.
- January 23: Four suspected PLA cadres were killed in an encounter with the SFs at Sandankhong in the Bishnupur District of Manipur.
- April 25: Four Kangleipak Communist Party cadres, including the Thoubal 'district commander', were killed following an encounter with the police at Nungei Khunui in the Thoubal District of Manipur.
- May 11: Assam Rifles personnel killed People's United Liberation Front, 'Commander-in-Chief' Bashir Lashkar along with his 'deputy home secretary' Mohammad Shafi in an encounter at Kakmayai in Manipur's Thoubal district.
- June 14: Three PLA militants were killed and four others wounded in an ambush laid by the SF personnel at Wakshu in Manipur's Chandel District.
- August 11: Three UNLF cadres were killed while two others sustain injuries following an exchange of fire with the SF personnel at Semol in the Chandel District of Manipur.
- September 5: The general secretary of the UNLF, Kh. Ibotombi was arrested by a team of Manipur Police from a hospital at Coimbatore in the southern State of Tamil Nadu.
- October 4: Three UNLF cadres were arrested at New Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport, en route to Kathmandu.

Pursuant to the Government of India's policy of engaging with any group that abjures the path of violence and seeks resolution of their grievances within the framework of the Indian Constitution, several militant groups have come forward for talks with the Government. One of the important outcomes of Government-initiated peace talks with some of the insurgent groups has been the decisive decline in the numbers of militancy-related

fatalities. Presently, at least six militant groups have entered into a ceasefire / suspension of operations agreement with the Union Government: NSCN-IM and NSCN-K in Nagaland; Dima Halim Daogah (DHD), United People's Democratic Solidarity, National Democratic Front of Bodoland in Assam; and ANVC in Meghalaya. The ULFA-constituted People's Consultative Group (PCG) of Assam held three rounds of talks with representatives of the Union Government to bring the outfit to the negotiating table. However, these efforts have now decisively ended as the PCG pulled out of the peace process on September 27, 2006, as its members claimed that the Centre was "backing out from the commitments made during the last three rounds of talks with us." The Government has been insisting that ULFA provide a written commitment that it was ready to hold direct talks with the Centre and that the top leadership of the outfit would participate in these. This was one of the conditions the Government wanted to be fulfilled for the release of five ULFA leaders (Pradip Gogoi, Bhimkanta Buragohain, Mithinga Daimary, Pranati Deka and Ramu Mech) from jail, as demanded by the outfit.

In Manipur, the Union Government managed to arrive at 'cessation of hostility' accords with eight minor Kuki militant groups in September 2005, but major outfits like the UNLF and PLA have not displayed any willingness to engage in negotiations. Indeed, the Chairman of the UNLF, Sanayaima, in an interview with Reuters in Hong Kong on September 14, 2005, ruled out negotiations with the Union Government without United Nations mediation. Sanayaima stated, "Whether we remain with India or whether we become a sovereign, independent nation, let the people decide. Considering India is the largest democracy in the world, I think they should accept the challenge." A 'plebiscite' is a major demand of the UNLF. Similarly, PLA President Irengbam Chaoren, in a message on the occasion of its 28th raising day on September 25, ruled out accepting the Union Government's offer for peace talks, saying that entering into a dialogue with New Delhi would not 'restore freedom'.

Nevertheless, talking to reporters in Imphal on October 1, Manipur Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh ruled out a full-fledged military offensive against militant groups operating in the State, saying that his Government was trying to establish contact with leaders of these organisations to bring them to the negotiating table: "We believe that one day the leaders of these armed groups will realise the futility of violence. It may take some time but they will surely accept our offer for talks."

In many cases, however, the process of dialogue with militant groups is yet to yield tangible solutions. The high-profile nine-year-old peace talks involving the NSCN-IM and Union Government have so far been unable to arrive at any major breakthrough to resolve the decades-old Naga conflict. Militant groups, on the contrary, have taken advantage of these long-drawn 'peace talks' and continued with rampant extortion and intimidation with impunity. Endless fratricidal clashes between well armed rival cadres have turned their respective ceasefires into a 'public mockery'. Talking to reporters in Kohima on September 22, 2006, the Inspector General of Assam Rifles (North), Major General S.S. Kumar, stated that the NSCN-IM has been consolidating its strength and position, taking advantage of the ongoing truce. "The ceasefire is giving the NSCN an opportunity to consolidate. We have conveyed our concern to the Ministry of Home Affairs." He disclosed, further, "Earlier, there were about 800 cadre of the NSCN-IM. Of late, the figure ranges between 2,000 to 2,500."

Similarly, since they entered into a formal cease-fire on May 25, 2005, at least 27 cases of extortion had been filed against NDFB cadres till July 10, 2006, and 63 of its cadres had also been arrested in connection with several cases.

Nevertheless, there are signs of a gradual return to peace, if not 'normalcy' in wide areas of the Northeast, and this creates enormous opportunities for political and developmental initiatives to restore this long unsettled region to a measure of civilized governance. Regrettably, the oft-promised 'peace dividend' has seldom materialized, as

political parties and Governments remain trapped in a culture of violence and subversive relationships. Even Mizoram, which has seen an unbroken peace since 1986, is yet to taste the fruits of the 'peace dividend'. Development, modernisation and a measure of efficiency in governance are the central challenges of policy, as violence slowly retreats in India's Northeast.

Running Guns in India's North-east

On September 21, 2002 security forces operating in the upper Assam district of Tinsukia recovered 31 AK-56 rifles from a suspected United Liberation Front of Asom hideout. A few days later, in a series of raids between September 28 and 30, a large quantities of arms and ammunition belonging to the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak-Muivah were recovered near Khonsa in the State of Arunachal Pradesh. The cache included RPG propellers, mortars, SLRs and substantial quantities of ammunition. On October 24, the police in Jorhat seized some 600 detonators on the Nagnimora bound passenger train that originated in Nagaland. The problem is rapidly extending into areas that were largely peaceful in the past, and in one of the largest ever seizures of ammunition in the State of Meghalaya, police on November 1, 2002, destroyed a Hynniewtre National Liberation Council hideout at Khlaw Roman in Mawlai Nongpdeng and recovered 460 M-16 live shells, 169 AK-47 bullets, two 7.62 SLRs and two high-explosive hand grenades, along with some other cartridges. Incidents like these leave behind a combined sense of relief and trepidation: each such recovery is another counter-insurgency success story, but it points towards the length of the road that needs to be traversed before India's North-east can be salvaged from the menace of small arms, and the spiral of violence they support and provoke.

For the insurgents in the region seeking sufficiency in arms supplies, it has been a slow and steady growth to perfection. The Naga insurgency, considered to be the mother of all insurgencies in the North-east, initially managed with the assistance of their counterparts in neighbouring Myanmar, until the Southeast Asian illegal

arms bazaars unveiled itself before their eyes towards the late 1980s. The underground markets in Thailand and Myanmar (then Burma) offer abundant supplies of AK series rifles, RPGs and an array of other sophisticated small arms and explosives. In its new avatar, the NSCN-IM not only used these bazaars for its own perpetuation, but also introduced new players in the arena, such as the ULFA in Assam, to the world of the arms dealer. Soon, the ULFA was not only surfing the Southeast Asian bazaars but also ventured into deals with European players. The ability of the insurgent groups in the North-east to engage the Indian state in protracted little wars is substantially the result of the easy access to these tools of terror.

Ironically, there has been little commensurate growth in terms of access to comparable weapons among the police forces in the region. As the Annual Report of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), 2001, noted, "the condition of police forces in the North Eastern States is quite poor. Many of the militant groups have far more modern arms and equipment than the State Police." There is little evidence of any dramatic transformation in the circumstances since this observation was made, and, in the absence of the Army and para-military forces - Forces modelled on a brawnier archetype with a better range of weapons - the police in the various States of the region retain very limited capacities to engage with the terrorists.

A September 2002 report on the State of Meghalaya, for instance, revealed that the Police in the district of South Garo Hills - the smallest among the State's seven districts, but spread over 1,850 square kilometres - have access to only 3 AK rifles and 2 Carbines. This, in spite of the fact that the district is not only a hotbed of a local insurgency led by the Achik National Volunteers Council but also serves as a key transit route for groups like the ULFA and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland, which operate in neighbouring Assam, from and to their safe havens in Bangladesh.

Official estimates of the quantity of weapons available to the insurgents vary, and are necessarily approximations.

However, if seizures are the proverbial 'tip of the iceberg', the region is awash in arms. A total of 6196 weapons have been seized in the period between 1991-2002. A senior officer of the Border Security Force (BSF) in the State of Manipur observes: "security force personnel operating in Manipur are up against 6,770 cadres of 12 terrorist outfits armed with 3750 numbers of sophisticated weapons. The People's Liberation Army, with a cadre-strength of 2,000 has 700 weapons; and the United National Liberation Front with 1,500 cadres has 800 weapons." Evidently, not only is access to weapons a relatively simple affair, but the time lag between the origin of an insurgent group and its graduation into a full-scale armed guerrilla group has become awfully short. Most of the insurgent groups operating in the North-east secure very rapid access to sophisticated small arms, often through the mediation of the larger established militant organisations.

The availability of huge numbers of arms and ammunition with the insurgents also needs to be analysed against the background of the growing networking among the terrorist groups and also the uninhibited extortion set-up that they administer with impunity. ULFA's newfound association with the Manipuri group, the United National Liberation Front, is one such marriage of convenience. Linkages between the ULFA, the Kamatapur Liberation Organisation, the NDFB, the ANVC, the NSCN-K and the All Tripura Tiger Force have, at least in part, emerged as facilitators of successful gunrunning across the North-east region. The Indian state is, consequently, pitted against a confederacy of insurgent groups with a vast and assured supply of sophisticated firearms.

The easy availability of such weapons is sourced primarily in Southeast Asia. Even a decade and a half after the cessation of hostilities in Cambodia, Southeast Asia remains an unending arms dump of the arms released from that conflict, and these cater to the ambitions of every malcontent in the region. Cox's Bazaar, a completely unmonitored port in Bangladesh, has emerged as a major transit centre for the supply of illegal arms and ammunition, not only feeding criminal and extremist elements in that

country, but also the medley of insurgent outfits in the India's north-east. Most of these arms and ammunition passing through this port originate from countries like Cambodia, and are routed through southern Thailand on tiny high-speed boats. The frequency of such delivery is also a matter of concern. In the past year alone, two major consignments are known to have found their way to ULFA's armoury alone. Intelligence sources suggest that another such delivery reached the NSCN-IM cadres in the month of December 2001. In the latter case, the contraband safari started from the Gulf of Thailand and, through multiple modes of transport, including small steamers as well as porters, reached the NSCN-IM's bastions in Nagaland.

It is true that the range of weapons available with the insurgents in the North-east is yet to reach the level of sophistication of their counterparts in other theatres of conflict, particularly Jammu & Kashmir. If the recovery of weapons by the security forces is any indication, the AK series of rifles still constitute just a small fraction of the total arms seized. Over the last five years, recoveries in Assam are mostly in the range of pistols, revolvers, rifles and other unspecified guns. The AK series rifles constitute less than six per cent of the total number of seized weapons.

This, however, gives little scope for complacency. There have been occasions where the militants have used an eclectic mix of small arms and explosives to execute major operations and the fatalities have remained high for nearly two decades. Thus, in a neatly planned ambush on May 16, 1996, ULFA with the assistance from the People Liberation Army, a Manipuri group, and the NSCN-IM, used weapons including 9 mm pistols, AK-56 rifles and rocket launchers to eliminate the Superintendent of Police of Tinsukia district in Assam. And on January 27, 2002, suspected ULFA terrorists killed Kamrup district Deputy Superintendent of Police Devajit Pathak and his driver, using a sophisticated Improvised Explosive Device (IED) on the Boko-Nalapara Road near the Nalapara village.

The impact of the easy availability of such a range of small arms and explosives is that most of these extremist

groupings have been able to continue with their unrestrained extortions over wide geographical areas. Insurgents have not only been able to kill with impunity (403 deaths have already been reported from the NE region this year), but have also usurped the political space in States like Manipur.

There is little prospect of curbing this liberal flow of arms in the foreseeable future in the absence of an international mechanism to impose accountability on the sources of supply and distribution. Regrettably, efforts to curb, monitor, or account for, the international production, stockpiling and diffusion of small arms have always been stonewalled by the major armament producing nations. Measures to account for the immense stockpiles that were transferred into the Asian region in the many 'little wars' of the Cold War era have also seldom gone beyond an elaborate charade, and the sheer volume of weapons floating about in the region becomes a primary source of escalation and transformation of social tensions into armed conflict. Within this context, the efforts of state agencies, within individual victim nations, to secure some degree of control through border management and counter-insurgency operations, are at best fire-fighting measures with limited possibilities of success. This is particularly true in the vitiated atmosphere in the South Asian region, where several states and their intelligence agencies actively support subversion, extremism and terror in neighbouring countries.

Arunachal Pradesh

The Land

The State of Arunachal Pradesh is the easternmost part of India hence its name, the 'land of the rising sun'. A mountainous territory, only properly brought under formal administration since independence, its former name was also descriptive the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA). It, thus, has international borders with Bhutan in the west, the People's Republic of China in the north (the Autonomous Region of Tibet or Xizang) and Myanmar (formerly Burma) in the east and south-east. The bulk of the state's territory lies to the north of Assam, of which it formed a part until 1972, but it curves around the upper, western arm of that state, which stretches up the valley of the Brahmaputra, to include some territory extending south of Assam and ending in a short western border with Nagaland. The NEFA became a Union Territory in 1972 and was renamed Arunachal Pradesh, becoming the 24th state of the Union on 20th February 1987. It has an area of 83,743 sq km (32,346 sq miles), making it the largest state in the north-eastern region of India, but it is the least densely populated in the country.

Lying on the south-eastern flank of the Himalayas, most of Arunachal Pradesh is mountainous, consisting of high ridges, variously aligned, and separating deep valleys. It rises to the north, culminating in the crests of the Great Himalaya (this so-called 'McMahon Line', originally proposed in the 1910s, is recognized by the Indian Government as the northern international border, but has long been

disputed by China). The highest point is the peak of Kangto (7,102 m-23,301 feet), in the west of that Chinese border. The state's main rivers are the Brahmaputra, known as the Siang in Arunachal Pradesh (or the Tsangpo higher up its course, in Tibet), and its tributaries, such as the Tirap, the Lohit (Zayü Qu), the Subansiri, the Kameng and the Bhareli. Although the heights are barren and snow-bound, there is extensive forest cover and the valleys are fertile. The climate of the foothills is subtropical, but temperatures fall rapidly with rising altitude, and this contributes to a great variety in types of fauna. Rainfall, although year-round, is varied: valleys opening out to the Assam plain can receive 4,000 mm (157 inches) per year; but more sheltered valleys might only receive 2,000 mm.

According to the census of March 2001, the total population of Arunachal Pradesh was 1,091,117 (provisional figure), compared to 864,558 in the 1991 census. The population density in 2001, therefore, was 13.0 per sq km, the lowest of any state or territory in India. Most of the population of Arunachal Pradesh are tribal peoples, related to the Tibetans and the peoples of Myanmar. There are 82 tribes and sub-tribes, of which the main ones in the west are the Nissi (Nishi or Dafla), the Sulung, the Sherdukpen, the Aka, the Monpa, the Apa Tani and the Hill Miri. The largest tribal group is that of the Adi, who occupy the central part of Arunachal Pradesh, while the Mishmi dominate the north-eastern hill country and the Wancho, the Nocte and the Tangsa are centred in the south-east of the state, around the district of Tirap (which neighbours Nagaland). Between them, the tribal peoples speak over 50 distinct languages and dialects (mostly of the Tibeto-Burmese branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family), making English (the official language of the state), Hindi, Bengali and Assamese the main means of inter-communication. Although influenced by Buddhism, most of the tribal peoples are animists, venerating natural and elemental deities or spirits and often practising ritual animal sacrifices (notably of the mithun, a semi-domesticated gaur or wild ox). Near the Chinese border some adhere to Tibetan Buddhism, while in the south-east

Hinayana Buddhism, as practised in much of South-East Asia, is more common (in 1991 some 13% of the state population avowed Buddhism). Hindu beliefs have been adopted by about the same proportion as practise traditional beliefs (37%, according to the 1991 census), especially near the Assam lowlands, while Christianity (10%) is a more recent arrival.

Most of the population is rural and towns of any size are few (only 12.8% of the population was described by the 1991 census as urban). The state capital is Itanagar (Yupia), in the west, near the southern border with Assam. Some of the administrative offices and the legislature are based in Naharlagun, some 10 km (6 miles) from the capital. The main town in the east is Tezu. The state is divided into 13 districts.

Languages

A number of dialects are spoken by various tribes, but Assamese is chosen as the means of communication among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The languages of the tribal groups are classified under the Tibeto-Burman group.

History

The earliest Sanskrit writings make mention of the area now known as Arunachal Pradesh, but otherwise its early history and the origins of the various native tribes exist only as oral tradition and myth. The extent and nature of a number of archaeological remains, most dating from around the beginning of the Christian era, indicate that Arunachal Pradesh was not completely isolated and the inhabitants had close relations with the rest of the subcontinent and other neighbouring peoples. The society was politically and culturally developed, but much of the terrain is inhospitable and, while the larger powers in India, Burma (Myanmar) and China have long disputed the region, none had seriously considered enforcing these claims. Historical references and archaeological investigations have pieced together isolated fragments about the region—thus, the ruins near the modern capital of Itanagar have been identified with Mayapur, the

seat of the 11th-century Jiti dynasty. Reliable records about the area appear only from the 16th century, when the Ahom kings of Assam annexed part of the territory. They exercised a tentative sovereignty until dissension among the royalty of the kingdom made them vulnerable to Burmese occupations by the beginning of the 19th century. The British then intervened, however, and by the Treaty of Yandaboo of February 1826 Assam (at least nominally including Arunachal Pradesh) was ceded to the British in India.

The British, now administering India as a direct possession of the Crown, did not try to bring this north-eastern fringe of their empire properly under their authority until the 1880s, although free movement in the region had been stopped (it remains a restricted area). The first attempts to establish a firm claim to the northern part of the territory, essentially the southern flanks of the Great Himalaya, led to a border dispute with the Chinese Empire. This was exacerbated when the authorities in British India included the disputed area in the North-Eastern Frontier Tract (NEFT the area of modern Arunachal Pradesh), which they made into an administrative district of the province of Assam. Although later that same year Tibet declared its independence, in 1913 the Chinese rejected the proposed 'McMahon Line' (settling the boundary along the crests of the Great Himalayas). Nevertheless, it became the de facto international frontier, even when the Chinese restated their claims to much of the northern NEFT after Indian independence in 1947 the claim only became a dangerous issue when Chinese rule was re-established in Tibet during the 1950s (China also had disputes over other parts of the Indian border, notably in Kashmir). Meanwhile, in 1954 the NEFT became the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), still constitutionally part of Assam state, but, because of its strategic significance, administered by the national Ministry of External Affairs. In 1957 the Tuensang Frontier Division was separated from the NEFA and joined in administrative union with the Naga Hills District of Assam (together they now form Nagaland).

Assam

The Land

Speak of a land of wooded hills and vales with a wide river meandering through, of sprawling tea gardens, of enticing songs and dances, of fine silks, and you are already able to hazard a good enough guess.

Add to that, the one-horned rhinoceros, the oldest refinery in India, a people made all the more colourful by a sizeable population of tribals and one of the most venerated Sakti temples in the country, and you know it is Assam—the land of the Red River, the Brahmaputra, and the Blue Hills flanking it.

For Assam is identified no better than by its Bihu songs and dances, the Kaziranga Wildlife Sanctuary where the rare one-horned rhinoceros roams at will, silks such as *paat* and *muga* which rank amongst the finest in the world, the State's tea which finds its way to millions of homes all over the globe, and the Shrine of Kamakhya which draws thousands of devotees every year.

Assam is almost separated from central India by Bangladesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Myanmar bound it in the east, west by West Bengal, north by Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh and south by Meghalaya, Bangladesh, Tripura and Mizoram. It is dominated by the mighty Brahmaputra, one of the great rivers of the world (length: 2900 kms), which not only has a fertile alluvial plain for growing rice, but also is famous for tea. Earthquakes are common.

It forms part of a global bio-diversity “hotspot”, out of 41 listed endangered species of wildlife are found in Assam, which includes Golden Langur, Hoolock Gibbon, Pygmy Hog, Hispid Hare, White-Winged Woodduck, Tiger, Clouded Leopard, Swamp Deer, Gangetic Dolphins, etc. Moreover, during season, flock of resident and migratory birds make Assam their natural habitat. Rainfall, one of the highest in the world (between 178 and 305 cms), is concentrated in 4 months, June to September.

Derivation of Name

In ancient times Assam constituted a part of the land known successively as Pragjyotisha or Pragjyotishpura, and Kamarupa. Asom (Axom) or its anglicized version Assam is a comparatively modern name. Opinions on the root of the name vary with one view ascribing its origin to the Bodo word *Ha-Cham* which means “low or level country” and a second view ascribing it to the word *Asama*, meaning “unequalled” or “peerless”, and used to denote the *Ahoms*, a Shan tribe which ruled the land for six centuries from the 13th Century A.D.

Language

With a majority of the total population using the tongue, Assamese is the major language of the State. Besides English, Assamese was accorded the status of the official language of the Brahmaputra Valley by the Official Language Act of 1960. However, Bengali and English were also simultaneously accorded the status of official language for the Barak Valley and the two Hill Districts by the same Act. The earliest specimen of the Assamese script is to be found in copper plates and inscriptions discovered in different parts of the region.

Scholars opine that the origin of Assamese goes back to the Magadhan-Prakrit script. By all standards it is a composite language into which words of Indo-Aryan and Indo-Chinese origins have made their way. Pre-Aryan and non-Aryan influences are also discernible not only in loan words but also in its grammar, syntax and pronunciation.

Speeches of the Tibeto-Burman, Austro-Asiatic and Tibeto-Chinese families abound among the tribal population. The widest variety of language found in the tribal population can however be attributed to the Tibeto-Burman family. The Bodo language group with its Kachari, Lalung, Rabha, Moran and even Chutia variations, in turn dominate the Tibeto-Burman family.

Other recognized Indian languages spoken in the State include Bengali, Hindi and Oriya. Oriya, Mundari, Santhal, Tamil and Telegu are mostly spoken by the tea garden labourers.

History

Much of the ancient past of Assam still lies buried deep beneath its soil. Lack of proper and systematic archaeological research has resulted in a dearth of archaeological material, and though evidence of human habitation in the land has been traced back to the Early Stone Age, the overall picture remains vague and indistinct. That Assam, by whatever name, was known in other parts of the world as far back as in 100 BC is nevertheless clear from the records of the Chinese explorer Chang Kien who traced his country's trade with Assam during that period. The *Periplus of the Erythrean sea* depicts how Chinese silk from Assam reached Egypt and Rome before the advent of Christianity. Ptolemy's geography also acknowledges the existence of Assam.

In contrast to the rest of India, Assam was a region in which the pre-Dravidian inhabitants succumbed to invasion from the east before Aryan influence worked its way down the Ganges. However, lower Assam was certainly known to Vedic literature.

The earliest inhabitants of Assam can be safely said to be the Australoids or the pre-Dravidians. It was however the Mongoloids who entered the land through the eastern mountainous passes who were to almost overrun the land long before the time of the compilation of the Hindu religious literature known as the Vedas around the 10th Century BC. The Vedas called the Mongoloids *Kiratas*, and the

present-day tribes of the North-east are all considered to be the descendants of the *Kiratas*.

Assam's history goes back to ancient times. The base of this history can be found in Tantric literature, Buddhist literature, Assamese folklore and Vedic literature.

However, first mention of the state of Assam is found in the epics and the religious legends. The Aryans belonging to the priestly and warrior classes found their way into Assam in very early times. Various places mentioned in the epics, like Mahabharata etc. are now identified with sites in this state.

The first known ruler of Assam was Mahiranga Danava of Danava dynasty, who was succeeded in turn, in the direct line by Hatakasur, Sambarsur and Ratnasur. After them there was a chief named Ghatakasur, the ruler of the Kiratas. He made Pragjyotishpur (the modern Guwahati) his capital, and settled numerous Brahmans at Kamakhya. Narakasur was killed by Lord Krishna of Dwaraka. Narakasur's successor, Bhagadatta, figured in the Mahabharata war leading a vast army against the Pandavas.

Sri Krishna frequently appears in Assam Mythology. Sri Krishna fought against king Bhisimaka of Kundil (now Sadia) in his bid to marry Bhisimaka's daughter Rukmini. Another king Banasura of Sonitpur (now Tezpur) fought against Sri Krishna, when Banasura's daughter Usha was secretly married to Anirudh, the grandson of Sri Krishna.

The records of the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang shed light on the area in the Seventh Century. Pragjyotishpura came to be known as Kamarupa in the medieval period. Hiuen Tsang speaks of a powerful and prestigious Kamarupa under King Bhaskaravarman. Kamarupa had perhaps achieved the zenith of its power during the time, for subsequent centuries were witness to repeated onslaughts by aboriginals which reduced the power of the kingdom and led to its fragmentation.

Political History

Historically speaking, the first king who ruled over Kamrupa was Pushya Varman (350-380 AD), who was a

contemporary of Samudragupta (350-375 AD). He took on the title of Maharajadhiraj and ensured steps to establish Kamrupa as a frontier state. Mahendra Varman, a descendent of Pushya Varman, was the first king of Kamrupa who waged a successful war against the Gupta army and also the first Varman king who performed the Ashwamedha Yagya. The rule of the Varman dynasty found apex in the rule of Bhaskar Varman (594-650 AD), because it is with the rule of Bhaskar Varman, that a new epoch of Assam history opened.

Harshavardhan (606-648 AD) was a contemporary of Bhaskar Varman. Harshavardhan honoured Bhaskar Varman at a conference held at Kanauj. The dynasty of the Varman kings ended with Bhaskar Varman (650 AD).

The Salasthambha dynasty was the next in the line which began with the reign of a chieftain called Salastambha. Among all the kings of the Salastambha dynasty, it was Shri Harshadeva (725-750 AD) who acquitted himself as a good king. After the last king of this dynasty, Tyaga Singha (970-990), it was Brahmapala (990-1010 AD), who opened the door to a new dynasty - the Pala dynasty. Jayapala (1120-1138 AD) was the last ruler of this dynasty.

The first Mohammedan invasion (1206 and 1226 AD) of Kamrupa took place during the reign of a king called Prithu who was killed in a battle with Illtutmish's son Nassiruddin in 1228. During the second invasion by Ikhtiyaruddin Yuzbak or Tughril Khan, about 1257 AD, the king of Kamrupa Saindhya (1250-1270 AD) transferred the capital 'Kamrup Nagar' to Kamatapur in the west. From then onwards, Kamata's ruler was called Kamateshwar. During the last part of 14th century, Arimatta was the ruler of Gaur (the northern region of former Kamatapur) who had his capital at Vaidyagar. And after the invasion of the Mughals in the 15th century many Muslims settled in this State and can be said to be the first Muslim settlers of this region.

Chutia Kingdom

During the early part of the 13th century, when the Ahoms established their rule over Assam with the capital

Meghalaya

The Land

The State of Meghalaya occupies the Shillong plateau in the north-eastern region of India. The 'abode of the clouds' rises steeply from the international border with Bangladesh, which runs along the state's southern length. Bangladesh also lies to the west, but there begins the long border with Assam, above the Brahmaputra lowlands to the north and the Barak Valley and Cachar (Kachari) Hills to the east. Meghalaya was formed as an autonomous state within Assam on 2 April 1970, but became a separate state of the Union on 21 January 1972. It has an area of 22,429 sq km (8,660 sq miles).

Lofty Meghalaya comprises the Garo Hills in the west, the central Khasi Hills and the Jaintia Hills, which bulge the state out towards the south-east. The compact, isolated plateau, which defines Meghalaya, is formed of the same ancient granites found in peninsular India. The rolling hills rise to their highest point at Shillong Peak (1,963 m-6,443 feet), although the town itself is at some 1,500 m above sea level. The elevation gives the state a cool and wet climate, while the landscape, with its pine-clad hills, its caverns, waterfalls and lakes has given Meghalaya the sobriquet of the 'Scotland of the East'. However, it is prone to severe earthquakes and is actually one of the wettest places on the planet, as the warm monsoon winds between May and September are forced over the plateau. The southern towns of Mawsynram and Cherrapunji (Sohra), in the Khasi hills,

vie for the title of the wettest place in the world: the latter once recorded rainfall of 23,000 mm (906 inches) in one year (a record recently exceeded in Mawsynram), while its average annual rainfall over a 74-year period is 11,430 mm. The average annual rainfall in Shillong, only some 80 km from Cherrapunji, is modest by comparison, at some 2,340 mm. This volume of precipitation, drained into the surrounding lowlands by rivers such as the Umiam, the Jadukata, the Khri, the Simsang, the Kynshi and the Kupli, falls onto a still well forested countryside, rich in wildlife (according to the elephant census of 1993, the state boasts the highest population density of pachyderms per square kilometre in India, counting 2,872 elephants in that year). In general, the climate is mild, with mean temperatures in Shillong in August at 21.1°C (70.0°F) and in January at 9.5°C (49.1°F).

At the census of 1 March 2001 the total population of Meghalaya was 2,306,069 (provisional results), giving a population density of 102.8 per sq km. The state had experienced a growth rate noticeably higher than the national average since the previous census in 1991, when the total population was 1,774,778. Most of the people belong to the three tribes for whom the hill state was created: the Mongoloid Garo (Achiks), an animist, Bodo people originally from Tibet; the supposedly Austro-Asiatic Khasi; and the Mongoloid Jaintia, who are related to the Shan of Myanmar (Burma). All have distinct cultures and histories, though they share some customs, such as matrilineal succession. The main languages are Khasi and Garo, which are joined by Jaintia and English as official languages of the state. Christianity has been widespread among the hill peoples since the advent of missionaries in the 19th century (indeed, the 1991 census records 65% of the population as Christian), but, traditionally, they are animists worshipping elemental deities. There are some Hindus and a small Muslim community.

Most of the population live in rural villages. The urban population was put at 18.6% of the total in 2001, with Shillong, the state capital, as the only town of any size.

The main town in the west, in the Garo Hills, is Tura, while the Jaintia headquarters is in Jowai. The old Khasi capital of Cherrapunji is situated near the border with Bangladesh. Meghalaya is now divided into seven districts.

History

The Garo, Jaintia and Khasi peoples have been largely undisturbed from their hill-top fastnesses for many centuries. Although variously influenced or nominally subject to surrounding powers in Bengal and Assam, the lack of penetration by Hinduism or Islam attests to the hill tribes' usual independence. The relatively widespread adoption of Christianity from the 19th century coincides with formal annexation by the British in India. Until the imperial authorities moved to consolidate their hold on Assam and the north-east region generally, the independence of the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia kings had been tolerated. The Ahoms had brought the Jaintia into the kingdom of Assam at the beginning of the 18th century, but the decay of royal power meant this sovereignty was shortlived. In 1824 the threat of Burmese invasion prompted the king of the Jaintia to seek British protection and other chiefs permitted the passage of British troops through the Khasi Hills. During the establishment of British authority in Assam between 1826 and 1838, a permanent road (completed in 1829) was considered necessary through Khasi lands, while the Jaintia hills were also annexed as part of Assam in 1835 (formally to the Bengal presidency). The Garo kingdom became a district of Assam in 1869, while in 1874, when Assam was formally separated from the jurisdiction of Bengal, Shillong, in the Khasi Hills, actually became the provincial capital (it remained the capital of Assam until the division of the state in 1972). In 1905 Assam was merged into East Bengal. That experiment ended in 1912, but Assam (then the entire modern north-eastern region of India) remained part of a reunited Bengal until 1919, when it again received provincial status. Eastern Bengal and neighbouring Muslim enclaves became part of Pakistan (East Pakistan-renamed Bangladesh upon its own subsequent achievement of independence) in 1947, while

the hill districts of the Garo, Khazi and Jaintia became part of the new India. This final process of partition left some border questions unresolved, although friendly relations between Bangladesh and India did not normally mean this was a problem for Meghalaya (on the southern fringe of which was a debatable 6.5-km stretch of frontier). However, in April 2001 Bangladeshi troops occupied a border post and some of the disputed territory in a clash that left 19 soldiers dead. By June the two national Governments were meeting to resolve the dispute and to discuss the exchange of a number of anomalous enclaves.

After independence, the hill districts of modern Meghalaya received some autonomy within the state of Assam, but the people remained dissatisfied. Discontent was particularly provoked by the introduction of Assamese as the state language, and the Garo, Jaintia and Khasi were united in their demands upon the federal authorities. In 1970 the hill districts were combined into an autonomous state, Meghalaya, within Assam, and this entity achieved full statehood in January 1972.

Government of the state usually depends on a coalition of parties in the Legislative Assembly, with no single party ever having a majority. There are 29 members elected from the Khasi Hills districts, 24 from the Garo Hills and seven from the Jaintia Hills. In November-December 2001 F.A. Khonglam displaced E.K. Mawlong as Chief Minister, making him the sixth person to hold the post since the legislative elections in 1997. Khonglam also earned the distinction of becoming the first independent member of a state legislature in the country to become a chief minister. Moreover, it was claimed that 59 of the 60 members of the Legislative Assembly were now former ministers. The fragmented nature of the state legislature is in marked contrast to Meghalaya's consistent (since 1980) election of Congress representatives to the national Parliament, one to the upper house and two to the lower house.

ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS COMPOSITION

The ethnic composition of the State is 85 per cent tribal and 15 per cent others. The major tribes are the Khasi-

Jaintia and the Garo. Khasi-Jaintia trace their ancestry to the Mongolian race, while the Garos belong to the Tibeto-Burman race. Their cultural traits and ethnic origins remain distinctive, mainly due to their geographical isolation.

The Khasi language spoken here is believed to be one of the few surviving dialects of the Mon-Khmer family of languages in India.

The Khasi-Jaintia tribe is one of the largest tribes in the State and occupies 4 districts out of a total of 7. The districts are East Khasi Hills, West Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills and Ri Bhoi. The erstwhile British government coined the word 'Khasi-Jaintia' after the invasion and annexation of the hills. Since then the terms Khasi and Jaintia are being used in administrative and intellectual vocabulary. Smaller tribes are the Baite, Hajong, Lalung, Koch, etc. It is interesting to note that only the major tribes named above practice matriliney while the rest practice patriliney.

The non-tribal groups comprise of the Nepalese, Bengalee, Assamese, South Indians, and North Indians. The religious persuasions of the State's population are: 64.58 per cent Christians (Presbyterian, Catholics, Baptist Mission, Church of God, Church of North India, etc); 14.67 per cent Hindus; 3.46 per cent Muslims; 0.15 per cent Sikhs; 0.16 per cent Buddhist; and the rest as other.

Short, muscular, robust and of complexions that vary from fair to dark brown, the tribal people of Meghalaya are sociable, cheerful, hardworking and great lovers of music and beauty. A unique characteristic is their habit of chewing unripe betel nut with dried tobacco, betel leaves and lime. The traditional costume of this place is the 'Jainsem' and the 'Dhara', though the younger generation has now taken to western clothes. The common food of the people is rice with meat and fish preparations. Rice beer is a favourite drink among the men folk.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Khasi, Garo and Jaintia are people with a rich cultural heritage. The important crafts of the Khasi and the

Mizoram

The Land

The State of Mizoram, formerly the Lushai Hills District at the tip of the southern extension of Assam, is in the north-eastern region of India. It juts southwards, out of India, into an angle between the countries of Bangladesh (to the west) and Myanmar (formerly Burma, to the east). In the north, this 'land of the highlanders', has inter-state boundaries with the former princely states of Tripura to the west and Manipur to the north-east. Directly to the north lies Assam (of which Mizoram formed a part until 1972, when it became a Union Territory under its present name, achieving full statehood on 20 February 1987). Mizoram has an area of 21,081 sq km (8,139 sq miles).

The Mizo (formerly Lushai) hills from which the state takes its name probably have the most variegated topography of any highlands in the region. A simplified description would be of some a half-dozen parallel ranges of hills, running from the north to the south and tending to taper at the ends. The eastern ridges, as they rise towards the Rongklang range in Myanmar, tend to be higher, with the highest point in the state being near the south-eastern border at Blue Mountain (Phawngpui), which reaches 2,164 m (7,102 feet). An average height for Mizoram is some 900 m, with the capital, Aizawl, itself situated at over 1,000 m above sea level. The steep hills are densely forested with bamboo and wild banana, and flank deep gorges hiding rapid rivers like the Dhaleswari or Katakhal (locally known as the Tlawang), the Sonai (Tuirial) and the Tuivawl, draining

north, and, in the south, the Kaladan or Kolodine (Chhimituipui), and the Karnaphuli (Khawthlang tuipui) and its tributaries, such as the Tuilianpui. Mizoram is bisected by the Tropic of Cancer, giving the hill state a mild climate, with an average maximum temperature of 29°C (84°F) in August and an average minimum temperature of 11°C (52°F) in January. The rainy season is in May-September, with Aizawl receiving average annual rainfall of 2,080 mm (8 inches).

The total population grew at a higher than average rate of growth between national censuses, rising from 689,756 in 1991 to 891,058 by March 2001. The population density remained relatively low, however, at 42.3 per sq km in 1991. The Mizo tribes are of Mongoloid stock and include the Lushai (after whom all the Mizo peoples were named for much of the past two centuries), the Pawi, the Ralte, the Pang, the Himar and the Kukis. They are united not only by kinship, but by common traditions and history. Thus, ethnically, for instance, they share the Christianity to which many of them converted in the 19th century, as well as more traditional concepts such as *tlawmngaihna*, which is a sort of imperative of welfare, kindness and hospitality. The missionaries also gave the Mizo tongue the Roman script, as well as English, which is the state's other official language. Originally animists, according to the 1991 census 85.7% of the population were Christian (mainly Protestant); the next largest religious affiliations recorded were Buddhists and Hindus. However, as so often in the borderlands of conflicting faiths or when traditional beliefs have relatively recently been displaced, exact creeds are often vague or even bizarre. The largely nomadic Chakmas of the western borders combine Hinduism, Buddhism and animism, while the surprising presence of Judaism (the small Bne Menashe sect, sometimes called the 'Manipur Jews') dates from 1951. That year a local chieftain, Tchalah, claimed that by divine revelation he had been instructed to lead the people of Mizoram and Manipur (whose identity as descendants of one of the lost tribes of Israel, Manesseh, had been suppressed by the Christian missionaries) back to their Jewish roots and, indeed, to Israel.

Although primarily agriculturalists, the 2001 census records that 49.50 % of the population of Mizoram were 'urbanized'. The biggest town was the capital, Aizawl, in the north, but other important towns were Lunglei and, even further south, Saiha, and Champhai on the Myanmar border. The state is divided into eight districts.

History

The Mizo peoples probably originated in north-west China some time in the first millennium of the Christian era, gradually migrating southwards and through Burma (now Myanmar) and into India by the 17th century. They conquered and assimilated other Mongoloid tribes in the Lushai Hills during the 18th century. The first Mizo people to move into the highlands were called the Kuki, and the final group were the Lushai themselves. The Mizo developed an autocratic political system based on 300 hereditary chieftainships. With Assam increasingly falling under the East India Company's rule from 1826, Mizo raids on the plantations to the north, particularly from late 1830s, became a problem for the British authorities. Punitive military expeditions and increasing contact with imperial officials had brought the area under control by the 1870s. More importantly, visiting restrictions not applying to missionaries, the conversion of many Mizo to Christianity helped the process and spread education. In the 1890s the Lushai kingdom was formally annexed to the British Empire, the northern hills falling under the jurisdiction of Assam and the southern hills Bengal. The district was united as the Lushai Hills, and awarded to Assam, in 1898.

The consolidation of administration in the district meant that in 1919 Lushai Hills was declared a 'backward area' (it remains a notified backward area in Indian government parlance) and it became an excluded area in 1935. After the Second World War a political organization that became the Mizo Union began to campaign for a single administration for all Mizo areas with Lushai Hills, although other activists wanted to join Burma upon independence. Autonomy for the Lushai Hills was granted in 1952, although that did not satisfy local aspirations, but the

introduction of new institutions allowed for the beginning of the abolition of chieftainships. The district suffered the ravages of the so-called Mautam famine in 1959 (caused by the flowering of bamboo encouraging an explosion in a predatory rat population, which proceeded to eat all available foodstuffs). A local famine committee formed from a cultural society founded by Laldenga evolved into a nationalist movement, the Mizo National Front (MNF). The MNF moved on to support armed action and was proscribed in 1967. However, demands for a separate hill state continued even after Mizoram was separated from Assam, when it gained territorial status in January 1972. Activists continued to campaign, sometimes violently, but the MNF entered negotiations with the federal Government in 1976, although agreement was not reached until the new Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, added fresh impetus to the process, securing an historic compact with the MNF and the state authorities in June 1986. As a result the MNF disarmed and, on 20 February 1987, Mizoram entered the Union of India as the 23rd state. Nationalist demands now focus on bringing contiguous Mizo areas in other states into Mizoram.

Since statehood three parties have dominated local politics: Congress (I); the MNF; and the Mizo People's Conference (MPC). Into the 21st century, Congress is still led by Lal Thanhawla, who has been Chief Minister for three terms, in 1984-86 and 1989-98 (the latter period extended by victory in the 1993 state elections). In the last election the Mizoram Pradesh Congress Committee only gained six seats and lost power. Thanhawla was succeeded in the state premiership by Zoramthanga, whose MNF had won 21 of the 40 seats in the Legislative Assembly. Zoramthanga had become leader of the MNF in 1991, upon the death of Laldenga. Laldenga had been Chief Minister in a coalition with Congress during the period leading up to statehood, but the MNF had won 24 seats in the first state elections in 1987 and so ruled alone thereafter. Laldenga lost power to a brief period of President's Rule (federal direct administration), which was followed by a significant loss of seats for the MNF in ensuing electoral contests, despite its continuing to win a large proportion of the votes, in 1998

Nagaland

The Land

The State of Nagaland is in north-eastern India, on the mountainous border with Myanmar (formerly Burma), which lies to the east. The land of the Naga tribes (the name is said to be derived from a Burmese word, *naka*, meaning those with pierced ears) is one of India's smaller states, until 1957 part of Assam, which lies along the state's long north-western border. There is a short border in the north-east with another Indian state, Arunachal Pradesh, and beyond the ragged southern border lies Manipur state. Nagaland, which became India's 16th State in December 1963, covers an area of 16,579 sq km (6,399 sq miles).

The State lies on the western flanks of the mountain ranges curving south-westwards from the Himalayas, before heading south into the Rongklangs of Myanmar. The crest of the Naga Hills generally serve as the international frontier, so the highest point is on the border, at Saramati, which is 3,826 m (12,557 feet) in height. The thickly wooded highlands include valleys and gorges cut deeply by rivers such as the Dhansiri, the Dayang, the Dikho and the Zungki or Tuzu. Nagaland has a moist, monsoon climate, with average annual rainfall of between 2,000 mm (79 inches) and 2,500 mm. Altitude also affects the temperatures, but the mean summer (June-September) maximum is 31°C (88°F) and the mean winter (October-February) minimum 4°C (39°F).

Nagaland's population was provisionally put at 1,988,636 in the census of March 2001, meaning the state had the highest rate of growth of any state or territory in India since the previous decennial census, when it totalled 1,209,546. The population density in 2001 was 119.9 per sq km. Most of the population of the state are Nagas, who are usually divided into 16 tribes or groups. An Indo-Mongoloid people, the largest tribe is the Konyak, followed by the Ao, the Tangkhul, the Sema and the Angami. The others are the Chakhesang (Chokri), the Chang, the Khiamngan, the Lotha, the Phom, the Pochury, the Rengma, the Sangtam, the Yimchunger and the Zeliang (actually a group of sub-tribes). Another tribe, the Kuki, are often considered not to be a Naga people. There are other Naga tribes outside the borders of the state, in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur, and in Myanmar (Kachin state and Sagaing administrative division), with nationalists claiming that the areas they inhabit should be united in a 'Greater' Nagaland (Nagalim). The Naga languages are all of the Tibeto-Burman type, but inter-communication is mainly in English, an official language of the state, and a pidgin known as Nagalese. Traditionally, the Naga were animists, but with a conception of a supreme being, which meant they adapted easily to Christianity, which was adhered to by 87.5% of the population in 1991. Hindus are the next largest group represented in the state and there are small communities of Muslims, Jains, Sikhs and Buddhists.

Most of the population live in rural villages (the rate of urbanization in 1991 was 17.2%) and there are only two towns of any size. Kohima, famed as where the Japanese advance was stopped during the Second World War, is the capital, and is located in the far southern highlands of Nagaland, at an altitude of almost 1,500 m. The original Angami settlement of Kohima (Bara basti) claims to be the largest village in Asia. Some 70 km (44 miles) to the north-west is the main town, Dimapur, on the border with Assam, down on the fringes of the plains, and only 195 m above sea level. The only other towns of any size are Mokokchung, Tuensang and Wokha. The state is now divided into eight districts, Dimapur having been made a separate unit.

Climate

Rains are heavy in Nagaland. The average rainfall is between 175 cm and 250 cm. Most of the heavy rainfall is during the 4 months from June to September. The rains during April to May is low. Strong winds blow from the north west in February and March. The climate is pleasant.

Nagaland is a hilly state. The hills are a continuation of the Burma Arc being joined with the Sub-Himalayan ranges in the north and stretching into the hills of Manipur. Forests cover the main part of the land and jungles it is natural that there will be lots of animal life. In fact, there are plenty of birds and animals and reptiles.

The place being hilly and the expanse of the hills not being very large there are a few rivers, which are quite small in both width and length until they leave the state. No rivers of this state are navigable in any season. In dry season, they become almost dry and in rainy season, they become torrential. Moreover, due to the rocky nature of the terrain and deep valleys navigation is not possible. In the plains of Dimapur a few small boats, which can be counted on fingers, are seen. Those are not for navigation but for catching the fish locally. Fish is available in all these rivers.

Lakes and waterfalls are conspicuous by their absence in Nagaland. There are places where water accumulates during rainy season and dries up in lean season. In Nagaland, there are no waterfalls, of course, many small waterfalls appear during rainy season but they dry up within a short time.

History

The origins of the Naga people are obscure, but they seem to have settled in the Naga hills (on either side of the India-Myanmar border) by about the 10th century. Legend sometimes ascribes a seafaring origin on Sumatra (Indonesia), but it seems more likely that they followed the traditional migration routes out of China and Mongolia. Tribes of similar stock had been in the area from Vedic times. From the beginning of the 13th century AD the

Sikkim

The land

The State of Sikkim is in northern India, in the mountains above the Bengal plains. It juts northwards into Tibet, part of the People's Republic of China (with which there are international borders to the north and east), and separates Nepal (to the west) from Bhutan (with which there is a short border in the south-east of the state). Sikkim's only border with the rest of India is in the south, with West Bengal. The former principality's name probably derives from a Tsong word (*sukhim*) meaning 'new home' or 'happy home'. Once a much larger realm, Sikkim's decline forced it into dependence on British protection from the 19th century; India, as a successor state to the Empire, formalized Sikkim's status as its own protectorate by treaty in 1950. Democratic politics and Indian intervention in the administration in 1974 led, the following year, to a referendum, the abolition of the monarchy and the accession of Sikkim as the 22nd state of the Indian Union on 15 May 1975. Sikkim became the smallest state in India (until Goa achieved statehood 12 years later), with an area of 7,096 sq km (2,739 sq miles).

The state lies in the eastern Himalayas, traversed by the Great Himalaya and some of its southern spurs. The topography is dominated by the deep valley of the River Tista (Teesta) and, to its west, the rising mass of Kangchenjunga (Kanchendzonga-'House of Five Treasures'), which, at 8,586 m (28,179 feet), is the highest mountain in India, the third

highest in the world and the presiding deity of the surrounding country. Only 40 km (25 miles) from the peak of Kangchenjunga, however, is Sikkim's lowest point, at 221 m, in the southern foothills. This indicates the variety and extremity of the altitudinal changes in the landscape, affecting the climate and the flora. About one-third of Sikkim is covered with dense, often inaccessible, forests of sal, sambal and bamboo. The mountainous terrain is slashed by deep ravines and green valleys watered by rivers fed with both snow and rain. The main river, the perennial Tista, flows from north to south, steeply down the east and centre of the state, ultimately flowing into the Brahmaputra (until the great floods of 1787 altered its course, the Tista had been a tributary of the Ganges). It has sources in the Tista Zhanse and the great Zemu glaciers, in the bleaker, colder north-east of Sikkim, where the more desert-like terrain is barely softened by the two main tributary river valleys, of Lachen and Lachung. The main river system flowing through the south-west of the state is that of the Rangit (Ranjit). The climate can range from tropical in the southern foothills, through temperate, to arctic in the very north and north-east or on the mountain heights. Sikkim generally experiences a considerable amount of rainfall, ranging from 1,260 mm (50 inches) to 5,100 mm per year, varying considerably according to altitude or how far north the place is. Gangtok, the hill-top capital, receives the maximum annual average of rainfall (3,494 mm), while Thanggu, high in the north-west, has the minimum (82 mm). Most rain falls between June and September, when the monsoons penetrate deep into the Himalayas up the valleys of the Tista and the Rangit. Fog is also common throughout the state at this time of year. Average January temperatures in Gangtok range from 4°C to 14°C (39°F-57°F), while by May the lowest average equals the winter month's highest, ranging up to 22°C (72°F).

In terms of population, Sikkim is still the smallest state in India (three territories also have higher populations), with 540,493, according to the provisional results of the 2001 census. The rate of increase in population since 1991 was considerably higher than the national average, the total

having increased by almost one-third from 406,457. The population density in 2001 was 76.2 per sq km, although this is misleading, as, owing to the mountainous nature of Sikkim, only about 20% of its territory is habitable. The most populous area is the south-east, while the north is sparsely populated. The latter is also the region reserved to the indigenous Lepchas, who barely account for 10% of the population. An Indo-Mongoloid people, who may be related to the Nagas of north-east India and probably entered Sikkim from Assam or Tibet before the eighth century, they are also known as the Rongpa or Kongpa, 'people of the ravines'. The Bhutia or Bhotia ('of Bhot' or 'of Tibet') arrived in Sikkim from the 14th century, particularly in the 16th century as aristocratic refugees from strife in Tibet, and are now traders and farmers, noted as hardy pastoralists of the high mountains. There is also a small community of the Magar, who have been present for not much less time. Officially registered Scheduled Tribes, of whom the Lepcha and Bhutia are the largest groups, constitute 22.4% of the total population.

By far the largest ethnic group, however, is Nepali; these people began to arrive with the Ghurkha invasions from the 18th century, mainly the Newar and other clans such as the Chettri or Sherpa. They now form the majority population of Sikkim. As a result, Nepali is the most widely spoken language, in one form or another, although Lepcha and Bhutia are also spoken, while Hindi is the official language and English the working language of government. The Nepali majority also means that Hinduism is the major religion (68 per cent of the population).

Mahayana Buddhism, heavily influenced by the animist Bon religion native to the Lepcha (and, indeed, to the Tibetans), claimed the adherence of 27.2% of the population.

Historically, Sikkim is a stronghold of the Nyingma pa, the 'old' sect or 'Red Hats' of Tibetan Lamaism, although in 1959 it gave refuge to the 16th reincarnation of the Gyalwa Karmapa (who died in 1981) when he fled the Chinese occupation of Tibet. Rumtek monastery, 24 km (15 miles) south-west of Gangtok, is now, therefore, the headquarters

of the Kagyu or 'Black Hat' sect. There are 70 monasteries in Sikkim. There were only small communities of Christians (3.3%), Muslims (1.0%) and other religions.

According to the census of 2001, the rural population was 4,80981 and urban population was 59,870, the largest town, the state capital, Gangtok, in the south-east, having a population of barely 30,000. The next largest towns, both also in southern Sikkim and on the main road from Gangtok into West Bengal, are Singtam and Rongphu. Southern Sikkim is split into three of the state's four districts, the south-west being the West District, the south-east the East District and the narrow strip of land between South District, with its chief town (Namchi) also near the border and transport links of West Bengal. Mangan is the main town of the North, which district covers almost 60% of the state's territory but contains only 7.7% of the population. The official headquarters of West District is Gyalshing (Gezing), with the ancient capital and religious centre of Yuksam not far to the north. The East District around Gangtok is the most populous.

History

Sikkim, once known as Basyul, the 'hidden land', was originally inhabited by Naong, Chang and Mon tribes, but these were subsumed into the Lepcha people who had moved onto the southern flanks of the Himalayas from Assam or eastern Tibet in about the eighth century. They were only united under a king or punu in about 1400, when Tur Ve Pa No, was crowned. Three more kings succeeded him, until the Lepcha resorted to a looser association of the clans. Meanwhile, Tibetan exiles (the first ancestors of the Bhutia) had began to arrive in the region of Sikkim from the 13th century, although the major influx was not until several hundred years later, during the religious strife between the 'Red Hat' Buddhists and the reformist 'Yellow Hats'. Although Buddhism was probably already present in Sikkim (the great eighth-century Guru Rimpoche, Padma-sambhava, is said to have passed through the country on his way to the first conversion of Tibet), the arrival of these 'Red Hat' or Nyingma pa Bhutia certainly ensured that it would become a Buddhist state under the Namgyal dynasty.

The Bhutia family that was to rule Sikkim for over 330 years, until its incorporation into India, first arrived in the region in the 13th century. They were descendants of the legendary prince who had founded the eastern Tibetan kingdom of Minyang in the ninth century. A Guru Tashi led his people south from the Kham region, his eldest son helping a Sakya king and winning himself both the name of Khye Bumsa and a princess in marriage. They settled in the Chumbi valley (where the People's Republic of China now juts down between Bhutan and north-east Sikkim) and established friendly relations with the Lepcha prince of Gangtok, Thekong Tek-not only a chieftain, but also a religious leader. He and Khye Bumsa established a blood-brotherhood treaty at Kabi Lungstok, and the Bhutia dynasty came to hold increasing sway in both the Chumbi and Tista valleys thereafter, particularly after the demise of Thekong Tek and the Lepcha chieftainship. Khye Bumsa was succeeded by his third son, Mipon Rab, who had four sons (from whom the four principal clans of Sikkim are said to be descended), the youngest of whom, another Guru Tashi, succeeded his father. He moved his capital to Gangtok and ruled over both Lepcha and Bhutia, becoming the first ruler of Sikkim as such. His great grandson, Phuntsok or Penchu, a son of the third ruler to follow Guru Tashi, was to become the first consecrated chogyal ('heavenly king'-both the ruler or gyalpo and the religious head of Sikkim) and first adopted the name of Namgyal for his dynasty.

In 1641, during the time when Lamaist Buddhism was being consolidated in Sikkim, three sages entered the country from different directions and met at Yuksam, in the west. During their debate on establishing a united temporal and spiritual leadership for Sikkim (Tibet had been bestowed upon the Dalai Lama by the Mongol rulers in the previous year), one of these lamas, the evangelizing Lhatsun Chenpo, cited a prophecy of Padmasambhava to silence the competing claims of the clerics. Thus, it was a 38-year-old scion of the ruling house, Phuntsok, who was found to satisfy the prophecy; he was consecrated as the first Chogyal at Yuksam (which became his capital) in 1642, taking one of Lhatsun Chenpo's names as the name of the ruling family.



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