



## RSTV Summary: The Big Picture: End of the Road for Northeast Insurgency

### Context:

- With more and more insurgent groups from the Northeast joining peace talks with the Government of India, the region has been witnessing a drastic decline in insurgency in the last five years.
- Home Ministry data from 2019 shows that insurgency in the Northeast region is continuously declining since 2014.
- According to the data, the Northeast region witnessed the highest number of insurgency activities in 2014 but they started to register a declining trend thereafter.
- The insurgent groups carried out 824 attacks and killed 212 civilians in 2014. In response, the security forces gunned down 181.
- In 2015, the insurgents launched 574 attacks in which 149 extremists, 46 civilians and 46 security personnel were killed.
- The insurgent activities continued to diminish in 2016 in which 87 extremists were killed during 484 insurgent attacks. The figure of civilian and security casualty stood at 48 and 17 respectively.
- The insurgent attacks reduced to 308 in 2017 in which 57 insurgents, 37 civilians and 12 security personnel were killed. In 2018, the extremism violent incidents came down to 252 in which 34 insurgents, 23 civilians and 34 security personnel were killed.

### History of insurgency in North-East India

- North-East India has been witnessing insurgency since 1950s.
- The British had generally followed a policy of non-interference in the NEI.
- However, the newly independent India in 1947 had the formidable task of uniting various princely states not only of NEI but of the country as a whole. The integration of these distinct cultures of NEI into the “mainstream” was generally met with resentment.
- The insurgencies started with Naga Hills. Under the leadership of Phizo, the Naga National Council (NNC) declared independence from India on 14 Aug 1947.
- Despite efforts at political settlement by various leaders of that time, the unrest did not die.
- As a result, Indian Army (IA) was ordered to undertake Counter-Insurgency (CI) operations in Jan 1956, after the Government of India (GoI) declared Naga Hills as a disturbed area. Thereafter, various regions proactively voiced their demands for freedom/independence, and initiating insurgencies in the region.
- The Mizo National Front led by leader Laldenga, demanded independence for Mizoram in 1966.
- A movement that started demanding the deportation of the illegal migrants also witnessed the birth of the militant outfit the United Liberation Front of Assam (U.L.F.A.) in 1979.
- National Democratic Front of Bodoland are demanding separate Bodoland out of Assam.

### Reason for insurgency in North-East India

- **Multi-Ethnic Region.** North east India is the most ethnically diverse region in India. It is home to around 40 million people including 213 of the 635 tribal groups listed by the Anthropological Survey of India. Each of these tribes is having its own distinct culture. Thus, each tribal sect resents being integrated into the mainstream India as it means losing their own distinct identity.



- **Underdeveloped Region:** Due to the difficult terrain configuration of jungles and mountains, infrastructural development in NEI has generally been slow, often at a snail's pace. This has widened the schism between the NEI and mainstream India, and further increased a sense of disenchantment with the GoI.
- **Lack of Economic Development:** GoI's economic policies have also fuelled resentment and insecurity amongst the people. Due to various factors, the development of NEI has lagged behind thereby resulting in lack of employment opportunities. Thus the youth are easily lured by various insurgent groups in order to earn easy money.
- **Sense of Isolation, Deprivation and Exploitation:** Distance from New Delhi and meagre representation in the Lok Sabha has further reduced the vox populi being heard in the corridors of powers, leading to more disillusionment in the dialogue process, thereby making call of the gun more attractive.
- **Demographic Changes:** The influx of refugees from former East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) into Assam led to a dramatic change in the demographic landscape of the region. This led to discontent amongst the people of the region, thereby giving rise to insurgency in Assam with the United National Liberation Front (ULFA), formed on 7 Apr 1979, leading the mass anti-immigrant agitation.
- **Internal Displacement:** From the 1990s to the start of 2011, over 800,000 people were forced to flee their homes in episodes of inter-ethnic violence in western Assam, along the border between Assam and Meghalaya, and in Tripura. According to conservative estimates, some 76,000 people remain in internal displacement in NEI due to the prolonged armed violence.<sup>4</sup>
- **External Support:** The insurgencies in the NEI have been supported by erstwhile East Pakistan in the late 1950s; and in early 1960s, in the form of training of personnel of Naga Army and giving them weapons. Later, China also provided weapons and moral support.
- **Perceived Excesses by Indian Army:** The promulgation of Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in most of the NEI has further alienated the local populace. Though imperative for strengthening the hand of IA for CI operations, it is often portrayed as draconian by various Human Rights (HR) organisations and thus has been vilified by various insurgent groups.

### Declining insurgency in India

- According to Ministry of Home Affairs there were 1,297 violent incidents in the Northeast India in North East India which reached its highest level in 2014 and is declining thereafter.
- In 2019 the insurgency incident had fallen to 223.

### Reason for decline in North-East insurgency

- Marked improvement in security relation with Myanmar and Bangladesh.
- Increased talks between government and insurgent for peace.
- Decline in popularity of insurgent group among people and they know that most likely it will go on declining.

### What are the challenges faced by government?

- Lack of infrastructural development due to obstruction created by insurgents.
- Poverty, unemployment, feeling of discrimination and neglect have also fuelled insurgency.
- Support provided by neighbouring country such as China to insurgents.
- Porous border due to which insurgents keep moving in and out of country thus remaining out of reach of security forces.



- Extortion and violence is deterring the private investment in the north east thus hindering development activity in the region.
- Nexus between politician, bureaucracy and militants which only harms the general innocent public while benefitting the affluent.
- Ethnic complexity due to which government find it difficult to pacify each community and result is the one or more community keep feeling neglected.

### Steps taken by Government to tackle Northeast insurgencies

- **Dialogue and Negotiation:** The Indian government has always given preference to dialogue and negotiations over armed conflicts in the Northeast. Mizo Accord, Naga Peace Mission of 1964, the Shillong Accord of 1975 and the ongoing peace negotiations with the NSCN (IM) and the NSCN (K).
- **Greater Statehood:** The government has given considerable attention to reduce the conflicts by conferring greater statehoods in the north east. Such as formation of Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya etc.
- **Autonomous Administrative Areas:** such as Bodoland council, Autonomous district council in Meghalaya.
- **Special Treatment to Nagaland** to pacify the Nagas.
- Creation of separate ministry for development of north eastern region (**MoDONER**) to fuel development in the region.
- **Look East and Act East policy** for economic development and trade routes to South East Asia via land and sea to bring about prosperity to the North-eastern states.
- **Civic Action Programme in the North Eastern States** for trust building between people and security forces.
- **Advertisement and Publicity** of government measures to bring development and peace in the region.
- **Counter Insurgency in North East:** use of AFSPA, Modernization of Police, counter insurgency movement by India in Myanmar to eliminate insurgents.
- **North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS):** Under this scheme, which is entirely funded by the central government, money would be provided to the north-eastern states for infrastructure projects on water supply, power and connectivity enhancing tourism, primary and secondary education and health. It also seeks to promote industrialisation in the region, with emphasis on boosting employment and income generation in the manufacturing and service sectors.

### What can be done to solve the issue in North-East India?

- Meaningful negotiations on priority basis with insurgent group who are willing to come on table.
- The Autonomous District Councils should be given more power and empowerment to pacify the local demands.
- Improvement in governance to reduce corruption and discrimination with communities based on their ethnic identity.
- **Full-fill the aspiration of younger generation:** Focus should be on creating enough employment opportunities for the local youth as they will be very useful in bringing normalcy to the region. Youth engaged in meaningful employment will not only help in development of north-east region but also development of whole country and at the same time bring peace in the region.
- **Development**
  - focus should be on tapping the natural resources abundant in this region such as bamboo and rubber and setting up of industry in this sector such as biofuel industry, furniture industry etc.
  - The North east should become a single economic unit without disturbing the political boundaries of the states.
  - Tourism should be promoted.



- **Relation with Bangladesh:** When we talk about the North-east region, we cannot ignore Bangladesh. Better relations with Bangladesh in terms of foreign policy, cultural exchange, social linkage, etc. will have better economic impact on the region.
- **Bring private investment in north-east:**
  - There is a need to identify possible areas in which investment can be made in the north-east and we need to step-up the investment.
  - Government should assure the private sector of the security to their business and installations.
  - Tax-break, cheap land, cheap credit etc. need to be provided by government to incentivise the private sector to invest in north-eastern region.
  - Focus on infrastructure development such as rail, road connectivity, adequate and continuous power supply etc. to make the industry feasible.

**Source:**

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