Migration, Ethnic Conflict and Insurgency in North-East India

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ABSTRACT
The North-East region of India is comprises of 8 states like Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura and Sikkim. The region shares its international border with the neighbouring countries like China, Tibet, Bhutan, Burma, Bangladesh and somewhat isolated from the rest of India. Since from the time of India’s independence the North-Eastern region has been witnessing continuous influx of migrations and episodes of ethnic conflicts and insurgency related to violence distorting peace and national security. The consequence in manifold, affecting development and prosperity of this region.

INTRODUCTION
Migration and international migration in particular, is a major problem in today’s world. This perspective holds that migration is primarily a product of economic and political crises that compel people to leave their homelands, usually involuntarily. Migrants tend to crowd into towns and cities, where they become an underclass exploited by unscrupulous employers and land lords. Out-migration does not even produce positive outcomes in the place of origin. Because migration is selective of the most able and talented youths, the ‘brain drain’ may even worsen the prospects for socio-economic development in the sending areas.

International migration is not simply the movement of people from developing to developed economies. Over 40 percent of those who have crossed international boundaries currently reside in developing countries. The Middle East has attracted millions of temporary labour migrants from south and South-East Asia. Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan have drawn Filipinos, Thais and many others to work as labourers and domestic servants. Added to these patterns of voluntary labour migration, the world is frequently beset with refugees fleeing war, violence, political persecution, and economic deprivation around the globe 1.

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF NORTH-EAST INDIA

North-East India is the sentinel of the Indian continent. It is strategically very important as the region is surrounded by five foreign countries Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bhutan, China and Nepal. This land locked region is connected with the rest of the country by a narrow stretch of plain land known as Siliguri corridor. It is also called ‘Chicken Necked’ region 2. The North-East region of India comprises of states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura and Sikkim, comprising 255.08 million hectares, which is about 8 percent of the country’s landmass. Since India’s independence the North Eastern region has been witnessing continuous influx of migrations and episodes of ethnic conflicts and insurgency related to violence distorting peace and national security. The consequence is manifold, affecting development and prosperity of this region.

OJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
1. To discuss the status and consequences of voluntary and involuntary migration in North-East region of India.
2. To find out the level and reasons of ethnic conflicts in this region.
3. To estimate the causes and consequences of insurgency problems in the North-East region.
4. To suggest remedial measures to the problems oozing out from migration, displacement, ethnic conflicts and insurgency.

MIGRATION

The term migration literally refers to the movement of population from one place to another. It may be temporary or permanent. Temporary migrations may be annual, seasonal or even of a shorter duration. Migration is not merely a relocation of human resources but is a process which has three kinds of impact:

a) On the area experiencing immigration
b) On the area experiencing emigration.
c) On the migrants themselves.

The purpose of migration may be employment, business, family movement, marriage, calamity etc. Migration is the net result of the combined effects of push factors of the area from where people migrate and pull effect of the area to which they migrate. In India the rural areas suffering from poverty, un employment, excessive population growth produce push effects from where rural youths, in large number migrate to megacities and industrial towns which have pulling effects due to more employment opportunities, greater prosperity and better lively hood conditions. Because of this unchecked influx India’s megacities and metropolises are growing as a over-blu
villages, without essential urban facilities, functions, infrastructure and services, and without a strong economic base.

**Insurgency:** An insurgency is an armed rebellion against a constituted authority when those taking part in the rebellion are not recognized as belligerents. In the context of Indian scenario it can be seen as armed rebellion and violent protests against Indian Government or authority.

**Causes of internal displacement in Northeast India:** Considering the magnitude of the problem of internal displacement in Northeastern region, it is difficult to outline all the causes of internal displacement. However some of the prominent causes of displacement in the region are listed below.

- Due to natural disasters like earthquake, flood, erosion, drought and climate change;
- Due to violence—ethnic, religion and language conflict, wars and revolutions;
- Due to development driven reasons and governmental policies;
- Due to take over of land by migrating communities.

Conflicts have regularly caused considerable internal displacement of population in most of the northeastern states. The region has witnessed a number of major causes of conflict-induced displacement in recent years.

- Displacement of Bengali Hindus and Muslims from and within Assam;
- Displacement of Adivasis and Bodos within and from western Assam;
- Displacement of Bengalis from Meghalaya, particularly from Shillong, the capital city of Meghalaya;
- Displacement of the Bengalis from and within Tripura;
- Displacement of Nagas, Kukis and Paite in Manipur;
- Displacement of Reangs from Mizoram;
- Displacement of Chakmas from Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram (Bhaumik, 2005).

**Conflict and displacement in Assam:** Human migration is an ongoing phenomenon in the Brahmaputra valley for centuries. Various immigrant groups belonging to Mongoloid group had entered Assam from neighbouring South-East Asian countries. When the British took over the administration of Assam in the year 1826, it changed the traditional social culture of Assam. After taking over of Assam, British established tea and oil industry in Assam and brought educated Bengali Hindus to work in important positions in the colonial administration and other important professions like teachers, doctors, lawyers and magistrates.

The local people were reluctant to work in tea gardens which results in lack of labour force in colonial Assam. As a result the colonial rulers encouraged migration of tribal people from Jharkhand and Orissa in order to meet the demand of cheap labour in British owned tea gardens. This had eventually led to an anti Bengali feeling amongst Assamese middle class who failed to understand the colonial limitation. The immigration of people from erstwhile East Pakistan took a dangerous turn during post independence period but the Government of India did have no definite policy to tackle the problem. In early sixties, the Govt. of Assam armed itself with Prevention of Infiltration from Pakistan (PIP) Plan, 1964 launched an aggressive campaign to flush out immigrants, who settled in Assam since January 1951. Bimala Prasad Chaliha then Chief Minister of Assam even disregarded the then Prime Minister’s plea to go slow on the deportation. During the post Bangladesh era, the All Assam Student’s Union (AASU) started a movement called Bideshi Khedao Movement which is also known as Assam Movement. The movement was actually triggered by the discovery of sudden rise of registered voters in the electoral rolls in 1070s. Taking advantage of the deep rooted sentiments and discontentment of Assamese people, AASU successfully translated the agitation into widespread popular movement. Tens of thousands of Bengalis—both Hindus and Muslims were displaced all over Assam in violence unleashed during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

**Conflict and displacement in Bodo areas:** Like other sub-nationalists and ethnic movements the Bodo movement in Assam has been associated with ideas of autonomy, liberation and revolution. The violent conflict in Bodo areas started with the Bodo movement in 1987. The Bodos who are the largest plains tribe in Assam alleged that there has been long socio cultural alienation, discrimination, de-culturalisation and anti-tribal policies of the government to deal with them. The Bodos objected the clause 6 of the Assam Accord (1995), which promised to safeguards the culture and identity of Assamese people. The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) along with Bodo Sahitya Sabha launched the Bodo Movement demanding a Bodo state for protecting and preserving their identity.

Many people argued that with a view to have complete hold over the territory Bodos started ethnic cleansing with large scale attack on Muslims of Bengali descent in October 1993. Violent clash between Bodos and immigrant Muslim settlers displaced 3568 families consisting of 18,000 people in Kokrajhar and Bomgaigaon district. Again in May-June 1996 massive attack was launched against Adivasi Santhals. The conflict has resulted in displacement of 42,214 families consisting of about 22,62682 persons throughout western Assam. After this initial outbreak, conflict between the two ethnic groups became a regular feature in western Assam (Phanjaubam, 2007).

**Conflict in North Cachar (NC) Hills and Karbi Anglong:** The two hill districts of Assam NC Hills and Karbi Anglong are mostly inhabited by indigenous tribes like Karbi, Dimasa, Kuki, Khasi, Jaintia, Hmar, Bodo, Tiwa and Zeme Naga. These two districts are continued to be plagued by unprecedented ethnic conflicts in recent years. Root causes of the conflicts are control over land resources and establishment of homeland based on ethnicity. A number of insurgent groups representing different tribal groups emerged demanding independent tribal homelands. Karbi-Kuki, karbi- Dimasa, Dimasa-hmar, Dimasa-Zeme Naga groups fighting with each other leading to killing and displacement of people in large numbers.

Another most domination insurgent group in Karbi Anglong is United Peoples Democratic Solidarity (UPDS). Formed in 1999 UPDS is fighting for separate Karbi homeland outside the state of Assam. According to report by the Asian Centre for Human Rights, as a result of ongoing conflict 44,016 Karbis and Dimasas have been displaced till October 2005 in Karbi Anglong, North Cachar Hills and Hojai sub-division of Nowgaon district (Laskar, Insurgencies in NC Hills and Karbi Anglong, 2008).

**Naga Insurgency and displacement in Manipur:** Naga people’s struggle for independence is one of the oldest...
struggles for self-determination in India. In pursuit of their declared national decision, the Nagas launched Civil Disobedient Movement and successfully boycotted the general election of the free India. In 1963, when Nagaland was formed as a separate state within the Indian Union militants were not satisfied and continued their freedom struggle. In 1975, a section of rebel leaders came out and signed Shillong Accord. Under the accord the militants were asked to accept without condition, the Constitution of India. It irritated leaders like Issac Swu and T. Muivah, who openly denounced the accord and decided to continue their struggle. By aligning with S.S.Khaplang a leader of Kanyak Nagas the two radical leaders formed the National Council of Nagaland (NSCN) in 1980.

In the year 1997, when Government of India concluded a ceasefire agreement with Muivah faction of NSCN to extend ceasefire agreement to all Naga areas in the Northeast, it was met with violent protest in Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

In the middle of of 1992, conflict between Nagas and Kukis resulted in wanton killing, kidnapping, and burning and destruction of houses. Conflict had forced the common people to flee from their original place settlement.

Naga-Kuki clash was followed by Meities and Pangal clash in 1993. The last in the series was the Paite- Kuki clash in Churachandpur district of the state.

Displacement in Tripura: After independence of India, the plans of Tripura i.e. Chakla Roshanabad which generated surplus revenue, was taken away from Tripura and annexed with Pakistan. As a result a large number of Hindu Bengali entered into Tripura from Chakla Roshanabad. This migrant population put sudden pressure in the state. The influx of large number of people over a long period of time brought about demographic changes in Tripura. The indigenous people in the state, who accounted for 95 per cent of the population of Tripura in the 1931 census, had been reduced to just 31 per cent at the time of the 1991 census.

The continuous influx of Bengali people from Bangladesh intensified the progressive alienation of tribal lands and traditional forest rights. As the Bengali migrants practiced relatively advanced pattern of wet-rice cultivation compared to the age-old jhum cultivation. There were large scale transfers of cultivable land of the tribal people to the Bengali migrants. Almost all writers on Tripura insurgency have identified land alienation amongst the tribal people as the major cause that had fuelled the violent insurgency in the state (Bhaumik S., 2005).

As a consequence of influx of large number of migrants, a growing number of ethno-centric tribal parties mushroomed. The Debar Commission and Hanumanthiya Commission which looked into the development of the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) suggested a tribal compact area to fulfill the aspirations of development of tribal people. In the mean time the government enacted Tripura land Reforms and Restoration Act in 1960 to restore alienated tribal land. The Act was amended in 1964. But all these had failed to prevent the alienation of tribal land to other non-tribal groups, creating a feeling of mistrust and betrayal amongst the tribals. This led to the formation of Tripura Upajati Juba Samity (TUJS) in 1967 (Ali S., 2011). In 1967, when as a direct fall out of large scale alienation the Sengkrak Movement started. Sengkrak movement was subsequently outlawed by the state. The state witnessed serious ethnic conflicts between tribals and non-tribals since 1980 till March 2002 and during the conflict about 2000 Bengalis displaced in the state (Phanjaubam, 2007). In an attempt to tribal insurgency, the state government enacted Tripura Tribal Autonomous District Council under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India with a view to empowering indigenous people to bring all round developments so as to protect and preserve their culture, customs and traditions.

**DISPLACEMENT IN MIZORAM**

**Reang (Bru) Displacement:** In 1997 Mizos had reportedly unleashed a wave of terror against the minority Reangs. As many as 35,000 to 50,000 people belonging to Reang tribe crossed over from Mizoram to Tripura following atrocities committed against them allegedly by Mizo tribes (Ali S. S., The Reang Refugees, 1998). The Reang women were raped and men were beaten up and killed. The Reang militant group, which calls itself the Bru National Front (BNLF), started attacking Mizoram police and that further provoked the Mizos to commit atrocities on Reangs. The Tripura Government says that 30,690 Reangs belonging to 6,859 families have fled into Tripura during the period of three years. But the Mizoram Government refuses to accept them. According to Mizoram government Tripura government has not given details of residence of 10,435 people belonging to 2,075 families. Therefore, their claim to be residents of Mizoram is untenable (Bhaumik S., 2005).

**Displacement in Meghalaya:** The non-tribal communities in Meghalaya made up of migrants from other parts of India and recent migrants from neighbouring countries particularly Nepal and Bangladesh. The Khasi and Garo hills fall under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India that provides for establishment of autonomous district council to enforce customary law, use of land as well as reservation in Parliament, educational institutions and government employment. There are mainly two militant organizations operating in the state. Hynniewtrep Achick Liberation Council (HNLC), Achik National Volunteer Council (ANVC) are the two most prominent militant groups in the state. The HNLC aims to transform Meghalaya into a state exclusively for the Khasi tribe, which it claims long been dominated by Garos. On the other hand ANVC founded in 1995 demands ‘Achik Land’ in the areas of Garo hills comprising the present districts of Garo hills in Meghalaya and large chunk of Kamrup and Goalpara districts of Assam.

**REASONS FOR CONFLICT IN NORTH EAST INDIA**

- **Historical reasons —** loosely administered under British India. Tensions between these states and the central government.
- **Tensions between tribal people, who are natives of these states, and migrant peoples from other parts of India.**
- **Geographical reasons —** not well connected with present Indian mainland.
- **Developmental reasons —** Poorly developed due to lack of fund from Center/States.
- **Environmental reasons. • Military reasons —** AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Power Act).
- **Foreign Policy —** Look easy policy and market changes bought.
- **External support —** China and Myanmar. Insurgent Groups in North East India.
SUGGESTIONS TO SOLVE NORTH EAST INDIA PROBLEMS OF INSURGENCY

Through background check of all insurgents groups should be carried out before the central government enters into any Ceasefire or Suspension of Operations Agreements with the insurgents.

POLITICAL

1. Political solutions to the Assam problem should be discussed openly as widely as possible to avoid backlash from the tribal and the minority population of the state.
2. A system of work permit should be issued so that the illegal Bangladeshi migrants do not end up as Indian citizens.
3. The Autonomous District Councils should be empowered.
4. Governance should be improved in a step by step manner. Strict supervision by senior officials should be initiated to improve the delivery system of the government.

DEVELOPMENT

1. The Ministry of the Development of the North East region (DONER) is merged with the North East Council (NEC) for better strategic planning and coordination of various developmental projects in the region.
2. Focus of the Ministry DONER and NEC should be on investment in mega-projects which will make big difference to the development of the region.
3. Institutional capacities in the North east should be developed urgently.
4. Pragmatic land use policy should be formulated for attracting industries in the region. Micro, small and medium enterprises should be encouraged.
5. Local tourism should be promoted. Tourists residing in the eight North Eastern states should be encouraged to travel within the region.
6. Niche tourism or high end tourism should be encouraged. Medical and higher education tourism should be encouraged.
7. The North east should become a single economic unit without disturbing the political boundaries of the states. No internal traffic barriers in the region. Exclusive five year plan for the North east focusing on development of infrastructure.

CONCLUSION

Ethnic tension in Northeastern region in most cases is a byproduct of land alienation owing to demographic change as the people are fighting for natural resources in the same geographical space. Therefore, it is obvious that peace can be restored in the region by land restoration, poverty alleviation, education and development especially in rural areas. Problems of indigenous people of the region have been continuously ignored by successive governments. Instead of exercising control over their land these indigenous people have found themselves politically displaced. Further there is dearth of strong and dedicated leadership in the region because of which human resources of the region could not be utilized in an effective and productive way.

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