

An Overview of Conflict and Insurgency with Special Reference to Assam

Bhaskar Gogoi

M.Phill Research Scholar, Department of Political Science,
Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam, India

ABSTRACT

The Northeast region of India comprising of eight states- Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura and Sikkim. Northeast India is a region poorly connected to the Indian mainland by a small corridor-Siliguri corridor (also known as chicken neck) with a narrow width of only 23 kilometers. North Eastern India has been facing problems of insurgency and conflict for near 5 decades, but things are now settling down and peace started to prevail. The insurgency is a reflection of its social, cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity, terrain, socio-economic development, politico-economic conditions, historical evolution and changes in the environment of the area. On the other hand, this is reflected in the pattern of conflicts, which are varied in their nature and the stance of insurgent groups which remain divergent and ever changing. In these research, highlighted the insurgency status in Assam is classified as very active. Conflicts in Assam can be broadly grouped under the different categories those are elaborated in further.

KEYWORDS: Conflict, Insurgency, Assam, ULFA

INTRODUCTION

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

Assam has been witnessing conflict since 1980-90 period, but since 1990, the intensity of conflicts started to decrease. Assam has several armed factions operate. Some groups call for a separate state, others for regional autonomy while some extreme groups demand complete independence. This is reflected in the pattern of conflicts, which are varied in their nature and causes and the stance of insurgent groups which remain divergent and ever changing. These range from secession to autonomy, movements against foreigners and immigrants, ethnic integration and reaction to perceived imposition of Indianness. The common factor is resorting to violence in articulation and mobilization of the demands.

Conflicts in the region can be broadly grouped under the following categories: National conflicts, Ethnic conflicts and sub-regional conflicts.

OBJECTIVES:-

1. To study about insurgency and conflicts in Assam
2. To study about recent developments regarding insurgency in Assam.
3. To study about statehood demands in Assam

METHODOLOGY:-

During the research it collected data through secondary sources like Books, Journals, E-Books, Articles, Internet etc.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:

REASONS FOR CONFLICTS IN ASSAM: - 1st state of NE India post 1947. Radical turn in Assamese nationalism can be traced back to the influx of illegal migrants from East Pakistan after partition in 1947 and later since 1971 onwards after the formation of Bangladesh. Massive migrant

flow created immense anxiety amongst the Assamese middle classes and the rural masses. Violent protests erupted in Assam. On the other hand Assamese thought that India is exploiting Assam's oil. Another reason is that revenues from Assam's other famous product tea were also going to the head offices located in West Bengal. Most proximate cause of the Assam Agitation (1979-1985) was however malpractices in the electoral procedure in 1978. All Assam Students' Union (AASU) led an agitation demanding the 1951 National Register for Citizens be utilized to determine the citizenship of all those living in Assam. State also tried to use force and suppress the agitation. Creation of one of the most persistent of violent ethnic movements in Assam- the United Liberation front of Asom (ULFA). 7th April 1979 ULFA was formed on at Ranghar, in Sivasagar, a sight of historical significance since the time of the Ahom rule. ULFA wants Assam's status to the Ahom ruled Assam, pre-1826 treaty of Yandaboo between the British and the Burmese, which brought in British rule in Assam. Recruits of the ULFA were drawn from the Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad (AJYCP). 3rd September 2011 peace talk has held. For instance Tripartite agreement for Suspension of Operations (SoO) against ULFA. Signed between Indian Government, Assam government and ULFA July 2012, violence broke out with riots between indigenous Bodos and Bengali-speaking Muslims (who were suspected to be illegal Bangladeshi muslims). Violence in Assam later had its repercussions in other parts of India, Azad maidan riots in Mumbai, Rumour mongering (via sinister SMS) triggered exodus of NE Indians.

Statehood demands in Assam-

1. Bodoland
2. Karbi Anglong
3. Dimaraji
4. Kamtapur

Post Telengana, revival of statehood movements by four ethnic groups- the Bodos, the Karbis, the Dimasas and the Koch-Rajbangshis.

General reasons behind their demand of separate statehood-

1. To preserve and promote their ethnic identity.
2. For rapid economic development in backward areas.
3. To ensure control over natural resources like land.

1. Bodoland

Demand for state consisting of areas located extreme north of north bank of Brahmaputra river in the state of Assam, by the foothills of Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh; inhabited predominantly by the Bodo people. Bodoland movement for an independent state of Bodoland started on March 2, 1987 under the leadership of Upendranath Brahma of the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU).

The Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC):-

BTC has legislative, administrative, executive and financial powers over 40 policy areas in the Bodoland Territorial Areas Districts comprising four districts (Kokrajhar, Baksa, Chirang and Udalguri) of Assam. It was established in 2003 following a peace agreement between the Government of India and Bodo rebels and is functioning since 2003 under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

National Democratic Front of Bodoland:-

NDFB(Songjit faction) had turned up the fire in Assam in the year 2014, December by attacking districts of Sonitpur and Kokrajhar, killing nearly 78 and leaving many seriously injured. It appears that this carnage started in retaliation to the death of three NDFB (S) cadres during a counter-insurgency operation conducted by the Mahar Regiment on December 21 against the outfit's camp in the Chirang District along the Assam-Bhutan border.

Causes of these recurring violence in the area:

First, the political empowerment of the minority communities in the Bodo Territorial Area District (BTAD) in recent years has resulted in growing unease in the Bodo community. The fear is about non-Bodo communities dominating the political process as seen in the election of Sarania.

Second, political tension in the area is further compounded by the perception among the Bodos that illegal migration from Bangladesh is relegating them to a minority status in their own land.

Third, the 'perception' of massive illegal migration has generated a fear psychosis in the Bodo community that their ancestral lands will be illegally taken away by the migrants. The lack of any reliable data on the number of people migrating from Bangladesh into Assam further aggravates the situation.

Fourth, the inclusion of illegal migrants in the voters list is viewed as a deliberate ploy to empower an outside group vis-à-vis the Bodos, so that the latter lose their distinct indigenous identity. This has created a siege mentality among Bodos.

The situation has been further compounded by the failure of the Bodo Territorial Council (BTC) to mitigate the fears of the Bodos. For instance, the Bodo Accord of 2003 clearly stated that the BTC will "fulfill the economic, educational, and linguistic aspirations and the preservation of land-rights

socio-cultural and ethnic identity of the Bodos." Despite these provisions the Bodos continue to feel insecure vis-à-vis the minority communities due to weak administrative institutions that have failed to lock in their rights.

The divisive politics of the members of the BTC have also added to the insecurity. For example, in May 2012, the BTC Chief Hagrama Mohilary had accused the minority community against the Bodos, which had led to the death of nearly 96 people (both Bodo and non-Bodo), without offering concrete evidence to back up his claims. The BTC has failed to assuage the fears of the non-Bodos too. In terms of composition, the BTC has 46 seats of which 30 are reserved for Scheduled Tribes, five for non-tribals, five are open to all communities and the remaining six are to be nominated by the governor of Assam from among the communities. In a council, where policy decisions in terms of development packages, land revenue, business tax and so on are based on a majority vote, it is clear that the Bodos are the privileged lot. The BTC is also vested with powers under Panchayati Raj System. While the Bodo Accord explicitly states that the non-tribal population will not be disadvantaged by the provisions of the Accord, in reality, their rights are not duly acknowledged by the BTC, creating enormous apprehensions.

The final cause of the recurring violence is the existence of armed groups like the NDFB-S, the Birsa Commando Force (BCF) representing the Santhals, etc., which have the capability to challenge the authority of the state administration.

The way out:-

1. Establish a land record system that is computerized and accessible to the local people, and which can address the fear of loss of land to the outsiders.
2. Improve the presence of both the state civil administration and the law enforcement agencies in areas that are identified as highly susceptible to ethnic violence.
3. The state and union governments need to work together to collate credible data on the flow of migrants into areas that have been included in the BTAD.

Assam Nagaland Border Crisis:-

More than 20 protestors were injured and two killed in police action at Rangajan, Golaghat District, Assam against an economic blockade on Asian Highway 1 (also called NH 39) leading into neighbouring Nagaland.(2014)

Major groups involved were:

1. Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chhatra Parishad
2. All Assam Tea Tribes Students Association
3. All Assam Tai Ahom Students Union, and
4. All Adivasi Students Association

The Assam-Nagaland border is disputed since Nagaland achieved statehood in 1963. The disputed land is claimed by private individuals and communities on both sides of the Official border based on historical rights in the absence of bonafide documents. In spite of the Supreme Court's intervention, the dispute remains unresolved with an interim agreement between Assam and Nagaland to place the disputed border areas under the control of a neutral Central Police force.

2. Karbi Anglong

Government has created Autonomous hill districts of Assam in Mikir hills. Demand separate state of Karbi Anglong (Homeland) is being made by people of Karbi tribe. Earlier Anglong district is the largest amongst the 33 administrative districts of Assam. 2006- Indian government named Karbi Anglong one of the country's 250 most backward districts.

3. Dimaraji

Dimasa people demanding a separate state called Dimaraji or "Dimaland" comprise the Dimasa inhabited Areas- Dima Hasao district, parts of Cachar district, parts of Nagaon district and Karbi Anglong district in Assam together with Part of Dimapur district in Nagaland. Government has created the Dima Hasao Autonomous Council (DHAC) in response to the demands.

4. Kamtapur

They do not have an autonomous council. Demand of state in North West Bengal and Assam by the Koch-Rajbanshis(Rajbongshis) people. Some districts of West Bengal and districts of Assam areas demanded under Kamatapur also overlap the areas which were demanded under the statehood of Gorkhland.

The KLO is contrastingly clear in its cessationist demand and is campaigning for restoration of the so-called past independence of a notional Koch Kamta kingdom, which existed during the 12th to the 15th century under the control of the Khen dynasty, with capital near Moynaguri in present Alipurduar sub-division of Jalpaiguri district. The KLO's activities encompass the six districts of north West Bengal and Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Dhuburi and Goalpara districts of west Assam.

Reasons for Conflict in Assam:

1. Historical reasons-loosely administered under British India.
2. Tensions between this state and the central government.
3. Tensions between tribal people, who are natives of this state and migrant peoples from other parts of India and abroad.
4. Geographical reasons-not well connected with present Indian mainland.
5. Development reasons-Poorly developed due to lack of fund from center/state.
6. Military reasons- AFSPA(Armed Forces Special Power Act).
7. Foreign Policy- Look East Policy and market changes bought.

Other Insurgent groups are discussed below:-

KLNLF- The Karbi Longri N.C. Hills Liberation Front is a militant group operating in the Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao districts of Assam that was formed on 16 May 2004. The outfit claims to fight for the cause of Karbi tribes, and its declared objective is Hemptrek Kangthim, meaning self rule/self-determination of the Karbi people. It is closely linked with the ULFA (United Liberation Front of Asom).

UPDS- The United People's Democratic Solidarity was formed in March 1999 with the merger of two terrorist outfits in Assam's Karbi Anglong district, the Karbi National Volunteers (KNV) and the Karbi People's Front (KPF).

In 2004, the UPDS (Anti-Talks) renamed itself as the Karbi Longri North Cachar Hills Liberation Front (KLNLF), and its armed wing as the Karbi Longri North Cachar Hills Resistance Force (KNPR).

In 2004 the UPDS disbanded, following the mass surrender of all its cadres and leaders.

DHD- The Dima Halam Daoga (DHD) is a descendant of the Dimasa National Security Force (DNSF), which ceased operations in 1995. Commander-in-Chief Jewel Gorlosa, refused to surrender and launched the Dima Halam Daoga. After the peace agreement between the DHD and the central government in the year 2003, the group further broke out and DHD(J) also known as Black Widow was born which was led by Jewel Gorlosa. The Black Widow's declared objective is to create Dimaraji for the Dimasa people in Dima Hasao district only. However the objective of DHD (Nunisa faction) is to include parts of Cachar, Karbi Anglong and Nagaon districts in Assam and sections of Dimapur district in Nagaland.

RECENT OBSERVATIONS:-

The basic ingredient of insurgency i.e. popular support is drying up in Assam. Ceasefire and Suspension of Operations with militant groups allow them to indulge in extortion and kidnapping, which in turn help them in maintaining their clout over the people of Assam. The biggest challenge to Assam is extortion carried out by various insurgent groups. Extortion has become meticulously organized activity in Assam and is one of the major sources of funds for the militants.

The perceived threat to the political identity of the Assamese people from the illegal migrants from Bangladesh lies at the core of the Assam problem. The indigenous people of Assam feel that in future the illegal migrants will become the majority population and they will lose political power. The ceasefire agreements and peace negotiations have resulted in reducing the violence levels and given the civil societies of Assam space to talk.

Security situation in Assam has improved in particular facilitating conducive atmosphere for investment and development.

CONCLUSION:-

The Anti-insurgency operations in the state have reached a crucial stage today amid speculations that the camps of the ULFA and the NDFB would be anyday busted by joint operations of the security forces and the Bhutanese Army. On the other hand conflicts are dominantly decreasing. Because people want development measures, employment and not bloodshed, which has been continuing for ever tree decades in Assam.

REFERENCES:

- [1] AASU, (1983). The Foreigners Problem: Why a Solution Is Still Elusive? Guwahati: Publicity Secretary, All Assam Student's Union(AASU) June.
- [2] Srikanth, H. (2000). "Militancy and Identity politics in Assam." Economic and political Weekly (Mumbai), November
- [3] Hazarika, Sanjay, Ethnic Conflict and Civil Society In The Northeast,

<http://www.littlemag.com/bloodsport/sanjoyhazarika.html> accessed on 23 March 2011.

- [4] Dutta Anuradha and Ratna Bhuyan, (Edit), 2008 Genesis of Conflict and Peace: Understanding North East India (Vol 1), New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House.
- [5] Gohain, Hiren; 2007; 'Chronicles of Violence and Terror; Rise of United Liberation Front of Assam,' Economic and Political Weekly, vol42, no 12.

[6] Hussain, Wasbir, 2006, Sustaining the Peace Process in Assam, New Delhi: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies.

[7] Insurgency & Peace efforts in Assam Northeast India, Centre for Development and Peace Studies, Source: <http://cdpsindia.org/assam-insurgencyasp>.

