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## Armed violence and poverty in Northeast India: a mini case study for the Armed Violence and Poverty Initiative

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Centre for  
International Cooperation  
and Security

## **The impact of armed violence in Northeast India**

A mini case study for the Armed Violence and Poverty Initiative

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MAKING KNOWLEDGE WORK

## **The Armed Violence and Poverty Initiative**

The UK Department for International Development (DFID) has commissioned the Centre for International Cooperation and Security (CICS) at Bradford University to carry out research to promote understanding of how and when poverty and vulnerability is exacerbated by armed violence. This study programme, which forms one element in a broader “Armed Violence and Poverty Initiative”, aims to provide the full documentation of that correlation which DFID feels is widely accepted but not confirmed. It also aims to analyse the processes through which such impacts occur and the circumstances which exacerbate or moderate them. In addition it has a practical policy-oriented purpose and concludes with programming and policy recommendations to donor government agencies.

This mini report on **Northeast India** is one of 13 case studies (all of the case studies are available at [www.bradford.ac.uk/cics](http://www.bradford.ac.uk/cics)). This research draws upon secondary data sources including existing research studies, reports and evaluations. As DFID does not have any direct development engagement in Northeast India, this report does give any direct programming or policy recommendations. However, it does highlight key issues which need to be addressed for armed violence to be reduced in the region. The authors would like to thank David Seddon for comments made on an earlier draft. The analysis and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views or policy of DFID or the UK government.

## **Acronyms**

**ANVC** Achik National Volunteers Council

**AFSP** Armed Forces Special Powers Act

**ATTF** All Tripura Tiger Force

**BLFT** Bodo Liberation Tigers Force

**BNLF** Bru National Liberation Front

**GOI** Government of India

**GPMG** General-purpose machine gun

**HPC-D** Hmar People's Convention – Democrats

**HuM** Harkat-ul-Mujahideen

**ISI** Inter-Services Intelligence, Pakistan's intelligence agency

**KNA** Kuki National Army

**KNF** Kuki National Front

**LTTE** Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

**MNF** Mizo National Front

**MULFA** Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam

**MULTA** Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam

**NDFB** National Democratic Front of Bodoland

**NEI** Northeast India

**NLFT** National Liberation Front of Tripura

**NNC** Nagaland National Council

**NSCN** National Socialist Council of Nagaland

**NSCN-K** National Socialist Council of Nagaland – Khaplang

**NSCN-IM** National Socialist Council of Nagaland – Isak Muivah

**PLA** People's Liberation Army (Manipur)

**POTA** Prevention of Terrorism Act

**SALW** Small arms and light weapons

**USCR** United States Council for Refugees

**ULFA** United Liberation Front of Assam

**ULFSS** United Liberation Front of Seven Sisters

## **Executive summary**

The seven states of Northeast India (NEI) – Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura – have witnessed a large number of conflicts for over five decades. These have been fuelled by a number of issues: land distribution, immigration, ethnicity, religion, and political autonomy. More than half a million people have lost their lives to insurgency in the area since Indian independence in 1947. Since the 1990s there has been a proliferation of insurgent groups representing various tribes and ethnic communities. There are currently 72 insurgent groups in NEI.

### **The context of armed violence**

Geographically isolated from “mainland” India and economically underdeveloped, NEI is home to around 220 indigenous groups and over 160 “scheduled tribes”. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these societies have been going through a process of transition from shifting cultivation to settled agriculture, from clan control of land to commodification of land, urbanisation and cultural change. This has attracted large-scale immigration, particularly from Bangladesh. However, a system of “protective discrimination” restricts the access of “non-tribals” to land ownership, business and trading licenses and access to elected office. An unintended consequence of this system is that there is a perception that scheduled tribes who have a “homeland” have managed to insulate themselves against these changes. Thus a “homeland” has become something to which all ethnic groups aspire. However, given the ethnic patchwork quilt of some regions, such an aspiration has fuelled tribal insurgent groups to use brutal tactics to forcibly displace “unwanted” groups thus allowing land for a homeland. This means that in addition to the wars being waged against the Government of India (GOI) and the regional states by insurgents groups, there are also conflicts within the various communities.

### **The parties to the violence**

The parties to the violence are the GOI, the regional states, and a plethora of secessionist groups. The first armed insurgencies of the Nagas, Mizos and Manipuris were later supplemented with secessionist groups fighting for tribal rights throughout NEI. The proliferation of state structures in the region over the past 30 years was one of the strategies used by the GOI to try to foster stakeholders in the Indian Union. However, this federalism is largely cosmetic given the existence of a *de facto* structure of government that manages counterinsurgency operations and is directly controlled by the home ministry in New Delhi. The GOI alternates between political pacification and development interventions and military cleansing of areas. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), which gives the security forces excessive powers including shoot to kill, and the huge deployment of security forces has helped foster a culture of violence and impunity. The use of collective punishment techniques, human rights abuses and the fact that all power lies with the military apparatus has further alienated NE Indians from “mainland” India. This militarization is a huge obstacle to peace in the region.

### **The role of small arms and light weapons (SALW)**

According to many writers, the proliferation of armed groups is being fuelled by the easy availability of SALW. This easy availability helps to escalate social tensions into armed conflict, helps to reduce the timescale between setting up a group and it becoming a full-

scale guerrilla group making a political impact, and helps to fuel a growing network between insurgent groups. There are no figures on gun possession in NEI, however, there are an estimated 63 million firearms in South Asia. Many of the insurgent groups, fuelled by funds from extortion and trafficking, have more modern arms and equipment than the state police. This has assisted them in criminal activities such as extortion, allowed them to kill with impunity, and helped them to dominate the political arena. Insurgent groups gain SALW from a number of sources: arms left over from the conflict in Cambodia and the arming of the mujahideen in Afghanistan; arms from other South Asian insurgent groups; China, Bangladesh, Pakistan; and the Myanmar arms bazaar.

### **The political economy of violence**

The various militant groups across NEI have been substantially criminalised. Many are involved in gun-running as well as extortion and abduction. It has been alleged that the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) has collected more than Rs5bn (£50m) through extortion, abduction and kidnappings. Another source of funds for insurgent groups is the imposition of taxation in areas under their control. It has also been alleged that many are involved in drug-trafficking, however given that some of the groups have a strong moral agenda and oppose drug-use this allegation is contested. There is, however, overwhelming evidence of a complex “web of collusion” between insurgent groups, politicians and political parties. A large quantity of the northeast states’ revenues are siphoned off and distributed to a well-established nexus of politicians, administrators and insurgent organisations. For example, sources estimate that of the Rs11.65bn made available in Assam for rural development from 1992 to February 1998, less than Rs4bn went into legitimate schemes. This criminalisation of politics and crisis of governance is a significant obstacle to peace.

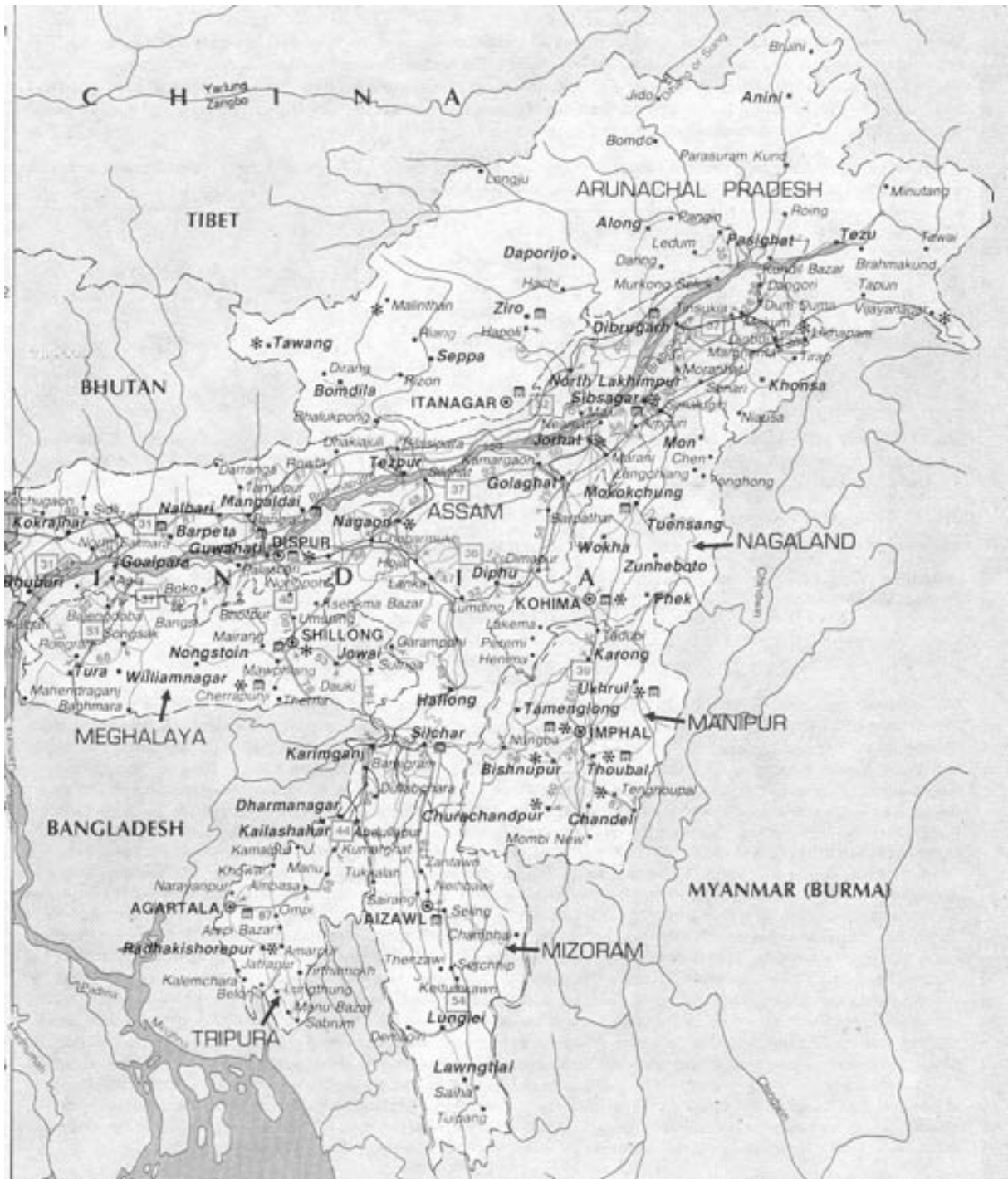
### **Impact of armed violence**

There is a strong culture of violence in the region with a lack of respect for human life and human rights. The size of the security forces and their deployment within communities has had many adverse impacts: high levels of physical and sexual violence, prostitution, substance abuse and harassment. Counterinsurgency operations and inter-ethnic violence has displaced large amounts of people, who are the most vulnerable in terms of poverty, insecurity and poor health. Violence against women and children has also increased. The impact on the wider economy is felt through: 1) a drain on resources due to the systems of “taxation” and the effects of the frequent *bandhs* (general strikes); 2) the decline of business confidence and a flight of capital, either directly by intimidation, kidnapping and extortion, or indirectly through the general climate of fear; and 3) disruptions to the provision of services such as health and education.

### **Recommendations**

While DFID is not involved in development work in NEI, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed for armed violence to be reduced in the area. The key to a stable future lies in the demilitarisation of the area and a community-based development programme which deals with local concerns over the distribution of resources. In addition, the GOI should be encouraged to develop an assistance package for IDPs and should allow international observers and NGOs, such as UNHCR, access to refugees and IDPs in the region.

## Map of Northeast India





## 1. Introduction

Northeast India (NEI) comprises the seven states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. The area has suffered from a large number of distinct conflicts for over five decades, fuelled by a number of issues: land distribution, immigration, ethnicity, religion, and political autonomy/secession. More than half a million people have lost their lives to insurgency in the area since Indian independence in 1947. Each conflict has its own roots and history, and each insurgent group – of which there are currently over 72 (and this number continues to rise) – has its own agenda. These include the protection of language and ethnicity, tribal rivalry, control over local resources, and opposition to immigration. According to many scholars and commentators the proliferation of armed groups has been, and continues to be, fuelled by the easy availability of small arms and light weapons (SALW). One NEI commentator argues: “The sheer volume of weapons floating about in the region becomes a primary source of escalation and transformation of social tensions into armed conflict.”<sup>1</sup> The easy availability of SALW and the growing network between insurgent groups has helped reduce the time between setting up a group and it becoming a full-scale armed guerrilla group making a political impact.<sup>2</sup> Here a clear link can be made between the easy availability of SALW and the level of violence. However, the hard-hitting response of the Government of India (GOI) and the continuation of what many in NEI see as an “occupation” has also helped to fuel the violence. The likely impacts of this on prospects for development and poverty reduction will be assessed throughout the report.

## 2. The context of armed violence

### 2.1 *The historical context*

Until the 1960s, Arunachal Pradesh<sup>3</sup>, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram were all part of one state – Assam. The two other states – Manipur and Tripura – were princely states during British colonial rule, and subsequently became Union Territories. The rest of the NEI states came into existence after the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act of 1971 which began the process of dividing Assam into smaller states. Some these states owe their boundaries to their prior status as autonomous districts with district councils.

The region is landlocked, sandwiched between Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan and China; practically its entire boundary is an international border. NEI covers an area of 255,037 square kilometers and is linked to the rest of India by a narrow 21 km-wide corridor, often referred to as the “chicken neck”. The “seven sisters”, as they are commonly known, make up 8% of India’s geographical area and 4% of its population – around 35 million. Two-thirds of the region is hilly terrain. This geographically isolated and economically underdeveloped area is home to around 220 different indigenous groups

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<sup>1</sup> Routray, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Routray, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Before 1962 Arunachal was known as the North Eastern Frontier Agency and was constitutionally a part of Assam. It was administered by the Ministry of External Affairs until 1965 and subsequently by the Ministry of Home Affairs through the Governor of Assam. In 1972, it was constituted as a Union Territory and renamed Arunachal Pradesh.

and has over 160 “scheduled tribes”, defined as the original inhabitants identified as such in a separate “schedule” of the GOI.<sup>4</sup> This continues a distinction introduced by British colonialism, which, after the subjugation of Assam in 1826<sup>5</sup>, segregated the tribal population into excluded areas that were administered differently from the rest of India.<sup>6</sup> This system prohibited access to these areas to all outsiders, even fellow Indians.<sup>7</sup> This restricted access continues today, as does the system of “protective discrimination”, which restricts the rights of “non-tribals” to land ownership and exchange, business and trading licenses, and access to elected office.<sup>8</sup>

The confusing ethnic landscape of NEI, particularly outside of Assam, fits well with its recent history of “slash and burn” agriculture and poorly defined “territories”. The fissures that existed between tribal and non-tribal populations were further deepened by the widespread conversion of the hill tribes to Christianity.<sup>9</sup> However, it is important to note that NEI is not a unified area. For example, before Indian independence, Assam had a developed state, economy and economic relations with India; Nagaland, on the other hand, was a tribal society divided into two-dozen tribes until the 1940s when the idea of a “Naga nation” emerged. Many academics and commentators regard the tendency to lump the region together as one and thus to see its various problems as unitary (particularly by the GOI), as a problem itself.<sup>10</sup>

## **2.2 The economy of the northeast**

The pace of development in the hill areas and plains varies considerably. The valleys are economically active areas, with that of the Brahmaputra being the most active. On the whole, however, the majority of NEI states are underdeveloped agrarian societies with weak industrial sectors and inflated service sectors. NEI contributes only 1% of the whole of India’s manufacturing output. The industrial sector has mainly developed around tea, oil and timber in Assam, and mining, saw mills and plywood factories in other parts of the region.<sup>11</sup> Most large and medium-sized private industry is in Assam, which is the major economy of the region. However, since the early 1990s there has been almost zero growth in the manufacturing sector in Assam.

The use of primitive farming methods means that the region is unable to produce enough grain to feed its population. Economic growth rates and per capita NSDP (net state domestic product) have stagnated since the early 1990s. Despite agriculture being the

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<sup>4</sup> The Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, launched in the 1950s, was an attempt to give small tribal communities extensive powers to protect their traditions and land.

<sup>5</sup> In this period, economic and political linkages with Bengal were very important. Independence and partition, which created East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), terminated this important connection with Calcutta, which had a devastating impact on the northeast’s economic and communication links. This also created mass migration which upset the demographic balance in neighbouring northeast areas. (Lieten, 2002)

<sup>6</sup> Laws in the rest of India were seen to be unsuitable to the stage of development of the populations of the hill areas.

<sup>7</sup> However, foreigners may visit some parts of Assam and Meghalaya with a valid India visa.

<sup>8</sup> In Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland, all but one seat are reserved for the scheduled tribes; in Meghalaya, 55 of the 60 seats are reserved (Baruah, 2003a, p923-33).

<sup>9</sup> Cultural diversity in the region was further complicated by the British policy of importing large numbers of administrators, tea plantation workers and cultivators from other parts of India. (Lieten, 2002)

<sup>10</sup> Misra, 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Sachdeva, 2000, p37.

mainstay of the economy, the land available for cultivation is less than in other parts of India and only a small proportion is irrigated. Tradition “slash and burn” methods are still used in some hilly areas.<sup>12</sup> Despite the creation of new states, the basic problem of integration and balanced economic development remains. In an attempt to address these problems the GOI has, since 2001, made the Department of North East Development a Cabinet-level department – no other region of the country has such a presence in the GOI.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of infrastructure, the experience is mixed. According to the CMIE Index of Infrastructures, Assam, with 82 points, is not far behind the national average of 100, but the other northeastern states are much further behind, with Arunachal Pradesh the worst with only 44 points.<sup>14</sup> Surprisingly (but probably linked to missionary activity), except for Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya, all the other states of the region have literacy rates above the national average, and as a whole the region has a female literacy rate significantly above the national average. Literacy rates amongst scheduled tribes are also high. However, some research indicates that the quality of education may not be that good. For example, only 45% of all teachers at all levels in the region are qualified, compared to the national average of 87%.<sup>15</sup> Lack of infrastructure, particularly communication, transportation and power, together with the lack of investible capitals and lack of entrepreneurship has slowed the pace of development and has fuelled some of the violence.

### **3. The underlying conflict dynamics**

#### **3.1 *The politics of uneven development***

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the tribal societies of NEI have been going through a process of transition from shifting cultivation to settled agriculture, from clan control of land to commodification of land, urbanization and cultural change. The breakneck pace of this change has been referred to by one commentator as “one thousand years in a lifetime”.<sup>16</sup> These changes have allowed “spaces” for new economic activity, which has attracted large-scale immigration, particularly from Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan).<sup>17</sup> Because of the “protective discrimination” regime, informal arrangements have emerged in land ownership and business practices.<sup>18</sup> Sometimes this has meant that tribals have lost their land to non-tribals; for example, in Karbi Anglong, Assam. However, it is far too complex a situation to say that non-tribals always exploit tribals. The privatization of clan lands has allowed class differentiation *within* tribal

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<sup>12</sup> Sachdeva, 2000, p20-22.

<sup>13</sup> Baruah, 2003a, p920.

<sup>14</sup> The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy uses seven indicators: transport facilities, energy, irrigation, banking facilities, communication facilities, education facilities, and health facilities. Sachdeva, 2000, p39-40.

<sup>15</sup> Sachdeva, 2000, p45-50.

<sup>16</sup> Hazarika, “Bloodsport”.

<sup>17</sup> “At least a part of the significant rise of population of northeast India has to be explained by this migrating proletariat meeting the labour demands of the building boom in the region – made possible partly by the state resources pumped into the area and the substantial leakage of funds through corruption – and the class relations in the emerging forms of post-shifting cultivation agriculture.” (Baruah, 2003b, p56).

<sup>18</sup> Baruah, 2003b, p54.

communities. “Land grabs” have been made possible by official policies that have encouraged plantation crops such as tea, coffee and rubber.

The ethnic politics of the region is related to the growing importance of land relations and land use. District authorities do not consult with tribal peoples about the use of land. Shifting cultivation is regarded by those in authority as primitive and unproductive but transitions to other forms of cultivation has tended to accentuate inequality in terms of agricultural technology to the detriment of tribals. A study conducted in the North Cachar Hills of Assam, for example, found that while farmers were encouraged to cultivate coffee, when global coffee prices dropped and support was withdrawn, the plantations were closed and there was no back up given to local people to pick up the pieces.<sup>19</sup>

An unintended consequence of the “protective discrimination” regime is that there is a perception that scheduled tribes who have a homeland have managed to insulate themselves against these changes. This means that a homeland has become something to which all ethnic groups have come to aspire.<sup>20</sup> For example, in Mizoram, a supporter of the Reang demand for a homeland said: “If the 60,000 Chakmas can have their own Autonomous District Council in Mizoram, why not the Reangs with a population of about 90,000.”<sup>21</sup> And in Manipur, a former Deputy Inspector of Police and a Kuki, P.Gangte, said: “In India alone we have a population of about three lakh (300,000) and including Myanmar we could easily be about 10 lakh. If Mizoram could get a state with only five lakh people in 1987, why not the Kukis?”<sup>22</sup> Given the ethnic patchwork quilt of some regions in NEI this has fuelled some of the more brutal attempts to forcibly displace those of another tribe. For example, the kidnapping and beheading in Assam in 2003 of four Kuki schoolboys by Karbi insurgents was designed to terrorise and force out the Kuki minority.<sup>23</sup>

While the dividing up of Assam into separate states may have partly fulfilled political demands for self-rule from certain tribal groups, many of these states do not have the revenue resources to meet their own administrative and development expenditure.<sup>24</sup> Most of the NEI states are “special category” states that rely primarily on assistance from the GOI. The overwhelming proportion of the finances of NEI states comes from the GOI: for Assam this is 69%, for the rest it is around 80%; the India average is 42%.<sup>25</sup> “Non-plan” expenditure (e.g. interest payments, public employee wages and social services) is high in most of the northeast. The NEI states’ own tax revenues are very low, sometimes negligible.<sup>26</sup> The per capita assistance from the GOI is huge compared to other Indian states. For example, from 1992-7 Arunachal Pradesh received Rs36,237 (£434.70) per capita, Assam received Rs3,161 (£37.92) per capita, while the poorest state in India, Bihar, only received Rs876 (£10.50) per capita.<sup>27</sup> This makes the NEI states almost

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<sup>19</sup> Barbora, 2002, p1289.

<sup>20</sup> Baruah, 2003b, p53.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Baruah, 2003b, p59.

<sup>22</sup> *Hindustan Times* (Delhi), February 12, 1994.

<sup>23</sup> AFP, 14 November 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Sachdeva, 2000, p60.

<sup>25</sup> Sachdeva, 2000, p62.

<sup>26</sup> Sachdeva, 2000, p62.

<sup>27</sup> Sachdeva, 2000, p78-9.

entirely dependent on New Delhi for their finances, and encourages fiscal irresponsibility by local politicians.<sup>28</sup>

### **3.2 The parties to the violence**

The parties to the violence are:

- The Government of India (GOI)
- The regional states
- A plethora of secessionist groups – there are now over 72 armed rebel groups.

The first major armed insurgency was that of the Nagas.<sup>29</sup> In the decades to follow, other armed groups emerged: in the 1960s, that of the Mizo and the Manipuris. Many of these groups were made up of the educated elites of different tribes who were struggling for political power and the gains of modernization.<sup>30</sup> The proliferation of state structures in the northeast has been, in part, the GOI response to these insurgencies. By creating state structures, it was hoped that this would foster stakeholders in the Indian Union. However, other insurgent groups emerged to fight for full independence from India, such as the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in Manipur.

Since the 1990s there has been a proliferation of insurgent groups representing various tribes and ethnic communities. For example, according to Nepam (2004), there were only three insurgency groups in Manipur until the 1980s, by the 1990s this had increased to 27.<sup>31</sup> In the month of July 2004 alone, another two rebel groups had emerged on the scene.<sup>32</sup> There is, of course, a problem in attributing the proliferation of insurgent groups to the wide and easy availability of SALW. The direction of causation could easily lie in the other direction – that the increased supply of SALW is in response to increased demand. However, it is possible to suggest that the easy availability of SALW and the growing network between insurgent groups across the whole of NEI means that small groups can easily arm themselves and make an impact out of all proportion to their size.<sup>33</sup> Some of these conflicts are between Bodo-Santhal, Bodo-Karbis, Kuki-Naga, Kuki-Paites, Tamil-Kukis, Reangs-Hmars, and between tribals and non-tribals. So, in addition to the wars being waged against the GOI there are now conflicts within the various communities and tribes. These should be regarded as “wars within a war”.

Although each insurgent group has its own agenda, some of the issues they raise include the protection of language and ethnicity, tribal rivalry, migration, control over local resources, access to water and a widespread feeling of alienation from “mainland” India.<sup>34</sup> For example, most of the violence between Bodos and Santhals has been over the control of resources. Tactics of guerrilla warfare, revolution and, more recently, terrorism

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<sup>28</sup> Baruah, 2003a, p924.

<sup>29</sup> Misra, 2000, argues that Assamese nationalism alienated hill tribes and helped to break up Assam.

<sup>30</sup> Misra, 2000.

<sup>31</sup> Nepam, 2004.

<sup>32</sup> Correspondence with Nepam, July 2004.

<sup>33</sup> Routray, 2002.

<sup>34</sup> VIC, 2003.

are evident across the states. The situation in each of the “seven sisters” is discussed briefly below.

### **1.2.1 Nagaland**

When India gained independence in 1947, leaders in Nagaland rejected ideas that they should become part of India. This escalated into armed confrontation between rebels and GOI forces in the 1950s. This is one of the world’s least-known but longest-running conflicts.<sup>35</sup> The Nagaland National Council (NNC), which initially led the fight for independence, was drawn from traditional village councils. This gave it strength and legitimacy but this led later to its downfall as it splintered into tribal groupings.<sup>36</sup> After the Indian Union state of Nagaland emerged in 1963, the NNC gradually became marginalized. Corruption became rife in the Naga state, which fuelled the emergence of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN).<sup>37</sup> Established in 1980, it is still the main insurgency group in NEI. Despite its initial goal of fighting for a socialist state, it is now plagued by inter-tribal rivalry, and fratricidal clashes between the two factions, NSCN-IM and the NSCN-K have resulted in more deaths than fighting between the insurgents and the security forces. There were 128 insurgency-related incidents in 2001, and 208 in 2002.<sup>38</sup>

By far the largest and most powerful faction, the NSCN-IM, boasts nearly 3,000 armed cadres. Myanmar and Bangladesh are its primary safe havens. Relations with Myanmar guerrillas and China facilitate the movement of arms to them.<sup>39</sup> The NSCN as a whole attracts large numbers of Naga youth and is virtually a parallel government in remote areas.<sup>40</sup>

The peace process, in operation since a ceasefire was declared between the GOI and the NSCN-IM in 1997, has brought its own problems. The NSCN-IM’s goal of a “Greater Nagaland” can only come at the expense of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. This has fuelled protest in these states, particularly Manipur. The illegal immigration of Muslims from Bangladesh is also emerging as a major issue.

### **3.2.2 Assam**

The insurgency in Assam started in 1979 and has been characterized by escalating violence and a decline in popular support over the past few years. It primarily emerged out of the issue of immigration from Bangladesh. In 2002 there were 454 insurgency-related killings, while in 2001 there were 606.<sup>41</sup> The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), which was established in 1979, continues to be the main group, despite the

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<sup>35</sup> Misra, 2000.

<sup>36</sup> The GOI tried to undermine it by dissolving tribal councils and reorganizing villages, much like the Americans did in Vietnam.

<sup>37</sup> Baruah, 2003a, p919.

<sup>38</sup> Nagaland Assessment 2003, SATP.

<sup>39</sup> Sahni, 2002, p13-18.

<sup>40</sup> Misra, 2000.

<sup>41</sup> Assam Assessment 2003, SATP.

signing of an accord between its leaders and the GOI in 1985. The Bodos started a second round of insurgency in the late 1980s for a separate state. The main Bodo insurgency group, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) has been blamed for the bomb blast in October 2004, which killed 56 and injured more than 150.<sup>42</sup>

Since the late 1990s there has been a proliferation of organizations along tribal, religious or cultural lines. Increasing attacks on immigrant Muslims from Bangladesh have pushed Muslims – both immigrant and Assamese – towards militancy.<sup>43</sup> There are now at least 15 Muslim militant groups, some backed by Pakistan’s intelligence agency the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).<sup>44</sup> A recent paper traces the emergence of Muslim fundamentalist organizations such as the Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA), the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) and the Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA).<sup>45</sup> Violence between and within other ethnic groups is also widespread.<sup>46</sup> This violence is displacing tens of thousands of people.<sup>47</sup>

Recent activities suggest that the ULFA has a good stockpile of weapons and is highly mobile (see Box 4 for an inventory). It has disrupted communications and hit various economic targets, including abducting and killing businessmen, civilians and government officials. A spectacular attack on a petrol refinery in March 2003 caused Rs200m (£2.4m) damage.<sup>48</sup>

### **3.2.3 Manipur**

Manipur acquired statehood in 1947, and was “merged” with the Union of India in 1949. The first insurgent groups were formed in opposition to what they saw as an unconstitutional merger or annexation. Topographically, the State of Manipur comprises of two distinct geographical regions: the “emerald valley” (9% of the entire state) and the “blue rugged hills” (91%). The hills are exclusively reserved for 30% of the tribal population and 75% of the total population of Manipur is confined to the tiny valley area. The fertile valley is the abode of the Meiteis who account for nearly 65% of the population. Many of the unemployed and student youth, having no political outlet for their grievances, have become ready recruits to the various insurgent groups. The conflict involves a variety of insurgent groups, constituted along tribal affiliations, and all fighting against the government for sovereign or separate homelands. The Meitei, who are the major ethnic group in Manipur, are not recognized as a scheduled tribe and strongly resent the benefits that the scheduled tribes receive. It is the Meitei who make up the membership of the Maoist or socialist insurgent groups, such as the PLA.<sup>49</sup> The Meitei insurgent groups are bitter rivals of the NSCN-IM. Casualties from armed violence increased significantly in 2001 and 2002.

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<sup>42</sup> The NDFB were also blamed for a twin bomb attack in Nagaland which killed over 36 people. BBC Online, 3 October 2004, “Fresh blasts hit northeast India”. Although the ULFA and Pakistani ISI have also been implicated.

<sup>43</sup> Misra, 2000.

<sup>44</sup> Sahni, 2002, p4-9.

<sup>45</sup> Saika, 2003.

<sup>46</sup> Sahni, 2002, p5-7.

<sup>47</sup> Assam Backgrounder, SATP.

<sup>48</sup> Assam Assessment 2003, SATP.

<sup>49</sup> Manipur Backgrounder, SATP.

**Box 2: Armed violence in Manipur (1998 – 2003)**<sup>50</sup>

<b>Casualties</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>1998</b>
Insurgents	77	101	161	53	6	5
Security Forces	18	53	25	26	12	29
Civilians	16	36	70	27	9	41
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>75</b>

A multiplicity of secondary conflicts have arisen out of tensions between various ethnic and tribal subgroups, often as a result of changes in patterns of land tenure and distribution. The Naga-Kuki ethnic violence, which erupted in 1992, has claimed hundreds of lives and displaced thousands (see Box 3). This was sparked by a rise in the “house tax” and “village tax” being levied by Naga insurgents, the NSCN-IM, which was resented by the Kukis and led to violent clashes between the two groups.<sup>51</sup> The Kuki National Front (KNF) and the Kuki National Army (KNA) were formed as a result of this and are now pressing for a separate Kuki state within the Union of India. About 37,000 Kuki refugees are housed in 26 relief camps situated all over Manipur, the largest of which is situated at Kangpokpi. One of the refugees in the camp said: “President’s rule is of no use for us. Give us arms, we can take care of the NSCN-IM.” Another refugee said: “Even our 10-year-old children are accusing us of being useless and are ready to go out into the jungles with arms to kill the NSCN. We are having a tough time restraining our children.”<sup>52</sup>

**Box 3: Kuki-Naga ethnic violence during 1992-97**<sup>53</sup>

Year	Tribe	Killed	Injured	No. of houses burned
1992	Kuki	11	22	11
	Naga	2	26	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>11</b>
1993	Kuki	261	69	2144
	Naga	60	72	1365
	<b>Total</b>	<b>321</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>3509</b>
1994	Kuki	95	49	262
	Naga	67	28	425
	<b>Total</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>687</b>
1995	Kuki	65	39	404
	Naga	44	43	653
	<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>1057</b>
1996	Kuki	32	18	61
	Naga	21	15	127
	<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>188</b>
1997	Kuki	9	13	27
	Naga	14	13	6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>33</b>

<sup>50</sup> Manipur Assessment, SATP.

<sup>51</sup> The NSCN-IM were demanding Rs100 (£1.19) per house, and Rs1,000 per village.

<sup>52</sup> *Hindustan Times* (Delhi), February 12, 1994.

<sup>53</sup> Imphal Secretariat Archives, 1997.



In addition to Meitei, Kuki and Naga rebel groups, several other tribes, such as the Paite, Vaiphei and Hmars, have also launched their own insurgent groups in recent years. Besides the Kuki-Naga rivalry, there have been ethnic clashes between the Kukis and Paites, in which more than 4,500 houses were burned leaving hundreds dead and several thousands homeless. In one incident, in June 1997 in Churachandpur, some armed Kuki militants attacked a Paite village and killed at least 10 villagers on the pretext that there were some Naga militants taking shelter in the village. There are also reports that the once peaceful Paities are taking up arms in response to the Kukis who are forcing the Paite people to pay taxes to them. Manipuri Muslims, who have been targeted by some insurgent groups, have now also set up their own militant groups.<sup>54</sup>

### **3.2.4 Tripura**

The main cause of insurgency in Tripura can be traced to the huge influx of refugees from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) following partition. The indigenous people, who accounted for 95% of the population of Tripura in the 1931 census had, by the 1991 census, been reduced to just 31%.<sup>55</sup> An estimated 609,998 immigrants entered Tripura between 1947 and 1971. The pressures of the migrant population pushed tribals into less hospitable lands in the hilly interior. Forests were cleared and the population density in Tripura rose. Government jobs as well as control over trade and business is dominated by immigrants. This has sparked serious discontent among the tribals, who have become a minority in their own land. The violence has taken on a particularly sectarian and brutal character as it is powered by an attempt to forcibly displace – or kill – non-tribals, particularly Bangladeshis. In 2003, 295 people were killed through insurgent-related violence.<sup>56</sup>

The first insurgent groups fighting for tribal rights emerged in the 1970s. Today, there are over 30 militant groups. However, only two are responsible for most militant activities – the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) and the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) – the others are mainly criminal gangs or dormant.<sup>57</sup> The NLFT, which has forged links with the NSCN-IM and the ULFA is the most lethal group, but both it and the ATTF are proscribed under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA).

### **3.2.5 Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram**

The relatively “peaceful” NEI states of Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram are not without armed violence.

**Meghalaya** became a state in the Union of India in 1972. However, inter-tribal rivalry and acrimony over immigrants from Bangladesh and Nepal has led to a growth of militant organizations whose violence is directed against other ethnic groups. There are an estimated 300,000 people of Nepali or Bangladeshi origin in Meghalaya’s population

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<sup>54</sup> Sahni, 2002: 9-13.

<sup>55</sup> Maitra, 2002, p150-154.

<sup>56</sup> Tripura Assessment 2003, SATP.

<sup>57</sup> Sahni, 2002, p21.

of 1.7m. The economic situation – with increasing unemployment – has also been pinpointed as a cause of increasing violence. Events took an ugly turn in 1992 when rioting in Shillong claimed 31 lives.<sup>58</sup> This was the fifth major riot against “dkhars” or outsiders since 1979. Shillong has a population of 350,000 of which 40% are non-tribal, consisting of Bengalis, Assamese, Nepalese, Marwaris and others. However, Meghalaya also suffers from it being a prime sanctuary and supply base for NE insurgents, particularly the NSCN, the ULFA, and the BUSF.<sup>59</sup> “Operation Birdie”, which was launched between March and April 1997 by the Indian army, provoked widespread protest. From 1994 to 2002 there were 2004 insurgency-related deaths.<sup>60</sup> Recently, killings, kidnapping and extortion have been on the rise.<sup>61</sup> The NSCN-IM is the main ally of the Achik National Volunteers Council (ANVC) and provides all sorts of support including training facilities and weaponry.<sup>62</sup>

**Mizoram** has been relatively peaceful since its inception in 1986 after a 20-year insurgency. The Mizo National Front (MNF), which fought for a Mizo state, transformed itself into a regional political party. In 2002, there were no major terrorism-related incidents. However, the abduction of employees of the North-Eastern Electricity Power Corp Ltd shows that some groups (in this case the Hmar People’s Convention – Democrats) are active here too. The Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF) – which is spearheading most of the violence that takes place in Mizoram – is an armed outfit of the Reang tribe. A major source of its finance is gained through abductions and ransoms. It has been reported that its cadres carry out attacks with AK assault rifles, grenades and bombs.<sup>63</sup>

**Arunachal Pradesh** suffers primarily from the overflow of violence from Nagaland. Insurgent groups such as NSCN-IM, NSCN-K, ULFA and the NDFB have been using Arunachal Pradesh to locate their hideouts, have been abducting people as a source of finance, and have been trying to extort money from businesses such as Oil India Limited.<sup>64</sup> However, in recent years discontent from local groups has also emerged against the Chakmas, a mostly Buddhist group from the Chittagong Hill Tracts, who were resettled in the border region with China in the mid-1960s after a dam displaced them.<sup>65</sup>

### **3.3 The relationship between the NEI states and the Government of India**

Each NEI state is part of the Indian Union and has its own elected state legislatures and elected chief minister. However, this federalism is largely cosmetic given the existence of a parallel *de facto* structure of government, made up of the Indian Army, other military and intelligence units (and the limited participation of state-level politicians and senior civil servants). This manages counter-insurgency operations and is directly controlled by

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<sup>58</sup> *Shillong Times* (Shillong), October 11, 1992. The Khasi’s ‘poison arrows’ were reportedly used to kill non-tribals.

<sup>59</sup> *North East Sun*, May 15-31, 1998.

<sup>60</sup> Meghalaya Backgrounder, SATP.

<sup>61</sup> *North East Sun* (Delhi), Vol. 13, No.19, May 1-14, 1998.

<sup>62</sup> *North East Sun*, 1998.

<sup>63</sup> Mizoram Assessment 2003, SATP.

<sup>64</sup> Sahni, 2002: 24-28.

<sup>65</sup> USCR, 2000, p10.

the home ministry in New Delhi.<sup>66</sup> Potential conflicts between the civil government and the security establishment means that the governor, which is appointed by the GOI, has a crucial role to play in the northeast, unlike elsewhere in the Indian Union. A recent analysis of the career profiles of the governors of all seven NEI states showed that all had occupied high positions in India's security establishments or had close ties to it. According to this research, such ties ensure that the "demands of security override the rules of democracy in the event of a conflict between the two."<sup>67</sup> For example, in Assam in 1998, charges of corruption against the chief minister were not pursued, as he was important to the security establishment.<sup>68</sup> Elected state governments can also be dismissed in situations of instability; as happened, for example in 1990 in Assam.

## **4. The significance of small arms and light weapons**

### ***4.1 Easy availability***

The most significant aspect of SALW in NEI is that the easy availability of arms and ammunition, and the growing networking between armed groups, has helped reduce the time between setting up a group and it becoming a full-scale armed guerrilla group. Many of the militant groups have more modern arms and equipment than the state police. In Manipur, for example, 6,770 cadre across 12 insurgent groups are armed with 3,750 weapons.<sup>69</sup> One well-informed observer makes this point clearly. "The ability of the insurgent groups in the northeast to engage the Indian state in protracted little wars is substantially the result of the easy access to these tools of terror."<sup>70</sup>

There are no figures on gun possession in NEI. However, in South Asia as a whole, the numbers of AK-47s in the possession of states and non-state actors has been estimated to have increased from virtually nil to nearly 8 million over the 20-year period from 1980 to 2000.<sup>71</sup> There are an estimated 75m firearms in South Asia, 63m of which are in civilian hands.<sup>72</sup> The easy availability of SALW has, in the context of NEI, helped insurgent groups have an impact out of all proportion to their size. It has assisted them in criminal activities such as extortion, allowed them to kill with impunity and helped them to usurp "political space in states like Manipur."<sup>73</sup> The rapid rise in the availability of weapons is indicated by the increase in weaponry in the ULFA's possession in just 10 years. (see Box 4 below)

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<sup>66</sup> Baruah, 2003a.

<sup>67</sup> Baruah, 2002, p184.

<sup>68</sup> Baruah, 2002, p184.

<sup>69</sup> Routray, 2002.

<sup>70</sup> Routray, 2002.

<sup>71</sup> Boyden, 2002, p28.

<sup>72</sup> IANSA.org

<sup>73</sup> Routray, 2002.

## 4.2 Sources

Over 13 sources of SALW into the Indo-Myanmar region can be identified:

1. Myanmarese insurgent groups/arms bazaar.
2. The Southeast Asian black market.
3. China
4. South Asian countries such as Cambodia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka.
5. South Asian insurgent groups, such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Jammu and Kashmir groups, Punjab extremists, the Maoist Communist Party operating in Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, and the Nepalese Communist Maoist forces.
6. Other parts of India, e.g. Uttar Pradesh, particularly through pilferages from legal gun factories.
7. Criminal gangs operating in India and other South Asian countries.
8. The Indian security forces. Home security guards are the most vulnerable.
9. International market.
10. Some tribes within the region produce weapons such as knives, spears and *daos*.
11. Fellow insurgent groups in NEI.
12. Some NEI politicians reportedly have become suppliers of weapons.
13. The RAW (Research and Analysis Wing), India's foreign intelligence agency, has been known to arm some outfits operating in the region.<sup>74</sup>

### Box 4: ULFA weapons inventory 1986-1996: the proliferation of SALW<sup>75</sup>

<i>Weapons Inventory</i>	1986	1996
G Series	None	250
AK 47/57	1	60 <sup>+</sup>
Semi – Automatics	2-4	130
LMG	None	20
Sten/Carbine	None	116
American Carbines	None	62
Pistols	9-10	336
Handmade Weapons	10-20	6
Grenades	None	1,143
Ammunition	Unknown	70,000 <sup>+</sup>

The single most important factor in this prevalence of SALW throughout South Asia is considered to be the massive funding for the arming of the *mujahideen* in Afghanistan by the U.S. through Pakistan. After 1989, an estimated 70% of these weapons were siphoned off by the ISI, Afghan leaders and field commanders and found their way into commercial channels.<sup>76</sup> The 6,196 weapons seized in NEI between 1991 and 2002 are therefore seen as merely the “tip of the iceberg”.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Nepram, 2002, 2004.

<sup>75</sup> Kartha, 1999, p269.

<sup>76</sup> Boyden, 2002, p28.

<sup>77</sup> Routray, 2002.

Initial training in China and then contacts with Myanmar rebel groups gave NEI insurgent groups their first access to weapons.<sup>78</sup> But abundant supplies of SALW really took off in the late 1980s, through the underground markets in Thailand and Myanmar. Weapons from the Cambodian conflict over a decade and a half later are still awash in the region and are reaching the insurgents through Cox's Bazaar, a completely unmonitored port in Bangladesh.<sup>79</sup> Tripura has also emerged as a major corridor for pushing arms into the northeast.<sup>80</sup> Nepram (2004) identified 57 different types of SALW which have flooded NEI over the past several years. The origins of these weapons have been traced to a variety of countries, such as China, Pakistan, Belgium, Thailand, Russia, United States of America, United Kingdom, Czechoslovakia, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Myanmar and, more recently, Israel.<sup>81</sup> Research charting the movement of weapons has claimed that two major deliveries were made to the ULFA and another to the NSCM in 2001 alone.<sup>82</sup> A consignment supplied to the ULFA by the Karen National Union (KNU) in 1993 reportedly included: 775 AK-56 rifles, 65 GPMGs, 10 rocket-propelled guns, more than 100 anti-tank shells, 50 pistols, and assorted ammunitions.<sup>83</sup>

### **4.3 Porous borders and safe havens**

With porous borders (in remote and rugged hill and mountain areas) and the passive (and even active) support for some insurgents by other states in the region, it is hardly surprising that the insurgents have easy access to weapons. China and Pakistan have, at different phases, trained more than 5,000 insurgents and provided them with modern arms.<sup>84</sup> This support continues. Indian intelligence sources have uncovered recent contacts between the ULFA and the NSCN-IM and China.<sup>85</sup> And Pakistan's ISI has been implicated in assisting northeast insurgent groups through training camps in Bangladesh, particularly the Islamist groups emerging in Assam.<sup>86</sup> Bangladesh has also served as a safe haven and training place for many of the militant groups, such as the ULFA, as well as an important area through which the supply of weapons has flowed (mostly through the MULTA and the MULFA).<sup>87</sup> In fact, an investigation in 2000 into a shipment of arms in December 1995, which was bound for northeast insurgents, implicated the former Bangladeshi government of Begum Zia.<sup>88</sup> Commentators suggest that the mortars used in attacks by the ULFA in 2003 were likely to have been procured through Bangladesh.<sup>89</sup> Myanmar has also served as a safe haven to groups such as the NSCN-K, the NSCN-IM and the ULFA. The Myanmar government up until recently turned a blind eye to their activities but recent campaigns have compelled the ULFA to relocate along the border

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<sup>78</sup> Nepram, 2004.

<sup>79</sup> Routray, 2002. In April 1996, Bangladesh forces seized more than 500 AK-47s, more than 80 general purpose machine guns, 50 rocket launchers and over 2,000 grenades from vessels off Cox's Bazaar.

<sup>80</sup> Sahni, 2002, p19-20.

<sup>81</sup> Nepram, 2004.

<sup>82</sup> Routray, 2002.

<sup>83</sup> *Asian Age* (Delhi), August 14, 1995.

<sup>84</sup> Maitra, 2002, p13.

<sup>85</sup> Ramana, 2002, p2.

<sup>86</sup> Ramana, 2002, p4.

<sup>87</sup> Ramana, 2002, p4.

<sup>88</sup> "India arms case reopened", BBC Online, 24 April 2000.

<sup>89</sup> Assam Backgrounder, SATP.

with the Chittagong Hill Tracts.<sup>90</sup> In 2003, Bhutan started to evict insurgent groups such as the ULFA and the NDBF, who had well-established camps inside the country.

#### **4.4 Networking between armed groups**

There are a number of connections and alliances between the insurgent groups. Inter-group linkages are primarily those between the ULFA and other groups, and the Naga insurgents and other groups. The most recent and formal of the alliances is the United Liberation Front of Seven Sisters (ULFSS) formed in the context of opposition to the NSCN-IM proposal of a “Greater Nagaland”. Its members are the NSCN-K, the ULFA, Dima Halim Daogah, the United People’s Democratic Solidarity, the Arunachal Dragon Front, the People’s Liberation Army, and the Revolutionary Democratic Front.

In one of the most publicized arms haul, “Operation Leech”, in February 1998 over the high seas off the Andaman Islands, the security forces killed six gun-runners, arrested 73 others and seized a consignment of arms. The illegal arms consignment included sophisticated AK series rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, night-vision fitted rifles and hand grenades. The intended end users of this particular consignment were probably the NSCN, the ATTF and the Chin National Army in Myanmar. This arms haul clearly showed the connections which the various insurgents have with one another not only in the region but also with that of Myanmar insurgents.<sup>91</sup>

According to one writer “An extremely well-organised network is responsible for supply of arms to insurgents.” The larger insurgent groups, such as the NSCN, provide arms – and often training – to other NEI insurgents. This has become a huge money earner for them.<sup>92</sup> Drug trafficking from Myanmar is also providing some of the insurgent groups with an income source for the purchase of these weapons.<sup>93</sup> According to army sources, the arrest of some NSCN-IM leaders in July 1996 revealed the huge amounts of extorted drug money that were changing hands in the arms bazaars of south east Asia, particularly with the Khmer Rouge.<sup>94</sup>

## **5. The political economy of violence**

### **5.1 The underground terror economy**

The various militant groups across the seven NEI states have been substantially criminalized.<sup>95</sup> Many are involved in gun-running as well as extortion and abduction. It has been alleged that the ULFA alone has collected more than Rs5bn (£50m) through

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<sup>90</sup> Ramana, 2002, p5.

<sup>91</sup> *Outlook* (Delhi), February 1, 1999.

<sup>92</sup> Maitra, 2002, p54.

<sup>93</sup> Maitra, 2002, p53; Boyden, 2002, p8.

<sup>94</sup> Maitra, 2002, p71.

<sup>95</sup> Baruah, 2002, argues that northeast India conforms to Collier’s thesis that there is a strong correlation between a specific set of economic conditions such as a region’s dependence on exports of primary commodity and low national income and conflict.

extortion, abduction and kidnappings.<sup>96</sup> It particularly targets tea companies. In fact, many companies (and politicians) make their peace with insurgents as many can guarantee security and collect tax better than the state can. This is common throughout NEI. For example, in 1997, the government of Assam accused several large companies, including Tata Teas, of financing militant groups such as the ULFA, because they gave into their demands for “protection money”. Other industries have also proved a valuable source of funds for the militants. Meghalaya is one of the largest suppliers of coal, and all vehicles carrying it have to pass through Assam. Insurgents have been levying taxes on the truck drivers and suppliers for the past few years. In fact, the “coal mafia” has developed strong links with ULFA militants.<sup>97</sup>

At times these illegal sources of revenue even exceeded the expectation of the insurgents: “ ‘It was amazing, we asked for a little and they were prepared to go well beyond what we wanted,’ said one ULFA leader. ‘That was when we realized how soft the state was, how weak the businessmen were, how much black money they had, that they could pay up and still have enough for themselves.’”<sup>98</sup>

Another source of funds for insurgent groups is the imposition of taxation in areas under their control. In Nagaland, for example, a social activist, who had traveled around the countryside in 1994-95, reported of a system of tax collection imposed by the NSCN as well as illegal taxation by the Naga state government’s public works department.<sup>99</sup> The NSCN also engages in bank robberies and extortion. However, this allegation is contested. There are massive networks of extortion and ‘taxation’ run by insurgents in their areas of influence. Virtually every vehicle on all major routes in the insurgency-affected states of NEI pays a “toll tax” at several points. In Manipur and Nagaland, the NSCN-IM imposes a “house tax” on every dwelling unit. Insurgent groups control virtually all illicit trade in the region. Some observers allege that drug trafficking is a major source of income for the NSCN.<sup>100</sup>

In Manipur, the thriving black economy is being fuelled by growing drug abuse and trafficking from Myanmar. This is also helping to spark violence between insurgent groups.<sup>101</sup> For example, in addition to the ethnic rivalry between the Kuki National Army (KNA) and the NSCM-IM, the conflict between the two is also over control of Moreh, a trading town which borders Myanmar, which is an important outlet for smuggling guns and drugs.<sup>102</sup> In Tripura, insurgent groups have turned abduction into an art form – 70% of all abductions in the region happen in Tripura.<sup>103</sup> Since 1994, 1,550 in Tripura people have been kidnapped and huge ransoms have been extracted.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Maitra, 2002, p90.

<sup>97</sup> Maitra, 2002, p62.

<sup>98</sup> Quoted in Sahni & George, 2000, p10.

<sup>99</sup> Baruah, 2002.

<sup>100</sup> Sahni, 2002, p13-18.

<sup>101</sup> Nepram, 2004.

<sup>102</sup> Maitra, 2002, p163.

<sup>103</sup> Maitra, 2002, p150-154, Sahni, 2002, p19-20.

<sup>104</sup> Baruah, 2002.

## **5.2 The criminalization of politics**

Unfortunately, it is not just a matter of a simple opposition between the GOI and the NEI states versus insurgent groups. Five decades of insurgency has led to a breakdown of the institutions of civil governance in NEI. A large quantity of the northeast states' revenues are siphoned off and distributed to a well-established nexus of politicians, administrators and insurgent organisations. For example, commodities distributed through the Public Distribution System (PDS) in Assam, which is the government's major instrument of poverty reduction, are diverted on to the open market. This generated illegal revenues amounting to an estimated Rs600m (£7.2m) a month in 1998, a large proportion of which went to the ULFA. Insurgent groups have also been known to offload rice, sugar, wheat and other essential commodities from the Public Distribution System and distribute these among locals at lower prices in order to gain "legitimacy" and support. In addition, 70% of all funds available to the state government in Assam for rural development are systematically siphoned off through a well-organised network of ULFA and SULFA cadres, contractors, civil servants and members of the political executive. Sources estimate that of the Rs11.65bn (£139m) made available for rural development from 1992 to February 1998, less than Rs4bn (£47.7m) went into legitimate schemes.<sup>105</sup> There is overwhelming evidence of a "complex web of collusion between terrorist outfits and various political parties".<sup>106</sup> This relationship helps strengthen the bargaining power of some politicians and political parties vis-à-vis the GOI and other parties, and aids the insurgents in their extortion rackets.

Sahni and George (2002) argue that the proliferation of armed violence in northeast India is not merely a law and order issue, nor merely a development issue. They argue that in order to understand the situation – and posit a possible solution – it is necessary to understand the dynamics of the underground terrorist economy. These "criminal entrepreneurs" are not simply predatory but also collusive. There is often a symbiotic relationship between them and government officials/agencies.<sup>107</sup> A recent report argues, for example, that in Manipur areas where "ethnic cleansing" took place have now been used for tea, coffee, spice and flower plantation. The authors of this report suggest that "It is possible to infer the intervention of a powerful, ruthless vested interest."<sup>108</sup> Many senior state officials and politicians pay extortion money demanded by the insurgents. In addition, insurgent groups have made inroads into the functioning of government departments, including interference in government contracts and development projects. Commercial contracts are often allotted to nominees or members of various insurgent groups.

The various links between insurgent groups and NEI politicians and political parties are too numerous to go into in detail here; suffice it is to say that some are even helping to divert weapons and ammunition to insurgent groups as happened, for example, in Nagaland in 1997.<sup>109</sup> This criminalisation of politics, and the contraband networks are

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<sup>105</sup> Sahni, 2000b.

<sup>106</sup> Sahni, 2003, p9-11.

<sup>107</sup> Sahni & George, 2002, p9.

<sup>108</sup> Core, 1999.

<sup>109</sup> Maitra, 2002, p58.



helping to fuel unrest.<sup>110</sup> The widespread collusion between insurgents, regional government departments and political parties has meant that the underground economy has well-developed and intractable links with the “above-ground” economy.<sup>111</sup> NEI states suffer from high levels of corruption and, despite large amounts of investment from the GOI, a dismal quality of services. This crisis of governance is a significant obstacle to peace.

## **6. Social and cultural aspects of armed violence**

### **6.1 A culture of violence**

It is possible to speak of a strong culture of violence in the region, with a lack of respect for human life and human rights.<sup>112</sup> Bombings, abductions, beheadings and murderous attacks on whole villages, including against women and children, have wracked the region. “Ethnic cleansing” is a strategy used by some insurgents to clear areas of “unwanted” groups thus allowing land for a “homeland”. There is also evidence to suggest that violence has increased within communities also. This is discussed in the impacts section below.

The culture of violence must be understood as part of the overall militarisation of society in NEI. This militarization is both a cause and an obvious effect of the emergence of the armed conflicts. The size of the security forces in NEI and their deployment within civilian communities has had many adverse impacts: high levels of physical and sexual violence, prostitution, exploitation, substance abuse, and harassment.<sup>113</sup> (See Appendix 1 for the location of military posts in Manipur alone.) The resentment this breeds only serves to reinforce the dynamics of conflict at the local level.<sup>114</sup> For example, in 1997 Maino Daimary, the publicity secretary of the Bodo Liberation Tigers Force (BLTF) said: “Unless you do something against the Indian government or the administration, you do not get any response. They [the government] respond only to violence. So we have taken up arms.”<sup>115</sup> Despite widespread antipathy towards the insurgent groups, the security forces, in particular the Assam Rifles, are seen by many as an army of occupation. Widespread human rights abuses in Assam, Nagaland and Manipur has encouraged support for the insurgents.

### **6.2 Counterinsurgency operations**

The GOI alternates between political pacification and development interventions on the one hand and military cleansing of the areas on the other.<sup>116</sup> The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) has been in place in large parts of the northeast for over four decades. After the Nagas held a plebiscite in the early 1950s, with the overwhelming

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<sup>110</sup> Lieten, 2002.

<sup>111</sup> Sahni, 2002, p28.

<sup>112</sup> Boyden, 2002, p30.

<sup>113</sup> Barbora, 2002, p1291.

<sup>114</sup> Boyden, 2002, p29.

<sup>115</sup> *Outlook*, September 29, 1997

<sup>116</sup> Lieten, 2002.

majority voting for independence, the GOI sent in the army and instituted the Internal Security Act (which later became the AFSPA). The AFSPA (and the Prevention of Terrorism Act) gives the security forces excessive powers, including shoot to kill, and contributes to a climate of impunity as legal action cannot be taken against the armed forces without the permission of the GOI. Human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International, have expressed concern about human rights abuses by the security sector, including allegations of rape and death in custody, and the use of torture.<sup>117</sup> And the Indian human rights activist and attorney, Nandita Haksar, has alleged that collective punishment methods are used against villagers accused of harbouring terrorists.

From the Indian government's perspective, these movements represent not just domestic discontent, but the danger of destabilization by Chinese or Pakistani intelligence activities. In addition to security concerns, NEI is of great importance to India due to its vast deposits of natural resources – oil, gas, timber, fertile land, uranium, and hydropower potential. The exploitation of these resources for the benefit of the whole of India has stirred up local resentment particularly since it has largely benefited recent immigrants, or non-tribal Indians, who have been employed in these industries.<sup>118</sup> Many of the dams and other infrastructure projects have uprooted hundreds of thousands from their home, creating “refugees of development”, and have caused massive environmental degradation and pollution.<sup>119</sup> In Manipur, for example, hydroelectric power generation has destroyed great areas of scarce and very fertile arable land and waterways.<sup>120</sup> The impact of dam projects is singled out by many to be one of the major causes of the insurgency in Tripura.<sup>121</sup> The lack of community consultation on these projects further alienates local people.<sup>122</sup>

Militarisation is a huge obstacle to peace. The fact that all authority lies with the military apparatus, the reality that ordinary people have no recourse to justice and the fact that civil society is not involved in the development strategies imposed on it means that widespread antipathy to the GOI is unlikely to abate.<sup>123</sup> The development strategies adopted as well as the process of militarization need to be addressed simultaneously.

## **7. The impact of armed violence on poverty**

### ***7.1 Internal displacement***

The patchwork quilt of overlapping ethnicities in NEI means that calls for homelands fuels violence against “outsiders” thus creating an “intricate relationship” between conflicts over homelands and displacements of people.<sup>124</sup> For example, the Bodo campaign in Assam – where they only constitute 11% of the population of the area in which they want their homeland – has fuelled violence against East Bengali Muslims and

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<sup>117</sup> Amnesty, 11 August 2004.

<sup>118</sup> Lieten, 2002.

<sup>119</sup> Libiszewski, 1997.

<sup>120</sup> Pinto, 2000.

<sup>121</sup> Hussain in Thomas, 2002.

<sup>122</sup> Bose, 1999.

<sup>123</sup> Barbora, 2002, p1291.

<sup>124</sup> Baruah, 2003b, p57.

Hindus, who have also been victims of the displacements that have followed.<sup>125</sup> These displacement help spread conflicts confined to a particular region, into other districts.

The US Committee for Refugees (USCR) in its 2000 report estimates that there are 177,000 IDPs in NEI.<sup>126</sup> However, given that the GOI does not allow international organizations access to the area, these figures are very tentative and most likely to vastly underestimate the scale of internal displacement in the region. According to the Global IDP project there could be as many as half a million IDPs. Estimates made in 2000 include:

- ❑ 87,000 to 200,000 in Assam.
- ❑ 31,000 to 41,000 Reangs displaced from Mizoram and living in the refugee camps of Tripura.
- ❑ 80,000 Bengalis uprooted in Tripura since 1993.
- ❑ No estimates of IDPs in Manipur but conflicts between tribal groups have led to the displacement of at least 130,000 Kukis, Paites and Nagas since 1992.
- ❑ As many as 3,000 Chakmas have become IDPs in Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>127</sup>

Appendix 2 reproduces estimates made by USCR of what it calls the “hidden displacement” in NEI.

The main cause of displacement is inter-tribal conflict. But the cause of that conflict is disputes over land and autonomy. However, the GOI has also played a direct role in displacement through its counterinsurgency operations. For instance, in the 1950s and 1960s in Nagaland and Mizoram, in order to disrupt the ability of civilians to assist insurgents, the GOI forcibly displaced populations. One estimate suggests that 100,000 people were forcibly relocated in Mizoram.<sup>128</sup> In addition, unrest in Arunachal Pradesh is largely a result of the GOI resettling 40,000 Chakmas in the border area with China in the mid-1960s. (Given the Chakmas loyalty to India, this was also regarded as a good security measure.)<sup>129</sup>

Displacement for many of these tribal groups has meant a continuing downward spiral in terms of their quality of life. The GOI has left the problem of IDPs to NEI state governments, the result being inconsistencies in conditions for the displaced across the region. However, in general, conditions for IDPs are poor – there are no intergovernmental or international organizations, they live in makeshift shelters and have limited access to food, medicine and education. A USCR visit to Assam in 1998, found that in most camps there was little medical care and no formal education; food aid arrived “sporadically”, and when it did arrive it was insufficient.<sup>130</sup> In Tripura, according to local community leaders, 36,000 displaced Reangs live in “inhuman conditions” without access to clean drinking water. Hundreds have died from dysentery.<sup>131</sup> Some groups,

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<sup>125</sup> Baruah, 2003b, p59-60.

<sup>126</sup> USCR, 2000.

<sup>127</sup> Global IDP Report, 2004.

<sup>128</sup> USCR, 2000, p7, Lianzela in Thomas, 2002.

<sup>129</sup> USCR, 2000, p10.

<sup>130</sup> USCR, 2000, p15.

<sup>131</sup> USCR, 2000, p15.

such as the Santhals in Assam, have not been able to return to their villages and farming livelihoods due to continuing threats against them, or because the state government has reclassified the land as forest.<sup>132</sup> No concrete steps have been taken to rehabilitate these IDPs thus condemning them to life in camps.<sup>133</sup> Some local NGOs try to help where the government's assistance is poor e.g in Tripura and Manipur.

## **7.2 Impact on children**

The impact of armed violence on children has been considerable and can be divided into three main areas: displacement and loss of service access, particularly health and education; direct targeting by the security forces and insurgent groups; and child labour and violence in the home.

### **7.2.1 Displacement and loss of service access**

During the 1998 Bodo-Santhal clashes in Kokrajhar and Bongaigoan districts, Assam, 102 children were killed and thousands displaced.<sup>134</sup> A report, prepared by UNICEF on the impact of insurgency and conflict on children in Assam, focused on the status of more than 70,000 children in different camps of Kokrajhar. It reported the existence of 76 relief camps during 1998, due to continuous ethnic violence. These sheltered 254,787 inmates of which 74,103 were children. The report further revealed that 1,257 children were orphaned during the violence. The health of most of the children in the relief camps was very poor with 27.07% of them suffering from diarrhea, malaria, typhoid, worms and malnutrition.<sup>135</sup> In an attempt to deal with these issues, UNICEF along with the State Home Department has launched the Assam Plan of Operation to focus on the problems of children due to insurgency and conflict. UNICEF has also proposed setting up mobile health units and daily health services.

Education is also being disrupted by armed violence. A study in Kokrajhar province in Assam in 1999 found that armed violence episodes had had a serious impact on education due to curfews and the closure of schools for long periods of time.<sup>136</sup> Ethnic clashes in Churachandpur, Manipur, in June 1997 brought education to a complete halt as many students had to be transferred to safer areas to prevent kidnapping or assault by warring tribes. This denial of access to education is compounded when children end up in refugee camps – they are unable to go to school and are often forced to work for their livelihood.

### **7.2.2 Direct targeting by security forces and insurgent groups**

Children are not, however, just getting “caught in the crossfire” but are also being targeted. For example, in June 1999, Bodos abducted 14 Santhals, including nine women and two babies, from their village in Dhubri District, Assam. Four bodies were later

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<sup>132</sup> USCR, 2000, p8.

<sup>133</sup> Thomas, 2002.

<sup>134</sup> Assam Plan of Operation, cited in *The Hindu*, April 1, 1999.

<sup>135</sup> Assam Plan of Operation, cited in *The Hindu*, April 1, 1999.

<sup>136</sup> Bhan 1999, p137-138.

found, one of which was that of a six-month-old baby.<sup>137</sup> And more recently, as referred to before, in November 2003, in Guwahati, Assam, separatist Karbi rebels kidnapped and beheaded four schoolboys, who were from the Kuki tribe.<sup>138</sup>

### Box 5: A child's account of arrest and torture in Manipur

“Some uniformed Indian army personnel armed with guns came to my house in about four vehicles including a “Shaktiman” truck. They claimed they were from the 14 Punjab Regiment who were camped in Mayang Imphal Police Station. It was around midnight of the night of 23 August 1998 and we were sleeping. We were woken up by the soldiers in uniform, one of them who spoke Manipuri language asked for me. My parents asked why and they were told that I was required for questioning. By this time, some local Meira Paibi [peace activists] women had also gathered at our house and they tried to persuade the soldiers not to take me as I was an innocent boy studying in school, and moreover, undergoing treatment for frequent attacks of loss of consciousness. The women were threatened and told not to interfere. My hands were tied then I was blindfolded and taken away. They reached their camp and took me into a large hall inside a building. One man who could speak Manipuri asked me to say yes to the question whether I was a member of the underground. I was hit on the back of my neck and back with the butt of a rifle. Then they made me lie flat on my back and poured water into my nostrils many times. They kept on pouring water into my nostrils until the water came out in my ears; it felt warm inside my ears. Then they stamped on both my thighs while two persons held my feet while another man sat on my head. Then they made me hang with the ropes tied to my hands and used sticks to beat the soles of my feet and my buttocks.

All the time, I said that I was innocent and had nothing to do with the underground. After some time, a small metal box, dull green in colour was brought out. Some electrical wire was taken out of this box and these were connected to a connection in the wall of the room. One man then took out a short metallic rod and touched the wires with it. Sparks came out when the wires touched the rod. They touched the wires' ends to my chest and gave me shocks three times. Each time I felt as if my whole body had contracted. Each time they pulled my body straight before giving the shock. They stopped beating me and putting electric shocks after some time. They gave one tablet to swallow, which I vomited out immediately. Then two Digene (antacid) tablets were also given to me. They also rubbed some white ointment on my skin where they had beaten me.

By this time it was morning. They took me to a doctor in the Mayang Imphal bazaar, a private doctor. He prescribed some medicines. Then they took me to the police station where I was kept in a room. My family members came to fetch me after some hours and they took me to the hospital. Now my body still aches, especially at my waist. I cannot sleep properly and get up with nightmares. I sleep with my father nowadays. I feel dizzy frequently and I am very afraid when night comes. I keep remembering how they used to beat me and see everything that happened to me vividly.”

*Witness statement of a 14-year-old child, reproduced from Pinto, 2002.*

Children are not just at risk from the violence of insurgent groups. Children and juveniles are routinely arrested and detained under repressive emergency laws. In Manipur, for example, evidence suggests that children and youths arrested by security forces are

<sup>137</sup> USCR, 2000, p9.

<sup>138</sup> AFP, 14 Nov 2003.

subjected to torture, some even “disappear” while in custody.<sup>139</sup> (See Box 7 below.) In addition, children have witnessed to their mothers being sexually abused and raped by the security forces.<sup>140</sup> (See Annex 1 for a list of children killed or tortured by the security forces in Manipur between 1980 and 1997.) As well as the direct impact of killings and torture, the indirect impact of the imposition of security checks, patrols and curfews also have an impact on the ability of children to lead a normal life.<sup>141</sup>

### **7.2.3 Child labour and violence in the home**

A report on the rights of the child conducted in Manipur in the late 1990s reports a visible and drastic increase in child labour due to pauperization and displacement of communities, although no exact figures are given. This report also claims that violence towards children in the family, including sexual violence, is on the increase. This, it argues, is due to the stress put on a family and community environment which is surrounded by a climate of violence. In addition, children who have been displaced from their communities into camps become easy targets for extremist groups and for trafficking to carpet factories and brothels.<sup>142</sup> Due to displacement and communal tensions, many of the extended family and community networks that would normally intervene have disintegrated or have become biased towards community solidarity rather than a child’s interests.<sup>143</sup>

Many of the NEI states, particularly Manipur, Nagaland, Assam and Tripura, are witnessing a dangerous trend of traumatized and disturbed children and youths resorting to heroin addiction. In Manipur, for example, the largest group of recently inducted addicts in the past few years has been juveniles and children who are working.<sup>144</sup>

## **7.3 Impact on women**

There are three main impacts of armed violence on women in NEI: direct violence by the security forces and by insurgent groups; impact on livelihoods due to lack of security and increased violence in the home; and, more positively, the development of community women’s groups, such as the Meira Paibis, to oppose violence.

### **7.3.1 Violence against women by security forces and insurgent groups**

Women have been raped and used as human shields by the security forces. This happens most often during crackdowns and cordon-and-search operations during which men are held for identification in parks or school yards while security forces search their homes. For example, in 1997 in Meghalaya, many Khasi women were reportedly raped during “Operation Birdie”. However, the Oinam incident in Manipur in 1987, where security forces went on the rampage, is one of the worst human rights violation cases. For four

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<sup>139</sup> In Manipur, more than 10 cases of arrest of students were recorded during 1997 and 1998 alone. Nepram, 2002.

<sup>140</sup> Pinto, 2000.

<sup>141</sup> Boyden, 2002.

<sup>142</sup> Boyden, 2002.

<sup>143</sup> Pinto, 2000.

<sup>144</sup> Pinto, 2000.

months the Assam Rifles subjected the villagers to a variety of inhuman conduct. Men were hung upside down, buried alive and given electric shocks. Women were sexually assaulted and raped. And two women were even compelled to give birth to their babies in full view of the soldiers. In May 1998, the 27 Assam Rifles gang-raped 14 tribal women at Ujanmaidan in Tripura. Rape and sexual abuse by the security forces continues. In August 2004, a Manipuri woman was raped and murdered by security forces after they picked her up on suspicion of being a member of an insurgent group. In addition to sexual violence, women have also been used as human shields. In March 1996, provoked by an attack by the NSCN, the 20 Assam Rifles used women as human shields by placing the muzzle of their guns on the women's shoulders.

The impact of rape on women in NEI is common to that around the world. Not only does the victim suffer from stigmatization (in Manipur, for example, the literal meaning of the word "rape" is "elimination of one's esteem"), and loss of marriage opportunities and thus livelihood opportunities, but there is no access to justice as the perpetrators have immunity under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act.

Several cases of rape and sexual abuse of tribal women by underground militants have also been reported; in some incidents, the women were killed if they resisted. In a recent incident, Tripura militants in the Amarpur subdivision of South Tripura district gang-raped a young tribal girl. Later they hanged her in a tree and left her to die. In addition, women have been attacked for not wearing "appropriate dress". For example, on one occasion, Manipuri women were "instructed" by the insurgent outfits not to wear any mainland Indian dress like salwar kameez or saris. Those who wore it were shot in the leg or in the stomach. The women were told to wear only "phaneks", a traditional Manipuri dress.

### ***7.3.2 Impact on livelihoods and violence against women in the home***

Due to the lack of security and the systematic rape of women by the security forces, women tend not to work outside of daylight hours. This impacts on their livelihoods and has led to their further marginalization<sup>145</sup> Furthermore, as NEI society has become more violent, violence against women has increased. A study which analysed the statistics on male/female ratios showed that in areas of greater conflict there is a more adverse sex ratio. For example, in Manipur, the Ukhral district has 884 women to 1,000 men, Bishnupur has 984 to 1,000. Ukhral is a more conflict-ridden area.<sup>146</sup> However, this study may well be revealing patriarchal and repressive tendencies which may be associated with a greater tendency to ethnic discrimination and violence. In addition, this is against the background of growing drug abuse and alcoholism, which is also resulting in increasing violence against women.

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<sup>145</sup> Banerjee, 2001, p146-7.

<sup>146</sup> Banerjee, 2001, p140.

### **7.3.3 The development of a women's movement**

Despite the rise of violence against women in the northeast, they have not relegated themselves to mere passive victims. Although no figures exist, anecdotal evidence suggests that many young women make up the membership of the insurgent groups.<sup>147</sup> In addition, organizations have sprung up to impart combat and self-defense training to young housewives and girls.

Meira Paibis, or Women Torch Bearers, are groups of women who emerged across Manipur as early as the late 1970s. Armed with cloth torches in their hands, these women activists launched campaigns against alcoholism and drug abuse as well as awareness campaigns for women to protect themselves from crime and violence. In the 1990s, these women, most of whom are middle-aged mothers, started to campaign against army atrocities and, on occasions have succeeded in preventing the army from arresting youths.<sup>148</sup> The Naga Mother's Association performs a similar role in Nagaland.

Women have been coming together to face the crisis in various other ways. In November 1998, nearly 4,000 women had a peace procession and rally in strife-torn Churachandpur district in Manipur calling for peace and reconciliation amongst different tribes. The Indian army has recently recognized the role of women's organizations by holding public meetings with them and releasing guerrillas through them.

## **8. Impact of armed violence on the economy**

Despite the lack of detailed information, two particular impacts of armed violence on the economy can be discerned in qualitative terms: 1) as a drain on resources; and 2) through the decline of business confidence and a flight of capital.<sup>149</sup>

### **8.1 A drain on resources**

A huge amount of funds are collected each year by insurgent groups through their systems of "taxation"; these help to boost their budgets, most of which are used to maintain their organisational base and to buy weapons to continue the insurgency. This flow of money into the underground terror economy is literally bleeding many of the NEI states of necessary funds for investment. For example, some commentators have estimated the combined annual budget of the two factions of the NSCN to be almost equal to the budget of the Nagaland state.<sup>150</sup> However, the widespread collusion between insurgent groups and some politicians discussed in Section 5.2 emphasises the fact that state corruption is also a key problem.

In addition, the frequent bandhs (general strikes) in some parts of the northeast against violence and militarisation is having an impact on the economy. For example, some 73

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<sup>147</sup> Butalia, 1999.

<sup>148</sup> For example, in March 1998, in Makhan village in Senapti, Manipur, Meira Paibis prevented the Assam Rifles from arresting seven suspects.

<sup>149</sup> Das, 2002, p31-34.

<sup>150</sup> Das, 2002, p31.



were called in Assam alone between June 1997 and May 1998, with a total loss in state domestic product of Rs1,255 crore (Rs12.5bn).<sup>151</sup>

## **8.2 The decline of business confidence and the flight of capital**

One of the main impacts that can be attributed directly to the presence of armed insurgent groups is the impact of widespread extortion on business confidence and investment in the area. Phanjanbam (2001) identifies two categories under which he discusses the impact of insurgency on business and investment. The first is direct: that investors are dissuaded by fear of intimidation, extortion, or that the company may be caught in crossfire; as happened for example, with the Japan-sponsored sericulture project in Manipur.<sup>152</sup> The second is indirect, or less direct: the government's focus on counter-insurgency rather than encouraging investments.<sup>153</sup> In situations of armed violence, state resources are often redirected to achieve political goals such as stability and legitimacy. But funds spent for counter-insurgency operations remain beyond public scrutiny. This further encourages state corruption.<sup>154</sup>

In order to survive, almost every industry or business in most parts of NEI makes regular "contributions" to underground groups through extortion, ransom or protection money. As discussed earlier, even a company as huge and powerful as the Tatas has been implicated in these payments. This "insurgency tax" is the biggest disincentive to investment in the area.<sup>155</sup> In addition, the relative absence of the rule of law, militarization and widespread corruption makes any investment in the area highly risky.<sup>156</sup> In Assam, for example, it has been widely reported that insurgents have forced a large number of businesses and shops to flee particular areas, such as Nagaon, because of extortion. Even a few World Bank projects have stalled due to extortion demands – and kidnapping – by the ULFA.<sup>157</sup>

A recent study of Nagaland showed that the private sector, which is dominated by the retail and wholesale trading business, does not fully invest its profit back into the country, but is diverted to open up business elsewhere as a fall-back if the violence increases. This, plus a low credit deposit ratio in the banks, indicates that large amounts of capital are moved out of the state.<sup>158</sup>

## **9. Impact of armed violence on health services**

According to a study in Assam, the areas affected by ethnic violence suffer from poor primary health services. It found that 70% of the sanctioned doctors in the two districts of Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon are absent and none are ready to work in the trouble-torn

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<sup>151</sup> Sachdeva, 2000, p217-224.

<sup>152</sup> Phanjanbam, 2001, p19-21.

<sup>153</sup> Phanjanbam, 2001, p19-21.

<sup>154</sup> Das, 2002, p33.

<sup>155</sup> Sachdeva, 2000, p225-6.

<sup>156</sup> Das, 2002, p32.

<sup>157</sup> Maitra, 2002, p72-74.

<sup>158</sup> Das, 2002, p32.

areas fearing risk to their lives. Many public health centers have been abandoned and some converted into security outposts.<sup>159</sup> Bandhs and economic blockages also mean that vital stocks of drugs are not replenished.<sup>160</sup> The disruption to health services is further compounded by military action against the insurgents. For example, in Manipur, after the recent popular demonstrations, curfews, which were imposed for 24-hours a day for the first 7 days, disrupted the battle against HIV/AIDS due to the break in the continuity of needle exchange. Given that HIV infection amongst intravenous drug users in Manipur rose from 25% in 1994 to 61% in 1997, such disruptions in medical care will have a dramatic impact on the fight to contain the spread of HIV/AIDS.<sup>161</sup>

## 10. Conclusion

### **10.1 Can poverty processes and impacts be attributed to SALW?**

It is difficult to disaggregate the impact of armed violence on poverty and development from the impact of uneven development in general in NEI. In fact, many academics and commentators say that there is a symbiotic relationship between the two: they both feed off each other. For example, most of the hill districts of Manipur, which are strongholds of insurgents, are reeling under acute poverty. However, this is mainly due to the under-utilization of their natural resources due to lack of infrastructure. In Chandel district, over 64% of the people live below the poverty line while in Churachandpur, Ukhrul and Tamenglong districts, it is between 51 and 55%.<sup>162</sup> The national rural average for India was 30.2% in 2000.<sup>163</sup>

Poverty in NEI certainly cannot be directly attributed to the availability and use of SALW. However, what can be said is that the easy availability of SALW is helping to fuel the proliferation of armed groups and the strength of impact that they can make. However, merely extracting SALW from the equation will not be enough to reduce the levels of violence and discontent in the region. For example, the Khasi's 'poison arrows' were reportedly used to kill non-tribals in the violence in rioting in Shillong in 1992.

### **10.2 Issues for future consideration**

While DFID is not involved in development work in NEI, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed for armed violence to be reduced in the region.

- Insurgency in NEI has strong roots in the land issue, large-scale unemployment of educated youth, and concerns over identity and culture. All this is exacerbated by the GOI's ignorance of the issues and its counterinsurgency operations.
- The GOI's preoccupation with law and order in the NEI states has tended to deepen those states' alienation from Delhi. While rehabilitation packages for ex-insurgents

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<sup>159</sup> Assam Plan of Operation, cited in *The Hindu*, April 1, 1999.

<sup>160</sup> Rupachandra, 2004.

<sup>161</sup> Pinto, 2000.

<sup>162</sup> Sanjenbam, 1998, p118.

<sup>163</sup> UN Millennium Indicators Database.

are a good idea and should be built upon,<sup>164</sup> the key to a more stable future lies in a better mix of Indian policies towards economic development, focusing especially on the region's energy resources; greater tolerance for local control; willingness to work with local leaders; and strengthening democracy and civil society.<sup>165</sup> Confidence-building measures need to be at the forefront. In an attempt to bridge the yawning gap between the perceptions of the policymakers at Delhi and the aspirations of people in NEI the GOI has drawn up a 52-point national strategy. Some of the proposals include:

- At least 25% of all Plan funds being released by the GOI to the NEI states should go directly to the district councils or panchayats.
- Each year, 1,000 youths from NEI are to be provided with vocational training with 5-year scholarship in institutions outside NEI.
- Rs500m per annum is to be made available for developing infrastructure for agricultural marketing and strengthening of NERAMAC, the North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation.
- New information technology centres to be opened in NEI
- A Central Forest Protection Force to be set up for the protection of forest areas.
- NEI politicians to be given prominent position at national-level committees, boards etc.
- Conscious efforts to be made to increase the exposure of Mongoloid northeast people on Doordarshan and other TV channels, by appointment as announcers, news readers and for advertisements.
- The most vulnerable group in NEI in terms of poverty, insecurity and poor health are the internally displaced. Their well-being and rehabilitation should not be left to NEI regional states. By not taking steps to rehabilitate the IDPs the GOI is condemning them to a life dependent on handouts with no livelihood options. The GOI should develop an assistance strategy and should allow international observers and NGOs such as UNHCR access to refugees and IDPs in the region.
- Some of the community-based organizations, such as the Naga People's Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR), the Naga Students' Federation, tribal organization such as the Naga Hohos, and churches have been working for a peaceful solution. Some have even had meetings with the NSCN-K. The GOI should be willing to work with some of these groups to achieve a sustainable peace in the region.
- The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) could play a key role by offering practical areas of cooperation, such as the exchange of information, intelligence and expertise among the security agencies in the region. An Arms Register should be maintained at the state and region level in order to monitor the kind of small arms found in the region.

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<sup>164</sup> The GOI and/or NEI states have a couple of rehabilitation packages for surrendered insurgents. In 1997, it gave Rs2,000 each to surrendered ULFA in an attempt to wean them away from violence. However, it has been suggested that this scheme helped to create a new problem: the surrendered ULFA and growing criminalization in Assam.<sup>164</sup> In another scheme, launched in 1999, former insurgents are provided with a stipend of Rs.1800 per month and offered training in vocational courses such as IT skills. Those who handed in a gun were to be given an additional amount. For example, for surrendering an AK-47 they would be given an extra amount of Rs.25,000.

<sup>165</sup> Mehta, 2001.

**Appendix 1: The militarization of Manipur society: location of camps and stations**

1. Mantripukhri, HQ. 12 Assam Rifle.	57. Napet Palli, HQ. 65 CRPF
2. Lamshang, Out-post 12 Assam Rifle.	58. Chingarel, Out-post 7 Assam Rifle.
3. Keithelmanbi (West), Out-post 12 Assam Rifle.	59. Sawombung, Out-post 65 CRPF
4. Kangla (Imphal), HQ. 17 Assam Rifle.	60. Sagolmang, Out-post 65 CRPF
5. Chinga (Imphal), Out-post 17 Assam Rifle.	61. Yaingangpokpi, Out-post 12 Assam Rifle.
6. Kanchipur (Imphal), Out-post 17 Assam Rifle.	62. Lital, Out-post 25 Assam Rifle.
7. Kumbi, Out-post 17 Assam Rifle.	63. Ukhrul, HQ. 25 Assam Rifle.
8. Sharam, Out-post 17 Assam Rifle.	64. Leimakhong, 9 Sector, Battalion HQ. 21 Assam Rifle.
9. Koireng-gei, HQ. 21 Assam Rifle.	65. Senapati, 21 Assam Rifle.
10. Saikul, HQ. 24 Assam Rifle.	66. Pallel, 55 Battalion HQ. BSF (Border Security Force).
11. Kangla (Imphal), HQ. 30 Assam Rifle.	67. CCpur, 163 BSF (Border Security Force).
12. Chingarel, Out-post 30 Assam Rifle.	68. Tolo, 6/5 GR (Gurkha Regiment).
13. Koireng-gei, HQ. 112 BSF (Border Security Force).	69. Jessami, Out-post 25 Assam Rifle.
14. Kotland, HQ. 12 CRPF (Central Reserved Police Force).	70. Lamlai, Out-post 20 Assam Rifle.
15. Lamphel, HQ. 81. CRPF (Central Reserved Police Force).	71. Sanshak, HQ. 25 Assam Rifle.
16. Yurenjam, HQ. 77 CRPF (Central Reserved Police Force).	72. Rongmal, Out-post 81
17. Dolaithabi, HQ. 133	73. Mayang Imphal, Out-post 14 Punjab Regiment.
18. Sawombung, HQ. IRB (Indian Reserved Battalion).	74. Wang-goi, Out-post 14 Punjab Regiment.
19. Motbung, Out-post 21 Assam Rifle.	75. Kangla, Out-post 14 Punjab Regiment.
20. Tulihal Airport, HQ. 14 Punjab Regiment.	76. Keirak, Out-post 5/5 Gurkha Regiment.
21. Churachandpur (CCpur), HQ. 23 CRPF	77. Khongjom, Out-post 5/5 Gurkha Regiment.
22. Tuinom, Out-post 23 CRPF	78. Chandel, Out-post 10 Jammu and Kashmir Light Infantry.
23. Sagang, Out-post 23 CRPF	79. Sharam, Out-post 17 Rajputana Rifle.
24. Moirang, HQ. 46 CRPF (Central Reserved Police Force).	80. Lilong, Out-post 7 Assam Rifle.
25. Bishenpur, HQ. 52 CRPF (Central Reserved Police Force).	81. Andro, Out-post 17 Rajputana Rifle.
26. Kangvai, HQ. 96 CRPF (Central Reserved Police Force).	82. Chingmeirong, Out-post 12 Assam Rifle.
27. Jiribam, HQ. 317 Field Regiment.	83. Yurembam, Out-post 12 Assam Rifle.
28. Bishenpur, HQ. 1 Jammu and Kashmir Light Infantry.	84. Kakching Lamkhei, Out-post 7 Assam Rifle.
29. Kumbi, Out-post 1 Jammu and Kashmir Light Infantry.	85. Kakching, Coy HQ. 85 SSB.
30. Moirang, HQ. 8 Mahar Regiment.	86. Bongyang, 55 Battalion BSF 1 Coy.
31. CCpur, HQ. 8 Madras Regiment.	87. Pheishangjang, 3 Assam Rifle 1 Coy.
32. Jiribam, Out-post 16 Sikh Regiment.	88. Moreh Haokip Veng, 3 Assam Rifle 1 Coy.
33. Maibam Lotpa Ching, Out-post 8 Assam Rifle.	89. Ningthoukhong, Out-post 8 Assam Rifle.
34. CCpur, HQ. 18 Rashtriya Rifle.	90. Henbung & Mayang-khang, 21 Assam Rifle 1 Coy.
35. Bishenpur, HQ. 8 Assam Rifle. Battalion.	91. Senapati, Out-post 21 Assam Rifle.
36. Bishenpur, HQ. 16 Sikh Infantry.	92. Lairouching, Out-post 21 Assam Rifle.
37. Nungba, Out-post 16 Sikh Regiment.	93. Karong, Out-post VVF (Village Volunteer Force)
38. Thoubal, HQ. 7 Assam Rifle.	94. Shokvao, Out-post 25 Assam Rifle.
39. Moreh, Out-post 3 Assam Rifle.	95. Phungyar, Out-post 25 Assam Rifle.
40. Sagang, Out-post 23	96. Ukhrul, DIG "B" Range Assam Rifle HQ.
41. Wangjing, HQ. 35 CRPF (Central Reserved Police Force).	97. Nungbi, Out-post 20 Assam Rifle.
42. Moreh, Out-post 55 BSF (Border security Force).	98. Paoyi, Out-post 20 Assam Rifle.
43. Wabagai, HQ. 5/5 GR (Gurkha Regiment).	99. Hungdung, SSB/VVF AS. HQ.
44. Sugnu, HQ. 10 Jammu and Kashmir Light Infantry.	100. Chasad, Out-post SSB/VVF.
45. Konkhang, Out-post 55 BSF (Border Security Force).	101. Kharasom, Out-post SSB/VVF.
46. Yairipok, HQ. Rajputana Rifle & Out-post 7 Assam Rifle.	102. Shangsat, Out-post SSB/VVF.
47. Tengenoupal, HQ. 15 Raj Rifle.	103. Phungyar, Out-post SSB/VVF.
48. Chasad, HQ. 4 Assam Rifle.	104. Shirakhong 25 Assam Rifle 1Coy.
49. Chasad, Out-post 3 Assam Rifle.	105. Langjing, CRPF Group Center.
50. Ukhrul, HQ. 20 Assam Rifle.	106. Lokchao, Out-post 93 CRPF.
51. Maram, HQ. 3 Assam Rifle.	107. Lamphel, HQ. 93 CRPF.
52. Thenjang, HQ. 5 Assam Rifle.	108. Senapati, 63 HQ. CRPF.
53. Kangpokpi, Out-post 21 Assam Rifle.	109. Nungba, Out-Post 63 CRPF.
54. Tamei, HQ. 31 Assam Rifle.	110. Keimai, Out-post 63 CRPF.
55. Nilakuthi, HQ. 17 Raj Rifle.	111. None, Out-post 63 CRPF.
	112. Tamenglong, Out-post 63

## Appendix 2: internally displaced persons in Northeast India<sup>166</sup>

### ESTIMATES OF NUMBERS OF PERSONS DISPLACED IN NORTHEAST INDIA

[Note: Several of the following ethnic groups sometimes refer to themselves by a different name than that by which they are commonly known. Because these populations are already little known outside India, the author has used the more commonly recognized name for the sake of clarity. While some of these estimates are widely cited, others have been provided by a single source that may have connections to the displaced population in question. These 1998 estimates should therefore be considered very tentative.]

State	Number Displaced	Maximum Displaced <sup>1</sup>	Displaced Groups	Parties to Conflict
Assam	87,000 <sup>+2</sup>	250,000	Santhals, Nepalis	Bodos <sup>3</sup> /non-Bodos
Assam	3,500 <sup>4</sup>	60,000	Bengalis	Bodos/non-Bodos
Manipur	n/a*	40,000 <sup>5</sup>	Kukis	Nagas/Kukis
Manipur	n/a*	15,700 <sup>6</sup>	Paites <sup>7</sup>	Kukis/Paites
Manipur, Nagaland	20,000 <sup>8</sup>	95,000 <sup>9</sup>	Nagas	Nagas/Kukis
Tripura	39,000 <sup>10</sup>	39,000	Reangs <sup>11</sup>	Mizos/Reangs
Tripura	25,000 <sup>12</sup>	200,000	Bengalis	Tribals/Bengalis
Arunachal Pradesh	3,000 <sup>13</sup>	3,000	Chakmas	Tribals/Chakmas

Other groups in the Northeast have also experienced displacement or remain displaced, including Bodos in Assam,<sup>14</sup> Chakmas in Mizoram,<sup>15</sup> and ethnic minorities in Meghalaya.

#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> These numbers represent the largest numbers of people displaced in each state in recent years.

<sup>2</sup> 80,000 as of August 1998: interview with Prof. Omprakash Mishra, Calcutta; interview with Mr. Naqib Ahmed, Santhal representative; 65,000: Bhaumik. According to the June 1, 1999 *The Statesman* (India), another 7,000 became displaced in June 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Bodos refer to themselves as Boros.

<sup>4</sup> Some 3,500 displaced Bengalis were living in one camp visited by the author. There are undoubtedly many more living in other camps or by their own means, but there are no estimates of their total.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Dr. T. Haokip of North Eastern Hills University (Shillong), Guwahati, August 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Zomi Coordination Committee on Relief and Rehabilitation, July 13, 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Paites refer to themselves as Zomis.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Artax A. Shimray, Naga leader. This was the only source for this figure.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Presentation by Professor Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury, Symposium on Internally Displaced Persons, Jadavpur University, Calcutta, August 1998. In an interview with USCR, Prof. K. Debbarma of North Eastern Hills University, Shillong, said there were 36,000 as of August 1998.

<sup>11</sup> Reangs refer to themselves as Bru.

<sup>12</sup> Bhaumik, Subir. "Flower Garden or Fluid Corridor," unpublished.

<sup>13</sup> Chaudhury said 3,000 to 4,000 Chakmas had been displaced for more than five years.

<sup>14</sup> According to Jitu Basumatari, a member of a Bodo organization, more than 700 Bodos remained displaced. Other sources, however, said that all formerly displaced Bodos had returned home.

<sup>15</sup> Some 200 families, according to Samran Chakma, representative of a Chakma group.

\* As of 1998, most displaced Kukis and Paites had returned home or resettled in new communities. USCR was unable to establish how many of those who remained displaced were vulnerable as a result.

<sup>166</sup> Reproduced from USCR, 2000, by kind permission of the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants.

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