



Mapping Security: A Study on India's Northeast from Non-Traditional Security Discourse

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ABSTRACT

The concept of security has acquired a new dimension which includes chronic hunger, disease, repression, refugees, poverty, environment degradation, unemployment, migrations as a major source of security threats. In this context, the unabated influx of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh as well as Myanmar's refugees in the Northeast India have remains a major concern. It already generates a series of violent conflict in region like the recent ethnic clash between the Bodo tribe and Muslim immigrant in Assam. This produces a kind of social turmoil which have a potential threat to unity and integrity of country. It is clearly shown in the recent exodus of Northeast people from various part of country. But it has still remains largely unnoticed. This paper's focus is on mapping of the Northeast India security from non-traditional security perspective with special focus on illegal immigration and refugee. In the final analysis, the point is made while addressing security issues in Northeast India - illegal immigrants, refugees, internal displacement problems and militarisation should be taken it seriously.

Keywords : Security, Illegal Immigration, Refugee, Northeast and Insurgency

Introduction

At present, the concept of human security has been incorporated as the core concern of security whereas military concern remains as secondary. Moreover, traditional security concerns of the country in its national security formation such as the security for whom, security of what values and security from what threat are also all in changed. In Northeast India, however, under the existing domain of the state-centric national security concept, the insecurities of the people remain unrecognised. In fact, many innocent people has been victimised in name of the national security. The violation of the human rights both by the security forces as well as by the insurgencies generates psychological fear or insecurities which characterise the lives of the people.

On other hand, unabated influx of illegal immigrations from the neighbouring countries fuelled a violent conflict in the Northeast region over the last three decades. The anti-foreigners movement of 1970s of Assam and Tripura has turned into unpleasant armed conflicts. Meanwhile, in Manipur and in some part of Tripura the insurgency problem can be trace back into historical merger of states into India. They denied the merger agreement since it was allegedly signed without the consent of the people (Lieten, 2002). Today, the whole region is popularly known as one of the hot-spot areas of internal security where the numerous insurgencies and Indian soldiers engaged in the defence of the nation (Baruah, 2005).

This paper analyses the growing non-military security threats in Northeast India with special focus on non-traditional security perspective of human security. However, since the concept of the non-traditional security remains a vast area of research, this paper focuses on illegal immigration, refugees' issues, militarization and political killing in the region. In the process of analysis, the paper tries to answer some of the significant questions like: In what way refugees and illegal immigrations constitute a threat to Northeast India? What values are which need to be protected? Who will pay for the cost of security? In order to understand or come to a proper conclusion the paper makes a necessary focus on: Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura.

Northeast India: An Overview

Northeast, the easternmost region of India is known for its

rich culture, handicraft, martial arts and scenic beauty. From time immemorial the region has its own unique identity with diversities in terms of ethnic origins, linguistic variation, and religious pluralism which characterise the region. According to the Census reports, there are around 475 ethnic groups and 400 languages/ dialects are spoken here (Census Reports, 2001). It is connected with mainland Indian through a narrow corridor of 21 km. known as Siliguri Corridor. It was created by the Radcliffe line, the boundary line drawn by the British after partition of India in 1947. It is main lifeline of the region verged by Bhutan in the north, Bangladesh in the south and Nepal in the north-west.

However, with increasing problem of extortion by insurgency as well as militarisation of the region in name of national security made the region a conflict zone. In fact, it has lost the gleam of beauty and uniqueness in terms of culture in course of time with increasing number of social and political problems. At this juncture, it is the growing influx of the refugees and illegal immigrants from neighbouring countries that compel to rethink the concept of the security in region. For instance, the recent ethnic clash between the Bodo tribe and alleged illegal Bengali Muslim immigrant in Kokrajhar district of Assam not only turmoil the law and order of the state but also victimised many innocent life. Furthermore, it produces a kind of insecurity feeling among the northeast people living within their own country which resulted into recent exodus of the northeast people from various part of the country.

Changing International Security Scenario: Non-traditional security discourse

Under the traditional notion of security, every nation-state concern is on external military. Buzan (1998) called this notion of security a narrow concept and he broadened it by encompassing five new security sectors. Under traditional notion of security most of security policies are formulated to protect fundamental values of country such as national sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of the state. In fact, this traditional view of security, which is a state-centric in nature, has developed within the domain of realist approach to study of international relations. Thus, the state-centric nature of security policies always denied the interests of individuals or mankind as a whole.

With the end of cold-war, however, the security concept has gone beyond the State and military security concerns. Hereby the nature of threats and security discourses has been expanded with inclusion of various non-military sectors. This has gradually shifted the focus of security away from military power, as the core determinant of international order and security, to several non-traditional sectors, with a much enhanced role of economic, political, and societal forces (Buzan, 1998). Human security is the core area under this non-traditional security concept. It embraces human rights, good governance and ensuring freedom from want and fear to each individual (Anand, 2000).

It also recognised the increasing problem of environmental destruction, poverty, illegal immigrations, famines and diseases part of security studies since it pose threats to lives of millions of people all over the world. Therefore, a new concept of security has emerged gradually within the United Nations, identifying security in a more comprehensive way. This has led to the transformation of concept from a realist notion of traditional security to a non-traditional security.

This new concept of security which has developed under domains of neo-realist as well as liberal's security studies identified several values. The new values of concern to liberals security studies are human rights, individual and communal identity, individuals' spiritual growth, the material well-being of individuals and communities, social and cultural viability of ethnic and national groups, individual and public health, environmental protection, and sustainable. Similarly, it also recognised environmental problems, pressures on natural resources, growing income disparities, the influx of illegal immigrants, refugees, illegal trade in arms, drugs and human trafficking, the spread of AIDS/HIV as new threat to security.

Mapping Security in Northeast India

Most of the Northeast's states have its own history of its independent existent since the time immemorial. Since then, the protection of its territorial boundary as well as protection of its people remains a major concern of the state. However, after its merger or inclusion into the newly formed Indian Union in 1940's the security paradigm of the region has been change. The state-centric, neo-westphalian, security order emphasizing national sovereignty discourse remains the reference objects of the region security concept. So, in this state-centric notion of security a large number of the population in the region lives in a web of insecurity.

a) Militarisation and political killing:

The presence of large number of the army and paramilitary forces in the region generates the feelings of insecurity among the people. Beside this, the enforcement of the draconian act like Armed Force Special Power Act (AFSPA), and National Security Act (NSA) further complicated the human insecurity. This militarization of the region along with the murky covert operations resulted rampant violation of human rights where extra judicial killing become a common phenomenon (Bhaumik, 2007: 1-2). Today, Northeast India and Kashmir become the two of the worst affected areas by imposition of the AFSPA. Whereas the killing of innocent people in name of the defence of state sovereignty as well as counter insurgency operation remained a part and parcel of present security realm in Northeast. According to media and human right activists reports, in northeast India, particularly in Manipur at the average of one to two extra-judicial killing take place in a day. Apart from extra-judicial killings, several hundred had been picked up and detained under the NSA on the ground that they were allegedly working with or supporting militant groups.

In 1994, on 27th December five innocent civilian were shot dead while six were burnt to death, several others were detained and harassed, and 16 or 17 women were raped at gunpoint by army at Mokok-chung in Nagaland under the pretext of fighting insurgents (Khala, 2003). In Manipur, there are several cases as of 1994 incident of Nagaland. In 2000, troops of 8 Assam Rifles fired indiscriminately towards a group of

civilians at the bus waiting shed at Malom on unfaithful day of 2 November killing 10 civilians apart from inflicting injuries to several others. Again, the 2004 incident of rape and killing of Thangjam Manorama Devi witness one of the worst and inhuman acts of the army against the people of the region. This incident were some of many such cases of arbitrary killing committed by armed forces on ground of controlling insurgency as well as in defence of the national security. In fact, such kinds of inhuman action were empowered by the act like AFSPA – to commit such crimes.

Furthermore, the on-going armed conflict at various dimension in the region left the people insecure. Whereas extortion, ethnic cleansing, large scale massacres remains a sources of human insecurity in northeast India. Moreover, it generates an internal displacement problem. In 1993, during the Naga-Kuki conflict (in Manipur) many innocent people were got killed, rape and murdered on both side. Since then, the fear is on both sides rather than their hatred. Similarly in Assam, in Karbi Anglong district Karbi militant and Kuki militant groups clashed for control over the public resources led to lose of the innocent life. On other hand, many people were tortures, kidnapped as well as extorted by some of the insurgency in name of the taxation. In such a situation where is personal security and social security of individual goes which is depicted at UNDP Human development Index?

This state-centric notion of India national security arrangement in the Northeast was a creation of former bureaucrats and retired army personnel, police and intelligence officers (Kojam, 2010). Under this notion, the security of the common man has always been given a backseat and overlook. However, under the critical approach of security studies, Ken Booth argues that State and implicitly governments should no longer be the primary referents of security (Booth, 1995 and also see Booth, 1994). He further argued that human security should be made as the main referents of security because governments are the guardian of their people security rather than the armed forces of a neighbouring country.

b) Influx of Immigration and Refugee:

Unemployment, ethnic and cultural threats

Beside this, the state-centric notion of Indian national security arrangement in Northeast has remains unable to recognise or highlight several other increasing security threats areas in region. One of the biggest threats in the region from human security perspective is the increasing number of refugees as well as illegal immigrations from the neighbouring countries like Myanmar and Bangladesh. According to neo-realist approach of Barry Buzan, Ole Weaver as well as liberal domain of security studies these are some of the major security threats in the post-cold war international security system.

This increasing influx of Bangladeshi immigrant in region is due to a number of interrelated factors: economic, environmental, religious and political. At present, it is economic and environment factors which have been remains as main push factors behind the growing influx of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants. In fact, Bangladesh is one of the most populous and poorest countries in the world. Further, the country is also highly prone to natural calamities, such as floods, cyclone, drought, riverbank erosion and landslides. On other hand, political insecurity from the military regime as well as poverty is the key drivers behind influx of refugees from Myanmar into the region.

This growing influx of illegal immigrants and refugees has an immense potential for the deterioration of the security situation in region (Rajeshwar, 2003). As a result of these unchecked influx of refugees and immigration, there is serious demographic change (with rapid growth rate of population) as well as it generates armed conflicts within the state. For instance, these unchecked influx of refugees and immigration already created a serious demographic change (with rapid growth rate of population) in Assam and Tripura. Considering this growing threat, in 1998, then Governor, Lt. Gen.(Retd.) S. K. Sinha submitted a report on 'Illegal Migration into Assam

to the President of India. These 42 pages report had warned that if the present trends are not arrested, the indigenous people of Assam would be reduced to a minority (The Governor of Assam, 1998). Furthermore, the Home Ministry sources again show that out of its 126 Assembly constituencies in Assam, illegal immigrants has already constituted a majority in 36 constituencies. Likewise, Tripura has been transformed, in recent history, from a predominantly tribal to a predominantly non-tribal state.

This emerging demographic change has created a fear-psychosis in the people mind which ultimately gave birth to the question of identity crisis and also paved the way for ethnic conflict. For instance, the genesis of the present armed conflicts problems in Tripura has lies in the demographic destabilization. Similarly, in Assam the anti-foreign movement of 1970s has already turned into an armed conflict with formation of an insurgencies organisation like United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA). At this juncture, the inability of the Bangladesh government to prevent the country from becoming a "safe haven for Islamic terrorists" in South Asia (Habib, 2003), has pose an immense potential for the deterioration of the whole region.

In Meghalaya, most of these immigrants were concentrated in the plain areas of the west Garo hills. Many of them had already married with tribal girls and started claiming rights and privileges in Nagaland as well as in Meghalaya. At present, there is no exact number of immigrants but many recent incidents highlighted the continued process of immigration into the region. For instance, the shot dead of two Bangladeshi intruders at Hat Thymmai, August 2011 by village defence forces (The Times of India, 2011), indicate continued influx of immigration in Meghalaya.

Simultaneously, the increasing number of refugees from Myanmar in Manipur, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh further complicated the internal displacement problem. According to the South Asian Human Rights Documentation Centre (SAHRDC), India has at least 100,000 refugees in Mizoram from Myanmar. Most of these refugees belong to the Chin ethnic groups. At present, more than 60,000 Chakma and Hajong refugees from Bangladesh are there in Arunachal Pradesh. Most of these refugees were from Chittagong hill tracts of Bangladesh who fled persecution by its majority Muslim community in 1960s.

In Manipur, maximum influx of illegal immigration and refugees were detected in Jiribam and Moreh. Among the hill districts of the state, Senapati district has the maximum number of illegal immigrants. At present, there is no exact figure of Burmese refugees who are taking shelter in Manipur. Some reports say that there are 50 Burmese refugees in Manipur while other claims more than thousand. In Jiribam, lands and property belonged to native people have already been taken over by the illegal immigrants in villages like Laimatai, Lat-ingkhal (Hueiyen Lanpao, 2011). This often brings a quarrel between local people and illegal immigrants.

Similarly, Bangladeshi migrants in Nagaland now constitute a serious threat to the demographic balance of the state. According to one estimate, Bangladeshi nationals run almost half of all the shops in Dimapur, the commercial hub of the state, and in the capital, Kohima. Besides this, many of the illegal immigrants have married local Naga women. At present, the fear of becoming minorities in their own homelands has become a key issue in the whole region. Thus, by recognising its dangerous consequence on demographic, social, economic and political condition of the Northeast, illegal immigrations should be at the forefront of the national security agenda.

Moreover, this development also poses threats to social cohesion, employment, or even a threat of insurgency and terrorism. At present, the unemployed youth of the region now have to share the limited job opportunities with illegal immigrants. Under the Annual administrative report of the Department of Labour and Employment (Government of Manipur),

there are 5, 58774 registered unemployed youth in Manipur till June 2006 (Government of Manipur, 2007-08). In fact, a large number of educated youth in the state paddling rickshaw cover their face out of embarrassment for fear of being recognized. Same like in Assam, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. Such young people are the soft target of the going armed conflict for recruiting those (unemployed youths) as a cadre. Moreover, in the fragile or underdeveloped economic condition too much pressure by this illegal immigrant or refugee remains as a threat to the very existence of native life. Thus, by recognising its dangerous consequence on demographic, social, economic and political condition of the Northeast, illegal immigrations should be at the forefront of the national security agenda.

Furthermore, this growing influx of immigration as well as refugees has been found closely associated with cross-border trafficking of drugs, arms and human trafficking in region. At present, this poses as main sources of threats to the security of the indigenous people in the regions. In fact, with its various dimensions it has a potential to bring turmoil in the region which is already affected by armed conflicts. Moreover, this development already exposed its nexus with drug trafficking, arms smuggling and human trafficking in the region. In Mizoram many of Burmese refugees were found involved in drug peddling and prostitutions which are considered as anti-social elements (Government of Mizoram 2003). Furthermore, the increase in the number of HIV/AIDS infected persons is directly or indirectly connected with drug trafficking and it affected both the social security of people and national military. However, the increasing insecurity of the Northeast people has remained unaddressed and unnoticed by the government till date.

On other hand, the condition of the immigrant and refugees in region are also a matter of concern. Since India is not the signatory member of the United Nations refugee commission, these refugees often become victim of authority as well as anger of the local people. This situation sometimes turns into a violent conflict between local and non-local.

Conclusion

Today, the whole region is in anxiety, helplessness, and fear of being killed, raped or displaced. Moreover, the quality of life is reduced by increasing poverty, hunger, disturbing smooth functional of educational institutions, denial of free speech and governance insecurity. The governance insecurity with widespread corruption and its ineffectiveness in control the social issues further complicated human insecurity.

At present security scenario, the article 21 of the Constitution of India, right to life that the Supreme Court has interpreted as every citizen's right to a life with dignity is literally absence in northeast India. Furthermore, the institutional, legal arrangement of the national security in region seem totally ignoring the basic principle of safeguarding and protection of its own people. Now, it is rather becoming a source of insecurity. Here, the policy makers, leaders as well as politicians of the region need to realise that the human security is under the constant threat and where the basic human dignity is trampled on. Otherwise, this might take into an ugly turn at any time.

Moreover, to deal with Northeast insurgency or armed conflicts need an understanding of its basic causes for better conflict resolution and development of the region. In fact, it is not only the ethnic factors but also a fear of being swamped by illegal immigrations that resulted in the longest insurgency problem in the region. For instance, as we have seen in the beginning of the armed conflicts in Assam and Tripura. Besides this, from the human security approach to security studies, militarisation of region with growing incidents of human right violation (including political killing) in name of national security has already generate web of insecurity in the region. Perhaps, it is because of this that despite the existence of acts like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in the region for more than 40 years the insurgency problem has

been remains unsolved till now.

At present, internal displacement of population is another emerging security concern in the region. This large number of internally displaced population mostly from armed conflicts or ethnic tension further problematizes the increasing immigrations issues. For example, the increasing number of Bru tribes from Tripura in Mizoram frequently disrupts the social harmony within the state (see Global IDP 2001). At this juncture, if the government left unchecked, illegal immigra-

tion will soon become a national crisis. There, the existing work permit licence system as well as mechanism to monitor increasing refugees should renew urgently. In addition, the present demand of the 'Inner Line Permit' in Manipur need to be consider since the rail connection is about to finish which will connect the state with mainland India. However, all this approaches will remains worthless until and unless proper co-operation and coordination between the state and central government is maintained.

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