

# CURRENT STATUS OF INSURGENCIES IN NORTHEAST INDIA



MUHAMMAD WAQAS SAJJAD  
&  
MUHAMMAD ADEEL UL REHMAN



# **THE INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN**

---

Registered under societies registration Act No. XXI of 1860

---

The Institute of Strategic Studies was founded in 1973. It is a non-profit, autonomous research and analysis centre, designed for promoting an informed public understanding of strategic and related issues, affecting international and regional security.

In addition to publishing a quarterly Journal and a monograph series, the ISS organises talks, workshops, seminars and conferences on strategic and allied disciplines and issues.

---

## **BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

### **Chairman**

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood

### **MEMBERS**

Dr. Tariq Banuri  
Chairman, Higher Education  
Commission, Islamabad

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Ali  
Vice Chancellor  
Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad

Ex-Officio  
Foreign Secretary  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Islamabad

Ex-Officio  
Finance Secretary  
Ministry of Finance  
Islamabad

Ambassador Seema Illahi Baloch

Ambassador Mohammad Sadiq

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry  
Director General  
Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad  
(Member and Secretary Board of Governors)

# **Current Status of Insurgencies in Northeast India**

**Muhammad Waqas Sajjad \***

**&**

**Muhammad Adeel Ul Rehman\*\***

**September 2019**

---

\* Muhammad Waqas Sajjad was Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad.

\*\* Muhammad Adeel Ul Rehman was an intern at ISSI from September-November 2017.

## EDITORIAL TEAM

<b>Editor-in-Chief</b>	:	Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry Director General, ISSI
<b>Editor</b>	:	Najam Rafique Director Research
<b>Publication Officer</b>	:	Azhar Amir Malik
<b>Composed and designed by</b>	:	Syed Muhammad Farhan
<b>Title Cover designed by</b>	:	Sajawal Khan Afridi

---

Published by the Director General on behalf of the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad. Publication permitted vide Memo No. 1481-77/1181 dated 7-7-1977. ISSN. 1029-0990

---

Articles and monographs published by the Institute of Strategic Studies can be reproduced or quoted by acknowledging the source.

Views expressed in the article are of the author and do not represent those of the Institute.

# CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Abstract	1
Historical background of Northeast India	1
Arunachal Pradesh	6
Assam	10
Nagaland	14
Manipur	19
Conclusion	21



## **Abstract**

Northeast India has long been an under-researched region, but its importance due to its strategic geography and multiple insurgencies needs to be highlighted. In this descriptive and exploratory paper, the current situation of insurgencies in four of the seven “sister states” of northeast India is examined. In addition, a brief historical background and the political circumstances facing northeastern states under the BJP are also discussed in order to both better understand the historical and political contexts. The four states under scrutiny are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur. This is not a random selection; rather they are being examined since incidents of insurgencies and casualties, due to active insurgent groups, have been highlighted in 2017, whereas there were no killings in the three remaining states, namely Tripura, Meghalaya, and Mizoram. This paper argues that a holistic approach to the insurgencies needs to be taken, accounting for political and development challenges, as well as the fluid nature of boundaries between states, leading to insurgent groups in finding cover in another state, even if there are no shared motives. The purpose of the paper then is to have an introduction to the insurgencies as they stand in northeast India in early 2018.

**Keywords:** Northeastern India, insurgent groups, BJP, Nagaland

## **Historical Background of Northeast India**

Northeast India is one of the most troubled areas in the South Asian region. It is an isolated hill-forest region linked to the Indian mainland through the twenty-two kilometers wide Siliguri Corridor along the north of Bangladesh. It comprises seven sister states: Assam, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Tripura which collectively cover almost 225,000 km<sup>2</sup>, or seven percent of total land of India. Northeastern states share borders with China, Bangladesh, Nepal and Burma and cover almost 40 percent of total Indian coastal border, and thus their strategic importance is undeniable. This region has been witnessing insurgencies since the independence of India. There are several factors that can be taken into account for the ongoing situation, but

the most prominent drivers are ethnic cleansing, cultural differences, economic deprivations and unavailability of political rights along with other insecurities.<sup>1</sup>

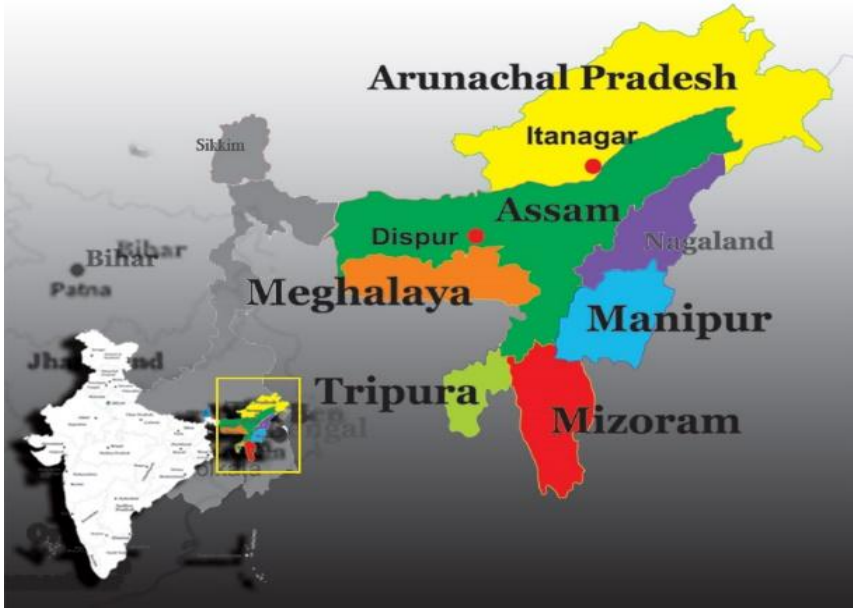
The irony is that these states except Assam (which is famous as producer of tea and oil) in northeast Indian were never ruled or administrated by British Empire even in the colonial era, even as some administrative issue did arise historically. The terrain is considered to be a major hurdle in development and building infrastructure. Since the withdrawal of the British from India, the Indian government (much like other nations that gained independence from colonial rulers) started making efforts to integrate many princely states and poorly administrated tribes to a mainstream Indian union. Within the first decade of independence, much resistance from different states against this integration process emerged, as they began questioning the extension of the central government. Later, this resistance led to the founding of several rebel, nationalist, separatist and ethnic groups focused on their distinct identities, each with various demands. In the backdrop however, was also genuine social unrest and lack of trust in the government. Despite using all means including political overtures and military operations, the Indian government is still struggling to establish complete writ in these states which are perfect regions for guerilla warfare, with thick forest areas, as well as national and international borders.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Subir Bhaumik, "Insurgencies in India's Northeast: Conflict, Co-option & Change" *East West Center*, no 10, July 2007. Accessed November 21, 2017. <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/insurgencies-india%E2%80%99s-northeast-conflict-co-option-change>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.





### Statistics of Northeast Indian States:

India/States	Area* (Sq km)	Population (Census 2011) **			Percentage all India		NSDP 2007/08 (million rupees) ***	NSDP Growth Rate in percentage (2013-14)
		Urban	Rural	Total	Popula- tion	Area		
<b>Arunachal Pradesh</b>	83,743	317,369	1,066,358	1,383,727	0.11 %	2.54 %	34,500	14.54 %
<b>Assam</b>	78,438	4,398,542	26,807,034	31,205,576	2.57 %	2.38 %	643,950	15.01 %
<b>Manipur</b>	22,327	834,154	2,021,640	2,855,794	0.22 %	0.67 %	51,810	12.83 %
<b>Meghalaya</b>	22,429	595,450	2,371,439	2,966,889	0.24 %	0.68 %	75,060	16.48 %
<b>Mizoram</b>	21,081	571,771	525,435	1,097,206	0.09 %	0.64 %	28,870	23.11 %
<b>Nagaland</b>	16,579	570,966	1,407,536	1,978,502	0.16 %	0.50 %	5,480	13.07 %
<b>Tripura</b>	10,486	961,453	2,712,464	3,673,917	0.29 %	0.31 %	100,070	22.82 %
<b>Total NE</b>	262,179	8,249,705	36,911,906	45,161,611	3.68 %	7.72 %	939,740	NA
<b>All India</b>	3287469	377106125	833748852	1210854977	----	----	38,114,410	11.07 %

\*Source: Office of Registrar General of India, Ministry of Home Affairs

\*\*Source: Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India<sup>3</sup>

\*\*\*Source: Directorate of Economics & Statistics of respective State Governments & for All-India - Central Statistics Office<sup>4</sup>

Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) figures are provided by official source, are presented in current prices while growth figures are based on constant price data.

<sup>3</sup> Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India  
<http://censusindia.gov.in/>

<sup>4</sup> Directorate of Economics & Statistics of respective State Governments & for All-India <http://niti.gov.in/content/gsdg-current-prices-2004-05-series-2004-05-2014-15>

## Major Insurgents Group Operating in India's North-Eastern States:

<b>Assam</b>	
<b>i.</b>	United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA)
<b>ii.</b>	National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB)
<b>iii.</b>	Kamtapur Liberation Organizations (KLO) **
<b>Meghalaya</b>	
<b>i.</b>	Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA) **
<b>ii.</b>	Hynniewtre National Liberation Council (HNLC)
<b>Manipur</b>	
<b>i.</b>	United National Liberation Front (UNLF)
<b>ii.</b>	Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP)
<b>iii.</b>	Manipur People's Liberation Front (MPLF)
<b>iv.</b>	People's Liberation Army (PLA)
<b>v.</b>	People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK)
<b>vi.</b>	Kanglei Yaol Kanna Lup (KYKL)
<b>vii.</b>	Revolutionary People's Front (RPF) and Coordination Committee Cor-con
<b>Nagaland</b>	
<b>i.</b>	The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang) [NSCN (K)] ***
<b>ii.</b>	The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (IsakMuivah) [NSCN (I/M)]
<b>iii.</b>	The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Reformation) [NSCN (R)]
<b>iv.</b>	The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khole-Kitovi) [NSCN (KK)]
<b>Tripura</b>	
<b>i.</b>	National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT)
<b>ii.</b>	All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF)
<p>*All the militant outfits mentioned above except [NSCN (I/M)], [NSCN (R)] and [NSCN (KK)] have been declared as 'Unlawful Associations' under the unlawful activities (prevention) Act, 1967.</p> <p>** (KLO) and (GNLA) declared as 'Terrorist Organizations'.</p> <p>***[NSCN (K)] declared as 'Unlawful Associations &amp; Terrorist Organization'.<sup>5</sup></p>	

<sup>5</sup> "Insurgency in North East" PDF. *Vision IAS*. <http://www.visionias.in/beta/>

The northeastern states have for long in public memory been associated with violence, insurgencies, and unrest. However, unlike in situations like Kashmir, there are also indications of political efforts to bring an end to violence. Of course, political efforts can also play a part in perpetuating violence. As it is however, there have been some recent reports that suggest a “significant improvement in the law and order situation”, at least from the point of view of official sources, as the Home Ministry has calculated that 2017 was the most peaceful year for the northeastern states in the last two decades. Of course, peaceful is a relative term. The same report also notes that “Security forces casualties in the region declined from 17 in 2016 to 12 in 2017 and civilian’s casualties from 48 in 2016 to 37 in 2017.”<sup>6</sup>

Official figures show “insurgency related incidents” – without exactly defining what they constitute – to have fallen in these states. For instance, since 2014, such incidents have reduced from 81 in 2014 to 33 in 2017 for Assam, but numbers for other states are less encouraging. Arunachal Pradesh for instance has seen increased incidents, with 61 in 2017, while the figure of 167 in Manipur is a reduction from previous years. Meghalaya however has witnessed a drastic reduction over the past few years since 2014 (179 incidents) and in 2017 only had 28 such incidents. The same was the case in Nagaland with 19 such incidents in 2017.<sup>7</sup> In addition, while some incidents are reported in Mizoram, Sikkim and Tripura, there have not been any deaths in these states in 2017, while other states have suffered casualties from civilian and security personnel. There are also no insurgent groups actively working in these three states as of now.<sup>8</sup>

The strategy to improve the situation in the states of the region is said to be multi-pronged, comprising development and security

---

<sup>6</sup> Rajiv Roy, "36 Percent Decrease in Insurgency Related Violence in Northeast." *NORTHEAST NOW*. February 20, 2018. Accessed February 27, 2018.<https://nenow.in/36-percent-decrease-insurgency-related-violence-northeast-centre.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Vivan Eyben, "Are the Guns Really Falling Silent in the Northeast?" *News Click*. December 12, 2017. Accessed February 27, 2018.<https://www.newsclick.in/are-guns-really-falling-silent-northeast>.

measures, while also pursuing a policy of talks with groups that “abjure the path of violence and seek resolution of their demands peacefully within the framework of the Constitution of India”.<sup>9</sup>

In this exploratory paper into this much understudied region, brief discussions and analyses of the situation in four of the states where insurgencies are still active, are given below. Thus, the following sections will not cover Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Tripura. The purpose is not to deeply go into the groups of insurgents, but to attempt to simplify the issues to make them more understandable. The purpose thus is to explore and understand the recent developments, the main insurgent groups and their methods, and the perceptions in India about the future of northeastern India. Following brief sections on the four states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur, the conclusion will also briefly look at the BJP’s role today in northeastern India, and what that could mean for the possibility of peace in the region in future.

## **Arunachal Pradesh**

Arunachal Pradesh is the largest northeastern state, and also significant for its geographical and strategic location. As this section will show, insurgencies and strife in other states – and indeed in other countries – also affects, and is affected by on goings in Arunachal Pradesh, where the thick foliage gives opportunities for transit and retreat. The state shares a long 1030-kilometre border with China, and a 160 km long border with Myanmar, is home to tens of thousands of Chakma refugees from Bangladesh and is thinly populated though with much forest area and rich in mineral resources.<sup>10</sup>

While compared to other states, Arunachal Pradesh has not had consistent and long-term insurgencies from separatist groups, sporadic and peripheral insurgency movements have been

---

<sup>9</sup> Rajiv Roy, "36 Percent Decrease in Insurgency Related Violence in Northeast"

<sup>10</sup> "Northeast India-Arunachal Pradesh." *Centre for Development and Peace Studies (CDPS)*. Accessed February 27, 2018.[http://cdpsindia.org/arunachal\\_overview.asp](http://cdpsindia.org/arunachal_overview.asp).

witnessed. And apart from indigenous movements, the bigger issue is that of the state's territory being used by insurgent movements from other states, such as the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) from Assam, and the Nationalist Social Council factions of the Nagaland-Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) and the Khaplang (NSCN-K) factions.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, the state had been hailed as “the abode of peace” at the end of the last millenium, when other northeastern states had been facing insurgencies and turmoil – however, that peace did not last as incidents escalated every year. Part of the reason was again the geography of the state, which saw insurgents from Nagaland and Assam using Arunachal Pradesh for transit especially since its strategic regions of Tirap and Changland provide foliage and cover. This also led to the indigenous insurgents in the shape of the East India Liberation Tiger Force (EILTF), which was altogether a new and different, and a much more serious, situation for the state.<sup>12</sup> However, from that time in the early 2000s, the situation is now also very different as the state has gained new power, when previously its response to insurgents was described as helplessness.<sup>13</sup> This situation by 2010 had changed to one of Arunachal Pradesh again being seen as a state that bore the brunt of spillover insurgencies from other regions, with those from Assam and Nagaland most critical throughout this period. A more heightened concern was also that of other neighboring countries such as China and Myanmar being embroiled in these insurgencies with difficult terrains and borders opening up opportunities for movement of people and arms.<sup>14</sup> The troubles in Myanmar – of which we are witnessing a new phase today – thus availed the territory of Arunachal Pradesh as well. Mostly however, the state was a safe haven for the Naga and

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Bibhu Prasad Routray, "Growing Tentacles of Insurgency in Arunachal Pradesh." *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS)*, July 03, 2002. Accessed February 27, 2018.[http://www.ipcs.org/comm\\_select.php?articleNo=783](http://www.ipcs.org/comm_select.php?articleNo=783).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Sandipani Dash. "India's Arunachal Pradesh: Insurgent Overflows." *Centre for Conflict Resolution & Human Security*, February 17, 2010. Accessed February 27, 2018.<https://ccrhs.wordpress.com/2010/02/17/indias-arunachal-pradesh-insurgent-overflows/>.

Assamese insurgents, and the lack of police and security institutions' collaboration from these states meant that the state found it difficult to end the process of extortion, as well as the transit routes used by the insurgents.<sup>15</sup> The state government was also deemed to be ineffective despite sporadic instances of development funding as a means to end unrest.<sup>16</sup>

More important than development work by the state government has however been the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, which remained in force in Arunachal Pradesh in specific districts due to "continuous violence, extortion and intimidation by insurgent groups" as late as the end of 2016. Again, this was since the state had been home to insurgents from Assam and Nagaland, following the declaration of the districts bordering Assam as "disturbed areas" under the AFSPA.<sup>17</sup> Of late, there have been sporadic arrests and killings of militants from the aforementioned groups in Arunachal Pradesh, with the state and official narrative being the only dominant one, so that insurgent voices remain largely suppressed. What emerges are stories not of the reasons for unrest, specially since most of the unstable areas are not widely accessible to foreign or Indian journalists, but rather narratives of fomenting unrest, and the use of arms and ammunition, extortions, abductions and criminal activities.<sup>18</sup> This is of course not to say that the local populations are not being affected by the neighboring states' insurgents making Arunachal Pradesh's villages their hideouts. As reported by the media for instance, near the end of 2017, following incidents in which the insurgents allegedly used locals as human shields, one

---

<sup>15</sup> Anurag K, "Arunachal Pradesh Becoming Safe Haven for Militants." *Rediff News*, June 29, 2011. Accessed February 27, 2018.<http://www.rediff.com/news/report/arunachal-becoming-safe-haven-for-militants/20110629.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> "AFSPA to Continue in Arunachal Pradesh for Six More Months." *FIRSTPOST*. May 06, 2016. Accessed February 27, 2018.<http://www.firstpost.com/india/afspa-arunachal-pradesh-insurgent-groups-2768896.html>.

<sup>18</sup> "NSCN (R) Insurgent Rounded up in Arunachal Pradesh." *The New Indian Express*, September 10, 2017. Accessed February 27, 2018.<http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2017/sep/10/nscn-r-insurgent-rounded-up-in-arunachal-pradesh-1655141.html>.

village located on the border with Myanmar “banned” the terrorists, in what was recognized as a “huge help” for the Army.<sup>19</sup>

As it is, the current situation in Arunachal Pradesh remains one of sporadic unrest at the hands of insurgent movements from Assam and Nagaland, with added unrest due to the situation in Myanmar. The government in this regard has been attempting to keep the southern belt of the state free from insurgencies through programs such as raising awareness and trainings for the youth, in addition to operations against the insurgents. The idea is after all to both defeat insurgencies and prevent people from joining them.<sup>20</sup> However, the threats emanating from the insurgents remain real and significant specially since it is not the state’s indigenous movements but those from other states that are the real problems, leading the Union Home Ministry recently to ask security agencies of all three states – Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Nagaland – to carry out a collaborative “massive hunting operation” against militants, without which the fluid insurgencies are unlikely to be solved.<sup>21</sup> As it is, the operations and incidents along the Indo-Myanmar border are described often as being “normal” encounters when some such incident manages to make the national headlines.<sup>22</sup>

The situation in Arunachal Pradesh as it currently stands in early 2018 then is one of unrest on the border, primarily due to insurgents

---

<sup>19</sup> Ratnadip Choudhury, "North-East Border Village's Bold Step Takes on Cross-Border Insurgency." *NDTV*, October 14, 2017. Accessed February 27, 2018.<https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/north-east-indo-myanmar-border-village-niasas-bold-step-takes-on-cross-border-insurgency-1762722>.

<sup>20</sup> Avik Chakraborty, "Effort to Make South Arunachal Insurgency-free: LongdingBn Conducts Pre-recruitment Training." *NORTHEAST NOW*, February 3, 2018. Accessed February 27, 2018.<https://nenow.in/effort-to-make-south-arunachal-insurgency-free-longding-bn-conducts-pre-recruitment-training.html>.

<sup>21</sup> "Assam Police Receives Militancy Threat from Arunachal-Nagaland: DGP Sahay." *INDIA BLOOMS*, January 17, 2018. Accessed February 27, 2018.<https://www.indiablooms.com/news-details/N/37260/assam-police-receives-militancy-threat-from-arunachal-nagaland-dgp-sahay.html>.

<sup>22</sup> "Counter Insurgency Ops in Arunachal Pradesh Is Routine: Army Chief Rawat." *The Northeast Today (TNT)*, September 5, 2017. Accessed February 27, 2018.<https://thenortheasttoday.com/counter-insurgency-ops-in-arunachal-pradesh-is-routine-army-chief-rawat/>.

from Assam and Nagaland. And thus there are occasional skirmishes, and reports of local populations being traumatized. With ongoing security operations in a climate of instability however, the government also continues with development projects including roads and bridges.<sup>23</sup> Without active collaboration with other states though, it is unlikely that such an approach can bring sustainable peace to Arunachal Pradesh. After all, the bigger issues are in the neighboring state of Assam, which we now move to.

## **Assam**

Assam is perhaps the most important northeaster state, sharing borders with several of the other states in the region, as well as with Bangladesh. It is also rich in natural resources but has been called a “classic case of high potential and low achievement”, while distribution of the resources has also been inadequate, contributing to the several insurgencies based on ethnicity that have over time embedded themselves in the state’s everyday life.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, the insurgency in Assam has been long-standing, with several groups emerging with their own goals, making it difficult for the government to bring stability and peace. The oldest such group is the United Liberation Front of Asaam, (ULFA) which was founded in 1979, while several further groups and their splinters and branches have also since developed. This has meant that even as government programs and operations continue, they have not managed to achieve success in eliminating insurgencies in the state – and rather, there have continued to be special powers granted to the security agencies in the shape of the AFSPA. Throughout the past decade or so, there have been attempts to negotiate with insurgent groups, with a 2014 report noting that thirteen outfits were in talks with the

---

<sup>23</sup> M.A. Athul, "Arunachal Pradesh: A Reassuring Calm." *Indo-Canada Outlook*, January 1, 2018. Accessed February 27, 2018. <https://indocanadaoutlook.international-perspectives.net/index.php/archives/2018/january-2018/2554-arunachal-pradesh-a-reassuring-calm>.

<sup>24</sup> "Northeast India-Assam." *Centre for Development and Peace Studies (CDPS)*. Accessed February 27, 2018. [http://cdpsindia.org/assam\\_overview.asp](http://cdpsindia.org/assam_overview.asp).



government while eight were active in militancy.<sup>25</sup> Of course, it must be kept in mind that these are official state narratives, and thus the perspectives and voices of the insurgent movements largely remain sidelined especially in the national and Hindi and English language media.

The ULFA remains the most potent and significant insurgent group in Assam, formed partly to counter the influx of migrants from Bangladesh, its objective was to “liberate Assam through armed national liberation struggle from the clutches of the illegal occupation of India” and to “establish a sovereign independent Assam”. It enjoyed periods of popularity across the state but is said to have lost much support due to its violent campaigns. It has also built alliances and cooperated with other insurgent groups in Assam and given its continued opposition to the state it has also been involved in long-term fighting, with its top leadership based in Bangladesh. There have however also been negotiations and peace talks over this time, as the government has also in the past agreed to release the ULFA’s leaders from jail so that peace talks could be facilitated.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the widespread problem of insurgencies in Assam can be gauged by the fact that at any time it has multiple groups with separate or combined goals, and at different levels of impact. For instance, some years ago, it was reported that there were twelve active insurgent groups, thirteen that had agreed to a ceasefire, and twenty-three inactive ones, and thus a complicated picture of the insurgency emerges.<sup>27</sup>

Today, the situation has not changed drastically. The fortunes of the ULFA have been diminished and the insurgency has periods of a lull, but this is never longstanding. As one official in the state put it, the ULFA is “down, but not out”. He also continued, following

---

<sup>25</sup> "Insurgency and Peace Efforts in Assam." *Centre for Development and Peace Studies (CDPS)*, Accessed February 27, 2018.[http://cdpsindia.org/assam\\_insurgency.asp](http://cdpsindia.org/assam_insurgency.asp)

<sup>26</sup> "Assam's Militant Group's Profile." *Centre for Development and Peace Studies (CDPS)*, Accessed February 27, 2018.[http://cdpsindia.org/assam\\_mgp.asp](http://cdpsindia.org/assam_mgp.asp).

<sup>27</sup> "Assam's Militant Groups Active, Inactive, Under Ceasefire and Disbanded" *Centre for Development and Peace Studies (CDPS)*, Accessed February 27, 2018.[http://cdpsindia.org/assam\\_outfits.asp](http://cdpsindia.org/assam_outfits.asp).

attacks by the group in late 2017, that its strength lies in its lethality and not its numbers. However, what has also emerged is that the activity of insurgents is now confined to certain regions in the state, and that too in pockets bordering Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, much like in the case of Arunachal Pradesh above, eliminating or decreasing the impact of insurgencies requires that state officials from all three states conduct joint programs in security and intelligence, since the idea is that the ULFA and insurgents from Assam take refuge in the other states. The government has however been asserting its writ in the state, and noted that the insurgency situation has improved vastly, which has allowed it to now work on “all encompassing development in the state through implementation of various welfare schemes in different sectors, including health, education, industry, agriculture, sports, social welfare, culture, sports, etc.”<sup>29</sup>

Any claims of complete success in eliminating insurgencies – and even more than that in eliminating unrest among the masses at large – will certainly be premature at best. After all, Assam in 2018 also continues to face challenges of violence and militancy from several quarters, including from the insurgent movements of neighboring Nagaland. This is since these insurgencies are linked insofar as they have a mutual distrust of the state, some shared goals, and certainly common routes and hideouts that are not entirely in the vicinity of the insurgent movement’s resident state. It is thus that in early 2018, suspected militants from the NSCN-K in Nagaland had set ablaze oil tankers in Assam, in an incident near the

---

<sup>28</sup> Prasanta Mazumdar, "Insurgent Group ULFA's Paresh Baruah Faction Down, but Not Out: Assam's Director General of Police." *The New Indian Express*, December 15, 2017. Accessed February 27, 2018. <http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2017/dec/15/insurgent-group-ulfas-paresh-baruah-faction-down-but-not-out-assams-director-general-of-police-1727775.html>.

<sup>29</sup> "Insurgency Situation Has Improved: Assam Governor." *The Tribune*, January 26, 2018. Accessed February 27, 2018. <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/insurgency-situation-has-improved-assam-governor/534486.html>.

border between the two states, as this is a group resisting talks with the government.<sup>30</sup>

Others have also rightly suggested that unrest in Assam for instance will remain intact due to its resources being exploited. Thus, the economic angle to political unrest can never be ignored, with recent policies of reaching out also criticized since they do not enable indigenous knowledge, but rather follow the center's direction when it comes to policies on the ground.<sup>31</sup> As it is, there are recent developments in northeast India in general, and in Assam as well, regarding the increasing political clout of the BJP, which could have seen new trajectories emerging that had not come up before. This however did not happen. For instance, while the BJP-led government in the state arose with much fanfare amid propaganda of "jati, mati and beti" (or nationality, land, and hearth), there has in only a few years been "an equally steep decline in its popularity". This is since the economic condition in the state has not improved and promises of a huge inflow of funds did not materialize as the state was, after the elections of course, expected to come up with funds itself.<sup>32</sup> However, the BJP government has been carrying out programs of a different sort in order to drum up support again. This has included ruthless eviction drives targeting Muslims who are "allegedly occupying government land" including a historically harsh treatment towards Muslim refugees from Bangladesh, while citizenship is being granted to Hindu Bangladeshis, using political loopholes that are seen as "a piece of constitutional adventurism, characteristic of the BJP which tries to use loopholes in the constitution to further its political design."<sup>33</sup> While there may be

---

<sup>30</sup> "Suspected NSCN (K) Militants Set Ablaze Nine Oil Tankers, No Casualties Reported." *Scroll In*, January 17, 2018. Accessed February 27, 2018. <https://scroll.in/latest/865345/assam-suspected-nscn-k-militants-set-ablaze-nine-oil-tankers-no-casualties-reported>.

<sup>31</sup> "Unless Assam Is Allowed to Develop on Its Own Resources, Unrest Will Always Be There': Hiren Gohain." *The Wire*, December 09, 2017. Accessed February 27, 2018. <https://thewire.in/203141/unless-assam-allowed-develop-resources-unrest-will-always-hiren-gohain/>.

<sup>32</sup> "BJP Is Using Citizenship Act Amendment to Reinforce and Spread Hindutva in Assam." *The Wire*, January 02, 2017. Accessed February 27, 2018. <https://thewire.in/politics/assam-citizenship-act-amendment-hindutva>.

<sup>33</sup> The issue of immigrants can be understood from the following extract: "What exactly is the number of such immigrants? During his tenure as governor of

short-term gains in political support through such Hindutva-inspired means in the state, it is unlikely that such steps will do anything to end the insurgency in Assam. For that to happen, political, economic, and military steps need to go hand in hand, and people's rights have to be considered in a holistic way. Moreover, to reiterate, the insurgencies in northeastern India have to be seen as separate, but also as having shared ground. This means, as the Indian government has also acknowledged, that the on-ground realities of the geographic intermingling of the insurgent movements in Assam, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh have to be acknowledged, and suitable policies subsequently developed.

## **Nagaland**

The Naga insurgency is perhaps the most sustained of all the insurgencies in India, and despite repeated operations, peace accords, and multiple steps towards reconciliation, the unrest has not diminished. The "principal insurgent group" in Nagaland is the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagalim's Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) faction, with which the government of India has been negotiating with since 1997, but increasingly it is suggested that the talks are failing.<sup>34</sup>

---

Assam, Lt. Gen. S.K. Sinha had submitted a report to the Centre in the late 1990s which drew on census reports in Bangladesh and estimated that the figure of decrease in Hindu population from 1971 to 1991 would be not less than 75 lakhs. If even 30 to 40 lakhs of them have sought refuge in Assam, that would upset the usual demographic balance in the state. Plus, the strain on resources in an under-developed state. No wonder there has been large-scale encroachment on forest reserves and government land and tremendous growth in urban population. Very little land is left for future immigrants, for whom the proposed amendment seeks to keep the door open. Already, thousands of youths seeking employment as low-level employees in other developed states have moved out of Assam thanks to a stagnant economy. No wonder people are expressing grave disquiet through various forms of mass protest and agitation."

See: "BJP Is Using Citizenship Act Amendment to Reinforce and Spread Hindutva in Assam." *The Wire*, January 02, 2017. Accessed February 27, 2018. <https://thewire.in/politics/assam-citizenship-act-amendment-hindutva>.

<sup>34</sup> Samrat. "India's Naga Insurgency Battles Neoliberal Capitalism." *Asia Times*, February 12, 2018. Accessed February 27, 2018. <http://www.atimes.com/indias-oldest-naga-insurgency-battles-neo-liberal-capitalism/>.

This is a historical struggle, rooted in the identity of the people of the state who have never reconciled to their land being taken up by British rule. For postcolonial India, however, it also remains a strategically important state since it shares a long international border with Myanmar – which has become increasingly significant in recent months and years due to the oppression of the Rohingya community in the neighboring country. Like other northeastern states, Nagaland’s economy is driven by agriculture and it is rich in mineral wealth, but insurgencies and lack of investment or interest in development have meant that despite phases of ceasefire between the government and insurgent groups, stability and peace have never been achieved completely.<sup>35</sup>

Afterall, the Naga desire for independence has been a major aspect of the state’s modern identity as the Nagas had desired a separate state for themselves outside the Indian Union – and they had been told by none other than Mahatma Gandhi that this would be accepted. This was a promise that was not kept however, and the insurgency in Nagaland has not subsided since. In recent decades, this has been spearheaded by the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) that was formed in 1980, which was later split into two factions: the Isak-Muivah faction (NSCN-IM) and the Khaplang faction (NSCN-K). Both groups however have had the objective of establishing a “Nagalim (greater Nagaland) comprising Naga inhabited areas of Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and neighbouring Myanmar.”<sup>36</sup> As a result, understanding Nagaland is key to understanding northeast India, and as the sections above suggest, despite it being a Naga insurgency foremost, it also involves other states – if not by direct collaborative action, then certainly by the geographic contiguous nature of the states in the region. Much like the other insurgencies in northeastern India, the NSCN approach has involved not just direct armed action, but also

---

<sup>35</sup> "Northeast India-Nagaland." *Centre for Development and Peace Studies (CDPS)*. Accessed February 27, 2018.[http://cdpsindia.org/nagaland\\_overview.asp](http://cdpsindia.org/nagaland_overview.asp).

<sup>36</sup> "Insurgency and Peace Efforts in Nagaland." *Centre for Development and Peace Studies (CDPS)*, Accessed February 27, 2018.[http://cdpsindia.org/nagaland\\_insurgency.asp](http://cdpsindia.org/nagaland_insurgency.asp).

extortion, arms smuggling, amid efforts by certain constituent groups to achieve some peace with the government. Indeed, peace efforts have not been absent from the narrative of insurgency and have also included major developments such as major insurgents dropping the demand for sovereignty. However, given the multiple insurgent groups operating in the region with their own command structures and motives, this demand has never been eliminated. And this of course has been categorically rejected by the Indian government at every occasion.<sup>37</sup> As it is, the Naga insurgents have disclosed their foreign collaborations including its offices in other countries and hundreds of members abroad, in the year 2013. This has also been notable since the competing insurgent groups have often been at odds with each other, sometimes with violent ends. Moreover, other states have also naturally resisted the territorial integration demanded by Nagas – such as in Assam.<sup>38</sup> Understandably then, the Nagaland insurgency is a complex phenomenon, with multiple complications at all levels. This includes internal fighting within insurgent groups and their varying demands, compromises, ceasefires, and negotiation with the government. And this is in addition to the Naga involvement in other states in the region, as well as their engagement with Myanmar and Bangladesh. As a problem to be solved then, a military solution is clearly inadequate. Various accords and agreements have been attempted in the past by New Delhi, and more will need to be done to achieve lasting peace.<sup>39</sup>

As it is, uneasy peace achieved through ceasefire agreements with various insurgent groups has over the past five years not proven to be sustainable, with the Khaplang faction of the NSCN ending the agreement, leading to much concern of violence since 2015. Some see the reasons for the insurgent group again resorting to violence to include its loss of public support, the perception of being sidelined

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> “Nagaland Assessment.” *Centre for Development and Peace Studies (CDPS)*, Accessed February 27, 2018. [http://cdpsindia.org/nagaland\\_assessment.asp](http://cdpsindia.org/nagaland_assessment.asp)

<sup>39</sup> See details of previous agreements > “Everything You Need to Know about Nagaland Insurgency and the Efforts to Solve.” *The Indian Express*, August 04, 2015. Accessed February 27, 2018. <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/everything-you-need-to-know-about-nagaland-insurgency-and-the-efforts-to-solve/>.

in talks with New Delhi, as well as internal conflicts within the group.<sup>40</sup> What is also certain is that neighboring states of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, while involved in their own insurgencies and conflicts, and indeed no strangers to Naga insurgents in their midst, would not be part of any accord that would take any part of their territories in a new Naga territory.<sup>41</sup> The Naga insurgency at its most extreme then faces multiple hurdles and challenges, not just from the government they are fighting. A positive step did emerge in May 2017, as the NSCN-IM faction conceded to signing a peace accord promising “shared sovereignty” and the process was said by the insurgent group’s leadership to be proceeding smoothly, though the ruling BJP government has clarified that the agreement is “initial and preliminary” at this stage and thus its terms were not made entirely public. This step had followed a historic “Framework Agreement” between the separatist group and the government, as the newly elected BJP government had begun to focus on achieving peace in the northeast.<sup>42</sup> By the end of 2017, the rhetoric has reached a more promising stage with the BJP government attempting further overtures to the Nagas in its attempts also to further solidify its strength in the region.<sup>43</sup>

Part of this endeavor involves the government – whether it is the BJP or not – to capitalize on the sentiments of the citizens of Nagaland, regarding their own discontent with insurgents, including extortions. It is the BJP’s enhanced rhetoric about its commitment to

---

<sup>40</sup> Mukesh Rawat. "Will Nagaland Ever Have Peace?" *The Diplomat*, June 04, 2015. Accessed February 27, 2017. <https://thediplomat.com/2015/06/will-nagaland-ever-be-peaceful/>.

<sup>41</sup> "Everything You Need to Know about Nagaland Insurgency and the Efforts to Solve." *The Indian Express*, August 04, 2015. Accessed February 27, 2018. <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/everything-you-need-to-know-about-nagaland-insurgency-and-the-efforts-to-solve/>.

<sup>42</sup> "Nagaland Insurgent Group Moves Closer to Peace Process, NSCN-IM Agrees to 'co-exist' with 'shared Sovereignty'." *FIRSTPOST*, May 10, 2017. Accessed February 27, 2018. <http://www.firstpost.com/india/nagaland-insurgent-group-moves-closer-to-peace-process-nscn-im-agrees-to-co-exist-with-shared-sovereignty-3435474.html>.

<sup>43</sup> "Solution to Nagaland Insurgency Near: Kovind." *The Hans India*, December 01, 2017. Accessed February 27, 2018. <http://www.thehansindia.com/posts/index/Latest-News/2017-12-01/Solution-to-Nagaland-insurgency-near-Kovind/342414>.

lasting peace in the state that has been heralded of late, and which has involved peace talks over overt and sustained military action. It is with these sentiments that elections in the state for the State Assembly in 2018 have been discussed, though it remains to be seen to what extent the rhetoric will translate into long-term and effective solutions once the elections are over.<sup>44</sup> After all, as a conflict with historical reasons and long-term causes for unrest resulting in radical thinking about territory and identity, also requires radical thinking to create peace. Some have rightly called for economic integration and benefits for the state's citizens, who have of late demonstrated in the relative peace amid ceasefires, to be desirous of a better life that comes with the sort of neoliberal capitalism that the rest of India has moved towards, and which is in fact called the real challenge to the Naga insurgents.<sup>45</sup> After all, the economic strains and oppression felt by the villagers of the Naga Hills are reported as huge reasons for unrest, and this is exacerbated when security officials are then seen as treating people badly, accusing them of being informants and insurgents themselves, when perhaps they could be the possible partners for and indeed vehicles for peace and development in the state and the region at large.<sup>46</sup>

Even as there has not been much progress in terms of achieving peace through peace talks over the past two decades for instance in Nagaland, there is a positive sign of ceasefire agreements with different insurgent groups in the state, that has offered "a relative peace." As discussed in this paper, Nagaland remains perhaps the most important state in the context of insurgencies and peace in

---

<sup>44</sup> Kangkan Acharyya. "As Nagaland Goes to Poll, Voters Hope for Peaceful Resolution of Decades-old Insurgency, Respite from Illegal Taxes." *FIRSTPOST*, March 03, 2018. Accessed March 27, 2018. <http://www.firstpost.com/politics/as-nagaland-goes-to-poll-voters-hope-for-peaceful-resolution-of-decades-old-insurgency-respite-from-illegal-taxes-4365679.html>.

<sup>45</sup> Samrat. "India's Naga Insurgency Battles Neoliberal Capitalism." *Asia Times*, February 12, 2018. Accessed February 27, 2018. <http://www.atimes.com/indias-oldest-naga-insurgency-battles-neo-liberal-capitalism/>.

<sup>46</sup> Sanjoy Hazarika. "To Understand the Naga Demand for Separation from India, Visit the Small Village of Benreu." *Scroll In*, January 15, 2018. Accessed February 27, 2018. <https://scroll.in/article/864958/to-understand-the-naga-demand-for-separation-from-india-visit-the-small-village-of-benreu>.



northeast India as a whole since the objectives of the NSCN factions to gain the Greater Nagaland territory means that it is both a regional issue – since this large territory involves parts of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in addition to Nagaland – as well as an international issue as it also includes parts of Myanmar.<sup>47</sup> And thus, achieving peace in the region also means balancing multiple stakeholders and their divergent interests. This is not an easy task.

## Manipur

Much like the other northeastern states, the insurgency in Manipur has also lasted several decades now, beginning formally with the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) in 1964, and followed soon by several other insurgent outfits. The insurgency in Manipur, as the previous sections in this paper have demonstrated, has been affected by movements beyond its borders, and it remains one of the worst affected states in terms of violence in the northeastern region of India, with several insurgent outfits operating in the state, and which have in the past largely worked unimpeded despite operations by the government.<sup>48</sup>

In recent years, unlike in Nagaland for instance, the government has taken a very firm stance on the insurgencies emanating from Manipur, with issues such as child soldiers, abductions and violence towards citizen coming to the fore. As a result, hundreds of militants have been arrested and several also killed – though the numbers remain inconclusive – and there has been a show of strength and rhetoric by the government regarding its success in controlling the insurgency.<sup>49</sup> However, this does not mean that there has been any success in achieving peace, support, and goodwill among the citizens of the state. As some have noted, the unrest and resentment towards the center and its policies have been palpable even when

---

<sup>47</sup> Mukesh Rawat. "Will Nagaland Ever Have Peace?" *The Diplomat*, June 04, 2015. Accessed February 27, 2017. <https://thediplomat.com/2015/06/will-nagaland-ever-be-peaceful/>.

<sup>48</sup> "Insurgency & Peace Efforts in Manipur." *Centre for Development and Peace Studies (CDPS)*, Accessed February 27, 2018. [http://cdpsindia.org/manipur\\_insurgency.asp](http://cdpsindia.org/manipur_insurgency.asp).

<sup>49</sup> "Manipur Assessment." *Centre for Development and Peace Studies (CDPS)*, Accessed February 27, 2018. [http://cdpsindia.org/manipur\\_assessment.asp](http://cdpsindia.org/manipur_assessment.asp)

active insurgencies were not present several decades ago, and this has not changed, specially as in its historical imagination there is a sense – like in Nagaland and other regions – of an independence and uniqueness among the people for their land. The resentment moreover has also been due to AFSPA, and hence heavy-handed presence of the military, as well as the circumstances in which the state officially and formally became part of the Indian union.<sup>50</sup> The insurgent groups also attempt to protect their state from the disturbances in surrounding areas, and thus despite periods of decline, have managed to sustain themselves. And while the security forces have been deemed to be inefficient, there are those who see the state government with its peace efforts to have been somewhat more successful in decreasing the support for militants in the state.<sup>51</sup>

Indeed, the government has repeatedly pledged to have been keen to dialogue with insurgent groups as well in order to bring a political solution – though the pressing problem is that there are said to be thirty different armed groups and the idea is for all of these to come under one umbrella in order to talk to the government.<sup>52</sup> Given internal fissures, it is unlikely that such a scenario will easily come about. As it is, Manipur has been the most volatile of the northeastern states with regard to insurgency-related incidents in the recent past, and perhaps one in which no clear solution is as yet coming to the fore.<sup>53</sup> This certainly needs to change if the region as a whole is to prosper.

---

<sup>50</sup> M. S. Prabhakara. "Insurgencies in Manipur: Politics & Ideology." *The Hindu*, December 16, 2016. Accessed February 27, 2018.<http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/Insurgencies-in-Manipur-politics-amp-ideology/article16839929.ece>.

<sup>51</sup> Rumani Saikia Phukan. "Top 5 Facts You Should Know About Militancy in Manipur." *Maps of India*, June 14, 2015. Accessed February 27, 2018.<https://www.mapsofindia.com/my-india/government/top-5-facts-you-should-know-about-militancy-in-manipur>.

<sup>52</sup> "Keen to Have Talks with Insurgent Groups in Manipur: N Biren." *Business Line*, October 10, 2017. Accessed February 27, 2018.<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/national/keen-to-have-talks-with-insurgent-groups-in-manipur-n-biren/article9896866.ece>.

<sup>53</sup> "Manipur Tops Insurgency-related Incidents List in Northeast." *NORTHEAST NOW*, February 12, 2018. Accessed February 27, 2018.<https://nenow.in/manipur-tops-insurgency-related-incidents-list-northeast.html>.

## Conclusion

The insurgencies in northeastern states of India have been long-term, often violent, co-dependent, and without clear solutions. At the heart of the matter however is that people's lives and livelihoods are affected. It is with this in mind that the BJP in the last half decade has developed a program of outreach and canvassing in the states, and amped its rhetoric for peace in the region. This is a new and major development, and while there is scepticism of the intent and policies of the central government, the near future is likely to offer a different scenario in the political circumstances of the states in question. Whether it is going to be a positive or negative development, however, remains to be seen.

The BJP increasingly sees its dominance in state elections in northeast India to add value to its Act East policy of reaching out to South East Asian countries for trade. Its push in northeast India and special attention to the states in the region since before the elections that brought it to power need to be seen in this context of its larger goals for the country at large.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, this strategy has paid off since the BJP now has power, or shares power, in six of the seven northeastern states (except for Mizoram, where the Congress has been more successful) where its presence before had been marginal. Infrastructure projects, and economic promises have since followed as the party seeks to consolidate its position.<sup>55</sup>

Despite this upward surge in its fortunes in northeast India, however, there are analysts who question if this can last, and caution against prolonged hope in the BJP's vision for the region to have lasting success in achieving peace against insurgents. It is moreover certain that the party's ideological approach of Hindu dominance will also not work in the pluralistic states, even if it has for the time

---

<sup>54</sup> "How BJP's North East Election Victories Further India's Act East Policy." *Live Mint*, March 09, 2018. Accessed March 27, 2018. <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/kUNTAP5u4WK1qC2Kcc211J/How-BJPs-North-East-election-victories-further-Indias-Act.html>.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

being dismantled long-standing communist parties.<sup>56</sup> There are also indications that even as the northeast is on the BJP mantle now, and perhaps for the near future, it will – by the admission of the party’s own leaders – take much more for it to be a nationwide popular party.<sup>57</sup>

In the case of northeast India for BJP, moreover, there is the added notion of insurgencies, which cannot be tackled with ideological confrontations, military action, and economic visions without a long-term commitment to the human rights of the people. At the moment, that seems to be missing, as intolerance, hatred towards communists, and breakdown of relationships has also occurred together with BJP rise. It is thus the Hindu-dominated BJP has also been forced to develop a more suitable political approach to northeastern states – after all, it has to win over non-Hindu constituencies as well – and in doing so also been listening to demands from the people to save and preserve their own traditions and cultures.<sup>58</sup> Not doing so, in fact, will only enable insurgents to garner more support from the people. This is since, as this paper has suggested, all the states in the northeast of India have strong ties to their history and a unique sense of identity. A government that fails to account for these, is certain to lose any appeal. And if this happens in parallel to insurgents capitalizing on these very sentiments, it will mean that decades of talks about peace, and occasions of ceasefires would have amounted to nothing. And that is, for the sake of the people, not a scenario in northeastern India that the government can afford.

---

<sup>56</sup> Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay. "Putting the BJP's Electoral Success in the Northeast in Context." *AlJazeera*, March 10, 2018. Accessed March 27, 2018. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/cloneofputting-bjp-electoral-success-north-east-180310080906052.html>.

<sup>57</sup> Rohan Venkataramakrishnan. "'Kohima to Kutch': BJP's Stunning Expansion Makes It the Dominant Player in North East." *Scroll In*, March 04, 2018. Accessed March 27, 2018. <https://scroll.in/article/870718/kohima-to-kutch-bjps-stunning-expansion-makes-it-the-dominant-player-in-north-east>.

<sup>58</sup> "Elections in North-east India Highlight the BJP's Political Savvy." *The Economist*, February 22, 2018. Accessed February 27, 2018. <https://www.economist.com/news/asia/21737301-hindu-nationalist-ruling-party-winning-over-christian-regionalists-elections-north-east>.



INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES ISLAMABAD (ISSI)  
SECTOR F-5/2, ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN  
TEL: 0092-51-9204423, 0092-51-9204424, FAX: 009-51-9204658  
EMAIL: STRATEGY@ISSI.ORG.PK WEBSITE: WWW.ISSI.ORG.PK