

Manipur

Blue Print For Counterinsurgency

E. N. Rammohan[?]

Manipur has been witnessing insurgency for the last 40 years, commencing with the Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN). The FGN insurgency was initiated in the Naga Hills district of Assam in 1956. It naturally spilled over into the four Naga-dominated districts of Manipur.¹ The base of the FGN was in Ukhrul district, but Senapati and Tamenglong districts also provided good support. A majority of the cadres and leaders were from the Thangkhuls of Ukhrul, the Maos, Poumeis and Marams from Senapati district and the Zeliangs from Tamenglong district. Ukhrul district has a 140 kilometer unguarded border with Myanmar. To a depth of 20 kilometers from the border there are virtually no roads. The Yomadung and Angouching are the last north south ranges along the border. Across are the Somra tracts, also populated by the Thangkhuls. The slopes of Yomadung and Angouching are thickly forested and do not offer easy access for conventional troops. All along the border there is only one fair weather dirt road of Second World War vintage from Kamjong to the Chindwin valley. Terrain wise, Ukhrul was a good district for

[?] E N Rammohan, an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer of the Assam-Meghalaya cadre was Director General of the Border Security Force (BSF) and Advisor to the Governor of Manipur.

¹ The National Socialist Council of Nagaland -- Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM)'s vision of a 'Greater Nagaland' includes four districts of Manipur – Senapati, Ukhrul, Chandel and Tamenglong.

the Naga underground army of the FGN. So were the districts of Senapati and Tamenglong, both thickly forested and with hardly any roads.

Later, with the signing of the Shillong Accord,² peace returned to the four districts of Manipur. This peace was, however, short-lived as Thuingaleng Muivah and Isak Chisi Swu,³ who were not a party to the Shillong Accord, formed the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) along with S.S. Khaplang, a Hemi Naga from north Myanmar. By 1980, the NSCN was operating in all the four Naga districts of Manipur. Later in 1988, the NSCN split in Myanmar and became two units, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland – Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) led by Muivah and Isak Swu and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland – Khaplang (NSCN-K) led by S.S. Khaplang. The NSCN-IM did not lose much time in setting up their units in all the four Naga districts of Manipur.

Insurgency made its first appearance in the valley districts of Manipur in the nineteen sixties in the form of a shadowy Pan-Mongoloid movement and the Revolutionary Government of Manipur. These groups preceded the creation of the United National Liberation Front (UNLF)⁴ of Manipur in November 1964. The People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), a chauvinist and revolutionary group was set up on October 9, 1977, by R.K. Tulachandra.⁵ The People's Liberation Army (PLA) was raised on September 25, 1978 by the late N. Bisheswar Singh.⁶ The reasons for the raising of these three organizations are not far to seek. Meitei pseudo-intellectuals never reconciled to the accession of Manipur in 1949 nearly two years after India attained independence. Manipur, an ancient

² The Governor of Nagaland, L P Singh, representing the Government of India and the underground leadership represented by Assa and Kevi Yalley, signed the Shillong Accord on November 11, 1975, at Shillong in Meghalaya. See <http://nagaland.nic.in/history/shillong.htm>.

³ Thuingaleng Muivah and Isak Chisi Swu are the General Secretary and Chairman respectively of the NSCN-IM

⁴ For a profile of UNLF, see South Asia Terrorism Portal; Countries; India; States; Manipur; Terrorist Outfits; UNLF; www.satp.org.

⁵ For a profile of the PREPAK, see South Asia Terrorism Portal; Countries; India; States; Manipur; Terrorist Outfits; PREPAK; www.satp.org.

⁶ For a profile of the PLA, see South Asia Terrorism Portal; Countries; India; States; Manipur; Terrorist Outfits; PLA; www.satp.org.

kingdom with a 2000-year-old recorded history and a magnificent culture, was made a Part C State⁷ – a Union Territory. Then in 1962, as a step to appease the secessionist FGN, the Naga Hills district of Assam was made a State. Manipur continued to be a Union Territory for another ten years, before being granted Statehood. Manipuri, an ancient language spoken and written by all the Meiteis and tribals, was not included in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution for years. The bureaucrats who came from Delhi and other States in 1949 were by and large not sympathetic to the Meiteis and the tribals. With a few exceptions, they did not win the confidence of the Manipuris. The worst was the policy of the party in power at Delhi, as a result of which the North East was flooded with funds, indirectly encouraging corruption, on the premise that this would make the people soft and finish off insurgency. On the contrary, it had just the opposite effect, driving home the truth that it is neither good nor expedient to tamper with the self-respect of a people. A coterie of contractors, all followers of the party in power at Delhi, was created, and later came to be called the 'Delhi Durbar'. This coterie secured most of the government contracts in the North eastern states. This infamous band of contractors took 95 per cent of the development funds allocated by Delhi back to private coffers in Delhi. Hundreds of kilometers of roads were built on paper and even annually maintained on paper. Food grain from the public distribution system were siphoned off wholesale into the black market. The politicians and bureaucrats of Manipur quickly adapted to this system.

The raising of the PLA, the UNLF, and the PREPAK was a direct reaction to these factors. The PLA, raised in 1978, grew rapidly and was in full cry in the Valley by 1979. A Meitei chauvinist group, its fierce leftist ideology and integrity attracted a cross-section of the educated youth. Many bright Meitei

⁷ 61 out of 552 Indian States that integrated into India after independence were the Centrally administered areas under the 1949 Original Constitution, which formed Part C States. This categorisation was a part of the effort to create administratively viable units and integrate the Indian States i.e. princely States, which had accepted British 'paramountcy', but were not under direct British rule as were the British India Provinces before independence into the dominion of India. See Durga Das Basu, *Introduction to the Constitution of India*, New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India, 1997, pp. 44-48 & 429.

students from national universities left their studies and joined the organization. A series of dacoities and ambushes committed in 1978 and 1979 were attributed to the PLA and the PREPAK. The object was to snatch arms from the security forces and collect money for purchasing arms.

The heart of the business community are the Thengal and Paona *bazaars*, home of the *Marwaris* and outside traders. They were key participants in the siphoning of essential goods into the black market. They naturally became a prime target of the PLA and the PREPAK in extorting money. This extended to the coterie of outside contractors who had cornered the bigger contracts in the State. And from them to the corrupt politicians and bureaucrats was a natural step. The unholy nexus of the politician, bureaucrat and contractor in siphoning funds led to a fourth channel – the insurgent, who now claimed the biggest share at the point of the gun.

Terrain is a crucial factor in any insurgency and the terrain of Manipur entirely favoured the insurgent. The hill ranges of Manipur are roughly north-south and peter off into the valley in the center in a series of low hills. The hills are thickly forested and, but for three national highways traversing them, are bereft of roads. Of the five hill districts, Ukhrul to the east is exclusively Thangkhum Naga, with a few Kuki villages on the eastern border with Myanmar. National Highway 150 (NH 150) bisects Ukhrul, coming from Jessamie in the north and, turning west, enters the valley at Yanganpokpi. The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has recently constructed a road from Shangshak near Ukhrul to Kasamkhullen in the south, crossing into Chandel district connecting Tengnoupal. In the north, Senapati district is bisected by National Highway 39 (NH 39), coming from Kohima. There are two lateral roads to the west connecting Kangpokpi to Tamenglong and Maram to Paren and one to the east from Tadubi to Ukhrul. In Tamenglong, a road links the district headquarters to Khongsang on National Highway 53 coming from Imphal to Jiribam and to Silchar. From Churachandpur, National Highway 150 was extended to Tipaimukh. This road has been abandoned for the last 10 years. In Chandel district, NH 39 connects Pallel to Moreh. The Tengnoupal New Samtal road constructed by the Border Roads has been abandoned. The interiors of Chandel and

Churachandpur districts are the sanctuaries of the PLA, PREPAK, UNLF, the Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP),⁸ and the myriad Kuki-Chin-Mizo underground groups. This is the hinterland from which they operate, and the main base camps and training areas of the PLA and the UNLF are in these two districts.



NOTE: The road map of NH-150 is indicative and not accurate.

The PLA and the UNLF initially had their hideouts in the Meitei villages in the valley, but established camps for training their cadres deep inside Chandel district and also inside Myanmar⁹ into which they crossed easily, as the border was not policed. Initially, weapons were purchased from the Myanmar

⁸ Kangleipak Communist Party was formed under the leadership of Ibohanbi on April 14, 1980. Like PREPAK, its major demand has been the ouster of outsiders.

⁹ Based on Indian intelligence reports, the Myanmar Army is reported to have destroyed certain UNLF camps. See www.nenanews.com/NEE%20Jan.7%202021.%202002/GuestC.htm.

Army, but a clandestine arms market gradually developed across the border of Chandel district. The break up of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia and the later peace agreement between the Shan State and Myanmar released a whole lot of Russian and US army weapons into the arms market. In the nineteen seventies, when the PLA and PREPAK were raised, arms were not easily available. Their arsenal was built up by looting arms from the police and para-military forces and buying from the poorly paid Myanmarese soldiers deployed across India's borders.

The Indian Army operated extensively against the PLA in the early nineteen eighties. In a series of swift operations, they were able to capture the PLA chief, N. Bisheswar and kill a number of top ranking leaders.¹⁰ The PLA was halted in its tracks. Upon his release, Bisheswar took to politics and became a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA). Although dormant, however, the hard core of the PLA remained intact. Later, after eliminating Bisheswar for changing track, the organisation regrouped and, along with the NSCN and the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), sought help from the Kachin Independent Army (KIA) in northern Myanmar, to arm and train its cadres.¹¹ All three groups secured adequate training but not much by way of arms. Except for a few Chinese M-22, the equivalent of the AK-47, they only got G-3 rifles and old weapons captured from the Myanmar army. In 1990, Bransen, the KIA leader, withdrew support to the NSCN, PLA and ULFA and all three turned to Bangladesh for sanctuary. Here, they secured support beyond measure from the Bangladesh government and the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan's external intelligence agency, at the Pakistan Embassy in Dacca. It was around this time that the Khmer Rouge broke up in Cambodia releasing a number of AK-47s, RPD 7.62 LMGs and RPG-7 rocket launchers into the clandestine arms market of South East Asia. The ISI seized this opportunity to sponsor the North Eastern insurgent groups. The first consignment of arms purchased in Thailand was landed in Cox's Bazaar in 1991, where a group of 240 NSCN cadres were waiting to receive them. It was

¹⁰ See "Insurgent groups in Northeast India", http://www.jarouchepub.com/other/1995/2241_ne_india_groups.html.

¹¹ "The Rediff Interview/Luhit Deuri, former ULFA militant", www.rediff.com/news/2001/jan/22inter.htm.

carried overland, via Bandarban, Parva, the eastern border of Mizoram, along the Tiddim road into Churachandpur district, then over the hills to Tamenglong and then into the Paren sub-division of Nagaland. All the major insurgent groups linked with the NSCN got their weapons through this channel. In January 1996, the drug lord, Khun Sa surrendered to the Myanmar government.¹² This led to the release of more arms to the clandestine arms market. Groups like the UNLF, the KCP and the different Kuki militant outfits discovered that they could procure arms from across the border from Chandel district.

Areambam Samrendra Singh founded the other main valley group, the UNLF, on November 24, 1964, initially as a social organization. It was the culmination of several movements like the Pan-Mongoloid Movement and the Revolutionary Nationalist Party, which raised the banner of independence in 1953. The UNLF took to arms only in the late nineteen eighties. The self-styled chief of this group, Rajkumar Meghen alias Sana Yaima, has royal lineage and was linked to the NSCN. It is reported that Meghen was aware of Khaplang's plans to attack Muivah and Isak Swu and their followers in northern Myanmar, but did not alert Muivah, as a result of which many of his followers were killed and Muivah himself barely escaped with his life. Since then the NSCN-IM severed all links with the UNLF. Rajkumar Meghen continues his close links with the NSCN-K.

By the nineteen nineties, some of the PLA cadres left the group, came overground and joined politics, and after the elections to the State Legislative Assembly in the year 2000, even became ministers. Today, the PLA and the UNLF maintain that they do not believe in elections conducted by India. The smaller groups, particularly the myriad Kuki outfits, each supported candidates of different parties who hired them. This included all the main national parties, except the Communist parties. They

¹² See "Failing Rebel", <http://www.asiaweek.com/asiaweek/96/0816/newsmap/myanmar.html>. Also see "Armed Conflicts Reports 2001", www.ploughshares.ca/content/ACR/ACR00/ACR00-Burma.html

openly used arms to rig the State-level elections both in 2000 and 2002.¹³

The FGN was the first to introduce extortion to Manipur. The NSCN-IM took over where the FGN left off and systematised it into an annual 'house tax' and 'ration tax'.¹⁴ Additionally, they taxed all buses and trucks and contractors. At times, their subordinate formations muscled in on development funds, applying coercive tactics to intimidate Deputy Commissioners. The UNLF and PLA initially sought donations for their social activities, but these were gradually transformed into extortion demands. The primary target was, of course, the unholy trio of the politician, the bureaucrat and the businessman. Later, they spread to the salaried government servant. By the nineteen nineties, the entire system had become institutionalized. Cashiers of different government departments were directed to deduct certain percentages according to the rank of the official, and pay the amount to the underground organization. Traders and businessmen were, similarly and regularly 'taxed'. Tankers carrying petrol, diesel and kerosene oil were diverted from the big authorized dealers and sold in the black market by all the major underground groups. These groups also diverted rice from the Public Distribution System (PDS) from all the dealers, with a part taken for supplying the underground camps. Rice, kerosene, petrol and diesel were also sold in the black market. Against the quota of five litres per family per month of kerosene oil, most people were getting only one or two litres in Imphal, while in the interior towns and villages, there was no penetration of the PDS

¹³ See "Democracy at gunpoint", *Frontline*, Chennai, vol. 19, no. 6, March 16-29, 2002.

¹⁴ Speaking to media at Dimapur, Nagaland in July 2001, a senior NSCN-IM leader and convenor of the cease-fire monitoring cell, Phunting Shimrang said, "We collect nominal taxes from individuals as well as business establishments based in Naga-inhabited areas as a contribution towards the Naga cause." According to Shimrang, while the armed wing of the GPRN, the Naga army, collects Rs 100 per individual per annum as 'ration tax', the GPRN itself levies 24 percent of an individual's annual income as royalty tax and Rs 10 as house tax. See "NSCN (I-M) likely to go on a fresh offensive", <http://home.nvcap.nr.com/nagaland/nnews47.html>. Also see "Dy. Chief Minister admits tax collection by Naga insurgents", <http://www.nenanews.com/OT%20Jan%207-20Jan%2021.%2000/oh15.htm>.

supply at all. In the interiors of Chandel and Churachandpur districts, the PLA and UNLF sold rice and kerosene at absurdly low rates to the villagers near their camps to secure a 'Robin Hood image'. In Imphal, both the PLA and UNLF had well oiled 'finance wings' working. Their records were computerized and they had up-to-date information of the receipt of development grants in the different government departments. They had full knowledge of the bank accounts of all government officers, doctors and engineers. Extortion demands were served accordingly. While there were standard deductions from all the government servants, doctors who also had good earnings from private practice got proportionate extortion demand notes. Officers dealing with development grants were forced to divert substantial sums to all the underground groups. Worse still, Chief Engineers were forced to award contracts to cadres of the main insurgent groups at gunpoint. The members of the 'Finance wing' of the different groups had free access to all government offices. Very often, senior officials were summoned to chosen rendezvous on the outskirts of Imphal where they were forced at gunpoint to do the biddings of the groups. During the reign of the People's Front government of 2000, the nexus between the PLA and the UNLF with the politicians reached its peak.

All this could come about because of the trend set by politicians in siphoning out money in collusion with spineless bureaucrats. Money was collected from government servants for enhancing the pay scales. Large-scale diversion of development funds took place at the level of politicians and bureaucrats. It was only then that the insurgent groups intervened and started taking a major share in these deals. Most of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Manipur are run by politicians in the names of their hangers-on. Grants obtained by them from the Union government for schemes like housing for the rural poor, watershed projects, etc. were largely siphoned off by these politicians. Only a trickle of approximately five per cent reached the people. Against this background, the development of this extensive extortion network is not a surprising development.

Of the five major valley underground groups, the UNLF is the one whose ideology is by and large intact. The PLA is better organized but there are narratives of PLA cadres constructing

large houses in Imphal. However, the senior leadership is well educated and has a good organizational control. The lower level cadres are primarily dropouts from schools and colleges. The poor quality of education and the lack of jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities produce a pool of youth readymade for the insurgent groups. Of the five groups, the KCP and Kanglei Yawol Kunna Lup (KYKL)¹⁵ exist mainly for extortion. The PLA, UNLF and PREPAK have a loose collaboration and have worked out space allotments in the hinterland and operational areas. The KYKL, formed by N. Oken, established links with the NSCN-IM, the first and only penetration of the valley underground by an outside group. KYKL has a junior but extensive role in the extortion net in the valley and operates along with the NSCN-IM cadres giving a share to them. The KYKL had split into two factions in 1994¹⁶ due to differences between Oken and Achou Toijamba, who linked up with the NSCN-K. Recently in year 2002, the two factions have patched up. Presumably, the NSCN-IM has won another round with Toijamba's link with NSCN-K severed.

Till the nineteen nineties, the valley groups had operated only in the valley. They did use the secluded hills and jungles of Chandel district as their hinterland and had base camps and training areas there. This changed when the Kuki National Organization (KNO) and the Kuki National Army (KNA) were set up in 1992-93 in Tamu across the border town of Moreh. The Nagas and Kukis were ancient enemies. The Kukis were the most enterprising of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo group and had not restricted themselves to Churachandpur district where they had presumably first migrated. In their wanderings, they occupied areas in Naga country in Ukhrul, Tamenglong and Senapati districts and even occupied areas in the Naga hills and North Cachar Hills districts of Assam. The Kukis were used as a buffer against the Nagas

¹⁵ A Meitei underground group called the Kanglei Yawol Kunna Lup (KYKL), meaning "the Organisation to save the revolutionary movement in Manipur" was formed in January 1994 after the merger of the Oken faction of the UNLF, the Meiraba faction of the PREPAK and Ibo Pishak faction of the KCP. For profile of the KYKL, see South Asia Terrorism Portal; Countries; India; States; Manipur; Terrorist Outfits; KYKL; www.satp.org.

¹⁶ "Insurgent on parole", <http://www.northeastvigil.com/newsarch/01121999i.htm>.

both by the Meitei kings and the British. The KNO and the KNA were raised probably taking a leaf from history to again act as a buffer against the Nagas, now in the shape of the NSCN-IM. Chandel district has a number of smaller tribes – Maring, Anal, Chothe, Kom, whom the Kukis claimed to be part of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo group, but with the rise of the FGN and later the NSCN, these tribes claimed that they were part of the Naga group. Irrespective of their origin, these small Naga tribes were numerically more than the Kukis in Chandel district. This district is roughly bisected into two by the Pallel-Moreh road. The eastern part adjoining Ukhrul is majority Naga. The area around Moreh is however dominated by the Kukis. And Moreh is a smuggler's town with enormous profits to whoever controlled it. The NSCN-IM had for long been eyeing it. The bait given to the Kukis in raising the KNO and the KNA was control of the rich spoils of smuggling through Moreh. Fierce clashes occurred between the KNA and the NSCN-IM as they attacked each other's camps. Soon, they were attacking each other's villages and both Naga and Kuki villages went up in flames. The NSCN-IM were better trained, equipped and much more experienced. With years of fighting the Indian army, they were better motivated. There ensued an ethnic cleansing of the Kukis in Ukhrul, Tamenglong and Senapati districts. The Kukis, realizing that they could not fight the battle on their own, sought assistance from all their brother sub-tribes in the Churachandpur district. Some of the sub-tribes responded positively but the Paites, one of the larger and more prosperous of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo group refused to help and berated the Kukis for sticking their neck out unnecessarily. This angered the Kukis and they attacked the Paites in a fratricidal war. The Kuki-Paite clashes were bitterly fought and several Kuki and Paite villages were burnt.¹⁷ The Paites were not well armed and naturally took a beating. They lived generally along the southern areas of Churachandpur district and many fled across the border into Myanmar where they ran into the NSCN-IM, who sympathized with them and soon developed an axis with them. They gave them arms, equipped and trained them. A new

¹⁷ See "15 Killed, 60 houses burnt in Paite attack", *The Indian Express*, New Delhi, February 24, 1998; "Thirty-Two Killed, Churches Torched in Ethnic Clashes", www.ucanews.com/~ucasian/our/ie9575.htm.

underground group primarily for the defence of the Paites was formed – the Zomi Reunification Army (ZRA). The Zhou, a sister group was dragged in by the Paites as a reluctant partner. For the NSCN-IM, it was a major breakthrough – they had penetrated the Kuki-Chin-Mizo group.

The PLA and the UNLF never had any bases in Churachandpur district. They had for long been eyeing the sparsely inhabited vast tract of hills and jungle from Churachandpur to Senvon, Tipaimukh, in the south, the Thangjing hills to the east, and the Tipaimukh-Jiribam road to the west and NH 53 to the north. This was a vast rectangle of hills and forests with only tracks connecting the isolated lonely villages. NH 150 constructed by the BRO had been virtually abandoned. This was classical guerilla country. The PLA and the UNLF with admirable foresight, taking advantage of the ethnic clashes between the Nagas and the Kukis, extended help to the Kukis in rehabilitating hundreds of Kuki families rendered homeless, providing money, food and building materials. The Kuki chiefs were grateful and could not refuse the PLA and the UNLF when they asked for permission to purchase land. Hundreds of acres of land were purchased by both these valley groups in Churachandpur district. They had now secured a foothold in the Kuki-Chin-Mizo area. Recruitment to the main valley groups was opened up to the Kukis and related sub tribes. Some axis between the groups also developed, such as the links between the PREPAK and the Hmar Peoples Convention Democratic (HPCD), a Mizoram underground group.

The worst fallout was the leadership squabbles, which soon followed in the KNO and the KNA. Out of the KNA emerged the Kuki National Front (KNF)¹⁸, which later split into the KNF–Military Council and the KNF–Presidential. The latter again split into two further factions. Although these myriad Kuki militant groups were ostensibly for the protection of their community, they were, in reality, only extorting money from the people in the form of ‘donations’ from traders and contractors and even from government departments. They had soon aligned themselves with

¹⁸ Kuki National Front was formed under the leadership of Rancho Thangboi Kuki on May 18, 1988. See South Asia Terrorism Portal; Countries; India; States; Manipur; Terrorist Outfits; KNF; www.satp.org

different politicians of national parties. In the elections of year 2000, the different groups were hired by politicians of all hues, both State and national. The groups freely used their guns to intimidate voters and the elections were completely rigged. This was the case again in the elections of 2002, with the different groups firing at each other on polling days with abandon on behalf of their candidates. It is even reported that the leaders of some of these groups stay in the houses of senior politicians of the State in New Delhi. The KNO, when first formed, talked of Zalongam, a homeland for the Kukis. However, this idea has long been abandoned. The myriad Kuki groups now have only one objective – extortion and hiring themselves to the highest bidder.

In the year 2000 elections, two Kuki lower level leaders, unhappy at not being given tickets for the State Legislative Assembly elections, had each left with some followers and linked with the NSCN-IM who armed and trained them. These constituted the United Kuki Liberation Front (UKLF), who now operate on the Churachandpur, Chandel axis and the Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA), who operate in the Saikul valley. Earlier, still another group had broken off from the KNO, the Kuki Liberation Organisation and the Kuki Liberation Army.

This is the unhappy state of affairs in Manipur. Can something be done to restore normalcy? A very determined effort will be required to stabilize the politics and administration of the State. The effort has to be a civil-military coordinated manoeuvre. The Union government has always had a standard reaction to any insurgent situation – send a couple of battalions of central para military forces (CPMF) or if there is a critical scenario, send in the army. Not in any insurgent situation have we analysed the causes of why an insurgent situation has developed, of why a group of people have taken to arms and is fighting the state. In the State of Bihar, when the Ranbir Sena, a private army of landlords, had massacred 35 Dalit (scheduled castes) sympathizers of the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC),¹⁹ on June 16, 2000,²⁰ a series

¹⁹ The MCC, a Left-wing Extremist group came into existence, in its earlier version, on October 20, 1969, as *Dakshin Desh*. When the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) was formed with the merger of several Maoist groups in 1969, one left-wing extremist group, *Dakshin Desh*, did not join and decided to retain its independent identity. In 1975, the outfit was

of meetings were held in the Home Ministry and several battalions of CPMF were sent to Bihar. After some time, when the situation was reviewed, it was found that the forces sent were deployed to hunt for the MCC and not for the Ranbir Sena. No one talked of the unlawful and unequal distribution of land and the denial of land to peasants because of their caste.

In any insurgent situation, the causes must be first dispassionately analysed. This must be left to professional economists, sociologists, judges, professional police officers and professional administrators. The emphasis on the prefix 'professional' qualifying 'police officers' and 'administrators' should be specially noted. In the last 30 years, the concept of 'committed bureaucracy' has become deep rooted. It is of no use to leave the judgement of an insurgent situation to a police officer or administrator who is aligned to any political party and has earned his promotions by patronage.

Once this has been accomplished, a blue print for counter-insurgency should be drawn up. The effort has to be a combined civil and military effort with the civil at the forefront. This has to be clearly emphasized. There should be no question of the armed forces ever having the leadership in an insurgent situation. Heavy deployment of army or paramilitary forces is bound to cause excesses. This is unavoidable. And when this happens, without redressing the conditions of the population, which has in the first place led to the resort to arms by a section of the population, they are bound to get further alienated. It is imperative therefore that the civil effort should be at the forefront and supported by the military effort.

The first step in the kind of situation we are faced with in Manipur, where there is an undercurrent of secession, rampant corruption led by the politicians and tamely abetted by the bureaucrats, and a complete failure by the state to protect the few upright government servants, is to list out the local civil, judicial and police officers and identify the few who have not been tainted

renamed as the Maoist Communist Centre. Currently, the MCC has a presence in the States of Bihar and Jharkhand. See South Asia Terrorism Portal; Countries; India; Terrorist Outfits; MCC; www.satp.org.

²⁰ "Striking at the roots", *The Week*, Cochi, July 2, 2000.

by chauvinism and corruption and who, if protected, are likely to stand up against intimidation. The second step is to post these officials in all crucial posts. The first preference should be for local officers. Where reliable local officers are not available, specially selected outside officers should be brought in and posted. The third step is to ensure that reliable judicial officers are posted. This is a sphere, which is invariably neglected, after the 1973 amendment of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), separating prosecution from investigation. The police now forget the case after the chargesheet is filed. It is necessary that every hearing be followed to ensure that the underground is not taking advantage of the police failure to follow the course of the case, to get their cadres released. The judicial officers posted should be equally strict to the prosecution and to the defence, in fact more so to the prosecution. In every insurgency, the underground always uses the judiciary, primarily because it is always local, except for the Chief Justice. Also, the judiciary does not get the kind of protection – the guards and escorts – that the executive gets. There is no reason why the Judges from the Sessions up to the High court cannot be from outside. Their security should be more stringent than that of the field officers. The Jammu and Kashmir judge, who sentenced Maqbool Butt to death, was not protected, and he was killed later.²¹ After this, no judge would have dared to sentence any insurgent to imprisonment, let alone death.

Special attention should also be paid towards strengthening the police. The Manipur Rifles was a very fine force but has degenerated because of very poor officering and lack of finance, resulting in a situation where the riflemen are forced to buy their own uniforms. Pay is never regular and as a result, the men have to borrow from the unit *bania* canteen. A soldier who lives like this loses his self respect and cannot be expected to fight. The first step to be taken is to see that the ration of the riflemen is

²¹ In Jammu and Kashmir, one of the first terrorist acts was the killing of District and Sessions Judge Neel Kanth Ganjoo on November 4, 1989. Ganjoo had sentenced Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) chief Maqbool Butt to death for killing an Indian diplomat in London. See “Homeless in their homeland”, www.rediff.com/news/1999/dec/14blood.htm.

equated to that of the CPMF and to ensure that he is paid on time, equipped well and trained rigorously. The command of the battalions should be given to officers of the CPMF. The civil police must also immediately be reorganized and strengthened. Some of the districts have only about 200 personnel with no reserve lines and miserable barracks, which have not been repaired for years. All sub-inspectors and above should be put through in-service courses in investigation, interrogation and intelligence tradecraft.

There are pitfalls into which the police can easily fall when involved in counter-insurgency operations. Fortunately, we have examples at close hand. In Punjab, we saw the police picking up innocent boys saying that they were terrorists and releasing them after taking money. This happened in Jammu and Kashmir too. In Assam, Hiteswar Saikia, the then Chief Minister, created a mafia after securing the surrender of known ULFA criminals, who had murder cases pending against them, and forming them into mafia gangs, extorting money from coal transporters. The surrendered ULFA (SULFA) boys were allowed to keep their weapons and operate as gangs under unofficial patronage.²² In all these cases, the victims were the very people who were to be won over to the government side and who were to be weaned away from the insurgents. The end result was an indignant populace, who were further alienated and a police force who had become terrorists themselves.

In Manipur, civil policemen and officers were selected and trained as commandos. Although they did a very good job initially, they soon deteriorated into a state terrorist force due to faulty leadership. They started extorting money from the business community, picking a leaf out of the insurgent's book. What were the consequences for the hapless public? Here were five to six underground groups extorting money from the traders and here was a special wing of the police force, set up to arrest the underground, who also demanded their share of the extortion pool. To whom could the people now turn? These are lessons before us and

²² For a detailed analysis on SULFA, see Ajai Sahni and Bibhu Prasad Routray, "SULFA: Terror By Another Name", *Faultlines: Writings on Conflict and Resolution*, New Delhi, vol. 9, pp. 1-38.

that is why it is imperative that, in all such situations, the leadership of the police force should be very carefully chosen.

The same rules apply to the civil administration. We have seen the way politicians and bureaucrats siphoned away development funds, diverted essential commodities to the black market and built roads on paper. It is very necessary to screen all the civil servants in such a situation and list out the personnel who are honest and not tainted with underground sympathies. One of the most important steps to be undertaken is to ensure that all essential commodities of the PDS are made available to the public in the remotest villages at correct prices. This is not too difficult a task as was demonstrated by an experiment undertaken during the recent phase of President's rule in the State. When President's rule was declared in June 2001, kerosene oil was being sold at Rs. 25 to Rs. 30 in Imphal and consumers were getting merely one or two litres per month. The condition was much worse in the districts and in remote villages where the PDS was defunct. Of the approximately 100 tankers of petrol, diesel and kerosene oil coming to Imphal weekly, approximately 30 tankers of kerosene oil would not even report at the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) depot, but would drive to the dealers, who would divert most of the supply to the black market. The huge storage reservoirs of the IOC depot were empty for many months. The main valley underground groups, of course, had their share in this diversion. The PLA, UNLF, PREPAK and others regularly took two to three tankers of kerosene oil and sold them in the black market. The traders did the rest of the black marketing. However, when the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) was deployed in the IOC depot and movement of unauthorized personnel strictly restricted, the members of the 'finance wing' of the underground groups found that they had no access to the depot. All tankers coming from Dimapur were stopped at Mao on the Manipur border, the challans (receipts) taken from them and escorted to Imphal by the Manipur Rifles. In Imphal, they were parked in the Manipur Rifles campus for the night and escorted to the depot in groups. There, storage tanks were filled for the first time in several months. From the depot, the Manipur Rifles escorted kerosene oil tankers to the district dealers. In Imphal, 50 per cent of the dealer's quota was directed to be sold in mobile sale directly by

the dealer to the public on ration cards – ten liters per family, at Rs. 8 per litre. This was supervised. Long queues of women and children were a familiar sight and consequently, people secured kerosene oil at the correct price. There were some attempts by the underground to disrupt the sale. However, no one had the courage to buck the public when the government was doing a correct job. Within a month, the black market price of kerosene oil had come down to Rs. 11 to Rs.12 per litre in the city. It was reliably learnt that one or two underground groups diverted two to three tankers of kerosene oil from some of the dealers, but sheepishly returned them, as they could not find any buyers. In the districts where the Deputy Commissioners were honest, they were able to get kerosene oil to the interior villages by escorting the tankers or by carrying the kerosene oil in drums. Very effectively, both the traders and the underground were defeated. Not giving up the fight, one of the underground groups served a notice on the IOC depot to pay Rs. 10 lakhs to them .The staff sensibly reported this to the police. The staff quarters were adjacent to the storage depot and was guarded by the CRPF and several telephone calls were made to the IOC manager. He was told not to respond to the calls and to confine himself to his quarters after work. The CRPF was directed to enhance their vigil and always escort the manager and his staff. The IOC management was contacted and requested to post personnel for two months at a time to the depot at Imphal. They cooperated. There was one attempt to abduct the manager when he crossed from one depot to the other, but two CRPF guards who were alert escorted him and the group gave up the attempt even before they could get started. After several more futile calls, the group gave up the attempt. Constant monitoring and visits by senior officers thwarted the attempt of the underground in this case.

It is very necessary to ensure that all civil police and judicial officers are guarded both at office and in their residences. For this the Union Home Ministry must set apart two to three battalions of the CRPF and direct the State police to see that they guard the offices, residences and escort all these officials. In the case of engineers, forest officers and officers of development departments, all of them should be escorted to their work sites. The counter-insurgency grid must, therefore, visualize a sizeable

force. The main area for extortions is, of course, Imphal. Extensive coverage of the city is absolutely necessary. Continual cordon and search operations are also unavoidable. It must be ensured that all such operations are done in the presence of magistrates. While all this is done, it should be ensured that the civil administration has been cleaned up and the public is getting essential commodities at correct prices and does not have to pay to get recruited or promoted. If the people feel that the government is responsible they will tolerate the inconvenience and indignity of cordon and searches. But, if it is the same corrupt government, then they will only be further alienated. One way to ensure positive results is to see that officers at the highest levels are accessible to the public.

One sphere in which the State has done well is that of agriculture. Currently the valley, with approximately 20 per cent double cropping, produces enough rice to feed 80 per cent of the population of the whole State. This can easily be improved by concentrating on minor irrigation schemes, and with double cropping brought upto 80 per cent. Within two to three years, Manipur can be made a surplus State in rice. In the hills, there is tremendous scope for horticulture, piggery, fisheries, poultry farming and dairy farming. It will also be necessary to take up conversion of slash and burn agriculture to terrace farming. A number of roads will have to be constructed to link the interiors with market towns. The beautiful Khoupum valley produces excellent oranges, which are wasted as the road to Bishnupur has been abandoned. The construction of roads into the interior should be co-ordinated with the setting up of the counter-insurgency grid in the hills.

The main concentration of deployment in the hills should be in the districts of Chandel and Churachandpur, the hinterland of the main valley groups. A careful study will show that most of the tracks in the hills are along the ridgelines or along the river valleys. It is imperative, therefore, to deploy along all the ridgelines in these two districts. Extensive use of helicopters for logistics is unavoidable. Once this is done, the groups will have no choice but to slip into Myanmar. Once this happens and the ridgelines and valleys in these two districts are held, it will be necessary to deploy the Border Security Force (BSF) on the

Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram international border with Myanmar. Although this is an expensive proposition, it is imperative that such measures are undertaken.

In the hills, the counter-insurgency operations must first concentrate on the rebel Kuki groups, like the United Kuki Liberation Front (UKLF), the KRA and the Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA) who have links with the NSCN-IM. There is always the tendency to use one group against the other. This has been done in Jammu and Kashmir, in Assam using the SULFA against the ULFA, and in Manipur using groups like the ZRA against the PLA. Such a strategy should never be resorted to. It is not only immoral and unethical but also counter-productive to arm any group or allow it to keep arms. There should be no question of any one having unlicensed arms. The aim of the counter-insurgency operations should be to see that not a single unlicensed arm remains with any one. There should be no question of any group feeling insecure, and consequently buying arms for their security. The NSCN-IM should not be allowed to keep any arms in Manipur and such a measure should be strictly enforced. This group has been pampered beyond measure.

After the smaller groups are de-fanged, the major valley groups should be taken on. In the hills, particularly in Chandel and Churachandpur, the ridgelines should be occupied and the main camps taken on in the river valleys. While these operations are being conducted, the valley areas should be carefully cordoned so that the groups do not filter back. This will force the groups to go to Myanmar and then to Bangladesh. The deployment of BSF on the borders should now be taken up. Simultaneously, the BRO should take up extensive construction of roads on the borders. As and when the interior areas are cleared, the civil effort should follow on the heels of the armed forces. The armed forces deployment should continue till the roads are constructed, water supply schemes implemented, electricity conductors and substations set up, health centers opened, horticultural and other schemes taken up. While this is being done, the government should gradually privatize. There are many spheres where the government should disengage, like in the spheres of collection of power tariff, irrigation, cess, etc. Government can also disengage in the field of education and

health care. This should be given increasingly to the missionary institutions.

During the counter-insurgency operations, magistrates and police should be associated with all cordon and search operations. Suspects picked up by the armed forces should be handed over to joint interrogation centers immediately. All cadres from whom weapons are recovered should be detained under the National Security Act (NSA) and their trials under the Arms Act or other special acts should be closely monitored. Special courts should be set up for such purposes. Whenever interim stay orders are granted, the higher courts must be appealed to and the stays vacated. Special day-to-day hearings should be carried out in all-important cases.

It must be borne in mind that India's powerful neighbour China is not far from Manipur and the North East. All the major insurgent groups in the North East have at one time or the other met the Chinese government and secured arms from them. Currently, the Myanmarese government has become heavily dependent on them. The Myanmar army is equipped with Chinese arms. It is reliably learnt that arms from the Chinese ordnance factories are trickling into the clandestine arms market in Myanmar. Recently, the Myanmar special unit NA-SA-KA (Border Control Unit), is reported to have arrested 36 cadres of the valley insurgents from Kalemryo and seized 1600 weapons from them.²³ It is learnt that the cadres were released after payment of heavy fines. The Myanmar army retained the weapons. All the weapons were reported to be of Chinese origin. The question is, were the weapons released to the arms market by accident or by design?

One must clearly understand that Manipur is geographically, ethnically and linguistically South East Asian. We have neglected this beautiful land and beautiful people too long. Instead of nurturing this frontier State we have allowed its politics and administration to degenerate. Despite all this, the people are remarkably patient. When one visits remote villages with an inaccessible dirt road, no water supply, no electricity, no primary

²³ See "Indian army team discusses militants' arrest with Burmese officers", <http://rebound88.tripod.com/01/nov/24.html#story7>.

health center and a dilapidated primary or middle school without any teachers, one is astonished by the warmth of the welcome given by the people for just visiting their village. One feels ashamed. The State is so small and population so limited, it is not difficult to usher in progress. All that one requires is the will.