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**MARGINAL ON THE MAP:**  
**HIDDEN WARS AND HIDDEN MEDIA IN**  
**NORTHEAST INDIA**

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## Chapter 1:

### REPORTING NORTHEAST

On a February night in 1961, British journalist Gavin Young arrived in the Naga hills in the north-east of India. Young, a reporter with *The Observer*, was interested in the largely unreported war between the Indian state and the Naga rebels. Flanked by Naga soldiers for 18 days, Young would trek along the switchback jungles of Nagaland, meet several people from the underground and finally emerge with some answers to what still is one of Asia's oldest unresolved conflicts. It was the first proper example of reportage on the Indo-Naga War in the world media and broke what was a wall of silence on the conflict. <sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Gavin Young's report *The Nagas: An Unknown War* is available on the internet: <http://www.nagajournal.tk/publ/others/achan/8-1-0-6>

From 1955 to 1960 the press had been blacked out in the Naga hills. So while people knew a war was on, very few knew just what was happening, who was fighting whom, and where or why. What we did know was that India was struggling to hold on to her image of being a democracy. A raging conflict with the separatist Naga National Council (NNC) did not fit in with this image. The State found this resistance difficult to accept. It did all within its powers to suppress it from the rest of the world.

The Naga hills has at least sixteen tribes bordering India's Northeast and Burma. A plebiscite organised by the NNC had led to the conclusion that the Nagas wanted independence from India. When talks, veiled threats and various promises all proved futile in the face of this insurrection, the Indian Army moved in to Nagaland in 1955. The war was well and truly on between the Indian State and the Nagas.

In December 1960, just a few months before Gavin Young's secret journey, the Indian government had been forced to facilitate a visit by a group of foreign journalists to western Nagaland. During the visit, a report in *The Times* of London noted that the Indian government had denied all reporters free access to travel and that the Naga rebels clandestinely passed on reports of the Indian Army's atrocities to journalists.<sup>2</sup> With limited mobility and access, it was impossible for these foreign journalists to verify the truth or report about the conflict in greater detail. What followed were negative reports in the Western media. *The Economist*, for example, wrote:

“The Indian authorities have persistently prevented foreign journalists from entering the areas where operations have been taking place, and if inquiry is denied to independent observers, the

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<sup>2</sup> For a full copy of the letter handed to the International Press see *My Journey In The Nagaland Freedom Movement* by BM Keyho (Pages 39-41)

Indian government should not be surprised if some people conclude that it has had something to conceal.”<sup>3</sup>

It was against this background that Young managed to first smuggle himself from Burma into Indian territory and then into the heart of the Naga hills. Obviously, he had help from the NNC. The NNC’s leader Phizo had escaped to East Pakistan and managed to set up an office in Vauxhall in south London with the help of the British missionary Michael Scott. The Nagas were aware the spread of information and overall media publicity ought to be key elements in their campaign. And so it was that Phizo arranged for Young to visit the hills.

Young finds similarities between the struggle in Algeria, the position of the Algerian Liberation Front and the Naga movement. Full of praise for the disciplined Naga, he mentions how each day the Naga officers would carefully scan, summarise and distribute news for the council members from the BBC, Voice of America, All-India Radio (the Indian government broadcaster, now an ostensibly autonomous body), Moscow, Beijing and Pakistan.

Fifty years after Gavin Young’s report, India’s Northeast still remains trapped behind a veil of selective silence for the rest of the country and the outside world. The engagement of the mainstream Indian private media—both print and broadcast—with the Northeast remains marginal. This fact becomes even starker when compared to the extensive coverage that events, even conflicts in the rest of the country (or ‘mainland’ India) receive. The result of this disengagement is that voices from the Northeast find very little space in newspapers and even less air-time in privately owned television news channels that are printed or aired out of metropolitan centres such as New Delhi, Bombay, Bangalore, Chennai or Calcutta.

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<sup>3</sup> *Economist*, Notes Of The Week. Delhi Surrenders. August 6, 1960

And often, the coverage of the Northeast remains trapped in stereotypes. With its conflicts, its tribes and its underdevelopment, this is India's area of darkness, an area of little interest to the media and to those responsible for governance and more generally in the greater cultural space of the country. In metropolitan India, the dominant image of the Northeast still remains that of a wild frontier. For most Indians, and, in effect most of the Indian media, this characterisation is not even regarded as insensitive.

This profiling comes out in various ways. Jonathan Glancey of *The Guardian* mentions a report on New Delhi Television (NDTV) in his Northeast travelogue, *Nagaland: A Journey To India's Forgotten Frontier* (which too is guilty of making the area appear attractively exotic), where someone suggests that the thriving monkey population in Delhi should be sent to Nagaland because "the locals will have no problem dealing with monkeys; they will eat them".

In fact, while Gavin Young was travelling in the Naga hills in 1961, the Naga Army had shot down an Indian Air Force Dakota plane and captured the pilots. Young's interview with a pilot brings into focus an old stereotype about the Northeast that many Indians continue to subscribe to. Young's report also junks various baseless claims about the Nagas, and particularly their alleged savagery and cannibalism.

[The Indian pilot Mishra's] impression was that the rebels were a handful of guerrillas or dacoits, though I knew that some of them at least were Christians. But I found this difficult to reconcile with my belief (and that of the rest of my crew) *that Nagas were head-hunters and even cannibals.*

Naga officers (who are practicing Baptists) shouted with laughter as Mishra added: '*when we climbed out of the aircraft we didn't know how we would be received. I believed we might be eaten*'. In fact, the Indians are getting on well with their captors. They have suffered no ill treatment. (emphasis added)

The Indian bureaucracy's narrow characterisation of Northeast India furthers the segregation. "*Security Tips for Northeast Students*" is a booklet written in 2008 by an Indian Police Service (IPS) official for students from the Northeast who come to study in New Delhi. In it, racial profiling was the underlying theme. It had instructions for women from the Northeast to avoid wearing revealing clothes and dress according to the sensitivity of the local population. "Avoid lonely road/bylanes when dressed scantily", it counselled, clearly implying that women from the Northeast display too much skin. It also objected to Northeastern food habits, especially the cooking of akhuni and bamboo shoots, saying "smelly dishes should be prepared without creating ruckus in neighbourhood". Ironically, the booklet was written by an IPS officer from the Northeast who considered these exhortations to be in the interest of "emotional and patriotic integration".<sup>4</sup>

Young's largely incisive report still stands out in contrast to all this profiling. However, since 1961 when it was written, stereotypes and myths have crawled back into media representations about Nagaland and the rest of India's Northeast. In August 2009, *NDTV* aired a programme called *Warrior Tribes of Nagaland*. "The longer I travelled, civilisation as I knew it, was being left behind", says the programme anchor as she crosses a modern-day bridge in a four-wheel driven luxury car and enters Nagaland. Her statement seems a carryover from British times. Read alongside the *Assam District Gazeteer's Report Volume-IX, Naga Hills and Manipur* (1905) prepared by BC Allen of the colonial government, it displays an uncanny similarity in content, and possibly, in their authors' mindset. Allen writes that the British thought places existed in Nagaland which were inhabited by "pertinacious savages". Allen's comment in 1905 simply demonstrates a long standing colonial belief that had resulted in ten military expeditions into the region by 1850. Each expedition resulted in the slaughter of locals and the tenth expedition alone claimed one

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<sup>4</sup> There is a full report on the booklet in *The Telegraph*, July 10, 2007: *Delhi profiles to protect: Police Booklet for Northeast students betrays prejudices*.

hundred Naga lives. An 1873 missive from Lord Dalhousie, the British Governor General, makes explicit the British attitudes towards the people of the British India's Northeast:

Hereafter we should confine ourselves to our own ground; protect it as it can and must be protected; not meddle in the feuds or fights of these savages; encourage trade with them as long as they are peaceful towards us; and rigidly exclude them from all communication either to sell what they have got, or to buy what they want if they should become turbulent or troublesome.

The *NDTV* report articulates a similar attitude in 2011 to that of the British administrator in 1873. Thus, for the *NDTV* anchor, Nagaland remains India's savage frontier in the twenty first century. The Naga people retain their identity as members of tribes and stepping into Nagaland is "moving away from civilisation". Rather than explore why this part of the country is underdeveloped, or why the Indian State hasn't been attending to the region's problems, the anchor ends up representing Nagaland and the Naga people as exotic, thereby "othering" them.<sup>5</sup> The story largely remains the same when it comes to reports on the rest of Northeast India in the media: apathy, ignorance and a perverse disavowal of history.

This paper attempts to find out why the Indian media's engagement with the Northeast is so selective, and the content of its reports misinformed. Former President of the Editor's Guild of India, Rajdeep Sardesai, blames it on the "tyranny of distance". That claim however, does not take into account the logic of commercial television and veils the mainstream private media's disengagement with a convenient excuse. Private television news channels in India use a very limited sampling, a set of only 6,000 households, to arrive at viewership ratings, what programmes are being watched and at what time. These households are spread across all Indian states except the eight Northeastern states. Such exclusion only reinforces prejudices that 'India' shares about the region. Media businesses follow what the

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<sup>5</sup> In fact at one point the *NDTV* programme degenerates into a search for an old gentleman who is introduced as one who was a "head-hunter" of repute.

ratings dictate, apparently unbothered by the fact that an absence of reports from the Northeast skews the balance of editorial decision and perpetuates a long-standing bias.

To look into such biases and selective engagement with Northeast India, this paper has been divided into six chapters. The second chapter, **Invisible Region**, gives an overview of the social, political and historical background to the various conflicts. The third chapter **What Gets Reported**, looks into case studies where the media has underreported the conflict and possible reasons for it. Chapter four **Locked Local Media**, discusses the role of regional media and its limitations. Chapter five **Tyranny of Access and New Media**, looks into the role of community media and new media. It also talks about the various aspects of access and prejudice in the urban-based media. The Sixth and final chapter **The Way Forward** stresses collaborative journalism as a way forward to remove selective engagement with the region. It discusses in detail the complex issue of manufactured conflict and how the media must be careful and responsible in such a mess. It also suggests that media can be an accelerator for the development of the region.

## Chapter 2: INVISIBLE REGION

The eight Northeastern states share porous borders of at least 4,500 km with Burma, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and parts of China. Part of them are also quite close to Nepal. A slender 22 kilometre stretch in Siliguri—often called the Chicken’s Neck—connects this entire zone with the rest of India. Unfortunately, “the Northeast tends to be seen as a distant outpost, some kind of land’s end. Yet it was until recently, a crossroads and a bridge to Southeast and East Asia, with its great rivers ending in ocean terminals at Calcutta and Chittagong.”<sup>6</sup> Ironically, the location of this frontier zone and the porous nature of its borders have mostly been used for free movement by rebel units. In 2008, just a month before the 26/11 Mumbai Terror Attack, a calculated and well planned militant attack took place in Assam. Nine serial blasts killed 100 people on 30<sup>th</sup> October that year. It was carried out by rebel groups who used the porous borders with Bangladesh. Four years before the October attack in April 2004, the port of Chittagong in Bangladesh reported one of the biggest arms haul in South Asia. Estimated at \$4.5-5.7 million, the seizure included rocket launchers, rockets, over a million rounds of ammunition, grenade launchers, grenades and assorted assault weapons.<sup>7</sup>

Most of the neighbouring countries around Northeast India have allowed training camps to be set up by rebel groups from there. Even now, Burma and parts of China are still being used by rebels (photo 1). A severe crackdown by Bangladesh in 2010 led to the dismantling of terror camps. In terms of border management, India’s internal security mechanism is constantly engaged with the region. Most legislative and administrative policies for the Northeast are made with the security establishment’s concerns kept firmly in

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<sup>6</sup> Transforming the Northeast: Tackling backlogs in basic minimum services and infrastructural needs. High level commission report to Indian Prime Minister. March 7, 1997

<sup>7</sup> Jane’s Intelligence Review (August 2004) Anthony Davis.. See also the interview of Davis in Consignment from China in *Prothom Alo*, March 8, 2009, and Complicity of State Actors in Chittagong Arms Haul Case Revealed by Sreeradha Dutta, Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis Comment, March 9, 2009

mind. The primary lens through which the region is viewed is a military one. In many areas of the Northeast, the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 (AFSPA) has been imposed that gives the Army sweeping powers to arrest and shoot anyone on suspicion and not get prosecuted.



Photo 1: ULFA militant camp photograph possibly near China, supplied to the media by the group's publicity wing in 2011

In the last sixty years the Northeast has seen 117 rebel groups. Out of these at least 20 are active in operations. In the Home Ministry list of 35 rebel groups banned under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (1967) across India, 11 are from the Northeast. Out of these banned groups, 3 are from Assam, 6 in Manipur and 2 from Tripura. At present, the Indian government is simultaneously in talks with at least 15 rebel groups from the Northeast. Some talks go back as far as 1947. Some negotiations are as recent as November 2011. Yet, in all these years, not one round of talks has had a final resolution or put a permanent lid on conflict.<sup>8</sup> The demands of the rebel groups range from a complete breakaway from India to more regional autonomy.

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<sup>8</sup> For a comprehensive list of rebel outfits and their operations please see Appendix I, prepared by the author.

The root causes of these rebellions are diverse.<sup>9</sup> Mostly, the idea of resistance against alleged Indian domination and territorial claims gave birth to rebel groups in Nagaland and in Manipur. In Mizoram, a famine and utter neglect by India gave rise to the Mizo National Famine Front in 1966. In Assam, the United Liberation Front of Assam grew out of a resistance movement, the Assam Agitation, that demanded expulsion of illegal migrants from Bangladesh and corrective measures to stop economic exploitation.

In all these years of conflict, allegations of neglect and deaths due to the violence, the role of media has gone through various ups and down. From the extreme indifference of the mainstream media which makes this region invisible to the world, to the extreme bias of the regional media, which supports resistance movements, and to journalists being killed, the Northeast has witnessed various swings of the media's attention. In all these, one overriding sentiment remains that of neglect of the region by the mainstream media.

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<sup>9</sup> On the cause of insurgency in 2011, see an interview with Pradip Phanjoubam, editor of Imphal Free Press in The Times of India, Editorial Page, November 14, 2001. He brings up the point of political representation. "If Manipur had 12 Member of Parliaments instead of two, we would have been wooed. But as long as democracy remains a numbers game, minority voices will remain unheard. And when your democratic voice is not heard, you resort to undemocratic methods. That's the prime reason for the insurgency - it's a language that's heard", says Phanjoubam.

### **Chapter 3: WHAT GETS REPORTED**

#### **Kashmir Versus Northeast:**

There is a lot of anger towards the mainstream media bias against the Northeast. Figure 2 lays out the bias in the media coverage of two main conflict zones in India: the Northeast (with the specific example of Manipur) and Kashmir. The bar graph indicates the number of reports from the Northeast and Kashmir over three months in 2009. During that time, the media in Manipur alone reported 102 civilian casualties, 72 deaths of militants that included 37 ‘encounters’, and five deaths of soldiers belonging to the State forces. Over the same period in Kashmir, 18 civilians were killed (including the rape and murder victims in Shopian), seven militants were killed and four soldiers died.<sup>10</sup> A closer look at the numbers reveal that in the last five years (2005- January 2011), a larger number of civilians have been killed and families affected in the Northeast (1,772) when compared to Kashmir (1,139). But the media’s apathy towards the Northeast of India remains unchanged. Why? Policymakers would ascribe the bias towards Kashmir to the greater importance of international boundaries with Pakistan and China vis-à-vis Burma or Bangladesh. Yes, there is a measure of truth in that. But the fact is that Kashmir is also an international media hotspot, and an integral part of the Indian national consciousness. The Northeast is neither. This indifference that influences Government attitudes as well as the media is unstated and remains an accepted framework of reference towards the region.

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<sup>10</sup> Data sourced from *The Hindu*, “Media Matters: Skewed Coverage” by Sevanti Ninan, August 31, 2009

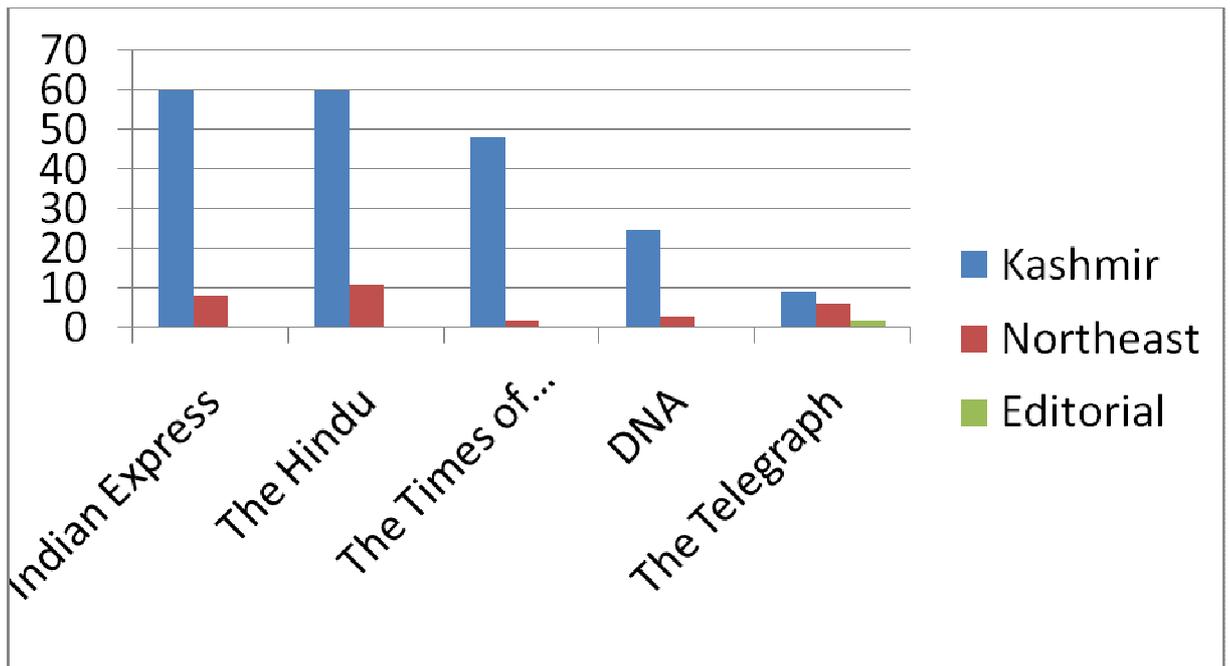


Figure 2: Biased Coverage: Frequency of reports from Kashmir and Northeast; Source as in note 10.

In a 2009 interview, historian Lokendra Arambam, a former President of the Apunba Lup (a conglomerate of 32 civil society organisations in the state of Manipur) told me that when it comes to its Northeastern states, “the government of India is interested in the land and not in the people”.<sup>11</sup> In 2006, just three years before Arambam’s remark, Henry V Jardine, US Consulate General, Calcutta, returned from Manipur, which borders Burma, and sent a confidential and detailed cable to Washington DC.<sup>12</sup>

In ConGen's many interactions, even with some government officials, *a reoccurring comment was that Manipur was less a state and more a colony of India.* The general use of the AFSPA meant

<sup>11</sup> In an interview with the author in 2009, Arambam criticised extra-judicial killings in Manipur and the policies of the Indian government.

<sup>12</sup> Released in 2011, by Wikileaks. Full transcript in *The Hindu*, March 21, 2011.

that the *Manipuris did not have the same rights of other Indian citizens and restrictions on travel to the state added to a sense of isolation and separation from the rest of India `proper.'* The overwhelming presence of military, paramilitary and police officers contributed to the impression that Imphal was under military occupation. Several Manipuris argued that they had greater rights under the British Raj than under the present federation. The Indian civil servants were also clearly frustrated with their inability to stem the growing violence and anarchy in the state, feeling their *efforts to effectively control the insurgencies was hamstrung by local politicians either in league with or at least through corruption, helping to finance the insurgents*". (Emphasis added)

“Violence to be managed within tolerable limits” is a key approach adopted by the Indian government when it comes to the region. So whatever happens here must cross a certain threshold if it is to get the attention of the powers-that-be. Elsewhere, there are other issues clamouring for their attention.<sup>13</sup> As a reporter, it has been my sad lot to observe that the routine briefing of deaths that I receive from the army every week does not qualify as news in the media, and often it does not even make the television ticker scroll. Evidently, government apathy finds an echo in the mainstream Indian media.

There are 117 local militias that challenge the idea of India as the ‘world’s largest democracy’. The language of interaction between these groups and the rest of India has been, and remains, warlike. Officially, the Indian government calls this resistance an internal disturbance that does not qualify as an armed rebellion and hence refuses to declare an emergency in the region.<sup>14</sup> As already mentioned, it has imposed the Armed Forces (Special

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<sup>13</sup> The standard approach of the Centre was explained in Manipur: The Way Forward, in a talk at the Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis by former Secretary, Internal Security, GK Pillai. September 2011, IDSA, Delhi. Also on treating the Northeast differently, see Union Minister for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Prof K V Thomas press release, September 29, 2011: ‘Since the problems faced by the North Eastern States are somewhat different from other states, I thought to have a separate meeting for NE States, as this Region is the corner-stone of Government of India’s Look East Policy,’ he said.

<sup>14</sup> For a look into the debate on an imposition of Emergency in areas where the AFSPA has been imposed see Indian Supreme Court order in Basu (2011) Routinization of the Extraordinary—A Mapping of Security Laws in India, Naga People’s Movement of Human Rights v Union of India 1998(2) SCC 109. “[t]he disturbance may not

Powers) Act 1958 (AFSPA) which curbs civil liberties and leads to deaths and human rights violations.<sup>15</sup>

### **The 68-day blockade**

In 2010, when Manipur was cut off from the rest of the country due to an economic blockade imposed by Naga student groups, the national media chose not to report the incident. The internal divide between Nagas living in the hill districts of Manipur and the valley-based Manipuris was of little interest to India or the world. Nor was India interested in the deaths of two students over the visit of Naga leader Muivah to Manipur. It took 68 days of the blockade for national television channels to start talking. In between there were a few reports both on television and in the print media but they were not enough to get anyone's attention. Television network *CNN-IBN* featured a prime time panel discussion called "Is Manipur part of India?" The moderator who is also the Editor-in-Chief of the channel, perhaps in an attempt to underline the fact that the channel is giving prime space to the Northeast, said: "When I was getting this discussion organised, my producer asked me 'why a panel on Manipur?'" Sadly, it only served to highlight the divide between a mainland India and the Northeast. So deep-rooted is this split that news reports from the region that find space in mainstream media almost appear like concessions or charity being doled out to the region and its people.

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be of such a magnitude as to pose a threat to the Security of the country or part thereof so as to call for invocation of the emergency powers under Article 352. If the disturbance caused by armed rebellion does not pose a threat to the security of the country and the situation can be handled by deployment of armed forces of the Union in the disturbed area, there appears to be no reason why the drastic power under Article 352 should be invoked."

<sup>15</sup> South Asia Terrorism Portal: Civilians killed (2005-January 2011) Northeast 1772, Kashmir:1139. The Special Army Act in question is the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958. AFSPA violates Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Sections 1, 2, 3, 5, 9 and 17. It also violates the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights among other laws. (For more details refer Times Of Assam report by Priyanka Goswami, August 23, 2011.)

## **Anna Hazare and Irom Sharmila**

This bias is stark, not merely a matter of deduction. An example: August 2011 saw a well-publicised anti-corruption drive by a group of Indian activists. This apparent crusade was led by a 74-year-old gentleman, Anna Hazare, from the western Indian state of Maharashtra. He wanted a bill to be introduced in Parliament to prevent corruption at every level. Hazare went on a hunger strike for 13 days in New Delhi. For these two weeks this hunger strike was televised 24x7. Not one moment went unrecorded. Hazare insisted that this was the second Indian struggle for freedom. His leadership was compared to that of Mahatma Gandhi's. *The Guardian*, *New York Times*, and the *BBC* all carried headlines about the hunger strike.

But far removed from this media circus is another protest---this one carried on in obscurity in a hospital bed in Manipur. Arrested on charges of suicide, 38-year-old Irom Sharmila has been fasting for the last 11 years. She wants the AFSPA imposed in her state to be revoked. The Indian state considers Sharmila's crusade against the corruption of democracy a crime. Sharmila has been under arrest for more than a decade. Every day, she is force-fed (by the government) a cocktail of medicines through a nose tube. In contrast, Hazare's fast for a bill against corruption got support from all quarters, and even the Indian Parliament buckled under pressure, passing a resolution. Is this because Hazare's cause is far less threatening whilst Sharmila threatens to expose the doublespeak of the Indian democracy? Or is this because the Indian State refuses to look beyond a military solution to

the problems of Northeast? Could it be that, if the government positions an internal struggle as a security threat, the private media with corporate interests will not take a position contrary to that of the government's?

As a token gesture (refreshing nonetheless), *CNN-IBN* carried an interview with Irom Sharmila from her hospital ward around the time of Hazare's protest. So did *NDTV*. But in the dip-in-dip-out sort of reporting where journalists are parachuted in to report from a region and airlifted out after the job is done, there was very little sustained engagement with Sharmila or attempts to understand her cause. What linger are questions of apathy, incomplete reports and selective engagements.

To explain the apathy, Rajdeep Sardesai, Editor-in-Chief, *CNN-IBN*, came up with a rhetorical answer in defence of the mainstream media. Sardesai adds the argument of complexity to his idea of 'tyranny of distance' in "TV News: A Zero Sum Game". He writes:

*"Why is it... we barely touch the story of Irom Sharmila, the Manipuri activist who has been fasting for over ten years for revoking the Armed Forces Special Powers Act? Or is Imphal simply too distant and complex for the country's 180 odd channels to report on?"*

There are actually much more direct answers to the almost brutal ignorance of the Northeast and treatment of people from the region as second-class citizens both by the State and the media.

### **The Inner Line Permit Debate**

In 1873, a traffic regulation was made for Nagaland by the British government (Bengal East Regulation-I, Section-V) between the hill areas and the low plains of the state by introducing an Inner Line Permit. According to this regulation, no outsider could go without an official pass beyond Dimapur—the main entry point into Nagaland. The idea of

the permit—to extend protection to different tribes—in effect created an imaginary wall of alienation, a divide between the Northeast and India. In 1947, an independent India adopted both the permit and the idea behind it. After 138 years in 2011 the Indian government removed the permit system on an experimental basis for a year from all of the Northeast except Arunachal Pradesh. The permit had helped to portray the Northeast as India’s savage frontier, underline differences and also set the grounds for future conflicts.

On February 4, 2005, The *Hindustan Times* reported that some states of the Northeast wanted the easing of the permit for foreign tourists but not for Indians. Many believed that ‘Indians’ would be less keen to visit the Northeast. In 2008, The Naga Students’ Federation (NSF) and the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) resolved to fight the move to remove the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873, by any organization, terming any such move as tantamount to the non-violent genocide of the ethnic and indigenous people. Is this a case of local politics, misplaced anger and regressive reasoning? More than 64 years after independence, not all the Northeastern states have railways networks or airports. Government statistics have been economical with the truth when it comes to infrastructure in the region. For example, a one-kilometre railway line was laid down in Manipur’s Jiribam, after which it was declared that the state was connected to the rest of India by a railway network. There is no railway network or airport in Sikkim. Mizoram has one airport and no railways. Nagaland has one railway station in Dimapur. Its capital Kohima does not have an airport. Tripura has a one-metre gauge railway.<sup>16</sup> Is it surprising then that the Northeast and the rest of India do not feel a connection with each other? In very real terms, those connections do not exist.

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<sup>16</sup> For details see Northeast Council Report on Roads: *Report on roads, North-East Council*, Government of India, 2008, available at <http://necouncil.nic.in/index3.asp?ssid=137&subsublinkid=452>

Most people in the Northeast react to the Indian government with cynicism and anger.<sup>17</sup> Often mutual suspicion is the key element in interactions between people from the so-called mainland and people from the Northeast. So outsiders become “bahirot manu”, “mayang”, “vai”, “bahar manu”, “tephreima”, “tsiimar” in Northeast India. Similarly, to mainland India Northeastern Indians are ‘chinkies’, indistinguishable from Southeast Asians.<sup>18</sup> This racial profiling has high-risk consequences and leads to an ‘otherisation’ of people living in the region and a denial of nationality and its benefits. It is this margin-mainstream perspective that drives representations of the region in the media. Be it the national media or the regional media there still remains the invisible inner line between the Northeast and the rest of India.

### **The naked protest in Manipur**

On the afternoon of July 15, 2004, 12 women disrobed themselves and stood naked in front of the Indian paramilitary headquarters in Imphal. Together they held one single white cloth that had ‘Indian Army Rape Us’ emblazoned on it in red paint. No corner of India had witnessed such a display of anger ever. (Photo 3)

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<sup>17</sup> “In the morning Indians would say something and forget by evening...It is our problem, leave it to us”, Rhaising, ( Ato Kilonser) Minister Home of the Naga Socialist National Council ( Issak-Muivah) faction in an interview to the author at the outfit headquarters responding to a question, can there be one underground outfit claiming to speak for all Nagas and their demand of secession or a Greater Nagaland.

<sup>18</sup> Terms used to denote Indians as outsiders in Assam ( bahirot manu), Manipur (mayang), Mizoram (vai), Nagaland (bahar manu) Anagmis in Nagaland (tephreima) and Aos in Nagaland (tsiimar).



Photo 3: Women disrobe and protest in Manipur against Army atrocities. Still from CNN-IBN report

The Manipuri women were protesting the rape and murder of Manorama, a 32-year old woman, by paramilitary forces. Gruesome as that incident was, and as widespread as the anger of the people was, the national media did not report it. It was only after this protest by the 'Imas' or mothers of Manipur and the publication of photographs of their protest in some newspapers that the rest of the mainstream media woke up. Reporters were sent to Imphal. Stories were carried and awards won. But unfortunately, the main demand of the protest, the repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, fell on deaf ears. Manipur, again, dropped off the national mainstream news cycle. Ironically, in December 2008, the same group of 12

women travelled from Manipur and staged a sit-in protest in New Delhi. The media did not find that protest as newsworthy.<sup>19</sup>

### **Underreported deaths**

What happens when the media virtually disengages with an important news story? Turning the spotlight away from a region of conflict can often help to create a situation where more deaths take place. In 2009, I interviewed retired High Court Judge C Upendra in Imphal. Between 1996 and 2007, Upendra headed inquiries into 12 instances of extrajudicial killing, rape or murder in Manipur. He found the security forces guilty of excesses in every single case. But no action has ever been taken against those involved. Based on his findings, Judge Upendra candidly accused the security forces of acting with impunity. “They do whatever they like, they have no regard for the law of the land”, he emphasised. He insists that the root cause of these violations is the draconian AFSPA that was imposed in Manipur in 1980. All the cases that Upendra investigated await closure and the rape and murder of Manorama is the only one that has any recall value. This is the case that features in every report on army atrocities in Manipur. The rest of the cases are usually only part of the count, mere statistics. And that is why it is important for the mainstream media to work on its apathy, refocus and report on the region.<sup>20</sup> Whether it deserves it or not, the media wields power.

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<sup>19</sup> The author interviewed the Manipur women protestors on that day in New Delhi. There was only one more TV crew and a couple of print journalists.

<sup>20</sup> Refer Justice C Upendra’s interview with author in True Lies of Manipur - CNN-IBN, 2009 or in CNN-IBN Special Reports on extrajudicial encounters and on Manorama case (2010). On the Manorama rape and murder, Upendra was very specific and said, “I gave a finding against the security people and then the security people made an appeal to the High Court”. The case still awaits closure.

## **Chapter 4: LOCKED LOCAL MEDIA**

The regional media, naturally, are a lot more engaged with the news in the Northeast. But rarely does it have the power to influence policy at the level of the central government in Delhi. In the course of my travels in Manipur and Nagaland as a reporter over the last five years, I have seen that regional newspapers come under a lot of pressure from underground groups to carry their press releases verbatim. Small newspapers do it for survival. If they don't, their reporters are attacked. They are soft targets. From 1991 to date, 25 journalists have been killed in the region. Yet, there is no perceptible change on the ground.<sup>21</sup> The government also tries to arm twist the regional media. For this, the archaic Prevention of Seditious Meetings Act, 1911 has been used in the past. Also, if a newspaper is overtly critical of the state, often the state government responds by refusing to give it advertisements.<sup>22</sup>

### **Reporting of the Naga-Kuki Violence:**

A weak regional media is, of course, vulnerable to more violence and extortion. Between 1992 and 1997, in violent ethnic clashes 900 people from the Kuki community were allegedly killed by one faction of the Naga underground groups, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Issak-Muivah). I met people from the Kuki community, including T Lunkim, who still wage a fight for justice for those killed in the clashes. Building his case precisely, with detail and evidence, Lunkim talked about September 13, 1993, a black day for the Kuki community. He pulled out old photographs, horrific ones of death and slaughter. On

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<sup>21</sup> Situation Report: India's Northeast by International Federation of Journalists: Journalists Pressured by Multiple Insurgencies and Ethnic Divides (September, 2009). Three more journalists were killed after this report was published.

<sup>22</sup> The Media in Terror: Analysing Reportage From Theatres Of Conflict, Kanchan L, South Asia Terrorism Portal <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume8/Article2.htm>. Please see for arrests made under Prevention of Seditious Meetings Act, 1911 in Northeast.

September 13, 105 unarmed Kuki women, children and men were allegedly slaughtered by armed Naga men. (Photo 4) “The ethnic strife was almost not reported in the national media. I was in Bombay and remotely aware of it. Senior journalists claim that the media in Manipur did extensive objective reporting on the conflict and even prompted the neutral majority community (the Meities) to broker peace in the ethnic strife”, the filmmaker and journalist from Manipur, Bachaspatimayum Sunzu, told me.<sup>23</sup>



Photo 4: Kukis killed by Naga groups( Photo 4) Photo Courtesy: T Lunkim

Why did this conflict remain underreported in the national media even when the regional media covered it? “When the Kuki-Naga conflict took place, mainstream media did not have resources in many parts of India and even less in the Northeast. 24x7 television managed to bring on, even if for once (some areas) to the national platform, something which

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<sup>23</sup> B Sunzu’s first film called Rude Awakening was on the Naga-Kuki conflict

the newspapers utterly failed over a longer period of their presence,” says Kishalay Bhattacharjee, Chief of NDTV’s Northeast Bureau.

The ethnic cleansing that took place in Meghalaya is another event of immense proportions that has hardly been reported. It was a struggle between indigenous members of tribal group and outsiders that led to the eviction of many outside families who had settled in the state.<sup>24</sup> Even though there are constant cases of excessive military action and clashes with underground groups, reports from the Northeast are few and far between. Effective collaborations between the regional and national media remain absent. It is in this sense the region remains a black hole in terms of reporting. Where there is news coverage, there is little impact or follow up.

### **How media choose to report: Nellie Massacre and Assam agitation**

In February 1983, in one of the worst communal riots the country has ever witnessed, at least 2,000 Muslim men, women and children were hacked to death in Nellie, a small village in Assam. A meagre compensation of 5000 rupees (£65) was paid to the next of the kin of those killed, and 3,000 rupees (£39) and 1,000 rupees (£13) to the injured, depending on the seriousness of the injury. Twenty five years after the riots I travelled to Nellie. The victims were still waiting for adequate compensation, with no real hope of getting it. Nellie hit the headlines after the massacre and quietly fell off the media map soon after. The horror still remains in the public memory but reports on the condition of the victims’ families or that of Nellie is not on the media’s priority list. And the government is probably happy to keep it like that. In fact, in November 2004, just 30 minutes before she was supposed to begin a talk on Nellie titled ‘Memories of a Massacre: Competing Narratives of an Incident’, Japanese scholar Makiko Kimura was stopped from talking by the Assam government.

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<sup>24</sup> For a detailed study into land and eviction in Northeast and how land remains at the root of conflict see *Troubled Periphery: Crisis of India’s Northeast* by Subir Bhaumik, 2009 (pages 61-87)

The Nellie massacre happened at a time when the Assam agitation (1979-1985) — then considered post-independent India's largest popular movement — was at its peak. It demanded the expulsion of illegal Bangladeshi migrants. Agitators believed that the long porous border that India shares with Bangladesh was being used by illegal immigrants. They were crossing over into Assam and settling there. In this debate, what was getting lost was the long shared history between the two nations, which not that long ago were part of one country. The Assamese would not settle for anything less than a complete eviction of the settlers. The militancy of their demand was in reaction to the fact that in Assam, politicians would misuse the helplessness of illegal immigrants and give them shelter to create a bigger voter constituency. But the agitation also led to an environment of mutual suspicion between the Hindu and Muslim communities. Often *bona fide* Indian Muslims who might have had roots in what is now Bangladesh, would be hounded out.

But the struggle also had an economic basis: Assam was supplying the rest of India with tea and oil, yet lagged behind economically. This economic frustration was at least partly responsible for the formation of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), a militant rebel group. During the unrest, Assam's regional newspapers clearly supported the movement as well as ULFA's aspirations of reversing economic exploitation and neglect. But the absence of critical media also led to the targeting of those who questioned the chauvinism of the protestors. In 1991 press freedom took a big hit when Kamala Saikia became one of the first journalists to be killed by the militants after he dared to criticise them. Immense as the movement and its repercussions were, the news remained restricted and on the margin of national consciousness.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Nitin Gokhale who has been reporting from the Northeast for more than two decades disagrees on the Assam agitation not getting featured in the national media. According to him the agitation did get its fair share of presence in the metropolitan media. The Kuki-Naga clash he agrees was off the radar.

## **Shortcomings of the regional media**

While it is true that the regional media's sphere of influence (or, indeed its quality) remains limited, the state of Assam has seen the setting up of a number of private television stations. Of course, these stations operate on the logic of commerce and tend to focus on city centric news, just as the private national media focuses on the metropolitan centres.

According to Kishalay Bhattacharjee:

“Media as a business, as a reverse force multiplier or an instrument to propagate agenda has become more potent since the days of the Assam agitation only because there is so much media and there is no quality (or ethical) control over them.”<sup>26</sup>

Other senior journalists agree. Sunil Nath, a journalist who was once one of the key members of the ULFA, sums up the issue of objectivity of the media when operating in a conflict region. In the context of the Northeast, the media he maintains cannot function objectively:

“Both the State and the rebels try to influence and if possible coerce the media. Moreover, there is sympathy among a section of the local media for the rebels, i.e. an ‘our boys’ syndrome’ affects the objectivity and neutrality of the media to a large extent.”<sup>27</sup>

Chitra Ahanthem, a freelance journalist from Manipur, brings up the key point: that the deep fragmentation of ethnic and political identity issues play out in the regional media in very subtle tones. She says reporters from the regional media have often been denied entry for news verification, and gives an example of the alleged mass rape of women from the

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<sup>26</sup> Interview of author with Kishalay Bhattacharjee, September 2011

<sup>27</sup> The Hoot: Choosing pen over gun. October 14, 2004

Hmar community in January 2006 by militants and how the Manipur media found it extremely difficult to get access to travel in the region and verify the truth.<sup>28</sup>

Teresa Rehman, a senior journalist from Assam, thinks that the regional media is still fledging. On the positive side she told me, “The proliferation of media in the various languages and dialects of the region is an indicator that the various ethnic groups want to create a space for themselves as well as retain their identity and this should be encouraged.” However, she echoes Ahanthem’s scepticism on the regional media. “It has also been witnessed that these media houses play on parochial sentiments which could also be detrimental at times. Also, influence of narrow political interests adversely affects the larger interest of the community”, she says.<sup>29</sup>

Most reporters and people from civil society in Manipur agree that the national private media have the resources and ability to do stories. They also come in without the burden of ethnic or political identity. Unfortunately, they have scant interest in engaging with regional issues or at least the issues of this region. “The conflict in Kashmir would definitely be centre stage followed by the Maoist conflict. The Northeast conflict seems to be of little importance”, Ahanthem says.

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<sup>28</sup> In March, 2006, Khelen Thokchom wrote a report in The Telegraph: Manipur rape victims recount day of horror

<sup>29</sup> Author’s interview with Teresa Rehman on the regional media

## Chapter 5: TYRANNY OF ACCESS AND NEW MEDIA

If the mainstream media choose to marginalise the Northeast, what about the new media? But this platform too is virtually absent in the Northeast. According to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, the Northeast II circle which includes Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal, has an overall teledensity of 8.71 %. So, for every 100 people there are about nine telephones. In the rural areas of these states, the number dips to three telephones for every 100 people and in the urban areas the number goes up to a modest 27 per 100 people.<sup>30</sup> The overall teledensity for the rest of rural Northeast stands at six. The India average stands at nine for rural areas. According to the Bangalore-based Centre For Internet and Society:

Cases like [Irom] Sharmila expose the digital divide of Asia's third-largest economy and underscore how a growing urban middle class may be getting its political voice heard [Anna Hazare] while millions of poor remain off the digital protest map ... India's internet users have grown 1,400 percent between 2000 and 2010, behind only China and Vietnam among Asian countries, according to a report by Burson-Marsteller, a consulting firm. But that masks India's low base. *Internet penetration is around 8 percent in India, the lowest among major Asian countries.* (emphasis added)<sup>31</sup>

Against this background it is easy to see the obstacles to the development of citizen journalism or video volunteers in most parts of Northeast, not to mention the reservations people have about these platforms. In the course of my travels in the Northeast, several people, especially in Manipur, spoke against the idea of citizen reporters. Their big concern is that there are sharp ethnic and political lines that could turn it into loose-cannon journalism. Nagas staying in the hills of Manipur will have a different view of things from Meiteis staying in the valleys. Manipur, however, has a unique take on the radio. Every now and then,

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<sup>30</sup> Digital Divide in India: Measurement, Determinants and Policy for Addressing the Challenges in Bridging the Digital Divide by Dr Sumanjeet Singh

<sup>31</sup> Digital Divide: Why Irom Sharmila cannot do an Anna. Hazare's [India Against Corruption](#) website says it has had 13 million phone calls of support. Its Facebook page has nearly 500,000 "likes" Irom Sharmila's struggle falls way behind.

a certain 'Leikai' (Manipuri for neighbourhood) decides to have its own rendition of the news that is read out on All India Radio. There are also Leikai announcements on a mike at certain hours. But such announcements do not have community discussions or any serious news content.<sup>32</sup>

Over the years, Manipur has acquired something of a name for the uniqueness of its protests. I was in this state when I witnessed a unique way of mobilising people, as I was filming the night protests against extra-judicial encounters in Imphal. The 'Meira Paibis', or women torch-bearers of Manipur, emerged in 1980. For more than three decades these women have organised people in protests against human rights violations and even against the militias. To let people know that a protest is on, at night, women from the group pick up stones and bang them incessantly on the metallic poles installed to distribute electricity across the neighbourhood. The metallic clang is now an established call for protest mobilisation.

These stone signals are a far cry from the idea of new media. But new initiatives with the help of established platforms like Video Volunteers are bringing about some changes. Essentially a citizen journalism platform, Video Volunteers encourages freelance journalists to file their own reports and also get paid. Naomi Hatfield Allen from Videovolunteers.org told me, "Our Northeast correspondents, particularly three of our women correspondents, are incredibly active and outspoken reporters. The content they shoot varies from 'soft' coverage of festivals etc. to hard-hitting stories about fake encounters and conflict in the region. In between is a whole host of 'development' and infrastructure reporting. The response has been generally encouraging and our correspondents in the last 2/3 months have started to do more advocacy work using their videos to bring about change in their communities." However, she agreed that connectivity problems come in the way of getting reports out, "Absolutely. It

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<sup>32</sup> I am grateful to Chitra Ahanthem for bringing to my notice the Leikai aspect while discussing community radio in Northeast.

takes twice the time for a DVD to reach our Goa office from the Northeast than it does from anywhere else in the country (2 weeks and 1 week respectively). This means there is always a serious lag in getting content out. Also, within the region, infrastructure is so poor that our correspondents often have to travel significant distances just to access internet. The poor infrastructure is exacerbated by regular bandhs (road blockades)”.<sup>33</sup>

In Nagaland community radio remains a distant idea. People are often edgy when asked about it. Many would respond with, “What does community radio mean?” There is a fear that if community radio broadcasts are not inclusive of all communities and speak of a greater good, it could lead to more friction. It is a very difficult position in a society where a person’s tribe remains one’s primary identity. Khriezovonuo Lhoungu, a correspondent with the *Eastern Mirror* newspaper in Nagaland says, “I am not too sure that the idea of community radio will work here. It could be a limiting idea in Nagaland. Maybe if it is issue-specific it might help in villages. But there has to be a balance and the radio should talk about general good.”<sup>34</sup>

Her fear might be well-founded. But can’t community radio be a bridge-builder? Right now, it looks like a distant idea in the Northeast. Of the eight states in the region, only Assam has community radios (and even there, just two). A Compendium of Community Radio Stations released by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting shows that among the three most conflict-ridden areas of India (Kashmir, the Red Corridor and the Northeast), it is the Northeast that has the least community radio centres.<sup>35</sup> According to data compiled by

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<sup>33</sup> On bandhs or road blockades see a recent New York Times report on Northeast (November 14, 2011): [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/15/world/asia/blockades-isolate-indias-manipur-state-even-more.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/15/world/asia/blockades-isolate-indias-manipur-state-even-more.html?_r=1)

<sup>34</sup> Of the 635 communities in India listed as tribal, 200 are found in the Northeast. Of the 325 languages listed by the People of India project, 175 belonging to the Tibeto-Burman group are spoken in the Northeast. There are 475 ethnic groups here

<sup>35</sup> Ministry of Information and Broadcasting: Compendium 2011: Community Radio Stations in India. In Jammu & Kashmir only Jammu has one. In the so-called Maoist belt or Red Corridor states, there are at least 10 spread

the South Asia Terrorism Portal, between 1992 and 2010 there were 15,000 deaths in the three states of Assam, Manipur and Nagaland. Less than 2,000 of these victims were members of security forces.<sup>36</sup> Had there been an effective community radio system in place, at least the locals wouldn't have to rely on news from the large media organisations that only comes out in fits and starts. The absence of a community radio deepens the vacuum in a no-news zone. Given that radio remains the most powerful tool for spreading information, it is not surprising that as a conscious state policy private news radio is illegal. The All India Radio remains the all powerful state news broadcaster across the country.

A community radio service like the CGNetSwara that operates out of the Maoist conflict zone in Chhattisgarh has run into trouble with the State. CGNetSwara is a web-platform where people can call a number and record their messages. These messages are then edited and put up on the website. It is in fact a first-communication platform for languages like Gondi (the lingua franca of Maoists in the region). There are no newspapers, magazines, or news bulletin on the All India Radio in Gondi, though it is spoken by 2.7 million people, according to the last census. According to Shubhrangshu Chowdhury, the founder of CGNetSwara:

We understand the problem in places like Chhattisgarh is not of Maoism (Maoists are of course there but in a very small number) but majority of tribals who join the Maoists, they do so because there is a breakdown of communication between tribal and non tribal (mainstream) Indian community which this platform is trying to bridge. Of course, the State does not like us (which we think should be doing more with such platforms themselves if they want to solve the problem) and have been trying to close us down.

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over Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and Bihar. In the Northeast only Assam has two community radios. Conflict affected Manipur, Nagaland has none. Tripura might get one soon.

<sup>36</sup> Data mentioned in Kolas': Framing The Tribal: The production of ethnic violence in Northeast India forthcoming in Ethnos journal of anthropology

They cannot close us legally so they threaten citizen reporters sending reports on Swara and they have forced two servers to throw us off, resulting in our closure in last 6 months.<sup>37</sup>

It is the State's fear about the free flow of information that influences media policy in conflict zones. Right now the State's paranoia of the possible misuse of new media platforms by various groups has prevented the growth of either proper telephone networks or community media in the Northeast. Even in mainstream media reporting the State tries to assume the role of a watchdog. In 2009 during the Dalai Lama's visit to the Tawang monastery in Arunachal Pradesh, which shares a border with China and history of a war that India lost in 1962, the Indian government banned all foreign journalists from travelling there.

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<sup>37</sup> My interview with Shubhranshu Chowdhury, founder of CGNetSwara

## **Apathy: Look the Other Way**

How does it help if the media reports on stories of underdevelopment, violence and apathy? Does it change government policies? The World Bank describes conditions in the Northeast as that of a low level equilibrium of poverty, non-development, civil conflict and lack of faith in political leadership. The deputy governor of the Reserve Bank of India has said that funds to Northeastern states add up to more than what India gets from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.<sup>38</sup> Yet, basic facilities---electricity, roads, water---are absent in most of Northeast. There are local militias calling the shots in various places and in many places the ideology of resistance has been replaced by the convenience of a money-sharing arrangement between local militias and the bureaucracy. The Justice Manisana Commission report (2008) on the misappropriation of funds in North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council mentions how funds meant for development work were channelled to militants and all departmental officers in Assam received their due shares. In 2009, Gammon India, Valecha Engineering, TBL and Continental Engineering Corporation decided on absolute withdrawal from the East-West Corridor, a National Highway project in Assam. Due to extortion, killings and abductions of engineers it was impossible to continue work. Such rampant misuse of money has not set the stage for development.

The regional media are mostly a silent spectator. Sure, there is the perfunctory report, but it's mostly little more than a mere mention. What needs to change is the journalists' perception or understanding of the matter being reported. In the Northeast if reporting means impact or follow-up reportage, then there has been no reporting from those states.

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<sup>38</sup> Reuters report The Economic Paradox of Northeast India, December 18, 2009

So the misuse of funds is hardly reported, thereby strengthening the nexus between politicians, militants and the security forces. Land grabs, trafficking, arms deals, public money used for personal benefit and even arrangements where money is paid to buy votes, all of this is carried on with impunity.<sup>39</sup> As the first minister heading the Ministry for Development of Northeastern Region (MDONER), Arun Shourie was wont to remark: “Funds are never a problem. Proper and timely utilisation of the allocated money is.”<sup>40</sup> As for civilians who have no part in this nexus, they are still struggling to have access to basic rights. Like the rest of India, there is a sharp divide between people who have benefits and those without them. For example in a place like Ukhrul where I travelled in 2010, there was electricity for just three hours a day. Villagers no longer have the patience to protest. The market there is flooded with cheap Chinese power generators. The catch is that not everyone can afford them.

A part of this sharp divide comes out in a 2008 report *Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas* by India’s Planning Commission:

In general the contradiction between the tribal community and the state itself has become sharper, translating into open conflict in many areas. Almost all over the tribal areas including Nagaland Manipur, Tripura, Assam, Jharkhand, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, tribal people seem to feel a deep sense of exclusion and alienation, which has been manifesting itself in different forms. The Report of the Expert Group on Prevention of Alienation of Tribal Land and its Restoration (October 2004) pointed out that the socio-economic infrastructure among the tribal people is inadequate, thereby contributing to their disempowerment and deprivation.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> From author’s interviews with the Naga underground representative of the ceasefire monitoring cell and with first-time politician Abu Mehta where both of them admitted that money is used to buy votes.

<sup>40</sup> Tehelka: The greed-neglect nexus, August 7, 2004

<sup>41</sup> Report by Expert Group to Planning Commission *Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas*. 2008. Mentioned in Mr Chidambaram’s *War* by Arundhati Roy in *Broken Republic*, Penguin, 2011

The regional media is hesitant to talk about this. Newspapers like *The Sentinel* in Assam which has been vocal about development money being misused are few and far between. In fact, in Sikkim and Assam, journalists are regularly honoured by ministers as part of a *quid pro quo*. These arrangements are outside all data sets and severely cripple media freedom.

So what has happened to the resistance movements that began in Nagaland, later spread to Mizoram and other parts of the Northeast? A lot has changed in these states when it comes to human rights policies, basic conditions of living and even surface-level markers of development (like the Adidas shoe store in Mizoram or the Oxford Bookstore in Dimapur). The regional population has been split in its opinions of extending support to resistance movements. What about the media? In *Conflict, Terrorism and The Media In Asia (2006)*, Benjamin Cole writes that the media might seek sensationalism in order to improve its ratings, but it also has a vested interest in ensuring the survival of the state. Cole rightly says that it is rare for a mainstream media organisation to champion the goals of a terrorist or revolutionary group. The media's close relationship with powerful business and political groups ensures that an unstated line is never crossed. So at the national or international level, it would be rare for non-state actors to dictate to media organisations. Of course, the situation is quite different at a regional level.

## Chapter 6: THE WAY FORWARD: COLLABORATION

Records of the colonial government like *Assam District Gazeteer's Report Volume-IX, Naga Hills and Manipur* (1905) prepared by BC Allen and subsequent stories of conflict make it clear that historically the Northeast has witnessed a heavy-handed approach by the State. Even now, when the ideological State apparatus talks about democracy, governance, sovereignty and civil liberties, all of it exists only on paper in the Northeast. And the repressive apparatus of the State—shoot-at-sight orders, imposition of curfew, deployment of the Army, incarceration, the killing of underground workers—has been working to ensure that the Northeast remains under State control. The State continues to kill its citizens in the region and the media reports very few of these violations.

Between the lack of interest of the national media and the lack of objectivity – or at the times the powerlessness - of the regional media, reportage in the region has become insignificant compared to the seriousness of the conflicts. But why should the media report on the Northeast? Bertil Lintner, an old hand at conflict reporting and a former correspondent with the *Far Eastern Economic Review* has a simple answer: “Because it’s an important part of India and the region, the crossroads between India, Southeast Asia and China”. So why is it not done? Chitra Ahanthem, a freelance journalist from Manipur, believes that there is an absence of specialised reporters in the state and most media personnel are untrained and underpaid. Stories are not reported beyond press conferences and rural areas not focused on.

Often many stories, many deaths, many stories of underdevelopment, many injustices remain unnoticed in the silences of the media. It is here that the argument of ‘tyranny of distance’ transforms into ‘tyranny of access’.<sup>42</sup> The mainstream media argument is that the

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<sup>42</sup> The argument of “tyranny of access” came up at the OxPeace Conference at St John’s College at Oxford after author’s talk on Reporting Northeast. Robert Harris, Department of History, Oxford came up with this term when analyzing author’s talk( 2011)

remoteness of a region makes it difficult for the media to access it. This argument hides the fact that the media suffers from a self-imposed restriction and refuses to invest money and get access to remote regions and report from there.

Given all these factors, reporting from the Northeast is often affected by the absence of media which are critical of both the State and the militant organisations. Often this leads to reporting based on handouts and to a vicious cycle where violence goes unreported and leads to more violence.

The following table (Figure 5) is a list of people killed in the state of Manipur between October 2007 and August 9, 2009. This includes members of the army, underground groups, civilians and unclaimed bodies. All these stories were reported regularly in the regional media in Manipur but failed to make the national headlines other than occasional brief mentions in *The Hindu* or *The Indian Express*.

<b>Manipur: People Killed From 2nd Oct, 2007 to 9th Aug, 2009</b>				
<b>Summary</b>				
Year		Total		
2nd Oct 2007 to 31st Dec 2007		80		
1st Jan, 2008 to 31st Dec 2008		484		
1st Jan, 2009 to 9th Aug, 2009		308		
	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>872</b>		

Figure 5: Deaths due to violence. Source: Human Rights Alert, Imphal

### **Barefoot reporters**

In a reporting environment like this, freelance journalists are often the only credible sources of truth. Many regional reporters and sub-editors, under economic compulsion, double up as freelancers or fixers for various media organisations. They prefer to stay anonymous and are able to work more freely. When representatives of the foreign or mainstream Indian media arrive on assignments, these fixers or barefoot reporters guide them through the region. Such collaborations, more often than not, yield results. There is, understandably, scepticism among some people in civil society: that the first point of contact in an account of regional knowledge might influence the way in which a story is framed. Some journalists I have interviewed are not too open to the idea of collaborative journalism. Ms Rehman told me that “Any kind of collaboration in terms of technical support is fine. But in terms of gathering information and analyzing any kind of subject, the reporter needs a deeper understanding of the issues, especially in a sensitive region like Northeast India. I would encourage journalists to come and spend time here and try to comprehend the varied nuances of this region rather than rushing in to do a few sporadic stories here and

there. Maybe the various aspects of the story can be split and individual journalists can delve deeper into these issues.”

But, in a difficult situation, this is a viable arrangement that benefits the flow of information. Even if there is an element of reporting bias, it is better than no news at all.

### **How collaboration can work: The July 2009 murders**

On 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2009, in Imphal, a freelance journalist managed to capture on camera the gruesome murder of a young man and a woman by state police commandos. The photographs (Photo 6) were couriered to Ms Teresa Rahman, at that time a correspondent for *Tehelka* magazine.



Photo 6: Fake encounter. Sanjit being dragged inside a pharmacy by commandos before he was shot dead. Courtesy: Sunzu



Photo 7: Dead bodies after they were tossed into a van. Still from CNN-IBN Report, September 2009

The magazine, which is often a platform for alternative voices, published it first. The report, a classic example of collaboration, created awareness in the national media. It was a chilling instance of a fake encounter being captured in still photographs. Chongkam Sanjit, a former member of the banned militant organisation Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA) and a pregnant woman, Rabina Debi were shot dead, allegedly by police commandos. The incident took place in the morning, right in the middle of a busy marketplace. The Manipur Police claimed that Sanjit had shot Rabina dead and that he was shot dead when the police tried to intervene. The bodies of the two were tossed into a van in full public view, and taken away. (Photo 7) My cameraperson and I travelled to Manipur to investigate the killings and to report on the alleged fake encounters in the state. The sequence of photographs captured how Sanjit was dragged inside a pharmacy and then shot dead. Investigations by the Human

Rights Commission also claimed that he was not carrying a gun. Deaths like this usually are rarely reported in the metropolitan media.<sup>43</sup>

People I interviewed were angry about Sanjit's killing but not surprised. Given the history of violence in Manipur it couldn't have been a surprise. I met members of Sanjit's and Rabina's families. The Director General of Manipur Police insisted that the State had not indulged in fake encounters or extra-judicial killings.

Currently, Manipur has about 34 militant organisations that are engaged in an armed struggle against the Indian state. Since 1980, the Indian Army has been stationed in Manipur to ensure law and order. As the Army and the militants fight each other, Manipuri civilians are caught in the cycle of violence. Despite being accused of violating civil rights, the Indian Army is protected by AFSPA which grants its soldiers the right to shoot on suspicion. Crucially it also protects the soldiers from prosecution. Convictions in such cases are very rare, in any case. Ironically, the state security forces often receive gallantry awards for such encounters. When I interviewed (then Home Secretary) GK Pillai, he claimed to have no knowledge of such practices.<sup>44</sup>

It's odd that he should say he was ignorant of such practices, as they are not new in the Northeast. Extra-judicial killings in the name of counter-insurgency, extortion by underground groups in the name of ideology or government funds being used to fund militancy are all open secrets.<sup>45</sup> The regional media is enmeshed, willingly or otherwise, in

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<sup>43</sup> For a comprehensive list of fake encounters please see Manipur's Human Rights Alert.

<sup>44</sup> Author's interview with GK Pillai where he said "I am not aware of such incidents and if they happen they will be looked into". For a detailed investigation one can also see *CNN-IBN* report of September, 2009, *True Lies In Manipur*.

<sup>45</sup> Author's interview with J K Thausen at North Cachar, Hill district of Assam where he admitted that bureaucrats were siphoning out money and that was being used by militant groups. Such terror funding was the National Investigative agencies first case.

keeping that secret. The national media rarely investigates these equations. The State media broadcasts news from government handouts. And there is almost zero community media in the Northeast. Coverage of the region is so weak that it may as well not exist.<sup>46</sup> “In most countries, there is a sharp divide between rebel movements and officialdom. In India's Northeast, most, if not all, resistance groups have their links to local politicians and even the security forces and agencies. It makes the situation in the Northeast much messier than elsewhere in the world”, explains Bertil Lintner.

### **The Mess: Media must act responsibly and probe**

Every year in the Northeast the army invites reporters to functions where militants lay down arms and are welcomed in front of a selected audience. Transport is provided to the media, as well as free alcohol and a good lunch. The information provided to the media is meant to portray the sincerity of the state's peace-building efforts. Once a ceasefire agreement is signed, the militants give up arms and move into government appointed areas also known as designated camps. And after that begins a process of negotiation.

The Naga struggle has gone through various phases of negotiations. Or rather, twists and collapses. I have gone through a detailed list of ceasefire agreements, suspension of operations and aid provided by the government (with underground groups in all the Northeastern states). I have also gone through the list of deaths that have taken place each year. Is there something wrong in these efforts? Is there something more than meets the eye? I felt, more than once, that there is a missing piece in the peace puzzle, one that hides the undercover deals and the whispers that the media will never hear.

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<sup>46</sup> For an extremely detailed investigation into the extortion arrangement in Nagaland see, *Wages of War* published in *Tehelka* August 13, 2011

Over the years militant groups have established parallel state structures. For example, four Naga rebel groups run a parallel government, that requires every individual in Nagaland to pay 'tax'. According to a study done by the Maulana Azad Institute of Asian Studies in 2011,<sup>47</sup> the group collected 7.24 million pounds in 2007-08 through such extortion. This sum was equivalent to over 50% of the state's tax revenue. Such parallel tax systems also prevail in Manipur, and parts of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that several schemes of the Ministry of Home Affairs have failed to woo militants to renounce arms.

Time	Funds(GBP million)	Deaths	Treaties and Ceasefire	
2001	125.4	1380	5	
2002	136.75	812	6	
2003	136.76	1107	4	
2004	159.3	890	6	
2005	158.1	715	7	
2006	181.7	637	6	
2007	190.6	1036	5	
2008	196.1	1056	13	
2009	196.3	851	6	
2010	234.1	322	8	

Figure 8: Development funds, conflict deaths, peace talks. Data Source: SATP, Ministry for

Development of Northeastern Region, [indiabudget.nic.in](http://indiabudget.nic.in)

I have visited designated camps and sometimes been surprised at the cadre composition. Young underage boys often join the ranks of underground organisations. Mobilisation happens at various levels. One reason that many of these young boys join is economic compulsion. The idea of resistance and challenging the state is probably secondary.

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<sup>47</sup> Development Disparities in Northeast India by Rakhee Bhattacharya, Foundation Books, New Delhi, 2011



Photo 9: Young boys recruited as part of militant outfit Black Widows. Photo taken in NC hills camp in 2010. Arijit Sen

I say this in spite of the fact that I have interviewed cadres who gave pitch-perfect answers about their concept of nation and their reason for joining the struggle. I still recall speaking to one cadre at the NSCN-IM camp. “The Naga nation is the only nation and that is why I am in this struggle,” he said in one of the military training sessions at Camp Hebron as senior leaders watched over this rare cadre interview.

Such ideals notwithstanding, terror is often manufactured and there are smooth and assured ways of terror funding. The National Investigative Agency’s (NIA) first case was to look into allegations of development money being siphoned off to fund the militant group Black Widows or the Dima Halam Daogah (Jewel-Garlosa) faction. In the North Cachar hill district of Assam, the NIA found that money was shared between politicians, bureaucrats, militants, allegedly a Governor who was also a former army man, and every other dot that made the circle. The Justice Manisana Commission Report (2008) clearly mentions that money was paid by political parties to militants. Payments were made for development work

that was never done. But there was little engagement on the part of the metropolitan media with the terror funding story. Only one national news magazine, *The Week*, carried a report. There was no follow-up.

Ashild Kolas of the Peace Research Institute of Oslo, captures the template of this nexus. In her paper, 'Framing The Tribal', Kolas makes the point that in the case of the Dimasa militancy, ethnic clashes are actually an institutionalised form of violence. According to Kolas, ethnic violence is a term that is used to cover up an arrangement between several players, state and non-state to manufacture violence and create a situation of conflict. The money that is sent as relief is split between the players. The media too falls into the dangerous trap of buying this major "cause of conflict" — ethnic violence. In September-October 2005 there were violent clashes between Karbis and Dimasas in which 90 people were killed. A fact-finding team of the Asian Centre for Human Rights countered the labelling of this clash as an ethnic conflict. It said it was a clash between two armed groups.<sup>48</sup>

In 2009 there was another instance of a so-called ethnic clash between Dimasas and Zemi Nagas in which 700 houses were burnt and at least 70 people were killed. I visited some of these areas soon after the clashes. In one village I met Nondita Bothari. Her house was burnt in the clashes. She spoke of the inferior quality relief material that was sent to her and how in one instance relief materials meant for her village were sent to another village that had not been affected by violence. Villagers insisted that all government departments used the clashes to make money. Signboards promise government schemes aimed at development of which there is no evidence. Roads vanish and reappear at will. Classrooms are half-constructed or teachers are absent. Yet these are not stories for the metropolitan media.

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<sup>48</sup> Ashild Kolas, Framing the tribal. Forthcoming in *Ethnos Journal of Anthropology*

## **Workshops**

So what can be done? A first and crucial step towards improving the reporting of the conflicts in the North-East is to hold media workshops that train reporters or encourage them to travel and report. What is also required is a strong journalists' body that extends support to underpaid journalists, and looks into their working conditions. Citizen journalism could start in the Northeastern cities and then extend outwards in collaboration with mainstream national news groups. This might help to bring at least some pieces of marginalised news to the national consciousness.

## **Act East: Media as an accelerator**

Through collaborations, new ideas, new media, radio and television, it is possible for the media to turn the spotlight on this corner of the world. For the last year, the United States as part of a new diplomatic thrust has expressed a desire to support India's Look East Policy, a policy of trade, development and security that connects India with Southeast Asia. Northeast India is at the heart of this policy. US President Barack Obama in his address to the Indian Parliament on November 8, 2010 said, "Like your neighbours in Southeast Asia, we want India to not only "look East," we want India to "engage East"- because it will increase the security and prosperity of all our nations". A year later US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in her address at the East-West Centre in Hawaii said that the US wants to actively support India's Look East policy as it grows into an Act East Policy.<sup>49</sup> The Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said (on November 17, 2011) that partnership with the Association of South East Asian Nations is an essential component of Look East policy. At this moment, the

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<sup>49</sup> US will actively support India's Look East Policy says Hillary, Economic Times, Friday, November 11, 2011

media's accelerated engagement with the region may well be a crucial step to raise awareness about the Northeast, stop violence and actually kick start trade and development.

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Centre For Development and Peace Studies

Asian Centre for Human Rights

**APPENDIX:** List of militant organisations and their areas of operation and Government peace efforts over the last sixty years

Militant Group	Year of Formation	Status	Area	Camps	Active
<b>ASSAM</b>					
1 United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA)	1979	Split; in talks, active	Assam	Burma, China, Assam, Bangladesh	yes
2 National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB)	1986	Split; in talks, active	Assam	Bangladesh	yes
3 United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS)	1999	Merger; in talks, active	Assam, NC	NC Hills, Assam	yes
4 Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO)	1995	not in talks, active	Lower Assam, North Bengal		no
5 Bodo Liberation Tiger Force (BLT)	1996	Ceasefire, active			no
6 Dima Halim Daogah-Nunisa (DHD-N)	1995	Ceasefire, active			yes
7 DHD-J or Black Widows (DHD-J)	2003	Ceasefire, active			yes
8 Karbi National Volunteers (KNV)	floated in the 1980s				no
9 Rabha National Security Force (RNSF)	NA				no
1 Koch-Rajbongshi Liberation Organisation (KRLO)	1995				no
1 Karbi People's Front (KPF)	1980s				no
1 Tiwa National Revolutionary Force (TNRF)	NA				no
1 Bircha Commando Force (BCF)	1997	Ceasefire			no

3						
1						
4	Bengali Tiger Force (BTF)	1996				no
1						
5	Adivasi Security Force (ASF)	NA				no
1	All Assam Adivasi Suraksha					
6	Samiti (AAASS)	NA				no
1						
7	Gorkha Tiger Force (GTF)	NA				no
1	Barak Valley Youth Liberation					
8	Front (BVYLF)	NA				no
1	Muslim United Liberation Tigers of		not in talks,		Trained in	
9	Assam (MULTA)	1996	active	Assam	Nagaland,	yes
2	United Liberation Front of Barak				ISI-support	
0	Valley(ULFBV)	2002	active			yes
2	Muslim United Liberation Front of					
1	Assam (MULFA)	1994				no
2	Hmar People's Convention-		split post talks,	Assam,		
2	Democracy (HPC-D)	1986	active	Mizoram,		yes
2	Muslim Security Council of Assam			Manipur		
3	(MSCA)	NA				no
2	United Liberation Militia of Assam					
4	(ULMA)	NA				no
2	Islamic Liberation Army of Assam					
5	(ILAA	NA				no
2						
6	Muslim Volunteer Force (MVF)	NA				no
2						
7	Muslim Liberation Army (MLA)	NA				no
2						
8	Muslim Security Force (MSF)	NA				no
2						
9	Islamic Sevak Sangh (ISS)	1990				no

3	Islamic United Reformation	NA			
0	Protest of India (IURPI)				no
3	United Muslim Liberation Front of	NA			
1	Assam (UMLFA)				no
3	Revolutionary Muslim	NA			
2	Commandos (RMC)				no
3		NA			
3	Muslim Tiger Force (MTF)				no
3	People's United Liberation Front	1993			
4	(PULF)				no
3		NA			
5	Adam Sena (AS)				no
		started			
		recruiting			
		youths from			
3		Assam in the			
6	Harkat-ul-Mujahideen	late 1990s	dormant		dormant
3		NA			
7	Harkat-ul-Jehad		dormant		dormant

## MANIPUR

1	United National Liberation Front (UNLF)	1964	active	Manipur, NC hills Assam	Bangladesh, Burma	yes
2	People's Liberation Army (PLA)	1978	active	Manipur	Bangladesh, Burma	yes
3	People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK)	1977	active	Manipur	Bangladesh, Burma	yes
4	MANIPUR People's Liberation Front (MPLF)	1999	active			yes
5	Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP)	1980	active	Churachandpur, Manipur		yes
6	Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL)	1994	active	Manipur valley	Burma	yes
7	Manipur Liberation Tiger Army (MLTA)	NA	not active			no

8	Iripak Kanba Lup (IKL)	NA					no
9	People's Republican Army (PRA)	early 1990s					no
1							
0	Kangleipak Kanba Kanglup (KKK)	NA					no
1	Kangleipak Liberation						
1	Organisation (KLO)	NA					no
1	Revolutionary Joint Committee						
2	(RJC)	late 80s					yes
1	People's United Liberation Front						
3	(PULF)	1993	active				yes
1							
4	North East Minority Front (NEMF)	NA					yes
							merged with the PULF
1							
5	Islamic National Front (INF)	1980s					
1							
6	Islamic Revolutionary Front (IRF)	1997					no
1	United Islamic Liberation Army						
7	(UILA)	early 1990s					no
1	United Islamic Revolutionary Army						
8	(UIRA)	NA					no
1							
9	Kuki National Front (KNF)	1988	active				yes
2							
0	Kuki National Army (KNA)	1988	active	Manipur	Burma		yes
2							
1	Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA)	1999	active	Manipur			no
2							
2	Kuki National Organisation (KNO)	1988					no
2							
3	Kuki Independent Army (KIA)	NA					no
2							
4	Kuki Defence Force (KDF)	NA					no
2	Kuki International Force (KIF)	NA					no

5							
2							
6	Kuki National Volunteers (KNV)	NA					no
2							
7	Kuki Liberation Front (KLF)	NA					no
2							
8	Kuki Security Force (KSF)	NA					no
2							
9	Kuki Liberation Army (KLA)	1992	active		Manipur		yes
3							
0	Kuki Revolutionary Front (KRF)	NA	active				yes
3							
1	United Kuki Liberation Front (UKLF)	2000	active		Manipur		yes
3							
2	Hmar People's Convention (HPC)	1986					no
3							
3	Hmar People's Convention-Democracy (HPC-D)	1986	split post-talks, active		Assam, Mizoram, Manipur		yes
3							
4	Hmar Revolutionary Front (HRF)	1990					no
3							
5	Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA)	1993	talks, active		Manipur		yes
3							
6	Zomi Revolutionary Volunteers (ZRV)	NA					yes
3							
7	Indigenous People's Revolutionary Alliance (IRPA)	NA					no
3							
8	Kom Rem People's Convention (KRPC)	NA					no
3							
9	Chin Kuki Revolutionary Front (CKRF)	1990s					no
4							
0	National Socialist Council of Nagaland -- Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM)	1980	ceasefire, active		Manipur, Assam, Arunachal, Nagaland	Burma, Nagaland, Arunachal, Assam	yes

## MEGHALAYA

1	Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC)	2000	active	Meghalaya	Bangladesh	yes
2	Achik National Volunteer Council (ANVC)	1995	talks, active	Meghalaya, Assam		yes
3	People's Liberation Front of Meghalaya (PLF-M)	2001	active	Meghalaya		yes
4	Liberation of Achik Elite Force (LAEF)	2005	active	Meghalaya		yes
5	Hajong United Liberation Army (HULA)	NA				

## NAGALAND

1	National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) – NSCN(IM)	1980	ceasefire, active	Manipur, Assam, Arunachal, Nagaland	Burma, Nagaland, Arunachal, Assam	yes
2	National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang) – NSCN (K)	1988	ceasefire, active	Nagaland, Arunachal	Nagaland, Arunachal, Burma	yes
3	National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Unification) NSCN-(U)	2007	ceasefire, active	Nagaland	Nagaland, Burma	yes
4	Naga National Council (Adino) – NNC (Adino)	NA				

## TRIPURA

1	National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT)	1989	active	Tripura	Tripura, Bangladesh	yes
2	All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF)	1990	talks, active	Tripura		yes
3	Borok National Council of Tripura (BNCT)	Sep-00	active			
4	Tripura Liberation Organisation Front (TLOF)	1992				no
5	United Bengali Liberation Front	1999				no

	(UBLF)		
6	Tripura Tribal Volunteer Force (TTVF)	The formation of this group came to light in 1993	no
7	Tripura Armed Tribal Commando Force (TATCF)	NA	no
8	Tripura Tribal Democratic Force (TTDF)	1990s	no
9	Tripura Tribal Youth Force (TTYF)	Its existence came to light in December 1993*	no
10	Tripura Liberation Force (TLF)	NA	no
11	Tripura Defence Force (TDF)	NA	no
12	All Tripura Volunteer Force (ATVF)	NA	no
13	Tiger Commando Force (TCF)	na	no
14	Tripura Tribal Youth Force (TTYF)	mid 90s	no
15	All Tripura Bharat Suraksha Force (ATBSF)	NA	no
16	Tripura Tribal Action Committee Force (TTACF)	NA	no
17	Socialist Democratic Front of Tripura (SDFT)	on 27 January 1995 the existence came to light	no
18	All Tripura National Force (ATNF)	NA	no
19	Tripura Tribal Sengkrak Force (TTSF)	NA	no
20	Tiger Commando Force (TCF)	NA	no

2						
1	Tripura Mukti Police (TMP)	NA				no
2	Tripura Rajya Raksha Bahini (TRRB)	NA				no
2						
3	Tripura State Volunteers (TSV)	NA				no
2	Tripura National Democratic Tribal Force (TNDTF)	NA				no
4						
2						
5	National Militia of Tripura (NMT)	NA				no
2	All Tripura Bengali Regiment (ATBR)	NA				no
6						
2						
7	Bangla Mukti Sena (BMS)	NA				no
2	All Tripura Liberation Organisation (ATLO)	NA				no
8						
2						
9	Tripura National Army (TNA)	NA				no
3						
0	Tripura State Volunteers (TSV)	NA				no

## MIZORAM

1	Bru National Liberation Front	1996	in talks, active	Mizoram, Tripura, Assam	Bangladesh	yes
2	Hmar People's Convention-Democracy (HPC-D)	1986	split post talks, active	Assam, Mizoram, Manipur		yes

## ARUNACHAL PRADESH

1	Arunachal Dragon Force (ADF)	1996				yes
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