Assam-Nagaland Border Violence
Role of militants and the state
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The violence that erupted in the Assam-Nagaland border a month back has been the fallout of poor governance by the respective state governments. Their complicity in the violence is linked to the interest of extremist elements who fuel insurgency by alienating people of both the states.

Out of eight north-east states Assam has seen most violence in recent times, to the point that violence is now synonymous with Assam. “A number of armed conflicts smoulder in this frontier region: the outside world is aware of a few of them, but only people living in remote war zones and paying a price with their blood and tears know the others” (Baruah 2005). The large scale brutality in Assam-Nagaland border in August 2014 came in only after a lull of few days since 57 Muslims were horrendously shot dead by Bodo militants in Baksa district of Assam.

Beginning of the present conflict

The ferocity started in the Assam-Nagaland border region with a dispute of land between two individuals. Of the two, one was from the ex-tea tribe community of Assam and the other one was from the Naga community. The dispute was apparently settled but the situation flared up with an alleged abduction on 26 July 2014 of two children - Filson Kujur of Green Valley High School and Ajay Gad of Gholapani Little Flower High School who are studying in the tenth and ninth standard respectively. The incident happened in the Assam Nagaland border under Dhanashiri subdivision of Golaghat district of Assam.

In the initial phase about 20,000 people from various organisations undertook democratic protests to put their demand for the release of the abducted students. The protestors went on to surround the 155 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) camp which led to baton charge by the CRPF on the protestors. At that time NSCN (National Socialist Council of Nagaland) extremists who were hiding about 200 m away started firing indiscriminately with sophisticated weapons on the unarmed protestors. In addition to firing, the Naga miscreants started torching houses which led to the evacuation of many villagers. The firing and torching of houses continued in the following days. 17 people were killed and there was
a massive exodus has led to the internal displacement of more than 10,000 people.

**Lack of police action**

Presently the disrupted zone of Assam-Nagaland border areas are under the supervision of neutral central forces. But the forces could provide no security of life and property to the villagers of the conflict zone. Villagers claimed that while the NSCN extremists were firing indiscriminately on the unarmed villagers the CRPF were mute spectators and didn’t take any preventive action.

In a specific instance Naga extremists allegedly shot bullets in the presence of none other than a Director General of Police (DGP) and the Superintendent of Police (SP) of Assam Police. Sanglasung, 2 no. Chainpur, Lachitgaon, Romanbasti, Jahajigaon, Kempur, Rojapukhuri, Komolpur, Majgaon etc. are a few villages along the border which were burned to the ground. The situation is so frazzled that the Naga government had issued an advisory to the Naga people not to travel through Golaghat district which is the violence torn district. Night curfew had been imposed for an indefinite period in the belt. Various student organisations of Assam had started economic blockade by blocking the crucial National highway 39 which connects Nagaland to Assam. This blockade will result a severe loss to the economy of Nagaland and Manipur.

**Root of the Conflict and Politics**

Conflicts between Nagas and Assamese in the Assam-Nagaland border areas are in no way a new experience. The first Naga assailment came in on 29 December 1959 on government property at Uriamghat, Assam. That day which may, on record, be cited as the first incidence of atrocities was perpetrated by a section of Naga militants on Assam, one forest office was looted and then set ablaze. These series of conflict has been enduring since the last 50 years or so and since then not less than 300 people killed in these conflicts. The central issue of present conflict in sector B and sector D of Assam Nagaland border area is claims and counter claims over land. Land of hill areas is not suitable for cultivation and therefore a section of Naga miscreants are parsimoniously looking upon the plains which are mostly inhabited by an ethnic group known as ex-tea tribes.

Continuing the tradition of massacre, invariably even this time the victims of violence are “…innocent people who had been struggling hard for survival like most other victims of politically-oriented violence” (Hussain 1995). “….in an official statement in the Assam Assembly provided the following statistics: over 86,886.12 hectares of land of Assam have been encroached upon. Nagaland alone has been accused of encroaching 59,159.77 hectares” (Economic Times 2014). A case is already pending in the Supreme Court regarding the dispute of boundaries between Assam and Nagaland. Supreme Court appointed a mediator team to prepare a report and the same also was submitted to the apex court. The damaging encumbrance came to the mediating process when the apex court asked for feedback from the parties, i.e. Assam and Nagaland. The feedback is yet to be
submitted to the court by both the parties and the process has thus stranded in deadlock.

The administration in denial

Violence in the border areas are occurring repeatedly due to poor governance by the respective state governments. "Governance today encompasses much more than mere rule or administration, it represents a commitment to democratic institutions, processes and values in order to ensure economic, political and social security"(Hussain 2003).

After the violence, both the governments have been playing blame game on the issue. The Assam government alleged that much of its territorial land has been encroached by some Nagas. In addition to that, the Naga government has legitimised the process by building offices, hospitals, educational institutions etc. on the encroached land. There have been instances where the respective state governments carried out dialogues to resolve the issue. But these superficial initiatives remained largely inconclusive.

Role of Naga militants

It is alleged that the last incident of violence was spurred by the NSCN militant groups of Nagaland. As Baruah (2005) argued, “The Naga conflict began with India’s independence in 1947: Naga leaders rejected the idea that their land, which was under a special dispensation during colonial rule, could simply pass on to Indian hands at the end of British colonial rule”. In the 1950s it turned in to an armed conflict.

However a separate state Nagaland came in to being in 1963 but the conflict continued over the decades. One of the important objectives of NSCN-IM (National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak-Muivah) is to establish a “Greater Nagalim” engulfing all Naga inhabited areas in neighboring states i.e. Assam, Manipur, and Arunachal Pradesh in addition to Nagaland. They even want to include some portions of Myanmar which are inhabited by Nagas into the “Greater Nagalim”. “The proposed Nagalim spreads over approximately 1, 20,000 sq km in contrast to the present state of Nagaland that has an area of 16,527 sq km”. With a vision of Nagalim this militant group is in a constant endeavor to push the boundaries of Nagaland towards the plains of Assam. Even the state government of Nagaland is allegedly in collaboration with the militant groups.

In 1985 a full fledge gun battle between Assam police and Naga police took place in the border areas and it is alleged that Naga police were accompanied by the NSCN militants in the gun battle. Killings, looting, kidnappings, threatening, etc. are some common phenomena in the Assam-Nagaland border areas. The Naga insurgency still persists due to lack of political will on the part of Nagaland government. “Mainstream Naga politicians do not want the insurgency to end because once that happens militia leaders would compete with them for elected office” (Misra 2000). Civil societies had been in constant endeavor for a long lasting peace in the region but governments of both the states are busy playing the blame game.
Northeast has been a safe haven for the terrorists as well as for the security agencies to carry out atrocities without any accountability in different forms. In larger parts of the northeast the draconian Armed Forces Special Powers Act is in operation. Security of life and property, ‘….civil liberties, due process, justice, and fairness….‘ is a distant cry for the people of Northeast in general and Assam in particular (Baruah 1999).

**Way forward**

Though no immediate solution is in sight, the state governments of Assam and Nagaland are should initiate chief minister level dialogues on the border dispute between the two states. These talks must be backed by utmost sincerity and dedication in order to bring a sustainable solution to the protracted conflict. It has been found that timely and prompt action by the neutral forces could have stopped the ongoing violence. Time has come on the part of state governments to accept responsibilities in a positive manner and to cooperate with the Supreme Court mandated team to bring peace in the region.

**References**


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