

Editorial

Thursday, May 23, 2019

A take on India's Act East Policy

The long cherished dream of getting benefit through the opening of the Indo-Myanmar border trade still fails to serve its purpose. Almost all trades are on illegal goods and those with licence legitimate traders are not showing much interest as the authority who were supposed to improve the condition still fails to show and translate into action to what they promise.

A noted scholar Edmund Downie once wrote in this paper that Cross-border transit infrastructure deficits are a major drag on India-Myanmar trade. Redressing this issue on the Indian side will require substantial investment, especially in railways and roads, the most natural channels for large-volume trading in this region.

In the railway sector, such efforts are ongoing, but progress is slow. A November 2014 presentation by India-ASEAN connectivity expert Prabir De suggests that efforts to connect Imphal to India's railway map, initiated in 2003, are slated to be completed by March 2018.

An extension from Imphal to Moreh, likewise set in motion during the mid-2000s, finished its engineering survey only this year, according to the Bangkok Post; and links from Moreh into Myanmar are further off.

For roads, at least, the basic infrastructure of trade already exists. Manipur connects to mainland India via two major highways. National Highway 102 (NH-102) is the extension of AH-1; it goes northwards into central Assam. National Highway 37 (NH-37) runs westwards into southern Assam. These two highways are essential not just for overland trade to Myanmar, but also for providing Manipur with the rice, petrol, cement, and other basic commodities which the state imports from other parts of India. However, both highways are plagued by shoddy construction, especially NH-37: Even in the dry season, traveling the 220 km from Imphal to Jiribam on Manipur's western border can take 13-14 hours.

The border trading environment itself is characterized by a combination of weak basic infrastructure and byzantine bureaucratic procedures.

In 2006, central government authorities approved the development of an Integrated Check Post (ICP) at Moreh - a single complex for border management authorities, intended to improve inter-agency coordination and it still under construction.

A 2011 report on border infrastructure at Moreh suggested that maintenance of current customs facilities had dropped off since ICP development began. Such deficits work against the sort of professionalized trading operations that Delhi policymakers seek to encourage, and in fact, the vast majority of Moreh's trade goes through informal and illegal channels.

Official statistics for these channels do not exist - both publicly available and in my own conversations with experts in Manipur - indicate that the annual volumes moving through each of these channels today stands somewhere in the billions to tens of billions of rupees, far above the hundreds of millions of rupees in annual formal trade.

Indeed, the volume of informal trade can be understood to indicate the mismatch between the infrastructure of formal trade and the demand for trade at Moreh. Informal trade here consists primarily of "headload trade" - goods carried across the border on one's head, which are largely exempted from standard customs procedures. But much of this trade is actually coordinated by high-volume traders, who hire large armies of coolies to carry goods across the border.

Prof. Ch. Priyoranjan Singh, an economist at Manipur University, last year stated that, of the forty traders who obtained licenses to operate at Moreh's formal customs station upon its establishment in 1995, just three still use them.

With the kind of delayed the Imphal-Moreh trade is going on illegal goods more than the legitimate goods. Above all Manipur still felt that are the promises made under the Act East Policy will be benefitted the people of this region or are they waiting for multi crore traders of the mainland to find a way by suppressing the local traders - a question to be pondered .

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Repeal Afspa Which Was Enacted On 22 May 1958 By Indian Parliament Call For Urgent Attention

By - Rebati Raman, Sr. Coordinator, North East Dialogue Forum



(1) Many civil society organizations and NGOs, network of NGOs of indigenous people, religious institutions, and indigenous Women's organizations working in Manipur for peace building and human rights since four decades to repeal Armed Forces (Special Power). Manipur was merged to India in 1949 with the instrument of controversial Merger Agreement. Indian parliament enacted the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in 1958 on 22 May and imposed on all the regions of the North-East states of India to be ruled by the Indian Army under AFSPA. AFSPA is - according to Amnesty International (1997) - the undeclared emergency without reason for unlimited period of time.

(2) Why do we provide this information and request your action? We believe that the military operations under AFSPA in Manipur and the North East of India in general correspond to grave and systematic human rights violations of the civilian population, infringements with the International Humanitarian Law, and even include aspects of ethnic cleansing. Following, we present a number of facts also in their historic dimension which may allow understanding our position.

(3) **Operation Blue Bird (1985) in Oinam village:** 27 people were killed after being brutally tortured. 96 villagers (including women and children, aged person) were kept in the detention centre for 3 months. **Two women were forced to give birth in the open field in front of the soldier,** the mothers were forced to work for the paramilitary Assam Rifles on the day of delivery, and hundreds of villagers were forced to labor for the Assam Rifles for months without payment. The Indian Army never allowed entering the representatives of the civil administration to provide support to the victims and investigation of the case by police. Members of the Indian Army committed mass raped in the detention centre.

(4) **Operation in Patsoi village:** On 26 of April, 1980, an operation was conducted at Patsoi located near Imphal town of Manipur. Several incidents of rape and maiming women were reported during the operation. A pregnant woman was shot while she was hiding in her granary. Men and women were stripped naked; nearly 50 men were savagely beaten. 3 people (including a woman) were killed.

(5) **Operation Summer Storm (2009):** Since April 10, 2009, a security operation called "Operation Summer Storm" at Loktak Lake was launched by the 57th Mountain Division to flush off militants from that area. Hundreds of people were displaced. Some of them were used as human shields by the security forces. It is reported that 12 persons were shot dead by them.

(6) **Further operations of that pattern:** Operation Stinger (2005) at Loktak Area; Operation Sontal no. I (2006) and Operation Sontal no. II (2007) at Sontal area, Operation Sunny Vale (1993), Operation Tornado (2005) in Jiribam subdivision, Operation Dragnet (2006) at Parbung and Thanlon Division.

Operations in Assam in terms of military strikes against the rebel movement ULFA (Operation Bajrang 1990, Operation Rhino 1991, Operation Rhino 2 in 2000) which always victimized civil population. I (7) **Massacres in Manipur:** (i) **Heirangoithong Massacre (1984):** Thousands were watching a volley ball match at the Heirangoithong Volley Ball Ground in Imphal. Some extremists tried to snatch weapons from the Central

Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel there which resulted in the CRPF to resort to firing killing five people. The CRPF at the spot then began to shoot indiscriminately at the crowd. Thirteen people were killed and 31 injured in the firing that went on for half an hour.

(ii) **Tera Bazar Massacre, March 25, 1993:** Unidentified youth shot at CRPF personnel at Tera Keithel, Imphal which killed 2 CRPF men. Thereafter, the CRPF personnel rushed out and fired indiscriminately. Five civilians were killed and many others received bullet injuries. However, no enquiry has been instituted to date.

(iii) **Regional Medical College Massacre:** On the morning of **January 7, 1995**, (CRPF) shot dead nine innocent persons at the Regional Medical College, Imphal, in retaliation to attacks on them by the members of an armed opposition group.

(iv) **Malom Massacre: November 2, 2000:** Assam Rifles convoy was attacked near Malom, Manipur by insurgents. In retaliation, the troops shot at civilians at a nearby bus-stop leaving 10 civilians dead, including a 60 year old woman and a boy who had been awarded the bravery award by the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. A brutal bombing operation followed.

(8) **Other massacres in Manipur:** Oinam Leikai Massacre on November 21, 1980, Ukhrul Massacres on May 9, 1995, Bashikhong massacre on February 19, 1995, Churachandpur Massacres on July 21, 1999, Nungleibam Massacre on October 15, 1997, Tabokpikhong Massacres on August 12, 1997, and Tonsen Lamkhai Massacres on September 3, 2000.

(9) **Concentration Camps in Mizoram:** In January 1967, 75 villages were grouped in 15 grouping centres and during 1968 to 1970, 367 villages were grouped in 73 grouping centre. When the villagers were led out of the villages, the security forces burnt down all their houses. There was no sanitation plan; they faced many problems, water and waste disposal. They were compelled to build the camp, dig trenches and bunkers, build fences, do the work of the porters, to fetch water for security forces. They did all the work without getting any money. Only a meagre amount of food was given, hungry children wept and cried for food. Famine swept the grouping centres and epidemic prevailed. They were not allowed to work in the fields for agriculture as they used to do before.

(10) **Operation in Mizoram:** (i) **Air Raids:** On 5. 6th March, 1966, the Indian Airforce conducted aerial bombardment at Aizawl town after the Assam Rifle Camp was attacked by the Mizo National Front (MNF) two days before. While dropping the bombs over civilian residences, the Indian Army fired their heavy machine guns on scattered places not only on the position of MNF but anywhere of the town.

(ii) **Air raids at Khawzawl (Champhai District):** On 6th & 7th March 1966, two planes

armed people were in full camouflage with sophisticated weapons and speaking only in Hindi. Still, the Government of India denies any independent investigation.

(14) **Human Skulls:** Several human skulls were found in the Tombisana High school complex located in Imphal City, which was occupied by central paramilitary forces during the peak of insurgency in the early 1980s and 1990s in Imphal West district of Manipur. On December 26, 2014 a senior police said that the school complex was occupied by the central paramilitary forces from 1980 to 1999. During that time, many youth was made disappeared by the armed forces. Local dailies published front page photos of the skulls while various organizations demanded DNA tests.

(15) **Disappearance, torture and killing : Since 1992 to 2017, the total number of 18,791 people were extra-judicially executed in the North East of India by the Indian Army, the Indian Police and allied paramilitary forces in the name of counter insurgency. The fatal consequences were spread such as 7448 people in Assam, 5101 (Manipur), 2266 (Nagaland), 3031 (Tripura), and 598 (Meghalaya). 6 Thousands of civilians were brutally beaten up which lead to physically disable, electric shock at the body and private parts, putting nails inside the fingers, water were pouring on the face which were covered with cloth for hours, using electric chair etc. We have thousands of cases of disappearance during the counter Terrorism activities of India Armed forces under AFSPA. Some background information** (16) 15 members of parliaments from eight states in the North-East of India attended a meeting with civil society representatives on 3rd December 2014 and supported to repeal AFSPA; as did a number of commissions contributed by the Government of India in previous times. The Government, however, decided not to take up such recommendations but to extend AFSPA in Manipur, Tripura, Assam and other North-East states of India in December 2014 till 2015. Recently, AFSPA was renewed in Nagaland as well. Many international organizations including International Commission of Jurist strongly denounced the government of India and its continuous refusal to repeal AFSPA. 7 (17) Since 1997, ICCPR with deep concern urges the Government of India to repeal AFSPA. CERD also recommended repealing AFSPA (in terms of racist discrimination) in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012 under the Early Warning procedure. The former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Navi Pillay (2009), the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders (2011), the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Executions (2012) and the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women (2013) recommended in their reports to the Human Rights Council (HRC) in the subsequent years 2009, 2011, 2012 and 2014 to repeal AFSPA too. They were invited by the Government of India to visit India including the North-Eastern states. Prof. Christof Heyns, the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Executions, also stated that he was confused of the response by the Supreme Court of India at that time to decline investigating into the cases of human rights violations under AFSPA which was applied for by the Naga People's Movement for Human Right in 1997. The facts which are sighted above are the few reasons why we call unitedly to repeal the draconian act AFSPA.

"REPEAL AFSPA, 1958 IMMEDIATELY!"