

Red Terror In Northeast India Maoists' link-up with ethnic rebels adds new dimension to the region's security

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‘Special cell to deal with Naxalites’—*The Assam Tribune*, Guwahati, 24 February 1971.

This news report, published more than four decades ago, talks of the Assam Government setting up a special cell with an Additional Inspector General of Police¹ to, as it said, “deal with the Naxalite menace which is slowly raising its head in Assam.” The report also talked about 20 arrests having been made, including a post-graduate student from Gauhati University. By 1971, the Naxalbari Movement in neighbouring West Bengal might have ceased to

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¹ The Additional Inspector General of Police referred to was R. C. Dutta

be a cohesive force, but Assam had a brush with Naxalism or Left-wing extremism then.

Therefore, when Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram admitted on September 14, 2009 that Naxalites were tying up with insurgents in the Northeast to synergize operations, there were many who were not surprised at all.² One is not aware if a concerted bid was made by the security apparatus to deal with the problem in the region when reports first started trickling in of the Maoists trying to gain a foothold in the Northeast, but the Assam Police in 2009 itself did sound an alert, directing superintendents of police in the districts to monitor whether there has been any growth of Naxalism or Naxalite activities anywhere in the State.

Now, of course, it is official that Maoists or Naxalites have managed to extend the 'red corridor' to Northeast India and have linked up with a number of insurgent groups in the region, adding an entirely new dimension to the area's security situation, besides forcing the authorities to take a re-look at their counter-terror strategies. In fact, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has begun a formal probe to get at the bottom of the linkage between the Communist Party of India (Maoist), the main political platform of the Naxalites in the country, and the People's Liberation Army (PLA), one of Manipur's, or for that matter the Northeast's, most potent insurgent groups³. Besides, official communications originating in Assam state in no uncertain terms that the Maoists in the State are being armed and trained by the anti-talk faction of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) headed by Paresh Baruah.

In 2005-2006 itself, the threat from the Naxals seemed real in Assam with the Maoists setting up base in Goalpara and Sonitpur districts. At least eleven Naxals were killed by security forces in these two districts although those eliminated passed off as cadres of local militant groups. The Assam Police at that time managed to identify at least two dozen overground sympathizers of the Maoists, people with Leftist leanings. They were kept under surveillance.⁴

² See Maoists forging links with NE ultras, <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/details.asp?id=sep1509/at01>

³ See NIA to probe PLA-Left 'nexus', <http://www.sevensisterspost.com/epaper/26.11.11.pdf>

⁴ Wasbir Hussain, Can Assam be immune to red terror?, <http://www.sentinelassam.com/mainnews/story.php?sec=1&subsec=0&id=46484&dtP=2012-01-14&ppr=1>

Assam Governor J. B. Patnaik's address at the Conference of Governors held at New Delhi on October 29-30, 2011 reveals some vital facts. "...the emergence of Left-wing extremism in Assam, particularly in Tinsukia and Dhemaji districts, has added a new dimension to the law and order scenario that needs immediate attention. Though spawned in the early parts of the last decade, the advent of the Maoist has surfaced to the forefront when one Shashikanta Rabha, a Maoist activist, was apprehended in 2006 at Goalpara (in western Assam)..."

The Manipur Front

In 2008, the then military chief of the CPI-Maoist, Mallojula Koteswara Rao, popularly known as Kishenji, was reported to have visited Thoubal in Manipur. He is said to have held a meeting in October 2008 with the frontline Meitei insurgent group, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), and had adopted a resolution to back each others' interests. Reports with security agencies say Kishenji identified himself as Pradip at the meeting that was attended by a team from the ULFA, led apparently by Partha Gogoi. Partha Gogoi was believed to have attended the Manipur meeting under express orders of the ULFA military chief Paresh Baruah.⁵

In fact, the nexus between the CPI (Maoist) and the PLA have since been corroborated by detained leaders of the Manipuri insurgent group. Disclosures by N Dilip Singh alias Ningthambam Ranjit alias Wangba, a senior leader of the Revolutionary People's Front (RPF), of which the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is a constituent unit, and Arunkumar Singh Salam, his colleague, arrested on October 1, 2011 in Delhi, not only reconfirm thickening of operational relationship between the Maoists and the RPF/PLA but also unveil their audacious plan to upgrade it to a strategic level.⁶

A note prepared by a security agency makes disturbing reading:

"...The proposed Strategic United Front, the concept of which is being currently fleshed out by leaders of the two outfits, would eventually incorporate all 'revolutionary groups' including those in Jammu and Kashmir and the Northeast. This development acquires sinister salience when viewed in the backdrop of credible reports

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Kishenji's N-E Nexus Exposed, http://www.tehelka.com/story_main51.asp?filename=Ne171211Kishenji.asp

about the Chinese security agencies exhorting the Northeast militants to forge a common platform of which Jammu and Kashmir militants and CPI (Maoist) would be crucial constituents to launch synergised campaigns of violence against India...”

The arrested PLA leaders are also said to have revealed that their outfit and the Maoists have since built on their intent of mutual cooperation spelt out in their joint declaration in October 2008 during the second Congress of the RPF/PLA in Myanmar. Dilip Singh (self styled captain, Chief, External Affairs, PLA) in fact was assigned in March 2009 with the job of operationalising the liaison with the CPI (Maoist) to push their relationship forward. The note by the security agency adds: “He (Wangba) visited Jharkhand along with his deputy and met senior CPI (Maoist) leaders in April 2009. Based on an agreement during this visit, three PLA traders imparted combat and communication training to CPI (Maoist) cadres of five states (Orissa, Chattisgarh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka) for two months from August 2010 in Jharkhand...”

That this was a nexus that was actually working has now been proved with the security establishment obtaining enough evidence to ask the NIA to launch a full-scale probe. The RPF/PLA, for instance, was said to have provided TH-K-2AT wireless communication sets to the Maoists, more of which were sought by them in 2011. The Maoists had also requested rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) for carrying out attacks on ‘enemy camps’ with a view to capture an estimated 1000 weapons or more.⁷ The note by the security agency talks of an advance of Rs. 15 Lakhs that the Maoists paid to the RPF/PLA for purchase of arms in 2009. The Maoists were said to have purchased a truck to transport such consignments from Imphal.

It was on June 8, 2011 to be precise that the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) ordered the NIA probe, on the basis of which the investigating agency registered a case against the PLA. Before starting its probe against the rebel group, the counter-terrorism agency informed the NIA court in Guwahati that the PLA “had imparted training to Left-wing extremists in the mainland of India”, and therefore, they will start a probe against it⁸. According to NIA, some of the PLA members visited places like Rourkela,

⁷ See N-E ultras train Orissa Maoists - Terror alliances set off alarm bells in Delhi, http://www.telegraphindia.com/1111016/jsp/orissa/story_14628211.jsp

⁸ See NIA to probe PLA-Left ‘nexus’, <http://www.sevensisterspost.com/epaper/26.11.11.pdf>

Kolkata, Guwahati and Champai in Mizoram since July 2010 to impart training to Maoist cadres.

Media reports quoting NIA sources said many PLA leaders went to the jungles in Jharkhand and imparted training to Maoist cadres for 39 days between September 11 and November 20 in 2010. The NIA has launched the probe under the provisions of Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Unlawful Activities (prevention) Act. The NIA has registered its first case against PLA under sections 120 B, 121 A of IPC and sections 17, 18, 18-A and 18-B of UA (P) Act.⁹

The NIA's mandate on this case is to find out the larger conspiracy behind PLA's alleged plans to "destabilise India" with the help of Maoists and other like-minded militant groups of the Northeast. Apparently, the premier anti-terror agency has also been asked to conduct a probe into PLA's nexus with China¹⁰. "A case (number 1/2011) has been registered at the NIA police station in Guwahati under Sections 120 (B), 121 (A) of the IPC and Sections 17, 18, 18-A and 18-B of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act," news reports quoted sources as saying¹¹.

Maoists On The Assam-Arunachal Frontier

A state like Assam has been an ethnic cauldron and this automatically increases the possibility of the Naxals cutting ice or igniting the fire among certain communities and groups harbouring a variety of grievances against the State. Location of the State also needs to be factored in. With the Kamatapur Liberation Organization (KLO) having a good presence around the vital Siliguri-corridor that connects the Northeast to mainland India, through West Bengal, the Maoists have a bridge ready. The KLO is known to be close to the Maoists. The Adivasis in Assam, that comprise the bulk of the tea garden work force in the State, has a whole lot of grievances. Several Adivasi insurgent groups have come into being to push these grievances. Some of them like the Adivasi Cobra Militants are on a truce. The Naxals are already said to be trying to cash in on these grievances and consolidate its presence in the State.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ ibid

On December 21, 2011, a delegation of the Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha, a frontline trade union body affiliated to the ruling Congress in the State, met Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi and apprised him of attempts by Maoists to recruit youth belonging to the tea community. "The delegation informed the Chief Minister that many instances of Maoists luring youths belonging to the tea tribes to join them had come to light. If this trend continued, said the delegation, it would spell doom, not just for the tea tribes, but for the entire State¹²." In fact, the Maoists are said to be paying a salary or stipend of Rs 2500.

The threat of the 'red terror' actually spreading to the region, particularly to a state like Assam, has always been there, and when the Maoists are actually in the State, the element of surprise is just not there. Assam's proximity to Bhutan is also something that needs to be factored in. Security circles in both India and Bhutan had been rattled by news of the launching of the Bhutan Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist) on April 22, 2003, the 133rd birth anniversary of Lenin. Pamphlets widely circulated by this new group in the Bhutanese refugee camps in Nepal and in areas inside Bhutan itself revealed that the new party's objective was to "smash the monarchy" and establish a "true and new democracy" in Bhutan.¹³

The 2003 launch of the Bhutan Communist Party was enough for the Indian and Bhutanese security establishment to put the ULFA, NDFB and the KLO under intensive surveillance and scrutiny. It didn't take long for New Delhi and Thimphu to identify the KLO as the group with a far greater nuisance value than perhaps the ULFA or the NDFB. The KLO is active and has pockets of influence in the strategic North Bengal areas of West Bengal and act as a bridge between the Maoist guerrillas and the newly emerging Maoist force in Bhutan. Indian intelligence agencies were also aware of the fact that the KLO had provided sanctuary to fleeing Maoist rebels from Nepal, that the outfit has acted as a link between the Nepalese Maoists and radical Left-wing activists in the Indian State of Bihar, and that it had received help from the Maoists in setting up a number of explosives manufacturing units in North Bengal.¹⁴

¹² Tea body points to 'dangerous' Maoist trend <http://www.sentinelassam.com/mainnews/story.php?sec=1&subsec=0&id=101134&dtP=2012-01-14&ppr=1>

¹³ See Rise of Red-army in the Last Shangri-La, <http://www.bhutannewsservice.com/feature/rise-of-red-army-in-the-last-shangri-la/>

¹⁴ Wasbir Hussain, Going For The Kill, <http://www.outlookindia.com/printarticle.aspx?222400>

It was these deepening linkages that forced both New Delhi and Thimphu to agree that it was time to launch a direct assault on the rebels in Bhutan before the situation went out of hand. This was in the winter of 2003. Nine years down the line, the Maoists have actually made their entry into the Northeast.

The first recorded meeting between the CPI (Maoist) and the ULFA was the one in October 2008 when Maoist leader Kishenji visited Manipur for a meeting with the RPF/PLA.¹⁵ The ULFA, as mentioned earlier, was represented by Partha Gogoi, deputed by none other than Paresh Baruah. What transpired at the meeting (if reports shared by security officials are true) was indeed significant. Kishenji apparently wanted groups like the ULFA to stop attacking the ‘proletariat’ or people belonging to the working class (wage earners etc.). The Maoist leader must have had the serial killing of migrant Bihari workers and settlers by the ULFA in Assam in mind while calling for a halt in attacks on the ‘proletariat’. The ULFA refused to pay any heed to Kishenji’s call. After all, the ULFA is not a pan-India outfit unlike the CPI-Maoist and it draws its sustenance from targeting symbols of the Indian state or people from the mainland who are soft targets but identified with the Hindi-speaking ruling class. Later, of course, as events would unfold, the anti-talk faction of the ULFA did take the Maoists under its wings, obviously as a matter of strategy in the wake of the split in the outfit with a large group headed by chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa entering into a peace dialogue with the Government of India. More than anything else, Paresh Baruah was looking for force multipliers and the nascent Maoists on the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh were the sort of allies he and his group was looking for.

It is now official that the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh frontier is turning into a Maoist den with cadres of the anti-talk faction of the ULFA headed by Paresh Baruah providing arms training to the fledgling ‘red rebels’. Until recently, the presence of secret Maoist camps in the Lohit and Lower Dibang Valley districts of Arunachal Pradesh, bordering eastern Assam’s Tinsukia district, was talked about in whispers in security circles. Now, there is any number of official communication to confirm this fact, a development that is ominous to say the least because this is the first clear sign of an extension of the ‘red corridor’ to India’s sensitive Northeast, and, that too, along the Myanmar-China frontier.

¹⁵ Wasbir Hussain, Can Assam be immune to red terror?,
<http://www.sentinelassam.com/mainnews/story.php?sec=1&subsec=0&id=46484&dtP=2012-01-14&ppr=1>

First, a look at the contents of some of the official documents, many of them meant for internal circulation within the country's security establishment—the CPI (Maoist), one of the communications from a central agency under the Union Ministry of Home Affairs says, is operating in the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border in the name of the Upper Assam Leading Committee (UALC). It says the UALC is functioning with distinct wings for political and military activities under the command of designated 'political commissars' and 'military commander.'¹⁶ The communication says UALC cadres were behind the snatching of four .315 rifles and 64 rounds of ammunition from forest security camps located in the 380 square kilometer Dibru-Saikhowa National Park in Tinsukia district on September 18, 2011. UALC cadres were also said in the communication to be behind the October 4, 2011 attack on India Reserve Battalion personnel at Ambikapur, in the Sadiya sub-division of Tinsukia district, in which one IRB trooper was injured and a 9 mm carbine snatched.

If this was a communication originating in New Delhi, take a look at the contents of a letter written on October 25, 2011 by a senior State Government official based in eastern Assam to Chief Secretary N. K. Das. The letter says the anti-talk ULFA faction headed by Paresh Baruah was imparting arms training to Maoist cadres on the border with Arunachal Pradesh, across the eastern Assam district of Tinsukia. The letter says youth in the age group of 20-25 years are lured by the Maoists and the main pull factor for these boys was the lack of economic activity and employment avenues in such far-flung and inaccessible areas like the Sadiya Sub-division of Tinsukia district. The official has sounded an alarm saying if urgent development initiatives are not undertaken by the Government in eastern Assam, particularly in Tinsukia district's Sadiya area, things might go out of hand.

The contents of these documents or communications may not be in public domain but there have been open corroboration of many of these facts by people in authority. This is what Assam Governor J.B. Patnaik had to say at the two-day meet of Director Generals and Inspector Generals of police and heads of central paramilitary organizations at Guwahati on December 20, 2011:

“...I have been informed that the Paresh Barua group of ULFA is in constant negotiation with them (Maoists) and is willing to provide

¹⁶ Wasbir Hussain, Red Terror On Assam-Arunachal Frontier <http://cdpsindia.org/point-of-view67.asp>

both sophisticated weapons and requisite funds...The danger signal in the Northeast should be taken seriously and immediate steps should be taken to bring the isolated areas suffering from decades of neglect by the administration to the mainstream of development so that they (the Maoists) will be denied easy recruitment of youths from those areas.¹⁷”

The lid on the organized Maoist activity in the area, mainly in the Lohit and Lower Dibang Valley districts of Arunachal Pradesh, was actually blown in August 2011 when arrested cadres made some startling disclosures. They told interrogators that they used to hold ‘revolutionary meetings’ in their hideouts at regular intervals and that such meetings were attended by anything between 150 to 200 cadres. During one such meeting held in August 2011, the arrested cadres claimed, they had mined a six km approach to the venue that was guarded by 60 armed fighters¹⁸. Revelations such as these had actually triggered the alarm in security circles.

Further evidence of Maoist activity in the otherwise ‘non-Red belt’ that was Northeast India was the confirmation by Tinsukia police that they had arrested 140 to 150 militants from the area between May and October, 2011 which included around 15 to 20 Maoist cadres. Again, between November and December 2011, Tinsukia police have arrested another 20-30 odd Maoist cadres¹⁹. In fact, Tinsukia police has also arrested at least two Maoist cadres from Namsai area in Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh who included Debojit Borgohain and Diganta Thamang. Assam Police sources told this writer that Thamang was among those involved in the Ambikapur arms snatching case in Sadiya sub-division.

On August 18, 2011, Tinsukia Police and the Army arrested five Maoist cadres.²⁰ “The big fish, Aditya Bora, was also with this group but our boys had an impression he was an elderly man and therefore did not lay their hands on him. Bora had shaved off his grey beard that he had when he was arrested from a forest in Orissa in February 2011 on charges of training Maoists in the region,” a police officer said. Incidentally, Bora, a former ULFA cadre got out on bail, and, according to the Assam Police, is now

¹⁷ Paresh gives arms, funds to Maoists: JB

http://www.telegraphindia.com/1111221/jsp/frontpage/story_14908521.jsp

¹⁸ Interview conducted by this writer with a senior police official in Tinsukia district, Assam, in November 2011

¹⁹ Tinsukia district authorities revealed during interviews to the writer in January 2012

²⁰ See Maoists arrested, http://www.telegraphindia.com/1110818/jsp/northeast/story_14390636.jsp

based in the Lohit and Lower Dibang Valley districts of Arunachal Pradesh, now a Maoist hotbed.

Aditya Bora's arrest by the Orissa police in February 2011 provided yet another confirmation that Maoists were trying to set up bases in Assam. Take a look at this news report following Bora's arrest:

“Aditya Bora, one of the leading ULFA figures in Assam who was arrested by Orissa police, was on a Rs 5 lakh contract to train Maoist cadres in Orissa and Jharkhand. His task was to train in the rebels in guerrilla warfare against the combat forces, Rourkela superintendent of police Diptesh Patnaik told reporters. Aditya Bora was the president of the Assam Students' Youth Organization (ASYO). He was one of the founder members of the ULFA. He left ULFA a few years ago and joined the Maoist organisation. He was sent on a three-month mission to Jharkhand and Orissa to train local cadres here...The SP added that during interrogation Bora admitted that he had come to meet top Maoist leader Kishenji to discuss about future course of action in the eastern region...²¹”

Poor Development At The Frontier: The Key Pull Factor

One can say with a lot of conviction that poor development and lack of job opportunities is the key driving force for unemployed youth joining the Maoist fold, not so much for ideology, but for lack of any option whatsoever or for a small financial consideration as referred to above. This writer traveled to Sadiya in eastern Assam's Tinsukia district, on the border with Arunachal Pradesh, identified as the Maoist hotbed, and was appalled to discover the following: the Assam Government has thought it fit not to appoint a Block Development Officer (BDO) at Sadiya for three years now (yes, there is an officer holding charge of BDO!); there is no Deputy Inspector of Schools; no Child Development Project Officer (CDPO); and the mini primary health centre at Sonpura inaugurated with much fanfare by the Assam Health department on September 13, 2011 had no doctor posted till the date of the visit (November 1, 2011) and was being run by a pharmacist. This is just a few in the list and the fact remains that more than a dozen officers have not been posted in Sadiya Sub-division for months.

²¹ China shadow on North-east Maoist uprising <http://www.sentinelassam.com/mainnews/story.php?sec=1&subsec=0&id=97010&dtP=2011-11-19&ppr=1>

What is also true is that there is no dearth of officers, but most of them simply do not want a posting in an inaccessible place like Sadiya²².

The following additional facts are also worth taking note of:

The Sadiya sub-division that has a population of around 1.20 lakh (2011 census) has just one degree-level college and that too has only the arts stream; there are only three higher secondary schools; and only one school has a centre for the students to sit for their school final examination (High School Leaving Certificate or HSLC). The lone college in the sub-division located at the headquarter town of Chapakhowa is not keen on opening a science stream as there are no feeder colleges to send in students to take up a science course at the degree level²³.

This is the scenario, 64 years after the country's independence. If anything, this is just the best recipe for Maoists to get a toehold and then consolidate, cashing on people's sentiments and sense of deprivation.

Local officials in charge of administering the area are more than aware of the need for a 'development push' to counter the spread of Maoism in the region. In fact, officials in eastern Assam have submitted rather detailed action-plan to the Assam Government following which the Chief Minister has ordered setting up of a committee of senior bureaucrats to go into aspects like formulating a development package for Maoist-hit districts like Tinsukia, augmenting the police machinery in the district, etc. In fact, the strength or structure of the police in Tinsukia continues to be the same when it was just a sub-division.

A note prepared by the Deputy Commissioner (DC), Tinsukia, dated August 11, 2011, makes certain significant observations²⁴. It states:

“...Whereas Tinsukia district is in need of core attention due to the

- Presence of many anti-social elements and frustrated unemployed or under employed youth, who breed such elements,
- Prevalence of support for militancy and presence of militants in certain areas,

²² Documented on the writer's regular column in *The Sentinel*, Guwahati, titled DATELINE, November 5, 2011

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ A copy of the note available with the writer

- Prevalence of remote and backward areas that are as yet hardly touched by development administration in a commensurate manner,
- Prevalence of relatively backward communities – Moran, Adivasi (Tea Tribe) in a sizeable strength in the district.”

The DC’s note continues: “Whereas such areas require

- Focussed attention of field level development works
- Regular attention by officers of all levels, i.e., both ADCs (additional deputy commissioner), SDOs (sub-divisional officer) as well as departmental officers, both for implementation of the schemes as well as ensuring adequate monitoring and supervision,
- Engagement of the people of the area in development works in a participative endeavour
- Maintenance of open channels of communication with the people of the area – as feedback and prompt grievance redressal is paramount
- Lastly, development of an equal partnership between the administrative agencies and the people of such areas is mandatory to wholesome development of those areas.”

The Front Organizations

The Intelligence Bureau (IB) has noted in September 2011 itself that the CPI (Maoist) has been engaging in activities in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh “under the garb of local movements, including the Mega Dam Resistance Forum...” In fact, Assam Governor Patnaik has also said publicly that Maoists in the State were functioning under various banners including the Mega Dam Resistance Forum²⁵. Sometime later, Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi also made statements, corroborating what the IB and the Governor has been saying²⁶.

On December 29, 2011, Assam Power Minister Pradyut Bordoloi stated that dossiers were being prepared on Maoist elements infiltrating into the anti-dam movement in the State. “We are checking the background of the protestors. We have got information on some, and we are compiling a

²⁵ See *The Telegraph*, Guwahati http://www.telegraphindia.com/1111221/jsp/frontpage/story_14908521.jsp

²⁶ *The Sentinel* <http://www.sentinelassam.com/mainnews/story.php?sec=1&subsec=0&id=103580&dtP=2012-01-20&ppr=1>

dossier on them. These elements are basically driven by Maoist ideology and their religion is to create disorder and unruliness,” Bordoloi told a news conference in Guwahati²⁷.

As mentioned earlier, Orissa police arrested three persons from Assam on February 12, 2011—Aditya Bora from Tingkhong, Asik Sabor and Tingraj Orang from Naharkatia in eastern Assam’s Dibrugarh district. Bora, who is said to be a central committee member of the CPI (Maoist) was also a member of the Assam Students Youth Organisation (ASYO), which was under security scanner for being a “front” of the proscribed ULFA. Sabor and Orang, on the other hand, belong to the tea garden community²⁸.

The Orissa capture had, in fact, come within a fortnight of the arrest of six suspected Maoists, including two women, were picked up from different areas of Assam’s northern Dhemaji district. They had been carrying out Maoist activities under the name of Brihat Nadibandh Pratirudh Mancha²⁹. The arrested persons were Kishore Das of Maj Kuruwa under Sipajhar police station in Darrang district, Nibash Hajong of Silapathar in Dhemaji district, Dhaniram Das of Lakhpathar Koibartya village under Dhemaji police station, Diganta Gogoi of Borguri in Tinsukia district, Jun Bora of Chowdangpathar under Merapani police station in Golaghat district and Maneka Medhi of Pengeri in Tinsukia district. Kishore Das is said to have confessed having undergone training at a Maoist camp in Orissa for three months³⁰.

In fact, Chief Minister Gogoi has gone to the extent of thinking aloud as to whether there was a Chinese link to the anti-dam protests in the State. On January 12, 2012, Gogoi stated the anti-dam movement in Assam has been fueled by people working to further China’s interests³¹. Without mentioning any names, Gogoi said, “Those opposing big dams are actually working for furthering China’s interests. China is trying to divert Brahmaputra water but they do not oppose it. China will divert Brahmaputra water if we do not

²⁷ *Seven Sisters Post*, Guwahati, December 30, 2011

²⁸ *The Telegraph*, Guwahati, Assam Maoists held in Orissa

http://www.telegraphindia.com/1110213/jsp/northeast/story_13575127.jsp

²⁹ *ibid*

³⁰ *ibid*

³¹ *Times of Assam* <http://www.timesofassam.com/headlines/anti-dam-movement-in-assam-for-china-interest-tarun-gogoi/>

implement our right of use of water resources in the absence of an international treaty on use of water resources (sic)³².”

NE Rebels Arming The Maoists?

Reports say that Paresh Baruah, the ULFA's exiled military chief, has been a key supplier of arms and ammunition to the Maoists in India. Of late, of course, charges of the Paresh Baruah-led ULFA faction supplying sophisticated arms and funds to the Maoists in Assam and elsewhere in the region have been leveled by people in authority, including Assam Governor Patnaik³³. The question arises: where exactly could Paresh Baruah (currently said to have made China's Yunnan province his key base), be sourcing these weapons? Well, if reports are to be believed, the China North Industries Corporation or Norinco, a shady Chinese arms manufacturing company, which is a key supplier of unauthorized weaponry to insurgent groups and street gangs across the world, is also selling weapons to the Maoists through intermediaries. Importations of most Norinco firearms and ammunition into the United States were blocked during the Clinton Administration in 1993 under new trade rules when China's Most Favored Nation status was renewed. Concern about their use by criminals in inner cities was the reason put forward for the prohibition. In 1994, some employees of Norinco came under federal investigation from both the FBI as well as the ATF after a successful sting dubbed "Operation Dragon Fire."³⁴

Another source for arms purchase by rebel groups in the Northeast, which could eventually be re-sold to the Maoists, is the notorious United Wa State Army, a rebel ethnic minority army of about 20,000 soldiers in Myanmar. The UWSA is the military wing of the United Wa State Party (UWSP), and was formed after the collapse of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) in 1989. The United States government labeled the UWSA as a narcotic trafficking organization on May 29, 2003. On November 3, 2005, The Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control listed 11 individuals and 16 companies that were "part of the financial and commercial network of designated significant foreign narcotics trafficker Wei Hsueh-kang and the United Wa State Army (UWSA)." The UWSA is said to be the largest drug-producing organization in Southeast Asia.³⁵

³² *The Sentinel*, Guwahati <http://www.sentinelassam.com/mainnews/story.php?sec=1&subsec=0&id=103580&dtP=2012-01-20&ppr=1>

³³ *The Telegraph*, Guwahati http://www.telegraphindia.com/1111221/jsp/frontpage/story_14908521.jsp

³⁴ See Norinco, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norinco#Controversies_in_the_United_States

³⁵ See United Wa State Army, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Wa_State_Army

Linkages such as these can be ominous, but have not come as a surprise. The ULFA-Maoist links have a fairly long history. CPI (Maoist) leader Koteshwar Rao in a media interview published in January 2010 said: “We unconditionally support ULFA’s struggle for self-determination in Assam. We only want them to stop attacking the Indian proletariat. We will continue to engage with ULFA on this issue... ULFA cannot ignore the revolutionary struggle of Indians and our enormous goodwill for their struggle... They have to trust us... I sincerely want ULFA, the PLA and other such groups fighting for separate homelands or for self-determination to fight the exploitative Indian state alongside us...”³⁶

The Maoists are also said to have established links with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland- Isaac Muivah (NSCN-IM). On May 9, 2010, then Union Home Secretary G.K. Pillai stated that the Union Government was aware that the CPI-Maoist had been in touch with NSCN-IM. He contended, further, that IM leader Thuingaleng Muivah had confirmed, “a few years ago, the CPI-Maoist had approached his outfit, apparently to help them with arms”. The meeting had taken place at the NSCN-IM’s camp in Hebron near Dimapur (on the Assam-Nagaland border). Reports also indicated that IM leaders attended a Maoist meeting in the Dandakaryana area in Chhattisgarh. It is also suspected that NSCN-IM might be training Maoist cadres³⁷.

Conclusion

The threat has turned into a reality—Maoists have actually made its foray into Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and elsewhere in the Northeast. What could actually sustain the ‘red rebels’ is lack of development caused by various factors, including poor accountability and leakage of development funds, and the area’s geography, the porous borders that the region shares with Myanmar, China, Bangladesh, and Bhutan. With frontline ethnic insurgent groups either on a ceasefire or in advanced stage of peace negotiations with the Government, the anti-peace talk factions of groups like the ULFA could use these Maoists as force multipliers. If an effective security and development strategy is not adopted, the Maoists could well come to fill the void created by ethnic insurgent groups giving up arms and joining the mainstream. Instead of sitting and discussing an anti-Naxal or anti-Maoist

³⁶ South Asia Intelligence Review http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/sair10/10_17.htm

³⁷ *ibid*

strategy later, the authorities would do well to devise a development action plan to give youths in areas like eastern Assam's Tinsukia district or the Lohit and Dibang Valley districts in adjoining Arunachal Pradesh jobs and livelihood options, besides providing connectivity to the far flung areas. Initiatives like these are overdue. After all, it has been 65 years since India had attained independence.