



*Vivekananda International Foundation*

*Issue Brief*

# *Tripura Model of Holistic Approach to Combat Insurgency: Genesis, Lessons, Future Challenges and Recommendations*

*Brigadier Sushil Kumar Sharma*



## About the Author



*Brigadier Sushil Kumar Sharma is a graduate from the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington and an alumni of Higher Defence Management Course at Secunderabad. The officer has served in two UN Mission assignments at Cambodia and Lebanon and has attended two security related courses at USA and Russia. He has commanded Brigade in Manipur and was the Deputy General Officer Commanding a Mountain Division in Assam. He has been awarded a PhD from IGNOU for his study on Northeast India, and is presently posted as DIGP Training , CRPF in Delhi.*

# *Tripura Model of Holistic Approach to Combat Insurgency: Genesis, Lessons, Future Challenges and Recommendations*

## *Abstract*

*Ethnic strife between the people of Tripura and Bengal that was simmering since the princely days increased subsequently, leading to tension and sporadic incidents of violence since its integration into the country. The partition of Bengal in 1947 resulted in an influx from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) which forever changed the demography of Tripura. This demographic change paved the way for a fierce ethnic conflict that has ravaged Twipra, as the indigenous tribes-people of the state call it. An anti-immigration stance, demand for the restoration of lands to the tribals and the promotion of the native Kok Borok language formed the basis of later movements that were launched purportedly to safeguard tribal rights in Tripura. Later, it became a very disturbed state of India which was followed by sustained counter-insurgency operations by the security forces. Tripura once upon a time was one of the most insurgent and violent state. It has now emerged as the most peaceful state of India. The multi-dimensionally focused counter-insurgency approach followed by the government lay down many valuable lessons for other insurgencies in India and the world to follow. The state still faces some challenges like repatriation of the Bru, further safeguard of tribals interests and existence of militant camps across the borders in Bangladesh. This paper highlights the counter insurgency lessons from Tripura for other insurgencies and makes recommendations to address the challenges for lasting peace in the State.*

## *Introduction*

### *The Study*

*Tripura, the most violent State in the country as declared once upon a time by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), has now emerged as the most peaceful State in the entire North-eastern region of India in terms of insurgency-related fatalities in 2015. The declaration of the State as a non-disturbed area and removal*

of Armed Forces Special Power Act in May 2015 is an evidence of an improved security paradigm as Tripura did not account for a single insurgency-linked death during this year. Other parameters of violence like abduction, extortion and killings have also declined. At the peak of militancy in 2000, Tripura had recorded 514 fatalities, including 453 civilians, 45 militants and 16 Security Forces (SF) personnel, an extraordinary number, the highest in the Northeast<sup>1</sup>.

Security Forces continued to maintain pressure on degraded militant groups like the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT-BM); Bru Democratic Front of Mizoram (BDFM) and Jama'atul Mujahedeen Bangladesh (JMB). Most of them remained largely inactive. Tripura has secured extraordinary success in eradicating insurgency through sustained and coordinated counter-insurgency operations, backed by a multi-dimensional approach that promoted developmental work to counter the psychological hold of militants. The pattern of counter-insurgency, development and governance in Tripura offer an exemplary model of 'holistic' response to the problem.

## Objectives

Broadly, the study aims to understand the genesis of insurgency in Tripura, and counter-insurgency practices followed for the successful resolution of insurgency in the state. The objectives of the study are to:-

- a) Understand the genesis of insurgency in Tripura.
- b) Analyse salient feature and best practices followed in Tripura.
- c) Highlight the lessons for other insurgencies for conflict resolutions.
- d) Highlight the emerging challenges in Tripura and recommended measures to address them.

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<sup>1</sup> Tripura Assessment Year 2016, SATP, available at <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/tripura/index.html>, Accessed on July 23, 2016.

## *Data Sources, Methodology and Scope*

*The study is primarily based on the writer's own experience as a serving combatant. Review of the existing literature on the subject was carried out to obtain current perspective on the subject. Field survey was carried out in order to obtain viewpoints of the people, right from the grass root level to the intellectuals who contribute on a regular basis in the media, nationally and internationally. Perceptions received from wide-ranging strata of society were studied, analysed and incorporated while authoring the study. Besides, an exercise was also undertaken to solicit the opinion of experts from various domains in order to carry out a holistic analysis on the issue, in the light of the views obtained from the common people. This detailed analysis has formed the basis of arriving at the strategy and recommendations for conflict resolution.*

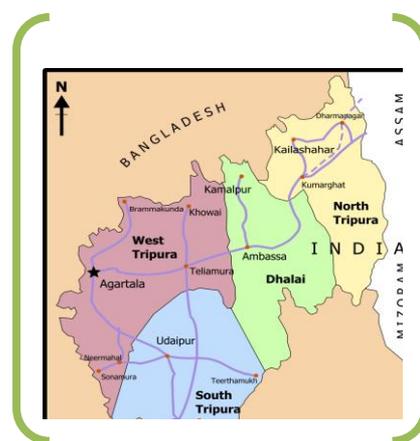
## *Background*

### *Brief History*

*Tripura's history dates back to the times of the Mahabharata. Historically, the Kings of Tripura were the descendants of the Lunar Dynasty. In Hindu mythology, the names of Shiva, Shakti, Pandavas, Kauravas and Kurukshetra occur frequently. There are mythological references to King Tripura, by whose name the state is known by i.e. by being a contemporary of 'Yudhishtira'. King Tripura is said to have ruled the Kingdom of Tripura in 14<sup>th</sup> century BC. The tribe of Tripuris had moved to Northeast Tripura before 65 AD and had gradually spread their influence and established a Kingdom, which included the existing Tripura and a major portion of today's Bangladesh. The intrusion of Muslims in Assam in the early 13<sup>th</sup> Century had effects on Tripura too. The 178<sup>th</sup> ruler of Manikya Dynasty, Bir Bikram Manikya died two months before the Independence of India. Thereafter, the State was ruled by*

Maharani Kanchan Prabha Devi, the Queen Regent till the Instrument of Accession was signed in Oct 1949, after which it was governed through a Chief Commissioner. Elections were first held in the State in 1952. Till 1965, it was a Part 'C' State and thereafter it became a Union Territory. Full statehood was conferred on Tripura on 21 Jan 72. The transition of Tripura to a full-fledged parliamentary democracy was completed by 1972. It can thus be seen that the simple process of implementing parliamentary democracy within a democratic country took 23 years, highlighting the indifference of the national political executive to the aspirations of the people of a small Northeast State.

Tripura has been facing distinct socio-economic, political and ethnic problems, which were essentially driven by a long spell of immigration from across the international border. The partition of Bengal in 1947 resulted in an influx from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) that completely changed the demography of Tripura. This demographic change paved the way for a fierce ethnic conflict that has ravaged Tripura, as the indigenous tribes-people of the state call it. On the eve of partition, the indigenous tribes of Tripura were not in a decisive majority like the tribals of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). In the CHT, Bengalis were less than 2percent of the population during partition. But in Tripura, the Bengalis accounted for more than 40percent of the population and the indigenous tribes of Tripura were in majority. This development in Tripura had serious implications in the rest of the North eastern states. As a matter of fact, the fear that other north eastern states would 'go the Tripura way' has weighed heavily on indigenous people and early settlers throughout the northeast which also provoked the youth to take up arms. Subsequently, the end of princely rule in Tripura and the introduction of ballot-box democracy meant that the indigenous people of Tripura



would soon be marginalised as far as control over political power was concerned. After the king was gone, it took Tripura more than 40 years to see the first and only tribal Chief Minister Tripura has ever had - Mr Dasarath Deb (at one time known as Raja Dasarath in the hills), for four years before a non-tribal returned to power in 1993.

### Topography

Tripura is situated almost at the extreme East of the Union of India and is surrounded on all sides by Bangladesh except for a corridor in the Northeast (NE) corner, which connects the State with the rest of India. The third-smallest State in the country, Tripura covers an area of approximately 10,491 sq km. and the State capital is Agartala. It is bounded on the North, West, South & South East (SE) by Bangladesh (856 km), whereas in the East it has a common border with Assam (53 km) and Mizoram (109 km).

One major highway, National Highway (NH) - 8 (earlier 44), i.e. Road Agartala - Shillong is the life-line of the State. A broad gauge railway connectivity from Delhi to Agartala started on 31 Jul 2016 (after conversion from metre gauge to broad gauge). The state capital is well connected by airlines with Kolkata, Guwahati and Imphal. An airstrip also exists at Kailashahar where Vayudoot used to operate earlier. Tripura has a predominant hilly terrain, though plain areas exist in Valleys and in the West. Plains are more densely populated while hill ranges are thickly wooded and sparsely populated. On the ridges there are number of tribal villages. These ridges have provided safe sanctuaries for the Undergrounds (UGs).

### Demography

According to the figures of the 2011 Census, the state population had reached a figure of 36,71,032 showing an increase of about five lakhs. The decadal growth in 2001-2011 was approximately 15.32 percent as compared to 15.74 percent in 1991-2001. It

was 31.7 percent in 1981-1991 and 31.94 percent in the decade previous to that. The growth rate from 1971 to 1991 remained high because of the migration from Bangladesh. Consequently over a period of time, the original dwellers i.e. the tribals have been outnumbered by the influx of migrants. The non-tribals now form the major ethnic group in the state.

Out of the 36, 71,032 people who inhabit Tripura, 30 percent belong to the tribal communities. There are 19 tribal communities in Tripura. The Tripuris are numerically the largest tribe who constitute the bulk of the tribal dwellers (approximately 55 percent). The Reangs, the second largest tribe are considered to be of the Kuki origin. The Jamatias are the fighting class. Six out of the 19 tribes i.e. Munda, Oraon, Santhal, Bhil, Lepcha and Bhutia are non-indigenous. They came to Tripura as tea garden labourers from Bihar, North Bengal, Orissa and East Nepal. The Tribals are mostly settled in the hill areas, while non-tribals dominate the plains. Population in the valleys is mixed. Most of the tribals are living in remote areas and are economically, educationally, socially and culturally not so developed as the non-tribals. They are content to stay in small hamlets in groups of 10-15 families called 'Paras'. In the valleys, the 'Paras' are bigger (50 to 60 families). The majority of tribals resort to 'Jhoom' cultivation whereas the plainsmen believe in settled cultivation. The food habits of the tribals are simple. Marriages and social interaction amongst the two groups are uncommon.

## *Genesis and Rise of Insurgency*

### *Origin of Unrest*

In 1767, the forces of British East India Company defeated Tripura and it became a princely State which enjoyed independent status. The origin of political unrest in recent times in Tripura can be traced to the period prior to the accession of the State to the Indian Union. Introduction of tea and settled cultivation by the King and

introduction of administrative and educative reforms led to a huge influx of non tribals into the State. Forcible conversion of Hindus in Chittagong division of Bengal led to the Naakhali riots, thus leading to migration of Hindus to refugee camps set up in Tripura. In November 1970 'Bhola cyclone of Category V' hit the then East Pakistan causing large scale destruction thus leading to further influx of refugees. Influx of refugees from erstwhile East Bengal continued during the Indo Pak war of 1971. Political unrest during this period was mainly directed against the administrative machinery. The first recorded tribal revolt in the history of Tripura took place in 1943 against the then rulers of the State. The appalling poverty of the tribals, successive failure of crops and the Sardari System gave rise to an open revolt popularly known as the Reangs' revolt. The revolt led by the Reangs encompassed the other tribal communities as well. The death of Bir Bikram (1947) was followed by a period of political vacuum, chaos and confusion. A secret and militant political union, 'Seng Krak' (meaning 'Clenched-Fist' in the local Kokborok language), was formed in 1950 by the tribals, which opposed the refugees and was highly anti-Bengali. It carried-out violent activities in many refugee colonies. This organisation was finally banned.

### **Demographic Inversion**

Insurgency in the State of Tripura has its roots in the demographic inversion that has taken place over the years. The situation aggravated after the State acceded to the Indian Union on 15 Oct 1949 and a Bengali Indian Civil Service (ICS) officer was appointed as the first Chief Commissioner. The influx of Bengali refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) to Tripura, in the wake of the Partition created demographic imbalance. Today, the demographic inversion has resulted in reduction of tribals to approximately 30 percent. As such, three distinct phases of immigration into Tripura can be identified - immigration occurring till the pre-Independence era, immigration caused by Partition and immigration during and

following the 1971 India-Pakistan War. While the first was regime encouraged, a curious mixture of factors caused the last two. In the ongoing social transformation of Tripura, the native tribals and Bengali immigrants were thus, positioned to take up confrontational roles against each other.

The tribals feared the possibility of economic exploitation by Bengalis, loss of political power and finally the loss of cultural identity. Besides these, other major causes are transfer of most of the cultivable land from the tribals to Bengalis and increased unemployment. There has been a lack of development in tribal areas and most of tribals live below the poverty line. In addition, promises made in the past have not been fulfilled, resulting in alienation of tribals. *En-masse* arrests of tribals by police made them support and even join insurgency. This can be seen from the fact that the population which in 1931 was 70 percent tribal and 30 percent non-tribal has come down to 26 percent tribal and 74 percent non-tribal as per the 2011 census.

There have been multiple impacts of demographic changes that took place in Tripura following the settlement of refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan in the aftermath of India's Independence. Most of the names of different villages, hamlets, rivers, tributaries, market areas, hills, hillocks, towns, etc. were changed to suit the refugees, who had since become the majority population. This created an impression that the state of Tripura did not belong to native Tripuri people.

## Language

Even as Bengali immigration was outnumbering the physical presence of tribals in Tripura, the Manikya rulers also adopted Bengali as the official language of the State. This had twin effects on the native tribals. One, they perceived their native *Kok Borok* language being marginalised and gradually dominated by the Bengalis. Secondly, the language was increasingly perceived as a means to achieve

social position, particularly in the post-Independence period and the Bengali language was viewed as a symbol of Bengali domination in the socio-economic arena.

### *Land Alienation*

The last monarch of Tripura had sensed the tribals' predicament. He had set-apart large areas as reserved areas for tribal settlements in 1942. However, this did not remain for long and part of it was de-reserved in 1948 for settlement of refugees. Whatever area was left of the tribal reserved areas was progressively de-reserved by successive governments to permit settlement of non-tribals in the tribal belt so as to build-up vote banks amongst the non-tribals whose strength was growing. As long as the tribals had enough land and the Bengali population was limited to certain urban or semi-urban pockets or rural areas around the capital, land alienation of tribals did not emerge as a major problem. This began to change with the Independence and the merger of princely Tripura with the Indian Union. Between 1947 and 1971, approximately 6,09,998 Bengalis who were displaced from East Pakistan and to Tripura for rehabilitation and resettlement<sup>2</sup>.

### *Initial Mobilisation*

An earlier mobilisation in Tripura had a distinct objective solve the problems of ill-health, poor communication and backward economy of all the tribes. Thus, a group of Young Tripuris organized themselves into the Tripura Jana Siksha Samiti (TJSS) in 1945. This movement did not apparently include any 'anti-immigration agitation' as part of its agenda. However, an anti-immigration stance, a demand for the restoration of lands to the tribals and the promotion of the native *Kok Borok* language formed the basis of later movements that were launched, purportedly to safeguard tribal

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<sup>2</sup> Subir Bhaumik, "Tripura: Ethnic Conflict, Militancy and Counterinsurgency" Policy and Practices, 52, August, 2012, available at <http://www.merg.ac.in/PP52.pdf>, Accessed on July 30, 2016.

rights in Tripura. These were the factors that eventually came to be exploited by later insurgent groups to justify their violent activities.

### *Tribal Aspirations and Gradual Alienation*

With simmering ethnic differences post- Independence, an incident of police firing in which seven personnel, including six tribals, were killed in October 1948, marked the beginning of the first phase of tribal insurgency in post-partition Tripura. The tribals who were among the debtors of a local *mahajan* (moneylender) had, allegedly with the active support of the Tripura Ganamukti Parishad (TGP), laid a siege to prevent the *mahajans* from taking away agricultural produce. Earlier, *Seng Krak* (Clenched Fist) had been created in 1947 as a secret militant tribal group, with an anti-Bengali immigration orientation.

The *Seng Krak* was short lived and also had little impact on the tribal population. The organisation was banned in 1948 for allegedly indulging in violence against the refugees. The group is believed to have been revived in 1967, but its activities again did not have much impact. Although varying degrees of mobilisation for the 'tribal cause' were present, it was with the formation of the Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti (TUJS)] in 1967, that the central issues were articulated in an organised form. The TUJS raised questions, *inter alia*, regarding the unification of cognate tribes, restoration of lands transformed from 'tribal' to 'non-tribal', recognition of the tribal language (*Kok Borok*) as the medium of instruction, more reservation for tribals in public services and appointments as also formation of a district council under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

### *Other Issues*

Three other events in this context had an impact on the future course of the conflict situation in Tripura. They included:

i) Provisions of the Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reform Act, 1960 aimed to vest ownership of the lands to the tiller, while declaring that non-claimed lands would belong to the State. The Act also sought to "regulate unrestricted alienation of tribal lands". However, an amendment by the State Government through an ordinance in 1974 legitimised transfer of lands to non-tribals up to 1st Jan, 1969. An agitation that followed witnessed a confrontation between the Ganamukti Parishad and the TUJS.

ii) A State Government official circular in 1974 asked various departments to increase use of Bengali language for correspondence. The TUJS and other tribal leaders opposed the same.

iii) The 1979 anti-‘foreigners’ agitation in Assam encouraged the TUJS to demand expulsion of all immigrants who came to Tripura after 15 Oct, 1949.

### *Evolution of Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti (TUJS)*

During the period 1977 – 1982, the TUJS in its enthusiasm to spearhead the tribal cause, started a systematic and aggressive campaign against the non-tribals, demanding the deportation of those who migrated after partition, since the Inner Line Permit for non-tribals and the Autonomous District Councils (ADC) did not permit settlement of outsiders in the State. The anti-Bengali Tripura Jan Shakti Samiti and the Seng Krak movement by tribals, which had taken roots in 1947 and 1950 respectively, was revived at Dasda-Kanchanpur at the foot hills of the Jampui Hills in 1967. This time, the Reangs and Chakmas backed by the Mizo National Front (MNF) took the lead. Though this movement did not last long, it left many Bengali’s homeless. Earlier the tribals had decided to emerge politically and formed the Adibasi Sansad and Tripura Unit of Eastern India Tribal Union in 1956. These organisations became fore – runners of the present TUJS, the main tribal party, which came into being in early June, 1967. With this came the political awareness amongst the

educated tribal middle class of Tripura. TUJS was originally created as a non-political organisation to fight exclusively for tribal rights. It followed an ideology based on communal militancy and avoided contact with any other Political Party. It was modelled like the Communist Party and had a streamlined organisational net-work.

### *Tripura Sena*

Within a year of its formation, the TUJS got deeply involved in the politics of Tripura and started its Student, Women and Youth Wings. The Youth Wing was named Tripura Sena in 1971. This Wing under the leadership of BK Hrangkhwal was backed by the Mizo National Front (MNF) and geared-up as a militant organisation. The mass base and organisation of the Tripura Sena matured for staging insurgency in some pockets of Tripura as a result of long years of indoctrination of the tribesmen in communal and divisive politics. By 1978-79 'Tripura Sena' units came up in all Sub-Divisions of Tripura.

### *Formation of Tripura National Volunteers (TNV)*

The Tripura Sena had attracted a large number of volunteers but this was not what Hrangkhwal was looking for. He wanted small bands of educated people who were prepared to sacrifice their lives for the cause. Therefore in 1979, Harangkhwal, Chuni Kolo, Binanda Jamatia and some other like-minded volunteers got together and decided to form the TNV. TNV came into existence at Kaeluma Misson School, Birganj, South District on 14 Dec 78, under B K Harangkhwal with the assistance of the MNF. The formation of TNV from Tripura Sena, its training in Bangladesh and nexus with MNF were discovered when TNV went on a rampage in Amarapur in Aug. 1979.

## *Evolution of Amra Bengali and Flare-Up*

A reaction to the formation of TUJS was the raising of Amra Bengali, a Party formed by non-tribals to counter activities of the TUJS. Thus, began the process of communalism. This led to differences cropping up between the tribals and the Bengalis that flared up to a genocide known as the 'Mandai Massacre' on 05 June, 1980, where two tribals were lynched by an irate Bengali mob in Amarpur leading to the 'Mandai Massacre' in the tribal dominated areas near village Mandai. A total of 350 Bengalis were killed and almost 1200 people of both communities lost their lives in the clashes that followed during the year. There spread a message that Tripura was moving towards a communal holocaust, though loud and clear, was not picked up by the administration and the rival camps continued to pursue their campaigns of hatred. The violence was put down by the Security Forces. The Army played an important role and arrested TNV leader B K Harangkhwal and other TUJS and TNV leaders on 14 June 1980.

## *Formation of Army of Tripura Peoples' Liberation Organisation (ATPLO) and Re-emergence of TNV*

BK Hrangkhawl in an understanding with the Communist Party of India - Marxist, (CPI-M), announced the dissolution of TNV in 1980, which came as a surprise to his colleagues, particularly, Binanda Jamatia and Chuni Koloï who formed a separate militant organisation called the ATPLO in Dec 1980. This party operated from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and received training from the MNF. Differences cropped-up between the two leaders and the organisation was split into two, the new group being Tripura Peoples' Liberation Army (TPLA) under Chuni Koloï. Meanwhile, B K Harangkhwal struck a deal with the State Government and was released. Binanda Jamatia, allegedly, kidnapped Harangkhwal and his wife in 1983 and took them to his camp in CHT. Chuni Koloï raided this camp and freed Harangkhwal from the clutches

of Binanda Jamatia. This led to the rebirth of TNV. TNV was again revived under the chairmanship of Hrangkhawl with Chuni Koloj as the Self Styled (SS) C-in-C of the Armed Wing. Binanda Jamatia and ATPLO were totally isolated and many of their members joined the TNV. The ATPLO however, later on came to an agreement with the CPI (M) Government and surrendered with 294 persons and 20 weapons. The re-emergence of TNV gave Hrangkhawl the opportunity to re-organise the designs and demands of TNV and step-up extremist activities independently in the State. TNV wanted to free Tripura and therefore asked the non-tribals to leave the State. Thereafter, insurgency picked-up and continued unabated. TNV continued its extremist activities, killing on an average, about 100 persons per year till 1988. The modus operandi of TNV was to choose non-tribal members living in isolated houses as targets and eliminate them, without getting involved in encounters with SF.

### *Emergence of National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and All Tripura Tribal Force (ATTF)*

In 1988, BK Hrangkhwal surrendered and signed a Tripartite Agreement with the Centre and the State. Harankhwal's decision led to disgruntlement amongst the ranks of the TNV and it led to the creation of the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) by his lieutenant Dhanajoy Reang in 1989. Two other members of the TNV, Lalit Debbarma and Ranjit Debbarma formed the All Tripura Tribal Force (ATTF) in 1990. Dhanajoy Reang was expelled from the NLFT and formed his own group, the Tripura Resurrection Army (TRA) in 1994 which later surrendered *en masse* to the Government in 1997. However, Biswamohan Debbarma, took over as the president of the NLFT and continues to head one of its factions called NLFT (Bishwa Mohan {BM?}), after his name. The NLFT has split thrice, mostly along tribal lines. The differences between the Halam and Tripuri tribal members of NLFT is believed to be behind the second split that led to the formation of the Borok National Council of

Tripura (BNCT) by Jogendra alias Joshua Debbarma in Sep 2000. The NLFT split further in Feb 2001 due to differences between its Christian members and the Hindu tribes.

### *External Linkages*

All the four insurgent outfits operating in Tripura - two factions of the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT- headed by Nayanbashi Jamatiya and Biswamohan Debbarma), All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) and Borok National Council of Tripura (BNCT) - had their camps in Bangladesh in districts including the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Sylhet, Comilla, Moulavi Bazar and Habiganj. The NLFT-N chief Nayanbashi Jamatiya has been accused of operating under the direct diktats of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan.<sup>3</sup>

### *Peace Process*

#### *Tripartite Agreement*

The tripartite agreement and en-masse surrender by the TNV took place soon after the state was declared disturbed in 1988. The Army was de-inducted and Disturbed Area Act was revoked. TNV which was the main insurgent group ceased its operations, laid down arms and joined the mainstream paving way for return of normalcy. Lalit Debbarma and his followers ATTF signed a Memorandum of Settlement on 23 August 1993, surrendering with 1,633 cadres.

#### *Suspension of Operations*

On April 15, 2004, leaders of two factions of the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) had a meeting with Deputy Prime Minister, LK Advani in New Delhi and agreed to put a halt to their armed campaign and enter into peace negotiations. "The

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<sup>3</sup> Bibhu Prasad Routray, "Tripura: Creating an Unenviable Record" SATP, available at [http://www.satp.org/satporstp/sair/Archives/2\\_14.htm#ASSESSMENT4](http://www.satp.org/satporstp/sair/Archives/2_14.htm#ASSESSMENT4) , Accessed on August 05, 2016.

Central Government, the NLFT (Nayanbashi) and the State Government of Tripura had agreed to observe mutual Suspension of Operations with immediate effect for a period of six months. It was also agreed that peace talks between all the concerned parties would follow the suspension of operations. In effect, the NLFT (Nayanbashi faction) and the Indian Government had agreed to a truce.

### *Surrender by Cadres*

Chief Minister Manik Sarkar stated on March 12, 2009, that, over the last three years, as many as 871 militants belonging to the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and Borok National Council of Tripura (BNCT) have surrendered, of whom 367 deposited arms and ammunition. According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) database, a total of 215 militants surrendered in Tripura in 2009, including 119 from the BNCT, 53 from the NLFT, 41 from the ATTF and two from unidentified militant outfits. On February 14, 2009, 118 BNCT militants deserted their hideouts in Bangladesh and surrendered before the police at Chawmanu police station in the Dhalai district. The militants disclosed that they had found it increasingly difficult to move freely in Bangladesh after the formation of the Awami League Government in January 2009<sup>4</sup>. You may consider adding what positive measures were taken by the Government to ensure their rehabilitation.

### *Loss of Safe Havens in Bangladesh*

There were indications that in the aftermath of the military operations in Bhutan, in December 2003, India has been able to build up considerable heat on the Bangladeshi authorities to act on the militant outfits long harboured in that country. Bangladesh had to act, as a result, on December 28, 2003, a number of hideouts of the outfit

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<sup>4</sup> Tushar Ranjan Mohanty, "Tripura: Unnoticed Consolidation" available at [http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/sair8/8\\_18.htm#assessment2](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/sair8/8_18.htm#assessment2), Accessed on August 05, 2016.

were reported to have been raided by the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) in Sylhet and Maulavi Bazar district<sup>5</sup>.

The electoral victory of the Awami League (AL) in the ninth Parliamentary elections in Bangladesh on 29<sup>th</sup> December 2008 and the assurance given by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina that the territory of Bangladesh would not be allowed to be used to launch terrorist strikes within India gave further grounds for greater hope in Tripura<sup>6</sup>. Gradually with the proactive role of the Awami League government resulted in the loss of safe sanctuaries of Indian insurgent groups in Bangladesh. It led to significant reduction of insurgents over political and administrative processes in the state and steady decline of their support base among the ethnic tribal populace. It underlines the fact that armed movement can be resolved through a mixture of political-security measures without acceding to the demands of the militants or even addressing the autonomy concerns that tends to surface every now and then<sup>7</sup>. Gradual loss of their safe houses in Bangladesh continued to make their revival difficult.

### *Conflict Resolution*

Tripura scripted a narrative of successful conflict resolution. The state adopted well - crafted, multi-dimensional strategy, a positive mind-set, resolute will, the right vision and direction, honest and credible leadership, efficient autonomous development councils, inclusive development, empowerment and modernisation of police forces, modulated and humane combat operations intertwined with psychological operations and civic Acton. <sup>8</sup> The model of successful counter insurgency response in Tripura

<sup>5</sup> Bibhu Prasad Routray, Tripura: Making Sense of a 'Surrender', South Asia Intelligence Review, Volume 2, No. 27, January 19, 2004, available at [http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/2\\_27.htm#ASSESSMENT2](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/2_27.htm#ASSESSMENT2), Accessed on August 15, 2016.

<sup>6</sup>Tushar Ranjan Mohanty, " Tripura: Steady Gains " SATP, available at [http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/7\\_30.htm#assessment2](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/7_30.htm#assessment2) Accessed on August 15, 2016

<sup>7</sup> Autonomy and Armed Separatism in South and Southeast Asia. Edited by Michelle Ann Miller, ISEAS, Published in Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2012 , p 206 Accessed on August 16, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> D.N. Sahaya, "How Tripura overcame insurgency" *The Hindu*, September 22, 2011 available at <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/how-tripura-overcame-insurgency/article2465348.ece> , Accessed on August 10, 2016.

provide valuable lessons to security forces, political leadership and other agencies fighting insurgencies elsewhere in the Northeast and across the country.

## *Lessons for Other Insurgencies*

### *Honest and Efficient Governance*

Insurgencies all over the world and India, especially in Northeast India and Left Wing Extremism (LWEs) have their origin and sustenance in poor governance and corruption. Counter – Insurgency operations, development and governance in Tripura offer an exemplary model of the ‘holistic’ response by the State. Tripura is considered to be the least corrupt state in the country and it is because of the exemplary and honest leadership of Manik Sarkar who has been Chief Minister of Tripura since March 1998, that the State received the best governance award conferred by the country's elite publishing group 'India Today' in December 20, 2013. He has emphasised on people friendly policies and their honest implementation with the consent of the people, which has made all the difference<sup>9</sup>.

Tripura retained its top position for the seventh consecutive year in providing jobs under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) – a staggering 94.46 person days per household – in the fiscal year 2015-16 against the national average of 48.51 days is evidence of this honest and people inclusive approach. According to a performance report of the union rural development ministry, Mizoram and Sikkim were second and third by providing 68.55 and 66.97 days of jobs in the fiscal 2015-16. In sharp contrast, two other North-Eastern States – Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur – were at the very bottom among India's 29 states by providing only 27.47 and 15.65 days of jobs<sup>10</sup>. There is lot to be learnt from Tripura as far as

<sup>9</sup> “Tripura CM receives award on 'best governance' from India today”, Tripurainfo, December 21, 2013, available at <http://www.tripurainfo.com/Info/ArchiveDet.aspx?WhatId=12528>, Accessed on August 23, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> “MGNREGA scheme: 3 N-E states on top, two at bottom” The Financial Express, April 27, 2016, available at <http://www.financialexpress.com/economy/mgnrega-scheme-3-n-e-states-on-top-two-at-bottom/244193/>, Accessed on August 25, 2016.

*honest and efficient governance is concerned by the States affected by Left Wing Extremism (LWEs) and insurgencies in Northeast India.*

### *Inclusive Development to Bridge Ethnic Divide*

*The government of Tripura took a number of steps to bridge the ethnic divide between the tribals and Bengalis. Special attention was given to areas beset by conflicts and provided roads, power, drinking water, sanitation, schools, hospitals, market places, irrigation, etc, to the people in those areas. The tribal pockets were focused upon mainly for development initiatives. The essential and underlying message was to bring inclusive development and wean away tribals from the divisive ideology of the insurgents.<sup>11</sup> Improvement of the overall situation allowed the government to take a large number of its development initiatives to the farthest and inaccessible corners of the State further shrinking the popular support base to insurgents.*

*In some cases, the State government also initiated village reorganisation schemes, enabling the tribals located in the remote forest and hill areas to relocate in the newly constructed areas along the national and state highways. This allowed the state to deliver medical, educational benefits to the tribals and effectively isolated them from the insurgents. Relocation of villages has been well planned and executed; similar hurriedly planned strategies could not succeed in Chhattisgarh. It resulted in significant loss of insurgents' influence over political and administrative process in the state and a steady decline of their support base among the ethnic tribal populace underlines that inclusive development can bridge the ethnic divide and armed movement can be resolved through a mix of political-social measures, without acceding to the demands of the insurgents<sup>12</sup>. The lesson here is that; inclusive*

<sup>11</sup> Ajay Singh, "'Tripura offers an alternative model of development", Governance Now, August 9, 2013, available at <http://www.governancenow.com/news/regular-story/tripura-offers-alternative-model-development>, Accessed on August 25, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Michelle Ann Miller "Autonomy and Armed Separatism in South and Southeast Asia," Publisher Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, pg 205 and 206 Accessed on August 26, 2016.

development can bridge the ethnic divide and bring peace. Such an approach can help in addressing the root cause of insurgencies i.e. non inclusive development in the States affected by LWEs and Insurgencies in Northeast India.

### *Humane Approach in Conflict Resolution*

One of the most significant factors in the overall approach of the state in dealing with the problem was maintenance of a humane approach, against all odds. Some of the salient features which glaringly stand out in this approach included the implementation of systematic development programmes under security cover, in spite of a serious financial crunch. Two significant endeavours to illustrate this are the efforts made by the government to go ahead with rail connectivity to Agartala and road connectivity in interior areas; and also allowing the Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) to carry out its exploration programmes in interior tribal areas, both at the peak of insurgency. Sustained and continuous vigil in the police camps in disturbed areas, to prevent complete migration of ethnic minorities, and ensuring a quantum jump in police helped further.

### *Efficient Functioning of Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC)*

The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) Bill, 1979 was passed by the Tripura Legislative Assembly on March 23, 1979. It was granted under Sixth Schedule by Indian Parliament on August 23, 1984. 25 of the 28 elected seats in the Autonomous District Council are reserved for Scheduled Tribes. The main objective of forming the TTAADC was to provide internal autonomy and protect the social, economic and cultural interests of the tribal population<sup>13</sup>. The last elections to the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) were held on May 4,

<sup>13</sup> Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council, available at <http://ttaadc.gov.in/History-TTAADC>. Accessed on August 26, 2016

2015 with impressive electoral turnout stood at 83 percent. As far as Northeast India is concerned, out of 16 Autonomous District Councils (ADCs), six are in Manipur, three each in Assam, Meghalaya and Mizoram and one in Tripura<sup>14</sup>. TTAADC is a model autonomous body in Northeast India. It has ensured socio-economic and all round development of the tribals and contributed towards peace in the State except the recent violence and demand for a separate state. The lessons for efficient and honest functioning of TTADC must be taken by other ADCs in Northeast India and grant of Six Schedule to the ADCs in Manipur is a necessity to empower these ADCs. There is also a strong case for creation of Autonomous District Councils to empower tribals in LWEs areas as fifth schedule and Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 or PESA<sup>15</sup>, has not been successful in bringing inclusive development<sup>16</sup>.

### *Modernisation, Skill Development and Empowerment of Police Forces*

Veteran Police Officer KPS Gill had mentioned "if police forces are empowered legally, politically and technologically, they can defeat any terrorist movement comprehensively". Tripura's counter - insurgency campaign was driven by a trained and reorganised State Police, led by the Tripura State Rifles (TSR). Counter Insurgency and anti-terrorist training was given due focus. Two initially raised TSR battalions were trained at the Indian Army, Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School, at Vairengate. The police had gone in for a major modernisation drive with the help of the central government under Police Modernisation Scheme. It was utilised in equipping police forces with state of art communication, navigation equipment, bullet - proof jackets, vehicles, and weaponry systems. Training coupled with modernisation

<sup>14</sup> "Tripura tribal council to be made model autonomous body" The Statesman, available at <http://www.thestatesman.com/mobi/news/northeast/-tripura-tribal-council-to-be-made-model-autonomous-body/64023.html>, Accessed on August 27, 2016

<sup>15</sup> A law enacted by the Government of India to cover the "Scheduled areas" in Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal states.

<sup>16</sup> Governor's Role in Tribal and Schedule Areas, Vision IAS available at [http://visionias.in/home/resources/open\\_doc/current\\_affairs/imp\\_issues/Governors\\_percent\\_20rolepercent20inpercent20Tribalpercent20andpercent20Scheduledpercent20Areaspercent20-percent20Final.pdf](http://visionias.in/home/resources/open_doc/current_affairs/imp_issues/Governors_percent_20rolepercent20inpercent20Tribalpercent20andpercent20Scheduledpercent20Areaspercent20-percent20Final.pdf), Accessed on July 23, 2016.

and enhanced operational strike capabilities of the security forces, enabled them to take daring successful small team operations in the interior areas<sup>17</sup>. It is important that the State police are modernised, equipped and trained to combat insurgency in the respective states and thereby reduce dependency on Central Armed Police Forces. Tripura's success, in fact, evolved out of improvements in police training, equipment and leadership, as well as a clear political mandate and political will.

### *Synergy and Tiered System of Deployment*

The State machinery has demonstrated that insurgency is not an insurmountable phenomenon. It has taken on the problem in a strategic and resolute manner. The control mechanism is based on swift area domination, ascendancy as well as psychological operations and Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) to include accelerated development thrust, management of media, and Security Forces. Over a period of time with a stable government at the state level, it has been able to ensure sustained growth and development in the entire state including the tribal areas. The central and state SFs are forged into a synergetic, coordinated and cohesive mode to derive optimal gain. Their conduct was under close observation at the highest level (including at the level of the Governor and the Chief Minister), tiered system of deployment with clearly delineated responsibilities of all security forces worked effectively. The SF are deployed as follows:

**Border Security Force (BSF)** - In keeping with the principle of 'One Border, One Force', the BSF is deployed along the 856 km long International Border (IB). They are deployed in Border Observation posts (BOPs) along the border fence. A large number of composite BOPs have also been constructed. Almost 86percent of the border has been fenced.

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<sup>17</sup> Kuldeep Kumar, 'Police and Counter insurgency: The Untold Story of Tripura's COIN Campaign" Sage Publication India, Accessed on August 28, 2016

*Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)* - CRPF battalions are tasked to carry out domination and protection of the NH 44 and the Class 9 roads linking the NH with the district and sub divisional Head Quarters (HQs). They are also employed to provide protection to the various very important person (VIPs) and for election duties.

*Deployment of Tripura State Rifles (TSR)* - Apart from static duties, their deployment is in the interiors of the state in Counter Insurgency grid.

*Assam Rifles (AR)*- AR is a potent and effective agency operating in the state. More emphasis of AR operations is in the sensitive areas adjoining the Indo - Bangladesh border in conjunction with the BSF and other SFs. The insurgency affected states have invariably, a large number of security forces employed, their effective coordination and clearly defined responsibilities are the take away lessons. Tripura is an example where insurgency has been controlled by a combined effort of Political direction , Bureaucratic implementation, coordinated and synergised domination by Security Forces.

### *Synergised Operations, Governance and Development*

Synergy of operations with governance and development was planned at the highest level. The governance elements were grouped with the security forces as part of operational planning. As the security forces achieved success in area-domination, implementing governance and developmental interventions followed swiftly. The government reached out to the tribal people with the delivery of basic services such as health care, rural connectivity, drinking water supply, employment generation and income accretion. It helped in tribal community connecting with the mainstream, Security Forces and the State. The outcomes were active community participation in the development process and in the fight against insurgency, the militants' return to

the mainstream leading to peace, harmony and prosperity<sup>18</sup>. There are differing views about Security Forces undertaking development activities which are generally seen as prerogative of civil administration. Tripura is a successful narrative of synergised operational and development activities. This is an important lesson to be followed as counter insurgency practice in LWEs affected States. Governance should be part of security forces operational planning and execution. A unified command structure as prevalent in Northeast India will help in synergy.

### *Introduction of Plantation Corps*

The introduction of plantation crops, especially the large-scale cultivation of rubber, triggered the creation of a new class of agro-entrepreneurs in tribal society, who would change the dynamics of a relatively classless society. Rubber cultivation has not only drawn the tribals away from slash-and-burn cultivation (jhum) but also from insurgency and in the process has turned the State into India's second largest producer of natural rubber<sup>19</sup>. The State government set up the Tripura Rehabilitation Plantation Corporation (TRPC) and Tripura Forest Department and Plantation Corporation (TFDPC). The empowerment of the rubber growers, in particular by forming societies of their own, has been the most important step. These societies got involved in planning and execution of rubber plantation thereby confining the role of government in providing technical knowhow and training. The poor tribals who provided the main recruitment base for the underground militant organisations are no longer turning to join undergrounds<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> D.N. Sahaya , “How Tripura overcame insurgency” The Hindu, September 22, 2011, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/how-tripura-overcame-insurgency/article2465348.ece>, Accessed on September 10, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> SuhirBhaumic, “ Tripura: Ethnic Conflict, Militancy and Counterinsurgency”, 2012, available at <http://www.mcrg.ac.in/PP52.pdf> Accessed on September 10, 2016

<sup>20</sup> RatnaBharaliTalukdar, “Tripura taps the rubber economy”, 22 October 2007, INDIA TOGETHER WEBSITE, available at <http://www.indiatogether.org/2007/oct/eco-rubber.htm>, Accessed on September 23, 2016

*The tendu leaves which are required to make bidi, has been a major source of funding for the Maoists in LWEs areas. Naxals have been threatening those plucking tendu leaves and gain huge profits from the tendu leaves contractors in return for continuing their business. Introduction of tendu leaves scheme wherein tribals are involved and empowered in planning and collection of tendu leaves will be a recommended step to counter LWEs and choke militant funding.*

### *Creation of Tripura State Rifles (TSR)*

*To counter the growing challenge of insurgency in Tripura during 1980s, the State Government decided to create a Force on the pattern of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF). Subsequently, Tripura Legislative Assembly passed Tripura State Rifles Act 1983. Based on that Act the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of TSR came into existence on 12th March 1984. This was followed by raising of other battalions. Presently there are 12 (twelve) battalions of TSR in the State out of which nine battalions (5th to 13th) are India Reserve (IR) Battalion. TSR has been raised for the dual purpose of fighting insurgency and providing employment to the local youth. The role of TSR in co-ordination with other CAPFs and various Government policies in combating and controlling insurgency in Tripura may be cited as an example. The TSR is deployed mainly in the interior areas where maximum extremist movements were noticed. It considerably reduced the movement and activities of insurgents. Special Operations Group (SOG) was formed in different battalions to conduct anti-insurgency operations in interior areas. The nine TSR Battalions raised for the State of Tripura were also utilised for deployment outside the State of Tripura for covering security of the Common wealth Games held in India in 2010, security during parliamentary and Assembly elections in Jharkhand, West Bengal, Bihar, Nagaland, Manipur, Chattisgarh and Mizoram. This gave them exposure and experience of functioning with other*

security forces and enhanced their operational efficiency<sup>21</sup>. This model can be followed by the states affected by LWEs.

### *Effective Surrender and Immediate Rehabilitation Policy*

The surrender policy being followed in the state has been effective in inducing the surrender among militants. The attractive rehabilitation packages, grant of government jobs, dropping of criminal charges, immediate and meaning rehabilitations are notable features which attracted a large number of militants including important leaders to shun violence and join the main stream. The most important fact, unlike other north-eastern states, there are no Surrendered, Ceasefire and Suspension of Operation camps in Tripura. This has instilled a sense of confidence among the militants and the people. On the contrary, since 1997 onwards, over 11,000 militants have been housed in 63 designated camps in Assam, Nagaland, Manipur and Meghalaya awaiting finalisation of accords and rehabilitations<sup>22</sup>. These militants are disillusioned and involved in various illegal activities. Immediate and meaningful rehabilitation of militants and closure of their designated camps are important lessons for other north-eastern states to follow.

### *Police Presence in the Remote Areas*

Militants generally take advantage of remote areas with poor communication and infrastructure which limit the security forces and civil administration's reach. In Tripura, the hinterland area is hilly and jungle, terrain, a lack of infrastructure which is favourable for insurgents. The core of the police strategy was to establish a strong presence in the remote areas to reduce the reaction time for counter insurgency operations. In addition, Infrastructure to remote areas was improved which enhanced

<sup>21</sup> Tripura State Rifles, Department of Home, available at <http://tripurapolice.nic.in/TripuraStateRifles.htm>, Accessed on September 15, 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Insurgency in Northeast India, Vision IAS, available at [http://visionias.in/beta/sites/all/themes/momentum/files/interview\\_issues\\_2016/Insurgencypercent20inpercent20NE.pdf](http://visionias.in/beta/sites/all/themes/momentum/files/interview_issues_2016/Insurgencypercent20inpercent20NE.pdf) Accessed on September 15, 2016.

its capacity, visibility and response. It helped in improved geographical domination of the security forces resulted in the increased flow of information from even the tribal population. Departure from the routine practice of establishing headquarters of the TSR close to highways, the Tripura Government disregarding logistics problem established the headquarters of the TSR units in the interior areas which ensured permanent presence of Security Forces. This move helped in dominating the interior and inaccessible areas, put pressure on militants and bringing development to these areas. The permanent presence of security forces consolidated the hold of security forces and civil administration in the remote areas<sup>23</sup>.

The State established a remarkable Police presence, with 736 Policemen per 100,000 population and 261 Policemen per 100 square kilometres (according to Bureau of Police Research & Development data). The number alone is not extraordinary; Manipur has 1,271, and Nagaland 1,048 Policemen per 100,000 population, however these State Forces have little police presence in remote areas. In Tripura, the core of the police strategy was to establish a strong presence in the remote area in order to minimise the reaction time for counter insurgency operations<sup>24</sup>. This is a lesson which LWEs and other northeaster state should follow.

### *Psychological Operations*

Counter Insurgency operations in Tripura were discreetly supported by well-planned psychological operations. These were focussed on improving the tribals' negative perception and building confidence about the credibility of the State's intentions. Themes of such operations were well planned to expose the militant's hypocritical conduct, their monetary interests, the lavish lifestyle of the militant leaders in contrast to the abject living conditions of the rank and file, sexual exploitation of

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Autonomy and Armed Separatism in South and Southeast Asia, institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010 Accessed on September 23, 2016.

women cadres, forced induction of adolescents into the outfits and a game plan to keep the region in perpetual backwardness. This strategy to discredit the insurgents and implement confidence building measures amongst the population was carried through the media, both print and electronic, art groups, intellectuals, and interactive seminars and discussions. The psychological operations were planned, directed and executed at the highest level by the Chief Minister and the Governor. These had a positive impact and resulted in large number of surrendered militants and waning away militant support base<sup>25</sup>. Well planned and executed theme based psychological operations are required in LWEs areas, Northeast India and Jammu & Kashmir and other parts of world to glean similar benefits.

### *Confidence Building Measures*

Confidence-building measures were planned and driven at the highest level by the Governor and the Chief Minister. In the course of their public programmes, they impressed upon insurgents to see reason, return to the mainstream and be active stakeholders and participants in the well-being and prosperity of the State and the people. The healing touches encompassed special recruitment to the security forces and other government services, especially in the insurgency-bound pockets. The provision of jobs to tribals in particular, and to the family members of victims, attractive rehabilitation packages comprising monetary benefits, and vocational training to induce insurgents to return to the mainstream and earn a peaceful living and decent livelihood, were other features. Some of the surrendered insurgents were also recruited by the Assam Rifles, TSR and the State Police. These had positive impact and led to mass surrender including an entire group of the National Liberation Front of Tripura - Nayanbasi faction (NLFT-NB) in 2006.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> N. Sahaya , “How Tripura overcame insurgency” The Hindu, September 22, 2011, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/how-tripura-overcame-insurgency/article2465348.ece>, Accessed on September 23, 2016.

<sup>26</sup> N. Sahaya , Ibid.

## *Future Challenges and Recommendations*

### *Repatriations of Bru Refugees*

*Bru or Reang families left Mioram in September 1997 in the wake of ethnic violence to take shelter at Kanchanpur in north Tripura and are living in seven Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps on the Mizo-Tripura border. The living conditions in these camps are very poor with frequent outbreak of diseases due to poor hygiene and sanitation. Since the State Government does not recognise them as citizens of Tripura, the youth residing in these camps are mostly unemployed with very few of them working as skilled and unskilled labourers. The Reang youth are easy prey for the militant outfits, as they are ready to carryout criminal activities for small amounts of money. Diverting these young people from such an activity is an open challenge for both Security Forces and Tripura state government. The latest effort of the Union Home Affairs Ministry to end the impasse over relocation of more than 30,000 Mizoram Bru tribal refugees has failed. The problem arose as the Mizoram government reiterated its decision to check the credentials of evacuees before paving the way for their return. A meeting of officials of the Ministry and the State government and leaders of the Mizoram Bru Displaced Peoples' Forum was held in Delhi on October 15, 2015, to work out a reconciliation and start the stalled repatriation. Only a few thousand refugees have returned over the past few years in unsuccessful official initiatives<sup>27</sup>.*

*It is sad that Indian citizens are staying as internally displaced in their own country since 1997. It highlights the commitment deficit of all stake holders i.e. Central Government, State Governments of Mizoram and Tripura; and also the Bru staying in camps. This issue needs to be taken seriously with a time bound plan of repatriation*

<sup>27</sup> Sayed Sajjad Ali, "Return of Bru tribal refugees to Mizoram still uncertain" The Hindu, October 30, 2015, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/return-of-bru-tribal-refugees-to-mizoram-still-uncertain/article7824806.ece> , Accessed on September 23, 2016.

which should be followed sincerely. The issues like compensation package, identification and repatriation should be resolved collectively. The early resolution of the Bru problem, closure of camps and repatriation of the Bru people to Mizoram is necessary for lasting peace in Tripura and Mizoram.

### *Closure of Militant Camps and Joint Operations*

Manik Sarkar, Chief Minister of Tripura admitted that two banned outfits - National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) - still have 16 or more hideouts in Bangladesh concentrated at Chittagong Hill Tract (CHT). These militants, taking advantage of the absence of Bangladesh's security forces, have been using remote areas adjoining the border, particularly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, to engage in their activities. Sometimes due to pressure of the Bangladesh security forces the militants temporarily shift from their camps but return once the security forces have moved away<sup>28</sup>. The present government under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has made a determined and courageous effort towards extremism. It has banned the activities of several violent Islamist groups. It has brought the perpetrators of atrocities during Bangladesh's war of liberation in 1971 to justice at considerable risk to itself<sup>29</sup>. Recent handing over of Anup Chetia, a top leader of militant group ULFA, signing of Land Border Agreement and enhancing economic cooperation and connectivity are the positive indicators of strong bilateral desire for peace and prosperity. To be successful in uprooting militancy from Tripura, there is a need to conduct operation across the state to force these militant to close these camps. Taking a lead from the recently conducted successful surgical strikes by the Indian Army across Line of Control (LOC) in a hostile environment, paves the way

<sup>28</sup> Indian militant camps still exist in Bangladesh: Tripura CM Manik Sarkar, bdnews24.com, january 03, 2016, available at <http://bdnews24.com/neighbours/2016/01/03/indian-militant-camps-still-exist-in-bangladesh-tripura-cm-manik-sarkar> September 20, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Anil Kamboj, "India's Neighbourhood: A Challenge: World Focus. <http://www.worldfocus.in/articles/india-and-neighbours/indias-neighbourhood-a-challenge/> September 20, 2016 Accessed on September 26, 2016.

for such operations across the Indo – Bangladesh borders, with a friendly government at the helm for lasting peace in the region. This is the ideal time to carry out joint training and operations against militants camping in Bangladesh which will strengthen the peace process in the region.

### *Economic Factors and Demand of a Separate Tribal State*

While the insurgency in Tripura started with the “Tribal Cause”, over a period of time that relevance has shifted. The major reasons for recruitment into these groups are the rampant poverty and weak economic condition of the State. The tribals residing in the remote and far flung areas are barely able to make a living to earn their daily bread. The infrastructure development in the State is by and large poor leaving the people devoid of basic amenities. This has been a major factor in the youth being weaned away towards joining militant groups with a hope of making a living out of it. Tribals continue to harbour a feeling of deprivation. If the disparity between tribals and the non-tribals continues to grow in respect of employment, health and care, then its exploitation by insurgents cannot be ruled out. Once investments increase and Tripura’s strategic relevance in the region enhances, this economic disparity between tribals and non-tribals will get further pronounced.

The recent demand for a separate state by the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) through elevation of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) to Twipra land, was followed by the blockade of the National Highway and the railway line; this highlights the development deficit in the tribal areas. It is true that the indigenous people of Tripura in the remote areas still remain deprived of basic amenities like health, education, transportation and drinking water. Hundreds of tribals have been dying due to malaria and water-borne and summer diseases every year. A separate Tribal state, is not practicable and will not resolve the problems. However, there is a need to bring about a focussed development of tribals in remote

areas. The ADCs need to be empowered by ensuring direct funding from the Central Government and should function independently to ensure development in a time bound manner. 50 per cent seats of the assembly must be reserved initially for a period of 10 years for tribal and inclusion of Kar Borok in the eight schedule of the Constitution<sup>30</sup>.

## Conclusion

Insurgency in Tripura is currently at a diminishing state due to the sustained counter insurgency operations by the security forces. The future of the state seems brighter since Tripura today, is no longer an isolated part of mainland India. All the development taking place in the state and the Act East Policy has brought Tripura firmly on the national and international map. The improvement of connectivity in Tripura is also reflected in the analysis of economic statistics of the state from 1999 to 2014, which brings out the quantum jump in budgetary expenditure, leading to substantial improvements on the Human Development Index (HDI), increase in the road network, tribal welfare schemes, power generation, participation of the tribals in joint forest management programmes and rubber plantations, revival of school infrastructure in the interior areas, and overall increase in minor irrigation projects. Overall, the security situation in Tripura is currently stable. The success of counter insurgency operations in Tripura, is attributed to the large number of factors as spelt out in the paper. To achieve success in countering insurgents, in LWEs, Northeast and J&K ; the State Government in conjunction with the support of the Central Government needs to lead the campaign with honest people, with an inclusive approach towards development with support of the Security Forces. When the will to prevail rises and honest leaders come forth to lead the State with courage and vision,

<sup>30</sup> “Political parties unite against demand of separate tribal state in Tripura” The Shillong Times, June 16, 2016, available at <http://www.theshillongtimes.com/2016/06/16/political-parties-unite-against-demand-of-separate-tribal-state-in-tripura/> , Accessed on July 23, 2016.

*not only do the people and lands prosper, the leaders also turns confident and powerful with the mandate of the people strongly aligned behind them for support. This lesson needs to be learnt and emulated in all the strife ridden states of our Country as also by the Central Government to bring about an end to political divides based on vote banks to create a strong, united and economically powerful Nation.*

- *Image Source: <http://dekhnews.com>*

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*The Vivekananda International Foundation is an independent non-partisan institution that conducts research and analysis on domestic and international issues, and offers a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution. Some of India's leading practitioners from the fields of security, military, diplomacy, government, academia and media fields have come together to generate ideas and stimulate action on national security issues.*

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### VIVEKANANDA INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

*3, San Martin Marg, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi – 110021*

*Phone: +91-11-24121764, 24106698*

*Email: [info@vifindia.org](mailto:info@vifindia.org), Website: <http://www.vifindia.org>*

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