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Cross Border Crime and its Impact in Manipur, India

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Abstract

India shares its borders in the North-Eastern India with two countries i.e. Bangladesh and Myanmar. The crimes relating to cross border are frequently debated and highlighted as it poses serious threat to the economy and internal security of the country but little has been done to curb the menace. Since independence, India has faced a variety of insurgencies and political challenges in its North-Eastern States. It's the main reason for the higher crime rate in the North-Eastern states as compare to other states of India. As the region shared international borders with other countries cross-border crime are very common in this region. The present study tried to examine the cross-border crimes which are happening in Northeast state Manipur. Further it tries to find out the impact of these crimes in the state.

Keywords: Cross-Border, Drug Trafficking, Golden Triangle, Insurgency, HIV.

Introduction

India is the structure of an ancient civilization and birthplace of four major religions. People of all major religions with their diverse sects and sub sects reside in India. There are more than a dozen of major, and hundreds of minor linguistic groups in India. India has common border with Afghanistan and Pakistan to the North-West; China, Nepal and Bhutan to the North; Bangladesh and Myanmar to the East; Sri Lanka to the South. India shares its borders in the North-Eastern India with two countries i.e. Bangladesh and Myanmar. Since independence, India has faced a variety of insurgencies and political challenges in its North-Eastern States. It's the main reason for the higher crime rate in the North-Eastern states as compare to other states of India. As the region shared international borders with other countries cross-border crime are very common in this region.

Methodology

The study mainly consists of secondary data. The data are collected from newspaper articles, blogs, books, journals, etc. A thorough examination of the data was conducted to come to the proper findings and conclusion.

Cross-border Crimes in Manipur

Manipur is a small state situated at the north-eastern part of India. This state has an area of 22,327 sq km with Imphal as its capital. The neighbouring states of Manipur are Mizoram, Assam and Nagaland. It also shares the border with a country i.e. Myanmar. Manipur, with a total population of 27, 21,756 (2011 Census)¹ has a rich culture with Manipuri dancing as one of the classical dances of India. The chief language is Meiteilon (Manipuri) and the major religions are Hinduism and Christianity. The main occupation of Manipur is agriculture. The agricultural products include paddy, wheat and maize. The state has shown exemplary excellence in sports and its favourite sport is Polo and Manipur claim to have invented it. In recent times the beautiful state of Manipur has reached a stage of decadence. Some claim that the present state of affairs as we have seen is because of the presence of different groups of undergrounds and internal ethnic conflict. But, one of the most important cause is the cross border crimes which are happening through the border of the state. Manipur shared

international border with Myanmar. The Indo-Myanmar border is 1,624 kilometer (1,009 mile) long. The border area shared by Manipur and Myanmar is 358 km. and the cross-border crime being committed in these porous border areas.

Most committed crime in this border area is smuggling. Smuggling is the illegal transportation of goods or people, such as out of a building, into a prison, or across an international border, in violation of applicable laws or other regulations. There are various motivations to smuggle. These include the participation in illegal trade, such as in the drug trade, in illegal immigration or illegal emigration, tax evasion, providing contraband to a prison inmate, or the theft of the items being smuggled.² According to Merriam Webster dictionary smuggling means to move (someone or something) from one country into another illegally and secretly.³

Smuggling is becomes very common in the north eastern part of India as it shared international borders with many countries and the state of Manipur is one of them. Crimes which are committed in Manipur through smuggling includes, smuggling of goods, arms and counterfeit Indian currency smuggling, drug trafficking, and insurgency.

One of the most common item which is smuggled through this border area is drugs. Drug trafficking is a global illicit trade involving the cultivation, manufacture, distribution and sale of substances which are subject to drug prohibition laws.⁴ Most of the world's drugs are produced in the 'Golden Triangle' and 'Golden Crescent' of South East Asia. The South Asian Region is a hot spot in relations to illegal drugs. Many countries from this area produce many drugs like heroin, opium, marijuana etc. Golden Triangle is triangular shape vast land of Myanmar, Laos and Thailand in South East Asia and it is the main producer of narcotics in the world. The countries covered under Golden Crescent are Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey and Pakistan in Asia. From this area large amount of heroin is smuggled to other parts of the world. But, it is considered that the quality of heroin from Golden Crescent is more inferior to that of Golden Triangle in the world market. The physical proximity of the state of Manipur with the drug producing zones of Golden Triangle like Tiddim Kachin and Shan Hills gives an easy means of smuggling of the drugs from these areas to other parts of the world through the state of Manipur. There are various villages in the border which gave a good connecting point of this state with Myanmar by dense jungle through hill tracts and roads. Mandalay, Tiddim Tahang, Homatin, Kheinam and Tamu are the main drug centres in Myanmar. It is from these centres that the heroin is smuggled to other parts of the world through Manipur via the towns of Manipur namely Behiang (Churhandpur District), New Samtal (Chandel District) and Kamjong (Ukhrul District).⁵

Border trade between India and Myanmar, which is a part of India's international trade, has great potential to influence economically for the development of North Eastern India and Myanmar.⁶ Northeastern cities are fast emerging cities in India. And it's become the main reason for the criminals to smuggle goods in these parts of the country. The number of smuggling cases continues to be high partly because of lack of coordination between various agencies involved, such as the Narcotic and Crime Bureau, Customs, department of revenue intelligence, state police, Border Security Force, etc. the most commonly smuggle items includes; goods, arms and counterfeit Indian currency. As mentioned earlier, the state of Manipur has shared international border with Myanmar it becomes very common for the criminals to smuggle in this tracts as its very easy for them. Most of the household items used in Manipur come from Myanmar. Cigarettes, toys, electronic gadgets and household goods such as blankets, mosquito nets, kerosene lanterns, utensils, patent medicines, crockery and a host of Chinese goods are commonplace in the states bordering Myanmar. Every major town of the region has its own thriving Hong Kong Bazaar and these goods are there for the taking. The goods come very cheap and most people who operate in the smuggling trade are under the protection of some militant outfit.

More than 90 per cent of smuggled goods are transacted through Moreh town on the Myanmar border, 109 km south of Imphal. Although no proper survey has been carried out, roughly 40,000 people in Manipur alone make a living out of it. The Indo-Myanmar trade agreement signed in April 1995, legalised trade for a restricted 25 items which include pulses, mustard beans, fresh vegetables, fruit, garlic, onions, chillies, spices, minor forest products, areca (betel) nuts and leaves, food items for local consumption, tobacco, tomatoes, reed broom, sesame, resin, coriander seeds, soyabean, roasted sunflower seeds, catechu and ginger.⁷ But, other illegal items are very often smuggled in this area. Arms and ammunition too were regularly smuggled to India through Indo-Myanmar border. Various underground groups active in Northeast which have spread their networks across the country are the main beneficiaries of these illegal consignments. Another major problem in the Northeast is the issue of insurgency. The insurgent groups in the Northeast started forming within the less than 10 years of independence of our country. The emergence of insurgency in Manipur can be traced to the emergence of Naga Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) in the early parts of 1950s. The insurgency group of Meitei community was started in the 1960s with the formation of United National Liberation Front (UNLF) on 24th November 1964. After that many insurgent groups like the People's Liberation Army (PLA), founded on September 25, 1978, People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) set up on October 9, 1977 and the Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP) that came into being in April, 1980 have emerged in the valley areas consisting of four districts of the State.⁸ Presently there are 35 (12 active, 18 at ceasefire and 5 inactive) insurgent groups operating in the State of Manipur. And the main target for every UG group is to get independence of a country.

Manipur is burning trouble spot, not simply because the state has many armed insurgent organizations operating and fighting the Indian state, but because cross-border connections that these groups have, and strategic alliances among them, have acted as force multipliers and have made the conflict dynamics all the more intricate. It becomes very easy for the insurgent groups to go to another country because of unfencing border with the neighbour countries. Events on the insurgency front in India's Northeast have shown that rebel groups have often succeeded in neutralizing the reverses faced by them by entering into deals with other insurgent groups, and these alliances act as force multipliers. Insurgent politics in the region registered a very important development in year 2000—the signing of a deal for joint operations by the ULFA and United National Liberation Front (UNLF), a Manipuri insurgent group whose primary area of operation was Manipur's Jiribam Valley and neighbouring Assam's Cachar district. A UNLF statement on July 29, 2000, disclosed the agreement between that group and the ULFA for the first time. Significantly, the statement came less than a fortnight after the UNLF claimed responsibility for the July 16, 2000, killing of three soldiers in the Cachar district of Assam. Given the admission about the agreement, the ULFA could well have provided logistic support to the UNLF in carrying out that ambush.⁹

The impact of Cross-Border crime in Manipur

Manipur has been a victim of so many subjugations and the history proves the suffering the state undergoes. Still the state is reeling under turmoil, be it political, insurgency, ethnic problems, unemployment and many more. The state's location on the international border fans the current problem into wildfire. The cross border crime that is being carried out in ease with the neighboring country Myanmar escalates the turmoil in the state and the country as a whole. Manipur and other states from North-East India are located on a vulnerable geographical area and the fencing on these states is more difficult. Goods, drugs and arms are smuggled through these porous borders. Many insurgent groups from the North-Eastern States are camping in neighboring countries like Myanmar and Bangladesh according to the Indian Intelligence.¹⁰

The law and order and the internal security is at maximum risk because of the cross crime border in Manipur. Only 52 km out of 1643km stretch shared by India and Myanmar are controlled by the Indian security force. The other parts of the border remain largely accessible for smuggling. The Myanmar government does little to curb the menace from their side.

The economy of the state is also severed by the ongoing crime. The neighboring countries of India like Myanmar, Bhutan and Bangladesh continue to harbor insurgency groups from these regions and supply of arms and ammunitions from India's hostile countries put a serious threat to the internal security.¹¹ The insurgency in Manipur and North-Eastern States is posing to be a serious threat and continues to hemorrhage the state from within. As a result of the arms smuggled from other country countries and the refuge the insurgents received, it continues to flourish and the people continue to suffer. Extortions from the public sector and government sector are common. In 2007 drug stores are shut down following a huge amount of money demanded by the militant groups. Similarly in 2009, the pharmacists are forced to shut down when a group of insurgent demanded 1 million rupees. Every sector are affected, the banks, government office, the traders etc. are all victims of the insurgency in Manipur.¹² Many lives are lost and many have suffered and widowed due to the ongoing violence. In 2013 alone more than 250 bomb that blasts rocked the capital city, Imphal. The easy availability of small arms and bombs through the porous border needs to be checked real soon.

The porous border and Manipur's proximity to the Golden Triangle is also a curse and add woes to the already suffering state. The heroine trade between the three countries Myanmar, Laos and Thailand affected the state so much and the smuggling of these drugs through the border to India cut right across Manipur. As a result the no. of drug addicts is on the rise in the state. A sizeable amount of drugs are consumed in Manipur as the drugs are smuggled inside the country through the porous border. Poor unemployed youths are recruited from this area are recruited by drug lords on the pretext of easy money and lured into drug trafficking to other parts of the country. North-Eastern states have a very high rate of drug users. According to a data in 2001 30% of the country's total intravenous drug users are from Northeastern states. As a result the HIV related epidemic is widespread. The infection has a high possibility of spreading to other parts of India as a large chunk of the people is travelling to other states. Truck drivers, businessmen, traders etc who travel frequently and are infected can spread the disease to other regions.¹³ Drugs addiction has destroyed many families in Manipur, and second only to the dreaded insurgency movement in the State. It has claimed many lives mostly youths and many are living with blur hope and future. In 1999 Manipur was declared as the state having the largest population of HIV (+) in the North-East.¹⁴ Another emerging trend of drugs is the Ephedrine, the trafficking of this drug is claimed to be replacing heroine and cannabis. On June 30, 2010, the Anti Narcotics (Special) Task Force held a meeting at Moreh with the Myanmar officials to curb the smuggling of this drugs on both sides. But such initiatives remain futile as most parts of the border are largely porous. The trafficking of drugs are carried out covertly through diverse routes in this area with the help of the militant groups operating along the border.¹⁵

The crimes relating to cross border is proving to be a major hindrance to the development of Manipur, the economy of the State is crippled, the infrastructures are not in the best position to serve, the public are always at the receiving end while the Government is busy tackling the issues. The insurgency groups are getting their regular supply of arm and this act as a major morale boost and continue to demand money from every possible sector. The people lived in a perpetual fear and anger because of the ongoing violence. The bandhs and strikes by the armed insurgency groups which is frequent affect the economy of the state. In the year 2009-10 the state faces 56 days of bandhs incurring a loss of Rs 442.4 cr and 63 days of economic blockade resulting to the loss of Rs 178.91 cr reaching to a total loss of Rs. 621.3 cr. And in 2011 alone the state witness 27 days of bandhs and loss Rs 229 cr and a whopping 135 days of economic blockade in incur a loss of Rs 415.8 cr reaching a total loss of Rs 644.8 cr.¹⁶ The blockade fuels the price hike in the state, the price of the petrol reached Rs 100 to Rs 140 per liter, the price of LPG reach to an all time high of Rs. 1200 to Rs. 1500 per cylinder. The cost escalation touched all time high. The expenditure on essential items multiplied with a heavy onslaught on the meager saving of the people in the state. More over the educated youths are reeling under unemployment and the private investors and companies from

outside the region are not willing to invest in the State because of the ongoing violence and extortions. The education system is affected due to the bandhs and strikes. Effective planning should be commenced very soon in order to curb the cross border crime otherwise the day is not far where Manipur is completely immersed in the 'perfect storm'.

Conclusion

Though the Central Government of India is doing their bits to improve the condition in the past two decades the policies like the 'Look East Policy' and other programs reaching the far and wide part of the North Eastern States, the crime on the border still continue to take place. Lives are still lost, youths are still lured into drugs and insurgency and families are still in trauma. Some stringent steps needs to be taken up to curb the border menace. Policies must be implemented between the neighbouring countries, better relations and co ordinations with the Myanmar regime might put an end to the operation of cross border activities. Myanmar and North Eastern part of India remain largely unexplored in terms of natural gas and rich minerals, to utilize this the cross border crime must be curtailed, which in turn will put an end to the existing insurgency and the drug trafficking. Only then the Look East Policy and other developmental policies will be able to bear fruit. The porous border must be checked thoroughly and effective plans must be chalked out to fill in these borders. The BSF should play an active role in strengthening and securing the border area. If the cross border crime is to be curtailed the North Eastern States should at first be prosper economically, only then the crime rate will come down. The youths are needed to be provided awareness about the situation as they are the most targeted lots in such crime. A prosper economy will lie on good education, employment to the youths.

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