

‘Networking’ the Northeast Partners in Terror

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Introduction

Terrorist organisations have frequently formed linkages among themselves and have also benefited from their association with both state and non-state actors in foreign countries. The linkages between terrorist groupings have been both formal and informal. A formal linkage refers to the coming together of two or more terrorist organisations under the same banner in the nature of an alliance. Informal linkages are those that are in the nature of establishing working relationships.

These linkages might be formed “for a variety of reasons, sometimes a shared ideology, sometimes a shared enemy or sometimes, simply shared training facilities.”¹ Two instances of the effectiveness of coalitions that terrorist groups form are the multiple terrorist attacks in USA on September 11, 2001, and the

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¹ Louise Richardson, “Terrorists as Transnational Actors”, in Max Taylor and John Horgan, ed., *The Future of Terrorism*, London: Frank Cass, 2000, p. 216.

August 7, 1998, attacks on US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania². Commenting on the embassy bombings, the then US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright said, “These were not two more examples of old-fashioned terrorism” She added, “What is new is the emergence of terrorist coalitions that do not answer fully to any government, that operate across national borders and have access to advanced technology.” The bomb victims, she claimed, were caught up “in a new kind of confrontation that looms as a new century is about to begin... a clash between civilisation itself and anarchy – between the rule of law and no rules at all.”³

In the context of the Indian experiences, the hijacking in December 1999 of an Indian Airlines aircraft, IC-814, to Kandahar, Afghanistan, hours after it had originated at the Tribhuvan International Airport, Nepal, volubly brought home the canvas of linkages that some of the terrorist groups had established, and their perilous ramifications.⁴

Although terrorist groups operating in the Northeast region of India have not performed any such spectacular acts of terrorism, they have established a complex web of linkages among themselves. In most cases in the Northeast region, the linkages had been, and are, informal working relationships. These linkages are visible at three levels: (a) between any two terrorist organisations cutting across theatres, (b) among terrorist organisations operating within a theatre and (c) broad fronts consisting of terrorist organisations operating in different theatres.

² “Shattered Diplomacy: The US Embassy Bombings Trial”, http://www.cnn.com/LAW/trials.and.cases/case.files/0012/embassy_bombing_213_persons_were_killed_in_the_kenya_blast_while_11_lives_were_lost_in_the_tanzania_explosion_investigation_pointed_the_involvement_of_terrorist_master_mind_and_fugitive_osama_bin_laden_who_along_with_21_others_was_indicted_by_a_federal_grand_jury.

³ Gideon Rose, “It Could Happen here - Facing the New Terrorism”, Review Essay, *Foreign Affairs*, Washington, vol. 78, no. 2, March/April 1999, http://www.foreignpolicy2000.org/library/issuebriefs/readingnotes/fa_rose.htm

⁴ The aircraft that took-off from Kathmandu, Nepal, was hijacked on December 24, 1999. Subsequent to a brief stop-over at Amritsar, it flew to the Pakistani city of Lahore and onward to Dubai and finally landed at Kandahar, the erstwhile Taliban headquarters in Afghanistan. The hijackers eventually secured the release of Maulana Masood Azhar, who now heads the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed terrorist outfit, Ahmed Omar Sheikh and Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar. See “Indian Airlines Plane Hijack” http://www.subcontinent.com/sapra/terrorism/tr_1999_12_25.html.

Furthermore, linkages that the terrorist groups have established also extend beyond India's borders. These cross-border linkages serve the function of providing terrorists with safe havens from where they can run their bases and camps, as well as source arms for their terror campaign.

It is important to examine cross-border linkages in conjunction with inter-group linkages, as the benefits of cross-border linkages for terrorist groups can be effectively maximised if inter-group linkages also exist. Moreover, the shrinking of cross-border linkages is, on occasion, also a factor in the emergence of newer inter-group connections. The nature of assistance that the terrorist groups secure as a result of the various linkages that they establish include financial and organisational support, weapons, training and operational co-operation.⁵

Cross-border linkages

Reflecting on cross-border linkages of terrorist groups, Christopher Harmon notes, "weak internal controls combine with weak border controls yielding countries... which all but lacking sovereignty, are ripe for abuse by internal groups, outside powers and foreign terrorist organisations."⁶ Echoing a similar line, the Union Minister of State for Home I.D. Swami said in Parliament that terrorist organisations in the Northeast were receiving arms as well as money from foreign countries.⁷ He added that arms were emerging primarily from Bangladesh, Myanmar and Thailand, while money was flowing in from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) based in unnamed European countries. Establishing camps in neighbouring territories has been rendered relatively easy for the Northeast-based terrorist groups primarily

⁵ Yonah Alexander and R A Kilmarx, "International Network of Terrorist movements", in Alexander and Kilmarx, eds., *Political Terrorism and Business*, cited in K L Oots, "Formation and Disintegration of Terrorist Groups", *Terrorism*, London, vol. 12, 1989, p. 146.

⁶ Christopher C. Harmon, *Terrorism Today*, London: Frank Cass, 2000, p. 89.

⁷ <http://www.satp.org/news/2001/July/news28.htm>. The Minister added that certain terrorist groups were maintaining bank accounts in foreign countries.

due to the fact that the region shares 90 per cent of its borders with China, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Bhutan.⁸

Thuingaleng Muivah, General Secretary of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland–Isak Muivah (NSCN-IM) is an apt example of a terrorist leader living in exile in a foreign country, and moving around the globe with impunity, even as he participates in negotiations with the Indian Government, on the one hand, and procures sophisticated weapons and fire power for the NSCN-IM. On January 19, 2000, Muivah was arrested in Thailand for travelling on a fake passport but was granted bail, which he jumped. He was, thereafter, arrested once again⁹. He now freely moves in and out of Thailand to lead his team at the negotiating table with the Indian government's representative. Earlier, prior to his arrest by Thai authorities, he was reportedly spotted in Karachi and was believed to have visited a number of other places in Pakistan, besides having met various influential people there.¹⁰

The Chinese Connection

The assistance that the insurgents operating in the Northeast region had received from China in the form of training, arms and ammunition from camps inside the Yunnan province is an indicator of the Chinese strategy of making conscious attempts "in support of expansion of its own sphere of political influence."¹¹

⁸ "Unwanted Force", *Northeast Sun*, New Delhi, May 1-14, 1998, vol. 3, no. 19, p. 8.

⁹ See Ranjit Dev Raj, "Naga arrest in Bangkok threatens peace talks", *Asia Times Online*, February 1, 2000 which can be accessed at <http://www.atimes.com/ind-pak/BB01Df02.html> The case was finally dismissed on July 11, 2001, following which Muivah traveled to Europe to participate in the negotiations with the Indian government's representative. See "Muivah leaves Thailand after dismissal of case". *Hindustan Times*, July 23, 2001. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/nonfram/230701/dtLFOR46.asp>

¹⁰ "The Arrest of Muivah and After", *Northeast Sun*, vol. 5, no. 18, April 15-30, 2000, p. 12.

¹¹ Ray S. Cline and Yonah Alexander, *Terrorism: The Soviet Connection*, quoted in Stephen Segaller, "State-sponsored Terrorism", chapter four, in *Invisible Armies: Terrorism into the 1990s* London: Michael Joseph, 1986, pp. 135-36.

Chinese assistance to the Northeast rebels commenced almost immediately after insurgency first emerged in the region. Such a trend, a recent Rand study projected,

“will become more significant overtime, in part because geographical limitations constrain – but certainly do not eliminate – more conventional forms of military competition. Moreover, both India and China have relatively less well-integrated, but nonetheless strategic, border areas that lend themselves as arenas for low intensity war. In the near to medium term, however, Sino-Indian competition is likely to be muted...”¹²

In conformity with the Rand projection, Northeast insurgents continue to be beneficiaries of Chinese arms assistance. The United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) terrorists in Assam have procured arms from the Chinese Army. Speaking in Parliament on December 13, 2000, MoS, Home Affairs, I.D. Swami, said that a surrendered ULFA militant had disclosed that some of his colleagues crossed over into China via Bhutan and established contact with the Chinese Army in 1993.¹³ The group, on the basis of this contact, had a rendezvous with a Chinese ship on the high seas in March 1995 during which the consignment was transferred to them. A further consignment landed in Bhutan in 1999, though it was originally acquired in 1997.¹⁴

Among other recent reports of Chinese arms for the Northeast militants, a news report of December 2000, quoting unnamed intelligence sources, said that a consignment worth an estimated US \$750,000 reached Cox’s Bazar, a coastal town in Bangladesh.¹⁵ At around the same time, another report claimed

¹² See “Sources of Conflict in Asia”, in Ashley J. Tellis et al., *Sources of Conflict in the 21st Century*, Santa Monica: Project Airforce, Rand Corporation, p. 157.

¹³ *The Indian Express*, New Delhi, December 14, 2001.

¹⁴ Reports have held that Indian intelligence agencies traced a transaction of the NSCM-IM group of terrorists having paid to a Chinese state-owned company one million dollars through a bank draft. The payment was made for supply of ‘unspecified goods’. Also, Naga terrorist leaders were detected moving about in Beijing.

¹⁵ The arms were reportedly to be handed over ultimately to the NSCN-IM. See www.satp.org/news/December/news_07.htm

that an arms consignment had arrived in Myanmar at a town named Tamu, close to the border with India.¹⁶

Furthermore, in the year 2000, Indian intelligence officials disclosed that NSCN-IM militants had revived their Chinese connection, which was believed to have been snapped in the 1980s. They also indicated that a top-NSCN-IM functionary was dispatched to strike a deal with Chinese officials in the Kuming province to provide them with a ‘major arms consignment’; and the NSCN-IM was pleading with the Chinese to use their good offices to secure a passage for the consignment through the territory controlled by the Kachin rebels in Myanmar.¹⁷ Reports have also indicated that the NSCN-IM militants have a “full-fledged liaison office” in the territories in China across the border with Arunachal Pradesh.¹⁸

The Waxing ISI Connection

The scope of the activities in India of the Inter Services Intelligence, Pakistan’s external intelligence agency, has been appropriately summed up by Lt. Gen. (Retd.) S.K. Sinha, the present governor of Assam:

It [the ISI] has made widespread efforts to engage soft targets, all over India. If Kashmir has been the front through which Jihad has got a foothold, the Northeast, with its unending influx of illegal immigrants is the backdoor, invitingly beckoning the ISI. Its activities have also been detected in several parts of the country – Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Mumbai and from Nepal into Bihar and UP [Uttar Pradesh]. Both some Muslim fundamentalists and some Hindus, lured by lucre, have

¹⁶ The consignment reportedly reached via the land route from China to Myanmar. The Myanmarese destination Tamu is located opposite the Indian border town of Moreh in Manipur. See www.satp.org/news/December/news_15.htm

¹⁷ http://www.satp.org/news/October/news_10.htm. The Kachin rebels, Kachin Independence Army (KIA) is a Myanmar-based guerrilla outfit.

¹⁸ See *The Pioneer*, New Delhi, February 22, 2001.

been falling a willing prey to [the] ISI's nefarious designs.¹⁹

Commenting on the assistance accorded to terrorist groups operating in the Northeast region, S.K. Ghosh, a former Indian Police Service (IPS) officer states that these groups received “funds, weapons, explosives, advice, forged travel documents and sanctuary” from Pakistan.²⁰ The continuing assistance to terrorist groups by the ISI can also be understood in the framework of destabilisation that this agency seeks to establish in India. As one analyst put it in another context, “once conventional war is impossible, futile or inconvenient, state sponsored terrorism is used instead as a proxy war, without the inconveniences of declared hostilities. The state can maintain diplomatic relations... [and] [a]s long as the states sponsoring terrorism can enjoy the luxury of holding both sides of the stick, this kind of terrorism will not only continue, but increase.”²¹

Concurring with these opinions, Assam's Director General of Police, Harekrishna Deka, stated that the ISI had issued instructions for the killing of Hindi speaking people in the State, in order to sustain pressure on Indian security forces on a ‘second front’, the first being Jammu and Kashmir.²² The ISI conducts training camps in Bangladesh for the various terrorist groups operating in India's Northeast – most prominently, the NSCN, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the ULFA and the Northeast Students Organisation (NESO).²³ In the past, the ULFA cadres

¹⁹ See “Foreword” by the Governor of Assam, Lt. Gen. (Retd.) S. K. Sinha, in S K Ghosh, *Pakistan's ISI: Network of Terror in India*, New Delhi: APH Publishing House, 2000, p. viii.

²⁰ S. K. Ghosh, *Pakistan's ISI: Network of terror in India*, New Delhi: APH Publishing House, 2000, p. 140.

²¹ A former Israeli Ambassador and Inspector General of the Tate police border Guard, Shaul Rosolio, quoted in Stephen Segaller, “State-sponsored Terrorism”, in *Invisible Armies: Terrorism into the 1990s*, London: Michael Joseph, 1986, p. 121.

²² “The Politics of Insurgency”, *Northeast Sun*, vol. 6, no. 10, December 15-31, 2000, p. 11. The statement of the DGP came in the wake of a series of targeted killings of Hindi-speaking non-Assamese people in the State. It is estimated in the same article that 70 persons have been killed in less than six weeks.

²³ For a detailed exposition of the ISI's activities in the Northeast region see Jaideep Saikia, “The ISI Reaches East: Anatomy of a Conspiracy”, *Faultlines: Writings on Conflict and Resolution*, New Delhi, vol. 6, August 2000, pp. 61-78.

were trained by ISI at a camp in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and others received specialised training in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK).²⁴ Earlier, the ULFA cadre of the 'Volcano Unit' had been trained at camps in Afghanistan.²⁵

In the wake of reports that the ULFA had established a close nexus with the ISI, India's Defence Minister, George Fernandes said in Parliament that:

... measures like gearing up the intelligence machinery, co-ordinated action by security forces, modernisation and upgradation of police and intensification of patrolling on the border etc. are being taken...²⁶

Barely a month after Fernandes referred to (but did not categorically state) the ULFA-ISI nexus,²⁷ his colleague in the Union Council of Ministers, Ajit Kumar Panja, disclosed that information available 'suggests' that ULFA leaders were in close contact with certain Pakistani diplomats posted at the High Commission at Dhaka, Bangladesh. It was apparently through their assistance that some among the ULFA leadership secured "foreign passports through fraudulent means."²⁸ And a little less than a fortnight before Panja's disclosure, the then Chief Minister of Assam, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta had tabled a document in the

²⁴ Ibid, p. 73.

²⁵ See *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, August 14, 2001. The 'Volcano Unit' was probably a specialized explosives group, as the cadres of the unit were trained in explosives.

²⁶ See India, Lok Sabha, Unstarred Question No 2359, March 9, 2000. Fernandes also said that the Army had not been in touch with the ULFA leadership with a view to persuading them to come to the negotiating table.

²⁷ In his reply in Parliament, Fernandes said that media reports were pointing to an ULFA-ISI nexus, and had also drawn attention to the ULFA appeal during the Kargil War of 1999 to the Assamese in the Indian Army not to go to war. An undated document of India's Union Ministry of Home Affairs says, "During the Kargil war in 1999, the ULFA 'Chairman' Arabinda Rajkhowa even went to the extent of issuing a press statement urging upon the Indian Army jawans belonging to the State of Assam to withdraw themselves from the battle field in Indo-Pak border stating that the Kashmir militants and the intruders from the Pak area were actually fighting for their existence on their soil and that they did not wage any war against the "Colonial" Government of India. See "Demoralisation Among ULFA Cadres", <http://www.satp.org/India/Documents/Demoralisation>.

²⁸ See the reply by the then Minister of State for External Affairs, Ajit Kumar Panja, to Lok Sabha, Unstarred Q. No. 4082, April 19, 2000. Panja also informed the House that the Union government had taken up the issue of 'cross-border terrorism' and 'ULFA-ISI nexus' with the Bangladesh government at different levels.

State Legislative Assembly establishing the deeply entrenched role of the ISI in aiding terrorist groups, including the ULFA, for subversion.²⁹ The activities of the ISI in Assam included:

- ? Promoting indiscriminate violence in the State by providing active support to the local militant outfits.³⁰
- ? Creating new militant outfits along ethnic and communal lines by instigating ethnic and religious groups.
- ? Supply of explosives and sophisticated arms to various terrorist groups.
- ? Causing sabotage of oil pipelines and other installations, communication lines, railways and roads.
- ? Promoting fundamentalism and militancy among local Muslim youth by misleading them in the name of 'jihad'.
- ? Promoting communal tension between Hindu and Muslim citizens by way of false and highly inflammatory propaganda.

Recruits into the Islamist terrorist groups operating in Assam mentioned already, were fed on the motivation that they were, in fact, selected to fight for a 'sovereign Muslim homeland' "in the Northeast region of India by [a]rmed struggle against the Government of India."³¹ Reports on the emergence of Islamist militant outfits in Assam emerged September 1996 and by then these groups, in their rudimentary stage of evolution, were being actively aided by the ISI.³²

²⁹ See *ISI Activities in Assam, Statement laid on the Table of the House of Assam Legislative Assembly, under item no. 12, dated 6.4.2000, by Shri Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, Chief Minister, Assam*, p. 16-17. The *Chief Minister's Statement* also contains the profiles of 17 of the arrested militant activists. Of these, one gives good insights. Md. Akbar Ali had to persuade and assure by an activist that he had the word of their leader, one Rubul, that they were fighting for the establishment of an 'Islamic country'. It was then that Ali agreed to go to Manipur to undergo arms training.

³⁰ The known Islamist militant organisations operating in Assam are Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA), Muslim Liberation Tigers of Assam (MLTA), Islamic Liberation Army of Assam (ILAA), United Muslim Liberation Front of Assam (UMLA), United Reformation Protest of Assam (URPA), People's United Liberation Front (PULF), Muslim Volunteer Force (MVF), Adam Sena Islamic Sevak Sangh (ISS), Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), Harkat-ul-Jehad (HuJ). *Ibid.*, p. 7. For full text of the Statement see South Asia Terrorism Portal; Countries; India; Assam; Documents; ISI Activities in Assam; www.satp.org.

³¹ See *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

³² S. K. Ghosh, *India's North-East Frontier: Fifty turbulent years*, Titagarh: Linkman Publication, 1997, pp. 288-89. Reports of the time had already

The aid to non-Islamist terrorist groups had, in fact, preceded the emergence and continuation of ISI assistance to Islamist groups. An analyst outlining the maturing of the ULFA's ISI connection, writing on the basis of information provided by the security forces in Assam, described the emergence of the ULFA-ISI nexus in the early Nineties, with the visit by a ULFA delegation to Dhaka, and the establishing of a direct contact with the ISI through the Pakistan High Commission there. This resulted in a visit by the delegation to Pakistan, and was followed by continuous subsequent contacts at the highest levels of the insurgent organisation, including visits to Pakistan by the Vice Chairman of ULFA, Pradip Gogoi, in January 1991, which resulted in the signing of an agreement with the ISI on training for ULFA cadres:

After the agreement with the ISI, Munin Nabis calls a group of ULFA members for training in Pakistan in April 1991. Pradip Gogoi accompanies a six-member group to Islamabad for training with the ISI.

Hari Mohan Roy alias Rustar Choudhury of ULFA, along with ten other ULFA cadres, undergoes training in camps organised by the ISI in Pakistan in 1993. Hari Mohan Roy obtains a passport under the name of Jamul Akhtar son of Akhtar Hussain of Bangladesh.³³

These initial contacts led to a continuous relationship between the ISI and the ULFA, as well as with other terrorist and subversive elements not only in Assam, but also those operating in different States of the Northeast. The top leadership of the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) received training at camps in Pakistan through their ISI connection.³⁴ The leaders who have visited Pakistan included the NLFT chief Biswamohan Debbarma, 'chief of army staff' Dhanu Koloi, 'organising

indicated that the ISI had pumped a huge volume of counterfeit currency into the Northeast region.

³³ Jaideep Saikia, "The ISI Reaches East: Anatomy of a conspiracy", *Faultlines: Writings in Conflict and Resolution*, vol. 6, August 2000, p. 74.

³⁴ Suman K Chakrabarti, "Terror in Tripura-Part II: Renegade militant spills NLFT's links with Bangla Army, politicians and missionaries", http://www.thenewspapertoday.com/india/inside.phtml:NEWS_ID=22915.

secretary' Mantu Koloï and 'publicity secretary' Binoy Debbarma. According to the interrogation report of an arrested NLFT cadre, "in 1997-98, all these NLFT leaders visited Pakistan to receive training and arms from ISI. The ISI had arranged the passport and visas for these militants. These leaders are again trying to procure visas to visit Pakistan..."³⁵

The ISI, through its network in Assam, also recruited cadres from among the local Muslim youth, who were sent to camps in Pakistan for weapons and religious training. The Assam police arrested 34 of the returning Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) cadres in 2001.³⁶ Moreover, some of the *madrassas* (seminaries) in Assam have come under the influence of ISI.³⁷ Another aspect of the ISI penetration of *madrassas* in Assam is that ULFA terrorists are often extended shelter in such seminaries, exploiting the official hesitation and public sensitivity involved in raids by security forces on religious institutions.³⁸

The Naga insurgents had also received financial and arms assistance from Pakistan before the emergence of Bangladesh.³⁹ The NSCN-IM chairman, Isac Swu, while admitting that the IM leadership had visited Pakistan and had apprised them of the peace talks with the Union government, however, maintained that the Pakistani supply-line dried up after 1971.⁴⁰

Nothing could be further from the truth and there is ample evidence that Pakistan continued with financial assistance to the Naga insurgents, contrary to Swu's protestations.⁴¹ With the money that the ISI provided, the NSCN-IM purchased several

³⁵ See www.thenewspapertoday.com/india/inside.phtml?NEWS_ID=22675.

³⁶ The then Chief Minister of Assam, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, quoted in "Exposing the ISI-ULFA nexus", *Northeast Sun*, vol. 5, no. 18, April 15-30, 2001, p. 10. Mahanta also alleged that the ISI was continuously dispatching arms and explosives into the State.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Swu admitted as much in an interview. See "Ceasefire at Stake", *Northeast Sun*, vol. 6, no. 3, September 1-14, 2000, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ A report in the 1990s indicated that an arrested Naga insurgent, Khayo Hurrey, disclosed that he received US "\$1,700, 000 in three installments as part of a deal to arm the Nagas." See Tara Kartha, *Tools of Terror: Light Weapons and Indian Security*, New Delhi: Knowledge World-IDSA, 1999, p. 260.

“Chinese rifles, machine guns, mortars and explosives from black markets in South East Asian and Bangladesh.”⁴²

Bangladesh Camps and Weapons Transit

Several reports allude to the presence of camps and hideouts of Northeast militants in Bangladesh, “located mostly in the border areas such as Zupu, Lalu, Toraban, Satchari, Chanbari, etc. ... The NSCN... has a base in Masalong”, as do some of the terrorist groups active in the Valley in Manipur.⁴³ For instance, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) had set up five camps in Bangladesh and two camps in Myanmar,⁴⁴ and approximately 1,000 recruits received arms training in these.

More than anything else and, indeed, most profitably for the ULFA, it has been able to establish a firm link with the ISI in Bangladesh. ULFA’s camps in Bangladesh commenced functioning in 1989, at which time there were 13 to 14 such camps. Initially Bangladesh was used as a safe haven and training place for its cadres, but the ULFA gradually expanded its activities to include the movement of arms shipments in transit to India. The Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA) and Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA) are the chief suppliers of arms for the ULFA through Bangladesh.⁴⁵ Owing to greater vigil along the known routes of the ULFA arms flow, the outfit has, in recent times, been making attempts to set up bases in Meghalaya, especially in the west Garo Hills, to coordinate the transit of arms coming through Bangladesh.⁴⁶

The NLFT is another terrorist group that reportedly has camps in Bangladesh. An NLFT ‘commander’, Chandi Pada Jamatiya, who surrendered in April 2001, confessed during interrogation⁴⁷ that such camps were situated at Sajak – the

⁴² See S P Sinha, “Insurgencies in North-East India: An appraisal”, *Akrosh*, New Delhi, vol. 3, April 2000, p. 45.

⁴³ “Tackling Tripura”, *Northeast Sun*, vol. 5, no. 16, March 15-31, 2000, p. 9.

⁴⁴ [www.satp.org/India/Manipur/Terrorist Outfits/PLA.htm](http://www.satp.org/India/Manipur/Terrorist%20Outfits/PLA.htm)

⁴⁵ “Encounters in Garo Hills”, *Northeast Sun*, vol. 6, no. 17, April 1-14, 2001, p. 7.

⁴⁶ The Superintendent of Police, West Garo Hills, quoted in “Encounters in Garo Hills.”

⁴⁷ Information in this section is based, unless other mentioned, on the *India Today* report. See

Headquarters of the group; Mayani Reserve – housing cadres; Boalchir – housing the families of the top-leadership; Alikadam – to procure arms from the Cox’s Bazar port town and for their storage; Usmanpur – a transit camp south of the Chittagong port city and close to Myanmar; Tailongbasti – another transit camp; the nearly defunct Kurma/Khasiapunji camp; and the Khagrapur transit camp. Besides, safe houses and transit houses were also identified. The Cox’s Bazar transit house, used for arms procurement, and two safe houses, one in Chittagong and another at Dhaka. Both these also act as communication centres. The safe house in Chittagong is where NLFT president Biswamohan Debbarma and other top leaders reside. Beyond these, a range of rightwing political leaders, army officers and Christian missionaries maintain contacts with the NLFT.⁴⁸

Besides NLFT, the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF)⁴⁹ and the Meghalaya-based Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC)⁵⁰ and the Achik National Volunteer Council (ANVC), also run camps in Bangladesh. Subsequent to proscription by the Union government, several cadres of the HNLC and ANVC moved to set up camps in neighbouring Bangladesh. The Meghalaya Chief Minister has pointed out that Bangladesh had ‘courted’ these groups to set up camps on its soil.⁵¹ Furthermore, the ATTF has, as reported in the year 2000, set up its headquarters in Satchari, in Bangladesh, from where its chairman Ranjit Debbarma directs the outfits activities.⁵² The arrest by

www.thenewspaperstoday.com/india/inside.phtml?NEWS_ID=22675

⁴⁸ Quoting Indian and Bangladeshi sources, the report says: Leaders of BNP [Bangladesh National Party] and the fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami are also helping NLFT for camping in Bangladesh... two [Bangladesh] Army officers [were] maintaining links with the NLFT... [the] Dhaka-based Rajendrapur mission, a Christian institution, regularly helps NLFT extremists in their militant activities... missionaries have helped to admit the children of top NLFT leaders in the Chittagong English Medium School, located near Chittagong Panchlail police outpost.

⁴⁹ The important among the ATTF camps are situated in Subhadhan, Moramachya Chora, Jogesh Chandpara and Khasai Mangal.

⁵⁰ The HNLC has a camp in Jaintiapur and a transit camp in Ramgarh.

⁵¹ For instance, see “Bangladesh woos banned Khasi militant outfits” *Hindustan Times*, December 18, 2000. Also see “Meghalaya militant outfits have bases in Bangladesh”, *The Hindu*, Chennai, December 16, 2000. The two outfits, HNVC and the ANVC, were proscribed on November 16, 2000.

⁵² “Another Surrender Drama”, *Northeast Sun*, vol. 6, no. 5, October 1-14, 2001, p. 16.

Indian security forces of cadres of the Islamic Liberation Army of Assam (ILAA) also brought to light the sustenance that was being provided to these Islamist militants by fundamentalist forces in Bangladesh.⁵³

Myanmar: Safe haven to hostile territory

Various terrorist groups operating in Northeast India have bases and camps in the areas in Myanmar bordering the Indian States of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Mizoram. The National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K) has its training camps⁵⁴ and its Central as well as General Headquarters (GHQ) in Myanmar.⁵⁵ The NSCN-IM, ULFA⁵⁶ and National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) also have camps in Myanmar. Among the other groups known to have a presence in Myanmar are the Kuki National Army (KNA) and the Kuki National Front (KNF).⁵⁷

Myanmar is among the many sources of weapons for the Northeast-based terrorist groups.⁵⁸ According to two surrendered KNA terrorists, sophisticated arms like the G-3 and the AK series of rifles “have been available in plenty inside Myanmar”, in the weapons’ market.⁵⁹ The movement of weapons is also being

⁵³ S K Ghosh, *India’s North-East Frontier*, p. 289.

⁵⁴ Special Mention by Badal Choudhury, Member of Parliament representing Tripura (West) in the Lok Sabha. See India, Lok Sabha Debates, XI Lok Sabha, Session IV (Budget), March 21, 1997. <http://alfa.nic.in/lsdeb/lsl1/ses4/51210397.htm>

⁵⁵ See “Military junta cracks whip on North East ultras in Myanmar: Khaplang among fleeing militants”, <http://www.nenanews.com/QT%20Mar%2022-%20Apr%20%207.%2000/oh2.htm>.

⁵⁶ Of the several ULFA camps in Myanmar, at least three were moved out in the year 2000. These camps were relocated in Arunachal Pradesh. See http://www.satp.org/news/May'00/news_29.htm.

⁵⁷ www.satp.org/news/2001/February/news27.htm. In an encounter with security forces on February 25, 2001, four Kuki militants who had sneaked into India from Myanmar near the border town of Moreh in Manipur were killed.

⁵⁸ It is not only India that is the destination for illegal arms. Rohingya migrants from Myanmar are known to have sneaked in arms for militant elements in Bangladesh. See www.satp.org/news/2001/february/news1.htm. The passage of arms reportedly occurs through the Bangladesh/Myanmar border town of Teknaf.

⁵⁹ “Surrenders Version”, *Northeast Sun*, vol. 6, no. 5, October 1-14, 2001, p. 13.

facilitated by Myanmarese migrants in the Northeast region, some of whom act as conduits in the arms delivery network, having fled their homes in the wake of repressive measures by the military regime and some others for economic gain. In one of the seizures affected in June 2001, a large cache of arms and ammunition was recovered from the residence of a Myanmarese national in a village in Mizoram, which shares borders with Myanmar.⁶⁰ Yet another incident of the involvement of Myanmarese nationals in running arms for the militants came to light with the arrest of a woman in another State in the Northeast, in Meghalaya.⁶¹ The Myanmarese conduits receive arms from rebel groups in Myanmar, which are prominent sources of supply for the Indian terrorists. Reports have indicated that the Chin National Liberation Army (CNLA) had delivered arms and ammunition to the terrorists at their ‘homes’.⁶²

In the early stages, Governments in Myanmar turned a blind-eye to the presence of Indian militant groups in border areas that were loosely governed, and often in the control of Myanmarese ethnic rebels. However, increased interaction between the governments of Myanmar and India has resulted in the former initiating armed action against the insurgents. At least two such incidents of attacks by the Myanmarese troops on the NSCN (K) have been reported. In the first, a weeklong operation commenced on February 6, 2000, in which the outfit’s Council, its General Headquarters in Chumnu as well as camps in Numnu and Wangrup, came under attack from an estimated 1,000 troops.⁶³

⁶⁰ www.satp.org/news/2001/june/news6.htm. Of the two persons apprehended during the raid-cum-seizure, one was a former terrorist of the Chin National Army (CNA), a Myanmar-based rebel group.

⁶¹ The arrested person was running arms for the HNLC and NSCN-IM terrorists.

⁶² Documents seized from CNLA by Indian security force personnel indicate that United Bengali Liberation Front (UBLF), ULFA and NDFB terrorists have been the recipients of arms and ammunition from CNLA. Besides, the UBLF was also to have received training in Myanmar. Source: www.satp.org/news/2001/May/news22.htm#3. Another report has indicated that arms were delivered to the ULFA and NDFB at their camps in Tirap and Changlang districts in Arunachal Pradesh. See www.satp.org/news/2001/july/news10.htm

⁶³ “NSCN (K) HQs attacked”, *Northeast Sun*, vol. 5, no. 17, April 1-14, 2000, p. 7. As disclosed by the then Joint Secretary in charge of Northeast in the Indian Union Home Ministry, G. K. Pillai., 30 terrorists and 40 troops were reportedly killed in this incident.

On May 6, 2001, Myanmar troops launched yet another operation against the NSCN-K.⁶⁴

Another report suggested that the military action by Myanmar against the NSCN (K) followed an ‘understanding’ in February 2000 between the Myanmar government and the rival Isak-Muivah faction.⁶⁵ Furthermore, joint-operations by Indian and Myanmar security forces have compelled the ULFA terrorists to relocate their camps to southwest Myanmar, along the border with the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh.⁶⁶

The Bhutan Connection

The ULFA and the NDBF have well-established camps in the forests inside Bhutan that run contiguous to India. The ULFA is reported to be operating in Bhutan since 1992.⁶⁷ However, its activities inside Bhutan have risen dramatically since 1995 after their safe havens in Bangladesh came under attack by the then government. The ULFA has camps in Bhutan located in the forests of southern Bhutan and the Samdruk Dzonkha area. It was at one such camp that the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan had trained the ULFA. Terrorists from India’s Northeast have been able to run camps in Bhutan primarily because of the Bhutanese government’s vacillating stand against taking action against these groups, as also a measure of collusion between certain Bhutanese officials and these groups. Indeed, the collusive patterns of interaction with Bhutanese officialdom made one

⁶⁴ During the operation that lasted for a few days, until at least May 15, action began near Nanking village, which is proximate to the Konyak region that houses the Headquarters of the NSCN-K. It then spread to other areas in Lau region. Troops advanced finally into the Konyak stronghold and raided four villages. www.satp.org/news/2001/May/news8.htm#1 an estimated 300 troops participated in the operations. Details of the success of the operation and casualty figures are either not available or are at best scanty. The general secretary of the outfit claimed that his cadres had killed 50 troops, while he put the casualties among his ‘boys’ at just three. Independent sources of verification were, however, not available. www.satp.org/news/2001/May/news19.htm#1

⁶⁵ A *Northeast Herald* report cited in www.satp.org/news/April00/news5.htm

⁶⁶ www.satp.org/news/march00/news12.htm

⁶⁷ http://www.satp.org/bhutan/Backgrounder_Bhutan.htm

commentator note that the terrorists there are treated with a good sense of hospitality by the government officials.⁶⁸ The official refrain from Bhutan was that its security forces have neither the training nor the maturity to undertake operations against terrorist groups there. The King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuk, has stated:

Once we send our armed forces to remove the militants, we will have to fight a war with them and until we win the war the militants will not leave the country... If we get involved in a war... [it] will bring loss of many lives among the security forces and the Bhutanese people as well as attacks on our developmental centres and facilities, and cause great hardship to our people.⁶⁹

The Bhutanese government engaged the ULFA rebels in two rounds of negotiations – on November 20, 1998, and May 7, 1999⁷⁰ – and had asked them to leave its soil. At these talks, the ULFA indicated to the government that it should wait till the end of year 2001 on the issue of vacating of camps. The Home Minister of Bhutan, Lyonpo Thinley Gyamtsho, said on one occasion that these talks were “unproductive and inconclusive” and the militants had used “various pretexts, excuses and conflicting proposals to stall the talks.”⁷¹ While the ULFA was, on the one hand, negotiating for time, on the other, it had only established more camps in Bhutan. At the third round of talks with the ULFA, on June 18, 2001, the Bhutanese government had, after protracted negotiations secured some ‘concessions’. ULFA agreed to close down four of the nine camps that it was operating and reduce the numbers of cadres at the remaining five.⁷² Though the two sides were to meet again and resolve the issue of the remaining five camps,⁷³ there were no reports to indicate that such a meeting had taken place. On the contrary, unnamed Indian

⁶⁸ See *The Times of India*, New Delhi, April 23, 2000.

⁶⁹ *Kuensel*, Thimpu, ‘Sarpang people will support government moves to resolve the problem of militants’, January 27, 2001.

⁷⁰ See South Asia Terrorism Portal; Countries; Bhutan; Backgrounder; www.satp.org.

⁷¹ See *Kuensel*, January 13, 2001.

⁷² At the meeting, ULFA agreed to immediately shutdown two of the camps and another two towards the end of the year 2001. See *Hindustan Times*, August 17, 2001.

⁷³ See G Vinayak, ULFA agrees to remove 4 camps from Bhutan”, <http://www.rediff.com/news/2001/jul/10assam.htm>

intelligence sources alleged that the ULFA's presence in Bhutan has not reduced.⁷⁴

Inter-group linkages

Loose networks among terrorist groups bestow upon them the advantages of flexibility, greater impact, geographical and operational segmentation and mutual support. This also enables, as a consequence, small bands of terrorists to look up to higher levels in the hierarchy of terrorist organisations for broad guidelines, while the objectives and operational details are evolved by the 'independent' groups themselves.⁷⁵ Besides direct alliances, terrorist groups operating in one theatre set up camps in other theatres. These serve the function of being used as training camps as well as what may be referred to as 'forward posts', as is the case with the ULFA, and both factions of the NSCN. The NSCN-IM, in fact, operates camps in the Tirap and Changlang districts in Arunachal Pradesh. This area is also used by the rival militant outfit, the Khaplang faction (NSCN-K), as a safe corridor. Thus, security forces had destroyed two camps of the NSCN-IM in the Deoparbat jungles in the Tirap district in the year 2001. Of these, one was in the 'final stages' of being prepared to function as its General Headquarters.⁷⁶ The NSCN-K, too, has a sizeable presence in Tirap and Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh and has established a reciprocal relationship with Chief Minister's Mukut Mithi's Arunachal Congress⁷⁷.

Counter-terrorist operations in one theatre also frequently lead to a terrorist group entering into alliances or areas detached

⁷⁴ See "ULFA leaders at Bhutan Minister's party", *Asian Age*, January 9, 2002. Furthermore, the report also claimed, quoting unnamed Intelligence sources, that, in fact, ULFA chairman Arbinda Rajkhowa was one of the prominent invitees at a birthday party hosted by Bhutanese Home Minister Lyonpo Thinley Gyamtsho.

⁷⁵ The hypothesis presented here is an adaptation of a formulation suggested by a scholar. Writing in the context of 'loose networks' within a terrorist group, James H. Anderson envisioned this possibility. See "International Terrorism and Crime: Trends and linkages", accessible at www.jnmu.edu/orgs/wrmi/it4.html

⁷⁶ *The Assam Tribune*, Guwahati, June 1, 2001.

⁷⁷ For details see Ajai Sahni and J George, "Security and Development in India's Northeast: An Alternative Perspective", *Faultlines: Writings on Conflict and Resolution*, vol. 4, February 2000, p. 55.

from their own theatres. Thus, even as the security forces were flushing out militants in Assam in December 2000, a high alert was sounded along the entire stretch of the border with Meghalaya and a night curfew was imposed in the Garo Hills district, home to militant outfits operating in the State of Meghalaya.⁷⁸ Such regulatory measures were initiated in order to prevent militants in Assam from ‘sneaking’ into Meghalaya.

Amongst themselves, as has already been outlined, terrorist organisations in India’s Northeast have formed three types of linkages. These are (a) between any two terrorist organisations cutting across theatres; (b) amongst terrorist organisations operating within a theatre; and (c) broad fronts consisting of terrorist organisations operating in different theatres. The consequent alliances among terrorist groups take the form of ideological collaboration, logistics or material support and co-operation, and joint operations.⁷⁹

Cross-theatre multiple linkages

Militant groups operating in India routinely call for a boycott of national day celebrations. This is also true of extremist organisations in the Northeast.⁸⁰ Although these calls are in the realm of symbolism, the distinctive nature of signatories to such statements is indicative of the waxing and waning of co-operation between these groups. In 1999, six groups⁸¹ issued such a joint call. In the year 2000, however, the statement revealed that only

⁷⁸ See *Hindustan Times*, December 15, 2000.

⁷⁹ One scholar, in his doctoral thesis, identified these ‘manifestations’ of terrorist ‘coalitions’. See an article, based on his thesis, by Ely Karmon, “German and Palestine Terrorist Organisations: Strange Bedfellows”, www.ict.org.il/articles.articledet.cfm?articleid=120.

⁸⁰ For instance, on Independence Day on August 15, 2001, 11 terrorist outfits in the Northeast issued a boycott call. These included the ULFA, NLFT, NDFB, and the PLA. See *Indian Express*, August 14, 2001.

⁸¹ The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), People’s Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), the revolutionary Democratic Front, the United National Liberation Front, Manipur (UNLF), the Naga National Socialist Council [Khaplang] (NSCN-K) and the Tripura People’s Democratic Front (TPDF).

three groups⁸² had come together as a joint-front. And in the year 2001, the statement was signed by as many as 11 groups, the highest thus far. The new signatories in 2001 included the Arunachal Dragon Organisation and the Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO), two groups that are in close co-operation with the ULFA. Significantly, the three groups who had in the year 2000 issued the call as a single front, were not signatories to the statement in the year 2001, but chose to retain their individual identity.

The most recent and formal of all the alliances constituted among terrorist groups in the region is the United Liberation Front of Seven Sisters (ULFSS), formed in the context of opposition to the NSCN-IM proposal of *Nagalim* or 'greater Nagaland'.⁸³ The members of the alliance are the NSCN-K, the ULFA, Dima Halim Daogah (DHD), the United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), Arunachal Dragon Force (ADF), People's Liberation Army (PLA) and Revolutionary Democratic Front (RDF).⁸⁴ The ULFSS was formed⁸⁵ at an undisclosed 'Naga base' somewhere along the India-Myanmar border, in July 2001, at a meeting attended by the leadership of the participating terrorist groups. An earlier front that had been created, but withered away, was the pan-Mongoloid association, the Indo-Burma Revolutionary Front (IBRF). Besides the UNLF, the other members of the IBRF were the ULFA and the NSCN (K).

⁸² These are the UNLF, RPF and PREPAK. The front was named the Manipur People's Liberation Front (MPLF). Besides, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland had also joined the boycott call, in the year.

⁸³ The purported objective of the NSCN-IM is the establishment of a *Nagalim* consisting of all the Naga-inhabited areas of the neighbouring States of Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and some portions of Myanmar, which it considers to be the rightful homeland of the Nagas. Slated to be an independent State, the Nagalim lies in the Patkai range between the 930 and 970 East longitude and 23.50 and 28.30 North latitude at the trijunction of China, India and Myanmar. The proposed Nagalim spreads over approximately 1,20,000 sq. km. in contrast to the present State of Nagaland that has an area of 16,527 sq. km. Source: www.satp.org/India/nagaland/Nagalim.htm. Also see www.angelfire.com/mi/Nagalim/Table.html.

⁸⁴ See www.satp.org/news/2001/August/news4.htm

⁸⁵ See <http://www.satp.org/news/2001/August/news04.html>

Intra-theatre linkages

Three Manipur-based terrorist groups – RPF, PREPAK and the UNLF – came together and formed the Manipur People’s Liberation Front (MPLF). The decision to form the Front was born out of a necessity to avoid fratricidal conflict or, as Sanayaima, the MPLF convenor said, “Internal unity among all those communities who have taken up arms is the number one precondition”⁸⁶ to achieve their objective of ‘Independence’.

However, the coming together of these terrorist groups is beset with ‘practical problems’. The urge to ally was weaker among the lower-rung of the cadres, and the merger was a political decision made by the top leadership and imposed upon the cadres. It was, therefore, bound to be riddled with contradictions. The alliance also envisioned founding a single cohesive unit. Alliance partners were, of course, aware that this could not be achieved instantly. The MPLF members chose to follow a gradualist approach and, as a first step, fund raising was sought to be centralised.⁸⁷ Though the idea has been firmed up, difficulties persist due to differences on the question of modalities. An effective umbrella organisation of insurgent groups in Manipur is, therefore, evidently, yet to emerge.

Reflecting on the MPLF, Sanayaima stated that alliances “should try to work depending on circumstances and the reality of the situation.”⁸⁸ The Front has not evolved any concrete plan of agreed action. For instance, when asked on the form of government that the MPLF would institute if it were to achieve its goal of Independence, Sanayaima said he “would not be able to speak for the other members in the Front”,⁸⁹ thus, clearly stating that they had not thought of the larger issues. Besides, the respective goals of members could also be contradictory and consequently lead to withering of such alliances.

⁸⁶ See interview with Sanayaima, “The UNLF Agenda”, *Northeast Sun*, vol. 6, no. 12, January 15-31, 2001, p. 15. Sanayaima is also chairman of the UNLF.

⁸⁷ Ibid..

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Another Manipur-based federation in operation is the Indigenous People's Revolutionary Alliance (IPRA).⁹⁰ It is predominantly a grouping of hill-based militant groups and was formed to prevent valley-based extremists from infiltrating the hills, in other words, for 'turf protection'.⁹¹ As K.S. Bonsing, general secretary of the Kuki National Front (KNF), which is not a member of the IPRA, rather flatly expressed it, "the objective behind (its) formation was to check infiltration of valley outfits in Churachandpur."⁹² In other words, the IPRA lacks all grand political goals and is merely predicated on the expedient of securing the sphere of influence of its individual members and, thereby, preventing any geographical erosion. The IPRA has, however, a declared set of goals: i. 'the re-unification of peoples having similar languages, customs and culture; ii. unity among, and peace and progress of, *our* people; and iii. to protect and safeguard the interests of *our* people *everywhere*'.⁹³ Though re-unification is the avowed objective of the IPRA, only certain KNF factions [KNF(MC) and KNF (P) T. Samuel group] have aligned with the IPRA,⁹⁴ while the one led by 'general secretary' Bonsing has, for the moment, stayed clear from the Alliance.

Inter-group linkages across theatres

Inter-group linkages among terrorist groups in the Northeast are primarily those existing between the ULFA and other terrorist

⁹⁰ The present constituents of the IPRA are KNO/KNA, ZRO/ZRA,KNF(MC) and the KNF -T Samuel group.

⁹¹ See interview with the IPRA general secretary, Vipin Haopik, "IPRA's re-unification Bid", *Northeast Sun*, April 15-30, 2001, vol. 6, no. 18, p. 18.

⁹² See the interview with K S Bonsing, "Question of Kukiland", in *Northeast Sun*, vol. 6, no. 5, October 1-14, 2000, p. 11.

⁹³ Emphasis added.

⁹⁴ See interview with Vipin Haopik, *Northeast Sun*, April 15-30, 2001, vol. 6, no. 18, p. 18. While some of the terrorist groups have joined the IPRA, the general secretary admitted in the interview that a total reunification was still a long way off. The IPRA has had several rounds of talks with the Hmar rebels—the HPDC-D—and are yet to hear any positive reply from them. Haopik is bitter that the Mizos have not responded to unification moves. According to him, "...They are now enjoying a blissful statehood... Until they decide again to arm themselves and join their blood brothers for the greater re-unification, we don't bother to disturb them for a while."

groups at one end, and on the other between Naga insurgents and the other groups.

As stated earlier, both the ULFA and NDFB currently operate primarily from bases in Bhutan and Bangladesh. Association between the two groups dates back to at least late 1992 if not earlier. In December 1992, the two terrorist groups, in a joint operation, had raided the Assam Police armory in Kokrajar and decamped with 44 SLRs, 5 LMGs, and approximately 4,000 rounds of ammunition.⁹⁵ It is difficult to state with certainty whether the association has been continuous. Co-operation between the two organisations is, however, at present, beyond doubt. ULFA's mouthpiece *Freedom* thus stated in July 2001 that, 'the ULFA and the NDFB have agreed to carry out a joint-struggle against the common enemy' (India), adding that they had 'agreed to form a co-ordination committee and joint-action plan'⁹⁶ in their fight against the common enemy. In the days following the disclosure in *Freedom*, reports emanated that they were, in fact, conducting joint-operations. According to a report, cadres of the two groups killed eight security forces personnel in an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) explosion in August 2001.⁹⁷ A little more than a month before the ULFA Martyrs Day address was delivered, the NDFB held its 'general assembly', at which its general secretary had called for "closer co-operation among the struggling forces of the Northeastern region to fight against the common enemy that is India."⁹⁸ Thus, co-operation between the ULFA and the NDFB extends far

⁹⁵ Tara Kartha, *Tools of Terror*, pp. 263-64.

⁹⁶ The ULFA chairman, Arabinda Rajkhova, disclosed information on the 'agreement' with the NDFB in his speech on the occasion of Martyrs Day, July 27, 2001. *Freedom* carried his speech which was distributed to the media. In the same speech, he also said, "ULFA, NDFB, UPDA and DHD have separately run a decade-long armed struggle with immense sacrifices over this period. [At] this very significant moment, my earnest call to the DHD and UPDS is to practically assist us in this joint political pursuit." See *Asian Age*, July 29, 2001.

⁹⁷ *Times of India*, August 6, 2001. While some security force officials said it was an individual act by the NDFB cadres, some others differed and declared that it was a joint-operation by ULFA and NDFB. The basis of the later inference was that the two groups have been acting jointly since 'some time' and their presence in the area of the explosion has been already recorded.

⁹⁸ See a report in *Assam Tribune*, June 12, 2001.

beyond the ideological realm into what can be referred to as a coalition.

The ULFA has also established linkages with the various smaller newly formed terrorist organisations. The presence of ULFA cadres was detected in North Bengal, in the Kumargramduar Block, in Jalpaiguri district.⁹⁹ The Kumargramduar Block shares borders with Bhutan, and it is inside the jungles that stretch into that country that the ULFA runs a camp, where its recruits are trained, as are those of the Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO).¹⁰⁰ Besides the KLO, a number of smaller groups¹⁰¹ are demanding a separate State carved out of the areas that now comprise Coochbehar, Jalpaiguri, parts of Darjeeling, south and north Dinajpur, Maldaha, the erstwhile Goalpara district in Assam – now Dhubri, Bongaigoan, Goalpara and Kokrajhar – and other adjoining areas.¹⁰² The ULFA was, to a large extent, instrumental in the emergence and consolidation of the Kamatapur militants. ULFA's search for allies in the area commenced after the Bhutanese government started pressuring it to vacate its camps in that country. As a fee for the patronage that the ULFA extends, the Kamatapur rebels reportedly provide access to new routes of passage, shelter and other logistic support.¹⁰³ The ULFA thus assists these militant outfits in order to create safe havens, bases and access to safer routes. The latent sense of deprivation among the Kamtapuris *vis-à-vis* and resentment against the West Bengal regime was ably exploited by the ULFA in a case where ideology was evidently not the primary consideration for forming and consolidating linkages.

The Chinese connection has also been instrumental in generating linkages between regional insurgent groups. At least three terrorist groups have made attempts to form linkages with a group that operates in Arunachal Pradesh in the districts that lie

⁹⁹ "Assam Militants Trouble Bhutan", *Northeast Sun*, June 1-14, 2001, vol. 6, no. 21, p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ See *Indian Express*, July 5, 2001. Also see, "Assam Militants Trouble Bhutan", p. 6.

¹⁰¹ These groups are the Koch-Rajbongshi Liberation Tiger Force (KRLTF), Koch-Rajbongshi Liberation Organisation (KRLO) and the Koch-Rajbongshi Security Force (KRSF).

¹⁰² See "Separate Kamtapur demand of Koch-Rajbongshis", *Sentinel*, June 3, 2001.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

on the border with China. Of these, the ULFA was able to establish close linkages with the Arunachal Dragon Force (ADF). The ADF, a new militant group, was dismissed as being an inconsequential attempt by disgruntled and frustrated youth,¹⁰⁴ but it acquired significance as a result of its utility to the other terrorist groups as a result of its knowledge of the ‘secret routes’ to China. The ADF had spurned attempts by both the factions of the NSCN-IM to co-opt it and finally teamed up with the ULFA, and paid the ULFA for training and arms.¹⁰⁵ The ADF–ULFA and the KLO–ULFA relationship reflect a client-patron relationship in which, “benefits exchanged between patrons and clients almost always are of different kind. For the usefulness of patron and client to each other stems not so much from the fact that their needs occur at different points of time, but each at almost any given time can supply the other with the benefits that the later can never obtain by himself, or can obtain by himself only on rare occasions.”¹⁰⁶

The ULFA has also been on the look out for newer routes of passage across India.¹⁰⁷ As frequently used routes come under scrutiny of security forces, identifying alternative safe routes becomes imperative. Assam’s Goalpara and Dhubri districts, situated along the State’s border with Meghalaya, are advantageously used by ULFA as a safe passage between Bangladesh and India. Furthermore, the route is also home to several sympathetic elements who are potential recruits.¹⁰⁸

The Karbi National Volunteers (KNV) and Dima Halim Daogah (DHD) terrorist groups also have some degree of understanding among themselves. These two groups have, together with the Karbi People’s Front (KPF), formed the United People’s Democratic Solidarity (UPDS). They (the KNV and the DHD) have also established ties with the NSCN-IM. The NSCN

¹⁰⁴ “Dragon Force: A new threat to Arunachal Pradesh”, *Northeast Sun*, August 15-31, 2001, vol. 7, no. 2, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. The ULFA had trained 25 cadres of the ADF at its camp in Bhutan. The ADF had also “procured about 25 AK 47 rifles.

¹⁰⁶ Carl H. Lande, “The Dyadic Basis of Clientelism”, in Steffen W. Schimdt, et al, eds., *Friends, Followers and Factions*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977, p. xx.

¹⁰⁷ See *Hindustan Times*, August 7, 2001. To sneak into Bhutan, ULFA currently uses, according to reports, the Manas forests.

¹⁰⁸ *Hindustan Times*, August 7, 2001.

provides training to cadres of these two groups, and has an understanding on logistics, such as “free movement through each others’ sphere of influence.”¹⁰⁹ The ULFA, too, has provided arms, training and logistics support to these groups.¹¹⁰ These smaller groups are under the ‘protective umbrella’ of the NSCN. The degree of association between these terrorist groups and the NSCN also extends to ‘lending of force’, whereby NSCN cadres assist the terrorist groups in extortion, and receive their ‘share’.¹¹¹

Also among the linkages between the terrorist groups is the one between ULFA and the Khaplang faction of the NSCN, which is manifested in support to operations by the ULFA as well as joint-operations by the two groups. The ‘Moran Massacre’ carried out by the ULFA’s ‘28th Battalion’ had the “active support of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland–Khaplang (NSCN-K) scouts,” who had helped in its ‘planning and execution.’¹¹² Also around the same time that the Moran massacre’ was executed, nine security force personnel were killed in an ambush near Changlang Gate, in a joint operation by the ULFA and the Naga militants. The *modus operandi* of the attack resembled that tactics of the Naga terrorists, while the area falls within what is regarded as ‘ULFA territory’.¹¹³ However, there are conflicting reports on which of the Naga factions had participated in this joint-operation. The presence of both the Naga groups has been detected in the areas across the border with Arunachal Pradesh. One report contended that it was, indeed, a joint-operation between the ULFA and the NSCN-IM’s arch rival, the Khaplang faction.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ “The Karbi Front”, *Northeast Sun*, vol. 5, no. 19, May 1-14, 2000, p. 16.

¹¹⁰ See *Hindustan Times*, July 7, 2001.

¹¹¹ “The Karbi Front”, *Northeast Sun*, p. 16.

¹¹² See Jaideep Saikia, “Revolutionaries or Warlords: ULFA’s Organizational Profile”, *Faultlines*, Vol. 9, p.111. The operation was carried out against members of the surrendered ULFA (SULFA) militants on June 21, 2001.

¹¹³ The primary suspect is the ULFA. See *Indian Express*, June 14, 2001.

¹¹⁴ See *Assam Tribune*, June 14, 2001. The report goes on to draw various connections to establish that it was the Khaplang faction that was a co-perpetrator in the ambush. The area falls in the route that was earlier used by Khaplang cadres to sneak into Myanmar. Besides, the local residents, the Tsangasa Nagas, are strong sympathisers of the Khaplang group. The *Indian Express* report of June 14, 2001 said it was the IM faction that had participated in the joint-operation.

The Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF),¹¹⁵ at the time of its inception, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the NLFT. As one writer, quoting a BNLF ‘captain’, notes:

[The MoU] laid down that NLFT would provide arms, ammunition and all sorts of logistic support to BNLF with strings that... [it] would operate inside Tripura only and not in Mizoram. BNLF must keep NLFT posted with information in advance about any operation by it and it should fill its rank and file from other tribes of Tripura and all cadres must accept Christianity.¹¹⁶

In pursuit of its goal of ‘protecting Reang identity’, the BNLF signed the MoU, which the ‘captain’ said was a formality. However, the BNLF and the NLFT fell apart later, as the BNLF reportedly did not share the anti-India sentiments of the NLFT. The differences culminated with the BNLF abducting and murdering some Christians. What followed was the bloody massacre of 75 BNLF cadres in a single series of incidents, on July 9, 2000.¹¹⁷ The BNLF has been virtually crippled after the incident. In one spate, it lost general secretary Hambai and ‘army chief’ Sheing Molshoy. Within a few hours after the massacre at the first camp, another BNLF camp was raided by the NLFT and its chairman Surya Mani Reang and 19 others taken hostage; their fate is not known. Disarrayed by the quick succession of events, the BNLF scouted for arms. It soon found a supporter in the NCSCN-IM which bestowed a ‘largesse’ of 10 AK-47 assault rifles¹¹⁸ on the desperate BNLF.

¹¹⁵ The BNLF terrorists also operate outside their immediate theater. For instance, they had abducted two tea garden employees, and were shortly thereafter shot dead by the security forces in the Bhuban Hills, near Sonapur, Kachar district. See *Tribune*, August 13, 2001 and *Hindu*, August 13, 2001.

¹¹⁶ “Behind the BNLF Massacre”, *Northeast Sun*, Vol. 6, no. 4, September 15-30, 2000, p. 10. The BNLF came into existence following the 1997 October-massacre of members of the Reang tribe in Mizoram, which displaced tens of thousands of people, to protect the interests of the Reangs. An official head count in 1999 at the six refugee-camps in Kanchanpur put the number of inmates at 31,811, while a total of 35,326 displace Reangs are residing in the Kanchanpur sub-division. Mizoram refuses to accept the figure and has declared that 11,723 of them are *bona fide* residents of Mizoram, indicating, thereby, that the rest, i.e. a vast majority of them, are ‘illegal migrants’.

¹¹⁷ “Behind the NLFT massacre”, *Northeast Sun*, Vol. 6, no. 4, September 15-30, 2000, p. 10.

¹¹⁸ “Behind the BNLF massacre”, *Northeast Sun*, vol. 6, no. 4, September 15-30, 2000, p. 10.

Yet another group, the Achik National Volunteers Council (ANVC), active in the Garo Hills and in certain parts of the West Khasi Hills of Meghalaya, has close linkages with the NSCN-IM. Cadres of the two terrorist groups have participated in joint-operations against security forces in the State. For instance, in December 2000, a joint-team of the ANVC and NSCN-IM terrorists ambushed a security forces' patrol and killed five personnel.¹¹⁹

Conclusion

While the influence of ideological considerations on the formation of alliances is 'a factor', pragmatic reasons are far more significant. The bilateral co-operation between smaller and larger terrorist groups, as is evidenced by linkages between the ULFA and Kamtapur rebels and NLFT and the BNLF for a long time, as well as newer linkages that BNLF has forged with the NSCN-IM, have little ideological basis. The ULFA and the NSCN-IM are secessionist and, at the other end, the BNLF has not questioned political boundaries of India, but is demanding a separate unit of governance within the Indian Union.

The linkages between the larger and the smaller terrorist groups have served two functions. They have provided arms training as well as arms for the smaller of the alliance partners, and they have also provided benefits to the larger group as these smaller groups perform the role of a conduit in reaching arms consignments to the theatre of operation of the larger group. Also, the larger group, in certain instances, have been able to keep its cadres 'busy' by lending its services to the smaller group. This affords dividends to both the groups. These groups have also collaborated in extortion to fill their coffers, with the smaller group providing the 'turf', while the larger group lends its cadre strength. An emerging feature of alliances in India's Northeast is coalition formation for turf control within a theatre.

¹¹⁹ *Pioneer*, December 8, 2000.