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Q10

The north-eastern region of India has been infested with insurgency for a very long time. Analyze the major reasons for the survival of armed insurgency in this region.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2017 · GS III · 10 marks · Internal Security and Extremism

Linkages between development and spread of extremism.

Core demand of the question

- Analyse why armed insurgency has survived for a long time in India's North-East
- **Focus on persistence:** terrain, identity, borders, funds, and politics, not only the first outbreak

Revision summary

North-East insurgency survives, not only starts, because of hill terrain and retreat across Myanmar and other borders.

Identity, homeland and migration politics continue to supply recruits after decades.

Extortion on contracts and highways, plus narcotics, fund groups when popular support falls.

Splinter factions outlive peace talks; **AFSPA**-era resentment can still be used in propaganda.

Mizoram-type accords plus **Act East** connectivity show that persistence is political and economic, not inevitable.

Introduction

The **North-East** has seen armed groups since the 1950s, from Naga hills to Assam, Manipur and Tripura. Some peace accords have worked in part; other outfits splinter and return. **Survival** of insurgency is not the same as its origin. Groups last because **terrain, identity politics, money, and a porous frontier** still give them a living, even when the original demand has been diluted.

Body**Major reasons the armed insurgency survives**

- **Terrain and logistics:** hills, forest and monsoon tracks favour ambush and hideouts; security forces cannot hold every ridge the way they hold a plains district.
- **Porous borders** with Myanmar, Bangladesh and Bhutan (historically) allow **safe havens**, arms, and retreat; even after Bhutan's 2003 operations, Myanmar camps have mattered for several groups.
- **Identity and homeland claims:** Naga integration, Assamese versus 'foreigner' politics after **migration**, Kuki-Meitei-Naga triangles in Manipur, and tribal autonomy demands keep a political story that recruits youth.
- **Demographic fear** in Assam and Tripura, rooted in Partition and later migration, feeds groups that claim to defend the 'sons of the soil' even after electoral politics occupies the same space.

- **Underdevelopment and isolation:** a thin industrial base, the old **Chicken's Neck** connectivity, and high unemployment make **extortion and 'taxes'** on highways, contractors and oil a parallel economy that funds cadres.
- **Splintering of talks:** when a faction signs an accord, a hard-line split continues the gun; **Naga talks** illustrate how a ceasefire can coexist with residual violence.
- **Easy weapons and narcotics** on the Myanmar-China edge, and links with **organised crime**, replace declining political donations.
- **Governance gaps:** delayed accords, corruption in local contracts, and heavy-handed security (including resentment around **Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act** in notified areas) can refresh the recruiter's narrative even when the public is tired of the underground.
- **Ethnic inter-group rivalry** means one surrender does not pacify a district; another community's outfit fills the vacuum.
- **External political sympathy** and, in earlier decades, alleged foreign intelligence play, gave oxygen; even reduced, the habit of looking across the border remains.

Why this is persistence, not fate

- Where roads, **Act East** trade, and credible **Sixth Schedule or accord** politics deliver jobs, cadres fade, as in parts of Mizoram after the 1986 accord.
- Survival is therefore **reproduced** by money, hills, and unfinished political settlement, not by a single ancient hatred that policy cannot touch.

Flow diagram

Terrain porous borders -> Survival of armed groups
 Identity migration homelands -> Survival of armed groups
 Extortion narcotics -> Survival of armed groups
 Splintered accords AFSPA resentment -> Survival of armed groups
 Act East jobs political settlement -> Fade of cadres

Conclusion

Armed insurgency has lasted in the North-East because hills and borders give sanctuary, identity and migration politics still recruit, and extortion plus narcotics pay the gun when ideology thins. Splintered talks and development that does not reach the hill district keep the cycle. Lasting peace needs settlement of core political claims, Myanmar-border cooperation, and livelihoods that beat the underground tax, not only more battalions.

Facts & figures

Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA)

Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, used in notified 'disturbed' areas of the North-East; operational tool that also feeds a rights-grievance narrative.

Act East

Policy to connect the North-East to Southeast Asia by road, trade and people links, meant to cut isolation that insurgents exploit.

Sixth Schedule

Constitutional autonomous councils in some tribal areas; a political alternative to the gun when it actually works.

Naga talks

Long ceasefire and political negotiations with major Naga groups; splits show how insurgency can survive an incomplete settlement.

Chicken's Neck

Siliguri corridor: the narrow land link to the North-East that historically raised isolation and the sense of a separate theatre.

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