

# Drugs and gun connection growing in Northeast India

by Ramtanu Maitra and Susan B. Maitra

The distant northeast of India—accessible by land only through a narrow strip between Bangladesh and Bhutan, and bordering China, Myanmar, and Bhutan—is fast becoming a major threat to India's security. Aided by a massive influx of heroin from neighboring Myanmar, various underground insurgency outfits have become highly active in the area and are in the process of building crucial links with each other. So far the leadership in India's capital of New Delhi are showing little interest, but the timebomb is now ticking away.

The heroin influx, from both Myanmar and China, has begun to flood the border state of Manipur. The three major drug-trafficking routes, already identified by Indian intelligence, are:

- Tamu-Moreh-Imphal
- Mandalay-Tiddim-Singhet-Churachandpur-Imphal, and
- Mandalay-Tiddim-Champai-Aizawl-Imphal.

Sources point out that the acetic anhydride, which is an essential chemical used in manufacturing heroin from opium, is smuggled out of India to Myanmar to feed innumerable clandestine laboratories located along the Myanmar-India borders. Although export of acetic anhydride has been officially banned in India, it is anybody's guess how effective the enforcement is.

Imphal, the capital city of Manipur, is now flush with heroin, and also with drug addicts and AIDS carriers. According to one estimate, Imphal harbors 30,000 heroin addicts, which is about 25% its youth population; of India's 4,082 HIV positive cases as of 1989 figures, 1,135 are found in Imphal.

While the heroin and AIDS figures are enough to cause serious concern, Manipur has, in addition, become the meeting point of various secessionist groups operating in the region. It is speculated that, besides developing links to spread the secessionist movements and combining their efforts, the insurgents are all in Manipur to dip into the heroin trade, which moves through the state to different destinations north and west.

## No secret

Although not a topic of discussion in Delhi, the insurgents' involvement with drugs is not a secret. Two years ago, a Delhi-based English news daily reported that the trade in guns for drugs, needed very badly by insurgents currently reorganizing themselves, was causing problems for the anti-smuggling operations of the security forces.

The report also noted that the problem had been further aggravated by the fact that, from time immemorial, the ethnic tribes that inhabit the region had been allowed to cross the borders unrestricted. Still, some Indian officials are under the illusion that the northeastern secessionists will not get into narco-trafficking in a big way, because they do not have a market of great potential.

Two news items which appeared recently should suffice to shatter this false comfort.

First, the news that the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), based in the state of Assam, and which were spotted in Manipur recently, have developed a link with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam of Sri Lanka, an established guerrilla operation which thrives on drug money.

The link was discovered by the Indian Army, which has been involved in a combing operation to root out the ULFA from the jungles of northern Assam, when it seized upon a militant's diary. In addition, Army personnel have also reportedly seized two boats from the ULFA at Tezpur. Both boats are exactly of the type used by the Liberation Tigers in Sri Lankan waters and off the Indian coastlines in the state of Tamil Nadu.

Second is the report of a steady increase in heroin seizures in Bangladesh, a neighboring nation to the east.

The reports indicate that Chittagong, the easternmost port city of Bangladesh, has become a transit point for drugs going to the Persian Gulf, among other places. While it is possible, though highly unlikely, that the drug travels from Myanmar to Chittagong by sea, it is widely acknowledged that the rebels in Mizoram, another northeastern state, and a faction of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the Manipur valley have links—and they may have sanctuar-

ies—within Bangladesh.

In addition, of course, Nepal in the north is a major drug distribution point as a recent, large breakup of a heroin racket underlines. The capital of tiny Nepal, Kathmandu, is fast becoming an entrepot, where dealing in drugs, gambling casinos, and the flesh trade is readily accessible to northeast guerrillas, particularly those located in Assam.

### Insurgency sprouting

Manipur, the main entry point of heroin and the meeting point of various tribal insurgency groups, itself nurtures two major terrorist outfits—the People's Liberation Army and the National Social Council of Nagaland (NSCN). The People's Liberation Army, which has become highly active in recent days, after years of controlled activities, is ostensibly against drugs—a posture which is in all likelihood to garner public support within the society. The National Social Council of Nagaland is powerful in three hill districts and run by various tribes commonly clubbed together as Nagas. Both NSCN and the PLA reportedly will be decisive factors in the coming elections as their writ goes deep into the rural areas.

In Assam, where Governor's Rule was imposed to deal with the fast-growing ULFA, the secessionist movement has brought under its umbrella a number of mainstream politicians. The ULFA, which champions the cause of the Assamese against the many well-to-do non-Assamese based in Assam, is well-armed and is now posing a serious challenge to the Indian Army.

In the states of both Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh, where terrorist activities are recent developments, small groups of insurgents such as the Meghalaya United Liberation Army (MULA) and the United Liberation Volunteers of Arunachal Pradesh (ULVA) have emerged and are in the process of linking up with the three major secessionist groups—People's Liberation Army, United Liberation Front of Asom, and the National Social Council of Nagaland.

In the state of Mizoram, where an accord was signed with the underground Mizo National Front (MNF) in 1988 that brought the guerrillas out of the foxholes to join the mainstream politics, a new insurgency group in the hills has emerged. This group, Hmar People's Council (HPC), has already made its mark, when it killed a former minister of Manipur, besides indulging in other terrorist activities.

### Separate . . . for now

While the various insurgent groups in the northeast have remained separate so far because they are based on the myriads of tribes who eye each other suspiciously, there are allegations that the insurgents have infiltrated the mainstream politicians, churches, and other social institutions.

There are also reports that these insurgents are now linking up with each other with the purpose of launching a region-wide armed movement to carve out a tribal nation in the east bordering China, Bangladesh, and Myanmar.

## Trilaterals dictate refugee policy

by Mary Burdman

At the meeting April 20-22 in Tokyo of the Trilateral Commission, the elite group of financiers and policy influentials from North America, Western Europe, and Japan, North American chairman David Rockefeller stated that one of the critical "post-Cold war . . . transnational issues [is] increased social and ethnic conflict including the large refugee and migrant flows they often create." To deal with this, he announced, "In 1991-92, the commission will be concentrating in particular on migration and refugee issues, inspired by the remarks of U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Mrs. Ogata."

Rockefeller's statement is all the more ominous, because his family was instrumental in setting up the very regime of usury and malthusianism which prevented viable solutions to the very crises which are causing population migration. After robbing the nations of the South of 25 years of development, the Trilaterals and their ilk are now stating outright that not only must population growth in those nations be stopped at all costs, but also that population movement, whether to flee disasters or seek a better living, must be stopped.

On her inauguration as High Commissioner in March, Sadako Ogata asserted that nations "producing refugees" must be held responsible, the German daily *Tageszeitung* reported May 13. This concept was first put forward by the U.N. apparatus in an attempt to stop the expanding flow of refugees from Vietnam in 1988, and taken up by the British Ditchley Foundation in 1990 after the Eastern European revolutions of 1989. But Ogata goes further: Those countries, she said, which "create a burden on other states" must pay compensation. States that "produce refugees" could be forced to cooperate with the High Commission and the World Bank on a new conditionalities scheme linking aid to social budgets, so that the stream of refugees is contained—a plan, *Tageszeitung* wrote, which is already being tested in eastern Africa where refugees have fled Rwanda and Burundi.

It is a little known fact that Ogata herself is an executive committee member of the Trilateral Commission—one of a tiny group of 36 people, including Henry Kissinger, Robert McNamara, and Paul Volcker, shaping the malthusian world order. Another Trilateral Commission member, Italian Socialist Margherita Boniver, controls another choke-point of