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## *Policy Brief*

# **Educated Unemployment and Insurgency in Manipur: Issues and Recommendations**

*Sushil Kumar Sharma*

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## **S***ummary*

The problem of educated unemployment is mainly two fold, firstly, scarcity of government jobs, and secondly, the, virtual lack of any other employer in Manipur other than the government. Improving infrastructure in general and promoting human resource development in a sustained manner, together with effective and people-oriented governance, is thus critical to ushering peace in Manipur and other parts of Northeast India. Creating additional employment opportunities to tap the immense human and natural potential could go a long way in addressing the aspirations of the unemployed youth of the region in general.

## Background

Manipur is strategically located in India's northeast. It is the gateway to the economies of Southeast Asia. Manipur is multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-religious, comprising of the Meiteis (the majority ethnic group), Kukis, Pangals (Manipuri Muslims) and Nagas. The Meiteis are mainly concentrated in the Imphal Valley, and the Kukis and Nagas in the hills. Manipur may be classified into two distinct physical regions – an outer ring of rugged hills and narrow valleys, and the inner area of flat plains, with all associated land forms. These two areas are not only distinct in respect of physical features but also in terms of development and employment, wherein the valley area is much better off in both these contexts.

According to the 2011 census, Manipur has a total population of 2,721,756, with 26.18 per cent in urban areas and the remainder 73.82 per cent in rural areas. The literacy rate stands at 79.85 per cent, higher than the national average of 74.04 per cent. Of that, male literacy stands at 86.49 per cent and female literacy at 73.17 per cent.<sup>1</sup> However, despite the high literacy rate, Manipur, as compared to the rest of the country, remains a socio-economically backward state.

The economy of Manipur is characterised by a high rate of unemployment and poverty, low capital formation, inadequate infrastructural facilities, geographical isolation, communication bottlenecks and practically no industrialisation. Agriculture continues to be the mainstay of the economy, with more than 70 per cent of the population dependent on it for livelihood.

## Insurgency in Manipur

Manipur is a kaleidoscope of different ethnic communities. The conflicting aspirations of the people and acute societal differences pose a huge challenge for the central government. The insurgency in Manipur is ethnicity-based and had started with seemingly genuine grievances and ideology. Some of these were: the perceived forced merger of Manipur with India in 1949, the denial of grant of full-fledged statehood till 1972, socio-economic and political disconnect, and mutual sense of insecurity among the various ethnic groups. These gave rise to the emergence of militant groups on ethnic lines, with conflicting and competing demands and aspirations.

With the passage of time, the core insurgent ideology has gradually given way to practical economic interests, especially among the younger generation. Over the past several decades, other North-eastern states have witnessed substantial changes in their security environment, while Manipur is still grappling with widespread insurgency. The lure of easy money and lack of employment

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Manipur, Planning Department, *Draft Annual Plan (2013-14) Proposals*, March 31, 2013, at <http://planningmanipur.gov.in/pdf/Annual%20Plan/AP%202013-14/AP%202013%2014%20document.pdf> (Accessed on December 25, 2015).

opportunities continue to drive even educated youth towards these insurgent groups. Understandably, therefore, one of the primary reasons sustaining the insurgency in Manipur today is educated unemployment.

## **Educated Unemployment and Insurgency**

The employment situation in Manipur is a matter of concern, with most of it being a rural phenomenon. The number of persons on the live registers of the employment exchanges rose from 2.28 lakh as on June 30, 1993 to 7.14 lakh as on June 30, 2012. The high rate of unemployment, particularly among the educated youth, is due to the lack of an industrial base, the absence of private enterprises, and limited employment opportunities in the government sector.<sup>2</sup> It is alleged that every government job has a price tag. Those boys and girls whose parents cannot afford large amounts to be paid as bribe are disillusioned and become susceptible to anti-national propaganda.<sup>3</sup>

Geographical isolation, political hopelessness, lack of infrastructure development, lack of incentives for private enterprise participation and poor trade opportunities with Myanmar, which lies to the east of Manipur, are the reasons why educated youth seek financial security by joining the insurgent groups. In fact, considering the large number of educated unemployed, militancy is fast emerging as an alternate, and a lucrative, means of employment. In pursuance of their economic interests, these militant groups have established a parallel government and parallel economy, and as long as they are allowed to do so the conflict in Manipur will remain.

Such is the demand for government jobs in Manipur that in 2011, when the state government employed some 1,000 men to form an armed Village Defence Force (VDF) to fight insurgents, it had received applications from "some 17,000 people who were either graduates or postgraduates," whereas the state was looking to hire people who had not even completed school.<sup>4</sup>

According to a survey carried out in Manipur by the author, about 78 of the respondents felt that the youth are joining militant groups because of coercion/compulsion and not for ideology. Similarly, 87 per cent of the respondents felt that educated unemployment is the key reason behind the insurgency. Thus, there is an urgent need to focus on this root cause, which is sustaining insurgency in Manipur and also in other parts of Northeast India.

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<sup>2</sup> *Draft Annual Plan (2013-14) Proposals*, March 31, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Iboyaima\_Laithanabam, "Over 7 lakh educated, unemployed in Manipur," *The Hindu*, May 18, 2014, at <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-otherstates/over-7-lakh-educated-unemployed-in-manipur/article6021743.ece> (Accessed on January 25, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Romita Datta, "Manipur: 'At least 600,000 educated, young people are jobless'," *Live Mint*, June 29, 2011, at <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/TckH83i1nyTxHe4hcQm1IP/Manipur--8216At-least-600000-educated-young-people-are.html> (Accessed on January 20, 2016).

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### Strengthening the Educational Infrastructure

Lack of access to quality and affordable education as well as vocational training institutes outside the capital city of Imphal has often led to students from other parts of the state dropping out before acquiring any meaningful educational qualification. The Report of the Higher Education Commission has noted this glaring disparity between the Imphal Valley and the rest of the state. The education infrastructure is primitive and quality education is almost non-existent in areas outside Imphal. This disparity has affected higher education adversely, particularly in the hills where even the basic infrastructure and the minimum teaching staff are found lacking.<sup>5</sup> There is also a serious deficiency of math and science teachers in schools, especially those located in the tribal areas. Hence, local students are unable to compete in state and national level competitive exams. There is an urgent need to strengthen the educational infrastructure in Manipur to provide quality and inclusive education.

Effective implementation of skill development and training programmes also need to be prioritised. There is also the need to create avenues for absorbing trained and skilled manpower in suitable jobs, without which it would be difficult to wean the youth away from the lure of earning easy income through militancy.

### Introducing Application-Oriented and Industry-Relevant Degree Courses

The graduate courses currently available in various colleges within Manipur are of the traditional nature, which is about learning basic science, or arts, or commerce. Such degrees do not throw open very many employment avenues outside or within the state, adding to the already high rate of educated unemployment. The course content, therefore, would need restructuring to refocus efforts at application-oriented learning, resulting in skilled manpower for employment in emerging industries.

The state government needs to consider the availability of skilled manpower and capable enterprises in each relevant industry sector before forming growth supporting industrial policies in those sectors.<sup>6</sup> Tackling rural unemployment and

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<sup>5</sup> Kashung Zingran Kengoo, "Education System in Manipur: A Comparison between the Tribes and Non-Tribes", *Naga Journal*, <http://www.nagajournal.com/articles/education-system-in-manipur-a-comparison-between-the-tribes-and-non-tribes/> (Accessed on February 20, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Shanjoy Mairembam, "Policy gap between Higher Education and SMEs support leads to unemployment growth in Manipur," *e-pao.net*, February 17, 2014, at [http://www.e-pao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=education.Jobs\\_Career.Policy\\_gap\\_between\\_Higher\\_Education\\_and\\_SMEs\\_support\\_leads\\_to\\_unemployment\\_growth\\_in\\_Manipur](http://www.e-pao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=education.Jobs_Career.Policy_gap_between_Higher_Education_and_SMEs_support_leads_to_unemployment_growth_in_Manipur) (Accessed on January 20, 2015).

identifying opportunities within the rural areas would play a key role in controlling unemployment among the educated youth. A sustainable policy in this direction would help reduce the pool of unemployed youth available to insurgents for recruitment.

### **Developing Manipur as a Tourism Hub**

Manipur, with its salubrious climate, topographical mystique, cultural heritage and sublime natural beauty has an enormous tourism potential. The Asian Development Bank has identified the region as a 'Key Area' due to its 'unrealized potential as an ecotourism product.'<sup>7</sup> Manipur is a gateway to South-East Asia, with the Trans-Asian Highway and Railway set to pass through the state and enter Myanmar. The State has immense tourism and commercial potential and is destined to become a commercial hub and a tourist hotspot in South-East Asia.<sup>8</sup> Thus, developing Manipur's tremendous tourism potential could help generate a range of employment opportunities for the local people. However, to attract the attention of national and international tourists, it is imperative to ensure a safe and secure environment along with necessary investment in building a modern hospitality infrastructure.

### **Encouraging Industrial and Infrastructure Development**

The report on 'Pre-investment Feasibility Study on the Industrial Potential Survey for Manipur' provides a vision for the development of potential industries in the State for the next 10 years. As per the report, Manipur lags behind in national norms with respect to agrarian output, level of industrialization, and infrastructure facilities. Lack of proper infrastructure – power, transportation and communication – is responsible for the slow pace of development. This has a cascading effect, leading to poor storage facilities, a weak marketing network, lack of credit facility, insufficient technological know-how, etc.

The socio-economic development of Manipur will also largely depend on the promotion of small and medium scale industries and encouragement to local entrepreneurs. The scope for large-scale industries too exists in the agro-horticulture, bamboo, cement, green marble, and power sectors. Investment in these sectors could help generate direct and indirect employment, and in setting up of various forward and backward linkages to support service sector units.<sup>9</sup> At

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<sup>7</sup> Government of Manipur, Department of Tourism, *Manipur Tourism Policy 2011*, at [http://www.e-paolive.net/download/manipurgovt/manipur\\_tourism\\_policy\\_2011.pdf](http://www.e-paolive.net/download/manipurgovt/manipur_tourism_policy_2011.pdf) (Accessed on January 20, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Limited, *Industrial Potential Survey for Manipur and Sikkim, 2003*, at [http://www.nedfi.com/sites/all/themes/industry/ar/tedf/exe\\_summary/33\\_Industrial\\_Potential\\_survey\\_for\\_Manipur\\_and\\_Sikkim.pdf](http://www.nedfi.com/sites/all/themes/industry/ar/tedf/exe_summary/33_Industrial_Potential_survey_for_Manipur_and_Sikkim.pdf) (Accessed on January 20, 2015).

present, the role of the private sector in the state is minimal. Most of the private participants choose to stay out of Manipur due to lack of infrastructure support and security concerns.

### **Self-Employment Programmes for Skill and Capacity Development**

The government needs to focus on developing local skills and capacities as part of the self-employment programme (SEP) to harness the potential of the youth in Manipur. The state offers opportunities to individuals and interested groups including urban poor for venturing into entrepreneurial activities for developing self-employment through micro and small enterprises. These incentives include preferential loans from the banks so that local skills and craft are encouraged in addition to assisting the under employed and unemployed urban poor to set up small enterprises relating to manufacturing and servicing for which there is considerable local demand.<sup>10</sup> These incentives are presently confined to the urban areas and need to be extended to the remote areas as well. One area that certainly needs to be tapped into is the ability of the youth to communicate in good English, hence developing BPO or front office or air hostess kind of skills.

### **Tapping Sports and Cultural Talent**

Manipur is known for its sporting talent especially in the fields of boxing, football, archery, mixed martial arts, etc. MC Mary Kom, famous woman boxing champion from Manipur, is a brand ambassador for the state in many a forum. Yet, many young sportspersons find it easier to prove their sporting talent by representing another state at the national and international levels due to lack of adequate training and sporting facilities in the state. A planned strategy and sustained investment in the sports arena by the government would create a sea of opportunities for the talented youth of the state. The establishment of a National Sports Academy in Manipur is a step in this direction. Similarly, the cultural talent in the fields of music, dance, art and cinema is unique to the state. If this culture is preserved and given the exposure that it deserves, many youths could benefit from it by the employment opportunities arising out of it.

In addition, the creation of sports facilities at village, block and district levels will help in keeping the youth engaged in sports, a constructive and positive activity, thus weaning them away from alcoholism, drug addiction and insurgency. This will also greatly help in developing the latent sports talent in the population. The creation of such facilities will also provide employment avenues for the local population. Perhaps, Manipur could be developed as hub for Mission Olympics.

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<sup>10</sup> See Government of India, Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, *Mission Document: National Urban Livelihoods Mission*, p. 18, at [http://nulm.gov.in/PDF/NULM\\_Mission/NULM\\_mission\\_document.pdf](http://nulm.gov.in/PDF/NULM_Mission/NULM_mission_document.pdf) (Accessed on January 20, 2015).

## **Better Governance and Job Awareness**

There is a need for more effective and people-oriented governance in the state. The youth form a potent human resource capital and frittering them away to insurgency and migration does not augur well for the state. Good governance comes with the implementation of various programmes in an effective and transparent manner.

Unlike other states, Manipur has restricted publicity mechanisms and as a result even the daily newspapers reach a day later in the remote interiors and hill districts. This has caused many youths to lose opportunities of getting a job due to lack of awareness of recruitment/interview/selection programmes. There is an urgent requirement of setting up job fairs and job melas, conducting awareness campaigns, recruitment drives and spot selection programmes. This can be done both by the government as well as private firms, and must reach both the rural and urban youth. Security Forces, which are the only symbol of governance in remote areas, can be incorporated into this campaign for creating job awareness.

## **Tapping Agricultural Capacity and Small Scale Industries**

Manipur is blessed with a climate suitable for producing a variety of agricultural produce and that is the reason why farmers grow cash crops, fruits and vegetables in large quantities. Hilly areas are conducive for the farming of vegetables and fruits. Organic farming has already commenced in many hill areas of the state. Many agri-horticultural crops are potential export commodities. The agro-based industry includes fruit preparations, juice concentrate plants, herbal plants, processing of spices, and so on. These farm produce along with bamboo shoots are used for commercial purposes. Since the cultivated land is under 10 per cent of the total land area in Manipur, optimising the use of the balance 90 per cent land and newer/innovative methods to increase production in the wake of expansion of the residential areas would help in addressing the unemployment issue indirectly.

With its geographical location and proximity to Myanmar, Manipur has the potential to become a trade and business hub with the opening of trade links across the border. Promoting small scale industries and encouraging small scale entrepreneurs to stand on their feet with loans and subsidies from banks/government would assist young people to build their own businesses and generate employment for themselves and those around them. Garments, aluminium products, electronics, and electrical, nursing and diagnostic services are some of the fields that can be exploited for setting up and promoting small scale businesses. Another issue in agriculture is the aspect of floriculture and growing of orchids and sending them not only to big cities of the country, but also exporting them to Southeast Asian countries.

## **Restoring the Composition of Assam Rifles**

The Assam Rifles was raised on the concept of Sons of Soil, created with a vision to employ the people of the Northeast, thus generating employment as also creating a force by the people to safeguard the borders, ethnicity, culture and religious traditions of the region. Over a period of time, the enrolment rules have been amended to convert this force into an 'All India and All Class composition', wherein only less than 40 per cent of the troops are now being drawn from Northeast India. This may be reviewed to restore the composition of the Assam Rifles to its earlier form. This will help increase the percentage of intake from the Northeast in comparison to the rest of India. It will help in maintaining the initial concept and also in providing employment to the educated youth from the region.

Raising additional Assam Rifles battalions to guard the Indo-Myanmar Border will serve a dual purpose - create additional employment opportunities for the youth from the region, on the one hand, and help maintain the same force on the border as well as the hinterland for better understanding and coordination from the point of view of counter-insurgency, on the other.

## **Creating Additional Central Government Jobs**

There is a visible and desperate hankering for central government jobs in the state. During the survey conducted by the author, several youth had responded that they would prefer a central government job over a state government job; citing fairness in the selection process, assured remuneration and also the chance and opportunity to go out of the insurgency prone state. If that be the case, then it would be logical to introduce more vacancies for the youth from the region for recruitment into the defence/paramilitary forces and central police forces. The average youth of the state is mostly matriculate and these kinds of job openings are best suited for such a target populace. Increased number of recruitment rallies in defence and para military forces would ensure that the youth earn Rs. 15,000-20,000 per month as starting pay in addition to other benefits such as free medical, canteen and travel facilities, etc. Moreover such a job would not only generate respect for the individual within the community but also integrate these communities with the Security Forces.

## **Integration and Employment**

The youth from Northeast India can also be integrated with the rest of the country by employing them in police forces of the Union Territories (UTs) initially, and later in states as well. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's plan to recruit youth from the Northeast for the Delhi Police and to send 200 policewomen from the Northeast to

Gujarat on a two-year deputation is a good initiative that meets the dual purpose of employment and national integration.<sup>11</sup>

### **Raising Additional Territorial Army Battalions**

Territorial Army (TA) Units are performing multifarious tasks by employing local youth. Raising additional TA units to perform tasks such as ecological restoration and highway/railway protection are in order, and will help in providing additional employment avenues to the local youth.

### **Raising Additional India Reserve Battalions**

The Central Government has recently approved the proposal for raising 17 India Reserve Battalions, out of which five will be for Jammu and Kashmir and 12 for the Maoist-affected states, by recruiting the local youth. In the case of Naxal-affected states, 75 per cent vacancies will be filled up by youths from the 27 worst-affected districts. Similarly, raising additional battalions for North-eastern states would also help in generating employment for the local youth.

### **Amendment of Recruitment Rules**

Recruitment rules need to be suitably amended to ensure that physical and education standards are in sync with that of the youth from Northeast India in general and Manipur in particular.

### **Make in Northeast India**

Make in India is an initiative of the Government of India, launched by Prime Minister Modi in September 2014, to encourage multinational as well as domestic companies to manufacture their products in the country. This idea is to create jobs for the people and fuel the economy. Manipur being the gateway to Southeast India is ideally suited for this concept. A Make in Northeast India initiative would not only help develop the Northeast but also provide a huge impetus to India's 'Act East' Policy. Opening of more areas along the Myanmar border as trade transit points, with Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status to Myanmar, too would help in strengthening the local economy.

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<sup>11</sup> K. Sarojkumar Sharma, "Northeast youth to join Delhi Police: PM," *The Times of India*, December 01, 2014, at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Northeast-youth-to-join-Delhi-Police-PM/articleshow/45329239.cms> (Accessed on January 20, 2015).

## Conclusion

Unemployment, especially amongst the educated youth of Manipur, is a problem both of the individual as well as the society around that person. It psychologically, financially, emotionally and materially affects the youths and their families. It brings in a sense of dejection, inferiority and hopelessness among the youth. Due to frustration, anger and disenchantment, youth often succumb to other alternatives, including alcoholism, drug addiction, robbery, murder, and suicide as well as joining the insurgent cadres for easy money. There is an urgent requirement to take concrete steps to address the issue before it goes out of hand. In fact, it should force us to think what ails the education system and employment avenues in Manipur. The problem of educated unemployment is mainly two fold, firstly, scarcity of government jobs, and secondly, the, virtual lack of any other employer in Manipur other than the government. Improving infrastructure in general and promoting human resource development in a sustained manner, together with effective and people-oriented governance, is thus critical to ushering peace in Manipur and other parts of Northeast India. Creating additional employment opportunities to tap the immense human and natural potential could go a long way in addressing the aspirations of the unemployed youth of the region in general.

## About the Author

**Brigadier (Dr.) Sushil Kumar Sharma**, YSM is presently posted as DIGP, CRPF in the Northeast Region.

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Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses  
1, Development Enclave, Rao Tula Ram Marg  
New Delhi 110 010 India  
T +91-11-2671 7983 F +91-11-2615 4191  
contact.idsa@nic.in www.idsa.in  
Twitter @IDSAIndia  
www.facebook.com/InstituteForDefenceStudiesAnalyses