

Insurgency fears return to Meghalaya

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After a period of relative calm, Meghalaya once again finds itself grappling with concerns over insurgency. The Northeast has long been troubled by insurgent movements; however, since 2014 there has been a noticeable decline in such disturbance. Despite such positive developments, the fragile peace now appears disturbed, with questions being raised about a possible resurgence of insurgency. Recent statements by Meghalaya's Director General of Police, Idashisha Nongrang (IPS), and remarks by other leaders, mainly from the opposition, have lent credence to these concerns. Although the Chief Minister has dismissed such speculation at a press conference, opposition leaders have maintained that intelligence inputs warrant serious attention.

Historically, the rise of insurgent groups in Meghalaya has been rooted in ethno-nationalist ideals and issues of territorial integrity. Between 1994 and 2002, the Ministry of Home Affairs recorded over 92 civilian deaths, 68 security personnel killed, and 44 terrorist casualties. Today, however, reports suggest that unemployment, drug menace, and cross-border infiltrations may be fuelling fresh anxieties. Prominent opposition leaders like Mukul Sangma and Saleng A Sangma, Member of Parliament, have voiced their concerns over growing youth disillusionment and criticised the government for failing to curb the drug menace or address youth marginalisation, dismissing its development claims as little more than rhetoric.

Recently, speaking to the Autumn Session on September 9, the chief minister admitted that Meghalaya faces a jobs deficit of 67,500, where 70,000 young people are entering the workforce but the state is able to provide only 2,500 opportunities. He pointed to tourism and 25 other sectors where skills training is being rolled out, but the gap between training and actual employment opportunities continues to widen, deepening frustrations. These gaps demand faster, more realistic interventions, supported by transparent policies and outcome-based monitoring mechanisms to ensure accountability and long-term impact. Given the scale of the challenge, the government's promise to transform the employment landscape in a short time appears highly ambitious.

Meanwhile, the drug crisis has reached alarming proportions. The recent seizure of

narcotics worth Rs 400 crore and the arrest of 1,061 individuals involved in drug-related activities highlight the scale of the problem. Compounding the concern is the alarming rise in the number of drug users, which has surged from an estimated two lakh in 2023 to over three lakhs in 2025. This growing menace has not only exposed significant lapses in enforcement and rehabilitation but has also eroded public trust in the government, particularly among the youth.

Cross-border vulnerabilities add another layer of concern. In the first quarter of 2025, the Border Security Force (BSF) apprehended 78 Bangladeshi nationals along the Meghalaya frontier. Some of the detainees were reportedly found in possession of narcotics, raising serious concerns about porous borders and their possible link to the expanding drug trade.

Thus, if the state government fails to address the challenges—the growing unemployment rate, rampant narcotics and cross-border flows—they could create fertile ground for renewed insurgent recruitment and radicalisation, as has been seen in Manipur. While there is no confirmation of regrouping by armed groups in Meghalaya, the social and security structures are becoming increasingly fragile. Rising mistrust between communities, pressure on border districts, and strains on law enforcement could, in turn, affect tourism, investment, and infrastructure development—sectors that depend heavily on the security conditions. Additionally, regional ripple effects, particularly along the international borders already under stress, cannot be ruled out.

These underlying issues point to a deeper structural failure than a mere law-and-order problem. Thus, it calls for multi-pronged responses facilitated by youth employment, border vigilance and a coordinated approach within and outside the state. Only through expanding community policing, strengthening cross-border intelligence with Bangladesh and Myanmar and participatory budgeting involving village councils and youth groups in deciding development priorities and schemas to address their needs can the region hope to mitigate insurgent resurgence and ensure long-term stability.

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