

Is China Helping

"War is the highest form of struggle for resolving contradictions when they have developed to a certain stage, between classes, nations, states or among political groups, and it has existed ever since the emergence of private property and of classes."

—Mao Zedong

ARMED uprisings in Manipur have a long history. "The revolutionary mystique extends far into the past," says one historian in Imphal. King Pamheiba (who took the name Garib Nivas after conversion to Hinduism) achieved the "Meeteis' finest hour" when he invaded and captured Mandalay in the early 18th century. And, just as the Vietnamese have a legendary *guru* in guerrilla warfare, Tran Hung Dao, the Manipuris revere Hera Chandra, a descendant of their royal family who was the first and best exponent of guerrilla warfare, *huyen lallong*, and harassed the Burmese during their occupation of Manipur between 1819-1826.

After independence, Hijam Irabat led a two-year struggle against feudalism from 1949. Irabat is another legendary figure—poet, journalist, theoretician, his revolutionary songs are popular even today. He died in 1951, of natural causes.

In 1959, the Kukis rose in protest against their Thadou chiefs, who dominated the Kuki National Assembly. Even today, the Hmars, the Paites and the Gangtes refuse to call themselves Kukis.

A more modern type of insurgency began in 1965, when Yangmaso Shaiza (later chief minister of the state), Chandramani Singh, Sudhir Kumar, Somorendra Singh, Hidanarayan Bobby and other angry young men secretly set up the Manipur Revolutionary Government.

The MRG, many of whose leaders are respectable citizens today, was a loose organisation with little ideological strength. It depended more on intellectual support. Some members of the MRG, led by Sudhir Kumar, went across into East Pakistan in order to try and obtain Chinese support. One of

Is China helping insurgents in Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram with arms and ideological training? New Delhi's investigation of the situation on India's north-eastern borders reveals that China and the United States are secretly backing an uprising that will

From Chaitanya Kalbag in Imphal

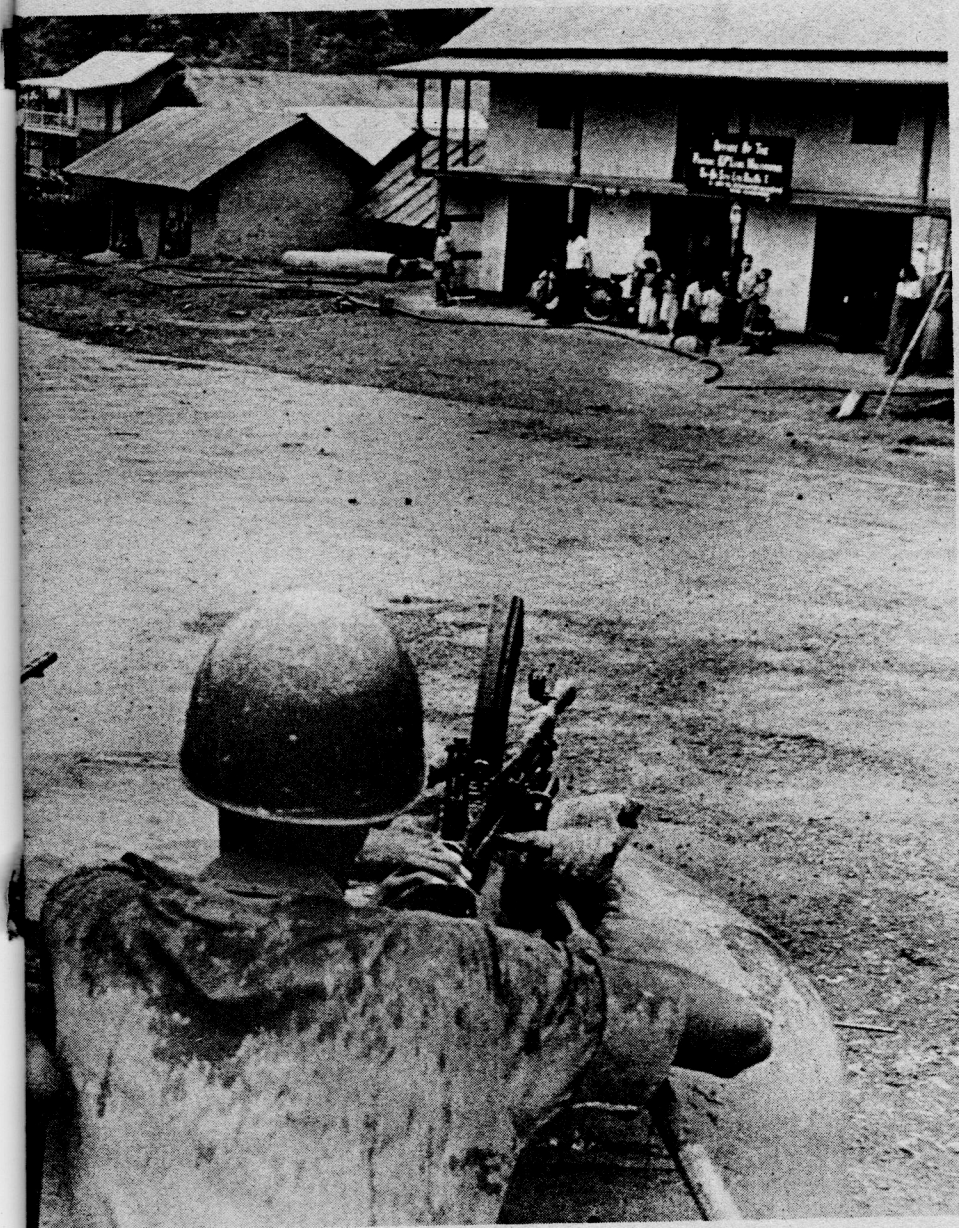


Unit of the CRP's 29th Battalion on search mission in village near Imphal

REVOLT IN MANIPUR, NAGALAND, MIZORAM: The Rebels?

'liberate' Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, parts of Upper Burma, and the Chittagong Hill tracts of Bangladesh — an area larger than Bangladesh — that contains two sea ports, Chittagong and Akyab. What will India's options be if open warfare breaks out?

Photographs by Raghu Rai



Sudhir's closest lieutenants was Nameirakpam Bisheshwar.

People in Manipur realised the MRG's existence only when the government cracked down on them in 1969. Many of the MRG's men were imprisoned at Agartala jail in Tripura—including Bisheshwar. Sudhir himself was arrested in early 1972 when returning from Bangladesh. It was in Agartala jail that Bisheshwar came into contact with some Naxalite leaders, and acquired the influences that were to shape his objectives later.

In 1972, Mohammed Alimuddin's United Legislature Party government granted a 'restricted' amnesty to the arrested MRG leaders—those with cognisable offences were retained in custody. In mid-1975, the Dorendra Singh ministry went one step further and declared a universal amnesty. Singh gave Sudhir Kumar and Bisheshwar a big portion of hilly land near Moreh and encouraged them to start a cooperative farm with grants and loans.

Meanwhile, between 1967-69, the Meetei State Committee had set up an alliance with the Naga underground. Its headquarters were at Tumnoupokpi village, near Kangpokpi, and its leader was Wangkhei Tomba. This alliance did not really get off the ground, and little is heard of it nowadays.

The Manipuris, therefore, claim a long martial tradition. They are a fierce, warrior-like people, quickly roused to anger. They have never forgiven the British for selling them away to India. Also, by the Treaty of 1834, the British gave the vital Kabaw valley to the Burmese. The Burmese undertook to pay the Manipuris an annual tribute of 900 *sicas* (Rs 5,720). But they failed to pay it after Manipur merged with the Indian Union in 1949, although the 1834 treaty had stipulated that Kabaw would revert to Manipur in case of non-payment. The Meeteis are also resentful of the fact that the Indian government has not honoured Clause 3 in Article VIII of the merger agreement (signed by the then king Bodh Chandra Singh and Governor Sri Prakasa) which stated that "The Government of India also



Unit of the Army's 61 Mountain Brigade between Wabagai and Sugnu

undertakes to make suitable provisions for the employment of Manipuris in the various branches of Public Services and in every way encourage Manipuris to join them."

All these factors rankled. In late 1975, Bisheshwar broke with Sudhir Kumar over the question of Sudhir's financial integrity and over their tactical approach to the Dorendra Singh government. Sudhir meanwhile became more and more friendly with the chief minister. He campaigned for the Congress in the 1977 elections. Bisheshwar went underground again.

Meanwhile, Bisheshwar began a series of top-secret trips to Lhasa (in Tibet) along with his closest aides, in order to obtain ideological and tactical training from the Chinese. Only on the third trip, in early 1976, was he found out. Bisheshwar's route was cheekily simple—he would travel from Agartala to Siliguri in North Bengal and thence to Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh by train, cross over into Nepal and reach

Kathmandu, and then, with the help of the Chinese underground there, proceed to Lhasa. In early 1976, however, one of the new boys going with the group (Bisheshwar was not with them) developed cold feet *enroute*. He was pushed out of the moving train near Siliguri by his comrades, picked up by the Border Security Force (BSF) and tortured, and revealed his companions' travel plans. They were arrested at Gorakhpur.

Throughout 1977 Bisheshwar lay low, waiting for the uproar that ensued to die down. It was as recently as July 1978 that his newly-formed People's Liberation Army (PLA) started its armed insurgency. That month, three incidents occurred in quick succession, on consecutive days. The first day, a sub-inspector of the Manipur Police and a constable escorting a Burmese prisoner to court in Imphal were shot down, and a rifle and a revolver were snatched. The next day, the Paona Bazar branch of the United

Bank of India was looted and the dacoits escaped with Rs 30,000 in cash. The third day, a bus returning from Moreh was attacked at Langjing, 30 km from Imphal. The two armed escorts were shot at; one died. One sten gun, two rifles were taken by the attackers. The PLA claimed responsibility for all three incidents. Immediate combing operations launched by the BSF and the CRP netted only one PLA man, Kabichandra, at Mayang Imphal. Meanwhile, Sudhir Kumar was assassinated on 14 January 1977.

In 1977 another liberation army was formed in Manipur—the People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (Prepak). Its leader was RK Tulachandra, a young and brilliant management graduate. Unlike the PLA, Prepak was made up of "disgruntled and antisocial youth", most of them angry at the unemployment and the economic mess they found themselves confronted with. Their armed attacks were indiscriminatory—their targets were



chosen at random. People in Manipur agree that they could not change their tactics to suit changing circumstances.

People supported Prepak more out of fear than popularity. Less squeamish about the means of obtaining arms and money, Prepak boldly looted banks, held up travellers, and extorted money from traders and businessmen, even Manipuris. Although Prepak's leaders professed a Maoist ideology, they were clearly not as politically mature as the leaders of the PLA.

The manifesto of the Prepak—published in part here for the first time—vowed to establish a 'Socialist Sovereign State' in Manipur. In order to achieve this, Prepak said it would "suppress all counter-revolutionary people" and destroy "class enemies".

"Class enemies" include "capitalist politicians, bureaucratic officials, the capitalist sections of society, the blood-thirsty contractors, anti-social elements in the villages, and supporters of

bureaucratic officials, and all religious groups."

"Neo-colonialist" enemies include the "bureaucrat-imperialist Indian government, which has exploited the entire traditional economy of Manipur, supported outsiders, and unleashed military force against Kangleipak."

Prepak also envisages the setting up of collectivised farming, nationalisation of all trade and business, and a judicial system of People's Courts.

Tulachandra was captured by the government in June 1979. Within a week, however, he escaped from the Singjamei police station with the help of a constable of the Manipur Rifles, humiliated by this, redoubled efforts to force a split in Prepak. By late 1979, they had bought over Prepak's "officer in charge of stores", Samurailatpam Maipak Sharma. Maipak Sharma managed to secretly gain control of most of Prepak's arsenal, and turned informer.

On March 14 this year Tulachandra was re-captured along with his girlfriend, Shusila Chongtham, in a darkness raid by the CRP. He was lodged in a top-security cell at Imphal Jail. Then an astonishing thing happened. Within a week of his capture, Tulachandra, reportedly under pressure from chief minister Dorendra Singh, recorded an appeal to his comrades to lay down arms and negotiate with the government; this was broadcast over AIR Imphal. Confusion reigned among Prepak supporters, and Maipak Sharma quickly snatched control of a sizeable faction. Another ironic twist—Leishabi Singh, the man who helped Tulachandra escape last

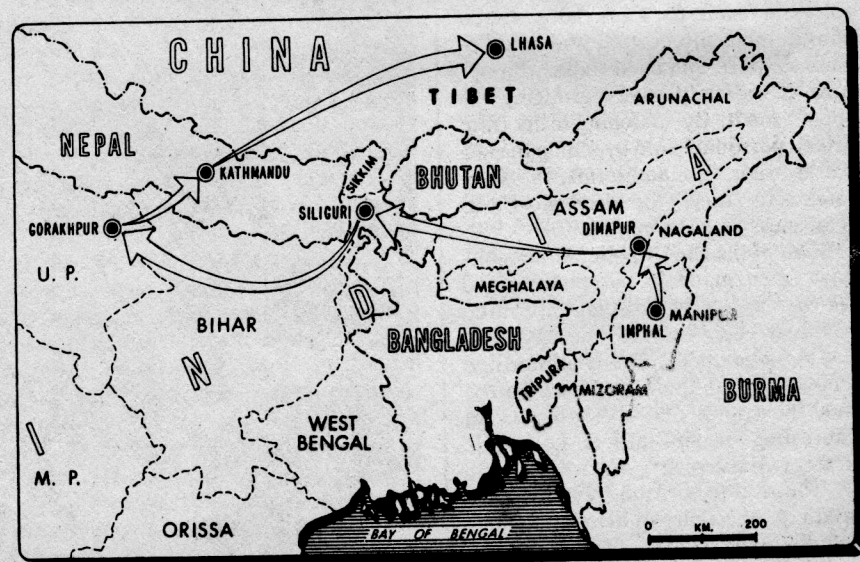
year, is today Maipak's "commander"!

Maipak's faction "executed" two of Tulachandra's closest aides—his brother Chitrasen, head of the "Red Army", and K Ibobi, "chairman" of Prepak, on March 16 and dumped their bodies in the Palace Grounds at Imphal. Yet, a Manipur Rifles constable, Mombi Singh, who was 'suspended' and infiltrated Prepak, was recently involved in a daylight dacoity at Thoubal along with Maipak's forces—an adventure that netted them Rs 1 lakh and two rifles.

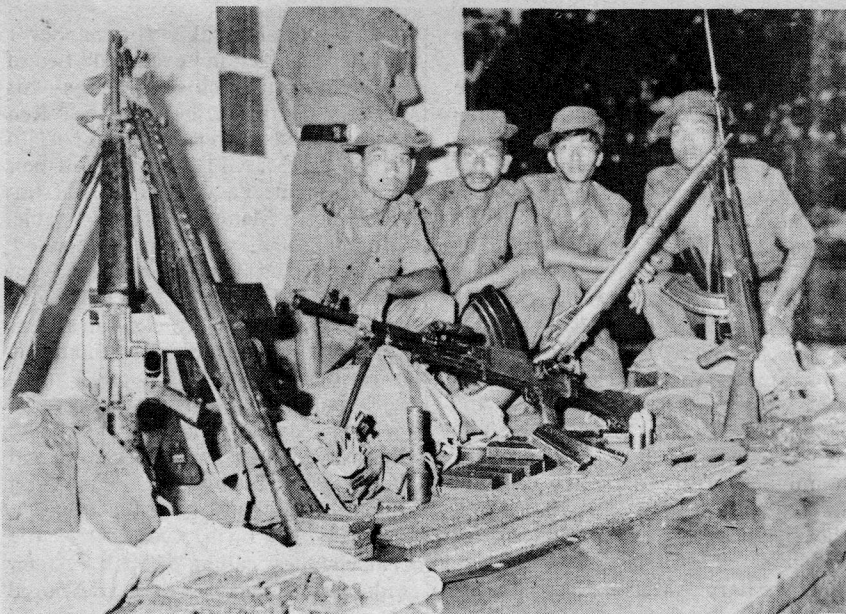
Prepak therefore is split into three groups—Maipak's faction, a faction that remains loyal to Tulachandra and believes he made his *volte face* in prison under torture, and a third faction that condemns both Maipak and Tulachandra, calling Maipak "a tiger cub reared to full growth that devoured its master".

Aside from Prepak, there are supposed to be a dozen other small insurgent groups, all with different objectives. The PLA is therefore the largest and best-organised of them all. Another group, the All Mongoloid Youth Association and the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) which, according to knowledgeable sources, have as cover the Pan-Manipuri Youth League (PMYL), has reportedly thrown in their lot with the insurgents and with the larger aim of unity with the Nagas, Mizos, and other tribals. Significantly, Maharajkumar Priyabrata Singh, brother of the last Manipuri king Bodh Chandra Singh, allotted land to PMYL within the Palace Grounds in Imphal—he is sup-

The route the Manipuri insurgents took to Lhasa for training



New Delhi map by KB Kumar



American and Chinese arms captured from Arakani rebels near Indo-Burmese border by the Manipur Rifles

posed to be a secret sympathiser.

Bisheshwar, who is often likened to Mao Zedong, is revered by the PLA's soldiers as "our great leader and teacher". Thirty-five years old, he is presently in hiding on the Burmese side of the border, but travels regularly to meet his contacts in the North-east. His soldiers are "well-disciplined", and most of them are also on the Burmese side; some are hiding out in Cachar and some in Manipur itself. Within Manipur, the PLA launches quick and predatory guerrilla attacks. Its targets are more selective than Prepak's.

One of the PLA's key aims is self-reliance. It draws its sustenance from Manipur's middle class—it is known to 'borrow' a scooter for a raid, for instance, and then to return it to its owner politely with a full tank of petrol. As a result, the PLA has garnered considerable intellectual and middle-class support, and even those who oppose it say they have "grudging respect" for it. By snatching arms from armed personnel, and by killing the latter in order to snatch arms, the PLA intends to "raise" the ideological consciousness of its young men.

Most of the PLA's policy statements have been made in pamphlets titled *Dawn*; the first two of these appeared last year and the third one appeared just two weeks ago. Hastily printed and emblazoned on their covers with a red star, the copies of *Dawn* provide an interesting insight into Bisheshwar's strategy. Excerpts:

"The future of the revolution is bright ... the unity of all nationalities including the Nagas, the Mizos, the Chins, the Kukis, the Meeteis and so on

can arouse the neighbouring states of India ... so that the Delhi regime can be overthrown by joint force." The PLA plans to "raise high the morale of the people by educating and helping them and building up a firm revolutionary base."

"The most urgent issue at the present stage is a real Marxist party, guided by Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong thought—a party which, by mobilising the whole masses, can lead the people to an armed revolution."

"We should wipe out Delhi's effective strength, its main and paramilitary

forces by means of guerrilla warfare, mobile warfare, war of annihilation and so on ... A guerrilla war can only succeed with a strong mass base".

"We openly oppose the Communist Party of India (CPI) which betrayed the revolution of the Indian working-class"

"In every unit of our army, we have apart from the military commander a political commander who carries out our political action through a process of war or armed struggle."

"We firmly believe that the heroic Naga people can never be defeated by the Shillong Accord (*which ostensibly ended Naga insurgency in 1975*) and we unite with them in defeating our common enemy, the Delhi reactionary regime."

"Our people are longing for international help, particularly for a close relation with the People's Republic of China ... China is indeed eager for no territory; today, she survives for the international proletariat, the working class of the world."

"After our study in China, we learned the invincible revolutionary thought, the Marxism-Leninism-Mao-Zedong thought, which today is the guiding light of our revolution. In China, Chiang Kaishek's tank plus rifle was defeated by Chairman Mao's millet plus rifle."

In February 1979, at a Plenary Session of the PLA Bisheshwar analysed the effects and lessons of the Chinese revolution, the changes in Naga politics, developments in the Mizo National Front (MNF), the lessons of the Naxalbari movement, and develop-



ments in the Thai Communist Party and the Burmese Communist Party (BCP), and dissolved the Revolutionary Government of Manipur (RGM). He said the PLA's aims primarily were organising "a revolutionary front covering Manipur (Kangleipak), Nagaland, Mizoram, Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh." He set up the 'Revolutionary People's Front' (RPF).

In the latest *Dawn*, recognising Mrs Indira Gandhi's success in neutralising Nagaland's Phizo and Mizoram's Laldenga, and the original RGM, the PLA resolves to "defeat such a deceptive weapon of the enemy by raising the consciousness of our revolutionaries" and to "defeat the enemy's sugar-coated bullet, sweet talk in the face, stab in the back".

It is, therefore, clear that the PLA intends to unite forces in the main with the Naga and Mizo rebels. Here, a brief diversion into Naga and Mizo developments is necessary.

Th Muivah and Isak Chisi Szu are the two leaders of the 'Socialist Council of Nagaland' (SCN). Muivah, Szu and the Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN)—set up on the Burmese side of the border with Nagaland—did not recognise the Shillong Accord of November 1975. But an internal rift resulted in Muivah's ouster and Szu's imprisonment; the presidency of the FGN was taken over by a Hemi Naga, SS Khaplang. Early this year, however, Muivah staged a counter-coup and reestablished his hold over the FGN and the SCN. On February 2, he established the 'People's Republic of Nagaland' and in a 'solemn declaration' vowed to "liberate every inch of our land under alien occupation".

Laldenga's betrayal

The Mizos have termed Laldenga's peace talks with the government a 'betrayal', and the Mizo National Front (MNF) has decided to continue the struggle, although no clear leader has yet emerged.

This is where the long-term strategy of the insurgents becomes clearer. Naga, Mizo and Manipuri rebels have all found refuge in the hilly terrain of Upper Burma, where the Burmese government is virtually non-existent. The Patkai, Chindwin and Arakan hills of Upper Burma are under the occupation of Burmese rebels—Kachin, Chin, Karen, and Arakani insurgents. To the west, the Indian rebels have found allies and refuge with the insurgents of the Chittagong Hill tracts of south-eastern Bangladesh. Repeated combing operations launched by the Bang-



"Oh Dear! It seems the foreign hand has got an edge over the domestic one!"

ladeshi Army against them have failed to shake the rebels.

Geographically, the rebels in all three countries are safe in their hilly hideouts—India's borders with both Bangladesh and Burma near Chittagong and Arakan respectively are practically wide open, although authorities claim to have "sealed" them. Movement in small groups from one country to the other is very easy. The Nagas under Muivah in fact have a 'liberated' zone in Upper Burma. Entry into China through Upper Burma is also simple, and the Burmese insurgents only require that Indian rebels coming back from China with arms bring two guns each with them—one for the Burmese, one for the Indian.

This is why four battalions of the CRP, six battalions of the Manipur Rifles, three battalions of the Army, and half a dozen battalions of the Assam Rifles in Manipur have failed to stem the tide of insurgency. Authorities in Imphal speak wistfully of the tactics that Ranjit Gupta and Debi Ray, two of Calcutta's most feared police commanders, used against the Naxalites. But the very geography of the insurgency militates against effective policing. Police officials themselves confess that the insurgents have two arms factories right in Imphal which they have not been able to locate.

The larger alliance thus consists of the Meeteis from Sylhet and Chittagong areas of Bangladesh, and the Arakan area of Burma, the Kukis from Burma, the Nagas, the Mizos, and the various groups of Burmese rebels.

While steadily gaining in strength, winning tactical victories against the 'enemy', and bringing back arms from China, the insurgents (who could be said to be under the overall leadership of Bisheshwar and Muivah) say that their ultimate aim is to 'liberate' the long swath of land that includes Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, the Kabaw valley and the Liem area west of the Chindwin river in Upper Burma, the Arakan State in central Burma, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh.

In total area, these areas will be bigger than the present Bangladesh. There will be two sea ports—Chittagong and Akyab. And how will liberation be achieved? This is where China enters the scene, say the insurgents.

● China, it is well known, has long coveted a warm-water port outlet into the Bay of Bengal. Insurgents claim that the Chinese army can reach Imphal within 24 hours if need be. Imphal, in any case, is recognised to be the 'planning centre' for the insurgency. "Governments in Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram today run on the fiat of the underground," says one disgusted bureaucrat.

Why is China interested in the area? And why, if sources are to be believed, is the United States egging the Chinese on? If one looks at a map of the world, one realises that the area sought to be 'liberated' is strategically the most important in Asia. Any superpower with bases at either Chittagong or Akyab can launch attacks easily on a stretch extending from Iran to Vietnam. The Chinese, say the insurgents, are not in-

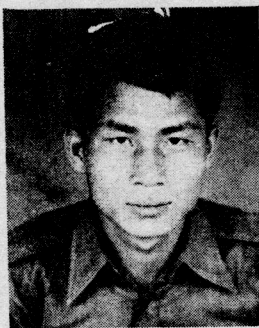


Members of the People's Liberation Army (l to r): 'Leader and teacher, N Bisheshwar, Kunjbihari Singh, Ch Ranjit Singh and Temba Singh

terested in *occupying* the area—they will only aid the struggle, and later on perhaps establish a base there.

●The aim? To de-stabilise India, and thus strike a body blow at the Soviet

ipuri rebels can cut). It is tactically and logistically well-nigh impossible to parachute thousands of troops in. The terrain is so rugged and hilly, that only locals with intimate knowledge of the



Prepak members (l to r): Leishabi Singh, leader of Maipak Sharma's faction, Kishan Chand 'Tayai', treasurer, and RK Tulachandra.

Union. Russian 'expansionism' in Afghanistan has imparted a new urgency to the situation. Few people know that there is a huge presence of the Soviet secret agency, the KGB agents operate through the Indo-Soviet Cultural Society (ISCUS), local journalists, and government officials. Obviously the Kremlin is worried at the way things are moving.

That there is secret governmental support for the PLA in Manipur is evident from the fact that of ten PLA men captured in early May near Moreh, six were released on 'bail' by an Imphal judge. Some of the PLA men were reportedly caught in the Government Forest guest house at Moreh!

Sources say that a Provisional Government will soon be set up on the Burmese side of the border with the active cooperation of the Burmese Communist Party (BCP) in order to coordinate the 'revolution'. Burma, after it left the Non-aligned group, has itself been under direct Chinese pressure. Between 1982 and 1984, these sources add, the revolution can be expected to take full shape.

Will the Indian government not react to this? As we have seen in the accompanying report, intelligence reports going to Delhi from this area are woefully inadequate. A cursory glance at the map will show that there are only two overland routes to Imphal—the Dimapur-Imphal road (which can be easily cut by the Nagas) and the Silchar-Imphal road (which the Man-

topography can find their way about. Battling the insurgents will therefore be very difficult, using conventional warfare techniques.

Although no statesman-like figure has yet emerged to take the primary position in the insurgency, the rebels are confident of their future. Economically, they say, they will serve as the conduit for trade by Burma with India, and they will open trade relations with India, Bangladesh, China and Burma. Tourism is one proposed 'industry'. "If Kashmir can earn Rs 40 crores annually from tourism, why has this region not been opened to foreign tourists?"



New Delhi map by KB Kumar

asks a Manipuri official.

The only good thing the Indian government has done, say the insurgents, is educating the regions' youth. "The Indian government has been investing in revolution," says one young man. "Just as Dacca University played a key role in the Bangladesh revolution, our educated young men will provide the revolution with its intellectual backbone."

That China is helping the Bangladeshi, Indian and Burmese rebels with training (witness Bisheshwar's trips to Lhasa), ideological inspiration, and finally arms is clear. China-watchers say that Peking is now more interested in maintaining *rapprochement* with New Delhi than in destabilising the region. But even after the Four Modernisations, say the insurgents, China is still interested in helping the revolutionary cause of the 'international proletariat'. It is not inconceivable that the US and China, which enjoy unusually close relations today, may want to hit at the Soviet Union's strongest ally in Asia, India, by utilising the long-term unrest in the Nagaland-Manipur-Mizoram belt.

Whether this will lead to open revolt and eventual 'liberation' is difficult to say at this juncture. Even supposing China openly steps in on the insurgents' side, there is a chance that Moscow might enter the fray, too—leading to superpower warfare. The insurgents say that just as the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) has gained United Nations (UN) recognition, the PLA also enjoys a possibility of UN recognition through the support of the US and China in that world body. This will "internationalise" the issue and further embarrass India, they claim.

Whatever happens, it is clear that the short-sighted policy of New Delhi over the last 33 years in regard to the strategically sensitive North-easternmost frontier areas is largely responsible for the present frustration of the people there. "We have been forgotten by Delhi," complain the Nagas, the Manipuris and the Mizos, "but we will make Delhi sit up and notice us soon." Will India one day soon be accused of driving the insurgents into the arms of the Chinese?