

Northeast rebel groups trying to forge united front

Three separatist rebel groups in India's northeast have launched a fresh initiative to activate a pan-Mongoloid grouping it had floated in 1990 for a joint revolutionary struggle in the Indo-Myanmar region, a rebel leader said Sunday.

'We had a meeting last year in Thailand attended by rebel leaders from the northeast to revamp the Indo-Burma Revolutionary Front (IBRF). Details are being worked out,' Kughalo Mulatonu, a top leader of the S.S. Khaplang faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-K), told IANS.

The IBRF was formed on May 22, 1990, by a frontline rebel group in Manipur, the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), along with other insurgent groups operating in the region like the NSCN-K and the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA). The coalition was then aimed at waging a 'united struggle for the independence of Indo-Burma', but failed to act as a cohesive grouping and gradually became defunct.

'Representatives from the NSCN-K, ULFA and the UNLF attended the meeting in Thailand. Other groups like the People's Liberation Army, People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (Prepak) and the Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL), all operating in Manipur state, have also expressed their desire to come under the grouping,' Mulatonu said.

Asked whether the rebel groups have plans to intensify their insurrection against the government under a common platform, Mulatonu said: 'The idea is not to launch a joint campaign against India or Burma (Myanmar). The idea is to usher in greater unity among the people in the region.'

The NSCN-K leader, however, warned that if India and Myanmar were to push the rebels to the wall with continued military offensives, they would be compelled to strike back with a vengeance.

'If we are not disturbed, we shall work for unity among those living in the region under our new grouping that will be a federal front,' Mulatonu said.

The grouping will have a new name. 'We are awaiting opinions from our other likely partners like the PLA, Prepak and KYKL before we formalise the nomenclature and other details of the grouping,' the rebel leader said.

Coalitions among insurgent groups in the northeast have come up from time to time, mainly to act as force multipliers to offset the sustained and coordinated counter-insurgency operations by the security forces. In the mid-90s, the Isak-Muivah faction of the NSCN had taken the initiative to form similar fronts. The idea was aimed at turning its war against the Indian state into a war of the nationalities of the region.

To achieve this objective, the NSCN(IM) formed the ULFSS (United Liberation Front of Seven Sisters) in 1993 and SDUFSEHR (Self-Defence United front of the South-East Himalayan Region) in November 1994. These two groupings too do not seem to be active now.

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