



## Peacebuilding and conflict in the Northeast

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### Abstract

The Northeastern part of India has a complicated past that includes political upheaval, cultural variety, and ethnic diversity. Numerous indigenous groups, such as the Naga, Mizo, Khasi, and others, have endured protracted struggle due to their demands for self-determination, autonomy, and opposition to what they see as central government marginalization. Ethnic tensions, old grievances, and political marginalization are frequently the root causes of these conflicts, which lead to militancy, insurgency movements, and demands for independence. The Naga Insurgency, which started in the 1940s and sought an independent Naga state because of the desire to accept Naga sovereignty and self-rule, has been one of the most well-known battles. Similar to this, the Mizo National Front (MNF) fought for more autonomy through armed conflict in the 1960s and 1970s, which resulted in the 1986 Mizo Peace Accord. Tensions have increased due to other organizations, like the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), continuing to strive for more autonomy in Assam despite these historic peace agreements. In North East India, peacebuilding initiatives have included political dialogue, military action, and cultural reconciliation. Numerous peace agreements throughout the years, like the Assam Accord (1985) and the Naga Peace Accord (2015), have attempted to address the underlying reasons for instability, including political marginalization, cultural repression, and economic hardship. Despite certain difficulties, these agreements have had some success in lowering violent conflicts and offering a framework for regional autonomy.

**Keywords:** Ethnic conflict, insurgency, autonomy, and self-determination mizo national front (mnf), naga insurgency, territorial conflicts, local self-government

### Introduction

In civilizations impacted by tension, violence, or war, conflict, and peacebuilding refer to initiatives meant to address the root causes of conflict, end violence, and establish enduring peace. Whether political, ethnic, economic, or cultural, conflict emerges when groups or individuals encounter long-standing differences that cause relationships to break down and occasionally become violent or result in war. These disparities frequently result from problems like discrimination, power disparities, inequality, old grievances, or rivalry for resources. For example, requests for autonomy, territorial disputes, and ethnic identity have all been major contributors to insurgencies and unrest in North East India. By addressing the root causes of conflict, preventing violence from recurring, and fostering reconciliation between separated communities, peacebuilding, on the other hand, is the process of establishing and maintaining peace. It entails a variety of activities, including institutional reforms, discourse, negotiation, and conflict resolution. The economic, social, and cultural aspects of peace are also the focus of peacebuilding, which aims to lessen injustice, poverty, and inequality while promoting mutual respect and collaboration among parties involved in conflict. In reality, peacebuilding may include initiatives to advance human rights, social cohesion, and the rule of law in addition to official peace agreements like the Mizo or Naga peace treaties. In the end, peacebuilding aims to establish circumstances that allow groups to coexist peacefully, with respect for one another's differences and understanding of one another. Long-term dedication, inclusive government, and the active involvement of all societal segments—particularly marginalized ones like women, young people,

and indigenous communities—in the peace process are necessary. Societies may mend historical scars, restore trust, and move toward a more secure, fair, and just future through comprehensive peacebuilding.

### Conflict and Peace-Building Problems

Ethnic, political, and social elements combine to create problems in North East India. Ethnic diversity in the area is a positive thing, but it has often made territorial disputes, identity issues, and autonomy more intense. Indigenous groups like the Nagas, Mizos, and Assamese have historically demanded more political autonomy or independence, which has led to insurgencies and brutal fighting. Important problems include competition for resources, discriminatory practices that have caused alienation, and the central government's marginalization of ethnic groups. While organizations like the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and others have called for the establishment of independent states or increased rights for indigenous populations, the Naga and Mizo insurgencies, for instance, wanted autonomy or sovereignty. Human rights violations and counterinsurgency operations have frequently been used to satisfy these demands, which have heightened tensions. Although violence has decreased as a result of peace agreements like the Mizo Peace Accord and the Naga Peace Accord, their implementation is still lacking. Ethnic divisions that impede lasting peace, economic hardship, and underdevelopment continue to plague the region. Long-term peacebuilding depends on inclusive governance and economic fairness because many groups believe their cultural identities and political ambitions are not fully acknowledged. Conflicts in Northeast India are likely to continue if these underlying

problems are not resolved, which would undermine stability in the region as a whole.

### **Relationship between India and Northeast India Following Independence**

Following independence, the relationship between India and North East India has been complicated, and influenced by political, cultural, and geographic elements. The region's unique ethnic identities, cultural customs, and historical experiences made it difficult to integrate North East India into the newly formed Indian Republic after India attained independence in 1947. In contrast to other regions of India, the Northeast was home to numerous indigenous groups, many of whom desired autonomy and self-government. These goals, along with geopolitical factors and the strategic significance of the area, produced a distinct set of difficulties in the years following independence.

### **Integration in Politics and Early Conflicts**

The process of North East India joining the Indian Union was not without its difficulties. This was greatly influenced by the historical background of the area. The North East was a group of semi-autonomous kingdoms, tribes, and settlements having minimal contact with the rest of India before the British colonial administration. The British maintained a policy of isolation in many areas of the Northeast to prevent confrontations with China and Burma (now Myanmar), two nearby countries. The colonial period was brief compared to other regions. As a result, many localities at the time of independence felt little of a part of the greater Indian nation. Political tensions centered on Assam, the region's largest state, in the years after independence. Attempts to satisfy the aspirations of regional ethnic groups for self-governance were reflected in the formation of Nagaland in 1963 and Mizoram in 1987; nevertheless, these initiatives were accompanied by bloody insurgencies, such as the Naga insurgency, which started in 1947. Decades of struggle resulted from the Naga people's quest for an independent Nagaland, spearheaded by the Naga National Council (NNC). To gain autonomy, the Mizo National Front (MNF) in Mizoram began its armed conflict in the 1960s, which ended with the Mizo Peace Accord of 1986.

### **Rebellions and Movements for Autonomy**

These insurgencies were frequently met with a harsh response from the central government, which exacerbated local frustrations and violated human rights. Imposed in 1958, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) granted the military broad authority to quell insurgency activities, but it also fueled considerable animosity among the local populace. Fears of economic underdevelopment, cultural deterioration, and marginalization propelled the long-standing call for self-determination, especially among the Naga, Mizo, and Assamese ethnic communities. Even though peace deals like the Assam Accord (1985) and the Mizo Peace Accord (1986) gave autonomy to some insurgent groups, they frequently left fundamental problems unresolved. For instance, there was sporadic violence and instability in Assam as a result of the indigenous Bodos' persistent demand for a separate Bodoland. The Naga

dispute is still unsolved despite the 2015 Naga Peace Accord, which was rejected by several factions, including the NSCN (K).

### **Economic Growth and Interconnectedness**

In the relationship between India and North East India, economic development has been another significant obstacle. With its high rates of poverty, poor infrastructure, and insufficient healthcare and educational systems, the area continues to rank among India's least developed. With initiatives like the Look East Policy (later renamed the Act East Policy), which attempts to improve economic growth in the region and fortify relations with Southeast Asian nations, the central government has attempted to solve these problems. However, development has been hampered by logistical difficulties, insufficient investment, and infrastructure impediments. More attention has been paid in recent years to enhancing the connection between the Northeast and the rest of India, especially through improved air, rail, and road systems. New geopolitical goals have also emerged as a result of the region's development as a key center for India's strategic interests, notably about China and Myanmar. The Act East Policy seeks to strengthen diplomatic and commercial ties with ASEAN nations, but it must first enhance regional infrastructure and security, both of which are ongoing projects.

### **Cultural Preservation, Regional Tensions, and Ethnic Identity**

In the relationship between India and North East India, the desire of numerous ethnic minorities to maintain their unique identities has been one of the most enduring problems. There are more than 200 different ethnic groups in the Northeast, and each has its language, traditions, and customs. Many of these communities have believed that migration, demographic shifts, and perceived central government neglect have threatened their cultural identity over time. The influx of migrants, mainly from Bangladesh, has caused friction, notably in Assam, where native Assamese have expressed fear of being overrun by migrants. Furthermore, one of the main points of debate is still the question of autonomy. Many ethnic communities still want more authority over their resources, governance, and political future, even though some have gained some degree of autonomy through the creation of new states or autonomous districts. While the Naga demand for a larger Nagalim has persisted, this has prompted requests for new states, such as Bodoland in Assam and Gorkhaland in West Bengal.

### **In Search of a New Connection**

The Indian government has worked to improve ties with Northeast India in recent years by emphasizing inclusive governance, cultural preservation, and regional development. Introduced in 2008, the North East Region Vision 2020 plan aimed to enhance employment prospects, healthcare, education, and infrastructure. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also undertaken several efforts to strengthen ties with the area, such as the development of the Brahmaputra River and the signing of the 2015 India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement. The deeper problems of autonomy, identity, and economic inequality must be addressed, though, to promote more communication and understanding between the Indian state and the indigenous groups and ensure long-term peace and prosperity in North East India.

### North East India's Conflict and Peacebuilding

Eight states—Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura—make up North East India, which has historically been a flashpoint for social, political, and ethnic strife. The area is a melting pot of cultural diversity because it is home to numerous ethnic groups, indigenous cultures, and religious traditions. But long-standing conflicts, mostly centered on questions of identity, autonomy, and governance, have also been exacerbated by diversity. Violent insurgencies, ethnic conflicts, and calls for further autonomy have plagued the area over the last few decades, posing serious obstacles to peace and progress. The complicated history of political exclusion and economic disregard experienced by the indigenous populations in the area is one of the main reasons for conflict in northeastern India. In the face of growing governmental power, migration, and globalization, many of these people have long fought to protect their languages, cultural identities, and natural resources. Because different groups were frequently compelled to live under a single political and administrative framework, which many felt did not sufficiently respect their distinct cultural and political aspirations; tensions were created by the region's historical experience under colonial rule and its subsequent integration into India after independence. The insurgencies of the Mizo and Naga peoples have been among the most important conflicts in the area.

Beginning in the 1940s, the Naga Insurgency aimed to establish an independent Naga homeland (Nagalim), while in the 1960s and 1970s, the Mizo National Front (MNF) fought for autonomy in Mizoram using violent means. Intense violence, involving military counter-insurgency operations, civilian losses, relocation, and loss of livelihood, characterized these wars as well as others like the ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam) insurgency in Assam during the time. In these situations, rebel organizations contested the Indian state's control over the area by calling for political autonomy and self-determination. Despite the intensity of these conflicts, peacebuilding efforts have also been prominent in North East India. Over the years, the Indian government has engaged in multiple rounds of negotiations with insurgent groups, leading to a series of peace accords that have helped reduce violence and grant greater political and economic autonomy to some regions. The establishment of the state of Mizoram and the end of hostilities were the results of the Mizo Peace Accord of 1986, which was signed between the Indian government and the Mizo National Front. It is regarded as one of the most effective peace agreements in the area. Similar to how the Assam Accord (1985) ended the bloody Assam Movement, the 2015 Naga Peace Accord has raised hopes for a settlement to the Naga conflict, despite difficulties in carrying out all of its stipulations. But the peace in northeastern India has frequently been shaky and unfinished.

The fundamental problems of political autonomy, resource control, and ethnic identity have not been addressed by many peace accords, even though they have reduced open bloodshed. Violence and calls for more autonomy are still occasionally seen in the area, especially from those who feel left out or unhappy with the conditions of current agreements. In addition, the region's economic progress is still unequal, with high rates of unemployment, poverty, and poor infrastructure present in many areas. For peacebuilding

in Northeast India to be truly successful, it must prioritize inclusive governance, economic growth, and cultural identity preservation in addition to addressing the political and territorial concerns of indigenous populations. Insurgent groups, the Indian government, and regional stakeholders must communicate, establish confidence, and work together to achieve a more durable peace process. To ensure that all voices are heard in the process of rebuilding the region, peacebuilding should also place a high priority on the active participation of women, youth, and marginalized communities. There is optimism that efforts to resolve conflicts and promote peace would result in a more equal, just, and peaceful society for all of the varied people in North East India as the region develops.

### Conclusion and Final Thoughts

In summary, the conflict resolution and peacebuilding process in northeastern India remains challenging and complex. Due to the region's great ethnic diversity, long-standing grievances, and aspirations for autonomy, it has seen bloody conflicts and protracted insurgencies. The Indian government has made a concerted effort to address these issues through peace accords such as the Mizo Peace Accord (1986) and the Naga Peace Accord (2015), but these agreements haven't always addressed the root causes of unrest, which include political marginalization, cultural identity issues, and economic underdevelopment. In North East India, peacebuilding calls for a comprehensive, long-term strategy that attends to the socioeconomic requirements of the populace, encourages equitable development, and cultivates intercommunal communication. It cannot be achieved solely by military means or political accords. Only when the many communities feel valued, heard, and included in decision-making processes can there be true peace. To do this, ethnic groups must be allowed to maintain their identities while still fitting into the broader national framework. A continued dedication to mutual respect, reconciliation, and a more decentralized political structure will be essential to attaining long-term peace and development in North East India as the area continues to face both historical and modern difficulties. Although the path to peace is not yet complete, if inclusive and equitable solutions are sought, there is hope for a more peaceful future.

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