

Peace Process in India's Northeast: An Overview

Giriraj Bhattacharjee* and M.A. Athul**

India's North East Region (NER) has faced a multitude of separatist and secessionist insurgencies since Independence. These insurgent groups, although up in arms against the state, did not have unified or common demands. While some were secessionist in nature [such as the Naga National Council (NNC) and United National Liberation Front (ULFA)], others such as Bodos, Kukis and Dimasas, demanded a separate state or autonomous District Councils within the Union of India. Throughout the course of conflict, neither the state nor the insurgents have been able to prevail upon each other, thereby sparking a long, attritional pattern of violence. Throughout the seven decades of insurgency in the region, neither Government forces nor major insurgent groups have been able to militarily prevail upon each other, although the Army and other Government Forces now have a permanent presence in the region. The presence of the Indian Army has been consolidated

* Giriraj Bhattacharjee is a researcher at the Institute for Conflict Management.

** Athul M.A. is a researcher at the Institute for Conflict Management.

in the region with two corps formations, 3rd and 4th, based in Rangapathar (Dimapur) and Tezpur (Assam).¹

Both parties have realised that they would eventually have to come to the negotiating table and conclude a mutually acceptable end state agreement.

However, the pattern of attrition seeps into the negotiation process as well, resulting in a long drawn out process. This also reflects the Government's approach (irrespective of political dispensations over time), which is primarily aligned to a conflict management mode, rather than a resolution mode that could terminate the conflict.

A primary example for such long drawn out peace process is seen in the case of Nagaland, where initial informal meetings between Government of India (GoI) and National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak Muivah (NSCN-IM) resulted in the signing of a ceasefire agreement in 1997, over two decades ago. Although, more than 80 rounds of peace talks have also taken place, a conclusive peace treaty is still elusive. The ceasefire agreement was signed by the IK Gujral Government, but neither the then Government nor later dispensations have been able to reach a conclusive peace agreement.

Armed movements in the region commenced in 1956, with the NNC led by Angami Phizo raising the banner of rebellion. NNC was initially formed as a political platform in 1946, its predecessor being the Naga Club. The organisation initially demanded autonomy within erstwhile Assam, which previously consisted of present-day Nagaland, Meghalaya

1 M.S.Prabhakara, "Going round the mulberry bush", *The Hindu*, March 20, 2010, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/Going-round-the-mulberry-bush/article16583727.ece>.

and Mizoram. However internal rifts within NNC later led to secessionist demands. NNC's armed violence continued till the signing of the Shillong Accord in November 1975.² However, a faction of NNC refused to comply with the agreement and went on to form the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) in 1980. The torchbearers of this group were Isak Swu, Thuingaleng Muivah and SS Khaplang. The NNC was quickly side-lined and NSCN became the main force in the region. In 1988, the NSCN split along tribal lineages into the NSCN-IM and NSCN-Khaplang (NSCN-K). In 2011, the NSCN-K split further into NSCN-KK (currently identified as NSCN-Kitovi-Neopao); and again in 2015, the new faction, NSCN-Reformation (NSCN-R) emerging.

In 1997, the government of India signed a ceasefire agreement with NSCN-IM, which had established itself as the most powerful of all insurgent groups in Nagaland. After more than 80 rounds of talks thereafter, a Framework Agreement was signed in 2015. On December 13, 2016, six Naga National Political Groups issued a joint statement saying that they had on their "own volition," agreed to come together in the interest of the Naga people as a whole and formed an interim 'Working Group', which would negotiate with the government for a

2 The Accord, thus states: "The representatives of the underground organisations conveyed their decision, of their own volition, to accept, without condition, the Constitution of India. It was agreed that the arms, now underground, would be brought out and deposited at appointed places. Details for giving effect of this agreement will be worked out between them and representatives of the Government, the security forces, and members of the Liaison Committee. It was agreed that the representatives of the underground organisations should have reasonable time to formulate other issues for discussion for final settlement.", *SATP*, "Nagaland Accord-The Shillong Agreement of November 11,1975", <https://satp.org/document/paper-acts-and-oridnances/nagaland-accord-the-shillong-agreement-of-november-111975>.

comprehensive peace accord acceptable to all the concerned parties and varied interests.

In the case of Mizoram, the two-decade long Mizo insurgency (1966-86), which ended with the Mizo Accord, is the only instance of an unambiguous resolution of conflict in north east India via a political peace process. The neglect towards the Mizo suffering during the 1959 famine was the cause of the two-decade long insurgency.³ A Mizo Cultural Society formed in 1955 was rechristened the Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF) on account of the famine. By 1961 the MNFF renamed itself as the Mizo National Front (MNF).⁴ Armed violence raged for two decades, commencing 1966, till the signing of the Mizo Accord in June 1986. Following the Accord, the state of Mizoram was created in February 1987 and MNF chief Laldenga became the first Chief Minister. Two important steps which probably ensured a rich peace dividend over the past three decades were the surrender of weapons by the MNF militants and a large rehabilitation plan which ensured that the surrendered militants were economically rehabilitated. Among the 614 surrendered rebels, 350 were given employment with the Government; 45 provided taxi permits; 15 allotted shops: and the rest were given government contracts.⁵ Under a unique surrender package, each of them

3 Mizoram Backgrounder, *SATP*, <https://satp.org/backgrounder/india-insurgency/northeast-mizoram>.

4 “What is the Mizo National Front?”, *Indian Express*, December 11, 2018, <https://indianexpress.com/article/what-is/mizo-national-front-mnff-mizoram-results-5488114/>.

5 Ramesh Menon, “Former Mizo insurgents gradually settle down to civilian life”, *India Today* July 15, 1988, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/special-report/story/19880715-former-mizo-insurgents-gradually-settle-down-to-civilian-life-797452-1988-07-15>.

was given INR 2,000 for their immediate needs. This was followed by another grant of INR 20,000 for buying household goods. Each was also given half a *bigha* of land (about 7,500 sq. ft.) to construct a house for which a grant of INR 40,000 was to be given. Except for the housing grant, other grants have been disbursed.⁶

In Manipur, the first insurgent group to be formed was in the Imphal Valley, the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), in 1964. Later, in the 1970s and 80s, groups like the People's Liberation Army (PLA), People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), and Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP) emerged and engaged in urban guerrilla activities. The initial issues that fuelled the insurgency were related to a sense of pride and distinct identity of the State, culturally associated with the long reigns of the Meitei kings. Other issues like the States' merger, and the status of the *meitelon* language and identity, added to popular dissatisfaction and conflict.⁷

Secessionist movements based on separate ethnic 'nationality' were raging in the hills of the state, where Naga militant formations like NNC and NSCN-K were active. Moreover, the Mizo militant group -MNF was active in Mizo-Kuki dominant areas. The 1990s saw the insurgency worsen, with Naga-Kuki clashes following militant activities by Kuki armed groups in Moreh and neighbouring areas along the Indo-Myanmar border, where a lucrative border trade was concentrated.

6 Ibid.

7 "Manipur Backgrounder", <http://satp.org/backgrounder/india-insurgencyinortheast-manipur>.

The ceasefire agreements with the two powerful Naga groups – NSCN-IM (signed in 1997) and NSCN-K (signed in 2001) – brought relative peace in neighbouring Nagaland, and an extension of the agreement to the Naga inhabited areas in Manipur was subsequently proposed by the then Indian Government. However, there was a severe backlash in the Imphal valley, with apprehensions that such an extension would give credence to Naga claims on Manipuri lands, and undermine Manipur’s territorial integrity.

Most of the valley-based Manipuri groups refused to negotiate with the State and Union Governments. In 2004, UNLF, responding to peace overtures from the governor, laid down four pre conditions to initiate peace talks.⁸

In 2009-10, the ‘chairman’ of UNLF, R.K. Meghen *alias* Sanayaima was handed over to India by the Bangladeshi authorities.⁹ But, even after his arrest and 10 years of subsequent imprisonment, the group has not climbed down from its position. However, some Imphal Valley based militant groups – KCP-Lallumba, United Revolutionary Front (URF), KCP-Lamphel, United People’s Party of Kangleipak (UPPK) and two factions of KYKL-MDF – have signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoU)s with the Government of India and Government of Manipur.¹⁰

8 Bibhu Prasad Routray “Talks with the UNLF: A Non-starter”, *IPCS*, <http://www.ipcs.org/focusthemselves.php?articleNo=1659>.

9 “UNLF Chairman Meghen arrested”, *Epao*, October 13, 2010, <http://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=15.141010.oct10>.

10 “Peace Treaty with Insurgents in Manipur”, Ministry of Home Affairs, Unstarred question no 2550, Lok Sabha, Government of India, May 10, 2016, <https://mha.gov.in/MHA1/Par2017/pdfs/par2016-pdfs/lis-100516/2550E.pdf>.

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Kuki militant formations started negotiations with the Indian Army in 2005. On August 22, 2008, a tripartite agreement was signed between the militant conglomerate and the Union and State Government. At present 25 militant groups, under two conglomerates-the Kuki National Organization (KNO) and the United People's Front (UPF), have agreed to suspend operations but any peace process has to accommodate the diversity of the State's ethnic groups, the sentiments of Valley residents, Manipur's territorial integrity as well as the demands for integration of Naga and Kuki areas under one administrative arrangement. While the Meitei of Imphal Valley defend the territorial integrity of the State, the hill residents, mainly Nagas, demand the integration of all the Naga areas straddling Manipur and Nagaland. The Kuki's want their areas under one administrative arrangement within Manipur.

As with Manipur, there are multiple conflicts in Assam. These conflicts are based on issues of Assamese cultural identity, land alienation of tribal communities, the 'foreigners' issue, autonomy of the hill districts and inter-tribal clashes for gaining control over land and resources. Civil society groups represented by the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and tribal interest by the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), launched massive social movements, including the Assam movement of 1976-1985 and the Bodoland Statehood movement in the late 1980s. Non-acceptance or non-satisfactory outcomes of the movements or peace agreements with Government led to sections within the youth or hardliners picking up the gun to resolve their issues.¹¹ Though the government signed two

11 Barun Das Gupta, "Bodoland Territorial Council to come into being tomorrow", *The Hindu*, December 6, 2003, <https://www.thehindu.com/2003/12/06/stories/2003120604521200.htm>.

MoU's with civil society organisations, AASU in 1985¹² and ABSU in 1993¹³ in Assam, violence continued even after these accords. Many smaller groups have sprung up who proclaim themselves protectors of the communities that they claim to represent. Some of these are clearly driven by lucrative extortion opportunities. Three MoU's were signed with Bodo, Karbi and Dimasa militants in 2003, 2011 and 2012, respectively. The Government is now negotiating with 13 insurgent groups with diverse demands and interests.

There are similarities in the causes of insurgent movements in Assam and Tripura. Both are linked to the massive migration to these States after the partition of the Indian subcontinent. The initial spurt of insurgency in Tripura erupted in the form of *Seng Krak* (Clenched fist) after the Princely States merged with the Indian Union and subsequent plans to settle non-tribal refugees from East Pakistan in tribal reserve forest areas. The situation in East Pakistan which resulted in the influx of millions of refugees in the early 1970s reignited the insurgency in the State. The fear of the 'indigenous' tribal population becoming a minority in its own land moved the tribals to take up arms against the state. The Tripura National Volunteers (TNV) was formed on November 10, 1978, with plans to conduct insurgent activities in collaboration with the MNF of Mizoram.¹⁴

Violence unleashed by the militants against non-tribal populations and government installations led to a crackdown by Security Forces. The subsequent peace process led to a MoU with TNV in 1988, but, as in the case of Nagaland and Assam,

12 "Assam Accord", Government of India, <https://assamaccord.assam.gov.in/portlets/the-assam-accord>.

13 "Bodo Accord", State Government of Assam, 1993, https://peaceaccords.nd.edu/sites/default/files/accords/Bodo_Accord_-_1993.pdf.

14 Tripura Backgrounder, *SATP*, <https://satp.org/backgrounder/india-insurgency-northeast-tripura>.

a section of dissatisfied militants relaunched violent militancy in the form of the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and All Tripura Tribal Force. While NLFT underwent several subsequent splits, the All Tripura Tribal Force was rechristened the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), and orchestrated an upsurge in violence. In 1993, Dasrath Deb became the first tribal Chief Minister (CM) of the State. After assuming power, he successfully negotiated with the ATTF and signed an MoS which led to the surrender of more than 1,600 cadres in March 1994 under an amnesty scheme offered by the State Government. But a group of ATTF cadres refused to surrender and kept the outfit alive. The NLFT and ATTF were subsequently banned under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.

The police led model of counter insurgency subsequently wiped out insurgency in the State. An MoU with the Nayanbashi Jamatia faction of NLFT was signed in 2004. L.H. Darlong, Tripura's Principal Secretary of Tribal Welfare noted, in 2018,

There was a peace talk with the insurgent outfit NLFT (NLFT-BM) three years back. Few insurgents surrendered after the peace talks. But there was no response from them after that. No one is aware of any peace talk which is in progress with NLFT now.

The insurgency in the State of Meghalaya started in 1992 with the formation of Hynniewtrep Achik Liberation Council (HALC). The State however was more of a victim of a spill-over effect of the insurgency from neighbouring Assam. A split in HALC resulted in the formation of Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) in 1993.¹⁵ In 1995, the

15 Rining Lyngdoh, "HNLC stresses political solution - Outfit urges Meghalaya govt to end differences through dialogue", *The Telegraph* January 7, 2015 <https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/north-east/hnlc-stresses-political-solution-outfit-urges-meghalaya-govt-to-end-differences-through-dialogue/cid/1626913>.

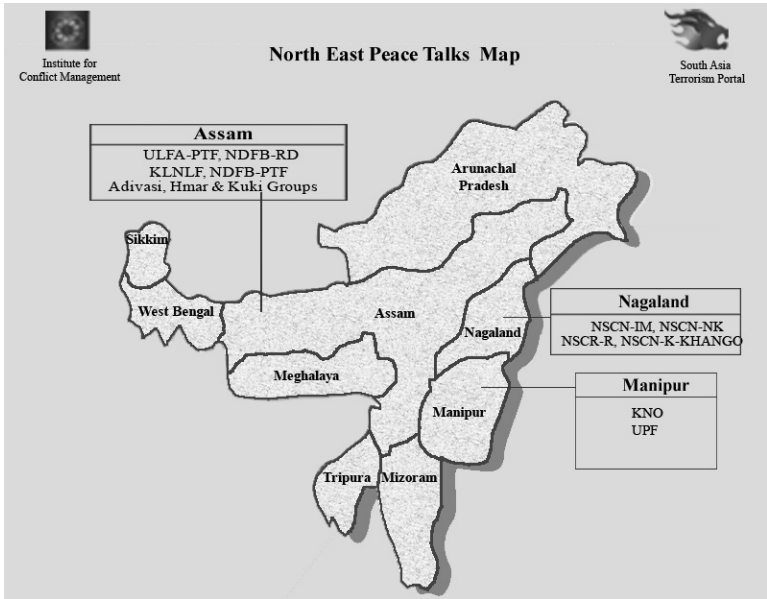


Figure 1: Northeast Peace Talks

Achik National Volunteer Council (ANVC) was formed and it continued to be operational until it signed a tripartite ceasefire agreement with the state and central governments in 2004.

But there was a factional split soon after, although it was formally revealed in 2012. The newly formed group was identified as Breakaway faction of ANVC (ANVC-B). In 2013, the ANVC-B signed a tripartite draft agreement with the state and central governments, and in September 2014, a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) was reached between the concerned parties. The MoS provided immunity to the cadres who were charged with criminal cases of assorted hues. According to MoS, "Criminal cases registered against members of the ANVC for non-heinous crime shall be withdrawn by

the state government”.¹⁶ It also states that the cases registered against ANVC members for “heinous crimes shall be reviewed case by case according to the existing policy on the subject, and, wherever feasible, steps for withdrawal of such cases will be initiated by the state government”.¹⁷ In the same year, an agreement was signed with ANVC and ANVC-B under which 748 militants surrendered their weapons at Dakopgre in Tura in West Garo Hills District in December 2014.¹⁸

COMPONENTS FOR A SUSTAINABLE PEACE AGREEMENT

A peace agreement can be defined as a formal commitment between two hostile parties to end a war.¹⁹ A peace accord can range from a cease fire agreement to a framework for social and political changes. Accords which go beyond ceasefires and terms of reference for further talks are likely to include provisions related to independence/autonomy/power sharing, human rights and fair distribution of resource and employment.²⁰ A peace process can also be defined as a process when people with inimical interests or ideas attempt to align or converge their interests which are acceptable, attainable and practical to all stakeholders. The most important consensus

16 “Chairmen of the two outfits surrender arms”, *The Times of India*, December 16, 2014, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/ANVC-breakaway-faction-disbanded/articleshow/45526617.cms>.

17 “Meghalaya Time Line”, *SATP*, <https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/meghalaya/timeline/2014.htm>.

18 Ibid.

19 “Inclusive Security, Sustainable Peace : A tool kit for advocacy and action”, *International Alert*, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/ToolkitWomenandConflictPreventionandResolution_InternationalAlert2004.pdf.

20 Swarna Rajagopalan, “Peace process in Northeast India: Journey over milestones”, East-West Centre, 2008, <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/ps046.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=32284>.

among stake holders should be to put an end to violence and resolve the issues at hand in a non-violent manner.

In India's internal security landscape, accords are defined as constructs that the rivalling parties have made for themselves and once they have entered into, they seem not only to exist independently of whatever the signatories think about them, but shape and mould their thoughts and practices, laying down modalities on the basis of which their affairs are supposed to be conducted in the future.²¹

Some of the essential features required for lasting peace settlements resulting in overall removal of violence and feeling of alienation are:

DEMOCRATIC AND CONSENSUAL PROCESS

The dialogue process should not be 'dictated' by one party alone. A consensus has to be built with in the negotiating parties as well as between both sides on the modalities of the negotiation process. Moreover, a mutually acceptable frame work and end state has to be concisely formed between and amongst the parties. For example, the Ao *Senden* (apex body of Ao Nagas) in its meeting on July 27, 2007 at Camp Hebron, in Dimapur (Nagaland) assumed responsibility for the problems afflicting the tribe while offering concrete solutions after consultations with all the different village representatives to the *Hoho*.

On the same day, the views of all the *Hohos* like Ao, Angami, Tangkhul, Jeme, Konyak, Sema, and the NSCN-IM, were listened to by around 5000 participants from all the Naga-inhabited areas of the Northeast. By the end of the day, a common consensus was reached for an indefinite extension of ceasefire between the NSCN-IM and the Union Government; transparency in the functioning of the NSCN- IM; support for

21 Ibid.

the peace negotiations between the Union Government and the NSCN-IM; more representations from the Nagas in the formal peace talks; infrastructure development; and improvement in the security situation in conflict prone areas were reached.²²

TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY

In the initial phase of a negotiation or peace process, it is essential that the trust deficit between both parties, who until recently has been actively involved in violence against each other, is effectively addressed. Specifically, in the northeast region, since the conflicts have been long drawn and protracted in nature, the trust deficit is a reality amongst the societal actors such as Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), Government representatives and insurgents. Building up trust and bringing a transparent process is essential as it would help in neutralising any other organisation or agency which could revamp the apprehensions of any hostile party and spoil the process.

Moreover, a transparent view of the complex issue at hand and that all the negotiators have a common understanding of the conflict is essential for any efficient peace process or negotiation.

INCLUSIVITY

Peace process negotiation is inherently influenced by inclusivity. All the stake holders should be brought to the negotiating table, and the dialogue should also take into account the grievances, hopes and aspirations of all the stake holders. All the parties should be ready to set aside pre-

22 Namrata Goswami, "Peace Negotiations and Dialogue in the Northeast: The Naga Case", *Restorative Justice in India: Traditional Practice and Contemporary Applications*, July 2017, http://www.spinger.com/cda/content/document/cda_downloadaddocument/9783319476582-c2.pdf?SGWID=0-0-45-1610645-p180318683.

conceived notions and judgmental mindsets and hear out each other's points of view. If the peace process does not have maximum number of people on board, a sustainable peace will be difficult to attain. A process of addressing the grievances and apprehensions of all stake holders should be identified and enacted upon to remove any residual grievances.

Both the negotiating parties have to have a clear and common end state in mind, which has to be acceptable for all parties involved and not leave any party aggrieved or feeling left out. If not, the aggrieved party might revert back to violence, thus, decreasing the peace dividend and prolonging the conflict. If the violence sustains, a future peace agreement may have to be penned with the violent party, which in turn may result in bitterness within the society resulting in fratricidal violence and targeted killings. A primary example for this is the Shillong Agreement of 1975. Although the NNC officially signed the cease fire agreement, Angami Phizo was either not consulted or by passed in the peace process.²³ The faction of NNC led by Isak Swu, Thuingaleng Muivah and SS Khaplang formed the NSCN, which then continued the violent movement resulting in the ultimate failure of the accord.

IDENTITY AND CONTEXT

The major insurgencies in northeast India have been ethnic or identity based. The perceived lack of commonness between sections of society is a root cause of the feeling of 'otherness', resulting in violent movement. The initial aim of the dialogue process thus should be to address this "us and them" perception. Since parties involved in the negotiations would

23 Kaka D Iralu, "Some corrections regarding the 1964 ceasefire and Shillong Accord", *Morung Express*, September 6, 2018, <http://morungexpress.com/some-corrections-regarding-the-1964-ceasefire-and-shillong-accord-of-1975/>.

be from varied ethnic or religious or regional backgrounds, the dialogue process should be insistent on accommodating the identity of everyone. The aim being to stress on commonalities rather than differences, and the shared worldviews and ideas between both parties.²⁴ The fear of loss of identity should be sympathetically addressed and steps initiated to retain and ensure the uniqueness of the ethnic groups.

Additionally, tribal rivalries or distinctions has also fanned ethnic militant actors in the region. Actions taken to diffuse or help over-ride these cultural or ethnic faultlines, particularly in the grass root level would go a long way to ensure a sustained peace initiative.

At the same time, the negotiators from the Government should be knowledgeable about the origins and context of the conflicts. Cultural familiarity and local knowledge are pertinent for the negotiating party to ensure that the process would move on unhindered and that no misunderstandings or animosities develop.

These components are likely to have a cascading effect on the peace process- if a democratic process is under taken it would automatically help in earning the trust of the opposing side, thereby helping the process to become transparent. This in turn evolves into a procedure with the support of more people thereby making it inclusive.

MIZO ACCORD: THE SUCCESS STORY

Circumstances leading to the Accord

The Mizo insurgency initiated in 1966 with 'Operation Jericho'²⁵ by MNF later evolved into a guerrilla war of attrition.

24 Ibid.

25 David Buhril, "50 years ago today, Indira Gandhi got the Indian Air Force to bomb its own people", *The Scroll*, March 5, 2016, <https://scroll.in/>

The MNF had bases primarily in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in the then East Pakistan (present day Bangladesh), where they ‘head quartered’ a parallel Government in Dhaka.²⁶ They also received funding from the Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and between 1972-75 the MNF had a base in Islamabad.²⁷ China also supported the Mizo insurgents. According to Zoramthanga, the current Chief Minister of Mizoram and ex- MNF insurgent, MNF insurgents had gone to China and “met Premier Zhou Enlai, Mao Zedong, Lin Biao and Chiang Ching” along with other Chinese leaders and they were given help by the Chinese in the form of arms.²⁸

However, the 1971 war and the creation of Bangladesh induced the Mizo rebels to shift their bases and headquarters from Bangladesh and they concentrated their bases in the Arakan region in Myanmar, where they were hosted by the Burma Communist Party (BCP), a Myanmar Insurgent Group backed by Beijing. As a result of this loss of their Bangladesh base, 356 MNF cadres led by MNF ‘vice president’ Lalnunmawia and MNF ‘defence minister’ R. Zamawia, surrendered to Indian SF’s on December 25, 1971.

Unlike East Pakistan authorities, the Myanmar Government was not sympathetic to the Mizo cause. In 1968

article/804555/50-years-ago-today-indira-gandhi-got-the-indian-air-force-to-bomb-its-own-people.

26 Shantanu Nandan Sharma, “Zoramthanga: From being an insurgent to becoming Mizoram CM”, *Economic Times*, December 16, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/elections/assembly-elections/mizoram-assembly-elections/zoramthanga-from-being-an-insurgent-to-becoming-mizoram-cm/articleshow/67109534.cms?from=mdr>.

27 Ibid.

28 “China and Pak Supported Mizo Insurgency, Says Former Chief Minister in Autobiography”, *The wire* December 10, 2018, <https://thewire.in/security/china-and-pak-supported-mizo-insurgency-says-former-chief-minister-in-autobiography>.

MNF, which had declared the Chin Hills (in Myanmar) as part of 'greater Mizoram', conducted attacks in which they lost 55 cadres.²⁹ This did not go down well with Myanmar authorities. Moreover, hostility between MNF and the Myanmar forces, MNF could not contact Beijing for further support.

The creation of Bangladesh and the subsequent loss of bases and mass surrender resulted in a decrease in the tempo of violence, and indirectly, although not immediately, led to the Peace Accord of 1986. An immediate result of the decrease in tempo of violence was the creation of the Union Territory of Mizoram (which was earlier a part of Assam as Lushai Hill District).

After 1971, although the MNF top leadership including Laldenga and his family with his aides, namely Zoramthanga, the 'secretary', 'captain' Tawnluaia and 'captain' Lalsangliana found their way to Karachi and were given shelter, they found it difficult to contact or communicate with their headquarters in Arakan.³⁰ However, after the creation of Bangladesh, Pakistan found little use for Mizo rebels.

Significantly, MNF also could not find any political support or sympathy from any other country for their cause. According to MNF 'vice president' Tlangchhuaka, "political aid to champion our cause was quite difficult to obtain and no one was ready to offer us." As a result, the top leadership of MNF, including Sainghaka and Lalnunmawia, were convinced of a need for a peaceful solution.³¹

MNF leader Laldenga himself seems to have been aware of the lack of political support. He had once stated that "Our party's demand was self-determination for the Mizos, which

29 Chawngsailova, *Mizo National Front and its role in Mizoram Politics*, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, 1997, p.115.

30 Ibid, p. 114.

31 Ibid, p. 178.

does not necessarily mean secession from Indian Union, When I look twenty years ahead, I cannot see any international opinion in favour of us.”³²

As early as 1973, while based in Pakistan, MNF leader Zoramthanga contacted Indian intelligence agencies, conveying his interest to engage in talks. Later he flew to Geneva from Pakistan to meet Indian intelligence officials, where he conveyed his willingness to return to India for peace talks.³³ In a letter to Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, he stated that:

Since 1973 my officials have been meeting your representatives... As I had mentioned, I have no doubt in my mind that the solution of Mizoram Political system will have to be achieved within the constitution of India.³⁴

Later, in November 1975, as per his request, India arranged for MNF's top leadership, including 'vice president', 'army chief' and 'party president', to join Laldenga in Cologne in Germany. Despite, differences arising between him and Tlangchhuaka the 'vice president' and Biakchhunga the 'army chief'³⁵, the talks did not break down and on February 18, 1976, MNF leaders and Indian officials issued a signed press statement in which MNF leaders 'acknowledged that Mizoram was an integral part of India' and conveyed to the Indian government their decision to accept the settlement of the problem in Mizoram within the Constitution of India.³⁶

32 Ibid, p. 198.

33 Ibid, p. 181.

34 Jagadish Kumar Patnaik, *Mizoram: Dimensions and Perspectives: Society, Economy and Polity*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 32-37.

35 Ibid.

36 Chawngsailova, 1997, op. cit., p.166.

Later a MNF convention was organized in Calcutta (West Bengal) on March 1976 wherein Zoramthanga was 'elected' as 'general secretary'. This gave the mandate for the MNF delegation to negotiate the peace settlement with the government. The convention helped turn a new page in the Mizo conflict, as it collectively decided to negotiate within the frame work of the Constitution of India.³⁷ The convention also decided to convert MNF into a political entity in India. And in the effort to bring peace, it decided to halt all violence, collect and surrender weapons and gather all insurgent MNF personnel in camps within a month. The government, on its part, decided to suspend all operations against MNF cadres with the exception of those attempting to cross the International Boundary.³⁸

On July 1, a formal peace agreement was finally signed by the Indian government and the MNF, Under the July agreement, as it became known, the agreement MNF accepted that Mizoram was part of India and agreed to forgo violence.³⁹

But this agreement hit a roadblock following doubts regarding surrender of arms and opposition from MNF leaders based in Arakan, and government forces resumed the anti-insurgent operations. Some steps taken by the new Indian Government which came to power in 1977 also alienated the Mizo rebels, and the talks started to break down. In June 1977 Laldenga was asked to leave the country. However, he persisted in the resumption of the talks and pursued the dialogue with the then Home Minister Charan Singh. Nevertheless, the talks soon derailed as Laldenga refused to give up the demand of forming an interim Government under him and his colleagues.⁴⁰

37 Ibid, p. 186.

38 Jagadish Kumar Patnaik, 2008, op. cit., pp. 32-37.

39 Chawngsailova, 1997, op. cit., p. 187.

40 Jagadish Kumar Patnaik, 2008, op. cit., p. 32-37.

Cracks started to appear amongst the MNF leadership as well. In Laldenga's absence three 'presidents' were elected by MNF based in Arakan. However, Laldenga was able to overcome the threat to his position and an MNF Assembly was convened in 1979 and Laldenga was elected as the 'president', while Zoramthanga was elected the 'vice president' and Tawnluia the 'army chief'. Additionally, those who opposed Laldenga's leadership were dismissed from MNF.⁴¹ But the talks were dead.

THE ACCORD OF 1986

The next attempt at political settlement was made after Indira Gandhi came back to power.⁴² Laldenga met the Prime Minister on April 4, 1980 and both sides agreed to a ceasefire and the talks resumed on April 13, 1980. Subsequently a cease fire was ordered by MNF on June 16, 1980. However, the peace process was terminated again in 1982, after incumbent Chief Minister (CM) T. Sailo refused to step down from power to accommodate Laldenga as the CM.⁴³ The ceasefire agreement also broke down, and insurgent actions and Counter Insurgency operations started again. After the breakdown, an organization formed by nine church denominations in Mizoram, the Mizoram Church Leaders Committee (MCLC) started talking with both the MNF and the government in an attempt to rekindle the peace process. In April 1984, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited Mizoram, where representatives from the MCLC met her and submitted a memorandum asserting that the MNF was ready to come to negotiating table. This restarted the stalled peace process and on September 6, 1984, Laldenga declared that he

41 Ibid.

42 L. Memo Singh, "The Mizo Accord", *Imphal Free Press*, June 25, 2014, <https://www.ifp.co.in/page/items/21852/the-mizo-accord>.

43 Chawngsailova, 1997, op. cit., p. 150.

was ready to order an immediate ceasefire agreement to create a conducive environment for settlement. He arrived in Delhi on October 29, 1984. However, Indira Gandhi was assassinated on October 31, 1984, the day on which he was slated to meet her. This again pushed back the signing of the peace agreement.

The negotiations picked up later when Laldenga met Rajiv Gandhi on February 15, 1985 and the government entrusted Home Secretary S. Pradhan with the negotiations. Earlier, these were spearheaded by G. Parthasarathy. In an attempt to pressurise the government and MNF to accelerate the peace process, students of Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) started a state-wide agitation in Mizoram on March 12, 1986. The Mizo students organised a relay fast and a general shutdown throughout the state on June 3 and June 27.⁴⁴ On June 15 Laldenga returned to Delhi for peace talks while a political mechanism was devised for the then Mizoram CM Lalthanwala to resign to make way for the MNF supremo. According to the deal, on a date agreed between Laldenga and the Indian Government, Lalthanhawla would resign and Laldenga would be elected as the leader of the Government and be sworn in as Chief Minister. The 'Memorandum of Settlement' was signed on June 30, 1986.

Thus, the Mizo insurgency which raged for two decades from 1966-86 was brought to a peaceful conclusion. According to the signed accord,

Notwithstanding anything contained in the Constitution,
no act of Parliament in respect of

- (a) Religion or Social practices of the Mizos,
- (b) Mizo customary Law or procedure,
- (c) Administration of Civil and Criminal Justice involving decisions according to Mizo customary Law,

44 Ibid, p. 212

- (d) Ownership and transfer of land, shall apply to the State of Mizoram unless the Legislative Assembly of Mizoram by a resolution so decides.⁴⁵

MNF agreed to a time bound process of surrendering its weapons and ammunition and return to civil life for its cadres. MNF also stated that they would not extend any support to TNV, PLA, or any such groups by way of training, supply of arms, or in any other matter. Reciprocating this, the government pledged robust steps for rehabilitation of MNF cadres as well as compensation programs for the families of those killed in the violence. Other provisions included provision of statehood to Mizoram (which was then a Union Territory). Additionally, the Mizos were reassured that their customary traditions and religious practices would be respected.

SOME OTHER SIGNIFICANT PROVISIONS OF THE ACCORD

- Inner line Regulation, as now in force in Mizoram, will not be amended or repealed without consulting the State Government.
- The rights and privileges of the minorities in Mizoram as envisaged in the constitution shall continue to be preserved and protected and their social and economic advancement shall be ensured.
- State will be at liberty to adopt any one or more languages to be used for all or any of the official purposes of the State.
- State would have its own University and High Court.⁴⁶

45 “Mizoram Accord 1986”, *SATP*, <https://satp.org/document/paper-acts-and-ordinances/mizoram-accord-1986>.

46 *Ibid*.

Today the Mizo Accord is considered to be the most successful instance of conflict resolution in northeast India. After the signing of the accord, instances of insurgency related violence have been negligible with only about 49 fatalities being recorded between 1992-2019 (till June 3, 2019).

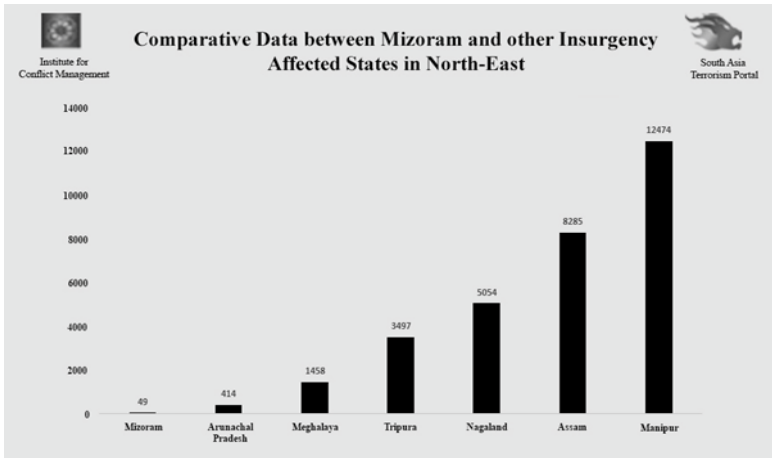


Figure 2: Comparative data between Mizoram and other insurgency affected states in North-east

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SUCCESS OF ACCORD

Some of the factors which have to the successful negotiation of peace accord and factors which constituted to the sustenance of the peace are:

Time bound process and a Flexible Political end state- Unlike the ongoing Naga peace process, the Mizo peace process was shorter. After the collapse of July agreement of 1976, the next round of peace talks was initiated in 1980 when Indira Gandhi came to power. Although she was assassinated in 1984, it did not spell an end to the talks. Her successor was also committed to the peace process.

Both the government and the Mizo rebel leadership displayed astute flexibility during the peace negotiations. Although the MNF started as a secessionist movement, they later displayed political flexibility by giving up the demand for an independent 'greater Mizoram', one of the pre-conditions set by the government for talks. A negotiation can only be successful if both parties can empathize and accommodate each other, and both parties in this case were ready to do so. On the government's part, it was ready to make political changes in the state Government and allow MNF's Laldenga to become the CM of the state.

Absence of factionalism and internal consultations- MNF continued to be homogenous entity throughout the span of armed insurgency. Hence the peace process was much less complicated as the GoI had only one insurgent group to deal with. Moreover, Laldenga continued to be the undisputed leader of the group. Although there were some moves against Laldenga, he was able to resolve the internal differences and consolidate his influence in the group, so that he could take a decision on behalf of the group which was acceptable to the rank and file. Moreover, Laldenga also consulted his organization members at every step of the process. Intra- MNF discussions were almost an integral part of the Mizo peace process. Although these internal consultations may have resulted in delays and back-tracking, this process did ensure that there was no internal dissatisfaction within the MNF leadership. And when the accord was signed all internal grievances were heard and addressed, resulting in a consensual decision within MNF to sign the peace accord.

Unity, Political transition and Stake-holdership- The Mizo movement was built on an inclusive ethnic identity comprising diverse Mizo sub groups. A probable reason for

the MNF not fracturing into factions may also have been the inclusive regional nature of the organisation, unlike that of the Naga's, Bodo's or ULFA. The MNF was thus able to align itself with all sections of the Mizo community and mobilize them throughout the insurgent movement, as well as the peace process.⁴⁷ Moreover, this inclusiveness also enabled the civilians to exert pressure on the actors involved in negotiation to bring the peace process into a conclusive end at the earliest.

After the signing of the accord in 1986, MNF rapidly evolved into a political party and integrated into the mainstream politics. The successful transition from an insurgent group fighting the authorities into that of a full-scale political party which was part of a system which MNF was up in arms against showed the political sense and organisational flexibility of the MNF. With transition into a political party which came to power in the state, the rebels became a direct stakeholder in ensuring that the accord would not break down and that there was no renewed violence in the state. This stakeholder ship cascaded to strengthen MNF's commitment to the accord.

47 Sushil Sharma, "Lessons from Mizoram Insurgency and Peace Accord 1986", June 2016, <https://www.vifindia.org/sites/default/files/lessons-from-mizoram-insurgency-and-peace-accord-1986.pdf>.

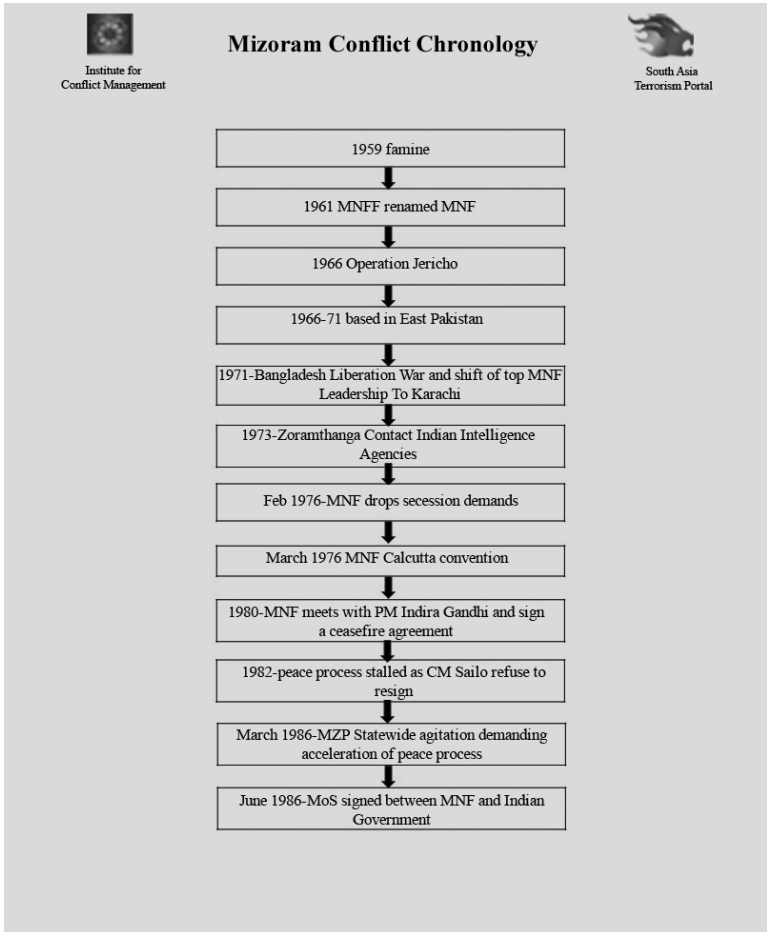


Figure 3: Mizoram Conflict Chronology

THE NAGA ACCORDS

The oldest and most formidable insurgency in the region is that of the Nagas. There were several peace initiatives taken by the government and civil society to resolve the conflict. Starting from the pre-independence Akbar Hydari Agreement

of 1947 to the latest Framework Agreement of August 2015, there have been four key peace initiatives so far.

THE NAGA-AKBAR HYDARI ACCORD 1947

The then Governor of Assam, Sir Akbar Hydari, visited Kohima, from June 27 to 29, 1947, and held long discussions with leaders of the NNC and various tribal groups. The result was the Nine-Point Understanding between the Governor and the NNC, giving broad concessions to NNC in the domain of Judicial, Executive, Agriculture, Education and Forest Departments, as well as Legislative, Land and Taxation issues.

TWO SALIENT POINTS WITH REGARD TO THE UNDERSTANDING

Boundaries – That present administrative divisions should be modified so as (1) to bring back into the Naga Hills District all the forests transferred to the Sibsagar and Nowgong Districts in the past; and (2) to bring all Nagas under one unified administrative unit as far as possible. All the areas so included would be within the scope of the proposed agreement. No areas would be transferred out of the Naga Hills without the consent of the Naga Council.⁴⁸

Period of Agreement – The Governor of Assam as the Agent of the Government of the Indian Union will have a special responsibility for a period of 10 years to ensure the observance of the agreement. At the end of this period the Naga Council would be asked whether they require the above agreement to be extended for a further period or a new agreement regarding the future of Naga people was to be arrived at.⁴⁹

48 “The Naga-Akbar Hydari Accord, 1947”, *SATP*, 1947, https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/nagaland/documents/papers/nagaland_9point.htm.

49 Ibid.

Thus, the essential feature of the nine-point agreement was providing integration of Naga areas, protection from outsiders, special powers in the sphere of judiciary, economy and decentralization of administration to the NNC, and a provision (clause 9) of review after 10 years. The agreement was signed between Governor Hydari and representatives of different tribes. Next year, on December 28, 1948, Governor Hydari passed away, undermining the implementation of the agreement.⁵⁰

Moreover, a faction led by Apatani Zapu Phizo denounced the agreement and conducted a controversial 'referendum'. This faction claimed that in the plebiscite, 99 per cent of Nagas had preferred separation from India. Subsequently, an armed faction of NNC emerged, undertaking violent attacks against Government forces. Naga Hills (then under undivided Assam) was declared a disturbed area by the government of India and the Army was called in.

Meanwhile, civil society and tribal groups continued their efforts to bring about an acceptable solution and bridge the divide. A resolution was adopted in Naga People's convention held in August 1957 for a unified Naga Hills- Tuensang area within the Indian Union.⁵¹ On December 20, 1957, Naga Hills-Tuensang Area (NHTA) was created as Autonomous District.

SIXTEEN POINT AND FORMATION OF NAGALAND

The NHTA arrangement did not arouse much enthusiasm. As a result, three years later, another accord was signed in 1960 between the Naga People's Convention (NPC) and

50 A Lanunungsang Ao, *From Phizo to Muivah*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2002, p. 9.

51 B.G. Varghese, *India's Northeast Resurgent*, Konark Publishers, New Delhi, 1996, p. 89.

the Government.⁵² The 16-point agreement was preceded by demands placed by the delegates of the NPC/ Congress (described as moderates) before the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru on July 26, 1960. Subsequently, agreement was reached during the meeting between the Indian Foreign Secretary Subimal Dutta and NPC delegation on July 27-28, 1960.

In the mid- and late- 1960s, violence by NNC continued intermittently along with the counter-insurgency drive by the SFs. Parliament passed the 13th Amendment to the Constitution in 1962 and formed the state of Nagaland on December 1, 1963. The NPC and peace mission held talks with Naga underground group. During the same period, tribal differences led to conflict within the Naga underground and much blood was shed.

Critics argue that division and mistrust within the Naga society started with NPC signing the 16-point agreement. The NPC was not a party to the 'Naga conflict' and hence the agreement failed to pacify the rebels.

Meanwhile, separately, there were eight rounds of talks from 1964 to 1968 with NNC, resulting in a Cease Fire Agreement, which was signed on September 6, 1964.⁵³ However, negotiations broke down by 1968, as a combined result of three factors. The primary reason was continued insurgent violence despite the ongoing negotiations. Second, a political vacuum created on the government side with the quick demises of successive heads of state, Jawaharlal Nehru (1964) and his successor Lal Bahadur Shastri (1966). And third, the

52 Bhowmick, Subir, "The Accord that never was: Shillong Accord 1975" in Samir Das ed., *Peace Process and Peace Accords*, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 2005, p. 210.

53 Nishit Dholabhai, "Naga groups charge Delhi with apathy", *The Telegraph*, September 6, 2003, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/north-east/nag-a-groups-charge-delhi-with-apaty/cid/802215>.

overtures made by the NNC towards China also resulted in the breakdown of talks.

The ceasefire which was applicable in Manipur's Mao, Tamenglong and Ukhrul Sub Divisions (Naga dominated areas in Manipur) was called off on September 1, 1972, after the then Chief Minister (CM) of Nagaland Hokishe Sema was ambushed by NNC militants.

A split within NNC also occurred during the talks, with the formation of the Revolutionary Government of Nagaland (RGN) under the leadership of Scato Swu, the 'president' of FGN.

SHILLONG ACCORD 1975

The 1971 liberation of Bangladesh had destroyed the militant sanctuaries in East Pakistan. Therefore, a large group of militants had surrendered after the war and were rehabilitated. Talks were restarted with the Naga underground groups resulting in the 1975 Shillong Accord.

The agreement was signed between Nagaland Governor L.P. Singh, representing Government of India and I. Temjenba, S. Dahru, Z. Ramyo, M. Assa and Kevi Yalley, representing the underground organisations, on November 1975. In the Shillong Accord, members of the Naga underground unconditionally accepted the Constitution of India and also agreed to deposit arms. However, the accord was signed by 'underground' leaders in their personal capacity and not as leaders of an organisation.

Importantly, Phizo, the NNC leader did not sign the accord, and another influential hardline group led by Thuingaleng Muivah and Isak Swu also saw the accord as a 'surrender'. Violence resumed in the late 1970s. The rebels were now stationed in Burma and operated along the Indo- Myanmar

border, and were clearly not interested in talks.⁵⁴ In 1980, NSCN was formed by the trio of Isak Chisi Swu, Thuingaleng Muivah and S.S. Khaplang

INCREMENTAL PROGRESS

Peace talks between the NSCN-IM and the Government of India started in the early 1990s with Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao initiating the process. The next Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda cemented the initiative when he met Swu and Muivah in Zurich in Switzerland on February 3, 1997, resulting in a Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) five months later. Atal Bihari Vajpayee took the process to the next level, meeting Swu and Muivah.⁵⁵ As a result, on July 1997, a CFA was reached and became operational from August 1, 1997. This led to Designated Camps in Nagaland and “Camps Taken Note Of” in Manipur, i.e., Oklong, Bunning and Chandel Camps,⁵⁶ for the Naga underground cadres. In 1998, an informal CFA was agreed upon with NSCN-K, which was later formalised in 2001. A Ceasefire Monitoring Board (CFMB) was formed, comprising representatives of the Central and State governments along with militants, to oversee the implementation of ground rules.⁵⁷

54 Iboyaima Laithangbam, “Naga rebels show no inclination to accept Shillong Accord of 1975 in letter and spirit”, *India Today*, May 15, 1979, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/indiascope/story/19790515-naga-rebels-show-no-inclination-to-accept-shillong-accord-of-1975-in-letter-and-spirit-822037-2014-02-28>.

55 Avirook Sen, “Bloody insurgency in Nagaland may finally become a thing of the past”, *India Today*, June 14, 1999, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/states/story/19990614-bloody-insurgency-in-nagaland-may-finally-become-a-thing-of-the-past-781101-1999-06-14>.

56 Sushil Kumar Sharma, “The Naga Peace Accord: Manipur Connections”, IDSA, December 18, 2015, https://idsa.in/policybrief/the-naga-peace-accord-manipur-connections_sksharma_181215.

57 “Centre, NSCN-K declare ceasefire” *The Hindu*, April 28, 2001, <https://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/2001/04/29/stories/01290005.htm>.

On 14 June 2001, during the annual review meeting between the government interlocutor and NSCN-IM, the ceasefire was extended “without territorial limits”.⁵⁸ The decision led to massive protests in the neighbouring State of Manipur, where the Valley residents (mostly Meitei) felt that such a move could eventually lead to a division of the State. The Union Government was forced to withdraw the decision on June 24, 2001, to pacify Manipuri sentiments.

The ban⁵⁹ on the NSCN-IM was lifted in 2002. This in turn facilitated easier movement of the Swu-Muivah duo for peace talks.

MAJOR MILESTONES

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s 2003 Nagaland visit and statement: Nagas (especially militant groups engaged in negotiation) consider the speech in Kohima by the Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee during his visit to the State as a landmark. Vajpayee recognised the ‘unique Naga history’, which formed the basis of the ongoing negotiations, observing: “As far as the Central Government is concerned, let there be no doubt in anyone’s minds that we are as keen as you are to achieve permanent peace with honour and dignity for the people of Nagaland. We fully respect your unique identity. It will be protected. We are proud of your culture. It too will be protected.”⁶⁰

58 Sudeep Chakravarti, “Naga ceasefire: ‘it’s a headache’”, *Livemint*, June 19, 2015, <https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/13Vhw0hB197Mjxf3Rpak4J/Naga-ceasefire-its-a-headache.html>.

59 “Ban on Naga outfit lifted”, *The Hindu*, November 27, 2002, <https://www.thehindu.com/2002/11/27/stories/2002112706740100.htm>.

60 Prasanta Mazumdar, “Nagas who fondly remember Vajpayee, mourn his demise”, *New Indian Express*, <http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2018/aug/17/nagas-who-fondly-remember-vajpayee-mourn-his-demise-1859073.html>.

Indefinite extension of NSCN-IM Ceasefire Agreement: From 1997-2007 the cease fire agreement was renewed annually. However, in 2008, both parties agreed to an indefinite CFA extension. The indefinite CFA has continued to be effective till date. The significance of indefinite ceasefire with NSCN-IM can be understood when compared with Suspension of Operations agreement signed with another northeast based militant group. In case of other militant groups, the SoO is periodically (ranging between six months to a year) renewed. For instance, the SoO with NSCN – Neokpao-Kitovi (NSCN-NK) and NSCN-R was extended for a period of one year (with effect from 28th April, 2018-till 27th April, 2019).

‘Covenant of Reconciliation’: There has been a cyclical pattern of violent upsurge during the CFA period mostly in the Naga inhabited areas of the Northeast region. This was mostly attributed to the rising factionalism. Naga Factionalism (internecine violence between different Naga factions) was at its peak in the years 2008, 2007 and 2006 with 119 killings (79 incidents), 90 killings (62 incidents), and 74 killings (60 incidents), respectively.⁶¹ There was a sharp drop in such killings in 2009 and 2010, mostly due to the ‘Covenant of Reconciliation’ (CoR) signed by the top leaders of NSCN-K, NSCN-IM and the Federal Government of Nagaland/ (FGN/ NNC) on June 13, 2009. This followed a Naga Reconciliation meet in Chiang Mai in Thailand from June 1 to June 8, 2009.

Signing of Framework Agreement in 2015: On August 3, 2015, GoI and NSCN-IM signed a Framework Agreement essentially for resolution of the protracted Naga issue. The agreement was described as creating a preamble for a final resolution.

61 Veronica Khangchian, “Naga Factionalism Escalates”, *SAIR*, Volume 10.41, https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/sair10/10_41.htm#assessment2.

Formation of Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) and widening of peace talks: NNPG was formed by NSCN- NK, NSCN-Reformation (NSCN-R) and four factions of NNC – Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN), NNC- Parent Body, Non-Accord faction of NNC/National People’s Government of Nagaland (NPGN/NNC-NA), and Government Democratic Republic of Nagaland /NNC-NA (GDRN) on December 14, 2016.⁶² The GoI interlocutor R.N. Ravi was also engaged with these groups to make the process more inclusive. NSCN-IM had expressed some reservations to GoI on NNPG’s involvement. The issue was sorted out after the Government assured NSCN-IM that the talks with NNPGs was informal in nature.⁶³

Stakeholder consultations during talks and after signing of Framework Agreement: Before signing the Framework Agreement, Naga *Hoho*, Naga Students’ Federation (NSF), Naga Mothers’ Association (NMA) and Naga legislators from Manipur and Nagaland were taken into confidence.⁶⁴ An office was set up at Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi where Naga militant leaders, civil society members and student groups could walk in to meet the government interlocutor R.N. Ravi with prior intimation.

Supra State Model Breakthrough and protest from neighbouring states: In 2011 media reported⁶⁵ that

62 Giriraj Bhattacharjee, “Nagaland: Widening Accord”, *SAIR*, Volume 16.20, <https://www.satp.org/south-asia-intelligence-review-Volume-16-No-20#assessment2>.

63 Giriraj Bhattacharjee, “Nagaland: Unresolved Reconciliation”, *SAIR*, Volume 17.38, <https://www.satp.org/south-asia-intelligence-review-Volum e-17-No-38>.

64 Kaushik Deka, “Hope floats for peace in Nagaland after the government’s personal touch to back-channel talks clinches a peace treaty with the NSCN(IM)”, *India Today*, November 30, 1999, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/nation/story/20150817-hand-held-to-a-historic-accord-820229-1999-11-30>.

65 Namrata Goswami, “A non-territorial resolution to the Naga ethnic conflict”, *IDSa*, November 15, 2011, https://idsa.in/idsacomments/AnonterritorialresolutiontotheNagaethnicconflict_ngoswami_151111.

the negotiations between the government and the NSCN-IM faction was in its final stages. The final settlement envisaged a “special federal relationship” between India and Nagaland and the creation of a “supra-State body” for the Nagas of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh to “preserve, protect and promote their cultural, social and customary practices”. But the Assam and Manipur State leadership were not enthusiastic about the “supra-State body” and the agreement was never signed.⁶⁶

HURDLES

NSCN-K Ceasefire agreement with Myanmar (2012) and 2015 unilateral abrogation of ceasefire with India: In 2011, late Khole Konyak and N. Kitovi Zhimomi parted way with Khaplang and formed NSCN-KK (now known as NSCN- NK). The 2011 split weakened the NSCN-K. Sensing that it was being left out of the peace talks, the outfit began clamouring that Naga nationalism was being stifled by the Indian government with its peace talks with NSCN-IM. In 2012, the NSCN-K signed a ceasefire agreement with Myanmar, allowing it greater freedom of movement within that country.⁶⁷ On March 27, 2015, NSCN-K unilaterally exited the ceasefire, declaring that “any ‘meaningful peace and political interaction’ between the two entities (NSCN-K and the Indian government) should be premised on the concept that Naga’s were sovereign people.” In 2017, S.S Khaplang passed away, and in 2018 the outfit was again divided with Myanmarese national Yung Aung assuming responsibilities and expelling the Indian leader Khango Konyak. The Khango Konyak led group joined the talks in 2019.

66 “Assam Objects to Naga Supra State Body”, *The Shillong Times*, November 19, 2011.

67 Wasbir Hussain, “Naga Peace Process: Gone Off Track” , *IPCS*, May 7, 2015, http://www.ipcs.org/comm_select.php?articleNo=4869.

The issues of integration, separate flags and Constitution remains the most contentious: According to a report submitted to the Rajya Sabha,⁶⁸ NSCN-IM still insists on integration of Naga inhabited areas, though it had given up its demand of sovereignty. According to 2017 NSCN-IM headquarters press release.⁶⁹

The issue of integration of all Naga territories is an integral part of the ongoing Indo-Naga political dialogue. Naga territories, which have been kept apart arbitrarily and indiscriminately by the British on the first place and then further divided between Burma (now Myanmar) and India under the leadership of then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru without the knowledge and consent of the Naga people, is unacceptable. Just as there cannot be a kingdom without territory, the Indo-Naga political talks, sans integration of all the contiguous Naga areas, will be a futile exercise”.

Most recently, NSCN-IM ‘general secretary’, Thuingaleng Muivah, in an interview to Northeast Live on February 16, 2019, declared, “there will be one Nagalim, only one government our flag and our constitution must be there. This is the stand we have given...”

On March 1, 2019, the present interlocutor to Naga Talks, R.N. Ravi has conceded that symbolic issues such as Naga constitution and flag remain issues that need to be resolved.⁷⁰

68 Security Situation in the North Eastern States of India, presented to Parliament (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha), July, 19, 2018, http://164.100.47.5/committee_web/ReportFile/15/101/213_2018_7_17.pdf.

69 Sumir Karmakar, “Cloud over Naga Peace talks”, *The Telegraph*, July 2, 2018, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/north-east/cloud-over-naga-peace-talks/cid/1453578?ref=search-page>.

70 “Delay for solution not with GoI: Ravi”, *Nagaland Post*, March 1, 2019, <http://www.nagalandpost.com/delay-for-solution-not-with-goi-ravi/191335.html>.

Peace Process in India's Northeast: An Overview

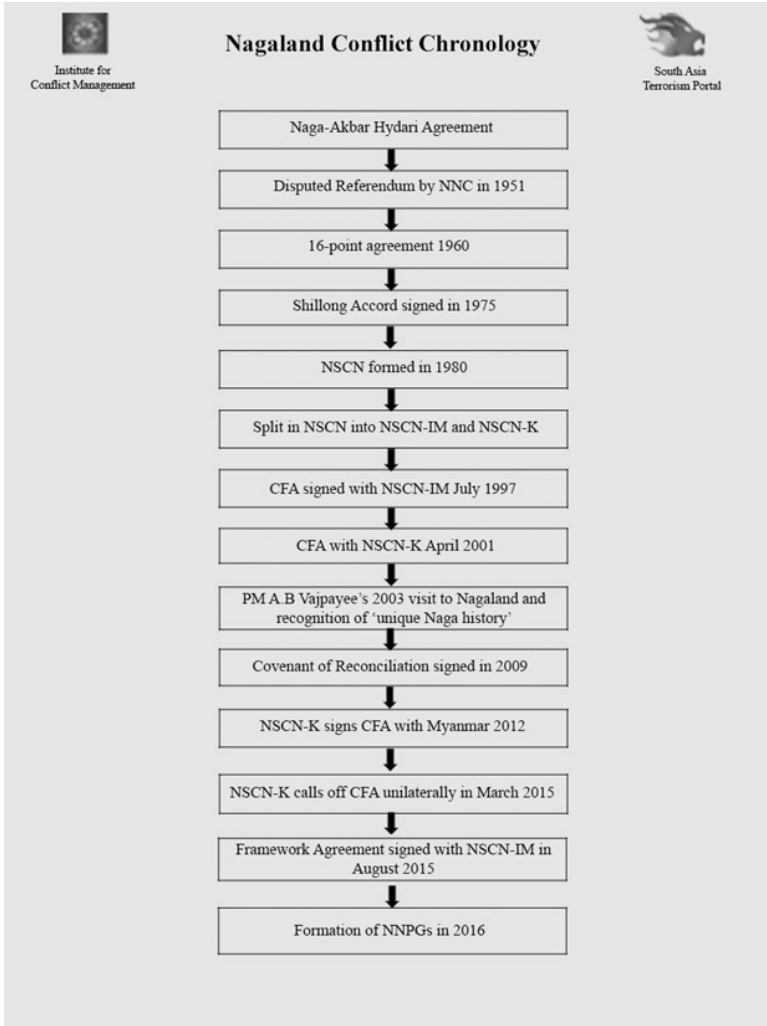


Figure 4: Nagaland Conflict Chronology

ACCORDS IN ASSAM

Multiple insurgent groups from the state with varied aims are negotiating with the Indian Government. The Government is also engaged with militant formations representing different regions and ethnicities in the state within the framework of peace talks. In light of these complexities, the various diverging issues and initiatives taken by Government with respect to Bodo, major and minor Hill tribe groups, Adivasi and Assamese outfits are discussed below.

BLT ACCORD

The agitations for a separate State for plain tribals later translated into a quest for a Bodo State in the mid-1980s. The 'cultural hegemony' of Assamese speaking people in the State further alienated the Bodos (the largest plain tribal group). A Separate Statehood movement led by the All Bodo Student's Union (ABSU), with the war cry of dividing Assam 50:50, aroused the emotions of the youth. Armed militant groups also became part of this fight for a separate homeland. The oldest such groups, Bodo Security Force (BdSF), under the leadership of Ranjan Daimary, was formed on October 3, 1986, to fight for a 'sovereign state' of Bodoland. On November 25, 1994, the BdSF rechristened itself the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). Another militant group, Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), with an aim to carve out a separate 'Bodo State within India', came into prominence in the mid-1990s.

Meanwhile, the Bodo Autonomous Council (BAC) was formed in 1996, after an agreement was signed between ABSU and the State Government. The principal issue that remained unresolved even after the signing of this accord was the number of villages to be included within the BAC.

But BAC failed to resolve the Bodo question. As a result, the Government engaged in a three-year long dialogue with BLT, one of the most violent Bodo militant groups operating in the region. In 2003, an MoS was signed between BLT and the Union and State Governments, leading to the formation of the autonomous Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) in Assam under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. After signing the accord, BLT chief, Hagrama Mohilary had said, "If the BTC accord signed yesterday is executed in letter and spirit, the Bodos will not have to go for another accord in future to assert their rights and development. BTC is capable of fulfilling the hopes and aspirations of the Bodos."⁷¹

However, the powerful militant group NDFB was not a part of the process and opposed the formation of BTC,⁷² believing it would undermine its demand for a 'sovereign Bodoland'.

In 2010, the Bodoland People's Front (BPF) (a political party formed after the dissolution of BLT) went back to its stance demanding a separate Bodo State. A resolution was passed declaring, *inter alia*,

...it is unanimously felt by all the people of Bodoland that the contentious issues... can be resolved only by creation of a separate Bodoland State. Therefore, the resolution has been moved, as decided by the Executive Council of BTC on January 20 last, 'for bringing permanent peace and all-round development to the Bodoland area'.⁷³

71 Bibhu Prasad Routray, "Bodo Settlement: Accord for Discord?", *SAIR*, Volume 1.31, http://old.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/1_31.htm.

72 G. Vinayak, "ULFA opposes autonomous council for Bodos", *Rediff*, August 2, 2012, <https://www.rediff.com/news/2002/aug/02assam.htm>.

73 "BTC House passes resolution for Bodoland State", *The Assam Tribune*, February 17, 2010, <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/mdetails.asp?id=feb1810/at08>.

MoS WITH KARBI ANGLONG DISTRICT BASED UPDS

The genesis and continuity of the insurgency in Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao (erstwhile N. C. Hills) in Assam were mainly due to prolonged neglect of the region by the central and State Governments, the strategic location of these underdeveloped regions, and ethnicity. In the late 1980s, a movement was launched for an Autonomous State comprising undivided Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills (now Dima Hasao) under Article 244A of the Indian Constitution. The movement could not attain its stated objective and the principal group behind it, the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) is now almost non-existent. In the early 1990s, Dimasas and Karbi militant groups made an appearance with help from Naga separatists who were active in these Districts, using it to escape counter insurgency operations in the neighbouring States of Nagaland and Manipur, and also for extortion activities. After the Government launched counter insurgency operations in these Districts to contain militant activities, an SoO was signed with Dima Halam Daogah (DHD) and the Karbi militant group, United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS). As seen in the case of several other militant formations, these groups splintered, and factions were increasingly involved in ethnic violence and fratricidal killings. However, at present all the armed groups except Karbi Longri North Cachar Hills Liberation front (KLNLf) have been disbanded.

The Karbi militant group UPDS was formed in March 1999 with the merger of two outfits in Assam's Karbi Anglong District, the Karbi National Volunteers (KNV) and Karbi People's Front (KPF). In 2002, UPDS agreed to a ceasefire

agreement with the Government.⁷⁴ After nearly a decade of the signing of SoO, UPDS signed a tripartite MoS with the Central and State Governments on September 25, 2011. The Anti-Talks faction of UPDS, rechristened Karbi Longri N.C. Hills Liberation Front (KLNLF) continued its violent activities till its surrender in 2010. After KLNLF's surrender, another faction, Karbi People's Liberation Tigers (KPLT) emerged to continue violent activities. Counter insurgency operations have weakened KPLT and the group is now largely defunct.

The MoS⁷⁵ signed with UPDS promised to convert the autonomous council to a territorial council, increase the seats under the council, and raise financial support and special packages amongst other provisions.

MoS WITH DHD

In N.C. Hills, Bharat Langthasa launched a militant group named Dimasa National Security Force (DNSF) in the early 1990s to fight for the cause of Dimasa tribals. Four years later, its 'chairman' Bharat Langthasa, along with a large number of cadres, surrendered to the government on November 17, 1994. Soon afterwards, Jewel Garlosa *alias* Mihir Barman floated the Dima Halam Daogah (DHD) in 1995, with the stated goal of forming a separate Dimasa State named Dimaraji. The outfit, was involved in various acts of violence in the District and neighbouring regions, until a ceasefire agreement was signed between the DHD leadership and the Government of India on January 1, 2003, in order to peacefully resolve the conflict. An year later, however, Jewel Garlosa broke away to form the

74 "UPDS agrees to ceasefire in Assam", *The Hindu*, May 24, 2002, <https://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/2002/05/24/stories/2002052404811100.htm>.

75 "Historic Agreement Signed between Centre, Assam Govt. and UPDS", Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, November 25, 2011, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=77623>.

Jewel faction of DHD (DHD-J) also known as Black Widow (BW). The ‘commander-in-chief’ Pranab Nunisa and ‘vice-president’ Dilip Nunisa took charge of what was left of DHD after the split, and called it DHD-N. On September 23, 2004, the undivided DHD team met the then Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil and submitted a memorandum demanding a separate homeland for the Dimasa tribals. After the split DHD-J engaged in large-scale violence throughout N.C. Hills and neighbouring districts. On March 8, 2008, Jewel Garlosa was arrested in Bangalore.

The following year, two batches of Black Widow militants surrendered along with their weapons. On October 8, 2012, the Central and the State Governments signed a MoS with both factions of the DHD – the DHD-N and the DHD-J. The MoS principally provides for enhanced autonomy for the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC) and a special package for socio-economic and educational development of the area. A special economic package of INR 2 billion (INR 400 million per annum), over and above the Plan allocation, for the subsequent five years was to be provided to the DHATC, to undertake special projects. The appointment of an interlocutor hastened talks with UPDS and DHD.⁷⁶ The arrest⁷⁷ of top DHD-J leaders Jewel Garlosa and Nirranjan Hojai also forced the belligerent group to surrender its arms and agree for peaceful resolution.

Nevertheless, the two DHD factions were the greatest violators of the SoO agreement. 462 cadres were arrested and

76 “Historic Agreement Signed between Centre, Assam Govt. and UPDS”, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, November 25, 2011, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=77623>.

77 “DHD(J) C-in-C Nirranjan Hojai held in Nepal”, *The Assam Tribune*, July 4, 2010, <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=jul0410/at06>.

82 weapons recovered during the SoO period.⁷⁸ Cadres of these militant groups or their splinters have also been suspected to be involved in major ethnic clashes (during 2001-2009)-such as Hmar-Dimasa, Karbi-Kuki Karbi-Dimasa and Zemi Naga-Dimasa in these Hill Districts.

Apart from above mentioned MoSs which have been finalised, talks are currently ongoing with several other militant groups based in the State.

ONGOING TALKS WITH ULFA

Large scale violent activities were launched by the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) from the late 1980s. The Government response was precipitated by the abduction and killing of Soviet coal engineer Sergei Gretchenko from Margherita in 1991.

The counter insurgency Operations codenamed Bajrang and subsequently Rhino were launched to contain rising violence. Following the crackdown and reprisals by ULFA, a ceasefire was announced in 1991. In 1992, ULFA had given a written proposal for peace talks, with almost the entire leadership onboard, with the exception of Paresh Baruah. The process did not make any headway as the ULFA leadership backtracked and slipped out of the country.⁷⁹ Even as the talks

78 “Militant outfits in peace process flouting ceasefire ground”, *The Times of India*, February 11, 2012, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/Militant-outfits-in-peace-process-flouting-ceasefire-ground-rules/articleshow/11853105.cms>.

79 Sushil Kumar Sharma, “Future Prospects of Peace Talk with United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) Genesis, Issues and Recommendations”, *VIF*, Occasional Papers, July 2016, https://www.vifindia.org/sites/default/files/future-prospects-of-peace-talk-with-united-liberation-front-of-assam-genesis-issues-and-recommendations_0.pdf.

failed, a large number of ULFA cadres, led by the head of its 'publicity wing' Sunil Nath, surrendered to the Government.⁸⁰

Another set of surrenders took place after the Bhutan operations. In 2003, the Royal Bhutan Army launched Operation All Clear to flush out Indian militant groups, mainly ULFA, Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) and NDFB, operating from its territory. More than 30 rebel camps were reportedly destroyed, and a large number of rebels were either arrested or killed. All those arrested were subsequently handed over to India. Thereafter, several hundred rebels, mostly belonging to ULFA and NDFB, surrendered before the Indian Government.

In 2005, ULFA constituted an 11-member People's Consultative Group to prepare the ground for formal peace talks with the Government. Unfortunately, it pulled out of the peace process in September 2006, following serious differences with the Government, particularly over its insistence that the 'sovereignty of Assam' be accepted as a pre-condition for talks.

It took two years of sustained efforts by the State Government to bring ULFA onboard for a peace process. On June 24, 2008, 'Alpha' and 'Charlie' Companies of ULFA's 28th Battalion declared a 'unilateral ceasefire' with the Government.⁸¹

Meanwhile, improved security cooperation between Bangladesh and India led to the handing over of top ULFA

80 Samudra Gupta Kashyap, "Between ULFA and peace", *Indian Express*, February 20, 2011, <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/between-ulfa-and-peace/752251/0>.

81 "Ulfa crack units declare ceasefire", *The Telegraph*, June 25, 2008, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/ulfa-crack-units-declare-ceasefire/cid/571328>.

leaders, including Arabinda Rajkhowa, Raju Baruah, Chitraban Hazarika, Sashadhar Choudhury, to India by the Bangladeshi authorities between November and December 2009.⁸² Except for Paresh Baruah and Anup Chetia, all the other leaders now came on board for peace talks.

After agreeing to unconditionally participate in talks with the Central Government in February 2011, the Pro-Talks Faction of ULFA (ULFA-PTF) signed a tripartite agreement for Suspension of Operations (SoO) with the Centre and State Governments in September of that year. Paresh Baruah announced the formation of ULFA-Independent to chart a separate path. In 2015, 'general secretary' of undivided ULFA Anup Chetia had been handed over to Indian authorities by Bangladesh.⁸³ In 2011, retired Intelligence Bureau (IB) Director, P. C. Haldar was appointed as the interlocutor for the group, and continued till 2016. Latest reports indicate that an accord with the group is almost ready, as the Government is ready to consider the major demands that were forwarded to it by the outfit

TALKS WITH NDFB FACTIONS

In October 2004, following sustained counter Insurgency operations, NDFB declared a unilateral ceasefire. This was followed by a formal signing of SoO in 2005. Over the course of the next decade, there were multiple splits within NDFB, for

82 Wasbir Hussain, "Crippling the ULFA", *SAIR*, Volume 8.19, https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/sair8/8_19.htm#assessment1; "Bangladesh hands over Ulfa chairman Rajkhowa to India", *The Times of India*, December 4, 2009, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Bangladesh-hands-over-Ulfa-chairman-Rajkhowa-to-India/articleshow/5298994.cms>.

83 "Anup Chetia handed over to India by Bangladesh", *Deccan Herald*, November 11, 2015, <https://www.deccanherald.com/content/511250/anup-chetia-handed-over-india.html>.

a variety of reasons, ranging from the crackdowns in Bhutan and Bangladesh, intensive counter insurgency operations, and the 2008 multiple bombings in Assam.

Currently, peace talks are progressing with two factions of NDFB – NDFB Pro-Talks Faction (NDFB-PTF) and NDFB- Ranjan Daimary (NDFB-R). Another faction led by I.K. Songbijit broke away from the Ranjan Daimary group forming NDFB-IKS and continued to engage in violence. The NDFB factions engaged in peace talks with GoI have also been involved in continuing illegal activities: 46 NDFB-PTF militants were arrested between 2005 and 2012 for illegal activities and 36 weapons were recovered from these militants.⁸⁴ No further updates with regards to SoO violations are available.

Separately, in 2008, 2012 and 2014 there was large-scale violence against Muslims in BTC areas by NDFB militants.⁸⁵ After a massacre of the Adivasi community in 2014, NDFB-IKS (now known as the Saoraigwra faction) has been put under sustained pressure by SFs and its activities have become minimal.

TALKS WITH ADIVASI GROUPS

Five Adivasi militant groups, All Adivasi National liberation Army (AANLA), Birsa Commando Force (BCF), Adivasi Cobra Military of Assam (ACMA), Santhal Tiger Force (STF) & Adivasi People's Army (APA), surrendered their

84 "Militant outfits in peace process flouting ceasefire ground", *The Times of India*, February 11, 2012, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/Militant-outfits-in-peace-process-flouting-ceasefire-ground-rules/articleshow/11853105.cms>.

85 Veronica Khangchian, "Recurring Bloodbath" *SAIR*, Volume 12.44, https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/sair12/12_44.htm.

arms⁸⁶ and began to negotiate with the State about the issues faced by their community. The major demand is granting them land rights and Scheduled Tribe status. These groups allege that Government did not initiate talks; and have warned that they will start an agitation for separate state if these demands are not met by 2019.⁸⁷

TALKS WITH MINOR HILL BASED KUKI AND HMAR MILITANT GROUPS

Various Kuki and Hmar militant groups, including the United Kukigam Defence Army (UKDA), Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA), and Kuki Liberation Army (KLA) are also active in the twin hill Districts – Dima Hasao and Karbi Anglong. These groups purport to protect the interest of the minor tribes from their dominant counterparts (Dimasa and Karbi). Since 2012, these groups have entered into peace talks with the State Government.⁸⁸ There has been little significant development in the talks with these groups.

Although the peace talks with militant groups have culminated in the signing of three MoSs, some of the issues that ignited the militant movements in Assam persist. As seen in the case of Mizoram, the top Bodo and Dimasa militants of

Assam who have come over ground have found political rehabilitation with top positions in Autonomous Council

86 Giriraj Bhattacharjee, "Farewell to Arms" , *SAIR* Volume 10.30, https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/sair10/10_30.htm#assessment2.

87 "Grant ST status or movement for separate Adivasi state will start", *The Sentinel*, April 12, 2018, <https://www.sentinelassam.com/news/grant-st-status-or-movement-for-separate-ativasi-state-will-start/>.

88 Giriraj Bhattacharjee, "Farewell to Arms" , *SAIR*, Volume 10.30, https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/sair10/10_30.htm#assessment2.

bodies.⁸⁹ Former top ULFA militant Naba Kumar Sarania had won 2014 Parliamentary election from Kokrajhar Constituency of Assam as an Independent candidate.⁹⁰The concessions agreed upon with these militant groups increase the insecurity for other communities residing in the same region. The election of Sarania from Kokrajhar Constituency is largely due to consolidation of the support of non-Bodo people for his candidature.

No doubt, the level of violence in the State of Assam had come down dramatically in recent years, due to multiple reasons that include peace talks with the violent groups, counter insurgency operations and cooperation from neighbouring countries. But the key to achieving lasting peace in case of Assam does not lie in a single accord. There is a need to understand and address the multiple ethnic faultlines arising not only from the historical past (foreigners' issues, land alienation) but also from recent developments such as creation of BAC and subsequently BTC, renaming N.C. Hills, ambiguous clause 6⁹¹ of Assam Accord. Solutions that are not community specific could be the way ahead.

89 Samsul Alam, "Debolal new chief of NC Hills council", *The Telegraph*, June 12, 2016, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/north-east/debolal-new-chief-of-nc-hills-council/cid/1413152>.

90 Samudra Gupta Kashyap, "From ULFA to LS, first non-Bodo MP from Kokrajhar", *Indian Express*, May 20, 2014, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/politics/from-ulfa-to-ls-first-non-bodo-mp-from-kokrajhar/>.

91 Clause 6 reads: "Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, Linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.

Peace Process in India's Northeast: An Overview

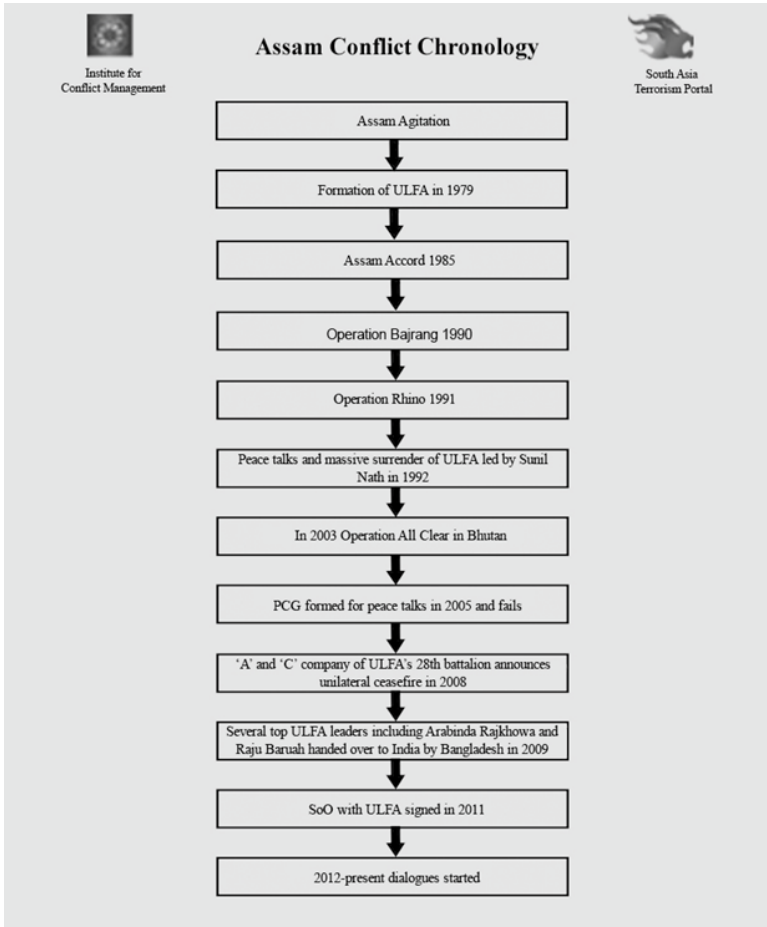


Figure 5: Assam Conflict Chronology

INTEGRAL FACTORS FOR A SUCCESSFUL PEACE PROCESS

The insurgencies in the Northeast have recorded tremendous declines, with overall fatalities falling to 74 in 2018, the lowest since 1992. The reasons for the decline

range from divisions within the ranks of militant groups, loss of Bhutan and Bangladesh as militant sanctuaries, and progressive negotiations between the Government and many of the active extremist formations in the region. The most important development being the engagement with NSCN-IM and the Framework Agreement signed in 2015.

If the 1950's saw the initial sparks of the Naga rebellion, the 1960's experienced the emergence of Manipuri and Tripura insurgent outfits; the 1970's saw the advent of Assamese the separatist movement; the 1980's witnessed the state of Meghalaya registering the initial sparks of armed violence, even as the Kuki insurgency emerged in Manipur. The 1990's saw the Bodo insurgency taking root in Assam. In short from the 1950's through to the 1990's, the region has seen the spawning of one major insurgency after another. However, there has been no major spread of insurgency into new ethnic groups or significant spread of armed movements into new geographical areas since 2000. Counterintuitively, the saturation of militancy eventually led to the current stabilisation of the security environment in the region.

The Security Forces and Government Administration have been able to gradually contain the violence throughout the North East. Between 1992-2002, the cumulative insurgency related fatalities, according to the *South Asia Terrorism Portal* (SATP) were 13,121. However, the figure decreased to 7,253 between 2003-2012 and to 1,361 between 2013-19 (until June 3, 2019).⁹² In pure numerical terms the current fatality rate is 1/10 to that incurred between 1992-2002 (Figure 6).

92 "Fatalities in terrorist violence in India's Northeast 1992-2019", *SATP*, <https://satp.org/datasheets/archives/india>.

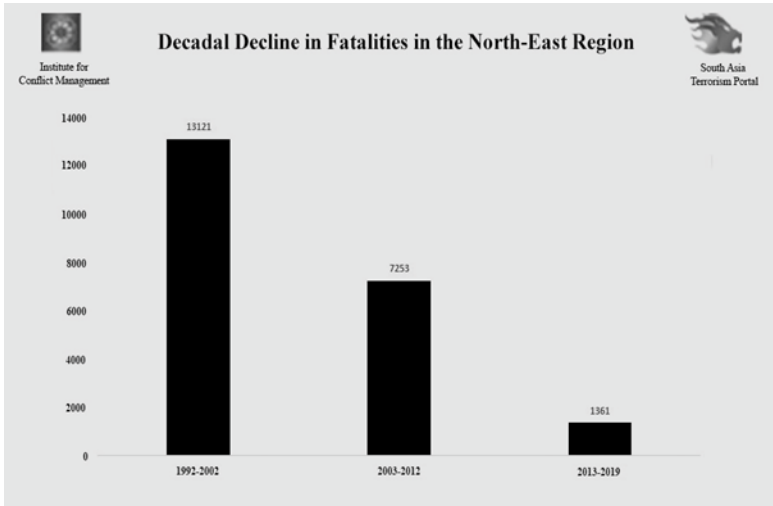


Figure 6: Decadal decline in fatalities in North-East Region

With the violence declining in the Northeast, the current environment is ideal for bringing to a close the multitude of insurgencies which have plagued the region. The average civilian in Northeast has been exhausted by continuing insurgency and resulting criminality, including parallel taxation and abduction for ransom. The idea of secession has run its course, and there is no substantial demand of 'Independence'.

A crucial reason for the demise of secessionist militancy has been the increasing move by residents of the Northeast out of the region,⁹³ to metros and other parts of India resulting in the significant erosion of 'otherness', which was prevalent earlier. This migration and consequent engagement is only likely to grow further in the coming years.

93 "50 lakh people may migrate from North-East in 5 years", *Hindu Businessline*, December 26, 2011, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/50-lakh-people-may-migrate-from-north-east-in-5-years/article23069875.ece>.

Support from the neighbourhood: The cooperation of neighbouring countries has played a significant role in bringing the groups to the negotiating table and the resultant decline in insurgency. Since 2003, the India government has been able to convince the sovereign Governments of Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar to dismantle the camps and bases of Indian Insurgent Groups (IIGs) based in their respective territories. The dismantling of major bases in the Sagaing region in Myanmar; CHT, Moulvibazar and Sherpur Districts in Bangladesh; and Samdrup-Jongkhar and Samtse Districts in Bhutan, took place over an extended period of time. The actions of these countries have been a major factor in the decrease of violence in India's Northeast. New Delhi has been able to bring the neighbourhood to act in an effective manner. However, since nothing is permanent in the world of international relations, there can be no certainty about the future direction of relations with neighbours and the sustainability of the current environment, which has weakened militant structures.

The government must take advantage of the flat-lining of insurgencies in the Northeast to address residual irritants, because the factors that have contributed to the current calm may not last forever.

Time bound Peace Process and Forming a consensus: The Government machinery must change its conflict management mode to a conflict resolution mode, and ensure that peace processes are executed in a time bound manner. If the peace process drags on for an extended period, the uncertainty of the end agreement persists. This entices militant groups to increase their cadre strength and arsenal. For instance, a senior official in 2017 noted that, "In 2015, when NSCN-IM signed an agreement, it had 2,000 cadres in its fold, after that they

recruited 5,000 more. The current strength is 5,000 as 2,000 deserted the ranks...⁹⁴

Moreover, chances of extraneous events derailing peace processes also increase if the process drags on. For example, on January 12, 2019, ULFA-PTF had threatened to pull out of the eight-year-old peace talks if the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) was passed to become a law. There is widespread resentment among the people of Assam against the Bill. In such a situation, ULFA leader Mrinal Hazarika argues, it will be difficult to continue with the peace talks if the Centre moves ahead with the passage of the bill.⁹⁵

Regrettably, one of the common features of most Indian peace accords has been the absence of all the top tier insurgent leadership unitedly joining the negotiation process. While some supported talks, others opposed it. As a consensual decision was often absent, armed violence continues and insurgent groups get factionalized, further complicating the conflict scenario. On November 11, 1975, Government of India signed an agreement with a section of NNC and Naga Federal Government (NFG). However, the NNC did not prepare the grounds for signing of the accord, and important functionaries such as Thuingaleng Muivah, who was the 'general secretary' of NNC and Isak Swu 'vice president' of NNC were staying in China when the accord was signed.⁹⁶ After the Shillong Accord,

94 Vijaita Singh, "NSCN-IM settles for 'shared sovereignty'", *The Hindu*, May 18, 2017, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/nscn-im-settles-for-shared-sovereignty/article18493154.ece>.

95 "ULFA Says They Will Pull Out of Peace Talks if Citizenship Bill Passed", *Northeast Today*, January 13, 2019, <https://www.northeasttoday.in/ulfa-says-they-will-pull-out-of-peace-talks-if-citizenship-bill-passed/>.

96 Samudra Gupta Kashyap, "What Isak Chisi Swu's death means: 'I' of NSCN who trekked to meet Chou; man who saw past, future", *Indian Express*, June 29, 2016, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/naga-rebel-leader-isak-chishi-swu-dead-nscn-2882241/>.

the NNC was completely side-lined and NSCN became the primary insurgent group of the Naga cause.

Similarly, in Assam, in case of ULFA, there were differences within the top leadership which led to the splintering of ULFA. The 'commander in chief' Paresh Baruah opposed the decision taken by the 'general council' to engage in unconditional peace talks. This resulted in a formal split in August 2012. Paresh Baruah expelled Arabinda Rajkhowa, the 'president' of ULFA and replaced him with Abhijit Asom. The Arabinda Rajkhowa faction is currently called the ULFA-PTF and has entered into peace talks with the government. However, the Paresh Baruah led ULFA-Independent, continues to engage in violence.

The lack of common consensus and resultant factionalism has been followed by narrower, non-inclusive and self-centered demands for peace talks by insurgent leaderships who were interested in forwarding the interests of their respective tribal or ethnic lineage. These demands, which were viewed as antithetical to the interests of other ethnic or tribal groups, resulted in factional violence and the mushrooming of minor insurgent groups as well.

This process can be seen in Nagaland, where the undivided NSCN fractured along tribal lines in 1988. A rumour had circulated that Swu and Muivah had 'sold out' and planned to oust Khaplang, seize arms from the Konyak cadres and surrender in India. In order to resolve the issue, a 'national assembly' session was called. However, while the meeting was going on, cadres loyal to Khaplang and the Myanmar Army attacked cadres loyal to Isak and Muivah, killing at least 140 Isak-Muivah loyalists, who belonged to the Tangkhul tribe. This resulted in a vertical split into the Khaplang (Hemi

and Konyak) and Muivah-Swu (Tangkhul- Sema) factions.⁹⁷ Meanwhile, Angami and Chakesang tribes remained loyal to NNC. Further complicating the inter-tribal rivalry, in 2011 cadres belonging to the Zeliangrong⁹⁸ tribal grouping of both NSCN-IM and NSCN-K formed the Zeliangrong United Front (ZUF) with the proclaimed objective of protecting the interests of the Zeliangrong tribes.⁹⁹

Rehabilitation of Militants: A robust system to help rehabilitate the militants and integrate them back into society is essential. Without proper rehabilitation, members may form their own group or form gangs of petty criminals. In one such recent incident, five surrendered NLFT militants were arrested for robbing a petrol pump at Maharani in the Gomati District in Tripura.¹⁰⁰ An effective rehabilitation plan is essential for the insurgent violence to end, and prevent its transformation into a law and order problem. In Mizoram an effective rehabilitation policy was also rolled out to lessen the chance of formation of any splinter groups. The issue of the surrender of 750 Mizo insurgents was resolved by the formation of two camps in the Indo-Bangladesh border, at Parva (Lawngtlai District) and Marpara (Mamit District). After surrendering their arms and ammunition in the camps, the rebels went to the rehabilitation centre at Luangmual on the outskirts of Aizawl.¹⁰¹

97 Sashinungla, "Nagaland: Insurgency and Factional Intransigence", *Faultlines*, Volume 16, January 2005, <https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume16/Article4.htm>.

98 Zeliangrong tribe is composed of 'Zemas', Liangmeis' and 'Rongmeis'.

99 Veronica Khangchian, "The Nagas: Troubling Fission", *SAIR*, November 21, 2011, https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/sair10/10_20.htm#assessment2.

100 "Five surrendered NLFT cadres arrested on robbery charge", *UNI*, February 28, 2019, <http://www.uniindia.com/five-surrendered-nlft-cadres-arrested-on-robbery-charge/east/news/1514306.html>.

101 Sushant Singh, "In fact: Happy Birthday peace: The Mizo Accord turns 30", *Indian Express*, June 30, 2016, <https://indianexpress.com/article/>

Over 100 surrendered militants were absorbed into the India Reserve Battalion (IRBN), about 70 in the Mizoram Armed Police and about another 100 in the State Government.¹⁰² The importance of rehabilitation was further stressed by a Parliamentary Panel on Home Affairs. The panel prepared a generous rehabilitation and settlement scheme for militants of NSCN-IM, which signed a Frame Work Agreement with the government in 2015. The panel report stated:

The committee, keeping in view the historical dynamics of insurgency, wishes to remind the Government that the most important aspect of any agreement with insurgents is the adequate rehabilitation and settlement program for the cadres of the insurgent outfits. NSCN-IM, being the largest group in the entire region, would have thousands of cadres who must be adequately settled to make the agreement successful and to prevent the emergence of any splinter groups.¹⁰³

Although 39 armed groups have signed SoOs with the Government, for varied periods of time, the resultant peace process has been cumbersome and time consuming and no final agreement has been signed to cement an enduring settlement so far.

explained/mizo-accord-congres-mizoram-insurgents-mizo-accord-anniversary-2884305/.

102 “Pragmatic 25 years ago: The Mizo Accord, June 2011”, *Takshashila*, <https://takshashila.org.in/pragmatic-25-years-ago-the-mizoram-accord/>.

103 Vijaita Singh, “Push for generous rehab scheme for Naga cadres”, *The Hindu*, February 9, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/push-for-generous-rehab-scheme-for-naga-cadres/article26226076.ece>.

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