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NAVIGATING TENSIONS: ANALYSING DISPUTE DYNAMICS AMONG NORTHEASTERN STATES IN INDIA

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1. INTRODUCTION

The word "Northeast" is a relatively new colonial phrase. The phrase was coined by the British to refer to a geographically defined area on the eastern Indian subcontinent. However, the idea of the Northeast became evident during the division of India in 1947 and the independence of Burma in 1937.

Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Tripura, and Sikkim are the eight states that make up northeastern India (Sikkim was included in the northeast in 2003). This area is encircled by numerous nations, including Bangladesh, China, Bhutan, and Myanmar, and has a substandard corridor connecting it to the Indian mainland. Just 1% of the northeast's borders are domestic, with the remaining 99% being international.

Unfortunately, because of the northeast's territorial organization, ethnic and cultural differences were disregarded when state borders were being drawn in the 1950s, which infuriated people. Furthermore, there was no physical link between northeastern India and mainland India. Thus, the idea of a central administration was never applied to a significant portion of the northeastern hill regions. Northeastern India differs greatly from the other Indian states in terms of ethnicity, language, and culture. One of the main issues in this area is the diversity of cultures and ethnic groups. Therefore, there are many different types of conflicts in the northeast, including separatist movements as well as communal, interethnic, and intercommunal conflicts.

In the northeastern states there have had a number of insurgency movements since India gained its independence in 1947. Additionally, these insurgency movements have had a variety of goals, including as creating independent states and calling for the highest level of autonomy or separate states or districts for their ethnic constituents within the parameters of the Indian constitution.

Sometimes, insurgencies have been rooted in the sense of alienation of the indigenous tribal as a result of the in-migration from neighboring countries or other states in India.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Problem

Despite the strategic importance of the northeastern states, there is limited comprehensive research addressing the multifaceted tensions and interactions among these states. This study aims to analyze the underlying factors contributing to regional tensions, including historical grievances, economic disparities, and the role of external influences.

2.2 Research Methods

This study intends to shed light on the actual experiences of affected populations, the participation of governmental entities, and the challenges and opportunities for resolving these issues by thoroughly analyzing secondary materials such as academic publications, newspaper reports, media coverage, and firsthand accounts. Furthermore, data from official government publications, records, and

reports are included. The study uses a descriptive and qualitative methodology.

2.3 Research Objectives

1. To identify and analyze the key factors contributing to tensions among northeastern states.
2. To assess the impact of historical and cultural contexts on current dynamics.
3. To provide recommendations for conflict resolution strategies based on the findings from the analysis of dispute dynamics in the region.

2.4 Research Questions

1. What are the key factors driving dispute dynamics among northeastern states in India?
2. What kind of conflicts prevail in the northeastern states?
3. What can be the approaches towards border dispute management in northeast India?

2.5 Hypothesis

The dynamics of disputes among northeastern states in India are influenced by a complex interplay of historical grievances, ethnic identities, resource competition, and political narratives, competition over natural resources which can lead to both escalating tensions and opportunities for conflict resolution.

2.6 Review of Literature

- **Samipyra Mahanta, "Understanding The Border Disputes Of Northeast India: Special Emphasis On Assam And Its Bordering States", Journal of Advanced Zoology ISSN:0253-7214, Volume 45 Issue 3**

It evaluates a number of contributing elements, including political interests, resource distribution, migratory trends, and ethnic diversity. India's focus on the Siliguri Corridor becomes vital given China's proximity to it through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The study also assesses the socioeconomic effects of these conflicts and suggests possible approaches to efforts at

peacekeeping and conflict resolution. It specifically analyzes border issues between Assam and its bordering Northeastern states, pinpoints the main sources of conflict, and provides practical suggestions for resolving them.

- **Tuhin K. Das, "Conflicts and Socioeconomic Consequences in Northeast India", Micronesian Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences 3(1):79-84**

The eight states that make up Northeast India have seen numerous conflicts. The conflicts are diverse and include separatist movements as well as communal, interethnic, and intercommunal disputes. This paper's empirical study demonstrates that war caused a drop in industrial growth in northeastern states. This outcome is consistent with other research findings.

It is also noted that in this area, there is a strong association between industrial expansion and socioeconomic status. The final section of this study discusses the government's policies and how they handle violence in northeastern India.

- **Indusree Bordoloi, "Inter State Border Conflict in North-East India with Special Reference to Assam Nagaland Border Conflict", IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS), Volume 24, Issue 5**

With particular reference to the Assam-Nagaland border conflict in the border areas of Golaghat district, this paper attempts to examine the interstate border disputes in northeastern India. The researchers aim to investigate how the recent Naga-Assamese conflict in the Golaghat district's border districts contributed to the breakdown of interstate peace, humanity, and communal harmony. This topic is the primary focus of this paper. This study will attempt to analyze the government's position in relation to the aforementioned issue.

- **Dharitry Borah, Debotosh Chakraborty, "Conflicts in Northeast India: Intra-state conflicts with reference to**

Assam”, International Journal of Research in Social Sciences, Vol. 8 Issue 7, ISSN: 2249-2496

With a focus on the intra-state disputes in Assam, this research attempted to investigate the origins of conflicts in Northeast India. Additionally, efforts were made to draw attention to the reasons why, in comparison to other regions of India, Northeast India has continued to be a region plagued by a high level of conflict. According to the findings, the state has remained the focal point of a number of intra-state disputes since some specific groups have called for a sovereign state, while others are engaged in a dispute over a separate state or homeland.

- **Vaibhav Kullashri, “Crystal Gazing Amicable Solutions for Inter-State Border Disputes in Northeast India”, The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS): ISSUE BRIEF**

This paper emphasizes that involving locals becomes crucial in settling interstate border disputes because doing so necessitates a drastic change in strategy from top-down to bottom-up. All parties involved, including the governments of the northeastern states, must anticipate that 2025 will be the year that the region's boundary conflicts are settled.

- **Sangkima (ed.), “Cross-Border Migration Mizoram” 31 (Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad Institution of Asian Studies, Kolkata)**

The book offers an in-depth exploration of migration dynamics in Mizoram, focusing on its historical, cultural, and socio-economic dimensions. The essays examine the region's complex cross-border migration patterns, influenced by geopolitical factors, ethnic identities, and economic needs. Key themes include the impact of migration on local communities, regional security, and the evolving relations between Mizoram, neighboring countries, and India. The collection highlights diverse perspectives, integrating insights from anthropology, political science, and economics to present a comprehensive

understanding of migration in this borderland region.

2.7 Scope and Limitation**Scope**

- Analyze disputes among key northeastern states, including Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh.
- Focus on the interplay of historical, cultural, socio-economic, and political factors that contribute to tensions.
- Explore existing conflict resolution mechanisms and their effectiveness in addressing disputes.

Limitation

- The evolving nature of disputes means that findings may quickly become outdated as new tensions emerge or existing ones are resolved.
- The complexity of ethnic identities and historical grievances may lead to subjective interpretations, impacting the objectivity of findings.

3. ORIGIN, HISTORY & CONFLICT IN NORTHEASTERN STATES**Origin & early history**

Numerous indigenous groups, each with its own unique culture, language, and customs, have lived in the area for generations. After the First Anglo-Burmese War²⁷⁴⁵ was ended by the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826, the British seized portions of the area in the early 19th century. The region's political and social landscape underwent substantial changes as a result of the start of British dominance in the region.²⁷⁴⁶

Independence and the Colonial Era

The northeastern states were governed as independent provinces after first being a part of

²⁷⁴⁵ Binita Kakati, “Conflict and development in Northeast India- Stories from Assam”, State Of Power Regions- India <https://www.tni.org/en/article/conflict-and-development-in-northeast-india?form=MG0AV3>

²⁷⁴⁶ Indusree Bordoloi, “Inter State Border Conflict in North-East India with Special Reference to Assam Nagaland Border Conflict”, IOSR JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCE (IOSR-JHSS), Volume 24, Issue 5

the Bengal Presidency during British rule. British colonial ambitions were centered on the area because of its strategic significance and abundance of natural resources²⁷⁴⁷. The integration of the northeastern states into the Indian Union following India's independence in 1947 was not without difficulties, though²⁷⁴⁸. The northeastern states were strategically important during British colonial administration because of their closeness to China and Southeast Asia. Land ownership and local governance changed as a result of British policies that frequently upended established systems.

Post Independence and insurgency

Numerous insurgent groups emerged in the area after independence, vying for independence or autonomy from India²⁷⁴⁹. Long-running disputes with the Indian government have engaged organizations such as the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA)²⁷⁵⁰, and others. Political, economic, and ethnic grievances have been the driving forces behind these insurgencies. The northeastern states encountered difficulties with integration, identity, and government following India's independence in 1947. Ethnic and cultural identities were frequently not taken into consideration when governments were formed and borders were drawn.

Ethnic Disagreements

Numerous ethnic groups with unique languages, cultures, and customs call the area home, including several tribes and villages. These communities' past travel patterns have

added to the region's diverse cultural fabric. Tensions between various populations have frequently resulted in violence and unrest, making ethnic conflicts a major problem in the area. With numerous programs designed to address the underlying causes of the conflicts and foster harmony among the various ethnic groups, peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts have been ongoing²⁷⁵¹.

4. TYPES OF CONFLICT

Ethnic and Territorial Disputes

1. Inter-Ethnic Conflicts: Tensions between different ethnic groups often arise over land, resources, and political representation. For example, conflicts between indigenous communities and migrant populations in Assam. Ethnic tensions and conflicts are prevalent due to the diverse ethnic groups in the region²⁷⁵². These conflicts often involve issues of identity, autonomy, and resource control²⁷⁵³. Examples include:

Naga insurgency: Seeking greater autonomy or independence²⁷⁵⁴.

ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam): Fighting for Assam's sovereignty²⁷⁵⁵.

Ethnic clashes in Manipur: which involve different ethnic groups.

Boundary Disputes: Disagreements over territorial boundaries between states and within districts, such as disputes between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, and between Manipur and Nagaland.

²⁷⁴⁷ "History of Northeast India", Indian Culture- Discover, Learn, Immerse, Connect- Govt. Of India

<https://indianculture.gov.in/north-east-archive/history-north-east?form=MG0AV3>

²⁷⁴⁸ *ibid*

²⁷⁴⁹ Samipya Mahanta, "Understanding The Border Disputes Of Northeast India: Special Emphasis On Assam And Its Bordering States", JOURNAL OF ADVANCED ZOOLOGY ISSN:0253-7214, Volume 45 Issue 3

²⁷⁵⁰ Indusree Bordoloi, "Inter-State Border Conflict in North-East India with Special Reference to Assam Nagaland Border Conflict", IOSR JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCE (IOSR-JHSS), Volume 24, Issue 5

<https://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol.%2024%20Issue5/Series-10/H2405106265.pdf?form=MG0AV3>

²⁷⁵¹ Urmitapa Dutta, "Ethnic Conflict And Peacebuilding In Northeast India: A Decolonial Perspective", Springer, Cham

https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-72220-3_9?form=MG0AV3

²⁷⁵² Indusree Bordoloi, "Inter State Border Conflict in North-East India with Special Reference to Assam Nagaland Border Conflict", IOSR JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCE (IOSR-JHSS), Volume 24, Issue 5

<https://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol.%2024%20Issue5/Series-10/H2405106265.pdf?form=MG0AV3>

²⁷⁵³ *ibid*

²⁷⁵⁴ "Inter-State Border Disputes In North East India & Its Spillover Effects", Chronicle Year Book

<https://www.chronicleindia.in/year-book/chronicle-year-book-2022/inter-state-border-disputes-in-north-east-india-amp-its-spillover-effects?form=MG0AV3>

²⁷⁵⁵ *ibid*

2. Insurgency and Armed Movements

Various militant groups demand greater autonomy or independence, leading to violent clashes with state forces. Notable groups include the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN).

3. Resource Allocation Conflicts

Disputes over access to natural resources, including land, water, and minerals. Local communities often feel marginalized in decisions made by state and central governments regarding resource exploitation.

4. Political Representation and Autonomy

Many ethnic groups seek greater political autonomy or recognition within the Indian union. Movements for separate states or union territories (like the demand for a separate Bodoland) illustrate these aspirations.

5. Cultural and Linguistic Disputes

Conflicts related to the preservation of cultural identities, languages, and traditions. This can lead to tensions over education policies and official language recognition.

6. Social and Economic Inequality

Disparities in development and access to resources often fuel discontent. Regions that feel neglected in terms of infrastructure and services can lead to protests and agitation.

7. Religious Tensions

Conflicts may also arise from religious differences, particularly between Christian and Hindu communities in certain states. These tensions can manifest in social unrest and violence.

8. Land and Land Use Conflicts

Issues related to land ownership and use, especially concerning traditional land rights of indigenous communities versus state-acquired land for development projects.

5. BORDER DISPUTES AMONG NORTHEASTERN STATES

Border disputes among northeastern states in India are marked by a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and political factors. These

disputes largely stem from colonial-era demarcations that often ignored local demographics and ethnic identities, leading to overlapping claims on territories.²⁷⁵⁶ For instance, the disputes between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh revolve around several areas where both states assert rights based on historical occupancy and administrative boundaries. Similarly, tensions between Assam and Meghalaya arise over inter-district boundaries and resource management, with both states vying for control over strategically important regions.

1. Assam and Arunachal Pradesh

The border dispute between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh involves several contested areas, particularly around the areas of the Siang and Lohit districts. Assam claims territories that were historically part of its boundaries, while Arunachal Pradesh asserts rights based on post-independence administrative decisions²⁷⁵⁷. Tensions often escalate due to land-use conflicts and resource management, with periodic skirmishes reported along the border.

2. Assam and Meghalaya

The boundary disputes between Assam and Meghalaya primarily concern several inter-district areas, particularly in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The Assam-Meghalaya border dispute involves several areas, including Langpih, Boko, and other regions²⁷⁵⁸. The conflict is rooted in differing interpretations of historical boundaries. The two states have engaged in discussions to resolve these disputes, but local opposition and political interests complicate negotiations. Resource allocation, especially concerning forests and water, further fuels tensions.

²⁷⁵⁶ Dharitry Borah, Debotosh Chakraborty, "Conflicts in Northeast India: Intra-state conflicts with reference to Assam", INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN SOCIAL SCIENCES, Vol. 8 Issue 7, ISSN: 2249-2496 <http://www.ijmra.us>

²⁷⁵⁷ Vaibhav Kullashri, "Crystal Gazing Amicable Solutions for Inter-State Border Disputes in Northeast India", The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS): ISSUE BRIEF

²⁷⁵⁸ Subir Bhaumik, "Assam-Mizoram clash: 'It was like a war between two countries'", BBC News <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-58066768?form=MG0AV3>

3. Nagaland and Manipur

The border conflict between Nagaland and Manipur is deeply intertwined with ethnic identities and the Naga political movement. Disputes primarily revolve around areas inhabited by Naga tribes that extend into Manipur. The demand for a separate Naga state has led to violent confrontations and unrest in the region. Manipur is concerned about losing territorial integrity, while Nagaland seeks recognition for its cultural and historical claims.

4. Manipur and Mizoram

The Manipur-Mizoram border dispute has seen tensions primarily around the boundary near the border district of Churachandpur. Local communities often engage in land-use disputes, exacerbated by demographic changes and migration. Encroachment and resource competition have led to clashes, with both states struggling to assert control over disputed territories.

5. Assam and Nagaland

Assam and Nagaland have had historical conflicts primarily around the districts of Karbi Anglong and Wokha.²⁷⁵⁹ The border has been a flashpoint for ethnic tensions, with claims often based on historical affiliations of various tribal groups. The conflict is further complicated by issues related to land rights and resource control.

6. Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim

While less contentious than other borders, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim have faced minor disputes regarding areas near the Tawang region. These issues typically arise from unclear demarcations and local grievances related to land use and resources.

7. Assam-Tripura

The Assam-Tripura border dispute involves areas like Karimganj district²⁷⁶⁰. The conflict has

led to occasional tensions and disputes over the exact boundary lines between the two states²⁷⁶¹.

6. DANGERS OF INSURGENCY

The history, geography, and a variety of socioeconomic elements of the Northeast are all deeply ingrained in the region's insurgency. The region's weak geographical relationship with the rest of India is indicated by the fact that 98% of its borders are international borders. Although the region's population of about 3.90 crores makes up only 3% of the total population, between 1951 and 2001, its growth rate surpassed 200 percent, placing a significant burden on livelihoods and contributing to land fragmentation. Tribals make up 27% of the population of the overall region, excluding Assam, while in the other states, that number rises to 58%.

The area has continued to be a hotbed of insurgency since independence. The shift from violence to stability has been made possible by actions taken over the years by several stakeholders²⁷⁶². Peace, nevertheless, is still elusive in this resource-rich area. Over the past eight years, insurgent incidents in the northeastern states have decreased by 80%, while security force casualties and civilian fatalities have decreased by 75% and 99%, respectively²⁷⁶³.

7. ARMS & NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING

The northeastern states of India have been grappling with the twin problems of arms and drug trafficking for decades. These issues have had significant implications for the region's security, development, and social fabric.

Arms Trafficking

The porous borders with neighboring countries like Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Bhutan have

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/explainers/2021/Jul/29/explained-why-assam-involved-in-many-border-disputes-with-neighbouring-states-2337200.html>

²⁷⁶¹ *ibid*

²⁷⁶² "A New Era of Peace and Prosperity in the North East", Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 13 November 2022.

²⁷⁶³ "Insurgency in Northeast Reduced by 80 percent, Civilian Deaths by 99 percent: MHA", The Times of India, 28 April 2022.

²⁷⁵⁹ Dharitry Borah, Debotosh Chakraborty, "Conflicts in Northeast India: Intra-state conflicts with reference to Assam", International Journal Research in Social Sciences, Vol. 8 Issue 7, ISSN: 2249-2496 <http://www.ijmra.us>

²⁷⁶⁰ "Explained: Why Assam involved in many border disputes with neighbouring states?", The New Indian Express

made the northeastern states vulnerable to arms smuggling. Insurgent groups operating in the region often obtain weapons from these sources, fueling violence and instability. The availability of cheap, readily accessible weapons has also contributed to the proliferation of small-scale conflicts and criminal activities.

Drug Trafficking

The northeastern region is strategically located on the "Golden Triangle," a notorious drug production hub that includes parts of Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand. This proximity has made the states vulnerable to the influx of illicit drugs, particularly heroin, opium, and synthetic drugs. The drug trade has had devastating consequences for the local population, leading to increased addiction, crime, and health problems.

Interconnected Issues

Arms and drug trafficking are often interconnected. Insurgent groups may engage in drug trafficking to fund their activities, while drug cartels may use weapons to protect their interests. This nexus between the two has made it difficult to address either problem in isolation.

The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) 1958²⁷⁶⁴

It is a controversial law in India that grants extensive powers to the Indian armed forces in areas designated as "disturbed areas." To combat insurgency and uphold law and order, the Indian government has enacted the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in portions of the NER. These areas are typically regions experiencing high levels of insurgency or militancy. Recent developments:

AFSPA repeal in parts of Manipur: In 2022, the Indian government announced the repeal of AFSPA in certain districts of Manipur. This was a significant step towards reducing human rights abuses in the region.

Ongoing debate: The debate over AFSPA continues, with many advocates calling for its complete repeal. However, the government has argued that the law is necessary to maintain security in areas affected by insurgency.

8. SPECIFIC CONFLICT PROFILES FOR EACH STATE

Arunachal Pradesh: Since the cease-fire with NSCN, which was in effect in Tirap District, the state has maintained its tranquility. With Hindi becoming the region's linguistic franca, the strategies put in place in the 1950s under the direction of renowned anthropologist Verrier Elwin have brought about a great deal of unity. The arrival of comparatively more adventurous Chakma migrants from Bangladesh in the State in significant numbers caused some unease, but it seems to have passed²⁷⁶⁵. Restrictions in work options and widening income gaps may be causes of conflict.

Assam: The state is afflicted by a wide range of ethnic conflicts, such as protests against the "influx of foreigners" and the government's alleged incapacity to deport them; periodic conflicts between religious and linguistic groups; and growing disputes between tribal communities that want local autonomy, among other issues²⁷⁶⁶. The longest insurgency history was in Assam. Furthermore, practically every tribal community has some armed groups that are said to be protecting its interests.

Manipur: With over fifteen violent outfits representing various tribes and communities operating there, Manipur is currently the "most insurgency ridden" state. It has also turned into a self-financing extortion operation, especially in the Valley. More over 70% of Manipur's people, who are primarily members of the culturally unique Meitei community, live in one-fourth of the state. Meitei kings ruled the state as a monarchy, which later evolved into a princely state. Following independence, the

²⁷⁶⁴ The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 No. 28, Act of Parliament, 1958 (India)

²⁷⁶⁵ Prof. J.K. Gogoi, Prof. H. Goswami, Prof. K. C. Borah, "Problems Of Border Areas In North East India: Implications For The Thirteenth Finance Commission", The Thirteenth Finance Commission Government Of India, New Delhi

²⁷⁶⁶ *Supra* 21 at 12

Meitei's socioeconomic power declined with reserves playing a major role in the rise of the indigenous people²⁷⁶⁷. The Meitei insurgency began in the 1960s as a result of dissatisfaction in some Meitei societies against the State's merger with the Indian Union.

Meghalaya: The state does not suffer the same level of violence that permeates many other areas of the region. There haven't been any significant issues in the state other from violence against "outsiders," especially the minority of people who speak Bengali. Some issues of concern for the future are as follows:

- a) Growing conflicts of interest between the State Government and the District Councils of the Sixth Schedule, which covers the entire State.
- b) Growing antagonism between tribes.
- c) Growing concerns over Bangladeshi infiltration, especially in the Garo Hills

Mizoram: The state serves as a model for all other states impacted by violence due to its history of violent insurgency and subsequent return to peace. Since the Mizo National Front and the union government reached a "accord" in 1986²⁷⁶⁸ and Mizoram was granted statehood the following year, there is total peace and harmony in the region. The State is credited with implementing development programs and making agriculture profitable in a commendable manner. The only possible points of contention are the widening gaps in wealth and income in a society that is generally equitable and the discontent of the three minor non-Mizo District councils with the State Government over matters of identity and reservation as STs.

Nagaland: Although it was the initial "hot spot" of insurgency, the State is essentially devoid of overt violent conflict since the cease-fire with the NSCN's dominating Muivah-Swu²⁷⁶⁹. Overall, the *Khaplang* minority faction, which opposes

the cease-fire, has likewise stayed peaceful. Concerns about the future include the following:

- (a) The ongoing question of a definitive political agreement, which includes the call for "greater Nagaland" or "*Nagalim*" which, as was already mentioned, is creating unease in the surrounding regions, especially Manipur.
- (b) Increasing competition for the State's meager resources and the issue of educated youth unemployment.

Sikkim: The state has not only succeeded in developing through decentralized planning, but it has also avoided significant disputes by adhering to its constitutional obligation to maintain harmony among the many ethnic groups, primarily the *Lepchas*, *Bhutiyas*, and *Nepalis*²⁷⁷⁰.

Tripura: Large-scale migrations from the newly formed East Pakistan in 1947 changed the state's demographic makeup, turning it from a predominantly tribal region to one where the majority of people speak Bengali. Tribals were forced into the forests after being evicted from their agricultural holdings at arbitrary prices. Tribal-dominated Tripura National Volunteers (TNV) became one of the most dangerous extremist groups in the Northeast as a result of the ensuing tensions, which led to significant violence and widespread terror²⁷⁷¹. The State was vulnerable to the "side effects" of the insurgency because of its proximity to Mizoram. However, there has been a significant decrease in conflict as a result of successful land reforms, the decentralization of "non-scheduled areas," the inclusion of tribal lands under the jurisdiction of an independent "Sixth Schedule" council, and the methodical advancement of agriculture. There are concerns of a rise in inter-tribal clashes as a result of the shifting religious makeup of tribal groups, especially the *Jamatiyas*. Tribal-nontribal conflicts are decreasing, but tribals are becoming increasingly resentful of the limitations placed

²⁷⁶⁷ *ibid*

²⁷⁶⁸ Mizo Peace Accord 1986

²⁷⁶⁹ *Supra* 21 at 12

²⁷⁷⁰ *Supra* 21 at 12

²⁷⁷¹ *ibid*

on their "freedom to use" the forests and their ostensible involvement in district development.

Notwithstanding the State's remarkable progress over the past ten years, the virtual prohibition on the transboundary flow of products and services from Tripura to Bangladesh has slowed the State's rate of economic expansion. When engaging in bilateral talks for deeper economic cooperation with Bangladesh, the Ministry of External Affairs ought to bring up this particular Tripura issue.

9. STRATEGIES FOR RESOLVING DISPUTES

In the Northeast, the following methods have been used to resolve conflicts:

- (i) security forces or "police action"
- (ii) increased local autonomy through mechanisms like the Sixth Schedule, Article 371C²⁷⁷² of the constitution in the case of Manipur, or "tribe specific accords" in Assam;
- (iii) talks with insurgent groups
- (iv) development initiatives, such as special economic packages. Many of these techniques have shown short-term success. Nevertheless, several of these therapies have also had unanticipated negative effects. The way disputes have been "resolved" in some places has resulted in new ones in other places and a never-ending demand cycle. But there's no denying that preventing and resolving conflicts in the Northeast would call for a careful combination of

10. BUILDING CAPACITY FOR RESOLVING CONFLICTS

1. Capacity Building in Administration

Effective conflict resolution begins with strong administrative practices. Training programs focused on conflict management, negotiation skills, and communication should be implemented for administrative officials²⁷⁷³. These initiatives can help develop policies that

promote inclusivity and address local grievances. By fostering collaborative governance through partnerships between government officials and civil society organizations, transparency and accountability can be enhanced, ensuring that diverse community needs are considered.

2. Capacity Building in Police

The police has an important role in maintaining peace and order. Community policing training is essential to equip officers with the skills needed to engage constructively with local populations²⁷⁷⁴. Additionally, cultural sensitivity workshops can help law enforcement understand the unique contexts of various communities, reducing the likelihood of misunderstandings. Implementing crisis management simulations will prepare police to handle conflicts effectively and prevent escalation, fostering a more peaceful environment.

3. Capacity Building in Local Governance Institutions

Local governance institutions are vital in addressing community issues. Leadership development programs can empower local leaders with conflict resolution techniques and consensus-building skills. Encouraging participatory governance initiatives will allow citizens to be involved in decision-making, creating a platform for dialogue that can address local grievances proactively²⁷⁷⁵. Moreover, training in resource allocation will help local institutions distribute resources fairly, alleviating tensions related to inequitable access.

4. Capacity Building in Regional Institutions

Regional cooperation is key to effective conflict resolution. Promoting dialogue between neighboring states can address cross-border issues and foster a regional approach to conflict management. Establishing regional conflict resolution mechanisms will facilitate

²⁷⁷² INDIA CONST. art., S 371C

²⁷⁷³ Biswajit Mohapatra, "Ethnic Communities and Conflicts in North East India: Building up a Framework for Conflict resolution", LIBERAL STUDIES JOURNAL, Vol. 4, No. 1, PDP, Gandhinagar

²⁷⁷⁴ *supra* 29 at 15

²⁷⁷⁵ *supra* 29 at 15

quicker responses to emerging conflicts. Additionally, creating knowledge-sharing platforms for regional institutions to exchange best practices and innovative solutions will strengthen collaborative efforts in peacebuilding.

5. Capacity Building in Other Institutions

Beyond government and law enforcement, empowering civil society organizations is crucial for conflict resolution. Providing training for NGOs and community groups in advocacy and mediation will enhance their ability to address local conflicts. Educational institutions can also play a significant role by incorporating conflict resolution and peacebuilding into curricula, nurturing a culture of dialogue among youth²⁷⁷⁶. Furthermore, media training focused on responsible reporting can prevent misinformation and help de-escalate tensions in the community.

II. A SHIFT IN THE STRATEGY FOR HANDLING BORDER CONFLICTS

Since the government has always had a passive stance toward the northeast, early remedies necessitate a proactive approach. Changing the policy initiative from a "top-down" to a "bottom-up" approach is the first and most important step. It denotes the establishment of village-level committees that subsequently resonate at a larger level. It will boost locals' self-esteem and spread the word about a peaceful option for improved living conditions. Otherwise, the previous committee's lack of representation prevented it from addressing the locals' complaints. Therefore, it is essential and more relevant for Northeastern people to have locals on the regional committee. Due to its historical neglect, the northeast is now suspicious of any constructive developments. Locals' involvement would improve communication by bridging the divide between the public and the government. Establishing institutions that must include locals as partners is essential to fostering confidence. However, the answer must be viewed as a joint gain

²⁷⁷⁶ *ibid*

rather than a victory or loss for any state, and it must be implemented with the highest level of responsibility. The government must promote the concept of "mutual co-existence and development" with the assistance of NGOs, civic society, and student organizations.

12. ETHNIC & POLITICAL DYNAMICS

The northeastern states of India are marked by rich ethnic diversity and complex political dynamics, with numerous tribes, each possessing unique identities, languages, and cultures. This diversity fuels identity politics, leading to the formation of regional parties and movements that advocate for the rights of specific communities, often resulting in demands for greater autonomy and, at times, insurgencies. Governance is challenged by the need to balance these diverse interests, and inter-state relations can be strained due to border disputes and resource competition. Recent developments indicate a growing engagement from younger generations and civil society, pushing for social justice and sustainable development, highlighting the need for inclusive governance that respects the region's multifaceted identities.

13. CURRENT SITUATION

The current landscape of border disputes among northeastern states in India is marked by a mix of active negotiations, persistent tensions, and efforts towards resolution. Several states, particularly Assam and Meghalaya, have been engaged in ongoing discussions aimed at resolving their overlapping claims²⁷⁷⁷. In recent years, they reached a significant agreement in 2022 that addressed six of the twelve disputed areas, reflecting a positive step forward, though challenges remain in implementing these resolutions.

Despite these efforts, tensions continue in certain regions, such as between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, where incidents of clashes have been reported. Community involvement has become increasingly prominent in these

²⁷⁷⁷ Dr Pushpita Das, "Inter-state Border Disputes in Northeast India", Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi.

discussions, with local populations advocating for their rights and interests, which is essential for addressing underlying grievances and fostering long-term peace²⁷⁷⁸.

Political will at both state and central levels is also contributing to the resolution process. The central government has been facilitating dialogues and encouraging states to find amicable solutions, showcasing a proactive approach to conflict management. However, ethnic identities play a crucial role in these disputes, as various tribal groups assert historical claims over land, necessitating sensitive handling during negotiations.

Resource management issues further complicate the situation, with competition over land, water, and minerals intensifying conflicts. States are recognizing the importance of collaborative resource management to prevent disputes and promote cooperation. Legal frameworks are being established, with border commissions and formal agreements being utilized to clarify boundaries and provide structured pathways for dispute resolution.

14. GOVERNMENT OF INDIA'S APPROACH TO ADDRESS CONFLICT IN NORTHEAST

North-East Areas Re-organization Act, 1971²⁷⁷⁹

The North-East Areas Re-organization Act, 1971, was a pivotal legislative measure aimed at reorganizing the northeastern region of India by creating the state of Manipur and the Union Territory of Mizoram from parts of Assam. The Act sought to address the unique cultural and ethnic identities of these regions, promoting better governance and local self-administration. It established a framework that empowered local populations and included special provisions to protect the rights of tribal communities. By recognizing the aspirations of various ethnic groups, the Act aimed to foster stability and reduce potential conflicts, significantly shaping the political landscape of northeastern India.

²⁷⁷⁸ *Supra* note 33 at 17

²⁷⁷⁹ The North-Eastern Areas (Re-organisation) Act, 1971, No. 81, Acts of Parliament (1971)

National Socialist Council Of Naga

The signing of framework agreements, such as the one with NSCN in 2015, has been a critical step towards resolving conflicts. These agreements outline the principles of peace and governance, recognizing the unique identities of different communities.

Development Initiatives

The government invests in socio-economic development to address the root causes of conflict, focusing on infrastructure, education, health, and employment. Programs like the **North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS)** aim to enhance connectivity and economic growth in the region.

North Eastern Council (NEC) Act 1971²⁷⁸⁰

The North Eastern Council (NEC) Act was enacted in 1971 to promote the socio-economic development of the northeastern states of India. The NEC aims to foster balanced and integrated development of the northeastern region, addressing issues unique to the area. Coordination between the states in the region and between the states and the federal government is facilitated by the Council. The old "conflict resolution provision" mandating the Council to "discuss issues of mutual interest to two or more states in the region and to advise the Central Government" may be reinstated by appropriately amending the NEC Act of 1971.

The Mizo Peace Accord 1986²⁷⁸¹

The Mizo Peace Accord, signed in 1986, marked a significant turning point in the history of Mizoram and the broader northeastern region of India. This agreement was the culmination of a long-standing insurgency led by the Mizo National Front (MNF) against the Indian government, which sought greater autonomy and recognition of Mizo identity. The accord aimed to resolve the conflict by granting Mizoram statehood, providing financial assistance for development, and addressing

²⁷⁸⁰ North Eastern Council (NEC) Act 1971, No. 84 Acts of Parliament (1971)

²⁷⁸¹ The Mizo Peace Accord 1986

issues related to land, culture, and governance. It established a framework for peace and cooperation between the Mizo people and the Indian government, ultimately leading to the restoration of normalcy and the promotion of socio-economic development in Mizoram. The success of the accord has since been seen as a model for conflict resolution in other regions facing similar challenges.

15. CONSTITUTIONAL SAFEGUARDS FOR NORTHEAST INDIA

The Constitution of India provides several safeguards for the northeastern states, recognizing their unique cultural, linguistic, and geographical identities. These safeguards are aimed at protecting the rights of the indigenous people and ensuring their equitable development. Some of the key constitutional provisions include:

1. Article 371A²⁷⁸²: This article grants special powers to the Governor of Assam to protect the interests of the indigenous people of the state. It allows the Governor to make regulations regarding land, forests, and other matters relating to the indigenous people.

2. Article 371B²⁷⁸³: Similar to Article 371A, this article provides special powers to the Governor of Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura. It allows the Governors to make regulations regarding land, forests, and other matters relating to the indigenous people of these states.

3. Article 371F²⁷⁸⁴: This article provides special powers to the Governor of Nagaland. It allows the Governor to make regulations regarding land, forests, and other matters relating to the indigenous people of Nagaland. It also allows for the establishment of a separate Nagaland Public Service Commission.

4. Sixth Schedule: The Sixth Schedule to the Constitution establishes autonomous districts in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura. These districts have their own district councils, which

have powers over local matters such as land, forests, and revenue.

5. Article 351²⁷⁸⁵: This article promotes the spread of the Hindi language, but it also recognizes the importance of regional languages. It directs the state to promote the development of regional languages and scripts.

6. Article 361²⁷⁸⁶: This article provides protection to the President and Governors of states, including those in the northeast. It ensures their immunity from legal proceedings in relation to their official acts.

7. Fundamental Rights: The Constitution guarantees various fundamental rights to all citizens, including those in the northeast. These rights include the right to equality, liberty, and life and personal liberty.

These constitutional safeguards have played a crucial role in protecting the interests of the northeastern states and ensuring their equitable development. However, challenges remain in implementing these provisions effectively and addressing the complex issues faced by the region.

16. JUDICIAL PRONOUNCEMENTS RELATED TO DISPUTES IN NORTHEASTERN STATES

*Naga People's Movement of Human Rights vs. Union of India*²⁷⁸⁷

The case addressed the human rights violations faced by the Naga people in the context of the ongoing insurgency and military operations in Nagaland. The petitioners argued that the Indian government's actions, including the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, led to severe human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings and arbitrary detentions. The Supreme Court of India acknowledged the complexities of the situation, recognizing the historical grievances of the Naga people and the need for a political solution to the conflict. The court emphasized the importance of balancing national security with the protection

²⁷⁸² INDIA CONST. art 371A

²⁷⁸³ INDIA CONST. art 371B

²⁷⁸⁴ INDIA CONST. art 371F

²⁷⁸⁵ INDIA CONST. art 351

²⁷⁸⁶ INDIA CONST. art 361

²⁷⁸⁷ Naga People's Movement of Human Rights vs. Union of India, AIR 1998 SUPREME COURT 431

of human rights, urging the government to address the underlying issues driving the unrest in Nagaland. This case highlighted the intersection of law, governance, and human rights in a conflict-ridden region.

***State of Assam vs. State of Arunachal Pradesh*²⁷⁸⁸**

The case concerns the two states' long-standing boundary dispute. The Indian Supreme Court issued a ruling with the intention of settling the Assamese and Arunachal Pradesh boundary disputes. The designation of the roughly 804-kilometer-long interstate border was the main point of contention. The court's ruling was supported by administrative convenience, historical documents, and local inhabitants' goals. The goal of the ruling was to settle the conflict permanently and guarantee that neither state would thereafter assert any new claims to the delineated areas.

***State of Assam vs. State of Nagaland*²⁷⁸⁹**

A land dispute in the Dimapur district was at issue in the case. In its ruling on jurisdictional borders, the Supreme Court of India emphasized the importance of reaching a mutually agreeable solution. Both states were ordered by the court to keep the disputed territories peaceful and refrain from taking any measures that would inflame tensions.

This decision emphasizes how crucial amicable discussions and court actions are in settling conflicts over interstate borders. It also emphasizes how important the court is to preserving peace and stability in the area.

***State of Manipur vs. State of Nagaland*²⁷⁹⁰**

This case involved territorial claims between Manipur and Nagaland. The Supreme Court emphasized the need for dialogue and cooperation between the states, reflecting the complexities of ethnic and historical issues in such disputes.

17. SUGGESTIONS

The northeastern states of India have a complex history of conflict, often arising from territorial disputes, ethnic tensions, and resource scarcity. To effectively address these issues and promote regional peace and stability, several key recommendations can be considered:

1. Strengthening Regional Cooperation:

Inter-state dialogue: Regular dialogue and consultation between state governments can help build trust and understanding.

Joint development projects: Collaborative projects in areas like infrastructure, agriculture, and tourism can foster shared interests and reduce competition.

Regional forums: Establishing regional forums, such as the North East Council, can provide a platform for discussing common challenges and finding solutions.

2. Addressing Root Causes:

Addressing underlying issues like poverty, inequality, and lack of opportunities can help reduce tensions.

Promoting education and cultural exchange can foster understanding and tolerance among different communities.

Implementing equitable land reforms can address land disputes and prevent future conflicts.

3. Enhancing Conflict Resolution Mechanisms:

Mediation and arbitration: Promoting mediation and arbitration as alternative dispute resolution mechanisms can help resolve conflicts peacefully.

Local governance: Strengthening local governance and empowering indigenous communities can help address grievances at the grassroots level.

Legal frameworks: Ensuring clear and impartial legal frameworks can provide a basis for resolving disputes.

²⁷⁸⁸ State of Assam vs. State of Arunachal Pradesh, (2014) 2 SCC 712

²⁷⁸⁹ State of Assam vs. State of Nagaland, (2005) 3 SCC 199

²⁷⁹⁰ State of Manipur vs. State of Nagaland, (2007) 3 SCC 106

4. Promoting Peace and Reconciliation:

Dialogue and reconciliation: Encouraging dialogue and reconciliation efforts between disputing states can help build trust and foster peace.

Community-based initiatives: Supporting community-based initiatives that promote peace and reconciliation can strengthen social cohesion.

Cultural exchange: Promoting cultural exchange and understanding can help bridge divides and foster a sense of shared identity.

5. Strengthening Security and Law Enforcement:

Effective law enforcement: Ensuring effective law enforcement can help prevent violence and maintain order.

Border management: Strengthening border management can help prevent illegal activities and reduce tensions with neighboring countries.

Human rights protection: Ensuring the protection of human rights can help prevent abuses and build trust between the government and its citizens.

6. Governance: In order to further enhance governance in the region, an inclusive growth model that reaches down to the grassroots level and increases trust and transparency is crucial. First off, increasing digital connectivity can help with effective governance by facilitating information availability, fostering transparency in public administration, and boosting communication. This objective can be accomplished with the aid of investments in essential infrastructure, such as internet access points and broadband networks. Second, settling disputes over interstate borders promotes regional harmony and collaboration, both of which are necessary for efficient governance²⁷⁹¹. Talking and negotiating while looking for alternatives that both parties can

agree on can help reduce tensions and avoid confrontations. Thirdly, simplifying land regulations can facilitate the process of acquiring land, attract investments across a range of industries, and promote effective land usage.

7. Socio-political: The effectiveness of combatting disputes also depends on addressing the sociopolitical issues in the area. Citizens' sense of accountability and ownership can be increased by community involvement in decision-making. Long-term stability and peace may be achieved by the rehabilitation of the militants who have surrendered, freeing up the area to concentrate on development projects.²⁷⁹² The much-needed link between the NER and the rest of India will be further refined with the construction of centers of excellence and higher education institutions. Making the most of the area's sporting possibilities may foster regional talent, raise spirits, and advance national unity. To realize this potential, sports academies, training facilities, and supporting infrastructure can be set up.

8. Socio-economic: The general stability of the northeastern states has been negatively impacted by the lack of economic growth and low human development indicators.²⁷⁹³ Encouraging trade-induced industrialization can boost growth, improve regional integration, and generate new job possibilities. Trade, tourism, and general economic growth can all be facilitated by investing in communication infrastructure, such as roads, railroads, and air connectivity. A Special Economic Zone (SEZ) designation for the NER can stimulate innovation, draw in both foreign and domestic investment, and strengthen the local economy²⁷⁹⁴. By improving human resources through education and skill-development initiatives, a workforce with the necessary skills to propel economic expansion and diversify the local economy can be produced. Establishing

²⁷⁹¹ Gurinder Pal Singh, "Integrating India's North Eastern Region in the Backdrop of Act East Policy", Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA), New Delhi.

²⁷⁹² "Scheme for Surrender-cum-Rehabilitation of Insurgents in NE States", North East Division, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

²⁷⁹³ "North Eastern Region District SDG Index & Dashboard—Baseline Report 2021-22", NITI Aayog, 2021.

²⁷⁹⁴ *Supra* 27 at 24

frameworks and procedures to support local produce can strengthen communities, advance sustainable growth, and reach specialized markets.

By implementing these recommendations, it is possible to create a more peaceful and prosperous northeastern region where different communities can coexist harmoniously.

18. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, navigating the tensions among the northeastern states of India requires a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay of historical grievances, ethnic identities, and socio-economic factors. The region's diverse demographics contribute to a rich cultural tapestry, but they also give rise to disputes over resources, political representation, and territorial boundaries. Addressing these tensions necessitates a collaborative approach that prioritizes dialogue, trust-building, and inclusive governance. By fostering greater cooperation among states, engaging local communities in decision-making processes, and implementing targeted development initiatives, stakeholders can work towards sustainable solutions that promote peace and stability. Ultimately, recognizing the unique challenges and aspirations of the northeastern states is essential for harnessing their potential and ensuring a harmonious coexistence within the broader framework of Indian democracy.

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