Conflict and Peace in India's Northeast:
The Role of Civil Society

Samir Kumar Das

East-West Center
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Contents

List of Acronyms

AAGSP	All-Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (All Assam Council of People's Movement)
AASU	All-Assam Students Union
AGP	Asom Gana Parishad (Assam People's Council)
AJYCP	Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chhatra Parishad
CNBC	Council of Nagaland Baptist Churches
CRG	Calcutta Research Group
FGN	Federal Government of Nagaland
GOI	Government of India
KLO	Kuki Liberation Organization
KNO	Kuki National Organization
MNF	Mizo National Front
NMA	Naga Mothers Association
NNC	Naga National Council
NNP	Naga National Party
NPC	Naga People's Convention
NPFNK	Naga People's Friends Network Korea

NSCN (IM) National Socialist Council of Nagalim (formerly Nagaland) (Isaac-Muivah)

NSCN (K) National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang)

NSF Naga Students Federation

PCG People's Consultative Group

PM Peace Mission

SULFA Surrendered ULFA

ULFA United Liberation Front of Assam

UMF United Minorities Front

UNC United Naga Council (Manipur)

UNLF United National Liberation Front of Manipur

WISCOMP Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace

YMA Young Mizo Association

Executive Summary

In the context of India's Northeast, it is possible to distinguish between two simultaneous, but very different, kinds of peace processes and evaluate the roles of civil society in them. On the one hand, peace processes in which the government is involved in talks with insurgent groups in the region are meant primarily for bridging the conflicting interests of the parties involved. These may or may not culminate in the signing of accords. The second type of peace process is active mostly at the local level and makes coexistence of diverse bodies of people possible—notwithstanding the conflicts that take place at the state or even regional level. Peace in this process is negotiated by the groups and communities within their neighborhoods and localities almost on an everyday basis.

For want of better terms, these processes can be referred to as "official" and "unofficial" peace processes, respectively. Unofficial peace processes are no less effective than proceedings involving government negotiators. These two kinds of peace processes also reflect two very different ways of addressing conflicts and defining the roles that civil society groups and local initiatives play in conflict resolution. The official peace process addresses conflicts by reducing them to a set of conflicting interests of the parties involved. The state and the insurgents are the key players, and peace is always defined as some form of a balance of power that obtains between them. The task of peace groups associated with the official peace process is to make the first move in conflict situations, bring the warring parties to the negotiating table, set forth potentially agreeable ceasefire terms, and offer alternative ways of settling conflicts that beset the region. The emphasis is on finding solutions at the macro-level, and the assumption is that the solutions reached at the macro-level will automatically lead to micro-level resolution of conflicts. This assumption is valid in the

Northeast only up to a certain point. Political conflicts are much more complex than what the adversaries would have us believe. Each conflict represents a cacophony of competing tunes. With the hardening of positions of the parties engaged in conflicts, the competing tunes are gradually pushed into oblivion. The surfacing of one particular set of issues implies submergence of a wide variety of them.

In contrast, the approach adopted in the unofficial peace process is to constantly negotiate across the ethnic divide, which otherwise gets hardened whenever conflict at the macro-level breaks out, and to make it possible for the rival communities to coexist within the same village, locality, or neighborhood without indulging in violence, arson, or bloodshed. This approach is predicated on the assumption that living within the immediate society involves compromises at almost every step and the resolution of local conflicts. Unorganized popular initiatives also play a critical role in protecting the general population from rebel groups and the state. The rise of the public as a critical force in India's Northeast is a fairly recent development.

Although unofficial peace processes are as effective—if not more so in some cases—than official negotiations, their impact on the official peace processes is limited. The official and the unofficial processes take on two parallel trajectories and fail to develop synergy between them for three reasons. First, as the state cracks down on insurgent groups, insurgents lose touch with life at the local level and are gradually cut off from civil society. As a result they take the public for granted and think that whatever they do automatically enjoys public support. Second, the locally based groups play a crucial role in building bridges in crossing the ethnic divide, but their positions on the broader issues underlying the conflicts are almost the same as those of the rebel groups. Third, the peace groups that are formally associated with the official peace process are autonomous from both insurgents and the state. However, since they cannot establish themselves as institutions with independent bases of power, they play only a limited role. The end of a peace process also implies their disintegration.

This monograph examines the role of civil society groups in the peace processes in three areas of India's Northeast—Assam, Naga Hills/Nagaland, and Mizo Hills/Mizoram. Evidence from these regions reveals that in order to make the conflicting parties reach middle ground, civil society groups must establish themselves as a socially powerful force—too powerful to be ignored by the rivaling parties. Mere autonomy is not enough. As a result of the absence of social power, peace groups in these areas have not been able to survive the failures of peace processes. Peace groups and other civil society initiatives associated with the official peace process must develop synergy with other constituents and stakeholders. Peace groups today seem

to operate in a rarefied atmosphere, cut off from the existing civil society institutions and processes as soon as they enter the official peace process, and depend solely on the individual reputation and credibility of their members. Reforming civil society, in other words, holds the key to ensuring its effectiveness in bringing about peace in the Northeast. Both the state and civil society have their roles to play in this regard.

Conflict and Peace in India's Northeast:
The Role of Civil Society

India's Northeast has been the theater of the earliest and longest-lasting insurgency in the country. In the Naga Hills—then a district of Assam State, violence centering on independentist demands started in 1952. It was followed by the Mizo rebellion in 1966 and a proliferation of more recent conflicts since the late 1970s. According to one estimate, about sixty-five major militant organizations presently operate in the region. Every state in the region excepting Sikkim is currently affected by some form of insurgent violence, and four of these (Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, and Tripura) have witnessed scales of conflict that could—at least between 1990 and 2000—be categorized as low-intensity conflicts in which fatalities were well over 100 but less than 1,000 annually. The peacemaking and conflict resolution frameworks employed to date have not worked in the ways that had been

reevaluation of... approaches to conflict resolution...is necessary

expected; a reevaluation of the conflicts and approaches to conflict resolution, using what Prime Minister Manmohan Singh calls "out-of-the-box solutions," is necessary. This monograph reviews the diverse roles played by civil society groups and initiatives in the region in managing, wherever possible settling, and in some cases even contributing to ethnic and community conflicts, and concludes with recommendations for overcoming some of their limitations.

Two simultaneous, but very different, kinds of peace processes are discernible in India's Northeast. On the one hand are those in which the government is involved in talks with any of the insurgent groups in the region. The goal of such talks is primarily to bridge the conflicting interests of the parties involved. They may culminate in the signing of accords. On the other hand are peace processes that are active mostly at the local level and make coexistence of diverse bodies of people possible—notwithstanding the conflicts that take place at the state or regional level. Peace is accordingly negotiated by groups and communities within neighborhoods and localities almost on an everyday basis. For want of better terms, these can be called "official" and "unofficial" peace processes, respectively.

Unofficial peace processes are no less effective than official negotiations. For example, in the early 1990s conflicts broke out between the Naga and the Kuki ethnic groups in Manipur Hills over their contentious homeland claims to the area. The Nagas argue that they were the earliest settlers in the hills of Manipur, and therefore have a rightful claim to the land. A United Naga Council (Manipur) resolution passed in an emergency meeting on October 22, 1992, points out that

> *Unofficial peace processes are no less effective*

> the Kukis are but dependent on the Nagas who are real landowners. . . . 1972 should be the basic (sic) year for the purpose of determining landownership for the Kukis in all hill districts of Manipur. . . . those Kukis who have settled after 1972 in the Naga areas must vacate their lands and their settlements in the villages, . . . and Kuki person's family who fails to comply with the above condition within the stipulated time will face dire consequences at their own risk.[1]

On the other hand, a document of the Kuki National Organization (KNO) prepared by P. S. Haokip addresses the long tradition of friendship and camaraderie that developed between these two communities, with the effect that "the Kukis as one unit of the tribes in the Naga Hills voted in favour of a sovereign Nagaland" in the famous plebiscite of 1951 conducted by the Naga National Council (NNC).[2] Haokip shows how the Nagas "have been continuously disturbing peace in the area from the beginning of Independence." In other words, according to Haokip, the Kukis have been forced to realize that they "will never have peace; they will never have a sense of security, they will never be free from harassment, until they

have their own land, their own nation-state, whether it be within India, within Burma, or without" (Haokip 1995: 83). The conflict took a toll of several hundred human lives and a number of villages were completely razed to the ground. A few thousand people were permanently displaced from their homes.[3]

The agreement that the National Socialist Council of Nagaland Isaak Muivah (NSCN-IM) and the Kuki National Organization, two then-outlawed[4] insurgent organizations claiming to represent the Nagas and the Kukis, respectively—*reportedly* reached in 1993 was effective in ensuring peace between the two communities particularly in the turbulent hills of Manipur. Among other things, the agreement underlined the importance of putting up joint resistance to the Indian state and made provisions for demarcation of villages between the two communities. It appears to be a partition agreement reached between two outlawed organizations at the insistence of the local church and its leaders.

Official and unofficial peace processes also reflect two very different ways of addressing conflicts and of defining the roles that civil society groups and initiatives play in them. Official peace processes address conflicts by reducing them to the competing interests of the parties involved. The state and the insurgents are thus taken as two key players, and peace is always defined as some form of a balance of power that obtains between them. The task of such peace groups in this process—for example, that of the Naga People's Convention (NPC), Peace Mission (PM), the People's Consultative Group (PCG), and People's Committee for Peace Initiative (PCPI)—is to make the first move in situations of conflict, bring the warring parties to the negotiating table, set forth potentially agreeable cease-fire terms, and offer alternative ways of settling conflicts. The emphasis is laid on finding solutions at the macro-level on the assumption that these will automatically lead to micro-level resolution of conflicts. This assumption is correct in the Northeast only to a certain point. Political conflicts are much more complex than the parties with competing interests would have us believe. Each conflict represents a cacophony of competing, zero-sum demands. With the hardening of positions of the parties engaged in conflicts, the competing demands are gradually silenced. The surfacing of one particular issue implies submergence of a wide variety of them. It is feared that the current peace talks with the NSCN-IM will produce an accord that might reinforce the intertribal rivalry among the Naga tribes.[5] Moreover, peace groups like the PM and the PCG—instituted expressly for the purpose of reducing the distance between warring parties—were unable to survive the "failed" peace attempts. The end of peace talks also resulted in their disintegration.

The purpose of civil society groups in the unofficial peace process is to constantly negotiate across the ethnic divide that otherwise hardens whenever conflict at the macro-level breaks out, and to make it possible for rivaling communities to live and coexist within the same village, locality, or neighborhood without indulging in violence, arson, and bloodshed between them. This is predicated on the assumption that living within the immediate society involves compromises at almost every step and the resolution of local conflicts. Organizations such as the Mothers Union in Meghalaya, the Naga Mothers Association (NMA), and Naga Women's Union and Meira Paibis in Manipur work mainly as large conglomerates of the locally based bodies representing the interests of respective villages, localities, and neighborhoods. Unorganized popular initiatives also play a critical role in maintaining the population's autonomy from the rebel groups and the state. The rise of civil society groups as a critical force in the Northeast is a fairly recent development.

While unofficial peace processes are as much if not more effective than official processes in some cases, their impact on the official peace process is limited. Despite NMA's appeal to end fratricidal warfare between the Isaak Muivah and Khaplang factions of NSCN, Naga politics continues to be marred by severe clashes between the two. On other occasions, however, peace organizations, with the help of critical public support, have been successful in forcing the insurgents to observe restraint and stop military operations. Examples of insurgent groups backtracking from their otherwise hard positions in the face of strong public criticism are not rare. The tendering of apologies by these groups for their actions also bears testimony to the growing importance of public criticism as an independent force in the region.

> *The official and unofficial peace processes...failed to develop synergy*

The official and unofficial peace processes run in two parallel trajectories. Civil society organizations like the PM or the PCG might have played an effective role in the official process had they been able to develop some kind of synergy with the unofficial peace processes. PM was considered too autonomous to be acceptable to the conflicting parties, and the PCG failed to envisage the many constituencies and concerns within society—other than the ones represented by the conflicting parties. As a result, they ignored or even failed the larger social constituencies they were expected to serve. Similarly, insofar as the PCG continued to be viewed as too close to the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), it lost its wider social

acceptability. It refused to recognize the many dissenting opinions and voices circulating within society. ULFA too shot down many peace overtures made by several other civil society organizations based mainly in Upper Assam. Civil society organizations would be better able to assume a measure of autonomy from the warring parties, become socially powerful, and make their presence felt in the peace process if they would cater to and articulate the interests and concerns of diverse social constituencies.

The two types of peace processes hence failed to develop synergy between them for three reasons. First, as the state cracks down on insurgent groups, insurgents lose touch with life at the local level and are gradually cut off from the active civil society processes. As a result, they take the public for granted and think that whatever they do automatically enjoys public support. Second, locally based groups play a crucial role in building bridges and crossing the ethnic divide, but their positions on the broader issues of the conflicts are almost the same as those of the rebel groups. Third, although the peace groups formally associated with the official peace process may be autonomous from both insurgents and the state, they are not able to establish themselves as institutions with independent bases of social power. Thus they play only a limited role. The end of the peace process also implies their disintegration.

The monograph begins with background to the conflicts that are presently afflicting India's Northeast and continues with a detailed study of Assam, Naga Hills/Nagaland, and Mizo Hills/Mizoram cases. The last case is marked by an absence of peace groups directly associated with the official peace process or with local bridge-builders, and of an involved public. The ensuing section sums up the diverse roles that various types of civil society groups and unorganized popular initiatives play in making peace or even in producing and perpetuating conflict. The study reveals the possibilities and limitations of peacemaking and conflict resolution. It concludes with recommendations for overcoming some of these limitations.

Background to the Conflicts in India's Northeast

Only with the independence of India in 1947 and, in its wake, the reorganization of international borders with eastern neighbors like East Pakistan/Bangladesh, Tibet/China, Burma/Myanmar, Nepal, and Bhutan did India's Northeast emerge as a separate geopolitical region, connected rather precariously with the so-called Indian mainland by a narrow (about 21-kilometer-wide) Siliguri Corridor—popularly known as the chicken neck. Although the Northeast historically has served as the eastern gateway for the passage of people, commodities, and ideas between India and its neighbors, the Northeast's emergence as a separate region bounded nearly

on all sides by other territorially defined nation-states brought such continuities and interrelations, at least theoretically, to an abrupt halt. The region has historically been one of the world's greatest migratory routes, cutting across such countries as Tibet/China, Nepal, Burma/Myanmar, Thailand, and East Bengal/Pakistan/Bangladesh. As a result, according to cultural historians, the region has provided a veritable meeting ground of many races and communities throughout history.

Despite the otherwise closed international borders, many communities living there continue to maintain greater social, cultural, and even economic affinities with the people across the borders than with those of the mainland.[6] Many of the imaginaries freely circulating in the region and continuing to influence people's social and political practices draw on the historically existing cultural connections and continuities.

A significant part of agriculture production, particularly in the hills and terraces, is still characterized by the practice of *jhum,* or swidden (slash and burn), cultivation, with extremely low productivity. The region is relatively poor and backward in terms of both industry and communications, and most of the states of the region rank poorly on India's human development index.[7] The indigenous peoples of this region (freely referred to as "tribes" in both popular and official parlance)—unlike in, say, the predominantly tribal-inhabited Central India—mostly belong to the Mongoloid stock. Only in modern times (more particularly, since the beginning of the last century when British annexation culminated in the establishment of frontiers and frontier outposts) have many groups and communities claimed themselves to be "native" to the region and started to feel

> *fear of being in a minority...opens up a new era of ethnic politics*

alarmed at the rapid influx of "outsiders" from across the frontiers. These frontiers include international borders and those of their respective states and imagined homelands. This fear of being in a minority or being reduced to one in the near future in what one imagines as one's homeland opens up a new era of ethnic politics in the region. Earlier migrations at times generated religious and racial conflicts, but as far as livelihood was concerned, "nature had enough to give to everyone" (Srikanth 2000: 4119).

With the British discovery of tea in India's Northeast in 1821, the demand for plantation labor was met by encouraging migration of mainly tribal people from the Chotanagpur Plateau of Central India. As colonial rule was established in 1826, clerks and officers acquainted with English and the running of administration were brought into Assam

Province, particularly from neighboring Bengal. The Marwaris (from Rajasthan) and the Biharis (from Bihar) in smaller numbers started trade and business in the state because of the opportunities created as a result of the economic expansion under colonial rule. According to one estimate, by the end of the nineteenth century 400,000 migrant laborers had produced 145 million pounds of tea in the region. Between 1911 and 1921, the tea industry brought in 769,000 laborers, and another 422,000 migrated in the following decade. The 1931 census indicated 1,400,000 tea garden laborers in Assam (Weiner 1978: 81). A section of the Assamese political leadership felt alarmed at the incessant immigration from outside and, as first step, the "line system" was introduced in 1916 to curb illegal immigration flows to Assam State. An imaginary line was drawn to segregate areas where new immigrants could settle from those which were declared as the "exclusive preserve" of the Assamese people. In spite of all this, C. S. Mullan—a British census commissioner, expressed in his census report of 1931 the apprehension that immigration would destroy the structure of Assamese culture and civilization and permanently alter the demographic future of Assam. The Assamese leadership, however, sought to achieve its objective by endeavoring to (1) reduce the immigrant population by demanding their deportation and (2) in the referendum of 1947, push out the predominantly Muslim-inhabited district

Table 1. Estimates of Population in the Seven States of India's Northeast, 1991

States	Actual Population for 1951 (base)	Actual Population for 1991	Expected Population	Excess Population	Excess in %
Arunachal Pradesh[a]	336,558	864,558	618,647	245,911	28.44
Assam	8,028,856	22,414,322	17,797,224	4,617,098	10.60
Manipur	577,635	1,837,149	1,280,419	556,730	30.30
Meghalaya	605,674	1,774,778	1,342,572	432,206	24.35
Mizoram	196,202	689,756	434,913	254,843	36.94
Nagaland	212,975	1,209,546	472,093	737,453	60.97
Tripura	639,029	2,757,205	1,416,508	1,340,697	48.62
Total	10,260,371	31,547,314	23,362,376	8,184,938	25.94

[a] Arunachal Pradesh total is for 1961.
Source: Adapted from Sharma and Kar (1997: 87).

of Sylhet, which had been held as part of Assam until independence. The verdict—as Guha informs us—"almost reflected the communal composition of the district's population" (Guha 1977: 320). In a district where 60 percent of the total population was Muslim, 56 percent voted for inclusion in Pakistan, while 43.4 percent of the population of Sylhet District voted to remain in Assam. Immigration remains at the heart of the conflicts in the Northeast. As B. P. Singh puts it:

> It is essential to realize that the widespread identity crisis in north-east India has been caused by the large-scale migration of population from outside the region during the past one hundred years, and the total dependence of people on the land and the States' apparatus for a livelihood. The phenomenon has made the local population feel outnumbered and swamped by people of different cultural origins. The failure of various sections of the migrant population to adapt themselves to the local language, customs and traditions has further accentuated the identity crisis. (Singh 1987: 162)

Although immigration remains at the heart of most of the conflicts in the region, the transformation of these conflicts into insurgencies, particularly in Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Assam, and Tripura, coincides with a radical reinterpretation of their respective histories in which the Indian state is considered an "external agent," and often a "colonial power." Such insurgent groups as the Naga National Council, National Socialist Council of Nagaland/Nagalim, Mizo National Front (MNF), United National Liberation Front of Manipur, and United Liberation Front of Assam seem to be in accord on this point, but with differences in their respective understandings of "external" and "colonial." For some, including ULFA, the state's colonial character is only incidental to its externality, with the implication that transfer of state power to the "people of Assam" would end colonialism. However, for others like the People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak based in Manipur, the state is external because its rule is of a colonial nature. The Naga National Council was the first to declare independence from India on August 14, 1947, a day before India became independent, and they were followed by MNF, which issued the declaration in 1966.

Conflicts in Assam

The fear of immigrants continues to haunt the minds of the Assamese. In his report to the president of India in 1998, the governor of Assam assessed the growth rate in Assam of the Hindu population at 41.89 percent and

that of the Muslim population at 77.42 percent from 1971 to 1991. The Muslim growth rate was higher than the national average and was dispro-portionately larger in the districts bordering Bangladesh. Dhubri and Bongaigaon Districts, the report notes, had already become majority Muslim districts. This could not have been possible with-out the immigration of many Muslims from across the borders. Immigration into Assam is believed to have (1) created pressures on land, (2) caused unemployment to the Assamese people claiming themselves as native to the region, (3) decreased the native Assamese percentage vis-à-vis the immi-

fear of immigrants continues to haunt... the Assamese

grants both in consecutive censuses and electoral rolls and, as a result, (4) fomented social tensions that often have ignited ethnic and communal riots (Das 1993: 165–75).

No authentic estimate is yet available on the actual number of non-Assamese foreigners/immigrants settled in Assam. The census practice of enumerating population according to place of birth serves only as an unre-liable indicator. Anti-immigrant leaders of the Assam movement (1979–85) were not in agreement on this question, but all population esti-mates for Assam made during the movement fluctuate between 4.5 and 5 million people. The Asom Gana Parishad (AGP; Assam People's Council) that emerged from out of the movement and formed the government in 1985 did little to deport "foreigners." The party's performance in deport-ing non-Assamese was dismal. According to official figures, the AGP gov-ernment during its tenure in office (1985–90) could only deport 157 per-sons (Das 1998a: 122–26).

Ethnic continuities between Bangladeshis whose mother tongue is Bengali and Bengali-speaking Indian citizens settled in Assam, highly complex legal procedures of detection, and lack of political will were responsible for failures in deportation. Many immigrants who settled in Assam several generations ago assimilated into Assamese society and report Assamese as their mother tongue (Guha 1980: 1710). Any attempt on the part of Assamese chauvinists to alienate them is likely to trigger a backlash. As Assamese chauvinism began to assert itself, many of these already-assimilated people gradually withdrew from the otherwise natural course of cultural assimilation. The United Minorities Front's (UMF) cry to get the assimilated immigrants reclassified as Bengalis on the eve of the 1991 census received a favorable response from many of the immigrant Bengalis, with the effect that it pushed the percentage of the Assamese-speaking population slightly down for the first time since independence.

Since 1947, the ethnic Assamese political leadership has pursued cultural policies that have sought to define Assam State as Assamese: for instance to make Assamese the official language of the state in 1960 and the language of instruction in the state's educational institutions in 1972. A contingent of Bengalis in Assam was unhappy with the official Language Act of 1960. They formed Nikhil Assam Bangabhasa Raksha Samiti (All-Assam Committee for the Preservation of Bengali Langauge) and submitted a memorandum to the president of India on April 5, 1961. The Government of India named Lal Bahadur Shastri, an eminent congressman, as peacemaker. After meeting all the parties to the dispute, Shastri formulated his compromise proposals, popularly known as the "Shastri formula," which also helped temporarily assuage the feelings of the non-Assamese minorities. According to the proposal: (1) communication between headquarters and the predominantly Bengali-dominated districts of Cachar and the tribal-inhabited Autonomous Hill Districts was to be in English until replaced by Hindi; (2) at the state level, all acts, ordinances, regulations, and orders would continue to be published in the official gazette in English (at a later date, the English text would be published alongside Assamese); and (3) linguistic minorities in the state would be provided with safeguards suggested by the Government of India.

The immigration issue had occasionally burst into the open in the politics of Assam State since independence. In 1965, when relations with Pakistan were deteriorating, the Assam State government, under instructions from New Delhi, began expelling Pakistani "infiltrators." However, the process had to be stopped when eleven members of the State Legislative Assembly (Vidhan Sabha) protested that Indian Muslims were being harassed in the process and threatened to resign. Some organizations also made claims to preferential policies in jobs. The dichotomy between citizens and foreigners that was central to the Assam movement continued even as late as early 2005 when the Chirang Chapori Yuva Mancha (Chirang Chapori Youth Forum, based mainly in Dibrugarh, Upper Assam) campaigned against the alleged Bangladeshis now settled in Assam. The organization urged native Assamese not to employ them in any way, not to sell land to them, and not to use vehicles owned or driven by them. The campaign has been so successful that an estimated 10,000 Bengali-speaking persons are believed to have already fled Upper Assam.

As a result of the population movement from Bangladesh, minorities are said to be a deciding factor in as many as 40 of 126 Assam State Assembly constituencies.[8] The incident that sparked the Assam movement—one of India's longest popular movements—was the controversy surrounding the holding of a by-election in the Mangaldai parliamentary

constituency of Assam. It became vacant when Hiralal Patwari, who had been elected to the State Legislative Assembly on the Janata Party ticket, died on March 28, 1979. The High Court sustained 45,000 objections out of 70,000 in a total electorate of 600,000, and the illegal voters were declared "Bangladeshi infiltrators." The emotions aroused by the events were first revealed in the strike (Assam Bandh) on June 8, 1979. A movement that was initially joined by "virtually every ethnic group of the State, student associations from other States, Government officers, business people, lawyers, journalists, artistes and other creative groups, as well as professionals," (Hazarika 2000: 65) gradually lost steam and by 1983 had turned into one of the worst communal upheavals of violence and interethnic warfare in history. The violence that occurred in Nellie (Assam) in February 1983, according to Hazarika, took a toll of as many as 1,753 lives in a single incident that lasted for only a few hours.

Until 1980, the term "foreigners" was either not used at all or was used simultaneously with the term "outsiders." It was only in 1980 that the Assam Literary Society (Asom Sahitya Sabha), one of the organizations leading the Assam movement, came forward and changed *bahiragats* (outsiders) into *Bideshis* (foreigners). It was a significant move: While outsiders may be bona fide Indian citizens, foreigners are not. The opposition between natives and outsiders is likely to ethnically divide the Indian citizenry and has no legal basis whatsoever (barring a few cases), while that between citizens and foreigners is well-recognized in national and international legal discourse.

The All-Assam Students Union (AASU), the organization spearheading the movement, submitted a memorandum to the prime minister on February 2, 1980. It insisted that the cut-off year be 1951 for determining who was a foreigner (AASU 1983: 23). However, the final text of the 1985 Assam Accord[9] signed by representatives of AASU and the interest group All-Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP; All-Assam Council of People's Movement) made January 1, 1966 the cut-off date for the determination of foreigners and deletion of their names from electoral rolls. Moreover, immigrants coming to Assam on or after March 25, 1971, would be treated as "foreigners." Their names would be struck from the electoral rolls and they would be deported following due process of law. The accord divides the immigrants into three categories: citizens, permanent residents, and noncitizens (or foreigners). Citizens, therefore, are those who had migrated to Assam by the end of 1965.

The permanent residents constitute a unique category. In simple terms, permanent residents are those who migrated to Assam between January 1, 1966 and March 24, 1971. According to the agreement, they

would at first be deprived of their voting rights but after a lapse of ten years would be re-enfranchised and regularized as citizens of India. As Chattopadhyay observes: "Thus, signing this Accord, the Union Government has accepted the proposition that in this country, apart from aliens there may be a group of people who are citizens without voting rights." According to Chattopadhyay, the number of permanent residents at that time varied from 0.2 million to 1 million (Chattopadhyay 1990: 198). Thus, although the accord formally declares 1966 as the cut-off year, in practice 1971 remained the cut-off year for purposes of detection, deletion from the voting rolls, and deportation.

From Assam Movement to Insurgency

Although ULFA was established on April 7, 1979, it was not until 1983 that the organization surfaced in the public arena and people became aware of its political presence in Assam.[10] It started as a more militant stream of the Assam movement and gradually broke away from the moderate forces that were associated with it (Das 1994: 51). ULFA first came to the limelight when it joined hands with the AASU and AAGSP in enforcing the boycott of polls of 1983 until the names of illegally settled "foreigners" were struck from the electoral rolls. As ULFA shot into prominence— whether by way of organizing exceptionally daring bank heists; by undertaking rural development works, particularly in areas where the state's presence was only cosmetic; or even by carrying out retributive killings and meting out summary justice in those areas—the government of Assam State did not come down heavily on the insurgents. As one ULFA leader subsequently acknowledged, they had no idea that this would be such a cakewalk for them: they asked for little, but the response was enormous (in Roy 1991: 58). ULFA was declared illegal only on November 27, 1990. Moreover, the Asom Gana Parishad regime that came to power in 1985 was reportedly "hand in glove" with them (Hazarika 1994: 175), and "most of the ULFA cadres were drawn from the ranks of AASU" (Misra 2000a: 134). Bhadreswar Gohain, the first chairman of ULFA, was actively associated with the Assam movement and became deputy speaker of the Assam Legislative Assembly as an AGP nominee. In many cases, ULFA's penetration into the state police was almost complete, so much so that a police officer then serving in Assam admitted that "ULFA cadres are un-uniformed policemen and the policemen are the uniformed ULFA cadres."[11]

> ***"ULFA cadres are un-uniformed policemen..."***

One wonders how such a state-insurgent nexus could operate in Assam almost uninterruptedly during the first ten years of ULFA's existence. This close relationship was in part due to the fact that AGP, AAGSP, and ULFA owe their common origin to the Assam movement. Although their organizations were ideologically distinct, many of the ULFA cadres were personally close to a section of ministers and leaders—sometimes across party lines—and were indirectly instrumental in bringing them to power in both the 1985 and 1996 elections (Das 1998b: 1–18). The immense popular support that ULFA enjoyed in the 1980s—especially by providing instant justice to accused "offenders" and "criminals" and undertaking rural development works beyond the government's sphere of influence—remained a factor that none of the established political parties could dismiss. ULFA served as the para-state in the more remote areas of Assam, where the presence of the Indian state was only cosmetic, if not non-existent. Most of the political parties were keen on deriving maximum political mileage from the organization's presence without ever trying to crack down on it. The nexus proved to be beneficial for both ULFA and the political parties and continued unabated until the first army operation against it began in Assam in 1990.

During its initial years, ULFA was keen on building strong trans-ethnic solidarity as a bulwark against the "colonialism" of New Delhi. This is known as ULFA's thesis of de-nationalization (*nirjatikaran*). The thesis drew flak from many communities, because they felt that, in the name of denationalization and obliteration of ethnic differences, ULFA would promote the hegemony of the already entrenched ethnic communities—the Assamese in particular. ULFA recognized that any rapid implementation of this policy could elicit hysteric reactions from minorities in general and smaller tribal groups in particular. ULFA revisited the thesis, and by May 1992, the organization showed signs of decisively moving away from this

ULFA was keen on building strong trans-ethnic solidarity

approach. It replaced the hitherto prevailing "Assamese nationalism" (*Asomiya jatiyatabad*) with a new one of "combined nationalism of all the exploited peoples of Assam" (*Asomar samuh soshit raijar sanmilit jatiyatabad*). It called for free self-development of each nationality, including the Bodos settled in the northern banks of the Brahmaputra in a region known as Independent Assam. According to Sajal Basu, ULFA's nationalism is territorial and not ethnolinguistic (Basu 2000: 66).

In a lengthy pamphlet entitled *ULFA's call to the groups from East Bengal living in Assam* (*Asombasi purbabangeeya janagoshthiloi ULFAr Ahvan*), ULFA redefines the concept of "the Assamese" (*Asomiya*) as "a people of all communities, the mixture of people who are determined to work for all-round progress of Assam." Thus the scope of the concept no longer remains restricted to those who speak the Assamese language as their mother tongue. Obviously, immigrants from Bangladesh, being the largest group of migrants, are described in the pamphlet as "an indispensable part" of the Assamese. However, this reformulation alienated ULFA from the Assamese middle class that was at the forefront of the Assam movement. As Udayon Misra questions: "In the long run would not the ULFA's position on the infiltration issue, its clear links with Bangladesh and its support for maximum tribal autonomy, bring it into conflict with the proponents of Assamese linguistic nationalism such as the AASU and the Asom Gana Parishad?" (Misra 2000a: 145).

Pressure from business interests appears to be a significant factor behind the government's decision to strike against ULFA. The murder of plantation owner and eminent industrialist Surrendra Paul radically changed the scenario and inaugurated, in the words of *India Today*, a "new era of capitulation" of the government to the tea industry (Gupta and Sengupta 1990: 23). This is revealed in the first of two government actions. First, it decided to relocate the top management cadre of tea companies facing threats for ransoms from ULFA to safe havens. In the early hours of November 8, 1990, Indian army and air force troops were involved in airlifting top executives of Brooke Bond, Lipton, and Doom Dooma tea companies from the airstrip controlled by the Aviation Research Centre, which worked under the auspices of the Research and Analysis Wing[12] in Tinsukia.

The year 1990 marks the watershed, as the army moved in and the first army operations were launched with the objective of "liquidating" ULFA. The army operations came as a surprise, however, both to the army and to the insurgents. ULFA by its own admission was not prepared for "taking on the army" (Siddhartha Phukan[13] quoted in *Budhbar* [Guwahati], June 6, 1990). Lieutenant Colonel K. S. Brar, the general officer, commander-in-chief of the Eastern Command of the Indian Army, pointed out that secret documents seized from ULFA hideouts suggested that warnings were given to them from the central headquarters to shut down their military training camps by December 19, 1990. The documents show that ULFA leadership was aware of the impending army operations and reveal the depth of ULFA penetration into the state and its intelligence machinery. Moreover, as the government decided to call in the army on November 29, 1990, ULFA too realized the importance of military preparations.

Siddhartha Phukan, for example, points out "the events of Lakhipathar and Charaipung [where the ULFA camps were broken up by the army and mass graves were discovered] have proven that it is a primary condition for any revolutionary organization to put emphasis on military discipline and ultramodern weapons" (quoted in *Budhbar*, June 16, 1991).

Although Operation Bajrang ended up anticlimactic, another operation—code-named Operation Rhino—began in September 1991 with the objective of flushing out the insurgents and isolating them from the people of Assam. The objective of the second operation was quite different from that of Operation Bajrang. It seems that the government realized that complete destruction of ULFA might not be possible in the short run. As ULFA was declared illegal and a series of army operations was launched against it, the early bonhomie between ULFA and the government came to an end. The need for talks was felt by both sides only after the battle lines were clearly drawn. By the early 1990s, both ULFA and the government formed a dyad of two mutually distinct parties in arms against each other.

Peace with the United Liberation Front of Assam

Initiating peace talks with ULFA has been a difficult process. In the middle of 1990, shortly after the first army operation against the organization, the Government of India extended its first peace offer to ULFA and expressed its willingness to hold talks in any location. Dinesh Goswami, a national cabinet minister hailing from Assam, even went a step further and remarked that he respected the sincerity of ULFA members. Back in the early 1990s, however, ULFA viewed any offer of negotiations as "a clever means employed by the capitalist groups and the State of disarming ULFA" and of creating "rift within its ranks." (*Budhbar*, October 30, 1991). Again in 1991, when the second military campaign was in full swing, the national government and ULFA reportedly engaged in dialogue with the help of interlocutors consisting mainly

> *Initiating peace talks with ULFA has been a difficult process*

of local contacts from the central administrative services and journalists. ULFA leaders also reportedly met secretly with the Chief Minister of Assam and worked out the terms of future dialogues between them. These back channel negotiations are common in such cases, but usually take time to bear fruit.

It seems that by the middle of 1991, ULFA was divided on the question of whether to enter into dialogue with the Indian government. According to *Budhbar*, it was possible to identify the "moderates" and

"extremists" on this crucial question (Ibid.). In an interview with *Budhbar*, Raju Baruah—then chief of ULFA's Nalbari unit—observed: "There has been no change in our position on freedom (*swadhinata*). The struggle will continue. The question of compromise with the treacherous State or its representatives is absurd" (*Budhbar,* January 8, 1992). On the other hand, there were reports that five ULFA leaders under the leadership of Arabinda Rajkhowa acquiesced to the Constitution of India and signed what Parag Kumar Das termed "a treaty of compromise" with the Government of India (Ibid.*,* January 22, 1992).

Arabinda Rajkhowa, along with five of his colleagues, was believed to have written a letter on January 12, 1992, to then-Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in which he expressed his willingness to enter into some form of negotiations with the Government of India and agreed to (1) accept the Constitution of India for the resolution of the Assam problem; (2) abandon the path of violence; and (3) surrender ULFA's arms at an appropriate time. In return, the same "compromise group" requested the government to (1) withdraw military units; (2) stop arresting ULFA members indiscriminately; (3) withdraw the ban imposed on ULFA and rescind the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958, which had been clamped on parts of Assam; (4) transfer all ULFA members arrested by the police to jail custody; and (5) extend general amnesty to all imprisoned ULFA supporters (Ibid.).

It is now clear that back in 1992, immediately after Operation Bajrang, a section of the ULFA leadership was involved in peace talks, which broke off when Rajkhowa decided to withdraw due to "pressure from his uncompromising 'commander-in-chief' Paresh Barua" (Misra 2000a: 139). *Budhbar* reported that Barua expressed his "dissatisfaction" with the "unconditional surrender of arms" and "one-sided acquiescence to the Constitution of India." As Rajkhowa withdrew from the talks, he described his compromise-seeking colleagues as "Government revolutionaries." Finally, on July 22, 1992, a full General Body meeting of ULFA was held at an undisclosed location in Bhutan. The meeting was attended by Arabinda Rajkhowa, Paresh Barua, Anup Chetiya, and other ULFA leaders. All eighteen district units, including that of Bengali-dominated Karimganj, took part. The delegates reached a "unanimous decision" that ULFA should not fall "into the trap laid by the Indian State through deceit and treachery in the name of discussions." Attendees also decided to prepare a list of compromise-seeking leaders, describing them as "counterrevolutionaries," but did not assign to the organization the responsibility of punishing them. It resolved that the people would "judge and punish" them (*Budhbar,* April 29, 1992).

In a signed statement issued in July 1996 by then-publicity secretary of ULFA Mithinga Daimary, the organization extended an offer of peace to the government on condition that the government stop forcefully Indianizing the people of Assam. However, the statement stuck to ULFA's prior formulation of "Sovereignty and Independence of Assam" as the only issue for discussion. Even as late as September 1998, ULFA was not reconciled to the idea of holding peace talks with the Government of India in a way that might undermine the national liberation struggle. The organization reiterated that any talks would center on the issue of Assam's sovereignty and be held in a third country under UN supervision.[14] In 1999 ULFA reportedly sent "feelers" through some surrendered ULFA (popularly designated as, SULFA) cadres to government officials expressing its willingness to enter into peace negotiations with the central government.

In December 2003 ULFA headquarters in Bhutan were stormed and a number of its top-ranking cadres were killed. Immediately following that incident, ULFA made another peace offer, although the same issues of sovereignty of Assam and a third country venue were set as preconditions by "commander-in-chief" Paresh Barua. The Government of India's response has been very cautious: the government keeps accusing ULFA of initiating peace talks, usually under pressure of an army operation, to give itself time to regroup.

In a November 2004 letter to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Indira Goswami, a professor at Delhi University and a renowned Assamese litterateur, urged New Delhi to hold talks with the insurgents. Arabinda Rajkhowa also expressed his willingness to begin dialogue, provided that ULFA received a formal invitation on the Government of India's letterhead with a signature and office seal. In an email message to the media, Rajkhowa made a case for a plebiscite on the contentious issue of "sovereignty" of Assam.

The peace process was highlighted at a recent national conclave held in Guwahati. Organized under the aegis of the People's Committee for Peace Initiatives, the two-day meeting urged New Delhi to start talks with ULFA on sovereignty or hold a plebiscite. The meeting adopted several resolutions highlighting various burning issues of the region, including establishing groups to facilitate direct talks with ULFA and other militant organizations. The Assam Government, however, has rejected the demand for a plebiscite. Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi denounced it as "a futile exercise," since the Government of India would never accede to the demand. He also argued that elections were already held democratically, and the people had been exercising their franchise despite calls for a boycott of elections by various organizations, including ULFA. ULFA however seems

to have moved a step ahead by dropping the condition of a plebiscite, and Paresh Barua has reportedly agreed to come to New Delhi or Dispur, Assam's capital and part of Guwahati, to attend such talks. However, in August 2004 he reiterated the demand of restricting talks to the issue of sovereignty and maintained that sovereignty was the core issue and they were willing to take part in dialogue anywhere if this issue were discussed.

Indira Goswami met Prime Minister Singh on November 16, 2004, and handed over a memorandum drafted in consultation with academics from Delhi University. Both Goswami and the Government of India have been consulting legal experts for an interpretation of "sovereignty" and its place in the Indian Constitution. Goswami also consulted Soli Sorabjee, then solicitor general of India. As *The Telegraph* (Calcutta) reported: "Legal opinion seems to be that there could be various kinds of sovereignty, some of which are not against the Constitution. Economic sovereignty is a possibility, for instance."[15] On November 19, 2004, in one of her meetings with the prime minister, she was successful in attracting the attention of the government to the serious problem of insurgency in Assam. She appealed to Prime Minister Singh to initiate a process of dialogue on ULFA's demand for "sovereignty" of Assam. However, the prime minister put to rest any such speculation, urged them to shun violence, and observed in Dispur on November 22, 2004, that violence and talks could not go on simultaneously. Responding to Singh's categorical rejection of ULFA's sovereignty demand, Paresh Barua interpreted the prime minister's commitment as unsurprising and completely in tune with the earlier "colonial policy" followed by his predecessors. Both Barua and Goswami maintained that the latter was talking with the prime minister in her own private capacity and initiative, but Barua lauded her effort to bring the issue of sovereignty into the agenda.

Goswami's move was preceded by similar moves by various organizations in Assam State. In September 2004, the Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chhatra Parishad (AJYCP), a partner of AAGSP during the Assam movement, initiated a People's Conclave (Jatiya Mahasabha) on the dialogue process. The conclave called for a unilateral ceasefire by the government and asked ULFA to give up violence. None of these demands was fulfilled. The AJYCP initiative was followed by several meetings organized by the intelligentsia and research organizations in Guwahati that reiterated the demand for continuing negotiations. Notably, AASU called for a 100-hour unilateral ceasefire by New Delhi. Although the government was in no mood to concede to these demands, ULFA was critical of such multiple forums, and in a media statement in the last week of October 2004, Paresh Barua asked these organizations to desist from such efforts.

In December 2004, ULFA leaders rejected the first peace offer made by the prime minister's office; but Goswami has not given up hope. Sometime in early 2005, Indira Goswami met Prime Minister Singh (who is a member of the Indian Parliament from Assam State and happens to be a former colleague from Delhi University) to request the start of a dialogue between ULFA leaders and the government. Despite a series of blasts in Assam apparently set off by ULFA, Goswami wrote to the prime minister to issue a fresh call to ULFA for talks. During her visit to Guwahati jail on January 1, 2005, she met three prominent ULFA leaders, Vice Chairman Pardip Gogoi, Political Advisor Bhimkanta Buragohain, and Publicity Secretary Mithinga Daimari. She requested that they talk to the

> *ULFA leaders rejected the first peace offer*

government with an open mind. In the past, the Government of India invited ULFA for talks, but most of the requests were turned down. After telephone conversations with some top ULFA leaders, Goswami is believed to have submitted a letter to the prime minister's office justifying the need to discuss the issue of sovereignty. The letter does not include two of ULFA's earlier demands: that peace talks be held in another country and under UN supervision.

Goswami seems to have convinced the government to discuss the issue of sovereignty. In an interview with Nava Thakuria, she observed: "The issue of sovereignty per se should not be seen as a precondition. . . . I understand that he [Prime Minister Singh] will have to find out some middle path and some solution after consulting all parties and experts. However, without the sovereignty issue, the ULFA leaders are unlikely to come" (Thakuria 2005). In fact, Arabinda Rajkhowa reportedly requested that she continue to push for peace despite the earlier setback in December 2004.

Goswami's nonpolitical past and immense respectability made her acceptable to both the government and ULFA ranks. Her humanist and apparently nonpolitical commitment literally catapulted her into the rough and tumble world of peace politics.[16] As she argued: "The Government should listen to the boys. Why have they taken to the path of violence? They are our boys, with guns in their hands. We have maintained the armed struggle for the last quarter of a century. So we cannot simply ignore them." She also realized that it was too much for her to handle—although she was very clear from the outset that her intervention was restricted to the task of bringing both parties to the negotiating table and it was for them to reach a solution.

In this context, an eleven-member People's Consultative Group, consisting mainly of well-known civil society activists, was set up by ULFA to conduct negotiations with New Delhi. This was the first time that ULFA involved individuals from civil society in the peace process. It also seemed to realize the necessity of involving the larger civil society in the peace process so that the issue of sovereignty would be discussed across diverse social constituencies—although once nominated, it became apparent that the PCG could hardly act independently. Moreover, the formation of such a group gives ULFA more room to maneuver, because it does not have to take direct part in talks with the government, despite several invitations to do so. The PCG provides ULFA with the advantages of not needing to make a commitment, diversions and, most obviously, a wide negotiating space. The members of the PCG expressed satisfaction over their first meeting with Prime Minister Singh in November 2005. The personal appearance of the prime minister without sending an emissary at the very first meeting is unusual, and speaks of his personal interest in resolving the problem as a member of Parliament from Assam State. It also shows that much groundwork might have already been done before the first meeting took place, and both parties refused to let their discussions get embroiled in procedural issues.

The recent withdrawal of the PCG from the talks seems to have been triggered by a combination of factors. First, since the talks were held without any ceasefire between ULFA and the government, the PCG could do little to stop the government forces from continuing the war of attrition. According to one estimate, no fewer than thirty-six ULFA cadres were killed by the security forces during the period when at least thirteen rounds of talks were held between the Government of India and the PCG. The PCG's change in position came after a tough stand by Defense Minister Pranab Mukherjee, who stated that there was no question of halting army operations because no ceasefire pact was in place and "individualistic" proposals to hold dialogue with the banned outfit could not facilitate ceasefire before ground rules could be framed. The ceasefire, the government confirmed, would have to be concluded with ULFA and not the PCG, which in the eyes of New Delhi suffers from a crisis of legitimacy. Moreover, members of the PCG, drawn from various sectors of society, are often not in accord in the course of talks.

The government's insistence on holding direct talks with ULFA must be read as a continuation of its past policy of completely bypassing civil society institutions, and helps only to erode the credibility of the PCG as a plausible stakeholder in the ongoing peace talks. Insofar as civil society organizations of the region are forced to cast themselves in relation to these

dyadic modules, they too find it difficult to transcend the barriers of their own ethnicities and community identities. The PCG could not address the problem of lack of trust that both sides had for them. Given ULFA's earlier record of breaking off talks even after the release of their arrested leaders, the government probably considered it far too risky to act merely on the basis of ULFA's verbal commitments. New Delhi therefore insisted on an official letter from ULFA requesting direct talks. ULFA too insisted on a written assurance from the government. The formalistic stand by both parties caught them in a stalemate. ULFA went on a rampage and claimed responsibility for the carnage of early 2007 that killed over seventy Hindi speakers—mostly Bihari brick kiln workers whose families, as subsequent findings indicated, had migrated to and settled in Assam more than 100 years ago.

It also has been reported that the Inter-Services Intelligence agency of Pakistan puts strong pressure on ULFA to stay away from peace talks. Indeed, Indira Goswami reportedly expressed surprise when she learned that ULFA was very close to the Pakistani agency, and its moves were masterminded from Pakistan: "I would have given up, if only I was told," she exclaimed. Goswami however conceded that she did not get a specific denial when she broached the subject with ULFA chief Paresh Baruah: "He said that they (ULFA cadres) were independent and can have ties with anybody" (quoted in Mohan 2007: 7).

Although peace dialogues have been deadlocked with the resumption of army operations on September 24, 2006, and the PCG backing out of the talks, the government has not ruled out the possibility of holding peace dialogues even at the height of army operations. The history of such *promised* talks with ULFA is as old as the history of war with it. Indeed, peace is viewed by both the warring parties as only a part of the game of war (Das forthcoming). Even as late as early January 2007, Prime Minister Singh offered safe passage to ULFA leaders should they come for direct negotiations. After the recent army operations began, then-Home Secretary V. K. Duggal observed: "Let them [ULFA] come for talks." He also dismissed a question about

peace dialogues have been deadlocked

whether the central government lacks the will to open talks with ULFA. The war game is clear from the objective of the current operations, which is to exert pressure on the insurgent group to give up violence and come to the negotiating table. As Army Chief J. J. Singh pointed out: "The Army has been given an assignment to perform. If we can compel them to come to the negotiating table and abjure violence, the peace and pros-

perity will come back to Assam" (quoted in Pandit 2007: 7). War and peace are inextricably tied together in this game.

The Naga Case

The rebel Naga National Council was the first to challenge the Indian state and declare independence in Naga Hills—then a district of undivided Assam—a day before India became independent on August 15, 1947 (Shimray 2004: 4640). British policy toward the tribal groups in general and the Nagas in particular was inspired by the imperative of exercising minimum interference in the pattern of life of the Naga tribes and keeping outsiders from entering the tribal areas.

On the eve of independence, Nagas were not ready to be ruled by any Indian political party. In 1929, the Naga Club—the first modern organization formed by the Western-educated middle-class Naga elite—submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission (established with the objective of suggesting administrative reforms) demanding that the Nagas be kept out of the proposed constitutional changes to "save them from being overwhelmed by the people of the plains" and pleading that direct administration by Britain be continued. It also reiterated: "You are the only people who have even conquered us and when you go, we should be as we were." An NNC handout circulating subsequently described the developments in the following terms: "In history, no enemy ever conquered the Nagas, except the British who conquered and occupied portions of Naga territory from 1879 to 1947, August 14th. The Nagas have not made any progress during the last seven decades. This is the truth and the source of all troubles" (quoted in Kumar 1995: 94).

> *[The Nagas pleaded]*
> *direct administration*
> *by Britain be continued*

The initial political objective of the NNC was to unify all Nagas, including those of Manipur and Burma, and to include the hills in the province of Assam "in a free India with local autonomy and adequate safeguards for the interests of the Nagas" (Ibid.: 101). The idea of a Naga nation emerged in the early 1940s as a discourse in the Naga political movement (Shimray 2004: 4640). Every Naga was supposed to be a member of the NNC. This attitude was maintained by the council until November 1946; and it was at the insistence of the Khonoma group—named after the village of the "father of the Naga insurgency," Angami Zapu Phizo—that the organization started talking in terms of independence. As Chakraborty observes: "We have no evidence to suggest that the

NNC had any clear policy about the political future of the Naga Hills before the emergence of Phizo in 1947" (A. K. Chakraborty 2004: 198). Phizo sent a memorandum to the British Government on February 20, 1947, arguing for the establishment of an interim government for a period of ten years, at the end of which the Naga people could be left to form a government of their choice. It was during his leadership that NNC turned "from an amorphous middle-class organization into a militant outfit wedded to the idea of a sovereign Naga homeland" (Misra 2000a: 34).

When the Advisory Committee on Aboriginal Tribes set up by the Constituent Assembly of India visited Naga Hills in May 1947, the NNC put forward its proposal for an interim government for ten years to be run under the supervision of a "Guardian Power." The NNC maintained that the Nagas retained the right to decide their future at the end of this ten-year period. Negotiations between the subcommittee and the NNC resulted in a deadlock: the Hydari Agreement (named after Sir Akbar Hydari— then governor of Assam) was an attempt to break this deadlock. The Hydari Agreement recognized "the right of the Nagas to develop according to their freely expressed wishes" and provided full safeguards to Naga customary laws.

Although the Hydari Agreement was approved by the NNC by a majority vote, the extremist section refused to accept it on the ground that Article 9 was "misinterpreted" by the Indian Government. Article 9 of the agreement states: "The Governor of Assam, as agent of the Government of Indian Union, will have a special responsibility for a period of ten years to ensure observance of the Agreement. At the end of this period, the Naga National Council will be asked whether they require the above agreement to be extended for a further period or a new Agreement regarding the future of the Naga people is arrived at" (Datta 1995). The NNC declared that Article 9 gave the Nagas the right to complete independence once the interim period of ten years was over. This was not acceptable to the Government of India, which insisted that the article gave the Nagas the right to suggest administrative changes within the Indian Union, but not secede. As a result, Gopinath Bardoloi, then the premier of Assam State, declared the agreement invalid in 1949. The deadlock could never be resolved, and the agreement for all practical purposes turned out to be a non-starter. In 1956, with the completion of the ten-year period, the NNC informed the Government of India of the formation of the Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN).

The NNC rejected the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, which provided for the establishment of self-administering

Autonomous District Councils for the tribal people of the Northeast, and held a plebiscite on the question of Naga independence. According to NNC sources, 99.9 percent of the Nagas voted in favor of "independence outside India." Prakash Singh, then a young Indian Police Service officer serving in Naga Hills, however, questioned the propriety of the plebiscite. For one thing, the Nagas, unaccustomed to the intricacies of a plebiscite, were not aware of the possible options. Many of them cast their votes without much reflection. For another, Singh argued, the plebiscite did not allow enough time to visit all the Naga villages during a time when there was hardly any means of communication. The plebiscite was followed by a total Naga boycott of the first general elections held in 1952, mass resignations of schoolteachers, boycott of all government functions, and refusal to pay taxes. With the hardening of positions on both sides, the Indian army marched into the Naga Hills.

The history of peacemaking in Nagaland is as old as the history of conflict. In the early part of 1957, a meeting consisting of church leaders from Kohima and Impur (in what was then called Naga Hills) sent out an appeal for peace. Its main objective was to oppose violence and win over the rebels. A Reforming Committee was formed without the knowledge of the underground FGN to negotiate with the Government of India. This occurred during the second general elections in India in 1957, in which the Nagas participated.

A moderate breakaway group of the NNC wrote to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to try to settle the problem within the framework of the Indian Constitution. The same group convened the first All-Tribal Naga People's Convention in Kohima, August 22–26, 1957, under the leadership of Imkongliba Ao. Although the underground section boycotted the convention, the NPC assigned itself the task of mediating between the FGN and the Government of India. It also resolved to settle the Naga issue through negotiation.

Despite the threats from the underground rebels, a second convention was held May 21–23, 1958, at Ungma. A Liaison Committee was constituted to contact the underground leaders and bring a peaceful resolution to the problem. The convention called upon the Government of India to recognize the Federal Government of Nagaland and its demand for independence as a basis of negotiation. The NPC also appointed an eight-member drafting committee that eventually thrashed out a sixteen-point demand culminating in the decision to establish a Nagaland State within the Indian Union. The draft was formally approved at the next Naga People's Convention held in Mokokchung, October 22–26, 1959. A delegation of fifteen NPC leaders under the chairmanship of Imkongliba Ao

visited New Delhi and held discussions with the Prime Minister and senior officials of the Ministry of External Affairs.[17] The charter of demands was accepted with some modifications. A Sixteen-Point Agreement—popularly known as the Delhi Agreement—was reached between the NPC and the Government of India in July 1960. The agreement paved the way for the formation of a separate State of Nagaland within the Indian Union. The Agreement also provided that no act or law passed by Indian Parliament relating to (1) religious and social practices; (2) Naga customary laws and procedures; (3) civil and criminal justice concerning decisions according to Naga customary law; and (4) ownership and transfer of land and its resources would have any legal force in Nagaland unless specifically approved by a majority vote in the Nagaland Legislative Assembly. The agreement could not resolve the issue of territorial consolidation of Naga-inhabited areas of the region with the new State of Nagaland. As it points out:

> The Naga leaders expressed the wish for the contiguous areas to join the new State. It was pointed out to them on behalf of the Government of India that Articles 3 and 4 of the Constitution provided for increasing the area of any State, but that it was not possible for the Government of India to make any commitment in this regard at this stage.

The [1960] agreement paved the way for...a separate State of Nagaland

On August 1, 1960, Prime Minister Nehru announced the proposed formation of Nagaland as a separate state comprising the existing district of Naga Hills and the Tuensang Area. Asoso Younou reports Phizo's denunciation of the pact from London on July 30, 1960, in the following terms:

> The Naga struggle was for a complete Independent Naga State having international recognition and which could at best have treaty relations with India on the basis of equality and reciprocity and [Phizo] added that the leaders of the NPC who signed for the Naga State in India was a puppet assembly and no Government could be recognized regarding the future of Nagaland except with those people who were fighting and were the true representatives of the Naga Nation. (quoted in Younou 1978: 237)

According to Udayon Misra, the NNC discovered that "it was losing much of its appeal" with the formation of the State of Nagaland within the Indian Union (Misra 2000a: 46). By early 1961, Phizo had established some contact with the Government of India through the London-based missionary Reverend Michael Scott and expressed his willingness to enter into a mutually agreed ceasefire. Phizo's proposal, however, was promptly rejected by Nehru. Maintaining that violence perpetrated by the NNC had already undermined its legitimacy and popular support, the Government of India asserted that a ceasefire proposal might be considered if the Naga rebels stopped hostilities and surrendered their weapons. Phizo replied from London that the government's demand for unconditional surrender was unacceptable.

With an outburst in hostilities between the security forces and the Naga underground forces, the Council of Nagaland Baptist Churches (CNBC) held a convention in Wokha from January 31 to February 2, 1964. This convention unanimously resolved to request the Government of India and the underground Federal Government of Nagaland to nego-tiate with a Peace Mission that the Council had formed with members comprising B. P. Chaliha (then the Chief Minister of Assam), Jaya Prakash Narayan (the noted Gandhian leader), and Rev. Michael Scott. A ceasefire was reached between the Naga underground leaders and the Government of India on August 15, 1964. Under the agreement, the security forces agreed to suspend (1) jungle operations, (2) raiding of rebel camps, (3) patrolling beyond 1,000 yards of security posts, (4) searching of villages, (5) aerial action, (6) arrests, and (7) imposition of forced labor as punish-ment. On their side, the Naga rebels agreed to discontinue (1) sniping and ambushing, (2) imposition of "taxes," (3) kidnapping and sabotage, (4) fresh recruitment, (5) raiding or firing on security outposts, towns, and administrative centers, and (6) movement with arms.

The church in Nagaland thus played an important role in the forma-tion of the Peace Mission in 1964. The CNBC greeted the ceasefire between the Government of India and the Federal Government of Nagaland as an opportunity for "working out a definite line of action as to how Christ's principles of mutual love and trust, patience and forgiveness could powerfully be put into operation in every walk of life" (Lasuh 2002). The inclusion of Rev. Scott in the mission is illustrative of

> *The church...played an important role in the formation of the Peace Mission*

the government's acknowledgement of the church's role in resolving con-
flicts and bringing peace. After at least five rounds and four years of delib-
eration, the mission finally came out with a proposal and urged both the
warring parties on "flexibilizing" their otherwise "rigid" understandings of
"sovereignty and independence," and called for the "Union of Nagaland
with India with certain distinct characteristics that are absent in the case
of other States." As Scott observed: "I plead with the Indian Government
for a liberal interpretation of the terms 'sovereign independence,' and with
the Federal Government for a more realistic understanding of the term
'sovereign independence'" (Ibid.: 321).

The Peace Mission's proposal was intended to reach a middle ground.
However, the FGN refused to accept the constitutional status of the State
of Nagaland within the Indian Union, and the Government of India
could not accept the demand for a sovereign Nagaland State. To overcome
these conflicting positions, the Peace Mission then proposed that "the
FGN could on their own volition decide to be a participant in the Union
of India and mutually settle the terms and conditions for that purpose.
On the other hand, the Government of India could consider to what
extent the pattern and structure of the relationship between Nagaland and
the Government of India should be adapted and recast so as to satisfy the
political aspirations of all sections of Naga opinion" (Ibid.: 323). The
Government of India welcomed the first part of the proposal, which urged
the FGN to participate "on their own volition" but rejected the second
part, which it interpreted as providing greater autonomy to the already
established State of Nagaland. The FGN asked to hold a plebiscite super-
vised by a neutral body so the Naga people could decide on the future
according to "their own volition." The Tatar Hoho, the highest legislative
body of the FGN, for example, maintained: "It is always the desire of
Tatar Hoho to settle our problem through peaceful means with the
Government of India and once our right to self-determination is recog-
nized, we shall seek friendly relationship with India" (Ibid.: 317). Thus no
agreement could be reached between them.

The Peace Mission was flooded with complaints of violations of the
ceasefire from both sides, but Jaya Prakash Narayan pleaded their help-
lessness. As he pointed out: "The Peace Mission has no machinery to
enable us to go into these complaints; we work merely as a Post Office,
however sufficient grounds to conclude that one of the terms of the
agreement, namely the personnel of the Naga Army will not move about
in villages in uniform and/or with arms, this to a considerable extent is
not being implemented" (Ibid.: 282). Michael Scott reiterated the same
point (Ibid.: 297).

The Peace Mission was keen to continue talks regardless of the prospects for any immediate settlement. Although Narayan thought that the government's openness might have given the talks a new lease of life, it would take little for them to fail. As he argued:

> If the Nagas decide to participate in the Union, the effect would be not the beginning of balkanization, but further consolidation and strengthening of the Union. If, on the other hand, they refuse to be participants, there would be no commitment on India's part to accept separation of Nagaland, which the GOI [Government of India] would be free to resist in the manner it chose. (Ibid.: 317)

Indeed, the problem also lay squarely with the rebels, who found the last part of his statement ("the GOI would be free to resist in the manner it chose") unacceptable. Narayan was the first to resign from the Peace Mission "on the ground that the federal leaders had no confidence in him" in February 1966 (Ao 2002: 84).

Yet because both sides were committed to a peaceful settlement of the problem, the parties decided that the peace talks would be upgraded to the prime ministerial level. The first round of these high-level talks on February 18, 1966, was followed by another five rounds. At a point when the FGN leaders completely ruled out any possibility of finding a solution within the Constitution of India, then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi suggested that a solution need not necessarily be within the framework of the Indian Constitution but could be found within the Indian Union, implying thereby that the "Constitution could be amended in a way to obtain a solution to the Naga problem." This came closest to the government's offer of extending "a Bhutan-like protectorate status" to Nagaland. All this means, as Rev. Scott clarified, "an Independent sovereign State within a confederation or even within the Indian Union on terms of Article 2 of the Constitution" (Lasuh 2002: 321). Article 2 provides the Indian Parliament with almost absolute right to form and reorganize the states of the Indian Union.

The FGN leaders rejected any offer short of complete independence and a sovereign Nagaland. At this point, the Naga underground was seriously afflicted by factionalism within its ranks. The Tatar Hoho blamed Kughato Sukhai for the failure of talks, and he was forced to resign as prime minister of FGN. The change in NNC leadership brought intertribal rivalry between two Naga groups, the Angamis and the Semas, to the fore and resulted in a series of assassinations organized by both sides. A rev-

olutionary group emerged from within the ranks and the two factions indulged in fratricidal warfare during this time. Finally, the Semas formed the Council of Naga People, unilaterally dismissed "the Angami-dominated FGN," and constituted on November 2, 1968, the Revolutionary Government of Nagaland.[18] As a result, the situation in Nagaland deteriorated in the early 1970s. The Indo-Pakistani war of 1971 that led to the "liberation" of Bangladesh dealt a blow to the Naga insurgent movement: "Foreign support to the Naga rebellion from China and Pakistan also dropped substantially after the creation of Bangladesh, and the defeat of the Pakistan army in 1971" (Bhaumik 2005: 202). The Indian army launched a massive counteroffensive against the Naga underground in 1973 at a time when many cadres of the Naga Federal Army, associated with the FGN, went to China for weapons training and returned with sophisticated arms.

> *FGN leaders rejected any offer short of...a sovereign Nagaland*

The church intervened for the second time in this new outbreak of violence. They appointed a Liaison Committee to bring together all sections of the Naga underground and the Government of India. After months of internal negotiations, the Liaison Committee decided that a six-member committee would be appointed by the FGN to conduct negotiations with New Delhi. Peace talks held on November 10–11, 1975, resulted in what became known as the Shillong Accord. Prior to the Shillong Accord, president's rule had been imposed on March 25, 1975. Imposition of president's rule meant that the central government arrogated to itself extraordinary powers, the state legislative assembly was suspended, and fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution were kept in abeyance. According to S. C. Dev, then a deputy commissioner of Nagaland, president's rule "created for the bureaucrats opportunities to show their determination and commitment to principles, ideals and values" (Dev 1988: 137). The bureaucrats adopted what Bhaumik calls "a tribe-by-tribe approach" to what the Naga National Council construed as a pan-Naga problem. The whole idea was to depend on intermediaries like village elders (*gaonburas*), interpreters (*dobhashis*), leaders of the public and, most importantly, family members of the combating sides and ask them to get in touch with the underground. If their efforts failed to halt the violence, unlimited state repression was threatened. Sometimes, the government enticed families and villages to surrender by offering programs that were essentially of local nature, like construction of roads and bridges, employment, and so forth (Ibid.: 98–114). The whole exercise

was intended to fragment and thereby decimate what was regarded as a comprehensive agenda of self-determination.

The accord was signed by the six persons—not as FGN representatives but "on behalf of the underground organizations," which were in reality breakaway groups of the NNC. In spite of being excruciatingly brief, two of the three clauses that make up Article 3 of the Shillong Accord—the only substantive article of the three in the accord—provide for the "acceptance of the Constitution of India, without condition and of their own volition" and the instrumentalities of "depositing" arms by the underground. Article 1 names the parties signing the accord, and article 2 briefly lays down the historical background of discussions that led to the signing of the accord. Article 3, clause iii, holds out the promise of arriving at a "final settlement" in the following terms: "It was agreed that the representatives of the underground organizations should have reasonable time to formulate other issues for discussions for final solution" (Lasuh 2002; Datta 1995).

It is unclear why the signatories were in such a hurry to work out the modalities of "depositing" arms and why "reasonable time" was not allowed for finalizing the terms of a political solution. Also not clear is whether the representatives of the armed resistance ever thought of reclaiming the arms they had "deposited" (but not surrendered) should the Government procrastinate over the discussions and they feel the necessity of going back to the jungles. The accord turned into a non-starter and soon was interpreted as a "surrender pact" by the NSCN. Moreover, the signing of the accord was followed by some of the worst crackdowns on Naga civil society. Nagaland came under emergency rule immediately before the accord was signed. Luithui and Preston (1999) have critically reviewed the post-Shillong Accord scenario and shown how free circulation and exchange of opinions and views on it were censored and crippled.

Phizo also distanced himself from the accord. Three Naga delegates went to London to discuss the accord with him. During his discussion with the delegates, he reportedly designated the signatories as "puppets." Later, in June 1977, when Phizo met Morarjee Desai, then prime minister of India, he was simply told: "If you want to persist on independence, I will have nothing to talk" about (Lasuh 2002: 320).

The National Socialist Council of Nagaland and the Ceasefire since 1997
The NSCN was born out of the ruins of the Shillong Accord. After describing the accord as a "surrender pact" (quoted in Luithui and Haksar 1984: 37) in its Manifesto of 1980, it referred to the NNC as a "spent force" that had become "treacherous and reactionary." The NSCN, out-

lawed until 1997, wanted to create a Greater Nagalim. Accordingly, the Government of the People's Republic of Nagaland was formed. The council wanted to create this proposed state by integrating Naga-inhabited areas of the Northeast and Myanmar with the Indian State of Nagaland.

The emergence of the NSCN was followed by a rise in violence. This triggered another round of peace endeavors on the part of the church. In 1990 the Council of Nagaland Baptist Churches appreciated the necessity of reconciliation between different Naga tribes as a condition for the success of peace talks with the government. On January 2, 1992, CNBC sent an invitation to all the underground organizations to attend a summit in Atlanta, Georgia, with a view to bringing about a political solution to the Naga issue. Another summit was organized in Kathmandu under the auspices of the CNBC. The preliminary proposal prepared for the summit underlined the importance of informing and unifying the Naga public and urged such organizations as the Naga Students Federation (NSF), the Naga People's Movement for Human Rights, the Naga Women's Organization, Naga Hoho, and Naga Vigil to do the job. It envisaged "tangible progress" by the beginning of the new millennium. Another meeting held in Atlanta in 1997 under the auspices of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America declared: "Our sole aim is to unite the Nagas in the name of Christ." In November 1997, on the 125th anniversary of Christianity in Nagaland, a gathering of about 120,000 Christians in Nagaland "reaffirmed and pledged their commitment and dedicated to the cause and process of peace, understanding, goodwill and reconciliation in Christ" (Lasuh 2002: 586). Again in 2002, CNBC emphasized the need for a negotiated settlement of the issue and reconciliation and unity between various Naga groups, with the help of the Christian virtue of forgiveness, in order to bring about a lasting solution.

The CNBC set the background for another round of peace talks. The ceasefire and Naga peace talks with NSCN-IM were officially announced during the United Front Government led by Indian Prime Minister I. K. Gujral in August 1997. The ongoing peace talks between New Delhi and NSCN are conditioned by the following terms: (1) that talks between the two groups be held without either side stipulating any precondition; (2) that the talks be held at the highest (prime ministerial) level; and (3) that they be held at a venue anywhere outside India. So far the talks have not yielded any concrete political understanding or documentation.

Although the Naga political movement has been consistently demanding the political integration of all Naga-inhabited areas and self-rule, the NSCN is virtually split because of the intertribal rivalry between Naga

groups. The split occasioned many a clash between the two factions. One of the "bloodiest internal clashes in the history of Naga insurgency," as Misra and Misra (1996: 133) describe it, took place on April 30, 1988, when the Khaplang faction attacked the general headquarters of the Muivah faction and killed one hundred cadres. In a statement issued in July 1989, NSCN Chairman Isaak Scato Swu and Secretary T. Muivah accused the vice chairman (who happened to be a Myanmar Naga) of killing dozens of Christian socialist revolutionaries who were Tangkhul Nagas (a Naga group based mainly in Manipur State), to which Muivah also belongs. They even accused Vice Chairman Khaplang of collaborating with the Burmese security forces in mounting the attack on NSCN headquarters. As Misra and Misra (1996: 133) have observed: "It is evident that the Naga underground movement is plagued by dissension and its dream of uniting the Nagas of India and Myanmar in a common and independent homeland cannot be realized."

> *"...Naga underground movement is plagued by dissension..."*

The Naga National Reconciliation Process was initiated with the specific objective of reconciliation between diverse Naga groups. Without bridging the gaps within the society and holding talks within their own communities, the next stage of peace dialogue with the Government of India, it was felt, could not progress. The Konyak Hoho, representing the largest Naga tribe, declared that reconciliation and unity must precede any agreement with the Indian state. The leaders of Naga civil society seemed to have come to the realization that while setting the peace initiative with the Indian State in motion, it was also necessary to reconcile the differences that separate the Nagas and often generate hostility between them. As the declaration for reconciliation made on December 20, 2001, at Kohima points out: "Nagas targeting the Nagas cannot solve the Naga political issue." The Concept Note prepared by the Naga Hoho Coordination Committee defines "rebuilding of the Naga family" as the principal objective of the reconciliation process (Lasuh 2002: 605). Both processes of peace and reconciliation are considered mutually complementary, for peace without reconciliation is not durable, just as reconciliation without peace is partial and incomplete. As the Workshop on Reconciliation and Unity, which adopted the declaration, puts it, the "Reconciliation process should continue for the growth and well being of the Naga society. The political negotiations should be the priority concern of all Nagas while at the same time pursuing the reconciliation process with vigor" (*North East Sun* (New Delhi) 2002: 9).

The process received a jolt when a section of Naga rebels publicly expressed their reservations about a couple of members of the Naga Reconciliation Commission, which had been established as part of the reconciliation process. The enthusiasm of an otherwise strong Naga civil society comprising such organizations as the Naga Mothers Association, the Naga Students Federation, and the Naga People's Movement for Human Rights was considerably diminished by the impasse. At the same time it has to be admitted that NSCN-IM Secretary Muivah considers, as Bhusan (2005) notes, "the process of negotiation is part of solution." In ceasefire negotiations, his entire cabinet turns up. In peace talks, adequate representation is given to various NSCN leaders, and at each stage others not present are briefed in detail. This is his way of ensuring that when a compromise has to be made, NSCN leaders will be willing to make allowances they may not make otherwise.

The rivalry seems to be continuing and affecting progress in the peace process, notwithstanding the efforts of the Naga civil society leaders to bridge the chasm between the two dominant factions of NSCN. Very recently NSCN (Khaplang) issued "Quit Notices" (notices to vacate Nagaland) to the Tangkhuls of Nagaland. Direct clashes between the supporters of the IM and Khaplang factions have been reported from such places as Dimapur, Mokokchong, Zunheboto, and other areas of Nagaland during the last few years (Lama 2007: 10).

The Naga National Party (NNP) vowed to intensify its peace mission through meetings and interactions with all Naga underground groups to stop the unabated fratricidal killing so that Nagas could come to the unification point through the process of reconciliation, in the spirit declared by Naga Hoho and others. The NNP proposes to "treat all Naga factions as equal national assets of the Nagas" as part of what it describes as the "Equi-relation policy" (*Morung Express*, August 26, 2006). Many Naga groups, including the overseas diaspora, condemned the issuance of the Quit Notice. In a press communiqué, the Naga People's Friends Network Korea declared: "NPFNK strongly condemns the quit notice issued to the Tangkhul community."

Although the scope of the ceasefire initially was confined to the Indian State of Nagaland, it was "extended without territorial limits" in 2001. This opened up a Pandora's Box, because it was viewed by the States of Manipur, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh as the first step toward integration of Naga-inhabited areas of these states with the State of Nagaland. The Government of India as a result was forced to rescind its earlier statement concerning ceasefire extension. The anti-ceasefire-extension agita-

tion that rocked the whole of Imphal Valley and set almost all government establishments of Manipur's capital, including the Legislative Assembly, ablaze in 2001 was reportedly spearheaded and organized by some of the leading ethnic Meitei[19] militant groups active in the area. Although Naga civil society is commendably strong, and few human rights violations go unreported in Nagaland, it seems that the Nagas have not had any enduring communication, let alone interaction, with the neighboring Meitei society since then. This has left a "bad scar" in the Naga-Meitei relations (Shimray 2004: 4641).

Since the June 2001 declaration extending the Indo-Naga ceasefire, no dialogue has occurred between the Meiteis and the Nagas of Manipur State, although the resentments of the Meiteis have not assumed the shape of organized warfare against their adversaries. After the Assam Legislative Assembly passed a unanimous resolution affirming the geographical integrity of its state, the Naga Hoho remarked that others could not decide the fate of the Nagas. The Naga People's Movement for Human Rights also reiterated similar concerns by commenting that the right of the [Naga] people could not be compromised in any way. The NSF downplayed the significance of the resolution by saying that it was "not an issue." Muivah is often accused of being unbending and unresponsive insofar as the NSCN-IM's demand for "Nagalim" is concerned. However, in a March 2005 interview with noted journalist Sanjoy Hazarika, Muivah expressed his readiness to reach out and hold conversations with other parties on this issue. He spoke of the need to recognize that the people of the region were neighbors, that they had a shared destiny, and that no solution could be forced on others (Hazarika 2005a). At the same time, he was reportedly critical of the Meiteis living in Imphal Valley and said that the Nagas cannot live according to the Meitei's "whims." Manipur State would have to accept "the inevitable," an obvious reference to what Muivah felt would be its imminent breakup. In fact at a consultative meeting with Naga civil society leaders in Bangkok in 2003, he personally intervened to insert a clause in the final declaration that said the Nagas must "allay" the apprehensions of their neighbors (Ibid. 2005b).

Although according to NSCN-IM the geopolitical integrity of Nagalim is not negotiable and cannot be compromised in any way, Muivah was not averse to the idea of talks with other communities that fall within its proposed boundaries. Then living in exile, both Muivah and Swu accepted the Government of India's invitation to visit Nagaland and expressed their willingness to meet the leaders of other communities. On being asked whether "other communities" include the Meiteis of Manipur, Muivah clarified: "Yes, including the Meiteis, the Assamese and others so

that we can understand each other better" (quoted in Bhusan 2005). It is not very clear whether this meeting was intended to make them "understand" the nonnegotiable nature of the demand for a Naga homeland.

Peace in Mizoram State

Today's Mizoram State was only an administrative district of an undivided Assam when India became independent in 1947. With independence approaching, the Mizos were faced with all possible options: to remain in India, stay under British rule, join Burma, or declare independence. As Nag indicates, many pamphlets embracing possible positions were in wide circulation. However, as he observes: "The closer the Indian independence came, the more polarized the Mizo leaders became over the issue of joining India or remaining [i.e., becoming] independent" (Nag 2002: 175).

A committee was formed by the Constituent Assembly of India to report on the North East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas. The committee was led by Gopinath Bardoloi, an eminent Gandhian and then premier of Assam. Mizo Union—the first modern political organization in the Lushai Hills, then a district of Assam—was divided on the question of drafting a memorandum to be submitted to the Bardoloi Committee. Two separate memorandums were submitted by two of its factions. In their memorandum to the committee in April 1947, the "Left Wing" demanded that (1) the Mizos of the neighboring areas in Cachar, Manipur, and other regions should be included in the district of Lushai Hills and the term "Mizo" should be substituted for "Lushai"; (2) the internal administration of the area should be left to the people within the general framework of Assam Province; and (3) there should be liberal financial assistance from the central government. Integration would be possible if adequate safeguards were provided to the Mizos. The "Right Wing," on the other hand, suggested that the Mizos differed from Indians in every possible way and hence their position would not be secure if they integrated with India. They wanted to revert back to their "independent status." In the words of Nag: "Thus, the memorandum of the Right Wing made the 'official' demand for independence for the first time" (Ibid.: 172). The anti-merger group, however, was marginalized within the Mizo Union.

In July 1947, a new political party, the United Mizo Freedom Organization, was established with the objective of joining Lushai Hills to Burma. In 1952, when the first general election was held in India, all three seats allocated to Lushai Hills in the Assam State Legislative Assembly were captured by candidates belonging to the Mizo Union. In view of the

increasing momentum of the secessionist forces, the Mizo Union decided to send its young volunteers to the villages to popularize its agenda of merger with the Indian Union and gather crucial feedback from them. The young cadres found that villagers were "reeling under the oppression of the chiefs, [and] these villages did not bother about the future of Mizoram whether it planned to join India, Burma or emerge independent. What they desired was to get rid of the chiefs" (Ibid.: 180). It became easier for the Mizo Union to refer to the pledge made by the Indian National Congress to abolish princely states and the *zamindari* system (landlordism) and to obtain from the Bardoloi Committee the promise that the chieftainship would be abolished after the region's merger with India. This, according to Nag, made a "sensational turn" in Mizo politics (Ibid.: 181).

In October 1958, the Mizo District Council predicted the imminence of famine (*mautam*) following the flowering of bamboo.[20] The council requested the governor of Assam to sanction a sum of 150,000 rupees as a precautionary measure to provide relief to the famine-affected people. The Assam Government rejected the request, dismissing the prediction as "a tradition of the primitive people" (Ibid.). When the famine struck, the administration was caught unawares.

A welfare organization called the Mizo National Famine Front was formed in 1960 and became highly popular due to the dedicated work of its young cadres, who collected donations from each house and helped the people in distress. The district administration also received help from the front in its work of relief and rehabilitation during the famine. On October 22, 1961, the Mizo National Famine Front dropped the word "famine" from its name and became the Mizo National Front (MNF). The front then emerged as a force with the demand for creation of an independent and sovereign State of Mizoram.

Large-scale insurgency (called Operation Jericho) broke out in the Mizo Hills late in the evening on February 28, 1966. The capital, Aizawl, and all major towns, including Lunglei, Vairengte, Cahwngte, Chimluang, Kolashib, Champai, Saireng, and Demagri, were captured by armed cadres of the MNF. On March 1, it came to be known that the MNF had declared independence. In the words of V. S. Jafa, a bureaucrat who served in the region at the time: "There was only a semblance of Indian authority in the Mizo Hills during 1966" (Jafa 1998: 105). Cyclostyled copies of a Declaration of Independence signed by MNF leader Laldenga and sixty of his armed comrades were circulated to the

> *Large-scale insurgency...broke out in the Mizo Hills*

public. According to Animesh Ray, a young Indian administrative service officer serving in the Mizo Hills at that time: "It took more than a month for the [Indian] troops to gain control over the main centres of administration" (Ray 1982: 155). Even after the Indian air force strafed rebel positions, MNF resumed its armed attacks on September 15, 1966.

According to government sources, the MNF rebels were allowed to operate from what was then East Pakistan. The deputy minister for Home Affairs observed in the lower house of Parliament on November 9, 1966: "A provisional Government by Mizo National Front is operating from East Pakistan and directing subversive activities in Mizo and Cachar Districts" (quoted in Ibid.: 156). Although Pakistan denied giving arms and training to the Mizos, the Government of India continued to charge it of having incited rebellion in Mizo Hills and the Northeast in general.

When Bangladesh became an independent country in 1971, the MNF lost its base. Most of its cadres were operating from East Pakistan with the support of the Pakistani Government. Many top leaders—the "ministers" and "chiefs" of the army—surrendered to the district administration and were given amnesty. About 1,000 MNF cadres also surrendered to the district administration, and about 500 were still believed to be "scattered in the area." These hostile groups by their "sporadic actions" were hindering the "progress towards normalization of situation in the territory" (Ibid.: 164). The whole district was declared a "disturbed area" under the Assam Disturbed Areas Act of 1955. The Government of Assam imposed the controversial Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958, which enables even a noncommissioned army officer to open fire and kill civilians without facing the burden of trial in a court of law. As a counterinsurgency measure, the army also experimented with the notorious Malayan experience of "regrouping" villages under army surveillance in a bid to isolate the rebels from any social interaction with the villagers. Because the villages were very small, it was "considered reasonable to shift the population from the interior villages to some vantage points particularly by the side of the main roads" (Ibid.: 169).

A regrouped village was called a "protected and progressive village". In each of them a security post manned by the armed forces was set up. Grouping affected about 80 percent of the rural population and 65 percent of the population in the district. The scheme was cleared by the government in December 1966, and between January 5 and February 23 of the following year, 45,107 inhabitants of 109 villages were relocated in 18 group centers on the main road. The regrouping process continued until 1972. These steps further alienated the security forces from the

common Mizo population and, as Jafa observes: "One hopes that the Indian Government would not allow the use of such outdated colonial military strategies while dealing with our own ethnic minorities who have not been able to finally settle their terms of political association with India" (Jafa 1998: 127). Additionally, Mizo Hills was upgraded to a Union Territory on January 22, 1972. The Mizo Hills District Council was dissolved and, following an election in 1972, the Mizo Union Party came to power, winning twenty-one seats in a thirty-member Mizo Legislative Assembly.

Peace with the MNF was a fairly long haul. In November 1972 Laldenga sent his aides to contact the Indian Mission in Kabul. In 1974 MNF first proposed talks for a solution to the Mizo problem. The government sent a helicopter to fly the rebel representatives, including Malsawma Colney, from their hideouts. While the talks continued for about a month, preparations were underway for an attack on the Indian security forces. Nothing concrete emerged from these talks and Colney returned to his hideout in Arakan Hills in Burma. Then, as security forces tightened their grip on the Mizo rebels in 1976, Laldenga once again offered peace talks. New Delhi readily agreed to the proposal. An understanding was reached between MNF leaders and the Government of India on February 18. The understanding was followed by the MNF convention held in Calcutta (now Kolkata) that ratified its terms and authorized its president to negotiate with the Government of India. Negotiations were held and an agreement was reached on July 1, 1976, according to which the rebels agreed to abjure violence and continue talks for an amicable settlement. This agreement was not acceptable to a section of rebels, and Laldenga gradually backed out of it saying that it was "an understanding" and not "an agreement" (Nag 2002).

As military operations resumed, Laldenga again offered to negotiate and agreed to find a solution within the framework of the Indian Constitution. When he was summoned by the home minister to state his demands, he was reportedly "evasive" and passed a decision on to his organization. The government found him "untrustworthy" and asked him to leave the country by July 6, 1977. Laldenga again came back and stated his terms: He demanded statehood for Mizoram, with himself as chief minister of an interim government. He also demanded that Mizoram Assembly elections scheduled for 1977 be stopped. The government rejected the conditions. When talks collapsed, he was asked to leave the country by November 26, 1977. Laldenga then proposed that the MNF lay down its arms and ammunition by January 28, 1978. The MNF National Council refused to accept the proposal. On March 20, 1978, the govern-

ment broke off the talks on the grounds that "Laldenga could not be trust-ed" (Ibid.: 264). He was then arrested.

However, when Indira Gandhi came back to power in 1979 as prime minister of India, the charges against Laldenga were dropped, and the prospects of continuing talks with him brightened. The talks continued in New Delhi between G. Parthasarathy, Mrs. Gandhi's emissary, and Laldenga. The list of twenty-three demands put forward by Laldenga included full statehood for Mizoram, special constitutional provisions guaranteeing complete autonomy, dismissal of the existing Sailo Government in Mizoram District, dissolution of the Mizoram Legislative Assembly, appointment of a Council of Advisors to the lieutenant-gover-nor, headed by Laldenga himself pending fresh elections, inclusion in Mizoram State of all the areas inhabited by the Mizos, even though these were parts of other states within the Indian Union and independent coun-tries like Burma and Bangladesh, a separate flag for Mizoram, member-ship for Mizoram in the UN, and a separate university for the state. New Delhi agreed to grant statehood to Mizoram and a separate university, but rejected the other demands. The Government of India also insisted that the lieutenant-governor have the power to control finance, law and order, and internal security. Government negotiators were intrigued by the fre-quent changes in Laldenga's attitudes. Therefore, on January 12, 1982, the government terminated the talks and declared MNF an unlawful organi-zation. Laldenga again was ordered to leave the country, and military operations mounted pressure on him and his organization. It was at this point that the church in Mizo made an appeal for peace and called on both sides to desist from armed campaigns. Although the church in Nagaland played an active role in initiating the peace process, in Mizo it only made an appeal to end hostilities and bring peace back. Church lead-ers hardly worked for any political settlement of the problem.

Laldenga offered peace talks again in 1985 from his exile in London when a new Indian National Congress ministry took over under the lead-ership of Rajiv Gandhi. The government invited him to talks, and on June 25, 1986, a political agreement, the Mizo Accord, was signed between New Delhi and Laldenga on behalf of the MNF. According to the agree-ment, the Congress (Indira) Ministry in the state was to be dissolved and an interim coalition ministry consisting of members of Gandhi's party and the MNF would be headed by Laldenga. Chief Minister Lalthanhawla was to become deputy chief minister. There were three key actors in the peace process: Laldenga, the MNF, and the government. The process according-ly was marked by a near absence of any civil society organizations.

Mizoram: A Success Story?

The Mizo Accord has been described as the "only accord that has not fallen apart or spawned violent breakaway groups" (Ghosh 2001: 234). Peace accords, according to Nunthara, become successful wherever the parties signing them act as homogeneous subjects and schisms internal to each of them are substantially reduced—if not eliminated. Each party speaking in many voices only complicates the conflict instead of resolving it.

> *speaking in many voices only complicates the conflict*

Nunthara defines "entrenchment" as a process whereby such constitutive ambiguities associated with the formation of an ethnic subject considered eligible for signing an accord with the state are reduced and avoided (Nunthara 2002). In this view, the entrenchment concept is the key to the obvious success of the Mizo Accord. Factionalism within the Mizo National Front, which spearheaded the Mizo insurgency in the pre-accord era, was reportedly much less than in other groups, and by all accounts Laldenga could by and large manage to get his organization to accept whatever he desired, sometimes at the risk of splitting the MNF. Nevertheless, by the time the accord was signed, the MNF had already earned notoriety for having repeatedly backed out of many of its verbal commitments. Laldenga, as Ghosh reiterates, "had total authority over his organization and there was no faction" (Ghosh 2001: 235).

What Nunthara calls "entrenchment"—whether within rebel ranks or within the society at large—is believed to have slowly produced an "illiberal" society in Mizoram in which individual dissent is more or less throttled and dissenters are forced to give way to the

> *"entrenchment"…[has] produced an "illiberal" society in Mizoram*

commands of the dominant organizations. It produces a society in which the underground and legal forces act in unison. MNF's internal discipline, coupled with the predominance of the ethnic and other faith-based organizations, helped in gradually laying the foundations of a highly illiberal society in which the commands of these organizations prevail over those of the government, and the communities other than the Mizos find it difficult to enjoy their rights to distinct language and culture. Laldenga is partly blamed for this. As Jafa notes: "Laldenga tended to be authoritarian in his attitudes towards the office-bearers of the MNF, and often took important decisions without consultations with other members

of the Front" (Jafa 2000: 70). Therefore, by 1970 a serious "internal rift" had developed within the front.[21]

The accord—in the perception of many non-Mizo organizations—hardly makes any room for them to exist, nor does it recognize their separate identity and culture. The Hmars—another tribal group in Mizoram State—disassociated themselves from the Mizos the moment the separate State of Mizoram came into existence in 1986. The demand by the Hmar People's Convention for Hmar land (*Hmar ram*) to be carved out from the newly formed State of Mizoram, symbolizes a deep ethnic divide between the two hitherto friendly communities. Interestingly, the Hmar People's Convention joined the Mizos in the latter's struggle for statehood of Mizoram.

The Reang population group in Mizoram is encouraged by the Mizos to embrace Christianity (Saha 2004: 167). Being non-Christians, their differences from the Mizos are only too visible, and after the formation of Mizoram as a separate state, the Reangs were supposed to be part of the Mizo mainstream. Many of their names have allegedly been struck from electoral rolls, and in elections for the Mizoram State Assembly in November 2003, only 637 voters—a dismal 14.93 percent of them—cast their votes, "because of the failure of the Mizoram Government to provide adequate security" (Chakma 2004). Reangs of Mizoram are involved in building alliances with other minorities in the state like the Chakmas, and Mizo Zirlai Pawl has already branded them as "the outsiders." For the last few years, these organizations have intensified their campaign against the Reangs, and according to an unofficial estimate, over 50,000 of them have been forced to leave the state and take shelter in Assam and Tripura.

Mizo society's intolerance of dissent was exemplified recently when Vanramchhaunvy, a leading Mizo woman activist, was threatened in May 2005 by the Young Mizo Association (YMA) while protesting the deaths of four persons and cruelty toward many others for their alleged involvement in peddling drugs and liquor. The YMA had launched a program to curb drugs and alcohol, and the victims of abuse were punished by the organization as part of its campaign of meting out instant justice to deviants and offenders in society. When Goswami saw two women on the roadside apparently accused of some offense and made to wear large placards around their necks, she pleaded for turning them over to the appropriate authorities and trying them according to the constitution and the law of the land. She was summoned the next day by the YMA, and nine local YMA leaders descended on her home on orders of the Central Committee and threatened her. In an open letter,

Vanramchhaunvy pointed out that she was under pressure and made a reflection on Mizo society:

> These faith-based and community-based organizations dictate our lives since they are so powerful and there is no scope for the development and flowering of individuality and individual freedom. We have seen so much of unique talents and personalities being suppressed because of fear of these organizations.[22]

The following conclusions can be drawn from the Mizo situation. First, the participation of civil society is not essential for an accord to be signed between hostile parties, nor is their participation essential for making it successful. In the Mizo case, the participation of churches was minimal and limited to an appeal to the hostile groups to desist from armed campaigns. Unlike in the Naga case, church leaders never intended to offer any middle ground or to help the hostile parties work out a political solution. Second, although the Government of India might have found Laldenga untrustworthy, he seems to have enjoyed full control over his organization and, with only a few exceptions, had little difficulty in getting the MNF to accept the terms of the accord. Insofar as the MNF was not ridden by factious conflicts, the government found it easier to sign an accord that was not opposed by any MNF factions. Third, the problem is not so much that the society in Mizoram State, like in many other states of the region, is divided, but that it refuses to recognize the divisions. The homogenizing influences of such Mizo civil society organizations as the YMA or Mizo Zirlai Pawl are so strong that any reference to the divisions and the existence of others outside the Mizo mainstream is a taboo. The homogenizing influences within Mizo society have adverse effects on both the kind of society that emerges in the wake of the accord and the quality of the peace.

Civil Society in the Northeast

While the usefulness of a classificatory scheme for understanding and explaining the role of civil societies in making peace or producing conflict in a region can hardly be denied, actual civil societies are far too complex to be fit into any one category. Moreover, many categories are of overlapping nature. At the risk of overgeneralization, this section outlines four types of organizations and initiatives that help to explain the role of civil societies in making peace or producing conflict in India's Northeast.

Civic Representatives

The first approach to understanding the role of civil society in peace and conflict is to refer to those civil society groups and bodies that make the

claim of representing an ethnic community and thereby get involved in conflicts that afflict the region. The scope of civil society according to this view is coeval with that of a particular community or nationality intent on carving out some measure of autonomy from the central state. Since India is divided into a multiplicity of communities, one uniform civil society has not come into being except on very rare occasions (Baruah 1997: 510–11). Insofar as civil society of this sort for all practical purposes is part of the conflicts, its role in making peace is obviously very limited.

Civil society is usually distinguished from ethnic groups and communities existing in any society. Although in political theory such groups are defined as closed bodies hardly allowing any freedom of entry or exit for their members and based on the principle of descent and perceived blood ties, civil society is regarded as a space where individuals and groups enter by free will and always retain the exit option once they enter into it. Literary bodies and organizations of students, teachers, and workers, for example, fall into the realm of civil society. Such bodies as Vaishnavite monasteries (*satra*) and prayer halls (*namghar*) of Assam State; Naga Hoho and Tatar Hoho of the Nagas; and Meira Paibis, Keithels, Lups, and Marups of Manipur State are illustrations of such ethnicity-based organizations.

In a region like the Northeast, this commonplace distinction between ethnic groups and communities on one hand and civil society on the other gets complicated due to a combination of factors. Although the apparent civil society organizations of students, intellectuals, and workers have undergone a process of ethnicization, organizations playing an active role in the peace process have not made a complete separation from the same ethnic groups and communities that are embroiled in the conflicts. Since ethnicity creeps into such apparently civic spheres, these groups can be described as "civic representatives" of ethnic groups and communities.

At a more general level, student politics in the Northeast cannot be regarded as politics *of the students*, because "students" as a single and homogeneous social category does not exist in the region—or within any of the states in the region. The students in the region remain not only ethnically divided but staunchly wedded to their respective ethnic groups and communities. As a result, student organizations serve as outfits and representative bodies of their respective ethnic groups and communities. Almost all communities in the region have their own student unions or federations meant for articulating and representing the interests and concerns specific to their ethnic communities. The preamble to the constitution of the Naga Students Federation for example, declares:

> We, Naga students, having solemnly resolved to constitute ourselves into
> a Federation to: Cultivate and Preserve our cultures, Customs and
> Traditional Heritages; Ameliorate Social and Moral Activities: Safeguard
> common interest, integrity, fraternity and cooperation amongst ourselves
> all over the Naga inhabited areas.

The preamble thus establishes a strong connection between the NSF and
the common interests of all Naga people. Similarly, the president of NSF
in his address to the 19th General Conference, for example, impresses
upon the audience the necessity of "learning to live as one people."

The Assam Literary Society was formed in 1917 as the supreme liter-
ary body of Assamese intellectuals and litterateurs in Assam. Its presently
existing Niyamabali (the Rules) declares as one of its objectives:

> The main (*ghai*) objective of this Sabha is the all round development of
> the Assamese language, literature and culture. Added to it, one of its
> other objectives will be to work for the development of the indigenous
> languages, literatures and cultures.

The term "main" is crucial, for it means that the "development of the
indigenous languages, literatures and cultures" will only be of secondary
importance. The society, in other words, will not undertake any work in
pursuit of "other objectives" that are in conflict with what its rules stipu-
late as "the main objective." It is important to remember that "none of its
presidents (since its inception in 1917) ever made a mention of the devel-
opment of these languages, literatures and cultures at par with that of the
Assamese language, literature and culture" (Deuri 2004: 26). The "aggres-
sive cultural nationalism" (Baruah 1997: 665) of the society is very evident
in the Second Resolution that it adopted in its 1976 session held in Tihu,
Upper Assam, where it emphasized the importance of developing Assamese
language as a lingua franca in "culturally and practically holding the peo-
ple of this diverse region together." Although first demanded in 1950, the
society in its twenty-seventh session formally adopted for the first time a
resolution in favor of making Assamese the only administrative language of
then-undivided Assam. Accordingly, the Government of Assam enacted
the Official Language Act in 1960 that sparked ethnic riots in largely
mixed parts of the Brahmaputra Valley.

The first U.S. Baptist missionaries were invited into the Naga Hills by
early British explorers such as Major Jenkins in the 1830s, but it was not
until the 1870s that significant missionary activity developed. The first set-

tled mission was in the Ao country at Deka Haimong (Molungyimchen) in 1876. Christianity played a role in bringing the Nagas—otherwise sharply divided between various groups and communities—together and forging "a spirit of nationhood" among them (Jacobs 1990). As Jacobs observes:

> The mechanics of missionary activity helped to crystallize a powerful pan-Naga sense of solidarity. . . . Participation in the missionary network (especially training of hundreds of Naga youth from different communities in the secondary and missionary training schools, and for the first time in a single common language, English) was a powerful force for providing the overall sense of Naga identity. (Ibid.: 156)

Jacobs also argues that the early Naga converts were insistent on making a distinction between "European Christianity" and "Naga Christianity" and pointed out that Christianity was no monopoly of the Europeans (Ibid.:157). This pitted them against the dogmatic Naga traditionalists who found them to be too Christian to uphold and remain steadfast to indigenous culture and tradition and retain their Naga identity.

Plantations were mainly located in Assam, accounting for the single largest labor-recruiting sector, which was overwhelmingly dependent on indentured labor transported into Assam since the middle of the nineteenth century from various parts of central and eastern India. At the same time, the labor market was ethnically based, which meant that any sustained working class or labor movement with solidarities cutting across ethnic groups and communities has been almost nonexistent in the region. In addition, in the poorly developed sectors outside of agriculture, the reluctance on the part of the local people to "work under the authority of others" played an important role in bringing an ethnic division of labor into existence (D. Banerjee 2005: 188). More often than not, ethnic divisions have prevailed over class solidarities and blunted the edge of workers' struggles. Guha describes the Assam movement as "chauvinist" and shows how the "cudgel of chauvinism" was used by the vested interests to "cause a division in the trade unions and the liquidation of some of them" (Guha 1980: 1706). He also points out how the poor laborers of non-Assamese ethnic origin were targeted during the movement and the rich and big landlords and industrialists were spared.

Peace Groups
A second category of civil society organizations are those expressly set up with the objective of making the necessary preparations for peace dialogues between two or more warring parties, working out ceasefire details,

and thereby facilitating a process that often culminates in the signing of peace accords. Peace Mission (established at the insistence of the PCG) and the People's Consultative Group (nominated by ULFA) serve as clear examples. Although nominated by ULFA, the PCG was drawn from otherwise diverse segments of society in Assam, and the government agreed to talk to its members before any direct talks could take place with the insurgents. Peace Mission was successful in mediating a ceasefire between NNC and the Government of India and tried unsuccessfully to reach, literally, a middle ground between them. The PCG, on the other hand, held several rounds of talks without any ceasefire being declared between ULFA and the government. Direct talks with ULFA remained elusive, as fresh military operations began in late 2006. Peace processes initiated by each group were eventually aborted. The peace talks initiated by the Peace Mission continued, at least for some time, following the disintegration of the Peace Mission, and talks were upgraded to the prime ministerial level, but the end of the peace process corresponded to the end of the PCG.

Notably, the peace groups have played only a limited role in mitigating conflicts—let alone settling them. In both the Naga and Assam cases, failed peace processes sparked fresh rounds of violence and hostilities. The involvement of peace groups in peace processes points to a dilemma: While the real challenge for peace groups is to be seen as autonomous by the conflicting parties and not to be identified with any one of them, these groups should not be so autonomous as to be found unacceptable by them. The Naga People's Convention was seen to be too close to the breakaway "moderate" group of the NNC, and the members of the PCG—although drawn from diverse social constituencies—could not serve as key mediating points between ULFA and the society at large. As a result, the PCG was criticized for allowing itself to be used as a mere rubberstamp by the insurgents. Even ULFA, as we have seen, was in regular correspondence with the newspaper-reading public until it was declared illegal in 1990. The PCG hardly played any role in activating and resuscitating such civil society processes and could not transform itself into an autonomous social force. By contrast, Peace

> *peace groups have played only a limited role in mitigating conflicts*

> *failed peace processes sparked off fresh rounds of violence and hostilities*

Mission was desperately involved in finding a middle ground between the conflicting parties. Yet it could not develop itself into a social force that was powerful enough not to be ignored by the conflicting parties. Although its members were very eminent personalities from the rest of India and abroad, they hardly had any organic links with Naga society.

The second reason the peace groups have played only a limited role is that, although the members were renowned civil society leaders, they seldom gelled as a group before or even after they came together. Although these groups are expressly set up on the basis of mutual agreement, the problem of their consolidation into a collective is never taken into account. For example, the PCG is marked by hidden tension between its members. A third challenge for peace groups lies in the fact that talks in both cases were marred by mutual accusations of violation of the ceasefire ground rules.

Bridge-builders

A third segment of civil society consists of groups and organizations (like the church in the hills of Manipur and mothers vigilante groups in Nagaland and Manipur) that play an active role in building bridges at the local level and thereby make coexistence of different communities possible. They play a crucial role in preventing conflicts between two or more communities from becoming full-scale wars. In many instances, they ensure that the common ground is not lost and societies do not get bogged down in all-out interethnic wars. Many interpersonal relations, particularly in mixed neighborhoods and localities, actually cut across the divide that is supposed to separate them. Although they play an important role in avoiding local conflicts and making normal social living possible in conflict situations, their impact on the officially initiated peace processes is minimal—if not negligible. These bridge-building organizations continue to be driven by the same nationalist agenda that the insurgents have been fighting for, and they want a political solution to the problem without indulging in violence and wanton killing.

[Bridge-builders] ensure that common ground is not lost

The politics of the Naga Mothers Association serves as a case in point. NMA was formed on January 14, 1984, in Kohima as a voluntary organization, open to all Naga women, with a "clear objective of combating all social evils confronting the society at that time in various forms, to provide a common platform for women's issues and interests and to uphold the dignity of motherhood"[23] (Naga Mothers Association n.d.). NMA does not have any rigid structure of rules and procedures: in fact, it oper-

ates through tribal women's organizations. By contrast, the Naga Women's Union Manipur functions more like an association with its own constitution and explicitly defined hierarchy and rules. Unlike NMA, it holds more regular assemblies and issues reports and publications. Mothers organizations like NMA, and to a certain extent Mothers Union of Meghalaya, that initially focus on predominantly social issues like substance abuse, alcoholism, broken homes, AIDS, and so forth, eventually enter the political arena and situate themselves between two or more warring groups, one of which is, of course, the state. Concern for their sons and daughters has inspired them to oppose midnight combing operations by the army and paramilitary personnel, unlawful detention and arrests, rape and sex-related crimes, and so forth. Their entry into the political arena has been born out of the realization that the concern for children also demands some kind of political action and intervention.

It is interesting to see how NMA's anti-drug and anti-alcohol campaigns brought them to the core of ethnic and nationalist agendas. Its concern for addressing social evils brought it gradually to the world of politics and made it realize the "indivisibility" of these issues (Chenoy 2002: 135). For NMA, the changeover came in 1994, when it transformed itself into a group poised for making peace interventions. In the same year, NMA initiated an inquiry into the massacre of many civilians in Mokokchung and submitted a memorandum to the National Human Rights Commission. NMA also opposed the imposition in 1972 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in Nagaland. Unless the causes of these social evils are properly addressed, the cases of drug addiction, substance abuse, and alcoholism are bound to shoot up. NMA subscribes to the concept that peace must be established through justice.[24] NMA's three successively elected presidents, Sano Vamuzo, Neidonuo Angami, and Khesilie Chisi, have located these social evils in the political problems facing Naga society (Manchanda 2004: 25). After the ceasefire with the government was declared in 1997, NMA, along with Naga Women's Union Manipur, went to speak to NSCN-IM leaders and then to opposing NSCN faction leader Khaplang to appeal to them to meet and talk over their differences. Despite repeated efforts, that meeting has not taken place. The factional killings continue, although the intensity has been substantially reduced.

In 2001, when the Government of India acceded to the NSCN-IM's demand to extend the ceasefire "beyond territorial limits," the declaration triggered off violent protests in Manipur, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh States. NMA's stand on the question was clear. As Neidonuo Angami observed in 2001:

We welcome the recent ceasefire without territorial limits to all Naga-inhabited areas. But to our surprise our sister Governments (Manipur, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh) have started to oppose it. We feel sorry for the unnecessary loss of lives in Imphal and the properties destroyed. We feel sorry there are differences in perspectives on the ceasefire. To us the ceasefire means cessation of armed confrontation, the creation of space for people to people dialogue, free movement of peoples, a time and space for consultation to find a permanent solution to the conflict. But to others it is threatening. In what way has it become a threat is not clear. We hope that we can explain what we mean by ceasefire. We are confident that they will understand. We appeal to them as Mothers that we should all work for peace because if a child dies, it touches us, it grieves us. Because for a mother anybody's child is our child. (quoted in Manchanda 2004: 62)

Angami has been persistently making this point. In a dialogue organized in 2002, for example, she pointed out that "as mothers we do not care just for our children but other children too who are victims of atrocities and violence" (quoted in P. Banerjee 2002: 16). NMA in fact keeps one day each year for mourning the dead—whatever community they belong to—for it means somebody has lost her son or daughter. It is this concept of universal mother that also drives them to listen to the experiences of mothers who do not belong to the same community, and to open dialogue and build bridges with them. In 2002 for example, Angami asserted that "the only way to build relationships is to have an understanding of others' problems" (quoted in Ibid.).

The bridge-builders, like the civic representatives, are rooted in the same ties that bind an ethnic group or community. Unlike the civic representatives, however, they work in a way that involves crossing the ethnic lines and thereby ensuring peace in the villages and neighborhoods. Yet the work is not enough to stop macro-level hostilities and settle the problems. Notwithstanding NMA's peacemaking efforts, its position on the integration of Naga-inhabited areas of the Northeast is just the same as that of NSCN.

Popular Initiatives
Finally, civil society's role in making peace is also located in some yet unorganized, or loosely organized, popular initiatives that mark its emergence as a force autonomous from both the state and the insurgents. These initiatives are still inchoate and at a very early stage of their development and,

most importantly, yet to take concrete organizational forms. However, these unorganized (or, in some cases, loosely organized) initiatives have yet to find any significant reflection in the institutionally established frameworks of peace-making and conflict resolution.

Popular initiatives viewed in this light at one level seek to carve out a measure of autonomy from the state and its institutions, but at another

> *Popular initiatives...*
> *[transcend] rigidly*
> *drawn ethnic boundaries*

negotiate their way through otherwise strong and rigidly drawn ethnic boundaries—particularly in times of violent ethnic and communal conflicts. There is reason to believe that these popular initiatives are increasingly gathering momentum. This also may symbolize the emergence of a critical public—a new phenomenon that is yet to be complemented by any significant attempt to institutionally sanction its involvement in the peace process.

As an example of this type of civil initiative, popular demonstrations were held against ULFA in the wake of the abduction and killing of Sanjay Ghose in Majuli, the world's largest riverine island situated in Assam State. The murder of Ghose—head of the Association for Voluntary Action and Rural Development-North East, a leading voluntary organization involved in a low-cost experiment in erosion control by planting trees along the coastline of the Brahmaputra—remarkably cut into ULFA's legendary popularity in the area. The island—declared a heritage site for being a center of Vaishnavism,[25] with many of its monasteries located here—has already witnessed mass out-migration, particularly to the nearby city of Jorhat (in Upper Assam). "It seemed that the tide was turning definitely against ULFA" (*The Telegraph* 1997), with the effect that hundreds of intellectuals took part in a procession "defying a Janata [public] Curfew" imposed by ULFA on independence day celebrations in 1997. When two of Ghose's alleged abductors were shot dead in Majuli, local residents of Kamalabari reportedly shouted slogans in support of the police action (Ibid.). That could have been the beginning of what turned out to be rapid erosion of popular support for ULFA, which could not afford to remain oblivious to these happenings. In a bid to recapture support, then-ULFA Publicity Secretary Mithinga Daimary, in a press release issued in August 1997, appealed to the people of Assam "to frustrate the designs of the rulers to alienate the ULFA from the masses."

The incidents of people raising their voices against the "atrocities" committed by the rebels seem to be on the rise. The public outrage against bomb blasts conducted by ULFA on August 15, 2004, at Dhemaji, Upper

Assam, that killed thirteen persons, mostly women and schoolchildren who had turned out to take part in the Indian Independence Day celebrations at their school, is a case in point. As *The Assam Tribune*—Assam's largest-circulating English daily—observed in an editorial: "All sections of the people of the State condemn the senseless killing of the innocents so that those involved in such acts do not dare to commit such acts in future" (*The Assam Tribune,* August 17, 2004). The group is still recovering from the outrage created by the bombing. Similarly, in 2004 when ULFA reportedly unleashed a series of organized attacks on the Hindi-speaking migrant Bihari laborers settled in Upper Assam, eminent intellectuals took part in a procession in the capital, Guwahati, condemning the attacks.

If Ghose's killing marks the beginning of the erosion, the killing of an alleged ULFA cadre in Kakopathar in early 2006 shows another face of the critical public that no longer takes "encounter deaths" by the paramilitary forces for granted. The recent incident of army soldiers (*jawans*) opening fire on a mob protesting the death of a suspected ULFA activist and killing as many as five persons in Kakopathar Village in the district of Tinsukia, Upper Assam, is a case in point. One of the *jawans* was allegedly stoned to death by the villagers, and it was reported in the national and local press that the *jawans* opened fire in retaliation for the ghastly killing of one of their men: moreover, they were trying to clear the national highway that had been blocked for hours by the irate villagers. Such incidents are bound to increase when—in the wake of mounting human rights violations—people's faith in the administration and security forces stationed in Assam State for more than sixteen years takes a severe beating, as it has particularly in recent years.

Such initiatives are not rare in the states of India's Northeast. Neither the government nor the rebels can ignore the importance of these initiatives, and they go a long way in creating and nurturing peace constituencies in the region. Criticisms of the state or the insurgents once spoken in whispers for fear of reprisals now show signs of being voiced and articulated in public. The rebel groups are increasingly facing the heat of public criticism. Thus, to cite one instance, in September 2004 thousands of Ao Nagas from the capital,

> *rebel groups are increasingly facing...public criticism*

Dimapur, dressed in traditional attire staged a protest march demanding the arrest of the attackers of Dr. Maong Wati, a prominent Ao Naga professional and philanthropist. The Ao traditional council, known as Ao

Senso Telongjem, wanted the government to arrest the assailants within fif-
teen days. Such open criticism of the militants appears to be a new trend in
the politics of the Northeast, and even the NSF has openly attacked both
NSCN-IM and NSCN (Khaplang) for the alleged torture and killing of
three youths in separate incidents during the months of August and
September 2004.

It would be wrong to conclude that such popular initiatives remain
completely unorganized today. Of late, a section of groups and organiza-
tions operating both in the region as well as outside have attempted to
organize and consolidate this newly emergent peace constituency. The role
of such organizations as the Calcutta Research Group (CRG) based in
Kolkata and Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WIS-
COMP) based in New Delhi deserves special mention in this regard. CRG
organizes a series of dialogues among the representatives from eastern
India and the Northeast to promote appreciation for the respective posi-
tions and differences that keep the conflicting parties apart. While elabo-
rating on the objective, the report on the first dialogue held in Kolkata in
2001 points out:

> We, the members of Calcutta Research Group feel that Bengal is not just
> adjacent to the States of the Northeast but is also related to the region
> through social, economic and political networks of human rights and
> peace. Therefore, as members of a young peace research group we have
> decided to hold this dialogue in Kolkata hoping that such a dialogue may
> bring out saner voices of peace in the region. It is in this spirit that CRG
> felt the necessity of organizing a civil society dialogue where all possible
> shades of opinion could be represented and rearticulated, organized and
> reshuffled in a manner that guarantees against privileging of any one of
> them. (Das and P. Banerjee 2000: 1)

CRG's strategic location in Kolkata gives it a relative distance and,
most importantly, a vantage point to bring together representatives from
different communities otherwise at war with each other so that they can
feel relieved and repose with confidence in the organizers, who are other-
wise not involved as parties to the conflicts in the region. Working from
within the region, the North East People's Initiative based in Guwahati
seeks "to bring together experts and academics that can analyze the peace
pacts of the past, and activists who would attempt to share their experi-
ences of some of these processes—their conditions for success and fail-
ure—in order to define the conditions for justice and peace in the region

in the coming days." The first seminar organized by the North East People's Initiative in September 2005 was successful in drawing together organizations that were partisan and involved in mutual hostility and even conflict.

Individual efforts beyond the organizational domain by such eminent persons as university professors Indira Goswami and Anuradha Datta are noteworthy. Goswami played a crucial role in the communication between ULFA and the government of India (which recently ended in a fiasco), and Datta organized a series of meetings drawing such feuding ethnic communities as the Karbis and the Dimasas together under the auspices of the Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development in Guwahati.

Conclusion

Civil society groups and initiatives play diverse roles in the conflicts afflicting India's Northeast. Civil society cannot be regarded as a magic wand capable of managing and resolving all kinds of conflicts in all situations. In many cases, civil society groups are an extension of these conflicts rather than a solution. In others their role in making peace is limited largely to a secretarial role. Civil society has largely remained in the background, and its role has been restricted to doing the groundwork necessary for the conflicting parties to stop hostilities, sit together, and find a negotiated settlement to their problems. In still fewer cases, civil society groups have been involved in direct talks with the government. New Delhi's predominantly dual policy of pigeonholing peace into neatly separate dyadic modules (like conducting talks separately with the two NSCN factions in Naga, ULFA, and the Bodo Liberation Tiger Force in Assam,[26] etc.) and of insisting on holding direct talks with the insurgents seems to undermine severely the importance of the civil society agenda and its initiatives. The peace talks have for all practical purposes been of a bilateral nature and rarely held in a roundtable mode.

The policy of holding talks within distinct dyadic modules, which keeps civil society groups and their initiatives out of the official peace process, has implications for the quality of peace initiated through the official process as well as the nature of society that emerges in the wake of peace accords. By generally excluding civil society from the peace process, peace is obtained through the balance of power that exists between the conflicting parties. The government's strategy of holding talks only after militarily weakening the insurgents and forcing them to deposit or surrender their arms might drive a wedge in the rebel ranks, but it did not work at all in the case of the 1975 Shillong Accord reached with a few individ-

ual rebels. The army's Operation Rhino II presently continuing against ULFA was launched with the same objective of "bringing the boys to the negotiating table."

Similarly, the government's strategy of creating divisions within rebel ranks and conducting negotiations with the "moderates," as in the case of the Naga People's Convention, has done little to isolate the rebels in the long run. All of these failed peace processes eventually set the ground for further re-intensification of hostilities. It is no use signing an accord either with a body that signs the dotted lines at the point of gun or with one that has hardly any control over the underground rebels. Such accords are bound to fail, and it is better not to sign an accord at all than to sign an accord that is bound to fail. Failed accords always proved costlier than continuing hostilities. Failed peace processes may also be used by rebels as part of their strategy and as an opportunity to regroup, particularly at a time when they are pushed into a corner by government forces and are on the defensive. A failed peace process is essentially a continuation of war—perhaps preparation for war at a more intense level.

> *Rebels...view [failed peace processes] as part of their [war] strategy*

The involvement of civil society groups and initiatives in the peace process may help to infuse the process with the values of human rights, democracy, and justice. Such civil society groups as CRG and WISCOMP seek precisely to ensure this. Civil society initiatives, whether at collective or individual levels, attempt to bring these values to the center stage. That a peace process can culminate in the production of an "illiberal" society is evident in the Mizoram case. When debates within society are discouraged and reduced to those within the militant ranks or a few dominant organizations, the entire society quietly undergoes a process of militarization. Even the so-called success of the accords will have to be revisited in this light, as this "success" may lead to even greater and costlier failures in the future.

Moreover, there are issues underlying the conflicts in India's Northeast that the state can do little to resolve except by bringing the conflicting parties together around a negotiating table. When two communities make contentious claims over the same piece of territory, as in the case of the Nagas and Kukis of the hills of Manipur, and conflicts take on a zero-sum character, the central government can do little to settle the conflict—except to facilitate a dialogue process that aims to bring the groups together and encourage them to arrive at some form of compromise. The problem springs not so much from the liberal fear of the state's sliding into

authoritarianism, but rather that by getting into a conflict that is otherwise irresolvable through institutionally administered diktats, the state runs the risk of losing its credibility and of being identified as one of the conflicting parties. Since the stakes are high, the tide of discontent may simply turn against the state.

The involvement of civil society groups and initiatives per se does not, however, guarantee a durable and stable peace. These groups and initiatives play diverse roles, and some of them even contribute to producing and perpetuating conflicts. Although the autonomy of civil society from both the state and the insurgents is cited as an essential prerequisite for their effective functioning, the example of the Peace Mission suggests that no necessary correlation exists between autonomy and effectiveness. The autonomy of the PM was not in doubt, and its desperate endeavors to find a middle ground, particularly at a time when the peace process was showing signs of an imminent breakup, were commendable. Yet two out of three PM members were eventually found to be unacceptable—one each by the State and the NNC—only after the peace process had failed. In other words, the process did not fail because the PM mediators were rejected. Had the talks been successful, the members might have been acceptable to the rivaling parties. B. P. Chaliha—the lone member left in the Peace Mission—tendered his resignation in protest of a bomb explosion attributed to NNC militants. As noted above, ULFA too rejected many peace overtures by such organizations as AJYCP and AASU, but welcomed the endeavors of Indira Goswami.

In order to make the conflicting parties reach middle ground, civil society groups and initiatives must establish themselves as a socially powerful force—one that is too powerful to be ignored by the rivaling parties. Such peace groups as the PM and the PCG associated directly with the official peace process were expressly set up for the purpose of helping the warring sides reach common ground. Unlike the civic representatives or the bridge-builders, they are not organically linked with any particular preexisting groups or institutions. As a result, peace groups have not been able to survive the failures of peace processes. It is important that peace groups and other civil society initiatives associated with the official peace process develop synergy with other constituents and stakeholders in civil society. Some peace groups seem to operate in a rarefied atmosphere. As soon as they enter the official peace process they are cut off from the existing civil society institutions and processes, depending solely on the individual reputations and credibility of their members.

It has been very difficult to hold the insurgents accountable to the civil society groups and initiatives. ULFA's publicity secretary used to be in reg-

ular communication with the members of the educated public, responding to their queries in the pages of at least a couple of vernacular newspapers until the practice was declared illegal in 1990. The government's decision to declare the secretary's writing illegal pushed the group into the underground and took away the burden of accountability to public opinion. Misra, for instance, argues that civil society in Assam State is "in a shambles" (Misra 2000b). The people who could have formed a critical public are caught in the middle of a tug of war between the Indian Government and the insurgents. Although New Delhi often accuses the insurgents of misleading the community they supposedly represent, the state's involvement in counterinsurgency operations, according to Misra, has silently contributed to its authoritarian transformation and the shrinking of the civil and democratic space. The recovery of this space will not be an easy task unless the civil society groups wield some social power and establish themselves as a force that is too important to be ignored by rivaling parties. Media can obviously play a critical role in this context (Das 2007: 52–65).

Reforming civil society, in other words, is the key to ensuring its effectiveness in peacemaking in the Northeast. Both the state and civil society have roles to play in this regard. Otherwise, it will be impossible to break the vicious cycle of war and peace.

Endnotes

All translations from original non-English sources are mine. I thank Pratap Bhanu Mehta and two anonymous referees for their comments on an earlier draft of this monograph.

1. See "An Abstract Copy of the Resolution Passed in the Emergency Meeting at the Executive Committee—United Naga Council," Imphal, October 1992.

2. NNC—the rebel organization leading the Nagas at the time of Indian independence—held a plebiscite in 1951 to ascertain Naga opinion on the question of integration of the Naga-inhabited areas into the newly formed Indian republic.

3. All estimates have been made by the ethnic organizations involved in the conflict and hence are highly politicized and unreliable.

4. Although the ban on the NSCN-IM has subsequently been lifted and the Government of India is currently involved in a process of intense negotiation with it, the ban continues to be in force against the KLO. Not much information is available about the agreement, although the intensity of conflict subsided substantially, if not completely, after this agreement.

5. The Nagas—scattered all over the Northeast and Burma/Myanmar—consist of as many as 64 tribes and hence cannot be considered as a homogeneous group (Lasuh 2002: 22). The number of "Naga" tribes has been a matter of political contestation. The smaller groups (like the Anals, Noctes, and Chirus) situated between two large tribal families (e.g., the Nagas and the Kukis), are often claimed by the Naga insurgents as Nagas and are included in their "family."

6. There have been some sketchily conducted studies on informal or even semiformal trade relations across the region (the most recent being a collection of essays included in Das, Singh, and Thomas, eds. 2005). Studies in this vein, covering social, cultural, and political sectors, need to be conducted on a much larger scale.

7. A report of August 2004, for example, shows Assam's rank as fifteen among twenty "large" states and, with the exception of Mizoram, all the other states of the region rank in the lowest five among the ten "small" states of India (*India Today* 2004).

8. Reported in *The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), September 27, 2000.

9. For the texts of accords, I have depended on Datta (1995).

10. This is only a brief summary of an otherwise detailed study of ULFA from 1979 to 1991; see Das 1994: 68–89.

11. Prakash Singh – the then Director General of Assam Police, made the point (Singh quoted in Banerjee 1991: 11).

12. The Research and Analysis Wing is India's external intelligence division.

13. Sunil Nath, alias Siddhartha Phukan, was ULFA's publicity secretary at the time.

14. ULFA has more or less stuck to these three conditions since 1992.

15. www.telegraphindia.com/1050222/asp/frontpage/story_4408414.asp.

16. Goswami was reportedly approached by the Naxalites of Andhra Pradesh to initiate a new peace initiative with the Government of India as well as with the concerned state government.

17. The affairs relating to the Naga Hills were under the Ministry of External Affairs at the time.

18. Insurgency leader Zapu Phizo was from the Angami tribe.

19. The Meitei are the numerically dominant group living largely in the valley of Manipur.

20. The much-dreaded flowering of bamboo pushes up the rodent population, which in turn creates havoc to the standing crops in the field.

21. The MNF was divided between two groups: The hardliners were led by Laldenga and S. Lianzula, and the moderates included C. Lalnunmawia, MNF Vice President C. Lalkhawliana, Thankima, and R. Zamawia.

22. *The Statesman* (Kolkata) North East Page, May 15, 2006.

23. The Mothers' Union of Tura (Meghalaya), formed in November 1941, is perhaps the oldest surviving mothers organization in the Northeast.

24. Anuradha M. Chenoy describes it as "feminist understanding of peace" (Chenoy 2002: 135).

25. Vaishnavism emerged as a sect within Hinduism that challenged its orthodoxies, particularly the Hindu caste system. Today, however, its followers are divided into many sects and acute sectarianism characterizes it.

26. The Bodo Liberation Tiger Force is a militant outfit of the Bodos with which the government signed an accord.

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India Today
Morung Express (Dimapur)
The Statesman (Kolkata)
The Telegraph (Kolkata)
Times of India (Kolkata)

Internal Conflicts and State-Building Challenges in Asia

Project Information

Project Rationale, Purpose, and Outline

Project Director: Muthiah Alagappa
Principal Researchers: Morten Pedersen (Burma/Myanmar)
                  Saroja Dorairajoo (southern Thailand)
                  Mahendra Lawoti (Nepal)
                  Samir Kumar Das (northeast India)
                  Neil DeVotta (Sri Lanka)

Rationale
Internal Conflicts and State-Building Challenges in Asia is part of a larger East-West Center project on state building and governance in Asia that investigates political legitimacy of governments, the relationship of the military to the state, the development of political and civil societies and their roles in democratic development, the role of military force in state formation, and the dynamics and management of internal conflicts arising from nation- and state-building processes. An earlier project investigating internal conflicts arising from nation- and state-building processes focused on conflicts arising from the political consciousness of minority communities in China (Tibet and Xinjiang), Indonesia (Aceh and Papua), and southern Philippines (the Moro Muslims). Funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, that highly successful project was completed in March 2005. The present project, which began in July 2005, investigates the causes and consequences of internal conflicts arising from state- and nation-building processes in Burma/Myanmar, southern Thailand, Nepal, northeast India, and Sri Lanka, and explores strategies and solutions for their peaceful management and eventual settlement.

Internal conflicts have been a prominent feature of the Asian political landscape since 1945. Asia has witnessed numerous civil wars, armed insurgencies, coups d'état, regional rebellions, and revolutions. Many have been protracted; several have far-reaching domestic and international consequences. The civil war in Pakistan led to the break up of that country in 1971; separatist struggles challenge the political and territorial integrity of China, India, Indonesia, Burma, the Philippines, Thailand, and Sri Lanka; political uprisings in Thailand (1973 and 1991), the Philippines (1986), South Korea (1986), Taiwan (1991) Bangladesh (1991), and Indonesia (1998) resulted in dramatic political change in those countries. Although the political uprisings in Burma (1988) and China (1989) were suppressed, the political systems in those countries, as well as in Vietnam, continue to confront problems of legitimacy that could become acute; and

radical Islam poses serious challenges to stability in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Indonesia. The Thai military ousted the democratically-elected government of Thaksin Shinawatra in 2006. In all, millions of people have been killed in the internal conflicts, and tens of millions have been displaced. Moreover, the involvement of external powers in a competitive manner (especially during the Cold War) in several of these conflicts had negative consequences for domestic and regional security.

Internal conflicts in Asia can be traced to contestations over political legitimacy (the title to rule), national identity, state building, and distributive justice—that are often interconnected. With the bankruptcy of the socialist model and transitions to democracy in several countries, the number of internal conflicts over political legitimacy has declined in Asia. However, the legitimacy of certain governments continues to be contested from time to time, and the remaining communist and authoritarian systems are likely to confront challenges to their legitimacy in due course. Internal conflicts also arise from the process of constructing modern nation-states, and the unequal distribution of material and status benefits. Although many Asian states have made considerable progress in constructing national communities and viable states, several countries, including some major ones, still confront serious problems that have degenerated into violent conflict. By affecting the political and territorial integrity of the state as well as the physical, cultural, economic, and political security of individuals and groups, these conflicts have great potential to affect domestic and international stability.

Purpose
Internal Conflicts and State-Building Challenges in Asia examines internal conflicts arising from the political consciousness of minority communities in Burma/Myanmar, southern Thailand, northeast India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Except for Nepal, these states are not in danger of collapse. However, they do face serious challenges at the regional and local levels which, if not addressed, can negatively affect the vitality of the national state in these countries. Specifically, the project has a threefold purpose: (1) to develop an in-depth understanding of the domestic, transnational, and international dynamics of internal conflicts in these countries in the context of nation- and state-building strategies; (2) to examine how such conflicts have affected the vitality of the state; and (3) to explore strategies and solutions for the peaceful management and eventual settlement of these conflicts.

Design

A study group has been organized for each of the five conflicts investigated in the study. With a principal researcher for each, the study groups comprise practitioners and scholars from the respective Asian countries, including the region or province that is the focus of the conflict, as well as from Australia, Britain, Belgium, Sweden, and the United States. The participants list that follows shows the composition of the study groups.

All five study groups met jointly for the first time in Washington, D.C., on October 30–November 3, 2005. Over a period of five days, participants engaged in intensive discussion of a wide range of issues pertaining to the conflicts investigated in the project. In addition to identifying key issues for research and publication, the meeting facilitated the development of cross-country perspectives and interaction among scholars who had not previously worked together. Based on discussion at the meeting, twenty-five policy papers were commissioned.

The study groups met separately in the summer of 2006 for the second set of meetings, which were organized in collaboration with respected policy-oriented think tanks in each host country. The Burma and southern Thailand study group meetings were held in Bangkok, July 10–11 and July 12–13, respectively. These meetings were cosponsored by The Institute of Security and International Studies, Chulalongkorn University. The Nepal study group was held in Kathmandu, Nepal, July 17–19, and was cosponsored by the Social Science Baha. The northeast India study group met in New Delhi, India, August 9–10. This meeting was cosponsored by the Centre for Policy Research. The Sri Lanka meeting was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, August 14–16, and cosponsored by the Centre for Policy Alternatives. In each of these meetings, scholars and practitioners reviewed and critiqued papers produced for the meetings and made suggestions for revision.

Publications

This project will result in twenty to twenty-five policy papers providing a detailed examination of particular aspects of each conflict. Subject to satisfactory peer review, these 18,000- to 24,000-word essays will be published in the East-West Center Washington *Policy Studies* series, and will be circulated widely to key personnel and institutions in the policy and intellectual communities and the media in the respective Asian countries, the United States, and other relevant countries. Some studies will be published in the East-West Center Washington *Working Papers* series.

Public Forums

To engage the informed public and to disseminate the findings of the project to a wide audience, public forums have been organized in conjunction with study group meetings.

Five public forums were organized in Washington, D.C., in conjunction with the first study group meeting. The first forum, cosponsored by The Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, discussed the conflict in southern Thailand. The second, cosponsored by The Sigur Center for Asian Studies of The George Washington University, discussed the conflict in Burma. The conflicts in Nepal were the focus of the third forum, which was cosponsored by the Asia Program at The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. The fourth public meeting, cosponsored by the Foreign Policy Studies program at The Brookings Institution, discussed the conflicts in northeast India. The fifth forum, cosponsored by the South Asia Program of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, focused on the conflict in Sri Lanka.

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Project Participants

Project Director
Muthiah Alagappa
Director, East-West Center Washington (from February 2001 to January 2007)
Distinguished Senior Fellow, East-West Center (from February 1, 2007)

Burma/Myanmar Study Group

Morten Pedersen
United Nations University
Principal Researcher

Mary P. Callahan
University of Washington

Christina Fink
Chiang Mai University

Saboi Jum
Shalom Foundation, Yangon

Kyi May Kaung
Freelance Writer/Analyst, Washington, D.C.

Tom Kramer
Transnational Institute, Amsterdam

Curtis Lambrecht
Yale University

David Scott Mathieson
Australian National University

Win Min
Chiang Mai University

Zaw Oo
American University

Martin Smith
Independent Analyst, London

David I. Steinberg
Georgetown University

David Tegenfeldt
Hope International Development Agency, Yangon

Mya Than
Chulalongkorn University

Tin Maung Maung Than
Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore

Ardeth Thawnghmung
University of Massachusetts, Lowell

Meredith Weiss
East-West Center Washington

Khin Zaw Win
Independent Researcher, Yangon

Harn Yawnghwe
Euro-Burma Office, Brussels

Southern Thailand Study Group

Saroja Dorairajoo
National University of Singapore
Principal Researcher

Thanet Aphornsuvan
Thammasat University

Marc Askew
Victoria University, Melbourne

Suchit Bunbongkarn
Chulalongkorn University

Kavi Chongkittavorn
Nation Multimedia Group, Bangkok

Neil John Funston
Australian National University

Surat Horachaikul
Chulalongkorn University

Srisompob Jitpiromsri
Prince of Songkla University,
Pattani Campus

Joseph Chinyong Liow
Nanyang Technological University,
Singapore

Chandra-nuj Mahakanjana
National Institute of Development
Administration, Bangkok

Duncan McCargo
University of Leeds

Celakhan (Don) Pathan
The Nation Newspaper, Bangkok

Surin Pitsuwan
MP, Thai House of Representatives

Thitinan Pongsudhirak
Chulalongkorn University

Chaiwat Satha-Anand
Thammasat University

Vaipot Srinual
Supreme Command Headquarters,
Thailand

Wattana Sugunnasil
Prince of Songkla University,
Pattani Campus

Panitan Wattanayagorn
Chulalongkorn University

Imtiyaz Yusuf
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Background of the Conflicts in Northeast India

Northeast India owes its geographical distinctiveness in relation to the Indian "mainland" to the partition of the subcontinent in 1947. But as an official Indian category it dates from 1971 following a radical reorganization of internal boundaries and creation of new states. The region is connected with the rest of India through a narrow corridor, which is approximate thirty-three kilometers wide on the eastern side and twenty-one kilometers wide on the western side. This constitutes barely one percent of the boundaries of the region, while the remaining 99 percent of its boundaries are international—with China's Tibet region to the north, Bangladesh to the southwest, Bhutan to the northwest, and Burma/Myanmar to the east.

The region comprises the seven Indian states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura—also known as "Seven Sisters." Since 2003, Sikkim has been included as the eighth member of the regional North Eastern Council. With the exception of Nagaland, which became a state in 1963, most of the states in the region were reorganized between 1971 and 1987. These cover a total area of over 254,645 square kilometers (about 8.7 percent of India's territory) and, according to the 2001 Census of India, have a combined population of 38,495,089 people—roughly 3.73 per cent of the country's population. The region accounts for one of the largest concentrations of "tribal" people in the country—constituting about 30 percent of the total population—though with a skewed distribution of over 60 percent in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland together. Three states—Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya—contain an overwhelming majority of Christians (90, 87, and 70 percent respectively). The region is characterized by extraordinary ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity, with more than 160 Scheduled Tribes and over 400 distinct tribal and subtribal groupings, and a large and diverse nontribal population concentrated mainly in Assam, Manipur, and Tripura. An estimated 220 languages belonging to the Indo-Aryan, Sino-Tibetan, and Austric language families are spoken in the region—the largest concentration of languages in the subcontinent.

Although the Ahoms were successful in gradually consolidating the greater part of the region under a single political unit in the course of their rule (1228–1826), court chronicles of the Kacharis (1515–1818), the

Jaintias (1500–1835), the Manipur Kings (1714–1949), and other local groups point out how they had historically retained varying degrees of independence into the nineteenth century, when the British took over the region. Colonial rulers took nearly a century to finally annex the entire region and exercised their control over the hills primarily as a loosely administered "frontier" area, thereby separating it from the "subjects" of the thickly populated plains.

Northeast India has been the theater of the earliest and longest-lasting insurgency in the country—in the Naga Hills—where violence centering on independentist demands commenced in 1952, followed by the Mizo rebellion in 1966 and a multiplicity of more recent conflicts that have proliferated especially since the late 1970s. Every state in the region excepting Sikkim is currently affected by some form of insurgent violence, and four of these (Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, and Tripura) have witnessed scales of conflict that could—at least between 1990 and 2000, be characterized as low intensity conflicts. The Government of India has entered into ceasefire agreements—renewed from time to time until today—with two of the leading factions of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland in 1997 and 2001. The Government of India and one of these factions, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah), are now reportedly involved in discussing "substantive issues" while trying to reach a "permanent and honorable" solution to the long-standing problem. The Mizo National Front and the Government of India signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 1986 and their rebel leader, Laldenga, subsequently formed his own political party and became chief minister of Mizoram State. The United National Liberation Front (UNLF)—the armed opposition group active in the valley of Manipur, contests the "Merger Agreement" that the king of Manipur signed with the Government of India in 1949 on the grounds that the king signed it under duress. The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) too questions Assam's inclusion in the Indian Union. Attempts have been made to bring UNLF and ULFA to the negotiating table. The Government's response to independentist demands so far has included enacting extraordinary legislation like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958, utilizing security forces to suppress rebellion, promoting economic development, and negotiating peace agreements with the insurgent organizations.

Although landlocked on all sides, migration, whether from across the international borders or from other parts of India, continues unabated. A

significant part of the immigration into the region is thought to be cross-border and illegal—especially of foreigners from Bangladesh. The region has frequently been rocked by violent tremors of anti-immigrant sentiments. Although a major problem, the Government often finds it difficult to detect and disenfranchise—let alone deport the foreigners.

Conflicts in Northeast India have not only focused on the Indian state, but also manifest intergroup and intragroup dimensions. Intergroup conflicts based on mutually rivaling "homeland" demands (say, between the Bodos and the non-Bodos, the Karbis and the Dimasas in Assam, the Nagas and the Kukis/Paites in the hills of Manipur, the Mizos and the Brus/Reangs in Mizoram, etc.) and struggle for power among competing groups have sparked conflicts and internal displacements. The multiple forms of resistance in the exceptionally diverse ethnic landscape have produced politics and struggles with multiple competing agendas.

Map of Northeast India

Map of Northeast India showing China (Tibet), Bhutan, India (Sikkim), India (West Bengal), Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar, Thimpu, Brahmaputra, Guwahati (Dispur), Assam, Nagaland, Kohima, Meghalaya, Shillong, Imphal, Manipur, Barak, Bangladesh, Dhaka, Agartala, Tripura, Aizawl, Mizoram, Burma / Myanmar, India, Bay of Bengal.
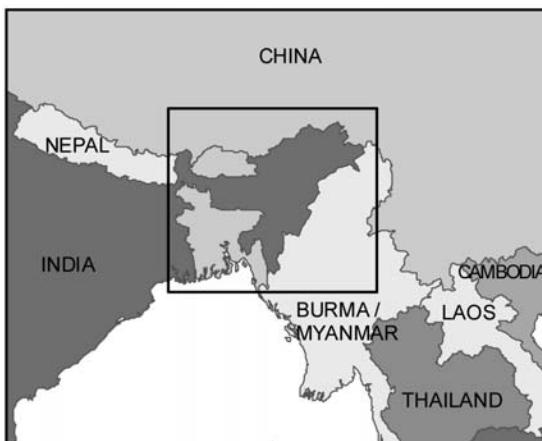
Legend:
- ■ Capital Cities
- ● State Capitals
- Provincial Boundaries
- Country Boundaries

Inset map showing China, Nepal, India, Burma / Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand.

Note: Map boundaries and locations are approximate. Geographic features and their names do not imply official endorsement or recognition by the UN.

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Scale: 0 – 100 – 200 Kilometers

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About this Issue

This monograph examines the role of civil society groups in peace building in three conflict regions in India's Northeast—Assam, Naga Hills/Nagaland, and Mizo Hills/Mizoram. These political conflicts are complex with each conflict representing a cacophony of competing, often zero-sum demands.

In investigating the role of civil society groups, the study distinguishes between "official" (between the Government of India and certain insurgent organizations) and "unofficial" peace processes at the local level that makes coexistence of diverse communities possible despite the continuing violence. These two processes reflect very different ways of addressing conflict and defining the role of civil society groups in peace building.

In the official peace process, the role of civil society groups is to bring warring parties to the negotiating table, set forth potentially agreeable ceasefire terms, and suggest possible settlements. The emphasis is on finding solutions at the macro level in the belief that settlement will also lead to resolution of micro level problems. In contrast the role of civil society groups in the unofficial processes is to constantly negotiate across ethnic boundaries and make it possible for rival communities to live together in the same village, locality, or neighborhood. Compromise is required at every level for conflict resolution. Popular initiatives also help insulate the general population from rebel groups.

The official and unofficial peace processes often proceed on parallel tracks with minimum impact on each other. It is important for the two processes to be connected. For civil society groups to be more effective in peace building, they must be socially integrated and develop synergy with other constituents and stakeholders.

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About the Author

Samir Kumar Das is professor of political science at the University of Calcutta, Kolkata. He can be contacted at samirdascu@hotmail.com.