

Inter State Border Disputes in North East Region of India: Special focus on Assam and its Bordering States

Smirti Priya Das

Dibrugarh University

Smritipriyadas69@gmail.com

Abstract:

North East part of India is known for its own unique features. But the present day political landscape of North East can be characterized by internal border conflict. The North East region comprising of Meghalaya, Assam, Tripura, Sikkim , Manipur, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland, is characterized with a unique mix ethnic cultural, religious and linguistic diversity. Border disputes between North Eastern States have been occurring since the 1960's after State Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram were carved out of undivided Assam. The union government has taken many efforts to resolved these disputes, However, not much success has been achieved. Non resolutions of this disputes has given rise to strong community sentiments among states concern and resultantly vitiated the inner state relations. Further the security situation of the region is threatened with insurgents and criminal gaining the upper hand. The need of the hour is to shape public opinion for peaceful borders and redouble efforts for a political solution to these decades old disputes.

Key words: North East India, border disputes, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh.

Introduction

North East India is characterized by its unique mix ethnic cultural and religious and linguistics diversity. The north-eastern region originally comprised of Assam, Manipur, Tripura. Meghalaya Nagaland and Mizoram were later carved out of greater Assam ; The Northeastern Frontier Agency later come to be known as Arunachal Pradesh. The region with differences in cultural and identity, was amalgamated into one major state which eventually lead to conflict among the various communities- further leading the ' balkanization' of Assam and there after to the formation of three major states i.e. Nagaland (1963), Meghalaya and Mizoram (1972)

However, the conflict further escalated the communities, due to lack of proper demarcation of border . The conflict spread outside Assam, and 'radically' redefined the political balance between the local communities. The conflict is not only limited to ethnic identity i.e. the suppression of one ethnic identity over another, but also is based on territorial and resources aspirations.

Objectives of the study:

1. To discuss about the various aspects of border disputes among the northeastern states.
2. To discuss about various steps and efforts under taken to solve the conflict.

Methodology:

The study is based on secondary information. All the relevant information collected from various books, journals, newspapers , articles, Internet etc.

Analysis of the study:**Assam and Nagaland border disputes:**

The conflict between Assam and Nagaland is considered to be one of the contemporary conflict of the north east region. Assam and Nagaland share a 434km long border. While the border dispute between the two states began right after Nagaland attain statehood in 1963.

The lack of proper border demarcation between Nagaland and Assam is one of the most important regions for the conflict. For Assam the border established in 1963 is the main border whereas Nagaland believes in historical claims and respect the border which was established during the colonial period. Clashes in the border region started from 1965 mainly in the form of raids, forced harvesting of crops, kidnappings abduction and killings. However, the first major violence was reported in 1979 in the chungajan region, between the rengma and karbi tribes in during which 55 villagers lost their lives and 467 house were fired. In 1985 in the region of Merapani another fresh round clashes occurred in the Merapani region between the police forces. The clash resulted in the killing of 32 villagers and 50 wounded as well as 25000 villagers fleeing..

Efforts at Disputes Resolution:

In 1967 to 68 an attempt was made to resolve the border disputes when both states government agreed to allow the survey of India to demarcate Assam- Nagaland boundary. Unfortunately, the survey had to be abandoned as the Nagaland government didn't cooperate. The first substantive attempt at resolutions of the border dispute was taken by the union government after the 1968 clashes when it constituted Sundaram Committee in 1971 with the mandate to determine the boundary between Assam and Nagaland, however the committee's recommendation were only accepted by Assam, Nagaland on the other hand rejected it. The violence in Doyang reserved forest in 1971 led both states to sign an interim agreement for peace and stability in the border region – this led to peace in the region.

The union government took steps to control the violence and set-up the Shastri Commission. The Commission recommended proper demarcation of border, for peace and tranquility in the region. It also favored the claims of both states within the constitutional boundaries, a short term measure for peace however, this also met with limited success with the Assam government seeking legal remedies for settlement of the border.

Current situation of the conflict:

Incidence of border skirmishes are now more regular, the latest being the economic blockade of 2020 where the Assamese protest encroachment of Nagaland into their land.

Assam and Meghalaya border Disputes:

Meghalaya was carved out from Assam in 1972. Assam shares an 884.9km long border with Meghalaya. The major point of contention between the two states is the district of Langph in West Garo hills bordering the Kamrup district of Assam – both the states have claim the ownership of the district for more than a century. The district was part of Kamrup district during the colonial period but in the post Independence was shifted to Garo hills and a part of Meghalaya. As per Meghalaya, the demarcation of border 1951 shows Langph as part of future Meghalaya States. Whereas Assam believes it to be part of the Mikir hills in the Assam.

Clashes between Assam and Meghalaya:

The two states are involved in on an off clashes since 1974, where in a skirmish occurred between law and order officials of both sides. However, a major conflict occurred between the two states in 2010, where in, the ethnic groups of Khasi, Garo communities clashed with the Nepali villagers, that ultimately required police intervention. During the clash four people were killed and 26 others were injured. However, this was not the end, in 2012 a Khasi individual led a hunger strike in memory of those killed in 2010; the hunger strike continued for a period of two weeks. The latest clash occurred in 2018 between the Assam police personnel and locals, however the situation was brought under control and escalation was averted.

Steps undertaken to solve the conflict:

The local government continuously takes effective step to maintain stability in the region, the most recent being the letter written by member of the legislative assembly from Meghalaya in 2020 to the Home Minister for a solution to the conflict.

Current Situation of the Conflict:

There are no new reports of a major clash between the communities since 2018. However, in the national interest it is important to take immediate steps to maintain the sanctity of the border.

Assam – Mizoram Border Disputes:

Mizoram was carved out of Assam and established as a union territory in 1972 and as a full-fledged state in 1987. The two states share a 164.6km long border. The boundary between the two states is defined in the North Eastern Area (Reorganization) Act of 1971, which in turn is based on notification no. 2106 AP dated 9 March 1933. During the 1950's the Assam government tried to demarcate the boundary between Assam and the Lushi Hills District, but its effort was halted the office of the Assam survey department was set on fire by miscreants from Mizoram. The first major instance between the two states came to the fore in 1994, when Mizoram objected to Assam's attempt to extend its control over the reserve forest . Major clashes along the border broke out in 2006, 2018, 2021 and more recently in 2022

Steps undertaken to solve the Conflict:

There was a meeting in Meghalaya comprising officials of both Assam and Mizoram with the sole purpose of finding a solution to the border conflict, where they agreed to maintain a status quo along the border. However owing to the dynamic nature of the situation, it is important to find a permanent solution to the border problem between the states.

Current Situation of the Conflict:

At present, the situation remains tense along the border. Central forces are deployed along the border Sashastra Seema Bal(SSB) and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) on Assam side and the Border Security Force on Mizoram side of the border to act as a buffer between the state police forces. Efforts are being made to diffuse the tension on July, 2021, the Union Home Secretary convened a meeting of the chief secretaries of both the states to arrive at some sort of agreement, but it remained inconclusive as Mizoram sought more time to hold consultation on Assam proposal for maintaining the status quo as in 2020.

Assam Arunachal Pradesh Border Disputes:

Arunachal shares an 804.1km long boundary with Assam. The boundary dispute between the two states came to the fore after the establishment of Arunachal Pradesh as a union territory in 1972. Conflict between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh started to gain momentum since 1992, when the Arunachal Pradesh government accused Assam of encroachment and construction in their territory. Additionally, there were also accusations of burning down of buildings both official and residential.

Clashes:

Since 1992 , small clashes took place between the populations, particularly in 2005, and 2007. In 2005 the main reason for the clash was the eviction drive undertaken by the Assam government in Arunachal Pradesh territory. In which about 100 houses were damaged by the officials of the Assam government. The second major clash occurred in 2007, wherein villagers from the other side of the border fired at a peace meeting in Assam, injuring eight people.

Steps undertaken to the solve the Conflicts:

One of the major step towards a plausible solution was taken up by Assam in 1989. When Assam government field a case in the Supreme Court. However, the case is still in the trial stage. Secondly another legal step was taken in 1997, when a member of the legislative assembly of Arunachal submitted a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) regarding the eviction drives. In 2015 Arunachal Pradesh again took the legal course to stop illegal constructions by Assam in disputed areas. This case however, averted Assam from proceeding with illegal construction.

Current Situation of the Conflict:

In 2020, there were clashes, which led to a small economic blocked by Assam NGO's for few days. The main reason for the clash was the killing of a truck driver from Assam due to an argument in the border. The tension were diffused after the intervention of local authorities from both sides of the border.

Conclusion:

It is time to find a permanent solution to the border conflict in North Eastern states, as it would not only lead to peaceful relation between the various states involved but in the long run , will act as an important juncture for "India's Act East Policy" owing to its proximity to the ASEAN countries. Moreover, the presence of China via its BRI near India's North East makes it all the more important to solve the North East " Internal Conflicts" as soon as possible.

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