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## India (Northeast tribal conflicts) (1952 - )

The northeast region of India is made up of seven states that collectively are home to more than 160 different indigenous tribes. Several armed rebel groups in the region have struggled for autonomy or independence since the Indian subcontinent was partitioned in 1947. Although some rebel forces did not become active until the 1970s, the entire region has been highly militarized since partition. A number of groups reached settlements with the government of India in the late 1980s and 1990s. Fighting continues, however, as some groups' complaints were not addressed and other factions remain outside the agreements.

The hilly terrain of northeast India is rich in natural gas, coal, limestone, forests, and water resources that are suitable for hydroelectric power generation. Historically self-sufficient, the tribes living in the hills have lost land to state-supported migration schemes and natural resource extraction programs. Many of the tribal people are Christian, and in-migration of Bengali Muslims and Hindus has changed both the religious and linguistic balance. Although there are numerous groups, the three main struggles have been in Nagaland, Mizoram, and Tripura.

The Nagas unilaterally declared independence the day before Indian independence in August 1947. Since then, they have engaged in diplomatic and armed struggles. Backed at times by China and Pakistan, the Nagas have faced forced village relocation and other government tactics to isolate the rebels. Despite peace accords signed in 1975, 1997, and 2003, factions remain outside the agreements. In addition, fighting has grown between the Nagas and Kuki tribe (who also live in Nagaland) in recent years.

Guerrilla violence in the Mizo hills began in 1966, when the Mizo National Front (MNF) launched a coordinated attack on military and treasury installations. The government responded by deploying an entire division of the Indian army, forcibly relocating thousands of people, issuing identity cards, imposing curfews, and forbidding collective land cultivation. Negotiations settled the conflict in 1986 and created the state of Mizoram, autonomous within India. The MNF won Mizoram's first elections, a success that has inspired other rebel groups in the northeast.

The Tripura region has had two waves of violence: the first began in 1948 as a communist and tribal alliance against the Indian military, and the second was a response to large-scale Bengali in-migration in the 1970s and 1980s. The Indian military countered the first insurgency with total destruction of villages. In the 1970s, Tripura nationalist parties responded government-backed in-migration by forming a rebel force called the Tripura National Volunteers (TVA). While they claimed the government of India as their enemy, the TVA almost exclusively attacked Bengali civilians. The TVA grew weaker in the 1980s, and reached a peace settlement at the end of the decade. Although most fighting has ended, there are still factions that remain outside of the agreement, and communal violence is common.

### *Print Resources*

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Azam, Kousar J. (ed.) (2001) *Ethnicity, Identity and the State in South Asia*. New Delhi: South Asian Publishers.

#### *Online Resources*

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Sahni, Ajai (2003) "Nagaland: Hope and Hopelessness." *Asia Times Online*.

#### *Timeline*

1947 - India, Pakistan become independent; Nagaland unilaterally declares independence

1956 - Indian army deployed to Nagaland

1958 - Naga rebels engage in full insurgency with Indian army; Armed Forces (Special Powers) Regulation grants enhanced power to army

1962 - India and China fight war

1963 - Nagaland becomes autonomous state of India; MNF wins Mizo Hills elections

1966 - MNF outlawed; Indian army crackdown in Mizo Hills

1971 - Bangladesh gains independence; India issues general amnesty to Mizo rebels

1975 - Shillong Accord signed between Naga dissidents and India

1977 - India and Mizos enter negotiations

1980 - Tripura National Volunteers commit first massacre of Bengalis

1986 - MNF and India reach settlement giving Mizoram statehood

1988 - TVA settles with Indian government