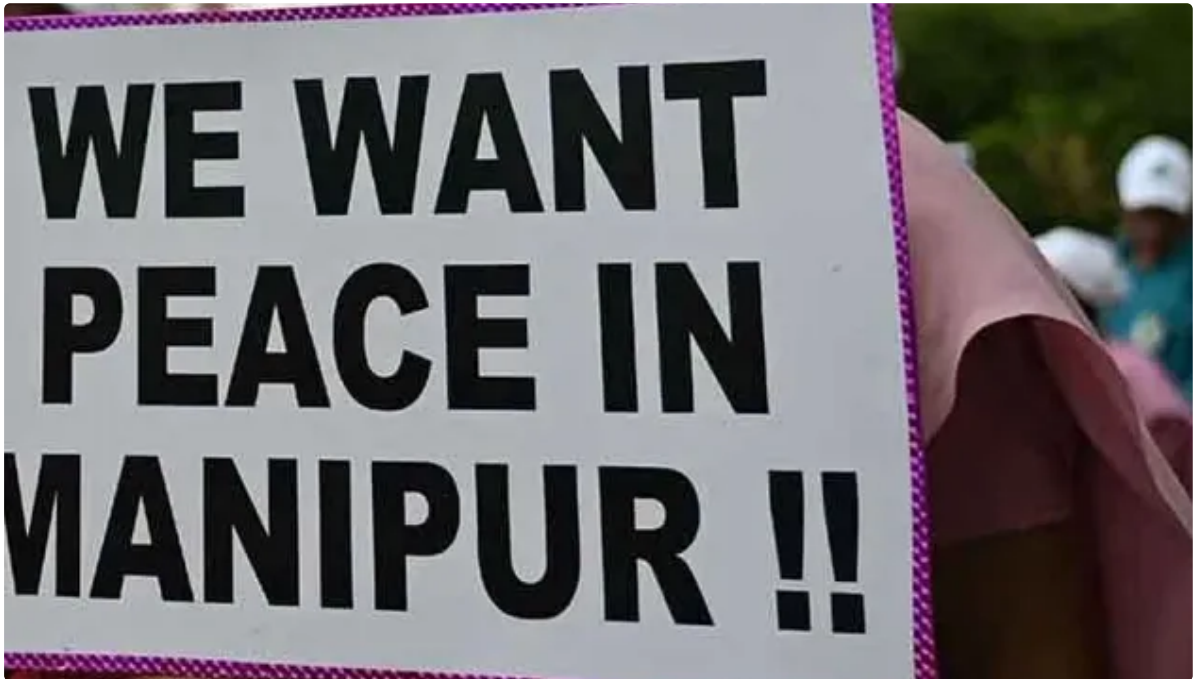


A Citizens' Initiative for Peace in Manipur



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Pramod Boro 21 July 2026 959 views

Manipur stands at a decisive historical juncture. The violence that began on 3 May 2023 has taken hundreds of lives, displaced nearly 60,000 people, destroyed settlements and places of worship, and fractured relationships formed over generations. Beyond these visible losses lies a deeper injury in terms of the erosion of trust among citizens. This is why the challenge before Manipur cannot be understood only as a question of law and order, as it presents a cavernous crisis of social cohesion, democratic confidence and shared belonging.

However, the present conflict must not become the only lens through which Manipur, or the wider Northeast, is viewed. The region possesses a substantial inheritance of coexistence. Village councils, customary institutions, traditional authorities, women's collectives, elders and community assemblies have historically mediated disputes and maintained social order. These systems were neither uniform nor free from inequality, but they demonstrated an important principle upon which peace and harmony get sustained through legitimate institutions that enable recognition of grievances and reparation of relationships.

This inheritance also reflects an ecological ethic where our shared civilization was rooted in respect for nature. Land, forests and rivers were not understood merely as economic assets but those which are deeply entwined to identity, ancestry, livelihood and responsibility to future generations. Air, water, and the environment were sacred inheritances for posterity. Communities respected each other's identities, cultures, languages, customs, and traditions because these institutions formed the moral foundation of society itself. This social wisdom is the greatest political inheritance of Northeast India. This provides to us also the key for a durable peace framework where we acknowledge that our conflicts over identity, territory, representation and resources are interrelated.

Unfortunately, the decades of insurgency, militarization, ethnic polarization, political competition, and administrative failures have gradually weakened these institutions. The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act was extended across Manipur in 1980, marking the beginning of one of the longest periods of militarization in independent India. The decades that followed witnessed insurgency, counter-insurgency operations, disappearances, extortion, assassinations, bomb attacks, and repeated cycles of violence. The memories of Operation Bluebird (1987), the Naga-Kuki conflict of 1993, the 2004 Manorama incident, and countless untold stories remain deeply embedded in the collective memory of our people.

Thousands of civilians, militants, and members of the armed forces have lost their lives since the insurgency intensified in the early 1990s. During the most violent years between 2004 and 2010 alone, annual fatalities frequently exceeded 300 people. By 2022, violence had reduced dramatically, creating genuine hope that Manipur was finally moving towards lasting peace.

Then came 3 May 2023. The new violence was unlike previous insurgencies. It was no longer simply a confrontation between armed groups and the State. It entered villages, homes, neighbourhoods, schools, places of worship, and families. Communities that had lived side by side became divided by fear and suspicion. By the end of 2024, more than 225-260 people had been killed, while approximately 60,000 citizens had been displaced from their homes.

In such a situation, security measures may be necessary to protect life, prevent escalation and restore public order. Political dialogue, judicial processes, relief measures and administrative action are equally indispensable. Yet experience from conflict-affected societies shows that official interventions, by themselves, rarely reconstruct trust at the level of everyday life.

Peace agreements signed on paper cannot substitute for trust built between neighbours. The greatest challenge before Manipur today is not simply ending violence. It is rebuilding relationships. How do neighbours trust one another again? How do children grow up without inheriting the hatred of adults? How do communities remember their pain without allowing that pain to define their future? These questions cannot be answered through legislation or security operations alone. Political leadership changes, Bureaucrats are transferred. Policies evolve with every administration. Society, however, remains.

In Manipur, the need of the hour is a Citizens' Initiative for Peace. A broad, non-partisan and institutionally supported framework. It should complement rather than replace the constitutional responsibilities of the Union and State governments. Its purpose should be to create credible spaces in which communities can acknowledge suffering, clarify grievances, resist misinformation, and develop practical forms of cooperation.

Such an initiative must include women, youth, tribal and non-tribal institutions, internally displaced persons, religious leaders, educators, customary authorities, artists, entrepreneurs, journalists, scholars, retired public servants and civil-society organisations. Women and young people, in particular, must be recognised as co-authors of peace rather than merely beneficiaries of decisions made elsewhere. It must create permanent spaces where people speak honestly, listen respectfully, acknowledge suffering across communities, and work together on common challenges.

The initiative could pursue four interconnected priorities. First, it should facilitate carefully designed inter-community dialogue, supported by trained and trusted mediators. Second, it should document losses and experiences across communities with methodological care, protecting both truth and human dignity. Third, it should promote joint civic action around education, health, livelihoods, environmental restoration and youth engagement to gradually rebuild confidence. Fourth, it should develop peace education and responsible communication so that schools, universities, media institutions and digital platforms do not become channels for inherited prejudice or inflammatory misinformation.

A credible peace process must reject both collective blame and enforced erasures. Individuals responsible for crimes must face due process, and survivors must have access to justice, reparation and dignified rehabilitation. At the same time, entire communities cannot be treated as permanently guilty. Restorative approach that asks not only which laws were broken, but also who was harmed, what obligations arise from that harm, and how civic relationships can be rebuilt without compromising accountability provides a plausible pathway. This balance is difficult, but has now become essential for our collective healing.

The significance of peace in Manipur reaches far beyond the State. India's democratic strength depends on whether diversity can be governed through constitutionalism, dialogue and mutual respect. The Northeast is a region of timeless traditions, ecological knowledge and community institutions which can enrich India's understanding of pluralism and peacebuilding.

In sum, our collective future cannot be built on fear. On the one hand, governments must ensure security, justice and an enabling institutional framework and, on the other hand, citizens must undertake the slower work of restoring trust. Manipur needs both. Let this generation be remembered not for transmitting grievance to its children, but for transforming pain into a collective healing. I believe that the most meaningful victory in Manipur will be the recovery of a political community in which every person can live with dignity, safety and hope.

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