

**Environmental Security in India's Northeast:
Climate Change, Land Degradation
and
Circles of Conflict**

**Roundtable Discussions
Organised by Calcutta Research Group**

21 February 2026, Guwahati

A Report

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Background Note

The Calcutta Research Group (CRG) – a network of scholar practitioners working on issues of peace, and security with Northeast India as a geographical focus of interest – proposed to organise a set of roundtable discussions on *Environmental Security: Climate Change, Land Degradation and Circles of Conflict* on 21 February 2026, in Guwahati. This is the second regional dialogue in continuation with discussions held in Guwahati in February 2025 with representatives and individuals working with internally displaced communities and vulnerable groups in the Northeast. Starting out as a forum of mostly young public activists and socially committed researchers, CRG is now well-known for its research, dialogues, and advocacy work. The emphasis that CRG places on the East and the Northeast in its research and dialogues has now resulted in a strong network of scholars, activists and institutions in the region. It has carved out a role for itself in the scholar-activist world more broadly for its policy studies on autonomy, human rights, women's dignity, issues of migration, peace and conflict resolution, citizenship, borders and border-conflicts, and other themes relevant to democracy.

Carrying forward its engagement in India's Northeast, this dialogue was aimed at bringing together academics and practitioners to deliberate on how power, politics, and economics shape the human environment relationship and intersect with conflict, peace and security; in particular with focus in India's Northeast, an economically fragile biodiversity hotspot, where the economics of extraction drawing on the oil, mineral and water resources has accentuated existing ethno-political faultlines. This along with its geostrategic importance on account of its location bordering four countries has made the region one of Asia's most militarised and volatile one, characterised by a militarised infrastructure, high deployment of armed forces and a number of armed movements against the Indian state (Kakati 2021). While there is considerable research on the impact of the environment in different sectors, its impact on existing conflicts and its emergence as a regional security challenge in India's Northeast needs closer attention. The CRG roundtable discussion was planned with the aim of addressing this vacuum.

CRG organised the dialogue on *Environmental Security in India's Northeast: Climate Change, Land Degradation and Circles of Conflict* in two roundtable discussions on 21 February, 2026. The first roundtable examines **frameworks within which environmental security can be understood drawing on traditional and non-traditional approaches to security**. Focusing on two tropes – **climate change** and **land degradation** - around which the triple crises of energy, food and water coalesce, it considers how this triple crisis of insecurity feeds into or multiplies existing ethno-political conflicts. The second roundtable includes specific **empirical studies of some states of India's Northeast to gain a more granular understanding of how climate change and land degradation impinges on environmental security in India's Northeast and creates conditions for or exacerbates existing conflict**. This is particularly relevant in India's Northeast where the fragile biodiversity, rich natural resources (oil, gas, minerals, water) and presence of diverse indigenous culture often intertwine leading to conditions that foster resource driven clashes, climate impacts (floods, displacements,

human wildlife conflicts) ethnic tensions over land and identity, and even insurgencies. These are further exacerbated by large scale development projects that involve unbridled resource extraction and central government policies that often sideline local needs.

Environment, Security and Conflict

The framing of environmental concerns within a security framework received an impetus with the idea of Human security articulated in the Human Development Report of 1994. As the Human Development report pointed out matters pertaining to the environment may not necessarily be associated with manifested violence but may contain within them the seeds of congealed violence. While it may be difficult to establish a clear causal relationship between environmental deterioration or resource scarcity on one hand, and violent conflict on the other, there seems little doubt that environmental factors interact with security issues prompting both domestic and international conflict. Homer-Dixon (1999) for instance explores the links between violent civil conflict and renewable resources while carefully steering clear of establishing a deterministic relationship between the two. His key finding that “scarcity of renewable resources or environmental scarcity – can contribute to civil violence, including insurgencies and ethnic clashes” (Ibid: 177) is substantiated by drawing on a set of environmental and social linkages from a decade of research on environmental security.

Environmental devastation may result in what the Human Development Report has described as a life cut short by disease or a job that disappears. Consequently “freedom from want” and “freedom from fear” became the new conceptual alphabets to design a different ‘nontraditional’ security discourse (Gopinath and DasGupta 2006). It did not supplant the more traditional military state centric security that had held centre stage under the influence of the Realist school of International Relations but both deepened and widened the debate on what constituted security. By bringing in people rather than states as the referent of security nontraditional approaches to security also brought in a range of different issues related to the ecology into the security basket.

The basic framework for understanding the relationship between environment and security is the millennium ecosystem assessment (MA) that looks at all the functions of ecosystems and the services they deliver to people and nature.ⁱ The MA defines the environment by looking at the ecosystem from undisturbed natural forests to landscapes mixed with human use to ecosystems managed and modified by humans such as agricultural and urban areas. It assesses how changes in the ecosystem affect human wellbeing. Human wellbeing is in fact the underpinning notion in the MA and is very broadly defined in terms of access to secure and adequate livelihoods, shelter, clothing, clean air and water, good social relations and ability to provide for children. It embeds the idea of security through this notion of wellbeing that includes secure access to natural and other resources, personal safety, security from natural and human made disasters and freedom of choice and action (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005). This resonates powerfully with

the ideas articulated in the Human Development Report of 1994, which brought the notion of human security into the limelight (DasGupta 2018).

Climate Change and Environmental Security

While weather events have always been unpredictable, climate change refers to the alarming increase in the frequency of such variable weather events in recent years. As the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) states in Article 2, climate change means a change in climate that is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere through emission of greenhouse gasesⁱⁱ and which is in addition to direct climate variability observed over comparable time periods.ⁱⁱⁱ

However, the responsibility for climate change from greenhouse gases cannot be borne equally by developed and developing countries, both because of the much larger role played by developed states for the greenhouse emissions, and the fact that global warming has disproportionately affected agricultural production in the developing countries. It is pertinent to note that while rising temperatures cause huge food insecurity to the agricultural lands of the Global South such as India, this can actually be beneficial for agriculture in the temperate regions of the Global North enabling single crop areas to be converted to double/multiple crop zones (Sahai 2010).

India's stand has been that developed countries need to reduce their own agricultural emissions while at the same time paying for adaptation in the agricultural sector in keeping with the principle of "polluter pays." India's negotiating position on climate talks is therefore based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibility (Rajamani 2000) the essence of which is that while all parties needed to act in the global climate effort, primary responsibility for capping emissions and paying for adaptation and mitigation strategies through technology transfers had to primarily be with the Global North who had been the chief architects of the fossil carbon economy.

While India is yet to develop a transparent environmental security policy, at the national level the Indian government has responded to the impending security threats caused by climate change by formulating a National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) in 2008 which identified eight core national missions running through 2017.^{iv} These respond to impending security threats to India from climate change to three of the most vulnerable sectors - energy, food, and water security.

The crisis of energy security emanates from the prediction that India will be the third largest energy consumer by 2020^v but the electricity grid is one of the worst in the world. The second part of the triad relates to food security. India's agriculture has been predicted to suffer more than any other country's as a result of climate impacts. Projected surface warming and shifts in rainfall could decrease crop yields

by 30% by the mid-21st century. There will also be reductions in arable land with resulting pressures on agricultural output (Kapur, Khosla and Mehta 2009). The third segment of the triad relates to the impending water security crisis in India. Melting Himalayan glaciers due to global warming threatens to disrupt lives and livelihoods and create environmental refugees. Food and water insecurity coalesce and carry consequences with spillover impacts at a regional level.

Land Degradation, Deforestation and Environmental Security

Land degradation - defined as the reduction or loss of biological or economic productivity of land (UNCCD 1994, article 2) - results in decreased yields, incomes, food security, and loss of vital ecosystem services (Chabay *et al* 2016). Indeed, across the globe deforestation, chemical intensive agriculture, extractive mining practices, overgrazing on land, has sometimes irreversibly undermined its restorative capacities. There appears to be a demonstrable link between land degradation and human security especially when we consider how poverty and hunger can be the drivers of migration and conflict. This undermines peace and stability of land dependent communities such as those found in India and South Asia where the majority of the population live in rural areas with agriculture as their main means of livelihood (Ibid).

In India the quality of land has been deteriorating because of heightened nutrient mining, soil erosion, increasing water scarcity, adverse impacts of climate change and accumulation of toxic elements in soil and water (Trivedi 2010). As Trivedi indicates, land degradation like climate change is an anthropogenic induced process that poses the biggest threat to livelihood security of farming communities across the country. The resulting food insecurity will be one of the key challenges for India in this century unless urgent measures are taken to reclaim wasted and degraded land.^{vi}

'In fact, the food-water-energy crisis whose complex interplays constitute environmental (in)security, offers an example of how land degradation could be a threat to human lives. With land degradation the services supported by it also become degraded and depleted reducing productivity and affecting lives and livelihoods (Jayaram 2016). Marginal farmers and Scheduled Tribes in India are disproportionately affected because they occupy land that has already been depleted by ruthless mining and indiscriminate use of forest resources by timber mafias. These communities are invariably pushed to move to marginal lands for cultivation thereby creating a vicious cycle of further degradation (Ibid).

It is not only the loss of arable lands that is the cause of worry. In India, coal continues to remain the most heavily consumed source of energy for the population and in this context the extractive policy of mining coal from ecologically fragile land by several private players particularly in the post liberalisation era (1990s onwards) has contributed to the heightened sense of insecurity. The loss of vital ecosystem services associated with land degradation has been starkly evidenced in India's eastern and central regions with the richest reserves of coal (Kugelman 2012).

Environment, Conflict and Insecurity in India's Northeast

India's northeastern region consisting of the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim is a resource rich area with reserves of oil, coal, gas and minerals, making it the site for resource extraction through mining and setting up of large hydroelectric power plants under the Indian state's paradigm of development. Often described as a biological hotspot, it is ecologically fragile, with its fragility further accentuated by climate change impacts. It also has the highest number of indigenous people in India making it the site of contested ethno-political identities. Finally, it borders four countries – Bangladesh, Bhutan, Tibet region/China, Myanmar and Nepal giving it a special geostrategic significance (Kakati 2021) and putting it at the heart of the Indian State's Look East and Act East policy.

This combination of factors has made India's Northeast a region of ethnic conflicts, most of them coalescing around land and identity. As Fernandes (2025) has argued for the people, the land represents livelihood but the Indian state's model of development has turned it into a commodity. The encroachment of tribal land has added fuel to fire and often land conflicts have turned into ethnic conflicts and then into religious conflicts. As Fernandes (2025) pointed out, "land issues turned religious is the new form of ethnic conflicts" in today's Northeast India. These are manifested in insurgencies and demands for sovereignty linked to resource control, environmental movements, human wildlife conflict and conflict and environment induced forced migration.

As (Phukan 2025) notes, India's Northeast (NE) ranks among the most vulnerable and early **climate change** impacted regions of the world. The area has experienced conflict, floods, erosion, landslides, loss of livelihoods, biodiversity reduction for decades but in the past not many would have seen this as the impact of climate change. Perhaps the first study to reveal the warming impact in NE India was the 2019 Climate Vulnerability Assessment for the Indian Himalayan region using a Common Framework which placed four northeastern states among the most vulnerable in the Himalayan region. The Indian delegation identified Assam and Mizoram as the most vulnerable to climate change at the COP24.

As Sushil (2023) highlights, while there is a range of research available on the impact of climate change on various sectors, its impact on existing conflict and its role as a threat multiplier in India's Northeast has received far less attention. The roundtables focus on case studies that shed light on how the impact of climate change – frequent floods, soil erosion, landslides, biodiversity reduction loss of livelihoods leading to displacement – can trigger conflict, jeopardising security.

The extraction economy of India's Northeast – a defining characteristic of the region's development trajectory – has resulted in severe **land and environmental degradation** and social conflict (PolSci Institute, 2025). The liberalisation of the 1990s that invited private investment and foreign collaboration along with the positioning of the region as a gateway to South East Asian markets resulted in a step up of extractive activities that

brought in its wake deforestation, soil erosion, water pollution, forest degradation. This in turn contributed to climate change impacts. The resultant social tensions in this region have come from communities questioning whether the so-called benefits of resource extraction justify the environmental and social costs that they have had to bear. The fundamental questions around “whose land is it” and “development for whom” has accentuated existing ethno-political faultlines and created new fissures.

The vision of India’s Northeast as a buffer zone from Myanmar and China was one reason for heavy army deployment and militarised infrastructure in the region. The manner in which this region was integrated into India and demarcated into administrative units left the political aspiration of fragmented tribes unaddressed. This along with the unmet basic needs of the people fostered a political economy of violence in an already militarised zone. The channelling of development funds into the extractive economy meant that for the vast majority of the people access to infrastructure, health and education remained elusive.

While any discussion on possible ways forward will have to take into account the unique characteristics of this region it is also important to acknowledge that India’s Northeast is now part of a broader scenario of ecological precarity. Lessons from the disaster in Tehri – Garhwal and the Teesta floods also carry important lessons for India’s Northeast. From deadly earthquakes in the Himalayas to catastrophic floods, cyclones, heatwaves, storms, relentless natural disasters have taken a heavy toll on lives, livelihoods and local and regional economies, and have had ripple effects throughout the country. Changing patterns of temperature, flash floods due to heavy rainfall, glacial lake outbursts and choked river channels due to unplanned urban development have on the one hand enhanced the possibilities of floods, landslides, and on the other side, loss of vegetation, increasing concrete cover and raised use of plastic products pose huge challenges to waste management in the mountainous regions of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu- Kashmir, and hilly areas of north Bengal, Sikkim and northeastern India. Inseparable for the ecology and survival of cities like Delhi, Jaipur, and many others, protection of the Aravalli hills is significant not only for conservation of numerous lower, scrub-covered ecologically critical hills, but also for preventing desertification, recharging groundwater and protecting the million livelihoods that are dependent on these hills. These issues of ecology, land, rights and livelihood protection will also help build up on the discussions.

In January 2020 Government of India released the draft Environment Impact Assessment notification intended to replace the 2006 rules. This controversial draft watered down environmental accountability by allowing industries who have violated existing environmental laws to continue to operate after paying a penalty. As Kakati (2020) noted the new notification also inverted the precautionary principle which had allowed for an initial assessment of the environmental impact of the projects. Instead, it proposed post facto clearances after constructions and operations had already begun. The entire structure of protection and management that defined environmental security in the past is now open to redefinition and revision and the extent to which this will impact environmental jurisprudence also remains an open question.

Given this background and using the lens of **Political Ecology** some of the issues which the roundtables raise are:

1. How do climate change and land degradation interact with peace and security dynamics?
2. How does climate- security and environment/nature security overlap?
3. How does environmental stress exacerbate existing conflicts or create new ones?
4. What are the links between biodiversity and security/insecurity?
5. What are the links between the environment and conflict financing and the creation of a political economy of violence?
With specific reference to India's Northeast and drawing on case studies and examples from Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Sikkim and Tripura:
6. What has been the impact of the environment on conflict faultlines?
7. How has land degradation and biodiversity loss in India's Northeast acted as drivers of conflict?
8. How has the impact of climate change – frequent floods, soil erosion, landslides, biodiversity reduction loss of livelihoods leading to displacement – triggered conflict and jeopardised security.
9. How has the economy of extraction in India's Northeast impacted livelihood security and contributed to health risks associated with air and water pollution? To what extent has this model of development been responsible for the creation of an illicit political economy that drives and sustains existing conflict and makes the task of conflict negotiation particularly challenging?
10. How have land issues and resource politics contributed to the ethnicisation of conflicts in India's Northeast and the creation of a militarised state and society?
11. What lessons can be drawn from other parts of India on how environmental security is being redefined and the impact of the 2020 notification on environmental assessment that is being proposed to replace the rules of 2006?
12. What are future environmental policies in India's Northeast that could be adopted to help transform the conflict landscape?

Notes

i Ecosystem services are benefits people obtain from the ecosystems such as provisioning services (food, water, timber), regulating services (that affect climate, floods,

diseases, waste, water quality); cultural services (provide aesthetic, recreational and spiritual benefits) and supporting services (soil formation, photosynthesis nutrient cycling). The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment conducted under the UN and governed under a multi stakeholder board was called for by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 2000 and was initiated in 2001 with the objective of assessing the consequences of eco system change for human wellbeing.

ii These gases include carbon dioxide, hydrofluorocarbons, sulphur hexafluoride, methane and nitrous oxide and the emissions have a direct impact on agriculture, food and nutrition security as well as rural livelihoods.

iii UNFCCC entered into force in March 1994 with the basic aim of preventing 'dangerous' human interference in the climate system and recognized for the first time that there was a problem of such interference. For the text of the convention see http://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/background_publications_htmlpdf/application/pdf/conv_eng.pdf

iv The eight core missions were: use of solar energy for power generation, sustainable habitats to promote energy efficiency, water efficiency through pricing and other measures, sustaining the Himalayan ecosystem and its biodiversity and forest cover, afforestation, sustainable agriculture to support climate adaptation, strengthening strategic knowledge for climate change to understand its impacts and challenges. National missions were set up for each of these eight areas.

v Power minister Shushil Kumar Shinde cited in the World Energy Leaders Summit, Istanbul 2016, http://www.foundryinfo-india.org/India%20to%20be%20world%203rd%20largest%20energy%20consumer%20by%202020_20.aspx

vi In India a study by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research in 2010 revealed that 120.4 million hectares of land in the country is degraded land or wasteland. See <http://www.icar.org.in/files/Degraded-and-Wastelands.pdf>

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Programme Schedule

Environmental Security in India's Northeast: Climate Change, Land Degradation and Circles of Conflict Roundtable Discussions

**Organised by Calcutta Research Group 21 February 2026
Don Bosco Kharguli, Guwahati**

9.30 am - 10.00 am: Welcome and Introductory Remarks: Shyamalendu Majumdar and Sumona DasGupta

10.00 am - 10.45 am: Keynote Address: Mahesh Rangarajan
In Search of a Balance: State and Societies in times of Environmental Transformation

10.45 am - 11.00 am: Tea Break

11.00 am - 1.30 pm: Roundtable 1: Reflections on India's Northeast: Assam, Nagaland, Manipur

Chair: Shyamalendu Majumdar

Speakers

Hijam Liza Rihmo: *Environmental Crises and Conflict in Northeast India: A Theoretical Analysis*

Debashree Chakraborty: *Political Ecology of Assam: Observations from the Barak Valley*

Narayan Sharma: *The Politics of Conservation in Assam: Implications for Environmental Security and Social Conflict*

Amba Jamir: *Environmental Security and Human Security in Upland Indigenous Contexts: Reframing Rural Development from Northeast India*

Arambam Noni: *Greening Laws and Civil Society: Reflections from Manipur*

Dimgong Rongmei: *Climate Change, the Push for Development and the Challenge of Sustaining the Environment*

Lead Discussants: Mrinal Gohain and Timothy Khongsai

1.30 pm - 2.30 pm: Lunch Break

2.30 pm - 4.30 pm: Roundtable 2: Reflections on India's Northeast: Mizoram, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura

Chair: Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury

Speakers

Rakhee Kalita Moral: *Securing Homes and Habitat: Gendered Landscapes in Northeast India*

Mary Vanlalthanpuii: *Ecofeminism in Mizoram: Women, Environment and Livelihood Security*

Snigdhendu Bhattacharya: *Northeast's Brightening Mining Prospect: Should We Worry or Cheer? Observations from Meghalaya*

Swargajyoti Gohain: *Infrastructure, Ecology and Security: Notes from Arunachal Pradesh*

Debraj Deb: *Land, Identity, Resource Politics and Conflict in Tripura*

Lead Discussants: Anjuman Ara Begum and Immanuel Varte

4.30 pm - 5.00 pm: Reflections and Q+A with Mahesh Rangarajan

Moderator: Sumona DasGupta

Reflections: Immanuel Varte

Lead Discussant: Shatabdi Das

5.00 pm - 5.10 pm: Closing Comments and Vote of Thanks: Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury

Abstracts

Roundtable 1: Reflections on India's Northeast: Assam, Nagaland, Manipur

Environmental Crises and Conflict in Northeast India: A Theoretical Analysis

Hijam Liza Rihmo

The environmental crises unfolding across the states of Northeast India cannot be reduced to mere climatic variability or geomorphological instability. It is not merely a natural phenomenon but also reflects larger structural inequalities that prioritize capital accumulation over social and ecological stability. The region is experiencing a convergence of "double exposure," where the localized impacts of global climate change intersect with the systemic vulnerabilities produced by state-led extractive developmental projects. The state acts as a primary agent in the "territorialization" of nature, turning forests, rivers, and minerals into commodities for national growth. The market-led development projects by the state often displaces traditional management systems with commodified paradigms, creating a "profitability-sustainability gap" where economic progress comes at the cost of long-term ecological resilience. This leads to a decrease in the "social efficiency" of natural resource utilization, where increased extraction does not translate into higher wages or better social welfare for the local population. Instead, the benefits accrue to a small minority of shareholders—investors and managers—while the ecological costs are externalized to the marginalized communities. This leads us to address the issue from the framework of environmental justice as there is disproportionate exposure of marginalized groups to environmental hazards and systematic exclusion from decision-making processes. Thus, the paper shall examine a multifaceted theoretical architecture comprising Political Ecology, the Treadmill of Production, and Environmental Justice in interrogating the power dynamics, colonial legacies, and social hierarchies that govern the distribution of environmental benefits and burdens in the region. The theories inform us that environmental crises and conflict in Northeastern states of India is intricately linked with inequality. Not only does inequality increase the burden of climate variability on the most vulnerable population but they are also robbed off the ability to voice their concerns and, many a times, they are left without the wherewithal to respond to environmental crises because of state acts of commission or omission.

Political Ecology of Assam: Observations from the Barak Valley

Debashree Chakraborty

Disruptions in environmental profiles lead to massive disruptions in the lives and livelihoods of people. In today's world, environment and security are increasingly becoming coterminous. Such disruptions not only affect the natural surroundings but also impact conflict and peace dynamics of the society. While environmental disruptions are largely considered signifiers of meteorological or geophysical changes, these have deep

rooted social and cultural impacts. Security becomes a key concern while dealing with environmental disruptions. Environment-related security challenges may arise in the face of disasters, climate risks and related disruptions. In my presentation, I shall talk about how environmental disruptions like deforestation in tea plantations, loss of biodiversity and wetland degradation in combination with resource politics are throwing off balance life and livelihood security in Barak valley of Assam.

The Politics of Conservation in Assam: Implications for Environmental Security and Social Conflict

Narayan Sharma

Conservation in Assam is deeply embedded within political, economic, and governance processes rather than being a purely ecological endeavour. I will examine how socio-political dynamics and state-led economic priorities drive forest cover change in Assam, and how these transformations in turn produce environmental insecurity and social conflict. Focusing on Upper Assam, Sonitpur, and Goalpara, I will examine how distinct political economies generate region-specific pathways of forest degradation, livelihood disruption, and human-wildlife interaction. In Upper Assam, forest cover change is historically rooted in the expansion of the tea plantation economy, railway infrastructure, and coal and oil extraction, which together underpin a contemporary pattern of forest degradation characterised by chronic, low-visibility resource extraction that gradually erodes ecological integrity and livelihood security. In contrast, Goalpara has emerged as a major hotspot of human-elephant conflict, among other, linked to state-supported land-use transitions, particularly the rapid expansion of rubber plantations and associated agrarian change. Sonitpur represents a different political ecology altogether, where forest clearance is closely tied to politically mediated territorial reconfigurations. The talk will further highlight how remnant forests continue to function as, besides supporting threatened flora and fauna, critical socio-ecological safety nets for marginalised, forest-dependent communities, most evident during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, revealing the centrality of forests to everyday survival and resilience. Finally, I will argue that the future of forests in Assam hinges on recognising conservation as a question of environmental security rather than biodiversity conservation alone. Without addressing the underlying politics of land, identity, and development, conservation interventions risk deepening social conflict and ecological precarity in one of India's most biodiverse yet politically contested regions.

Environmental Security and Human Security in Upland Indigenous Contexts: Reframing Rural Development from Northeast India

Amba Jamir

This talk examines rural development and environmental governance in upland and indigenous contexts of Northeast India through the analytical lens of human security, as articulated in the 1994 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report. Moving beyond state-centric and sectoral understandings of

security, the presentation adopts a people-centred framework that defines security in terms of freedom from want, freedom from fear, and the ability to live in dignity. I argue that prevailing development policies and environmental management interventions in the region frequently overlook how livelihoods, land, institutions, and ecosystems are deeply integrated in everyday life, and therefore function as de facto human security systems.

Drawing on long-term field-based observations and engagement with rural communities, my presentation highlights how rainfed agriculture, shifting cultivation systems, forest-based livelihoods, and common property regimes provide diversified and flexible strategies for managing ecological, economic, and social risk. These systems contribute simultaneously to economic, food, environmental, and community security. However, many contemporary policies and programmes - often designed through top-down, standardised development models—tend to frame these practices as inefficient, transitional, or environmentally problematic. In doing so, they risk weakening local resilience by narrowing livelihood options, undermining customary institutions, and increasing household exposure to climate variability, market volatility, and social vulnerability.

The presentation critically examines dominant narratives around land-use change, including simplified academic and policy arguments regarding shortened fallow cycles, demonstrating that such framings often obscure the political, institutional, and governance factors that shape community choices. Rather than treating these dynamics as purely technical or agronomic challenges, I hope to situate them within broader processes of land governance transformation, market-oriented resource management, and the erosion of community-based institutions.

By reframing rural development as a human security challenge, I argue for policy approaches that prioritise resilience, local agency, and institutional integrity alongside environmental sustainability. I conclude with the notion that environmental security in upland indigenous regions cannot be achieved through narrow sectoral interventions alone, but requires strengthening the social, cultural, and governance systems that underpin people's everyday security and well-being.

Greening Laws and Civil Society: Reflections on Manipur

Arambam Noni

The North East Region (NER) of India constitutes a mere 3.5% of India's population, yet its forest cover contribution is far greater. The forest cover of Mizoram is 84.53%, Arunachal Pradesh 79.33%, Meghalaya 76%, Manipur 74.34% and Nagaland 73.90%. NER contributes about 24.22 percent of India's total forest cover (FSI 2017). According to Indian Forest Reports published by the Forest Survey of India (FSI), 2022, the Manipur state lost 1080.73 sq. km. of forest cover from 1987 to 2021. Climate change is like a ticking time bomb in the state. Of late, social disharmonies in Manipur have hovered around the issues of ecological anxieties. The irony, however, is that it has been either overshadowed by competitive ethnic predilections or non-greening ineffective legislative

regimes. With more than 40-armed opposition groups operating in the state, Manipur has seen radical mobilisation for territorial identities, without any significant social care for the land where their identity politics is located. Due to near absent town planning, water bodies have been littered with urban wastes.

Poor implementation of Manipur Conservation of Paddy Land and Wetlands Act, 2014 has not fully ensure greening of the ecological governance. With no synchronisation with the Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017, many among the 134 wetlands in Manipur state are today either dried up or on the verge of extinction. Only 27 of the wetlands are under the radar of the government's conservation road map. Loktak Lake is silted with bio-medical wastes threatening Manipur's largest wetlands that act as eco-kidney and flood buffers. Legislations without administrative convergence and civil society disorientation is a crisis. Judicial activism has often appeared to be the last bastion of eco-institutionalism. Judiciary and NSGT have been pivotal towards greening laws, and even the civil society for it has pre-empted encroachments. Narratives of ethnicity and identity becoming the predominant lens of defining development and ecology requires critical rethinking in order to address the pressing eco-crises and the non-green civil society polarised myopias.

Climate Change, the Push for Development and the Challenge of Sustaining the Environment

Dimgong Rongmei

Drawing on my work as Executive Director of Realm of Nature-Based Actions and over twenty-five years of engagement with Indigenous communities in Manipur, this presentation examines the intertwined challenges of climate change, development pressures, and environmental sustainability. In Manipur, climate change is not a distant or abstract threat but an everyday reality, evident in erratic rainfall patterns, declining soil fertility, forest degradation, and increasing stress on land and common resources. These ecological changes are unfolding alongside a dominant development paradigm that prioritises extractive infrastructure, commercial forestry, and large-scale projects, often with limited recognition of customary land tenure systems and Indigenous governance institutions.

The presentation argues that this convergence of climate stress and development-driven land use change intensifies environmental degradation and undermines community resilience. As access to land, forests, and water becomes more constrained, competition over resources deepens social and ethnic tensions, expanding the scope and complexity of conflict in Manipur. Environmental degradation, therefore, functions not only as a consequence of climate change and development, but also as a critical factor shaping insecurity and social fragmentation.

At the same time, the presentation highlights alternative pathways for sustaining the environment while meeting livelihood needs. Indigenous knowledge systems—embedded in practices such as adaptive shifting cultivation, community forestry, water management, and biodiversity conservation—offer time-tested approaches to ecological

stewardship. When combined with innovation and ethical forms of entrepreneurship, these practices can inform nature-based livelihoods, agroecological enterprises, and circular economic models that challenge extractive growth trajectories and internalise social and environmental costs.

The presentation concludes by situating environmental sustainability within a broader human security framework. It argues that sustaining the environment cannot be separated from questions of livelihoods, land rights, and peace. Meaningful responses to climate change and development pressures must therefore centre Indigenous rights, strengthen community stewardship of land and resources, and reimagine development as a process that enhances dignity, resilience, and long-term environmental and social stability rather than deepening existing ecological and political fractures.

Securing Homes and Habitat: Gendered Landscapes in Northeast India

Rakhee Kalita Moral

The Northeast of India in the Eastern Himalayas is a fragile terrain, caught in the geostrategic borderlands where conflicts, climate change and environmental damage challenge habitats and homes of its peoples, tribes and indigenous populations. In this Roundtable I propose that these shared ecologies of India's NE necessarily demand an attunement to the landscapes and the more-than-human entities that shape and sustain contemporary attempts to live with nature gesturing toward entangled realities, understood and practised by communities of women of the region. In the time of the Anthropocene, literature often closes the gap between environmental damage and the desire for survival and Janice Pariat's *Everything the Light Touches* (2022) from Meghalaya explores ordinary stories of her people whose keepers are female divines in sync with the caves of the Meghalayan age where stalagmites and the oracle come together bringing human, more-than-human and beyond-human closer than ever before. Drawing upon Pariat and a couple of other examples, I shall like to bring to the table the following:

- How have customary laws often reinforced environmental concern in NE states with women majorly leading community missions to save their ecologies?
- Women in Meghalaya and Nagaland undertake food sovereignty agendas as part of their investment in environmental security, in a space where unrest and insurgency have led to displacements of traditional practices and livelihoods.
- In resource-rich NE India, women led resistance to neoliberal development agendas and extractive enterprise by the state and capital agencies demonstrate the gendered approach to conservation and preservation of traditional livelihoods and communities.

The rise of ecological writing by women from the region further reinforces the gendered roles and interventions that undergird our vulnerable planetary futures, and thus the hopes and instincts for human security and survival.

Ecofeminism in Mizoram: Women, Environment, and Livelihood Security

Mary Vanlalthanpuii

Mizoram provides an important context for examining the relationship between women, the environment, and livelihood security. The state has a fragile ecological system, and a large section of the population living in the rural areas depend on forests for daily survival. Due to its steep hills, heavy rainfall, and frequent landslides, environmental sustainability in Mizoram is closely linked to everyday life. This study adopts an ecofeminist framework to analyse how indigenous women in Mizoram interact with nature, contribute to environmental conservation, and sustain household and community livelihoods. Drawing on the ideas of ecofeminist scholars such as Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies, the paper argues that the exploitation of nature and the marginalization of women arise from patriarchal and profit-driven development models that prioritise control over care and sustainability.

Mizo women play a crucial role in jhum (shifting) cultivation, seed preservation, kitchen gardening, and the management of forest resources. Their indigenous knowledge of soil, crops, rainfall patterns, medicinal plants, and biodiversity is vital for ensuring food security and maintaining ecological balance. As seed keepers and agricultural caretakers, women sustain crop diversity and adapt farming practices to changing climatic conditions, thereby strengthening resilience to environmental uncertainty. Traditional Mizo beliefs further reinforce this close relationship through the worship of female deities associated with forests, land, and wildlife, reflecting values of care, protection, and harmony with nature. However, contemporary development pressures, infrastructure expansion, and climate change have intensified environmental degradation, disproportionately increasing women's labour burden and livelihood insecurity. Despite these challenges, women-led environmental activism such as Mrs. Vanramchhuangi, popularly known as Ruatfela Nu demonstrates how ecological protection is deeply connected to social justice and indigenous rights. Environmental security in Mizoram cannot be achieved without addressing gender inequality and recognising women's central role in sustaining ecosystems and livelihoods. Ecofeminism offers a critical framework for understanding the interconnected crises of environmental degradation, climate change, and gendered livelihood insecurity. By foregrounding women's knowledge, labour, and leadership, more inclusive and sustainable approaches can be developed to promote ecological integrity, social justice, and livelihood security for present and future generations.

Meghalaya's Brightening Mining Prospect: Should We Worry or Cheer? Observations from Meghalaya

Snigdhendu Bhattacharya

The identification of over 36,000 sq km of mineral-rich land with a potential for 3,000 mines in Northeast India appears to have triggered more concerns than cheers among the local people and public policy enthusiasts. The government promises prosperity to the region through extraction of the resources. The minerals are of the nation's strategic

interest, the government says. However, the promises do not yet outweigh the concerns from ecology and safety perspectives. This is precisely because the government's excitement around the identification of extractable resources comes amidst two serious threats to the region and its people— i) a slew of legal reforms diluting forest, environmental and livelihood protective measures to facilitate ease of doing big business, and ii) increasing extreme weather vulnerabilities in a geologically fragile, earthquake- and landslide-prone region.

The legal reforms include Forest (Conservation) Rules, 2022, the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act, 2023, and the September 2025 notification exempting atomic minerals, including uranium, from the mandatory public hearings under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act. They have together significantly altered forest governance in India, removing a great deal of protection that the forest cover and the local people used to enjoy in protecting and preserving their environment. Meghalaya finds itself in a critical situation at this juncture. It has already had bad experiences with mining—the infamous rathole mining that currently continues despite being formally banned. Meghalaya has already lost 84.07 sq km of its forest cover between 2021 and 2023. It has a high share of unclassified (community/customary lands not formally notified) forest, which have been exposed to easy deforestation by the legal reforms. Its uranium reserve keeps the government keenly interested. It has a lucrative coal and bauxite reserve and search for Germanium and Lithium is on.

The recent legal reforms will facilitate forest felling and other clearances for these mining projects and associated infrastructure like access roads and power lines. People may have little legal recourse to resist, if they want to—potentially increasing the risk of conflict. Given the context, how should civil society respond, especially regarding locals' informed, prior consent?

Infrastructure, Ecology and Security: Notes from Arunachal Pradesh

Swargajyoti Gohain

'Security' can evoke different things. Food security is used to talk about freedom from hunger. In the UNDP use, climate security is the increased competition and conflict over natural resources that result from climate change induced scarcity and disruptions. For a scholar of border studies, security evokes geopolitics. In Arunachal Pradesh, as elsewhere in the Himalayas, which is a vast border region straddling five countries, geopolitics shapes development, business and infrastructure as well as every day and intimate spheres of life. Geo-strategically important in India-China relations, especially following the border war in 1962, Arunachal Pradesh is a heavily militarised border state. It has a dense security footprint in the form of personnel, sites, and infrastructure. In my presentation, I will show how security concerns have driven the development of infrastructure, and changed the ecological and cultural landscape of Arunachal Pradesh. While my primary focus will be the role of security in the construction of roads in this border state, I will also bring in other ways in which security and ecology have intersected,

notably in the functioning of conservation, tourism and development. I build on my long-term work in Western Arunachal Pradesh and also cite instances from other parts of the state to support my argument.

Land, Identity, Resource Politics and Conflict in Tripura

Debraj Deb

This study is an effort of a critical commentary on the evolution of land ownership, identity and politics over resources in Tripura and the way they have shaped conflict in the state between state and non-state actors over the past seven decades since Tripura became a part of the Indian Union in 1949. A predominantly tribal state that underwent massive demographic shift post 1971, Tripura presents a unique case of conflict over resources—territorial, financial and otherwise, and a chequered history of conflict that has plagued it for four decades. This state has witnessed struggles for education and autonomy against erstwhile monarchical masters, armed insurgency, demands of rights of self-determination among tribals, 1980 ethnic riots, a series of subsequent massacres that left thousands dead and homeless— families which are yet to find resettlement on both sides of the spectrum. This state has also seen evolution of demands of cessation to separate statehood—something that helped topple 25 years of uninterrupted Left rule in 2018, coupled with significant promises of development. While infrastructure, connectivity and human resource development continues, questions of disparity in distribution continues to haunt electors and political stakeholders, more so as the state's tribal autonomous district council that governs 70 percent Tripura's geographical area, is scheduled to undergo general elections in two months. Too many questions ponder on how tribals are expected to view their own identity, speak and write their own language, manage their revenue and security vis-a-vis the state's jurisdictional ecosystem that tries to leverage the status quo in the face of identity politics that has a history of conflict in the past. This study is an effort to understand how tribals became a minority in their own state and how different stakeholders are trying to move forward.

Bionotes

Shyamalendu Majumdar is the Director of the Calcutta Research Group. He was Associate Professor in Sivanath Sastri College and taught Political Science there since 1985. He is particularly interested in conducting research on forced migration and has conducted research on the problems and politics of internal displacement of the Reangs in Mizoram. He is deeply involved in carrying on research in the trends of political theatre in Bengal.

Sumona DasGupta is a political scientist and independent researcher based in New Delhi. She is a Member of the Calcutta Research Group, Senior Research Advisor with Women in Security Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP), New Delhi, and Member of Women Mediators across the Commonwealth. She has an active research interest in participatory democracy, gender and conflict and peace mediation.

Mahesh Rangarajan is Professor of History and Environmental Studies at Ashoka University, Haryana. He is also Hon. Chair of the Archives of Contemporary India at Ashoka.

Hijam Liza Dallo Rihmo is Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at North Eastern Hill University (NEHU). She has a PhD from the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Previously she has also taught as Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science of Shri Ram College of Commerce (SRCC), University of Delhi. Among her research interests are International Relations Theory, Social Constructivism, Political Theory, Climate Change Politics and Feminism.

Debashree Chakraborty is a Researcher at the Calcutta Research Group. She has previously worked as a Junior Research Fellow at the Department of English, Assam University. She has also worked as a Research Associate in an ICSSR sponsored Major Research Project and has taught at the Department of English, Gurucharan College, Silchar. For her Ph.D thesis, she has worked on Climate Fiction. Apart from environmental humanities, her research interests include the intersections of climate change, migration, and partition in cultural studies.

Narayan Sharma teaches at the Department of Environmental Biology and Wildlife Sciences, at Cotton University, Assam. He is also an Adjunct Professor at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru. His research interests lie in Biodiversity Conservation, Community Ecology, Urban Ecology and Ecological Pedagogy. An educationist, conservation biologist and ecologist, he has two decades of experience working in the field of education and wildlife research in Northeast India.

Amba Jamir is a policy and development consulting expert with over two decades of multidisciplinary and multi-team experience from policy formulation to project development, implementation and review. He has vast experience in the Asia Pacific and Eastern Himalayan regions in areas of development, community institutions and resource management, and policy development. As a board member, he advises on a number of national and international bodies and companies, including the G.B. Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment (NIHE).

Arambam Noni is Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science, Dhanamanjari University, Imphal. He did his PhD from the Centre for Political Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and specialises in Political Theory and Regional Studies. He is an Hon. Fellow at the Centre for Multi-Level Federalism, New Delhi. He is also the Executive Editor, *Alternative Perspectives*. He has delivered numerous public lectures in India & abroad, spoken at UN events in Geneva, television talks, radio talks. He has published extensively on colonialism, resistance, society and State power.

Dimgong Rongmei is an experienced development professional from Manipur, India, serving as the Executive Director of the Realm of Nature Based Action (RNBA). Dimgong holds a degree in Botany, with diplomas in Sustainable Agriculture, Leadership, and Computer Applications, and an MA in Conflict Studies from the University of Cambodia. With over 24 years of experience, he focuses on sustainable agriculture, livelihood, climate change, land rights and community-driven development in Northeast India. He advocates for integrating traditional ecological knowledge with modern environmental stewardship.

Mrinal Gohain leads Action Aid's efforts in the North-East of India and has been a prominent figure in coordinating humanitarian responses to natural disasters, highlighting the urgent need for food, shelter, and long-term food security plans for affected communities. He has participated in discussions on climate crisis in the North-East, focusing on developing sustainable and resilient urban and rural communities in the face of increasing extreme climate events. He speaks and writes on the challenges faced by vulnerable populations, such as those in poverty zones, the disabled, refugees, and tea workers, advocating for better coordination between government agencies and NGOs to bridge information and service gaps.

Timothy Khongsai is a Doctoral scholar at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology in Ashoka University. His research interests revolve around the intersection of agrarian transformations, rural livelihoods and contestations over land and resources around the hills of Manipur; particularly focusing on the politics, economy and ecology of monocrop and plantation agriculture. He has also worked as a Research Associate at the North Eastern Social Research Centre.

Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury is Professor of Political Science and former Vice Chancellor at the Rabindra Bharati University in Kolkata, and the President of Calcutta Research Group. His research interests include labor in the platform economy of India, global politics, South Asian politics, and refugees, migration, democracy and human rights in the Global South. Among his recent publications are: *Sites of Statelessness: Laws, Cities, Seas* (co-edited with Ayse Caglar and Ranabir Samaddar, SUNY Press, 2024); *The Rohingya in South Asia: People without a State* (Routledge: Abingdon 2018).

Rakhee Kalita Moral is Professor at Centre for Women's Studies in Cotton University. She has a PhD in American Literature and has worked on the sociology of TS.Eliot's poetic identity and sense of nation, with later research concerns in postcolonial studies and has worked at the intersections of Literary theory, gender and Northeast India Studies. Her postdoctoral research has been in Gender Studies at the Nehru Memorial

Museum and Library, New Delhi where she was a Nehru Fellow from 2013-2015. She has published on gender, conflict and society, postcolonial literature.

Mary Vanlalthanpuii has been a research fellow at the Asiatic Society, Kolkata (2017-2021) and currently working as a guest faculty of the UGC-Women's Studies Centre, Mizoram University. She completed her PhD from Calcutta University. Her areas of interest include the role of women in formal politics and the informal politics of the Church, and she has published and presented nationally and internationally on these. She is a recipient of the Zubaan-Sasakawa Peace Foundation Grant for Young Researchers from the Northeast (2018-2019) and is co-editor of *The Keepers of Knowledge, Writings from Mizoram*.

Snigdendu Bhattacharya is a Kolkata-based independent journalist and author. He writes on issues concerning South Asia, including politics, history, human rights, culture, environment and climate change. His works have appeared in *The Diplomat*, *Outlook magazine*, *The Wire*, *Al Jazeera English*, *Huffpost*, *TRT World*, *Nikkei Asia*, *Mongabay*, *Eco-Business*, *The Hindu*, *The Caravan*, *The Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*, *The New Indian Express*, *Deccan Herald*, *The Print*, *The Quint*, *Newslaundry*, *Article 14*, *IndiaSpend*, *BOOM Factcheck* and *Anandabazar Patrika*, among others. He authored two socio-political non-fictions published by HarperCollins *India: Mission Bengal: A Saffron Experiment* (2020) and *Lalgarh and the Legend of Kishanji: Tales from India's Maoist Movement* (2016).

Swargajyoti Gohain is an Associate Professor of Sociology and Anthropology at Ashoka University. She has a PhD in Anthropology from Emory University, U.S.A., and has held postdoctoral positions in the International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden, Netherlands, and the Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi. Her research interests include the anthropology of state and borders, indigenous politics, anthropology of mobilities, roads, development and infrastructure, conservation, religion, and ecology, and institutions and networks.

Debraj Deb is a Senior Copy Editor with The Indian Express and covers Tripura and occasionally other states of Northeast India. He has an M.Phil, a Ph.D in Mass Communication from Assam University, Silchar and served with two major research projects funded by the ICSSR. He started his journalism career in 2008 and now has over 18 years of reporting experience from the NE region. He has keen interest in politics, migration and displacement, conflict, ethnic culture, media market, ancient and modern history, communication studies, and has published in several journals and research publications of national and international repute.

Anjuman Ara Begum a human rights activist, gender rights activist, freelance journalist from Assam. She is the co-founder of Rights to Nationality and Citizenship Network. She is also a member of the Calcutta Research Group. With a PhD in Law from Gauhati University her interests lie in human rights, social justice and gender issues. She specialises in advocacy, legal education, journalism, public policy and has extensively researched and documented issues of human rights and gender-based violence in armed conflict situations in Northeast India.

Immanuel Varte is Principal of Morning Star College in Shillong and Guest Faculty, Department of Tribal Studies, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University- Regional Campus Manipur. He has a PhD in Cultural Anthropology from the North Eastern Hill University (NEHU). He is passionate about justice, equitable and sustainable people-centered development, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, human rights and environmental conservation and wise-use of resources.

Shatabdi Das is a Researcher at the Calcutta Research Group. She has a Ph.D. in Geography from the University of Calcutta. Her research interests lie in climate change, city and urban planning, sustainable development, coal hazards and environmental issues.

Sudipta Konwar is a postgraduate in Sociology and has qualified the UGC NET. He is currently a PG student of Gender Studies at Cotton University and plans to pursue doctoral research. His academic interests focus on climate-induced displacement, gender, and environmental security in Northeast India.

Dhritimoni Mahanta is a PhD Research Scholar in the Department of English, Cotton University, Guwahati, Assam. She has a specialisation in Gender Studies and keeps a keen interest in Green Studies, Climate Justice and Indigenous Studies. Her work bridges academic research and community engagement, drawing on her experience in research consultancy, live translation for global studies, and creative writing for social change.

Nayanjyoti Moran is a postgraduate in Environmental Biology and Wildlife Sciences from Cotton University, Guwahati. His research focuses on urban biodiversity, including butterfly community dynamics in rapidly urbanizing landscapes of Northeast India. He is actively involved in citizen science initiatives and science communication to promote biodiversity awareness.

Himparna Das, a postgraduate student in the Department of Environmental Biology and Wildlife Sciences at Cotton University, is a passionate learner whose interdisciplinary interests span across urban ecology, socio-ecology, and environmental psychology. Academically invested, with her baby steps into the field of research, she believes that individual knowledge finds its true power only when paired with effective communication, aiding in the building of ecologically conscious & gender-just societies.

Sessions

Inaugural Session

Shyamalendu Majumdar delivered the welcome address and briefly introduced CRG and the Guwahati dialogue. Sumona DasGupta introduced the programme theme with the mention of this year's dialogue being the second in the series of consultations held in Northeast India, as part of a larger project on vulnerable populations. Last year's deliberations were on displacements in India's Northeast at a time when Manipur was under gaze. The conversations were around roundtables and keeping in mind safety experiences of persons displaced due to conflicts, who bore the burdens of disputes as well as practitioners, was very important. Sumona DasGupta shared that she was tasked with the onus of documenting these experiences and emotions. The significance of emotions that came out through the previous dialogue added value to the initiatives and proceedings coming from different parts of Northeast India. This year the dialogue has semi-formal interactions, power-point presentations and conversations, in a roundtable format featuring sharing of insights by speakers, discussants, and the keynote speaker through their experiences and thoughts of work, research and social engagements.

Drawing from references of *human security* in the reports of the 1990s, Sumona underscored the significance of 'freedom from fear and freedom from want' as the two pillars around which newer notions of security were being reconstructed. The newer notions enable scholars today to move away from the hierarchies of authority and the idea of the State as the sole unit of power, and look at human beings as the referent of security. The moment the referent of security changes, different sets of questions can be asked - whose security, what kind of security; moving away from the immediate practices of military security into human welfare and livelihoods. The sessions ahead, DasGupta mentioned, would look into the relationships of ecology and politics, political economy and the ideas of power dynamics at the centre of the understanding of how the environment and human beings interact through a feedback loop that increasingly looks tensed and very terse; and that the social and geopolitical interactions are very closely related. Linked with this notion of political ecology is the perception of ecological precarity and around this concept the histories of the environment are written - as the keynote speaker would discuss. The notion of ecological precarity will be analysed not as an external crisis but will be looked at, as a crisis directly connected with foundational security, and human security. The idea of 'freedom from fear', which is implicit in the notion of security, is important and connected to the notion of precarity - a crisis heightened by climate change and resource exploitation, issues that are part of the discussions, revisited through the engagements, conversations and consultations.

Keynote Lecture: *In Search of a Balance: State and Societies in times of Environmental Transformation*

This session was **chaired by Shyamalendu Majumdar**, who introduced the **Keynote Speaker Mahesh Rangarajan**. Mahesh Rangarajan commenced his talk by first explaining ecology as the study of the structure and function of science; whereas history is the study of past and how the present has been shaped and helps to prepare for and critique the future. To get a sense of the past it is very important to think of and know about the processes and phenomena that shape the present and future. Rangarajan explained how history helps one locate in time and space where we are, like the changes in landscape with change of seasons. In summer the Brahmaputra recedes from the banks that are visible, whereas in monsoon the river water will overflow the banks and cause floods. History of the states through which the river Brahmaputra flows also helps to understand the significant role that the natural endowments and ecosystems play in development of a place or region. In the twentieth century as the world witnessed the expansion of industrial revolution the larger nation states grew industrial hubs and became centres of innovation. With the advent of the industrial revolution humans started tapping into fossil fuels like coal and petroleum. The speaker underscored that once the minerals are extracted from the earth and the form in which they exist are transformed into different forms of energy giving out chemical compounds and products, the released end products affect the atmosphere. Rangarajan spoke about the role of nitrogen and related fundamental transformations. The algal blooms' role in ecosystem and material cycle and life cycles was explained in terms of imprints created through inputs, outputs and emissions. The ideas of pristine landscapes are almost impossible today when one considers ecology and economy; and what is often ignored are human societies that are still primitive but are continuously shaping the earth with their significance and position in natural systems.

The speaker went on to elaborate upon states and societies and their complex relationships in terms of allocation of wealth, defence, administration, laws and regulations. Material flows and their impacts on living organisms, and the promises as well as damages of technology controls, refinement and distribution of fossil fuels. The hills surrounding and plains of Brahmaputra have reserved forests where the rights of tribal populations and forest rights' notions are mostly controlled by forest departments. Earlier also the State had mechanisms such as departments and wings of administration looking into various parts of land, but there were not as many details of rules and regulations, which left the forest dwellers with some rights. The breakup of the colonial empire led to a trialing time for new states emerging after colonial rule. The significance and role played by tribal population groups in climate protection and environmental conservation have been lost today. Transformations due to dam-building require huge costs and these have ecological impacts. The notions of land acquisition continued since

the Land Acquisition Act of 1950s, to very recently to the amendments in 2013; similarly changes in Forest Acts have taken place only as late as 2006. The importance of freedom from fear and want are often forgotten when it comes to upholding the dignity of primitive societies and their role in ecological security. Rangarajan pointed out the importance of the stages of changes that land go through in slash-and-burn method of cultivation or the jhum cultivation where slash-burn-fallow-reap-go away-come back again are the stages that help forest land maintain its own life cycles; these are the areas where conflicts between states and societies provide important background of inquiry. The lecture concluded with reflections on Bhutan, China, Nepal, Bangladesh and India's approaches to look at urgent issues of security and ecological precarity, especially in the time of growing emphasis on fuel-based transformations, also called by scholars as the Anthropocene. The transformations of economies are just beginning and the direction in which India will go, considering ecological precarity and security, is expected to be different from the other states.

Roundtable 1: Reflections on India's Northeast: Assam, Nagaland, Manipur

The first roundtable began with **Hijam Liza Rihmo's** presentation on "**Environmental Crises and Conflict in Northeast India: A Theoretical Analysis**". Liza highlighted the well-known factors and causes of climate change and underscored that climate issues have got to do with society, environment and variabilities, in which, the role of developmental projects become important. Speaking about the extractive economic practices in Northeast India, the presentation mentioned the disturbances that arise from coal extraction and proposals for palm oil expansion. Highest quality uranium exploration in Meghalaya and exploration of oil reserves in Nagaland — have influenced human capital formation, but the extractive nature of the economy has compelled society to forget the controls over land, forests and minerals; these have also led to the formation of "resource frontier" where the State-led development projects take precedence. Liza spoke about the loss of livelihoods in Jaintia hills as a result of banning coal mining, wherein the need for understanding the politics of having control over nature, land, forests and minerals and the modalities of power exercise, authority and planning become important. Building community resilience was mentioned as an important factor for planning and development, against the multitude of hierarchies of structures and controls in the pretext of climate change, keeping in mind that local populations are affected by the results of policies. In extractive industries societal relations with land also act as an identity. Thus, the analysis of power is crucial, when lack of ownership, records and documents often affect people during compensation. Local community and reserved forest management schemes become important. Liza underlined that the interplay of power between forest and societies come out through forest acts and their influences on rights. It is observed that tribal elites are benefitting from ownership of forest land but the costs of development

projects as the cost of removing forest cover is burdened on local people. Patnaik's models of destruction and imperialism were mentioned in reference to decentralisation of power and cases of power blamegames doing away in the name of injustice. The way out is through the assurance of environmental justice in its equitable nature, aimed at distributive and ownership-based justice. The practice of sacred grove is already rich, but re-looking at such practices of nature conservation is important. The presentation concluded with the suggestion that methods of protecting local people's rights to forests should be focused when it comes to ownership and shareholder issues.

Debashree Chakraborty's talk on "**Political Ecology of Assam: Observations from the Barak Valley**" elaborated the role of narratives in mainstream discourses and in developing people's opinions, reactions and initiatives, and how narratives dominate or play a role in developing concepts and understanding of ecology. She spoke about an incident in Barak valley during the 2022 Silchar floods and how the commotion that one religious community played a role in sparking off the deluge, led to further destruction. Many news channels flagged the commotion as flood jihad, where the understanding that developed was that the disaster was triggered by humans and not nature. Floods are natural to Assam, not only the Brahmaputra floods, but also the Barak floods. Chakraborty stated that as a student of environmental history, she has an understanding of how nature works to create disasters. There might be conflicts that are triggered by environmental insecurities, but environmental problems get ingrained in memory through misplaced narratives, given the reforms and conservation initiatives that are in place in the country. Working with narratives is also important, because when the general public opinions are taken into consideration, and their portrayals by media houses are not contemplated, narratives cover realities. The speaker ended by stressing on the power of narrative and its getting ingrained into the psyche of people through the stories told and manners of packaging by news media should be considered while observing changes or disasters.

Narayan Sharma discussed "**The Politics of Conservation in Assam: Implications for Environmental Security and Social Conflict**" while first introducing forest cover changes in Brahmaputra valley and mentioning that forest conservation cannot be separated from land identity. Sharma went on to explain that, when considering forest conservation, the Kaziranga Model of Conservation might be a success story, though it is equally important to look at the aspects that control political ecology. Reviewing questions like: who controls land, who benefits from forest conservation, who bears ecological costs help to understand the issues of livelihood stability, access to resources and social cohesion. The speaker stressed that on the one hand, critically endangered forestwood is being extracted for prevention of forest fire, while on the other side rubber plantations have now become part of forest land. Like in Goalpara, forest covered land has been taken over by rubber. He mentioned that, in the Sonipur area, land reallocation

and governance transitions have been shaping land control, and went on to explain how forest clearance is linked to identity and territorial politics. Forests act as socio-ecological safety nets, and from the point of view of conservation and the ways of practicing preservation, it is important to combine biodiversity protection and environmental security. The political landscape and the future of rethinking development in the Northeast is important, in order to be inclusive with conservation models.

Amba Jamir spoke on “**Environmental Security and Human Security in Upland Indigenous Contexts: Reframing Rural Development from Northeast India**”. His presentation focused on redefining the perimeter and revisiting the uplands that are fragile in the context of climate change, especially in the context of Northeast, where security is closely tied to land governance, inspite of the fragile ecology, where institutional erosions and the causes of erosion of security are less talked about. Diversity being the backbone of security, the anchor is the traditional livelihood patterns like shifting cultivation, slash and burn methods. Jamir further discussed three important features: i) mixed jhum - where a single field contains upland rice and maize and acts as the anchor; ii) forest and bamboo provide food in lean season and act as buffer along with wild ferns, mushroom; while bamboo provides materials for construction and fencing; iii) liquid assets that act as insurance such as pigs, poultry systems that convert crop residues into assets. Jamir reminded that it is crucial to understand that the introduction of a single crop can not only change the entire dynamics of a system but also has implications on species population and biodiversity and these aspects are less considered while people talk about agricultural or production interventions for profit. He mentioned that younger generations have less idea about territorial identities and the larger forest-human interfaces, coordinations and combinations. Role of institutes in influencing land, identities, ownership, relational aspects and sustenance for future in terms of livelihood security should be considered in development policies. The speaker explained how institutional erosion by incentives are slow and incentive-driven, not by decree. It is important to look into the impacts of conservation, such as people driven away from land under plantations, that create burdens for poor people in terms of loss of land and other insecurities undermined in the name of development.

Discussant Mrinal Gohain commented that the shift of industrial revolution and factories coming up in upper Assam at the cost of loss of forests, come with pushing people away from their land. Gohain while commenting on the presentations connected opium transportations, ports of China and the steel-belt road initiative. He revisited the disappearance of the sal forests having a critical impact on ecology, and suggested that, drawing from history, scholars should ask questions in violation of rights.

Arambam Noni while speaking on “**Greening Laws and Civil Society: Reflections from Manipur**” showed a picture of a solidarity gathering of community members of an environmental group. He emphasised that the percentage of very dense forest is only 4% in Manipur, which is a cause of worry. The speaker further stressed on how narratives of ethnic conflicts play an important role in the understanding of the causes of forest loss, and the possible explanations given for forest loss. The presentation drew attention to the poppy-cultivated areas destroyed in different parts of Manipur between November 2025 to February 2026, with up to 1037 acres of land destroyed in February 2026 in Ukhrul, Kangpokpi, Chandel, Senapati, Tengnoupal, Tamenglong in Manipur; with a grand total of 2528 acres destroyed. Noni mentioned that polarisation of politics plays an important role in saving forests. The possibilities of the civil society groups represented by Nagas, Kukis and other civil societies coming together would help lessen the conflicts of laws with societal values, because laws are sometimes found to be ‘not green’ when it comes to resources and land. Habitations are concentrated in the valleys where the traditional knowledge system of protecting rivers is getting lost. The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act 2025 has relaxed norms of water administration, whereas conflicts in Manipur have been controlled by narratives. It was suggested by the speaker that Manipur needs more studies on the Loktak Lake and the foothills nearby where agriculture is practiced, to enable conservation of lakes, wetlands and human practices, and bring human survival and responses in sync with ecology.

Dimgong Rongmei while discussing “**Climate Change, the Push for Development and the Challenge of Sustaining the Environment**” stressed on why conservation matters from the point of view of Manipur. Rongmei connected how the push for development, rapid expansion of infrastructure and extractive projects and land degradation create larger impacts in terms of climate issues. Commercial forestry, large scale land-use changes, investments for land-development and extractive industry projects burden local people in terms of climate induced resource scarcity, intensified competition over land allocation that deepens mistrust across ethnic communities. The debate of carbon market vs community stewardship was discussed, the carbon market being a technomanagerial market that adds to the problems of livelihood, because carbon is commodified where price for carbon credit is controlled and decided by others. Instead, the possibilities of exploring rights-based, community-based governance as an alternative were suggested. All ethnic groups are affected by development projects and therefore the discussions and focus of planning need to be further widened by linking environment, livelihood and peace. Indigenous knowledge systems and documentation of existing land tenure systems can help shift the focus of the role of customary protection practices in terms of responses to climate change. Ethical leadership is important along with focus on the concerns for ethnic identities on humanitarian grounds.

Discussant Timothy Khongsai commented that the reasons for which political laws are not working should be questioned. Timothy added that it is important to move away from the binaries of just looking at policies and their impacts on people, to environmental laws that are well-intended such as master plans and policy implementation at several levels that often overshadow the possibilities of sharing effective results towards solving a problem. He stressed that when policies are termed as ineffective then the work done towards the fulfilment of goals for policy-making is lost. In identity-politics, laws that are made for the environment often widen the divides between identities, in the name of protection; thus, identity also creates environment. Timothy suggested that it is critical to ask if people working for development are also environmentalist, or do they work for the environment for a living. Along with the importance of narrative, the language of narrative is also important in problematising environmental security. Similarly traditional knowledge and its role in environmental protection is also important, but which traditional knowledge system are we trying to explore and from which point of view, is one trying to look at the inquiry are equally important. Thus, emphasising on the essentials of the knowledge system is important. Mrinal Gohain added that the transformations that authorities and corporates are capable of bringing about should be taken into account for a deeper understanding of the interrelationships of land and resources. Sumona Dasgupta closed the session by mentioning that traditional knowledge also needs to be critically analysed, instead of giving in just to the essence of traditional knowledge systems.

Roundtable 2: Reflections on India's Northeast: Mizoram, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura

Rakhee Kalita Moral contextualised her talk titled “**Securing Homes and Habitat: Gendered Landscapes in Northeast India**” on how literature, fiction in particular, from the Northeast, has been responding to environmental and climate crises. Taking the novel *Everything the Light Touches* (2022) by Janice Pariat from Shillong but now based at Ashoka University, Sonipat, Moral discussed how fiction plays a role in passing ahead the nuances of environmental crises through narrativising crucial information which otherwise do not really reach a larger crowd and usually remain confined within spaces of academics and praxis. Moral first contextualised the issues that form part of the broader concerns on environment in the Northeast. She noted how the ecologically fragile zone of the Eastern Himalayas and the Northeast are always at the tethers of tectonic, geo-political and ecological shifts. Ongoing climate change has not only exacerbated the threats but has brought to the fore multiple environmental security related concerns. Indigenous societies of the region with their traditional practices now find it hard to sustain in this rapidly changing site of both ecology and geo-politics. Amidst such changes, the role of the indigenous communities becomes important. These communities, with their age-old customs and traditional knowledge, provide the blue-print of security and safety

of their environment, water sources and are able to retain their food sovereignty. Moral spoke of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution which safeguards the indigenous land in the Northeastern states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram and noted how it has been able to empower indigenous communities of these states in protecting their land, water and forest resources.

Speaking in the context of Meghalaya, Moral cited examples of Agnes Kharshiing who fought against rat hole mining in the Garo Hills and Spelity Lyngdoh Langrin of the Khasi Hills who fought against uranium mining by refusing to give up her land underneath which huge reserves of uranium had been located. Spelity became a cultural icon in Meghalaya following her steep resistance to uranium mining which if undertaken would have allowed the land owners to earn money at the cost of substantial environmental degradation. As development related ideas and projects sweep the Northeastern states, resistance has also become steep. Women continue to lead from the front and over the years, many such resistance movements have seen success. Moral then discussed the aforementioned novel in this context of resistance and noted how the novel is almost a deliberate attempt to tell real stories from Meghalaya. The novel weaves together multiple threads of environmental crises, the subsequent resistance, its lack thereof and the palpable failures that the state witnessed over the past few years ever since there has been an active push of infrastructural development and resource extraction in the state. Moral spoke of the role of women in resisting infrastructural development at the behest of their life-worlds and stressed on the importance of traditional knowledge as a non-negotiable factor in securing food and water sovereignty of indigenous communities across the Northeast.

Mary Vanlalthanpuii's presentation titled "**Ecofeminism in Mizoram: Women, Environment and Livelihood Security**" was made in absentia by Anjuman Ara Begum who was also the discussant of the said presentation. Vanlalthanpuii's deliberations stressed that environmental crises and climate change activities are experienced differently by indigenous communities, most notably by women of such communities. The context of her discussion was Mizoram and the Mizo women. Indigenous communities do not view themselves as masters of the environment. Instead, they consider themselves as part of it and draw their sustenance through age-old practices of living and livelihood. Most of Mizoram's economy is generated through agricultural practices and women form a massive base of agrarian labour. Women are involved in every stage of agriculture—sowing, reaping, seed preservation, etc. In the traditional agricultural practice involving *Jhum*, Mizo women have been able to create a cumulative knowledge base and also act as custodians of such knowledge. They not only perform the hard labour of agriculture but also sustain knowledge bases which they pass on to the next generation. Mizo women

have also been successful in selling their agricultural produce in national markets and a few of the products like turmeric, ginger and chillies sell at good price points in the markets of Karnataka and Odisha. However, changing temperature and season cycles as effects of global warming and climate change are increasingly making it difficult for Mizo women to sustain their age-old agricultural practices which mostly operate along traditional methods.

Vanlalthanpui's presentation stressed on the need to recognise women's labour and their traditional knowledge of agriculture, forestry, water preservation and overall environmental protection which hinge on the idea that they are no different from the surroundings they live in, in the framework of environmental security. The presentation drew from the theoretical framework of ecofeminism widely discussed by ecofeminists Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies.

Snigdhendu Bhattacharya spoke on the recent thrust on rare earth material mining activities in Meghalaya following the publication of a report by the Geological Survey of India in his presentation titled "**Northeast's Brightening Mining Prospect: Should we Worry or Cheer? Observations from Meghalaya**". Bhattacharya's presentation highlighted the dichotomy between establishing developmental infrastructure/revenue generating infrastructure and the tolls it might impose on the life-worlds of indigenous communities in ecologically fragile regions of Meghalaya. Furthermore, his presentation also highlighted the challenges that the government also faces in implementing such developmental projects as they bring to focus the ethical question of what to choose—economic prosperity or existing green cover. The presentation covered issues of legal protection of forests and rights of forest communities and the challenges of putting up such projects at a time when increasing instances of extreme weather vulnerabilities in the geologically fragile, earthquake- and landslide-prone region of Meghalaya are getting reported frequently. Given Meghalaya's previous experience with mining related incidents, it remains to be seen how the civil society of the state deals with this emerging situation of rare earth material mining.

Swargajyoti Gohain in her presentation titled "**Infrastructure, Ecology and Security: Notes from Arunachal Pradesh**" spoke on the infrastructural developmental activities in West Arunachal Pradesh. The presentation focussed on how developmental activities sit at the crossroad of environmental security. Gohain suggested that in states like Arunachal Pradesh which is a frontier and as such heavily militarised, the ideas of traditional and non-traditional security get blurred. While traditional security practices provide safety against external aggression by way of development of adequate

infrastructure, the same practices also tend to hinder the indigenous ways of life thus creating a gap in the ways non-traditional security aspects are put into place. Gohain noted that oftentimes military based infrastructural development bypass local concerns thereby putting certain areas behind others. This uneven infrastructural development creates issues as some villages or areas get more connection than others. Tourism also follows in areas which fall on the path of infrastructural development. Apart from this, oftentimes, such development comes up at the behest of ecological security. Indigenous communities are dependent on their surrounding ecological niches for survival. Their age-old practices often get interrupted as a result of security measures put up in national interest. Gohain noted that this is a conundrum that people living in the borderlands face.

Debraj Deb in his presentation titled “**Land, Identity, Resource Politics and Conflict in Tripura**” spoke on the issues of land and resource ownership in the state of Tripura. Tripura is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual state with a long history of conflict. The shadows of Partition and resultant refugee influx have added to its political atmosphere becoming murky. On top of that, Tripura, being an erstwhile princely state, joined the Indian Union in 1949. This event anyway makes Tripura slightly different from other states in terms of its political contests. All these factors together have made the state a hotbed of conflicts which have fomented there for more than four decades. The conflicts in Tripura were based around the rights question—rights over land and resources formed the initial struggles and gradually expanded to issues around struggles for education and autonomy against erstwhile monarchical masters, demands of rights of self-determination among tribals. Armed insurgency became part of everyday life in the state. The 1980 ethnic riots, a series of subsequent massacres that left thousand dead and homeless still remain fresh in the memory of the people of the state. Deb noted that the massive demographic shifts in the state post 1971, Tripura presents a unique case of conflict over resources—from fights for territory to demands of cessation to separate statehood, the journey of Tripura has been long. But in 2018, a political regime change changed the discourse on conflict to discourse of development. While infrastructure, connectivity and human resource development continues, questions of disparity in distribution continue to haunt electors and political stakeholders. The presentation touched on how the indigenous communities have been sidelined in their own land owing to geo-political shifts in the state over time.

Question-Answer Session

The session was woven around the question of the connections between climate change and gender and how to frame a more gender inclusive climate action plan.

The answers were based on how patriarchy is internalised by women and as such knowingly and unknowingly become actors in their own oppression. Education is the way

forward. Gender budgeting is one way of ensuring a gender inclusive climate action plan. Women are exposed to environmental insecurities naturally by way of their socially assigned roles. Women working on fields, going out to fetch water are generally more vulnerable to climate risks and sometimes even to assaults. However, this is not the case everywhere. A few indigenous societies have systems in place to ensure safety and security of gendered minorities. Vulnerability is experienced by different people in different ways. Questions around security and vulnerability. Civil society should take up the responsibility of questioning the appropriate authorities when security of individuals—gendered minorities in particular—is at stake.

There were also conversations around forest cover in the Northeast. A part of the existing data is still based on old data frameworks and needs to be surveyed again. Realtime data can help in framing more cohesive forest protection laws and other climate change-based actions while at the same time securing the life and livelihoods of forest communities. Climate change is not an isolated event affecting human beings only. Proper monitoring of non-human species would add up valuable data to the existing knowledge and enable more localised climate action.

The session ended with a vote of thanks from the organisers.

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