

Kuki-Zo insurgent groups raise demand for UT with legislature; MHA says not possible

Demand raised in talks with MHA on November 7; SoO groups cite historical precedent, saying it would not be secession from Manipur State, but a restoration of pre-Independence autonomy

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Buffer-zones have been created in areas where Kuki-Zo and Meitei population merge. | Photo Credit: The Hindu

Kuki-Zo insurgent groups in Manipur said on Saturday (November 8, 2025) that they held talks with the Union Ministry of Home Affairs this week, “focusing on the core demand for

a Union Territory with a legislative assembly” for Kuki-Zo areas, insisting that “coexistence” within the State was not possible. This comes just two months after the groups signed a suspension of operations (SoO) pact with the Union and State governments.

However, the Centre’s representative in the talks reportedly said it was not possible to accept their demand, according to both the insurgent groups as well as an MHA source.

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‘Coexistence not possible’

The two umbrella groups — the Kuki National Organisation (KNO) and the United People’s Front (UPF) — said the talks were held on November 6 and 7, with the MHA being represented by its North East Advisor A.K Mishra.

In a statement, the SoO groups said that on November 6, the discussions centred around the implementation of the September 4 tripartite agreement where they demanded that the administration and governance issues in Kuki-Zo inhabited districts should be addressed.

“The second day (November 7) focused on the political demand for UT with legislature, with the KNO and UPF leadership reiterating that coexistence under the Manipur State administrative setup is no longer possible,” the statement said.

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Negotiated political solution

According to the SoO groups, Mr. Mishra reiterated that while the Centre is sensitive to the plight of the Kuki Zo people, the current policy does not support the creation of new Union Territories. He stressed the need for consultations with other communities in Manipur, they said.

An MHA source said that talks with the insurgent groups will continue, to find a negotiated political solution in consultation with all communities, but the demand for a

UT with legislature was not possible.

The talks covered issues of land, forests, customs, and development, along with mutual confidence-building measures to be pursued alongside the regular political dialogue, the groups said. They urged the MHA to take concrete steps to protect traditional tribal land rights and uphold the authority of tribal chiefs, who traditionally manage land and customary matters in the hill areas.

“They also urged Government to remove administrative hurdles related to the succession of village chiefs after their demise, and to simplify procedures for land registration and deed processing, which currently require travel to Imphal—an area that has become inaccessible and unsafe for the Kuki-Zo community since the outbreak of ethnic violence,” the SoO groups said.

Renegotiated SoO pact

On September 4, the MHA had announced that the tripartite pact, in limbo since February 2024, had been signed with renegotiated terms and new ground rules. The new terms said that security forces would conduct verification of cadres, de-list and deport foreign nationals, and the relocation of camps run by the insurgent groups. The September 4 agreement, the latest version of the SoO pact in place since 2008, reiterated the territorial integrity of Manipur but inserted a new clause: “negotiated political settlement within Constitution of India.”

The pact had been periodically extended annually until February 29, 2024 when the Manipur government refused to extend the tripartite pact following the eruption of ethnic violence between the tribal Kuki-Zo and Meitei people on May 3, 2023. Former Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh had claimed that the SoO groups had violated the ground rules of the pact and instigated the ethnic violence. Around 250 people have been killed and more than 60,000 people were displaced from their homes due to the violence.

Before May 3, 2023, the SoO groups had been demanding autonomous territorial councils for Kuki-Zo communities within Manipur. Post-violence, however, the demands have changed.

Historical precedent

On Saturday (November 8, 2025), the SoO groups said that they had highlighted the historical justifications for their political demand, noting that the Kuki-Zo Hills had never been under the control of the Manipur State Durbar before Independence. “It was also pointed out that under British rule, the Kuki Zo lands and other tribal areas were classified as ‘Excluded Areas’ under the Government of India Act, 1935. They were administered directly by the British Political Agent, not by the Meitei king - Kuki Zo governance rested with the traditional chiefs, who exercised complete control over land, justice, and local affairs,” the statement said.

It added that the incompatibility of the tribal land tenure system—based on ownership under the chiefs—with the valley’s state-controlled land model was discussed. “When the British unified the administration for convenience, dual governance remained intact, with the valley under the Maharaja’s rule and the hills under the British Political Agent. Administratively, politically, and culturally, the tribal people had never been organically part of the Manipur State before 1947. Given this history, the Kuki-Zo representatives maintained that their demand for Union Territory status with a legislature is rooted in constitutional and historical legitimacy,” the statement said.

The post-merger integration of Manipur in 1949 unfairly absorbed the hill regions into a valley where a centric governance structure, disregarding tribal autonomy and traditional rights, was emphasised, the SoO groups said. They added that the government had compensated only the Meitei king, not the Kuki Zo chiefs; thus, creating a separate administrative unit for the hill tribes within the constitutional framework of India would not be an act of secession but a restoration of pre-independence autonomy and a step toward a lasting equitable governance, security, and development within the Indian Union.

(with inputs from Rahul Karmakar)

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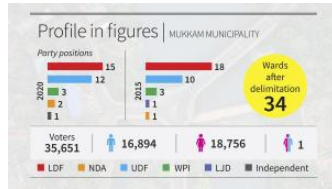
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