

# KARNATAKA-MAHARASHTRA BORDER DISPUTE - POLITY

**NEWS:** *Bus services between Karnataka and Maharashtra have come to a standstill after tensions flared up recently when a bus conductor was beaten up in Belagavi for allegedly not responding in Marathi.*

## WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The longstanding **border dispute between Karnataka and Maharashtra** primarily revolves around **Belagavi** (formerly known as **Belgaum**), a district in Karnataka that has a **significant Marathi-speaking population**. Maharashtra has repeatedly claimed Belagavi and several adjoining areas, arguing that these regions were historically a part of the **Bombay Presidency** before India's independence. Karnataka, however, asserts that the district was correctly allocated to it under the **States Reorganisation Act of 1956**, which was based on linguistic majorities.

## Historical Background and Timeline of the Dispute

- 1956 – States Reorganisation Act:**
  - The **States Reorganisation Act** was passed to restructure Indian states based on **linguistic demographics**.
  - Despite having a **large Marathi-speaking population**, Belagavi was **assigned to Karnataka** instead of Maharashtra.
- 1960 – Maharashtra's Initial Claims:**
  - Maharashtra began challenging Belagavi's inclusion in Karnataka, claiming that several **Marathi-speaking villages** and towns along the border were wrongly assigned.
  - The state argued that the linguistic composition of these areas justified their **merger with Maharashtra**.
- 1966 – Formation of the Mahajan Commission:**
  - To settle the dispute, the **Indian government appointed the Mahajan Commission** under former Chief Justice **Mehr Chand Mahajan**.
  - The commission's findings **favored Karnataka**, recommending that Belagavi and **247 villages remain with Karnataka**, while **264 villages should be transferred to Maharashtra**.
  - Maharashtra **rejected the report**, refusing to accept its recommendations.
- 2004 – Maharashtra Moves to the Supreme Court:**
  - Maharashtra escalated the dispute by filing a **petition in the Supreme Court of India**, officially staking its claim over Belagavi and surrounding areas.
  - The case remains **pending**, with no final ruling from the **Supreme Court**.

## Claims of Both States

### Maharashtra's Claims

- Maharashtra asserts its claim over **814 villages** and urban centers such as **Belagavi, Karwar, and Nippani**, arguing that they were historically a part of the **Bombay Presidency** before independence.
- The state contends that these areas have a **majority Marathi-speaking population** and should have been included in Maharashtra during the **1956 reorganization**.
- Maharashtra officially **challenged the allocation of Belagavi** in the Supreme Court in **2004**, maintaining that the will of the local Marathi-speaking population was not considered.



### Karnataka's Claims

- Karnataka **strongly defends its jurisdiction** over Belagavi, asserting that the district was rightly included under the **States Reorganisation Act of 1956**, which prioritized linguistic demographics.
- The **1966 Mahajan Commission Report** upheld Karnataka's claim, recommending that Belagavi and **247 villages remain within Karnataka**.
- Karnataka argues that since Belagavi's inclusion, the region has **witnessed significant economic and infrastructural development** under Karnataka's governance.
- To further reinforce its **administrative and political control**, Karnataka constructed the **Suvarna Vidhana Soudha** in Belagavi, where it has been **holding winter sessions of the state legislature** since 2006.

### Current Status of the Dispute

- The **border issue remains unresolved**, with the Supreme Court yet to **deliver a final judgment**.
- Periodic tensions between the two states continue, often leading to protests, political debates, and cultural disputes.

- While Maharashtra continues to demand a reassessment of the border, Karnataka remains firm in its position that **Belagavi is an integral part of the state.**

## **Mahajan Commission and Inter-State Border Disputes in India**

### **Mahajan Commission (1966)**

The **Mahajan Commission** was established in **1966** under the chairmanship of **Mehr Chand Mahajan**, who was the **former Chief Justice of India**. The commission was tasked with examining and making recommendations on the **Karnataka-Maharashtra border dispute**, particularly concerning the **Belagavi (Belgaum) region**.

### **Key Recommendations of the Mahajan Commission:**

- The commission conducted a detailed review of the linguistic demographics and historical claims of both states.
- It **recommended the transfer of 264 villages** from Karnataka to Maharashtra.
- However, it ruled that **Belagavi and 247 villages should remain with Karnataka**, rejecting Maharashtra's demand for their inclusion.

### **Response to the Mahajan Commission Report:**

- **Maharashtra rejected** the commission's findings, arguing that the **Marathi-speaking population** in the disputed areas was not adequately considered.
- **Karnataka accepted** the report and has since maintained that either the **recommendations should be fully implemented** or the **existing territorial status quo should be upheld**.
- Despite the commission's recommendations, the dispute remains **unresolved**, with Maharashtra continuing to press its claims, and Karnataka asserting its control over Belagavi.

## **Key Inter-State Border Disputes in India**

Apart from the Karnataka-Maharashtra dispute, several other inter-state border conflicts exist in India, primarily arising from **historical agreements, colonial-era demarcations, and linguistic or ethnic factors**. Some of the major disputes are:

### **1. Assam-Mizoram Border Dispute**

- The dispute originates from two conflicting **British-era notifications** regarding the boundary between Assam and Mizoram.
- **Mizoram claims the 1875 boundary**, which was drawn under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act and is considered favorable to Mizoram.
- **Assam, on the other hand, follows the 1933 boundary**, which it believes accurately defines the state's jurisdiction.
- The lack of clarity and differing interpretations have led to **frequent violent clashes** along the border.

### **2. Haryana-Himachal Pradesh Border Dispute**

- The conflict primarily revolves around the **Parwanoo region**, a town near the **Haryana-Himachal Pradesh border**.

- **Haryana claims** that certain areas near Parwanoo were historically part of its territory before the **formation of Himachal Pradesh in 1971**.
- **Himachal Pradesh refutes this claim**, asserting that the region has always been within its boundaries.

### 3. Himachal Pradesh-Ladakh Border Dispute

- This dispute centers around the **Sarchu region**, which lies on the strategic **Leh-Manali highway** and is a crucial transit point between **Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh**.
- Himachal Pradesh has **historically administered Sarchu**, but **Ladakh claims** that the region should be under its jurisdiction.
- The dispute holds strategic significance due to the **military importance of the region** in the context of India-China border tensions.

### 4. Arunachal Pradesh-Assam Border Dispute

- The dispute originates from the **reorganization of North-Eastern states** and the transfer of certain **forested areas from Arunachal Pradesh to Assam**.
- **Arunachal Pradesh contests this transfer**, arguing that it was done without proper consultation and that the **territory rightfully belongs to Arunachal Pradesh**.
- The matter remains **pending before the Supreme Court**, with periodic tensions along the **shared border**.

### 5. Meghalaya-Assam Border Dispute

- This dispute arises from Meghalaya's opposition to the **Assam Reorganisation Act of 1971**, which defined its borders after gaining statehood.
- Meghalaya claims that **Blocks I and II of Mikir Hills**, which were included in Assam, historically belonged to it.
- The disagreement has led to **frequent protests and minor clashes** between the two states.

### 6. Assam-Nagaland Border Dispute

- This is **one of the longest-running border disputes in India**, dating back to the formation of **Nagaland in 1963**.
- The dispute primarily concerns **Naga-dominated areas that were left within Assam's territory** when Nagaland was carved out as a separate state.
- The issue has led to **violent clashes, police confrontations, and displacement of villagers** over the decades.

## Conclusion

Inter-state border disputes in India are a legacy of **colonial-era boundaries, linguistic divisions, and historical claims**. While **judicial intervention** and **government-led negotiations** have helped manage some disputes, many remain **unresolved**, leading to periodic tensions between states. A **cooperative approach** involving **historical review, local consultations, and legal adjudication** is essential for finding lasting solutions to these territorial conflicts.

**Source:** <https://indianexpress.com/article/political-pulse/maharashtra-karnataka-border-dispute-history-9852296/>