



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**PARADOX OF THE APPROACH TO
THE MANIPUR ISSUE**

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Context

- The **ongoing Manipur crisis** which has lasted for two years, has resulted in over deaths and the displacement that has **not received the same level of national priority** as other security concerns.

About the Manipur Issue

- It escalated in May 2023, stemming from **ethnic tensions** between the **Meitei** and tribal communities, particularly the **Kuki-Zo groups**.
- It was triggered by the **Manipur High Court's directive** to consider **granting Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to the Meitei community**, which led to widespread protests and violence.

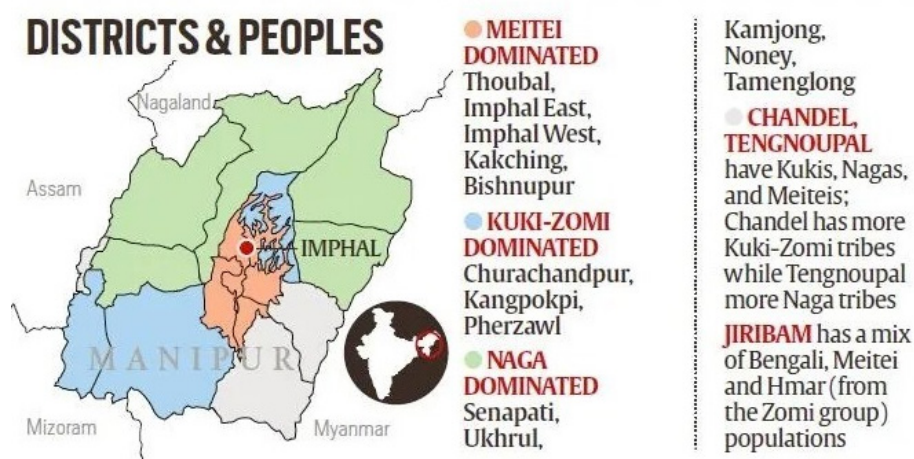
Manipur

Historically, Manipur has been a **center for Krishna consciousness**, with its rulers **embracing Vaishnavism since the 15th century**.

- It shares border with:
 - ♦ **Nagaland** (204Km) in the north
 - ♦ **Mizoram** (95Km) in the south
 - ♦ **Assam** (204.1Km) in the west
- International Borders:** **Myanmar** (352Km) in the east as well as in the south.
- It is known for its **classical dance form, Manipuri**.
- It is often referred to as the **gateway to Southeast Asia**, given its geographical location and **proximity to Myanmar**.
- It is a crucial part of **India's Act East Policy**, aimed at strengthening trade and diplomatic ties with Southeast Asia.



Background of the Conflict



- Demographic & Political Imbalance:** The **Imphal Valley** makes up **10% of the state's landmass**, is **dominated by the Meitei community**, who constitute over **64% of the population** and hold a **majority of seats in the state assembly**.
 - ♦ Other regions, **except the Imphal Valley**, comprising **90% of the land**, are home to various tribal groups, including the **Kuki and Naga communities**, have **less representation in state assembly**.
- Immediate Reason:** In April 2023, the **High Court of Manipur** directed the state government **to submit a 10-year-old recommendation for Meitei ST status** to the Union Tribal Affairs Ministry.

- ♦ It was opposed by the tribal groups, arguing that the Meiteis already hold political and economic advantages and that granting them ST status would further marginalize tribal communities.

Key Concerns

- **Humanitarian Crisis:** Over 250 deaths and thousands displaced in relief camps.
 - ♦ Lack of basic necessities, healthcare, and education for affected communities.
 - ♦ The buffer zone, meant to separate communities, has instead become a flashpoint for further violence.
- **Political Instability:** The **imposition of President's Rule** following the resignation of the Chief Minister.
 - ♦ Lack of clear roadmap for reconciliation.
 - ♦ Thousands of Kuki-Zo residents gathered to observe '**Separation Day**', demanding a separate administrative arrangement, in Churachandpur.
- **Ethnic Tensions and Security Concerns:** Deep-rooted **Meitei vs. Kuki-Zo divisions**, exacerbated by political narratives.
 - ♦ Attempts to frame the violence **as a cross-border security threat**, particularly blaming **Kuki armed militants from Myanmar**.
 - ♦ The mobilization of **valley-based insurgent groups (VBIGs)**, which has received little attention.
- **Economic Impact:** Internet shutdowns, leading to restricted communication and documentation of the crisis.
 - ♦ Inflation and rising food prices, making survival even more difficult for displaced communities.
 - ♦ Decline in tourism and small-scale industries, affecting the state's economy.
- **Challenges to India's Act East Policy:** The unrest in Manipur could impact India's Act East Policy, which aims to boost economic and strategic ties with Southeast Asia.

Way Forward: Dialogue & Reconciliation

- **Political Leadership and Governance Reforms:** The Union government needs to actively engage with all stakeholders to ensure a neutral and effective administration.
 - ♦ The **Manipur People's Convention** urged the central government to ensure free and safe movement for all residents and called for a time-bound roadmap to restore peace.
 - ♦ Community-led peace initiatives should be encouraged to rebuild trust and social cohesion.
- **Security and Law Enforcement:** The buffer zone policy needs reassessment to prevent further violence.
 - ♦ Illegal weapons circulation must be curtailed to prevent armed conflicts.
 - ♦ Security forces should focus on de-escalation rather than militarization of the region.
- **Inclusive dialogue:** Engage all stakeholders, including various ethnic groups, in a dialogue to understand their grievances and find common ground.
 - ♦ The **Mizoram Accord of 1986** between the Government of India and the Mizo National Front (MNF) serves as an example of successful engagement with all stakeholders.
- **Evaluation of Criteria for declaring a community as SC/ST:** The **Lokur Committee (1965)** which recommended criteria for identification, namely, primitive traits, distinct culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large, and backwardness.
- **Humanitarian Relief and Economic Recovery:** Immediate relief measures need to be expanded to support displaced individuals.
 - ♦ Economic rehabilitation programs should be introduced to restore livelihoods.
 - ♦ Infrastructure rebuilding is essential to ensure long-term stability.

Mains Practice Question

[Q] Does the Indian government's handling of the Manipur issue reflect a deeper paradox in its approach to internal conflicts — one that prioritizes political and security concerns over the humanitarian crisis?

