Assam-Mizoram Border Dispute

Why in news?

The old boundary dispute between Assam and Mizoram exploded in violent clashes at a contested border point.

What led to the violence and clashes?

- The violence highlights the long-standing inter-state boundary issues in the Northeast, particularly between Assam and the states that were carved out of it.
- Mizoram borders Assam's Barak Valley.
- Both the States border Bangladesh.
- Status quo should be maintained in no man's land in the border area.
- This was the understanding according to an agreement between governments of Assam and Mizoram some years ago.
- However, people from Lailapur, Assam broke the status quo.
- They allegedly constructed some temporary huts.
- People from Mizoram side went and set fire on them.
- Officials say that the contested land belongs to Assam as per the state's records.
- According to Mizoram officials, the land claimed by Assam has been cultivated for a long time by residents of Mizoram.
- On the other hand, Mizoram's civil society groups blame "illegal Bangladeshis" (alleged migrants from Bangladesh) on the Assam side for the disturbances.

What is the origin of the boundary dispute?

- The boundary between present-day Assam and Mizoram is 165 km long.
- The heart of the dispute dates back to the colonial era.
- Back then, Mizoram was known as Lushai Hills, a district of Assam.
- The dispute stems from a notification of 1875 that differentiated the Lushai Hills from the plains of Cachar.
- [This was derived from the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR) Act, 1873.]
- Another notification of 1933demarcates a boundary between the Lushai Hills and Manipur.

- The Mizo society was not consulted prior to the 1933 notification.
- So, Mizoram believes the boundary should be demarcated on the basis of the 1875 notification.
- But the Assam government follows the 1933 demarcation.
- This is the point of conflict between the two states.

What led to the two differing notifications?

- British tea plantations surfaced in the Cachar plains during the mid-19th century.
- [It covers the Barak Valley - now comprises the districts of Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj.]
- Their expansion led to problems with the Mizos whose home was the Lushai Hills.
- In August 1875, the southern boundary of Cachar district was issued in the Assam Gazette.
- The Mizos say this was the fifth time the British had drawn the boundary between the Lushai Hills and the Cachar plains.
- But this wasthe only time when it was done in consultation with Mizo chiefs.
- This demarcation also became the basis for the Inner Line Reserve Forest demarcation in the Gazette two years later.
- But in 1933, the boundary between Lushai Hills and the then princely state of Manipur was demarcated.
- This notification said the Manipur boundary began from the trijunction of Lushai Hills, Cachar district of Assam and Manipur state.
- The Mizos do not accept this demarcation, and point to the 1875 boundary which was drawn in consultation with their chiefs.
- In the decades after Independence, many states and UTs were carved out of Assam:
    1. Nagaland (1963)
    2. Arunachal Pradesh (UT 1972, formerly NEFA)
    3. Meghalaya (UT 1972)
    4. Mizoram (UT 1972)
- Now, with different interpretations of the border question, clashes erupt often. The earlier one was in October 2020.
- In the current clashes, at least six Assam Police personnel were killed.

Source: The Indian Express



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