Manipur Blockade

Why in news?

\n\n

Manipur has been experiencing severe hardship in supply of essential items since November 1 after the UNC imposed an indefinite economic blockade on the two national highways that serve as lifelines for the State.

\n\n

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n
- The Manipur Cabinet on December 9 decided to form **seven new districts**, bifurcating the existing nine. Four new districts have been formally inaugurated.
\n
- The United Naga Council (UNC) has been agitating against the government decision to create Sadar Hills and Jiribam into full-fledged districts, claiming it would bifurcate ancestral lands of the Nagas in Manipur.
\n
- It would also be against their objective of establishing Nagalim i.e *Greater Nagaland.*
\n
- Tension escalated after militants ambushed the Manipur police and other State forces that left three policemen dead and 14 others injured on December 15 and violence had been on the rise since then.
\n
- Inter-community tensions are also been boiling since the decision December 9 decision.
\n
- The UNC has deemed the government's move to upgrade Sadar Hills and Jiribam to full-fledged districts **an attempt to take "traditional Naga land and to divide the Naga people"** and imposed an economic blockade from November 2 onwards.
\n

\n\n

What is the government’s justification?

\n\n

The government’s justification for the formation of the new districts is both a response to longstanding demands of local people and administrative convenience.

\n\n

What else is causing the unrest?

\n\n

\n
- The resentment against the new administrative units is just the latest in a series of issues that have caused strife.
\n
- The demand that the Inner Line Permit (ILP) be implemented in Manipur has gained traction over the last few years
\n
- The ILP is a special pass or permit that is required to enter the Northeastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram. The system was introduced by the British to protect their commercial interests, particularly in oil and tea, and continues now essentially as a mechanism to firewall the tribal peoples and their cultures from onslaughts by outsiders.
\n
- It has been demanded now, amid fears that increasing tourism and migration would alter the demographic profile of the state.
\n
- Following the demand, the **Regulation of Visitors, Tenants and Migrant Workers’ Bill** was introduced in 2016.
\n
- The Bill proposed to set up visitor registration centres in the state. Owners of “transit units” like hotels were to register and submit details of visitors along with identity documents to the government. Contractors hiring labour from outside Manipur were to follow similar rules, and the government was to issue permits to migrant workers.
\n
- The Bill fulfilled a longstanding demand from powerful groups in the state, but failed to satisfy the hardliners who wanted nothing short of the ILP.
\n
- Subsequently the bill was withdrawn after violent protests.
\n
- Three other laws passed by the state assembly in 2015 — the Protection of Manipur People Bill, the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Bill

(Seventh Amendment) and the Manipur Shops and Establishments (Second Amendment) Bill — ostensibly as a response to demands from the state's tribal communities, were also met with protests.
\n
- The laws were seen as an attempt to encroach on tribal lands and rights. It is against this backdrop that the redrawing of district boundaries has taken on the colour of a Native versus Other conflict.
\n

\n\n

What should be done?

\n\n

\n
- The government did not make the process or the decision on the new administrative divisions a consultative one.
\n
- **The Hill Area Committees** are formed to protect the rights of hill people, and under **Article 371(C)** of Constitution, must be consulted on matters relating to tribal people. But they have claimed they were never consulted.
\n
- The redrawing of boundaries is a sensitive issue in the complex social fabric of Manipur and has immediate and real consequences for the law and order situation in the state.
\n
- The government and other political actors, whether for political considerations or administrative convenience, must come to a broad agreement before the situation deteriorates further.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Category: Mains| G.S-II| Social Justice

\n\n

Source: The Hindu, The Indian Express

\n

