The History of Insurgency in Manipur

Why in news?

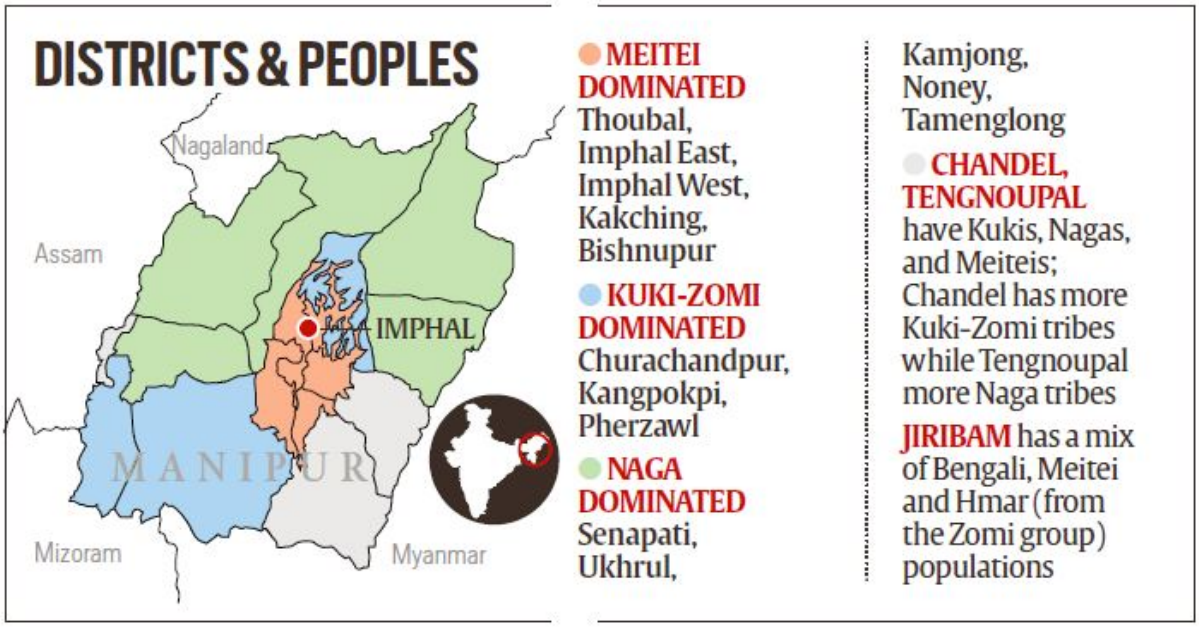
A battle is raged between Manipuri commandos and Kuki-Zomi insurgent groups killing many insurgents amidst rising protests and spurts of violence in Manipur.

What is the history of conflict in Manipur?

- Manipur has been in the cross-currents of India's oldest insurgent movements.
- **Naga -** The Naga movement (1950s) is the country's longest-running insurgency which fights for the Greater Nagaland or Nagalim.
- **Kuki -** Kuki groups also have fought the Indian government for an 'independent Kuki homeland', spread across Manipur.
- The Kuki insurgency gained momentum after ethnic clashes with the Nagas of Manipur in the early 1990s.
- **Meitei -** The Meiteis in Manipur also opposed the merger agreement between the Manipuri king and the Indian government (1949).
- In 1964, the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), a meitei insurgent group, was formed, demanding secession from India.
- Subsequently, numerous Meitei insurgent (valley insurgent) groups like the People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) came into being.

What are the major ethnic conflicts in Manipur?

- **Naga-Kuki clash -** Land that the Kukis claim to be their 'homeland' in the Manipur hills overlaps with the Greater Nagaland or Nagalim.
- The NSCN-IM entered a ceasefire agreement with the Indian government only in 1997.
- **Kuki-Zomi -** In 1993, a massacre of Kukis by the NSCN-IM left thousands of Kukis homeless.
- The Kuki-Zomi tribes organised various armed groups as a reaction to this aggression of Nagas.
- **Meiteis and Meitei Pangals (Muslims) -** Similar clashes were taking place between them which led to the formation of the Islamist group People's United Liberation Front (no longer active).



What is the Kuki-Zomi movement?

- The Kuki-Zomi movement started as defence against aggression by other groups.
- It later transformed into a call for Kukiland and later diluted to simply a call for a separate state.

Kukiland – an imagined country spreading across the Kuki-Zomi inhabited areas of India, Myanmar and Bangladesh.

What are the dominant valley insurgent groups?

- The United National Liberation Front (UNLF) is considered the mother of all Meitei insurgent groups.
- Out of the valley insurgent groups, the UNLF remained the most powerful till recently.
- Few other powerful groups are the Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP) and the Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL).
- These groups emerged over time and now function out of camps set up in Burmese territory.
- Over the years the power of the valley groups has waned, even UNLF is at its weakest.
- Amongst the Naga groups, the NSCN-IM remains the most prominent group.

How influential are these insurgent groups in politics?

- The insurgent groups are intricately woven into the daily life in Manipur.
- The valley groups, in particular the UNLF, have from time to time called for strikes.
- They have rules as ‘moral codes’ such as ban on Hindi movies and music, ban on Indian clothing, ban on alcohol and regulations on what can be shown in Meitei movies, etc.
- They also levy ‘taxes’ on the public.
- Cutting across party lines, candidates stand for elections with insurgent backing.
- The groups also dictate to the voters who should win and influence the voters.

What was the Government's reaction towards these clashes?

- The Indian government enacted the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in 1958 in reaction to the Naga separatist activity in Nagaland and parts of Manipur.
- When the valley movement gained momentum, the AFSPA act was extended to the entire state.
- In the 1980s, Manipur was declared a disturbed area.
- A tripartite Suspension of Operation (SoO) agreement between the Centre, the state and the Kuki-Zomi groups was signed in 2008 after several peace talks.
- With the gradual improvement of law and order AFSPA has been repealed in several areas.
- The Manipur government recently decided to withdraw from the SoO agreement.
- The Valley Insurgent Groups which remains active never entered an agreement with the Centre or participated in any peace talks.

References

1. IE - What is the history of insurgency in Manipur?
2. IE - What is the SoO agreement with tribal insurgent groups?

