The Other Side of Nagaland Killing requires Full Probe

What is the issue?

There have been mounting demands for repeal of AFSPA in Nagaland amidst the killing of 14 civilians by the army personnel but a full probe is necessary.

What incident triggered the demand of withdrawal of AFSPA?

- Six civilians said to be workers in a coal mine were killed by security forces in an area between Tiru and Oting village in Nagaland's Mon district.
- The incident triggered violence in the area in which eight more civilians were killed after security forces allegedly opened fire.
- The Army has set up a court of inquiry headed by a Major General to probe the circumstances.
- The state government has also set up a special investigation team, which has been directed to complete its work within one month.
- Since the AFSPA Act gives enormous power to the armed forces and the impunity for security personnel for their actions taken under the law, the incident has rekindled the debates over AFSPA.

To know more about the Nagaland killing and AFSPA, click here

What is the common view regarding the incident?

- There have been a flood of expressions of anguish including messages from Parliament, the Prime Minister, the Home Minister and more.
- The killing of civilians has been condemned by local civil society organisations, Naga outfits, national political parties, and the state government itself.
- There have been mounting demands for repeal of AFSPA in the Nagaland region.

What is the other uncommon view of the incident?

- For those sympathetic to the rebel Nagas, this is an opportunity to tarnish the image of the Army, demand its withdrawal from the area, and push their agenda to demand a separate Constitution and a separate flag for

the Naga separatists.

- It must be remembered that the security forces are performing an extremely difficult and complicated task in the midst of multiple insurgencies in the Northeast.
- In fact, they are paying the price for our political mis-management and blunders since the mid-fifties when trouble erupted in the Naga Hills.
- According to reports , the suo motu FIR lodged by Nagaland Police, mentions that there was an intention to “murder and injure” civilians which was an unprofessional entry.
- Counterinsurgency operations are full of uncertainties and in such a situation, mistakes and blunders happen.
    - In Iraq, on March 1, 2017, during a strike on ISIS near Mosul, there was an unintentional death of 14 civilians because the blast set off a secondary explosion.
    - Recently, on August 30, a drone strike by the US forces killed 10 civilians near the Kabul International Airport.
- However, it cannot be denied that the incident was negligible, but it needs to be carefully investigated, and if there was any malafide or excessive use of force, the guilty must be punished.

What is the track record of the rebel Nagas ?

- The **Naga People’s Convention held in 1957** demanded that the Naga Hills district of Assam and the Tuensang Frontier Division of North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) be merged into a single unit.
    - The demand was conceded and the Naga Hills Tuensang Area (NHTA) was formed.
- Another **Naga People’s Convention, held in 1959**, demanded the creation of a separate state of Nagaland.
    - This was also conceded and Nagaland was carved out in 1963.
- There was the **Shillong Agreement in 1975** whereby the underground groups agreed to deposit their arms while the government agreed to release the rebels held in detention and give liberal grants for their rehabilitation.
    - The hardcore elements, however, did not abide by the terms of the agreement.
- Recently, the Framework Agreement (**The Nagaland Peace Accord**) was signed in 2015 for an enduring new relationship of peaceful co-existence of the NSCN and the government.
    - But the NSCN (IM) has been preventing its implementation.

So, what can be done with respect to AFSPA Act?

- Government has already, during the last few years, been gradually withdrawing AFSPA from different areas.
- The Act was withdrawn from Tripura in 2015 and Meghalaya in 2018 while in Arunachal Pradesh it is now restricted to the three districts of Tirap, Changlang and Longding.
- At present, the whole of Assam, Nagaland and Manipur (except the Imphal municipal area), continue to be under AFSPA.
- The **Jeevan Reddy Commission** had, in 2005, recommended the repeal of the Act.
- The matter could be examined again in consultation with all stakeholders and a well-considered decision taken, keeping in view the requirements of national security.

Reference

1. https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/before-criticising-afspa-full-probe-necessary-7666815/

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