UNLF Peace Accord

Why in news?

Recently, the Centre and Manipur government signed a peace agreement with the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), the oldest valley-based armed group in Manipur.

History of insurgency in Manipur
• Manipur has been in the cross-currents of India's oldest insurgent movements. • **Naga movement**- It is the country's longest-running insurgency which fights for the Greater Nagaland or Nagalim. • **Kuki** - They 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 opposed the merger agreement between the Manipuri king and the Indian government in 1949. To know more about insurgency in Manipur, click here

What is the history of UNLF?

> *It is Manipur's oldest militant group dominated by the Meitei community and one of the seven "Meitei Extremist Organisations" banned by the Union government under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act.*

- **Established**-1964
- **Founder-** Arambam Samarendra
- **Aim**- To liberate Manipur from India and to form an independent socialist state of Manipur.
- It is distinct from the insurgent groups active in the state's Naga-dominated and Kuki-Zomi dominated hills.
- **Objective-**
  - It favoured a long-term programme to ***secede from India,*** form alliance mainly with China and gradually capture political power with the help of an indoctrinated young population and the intelligentsia.
  - It aimed at reclaiming the ***Kabow Valley in Myanmar.***
- **Manipur People's Army**- It is an armed wing formed in 1990 which has carried out attacks on India's security force.
- **4 point proposal-** In 2005, it mooted a proposal to bring the Indo-Manipur conflict to an end.

Plebiscite	It should be conducted under United Nations (UN) supervision to elicit the opinion of the people of the State on the core issue of restoration of Manipur's independence.
UN peace keeping force	They should be deployed in Manipur to ensure that the process is free and fair.
Arms surrender	Arms to be surrendered to UN force by UNLF, matched by the withdrawal of Indian troops
Political authority	Handing over of political power by the UN in accordance with the results of the plebiscite.

- **Government's response**- The Central government didn't accept the 4-point proposal by UNLF.
- **Factions-** UNLF split into 2 factions due to internal differences.
    - **Khundongbam Pambei-** Signed the peace agreement recently with the government.
    - **NC Koireng**- Remains opposed to talks.

What is the significance of the deal?

- **Historic milestone**- The pact marks a historic milestone, as it is the 1st time a valley-based proscribed organization has engaged in peace negotiations since the eruption of ethnic violence in 2023.
- **Establish peace-** The UNLF, known for its armed struggle, has agreed to renounce violence and participate in the peaceful democratic process.
- **Success of tripartite agreements**- The tripartite accords initiated by the Centre since 2014 have led to surrendering and a substantial decline in violence in terms of security forces, civilian casualties and number of violent incidents.
- **Rehabilitation-** The agreement provides for the rehabilitation and re-settlement of UNLF's armed cadres.
- **Institutional support**- A *Peace Monitoring Committee* will oversee the enforcement of agreed ground rules.

What are the challenges?

- **Multiple stakeholders-** The peace agreement can be complex to implement due to multiplicity of stakeholders and their divergent interests and grievances.
- **Unknown terms-** The terms of the agreement are not known and the involvement of militants in the latest ethnic conflict may complicate the issue further.
- **Opening up of issues**- If criminal cases are withdrawn, then similar concessions have to be given on the other side to the Kuki militants who professedly are continuing with the Suspension of Operations agreement.
- **Diverse demands**- Each group has distinct historical grievances, aspirations and demands, making it hard to arrive at a resolution that satisfies all parties.
- **Vulnerability**- The fragility of peace agreements also lies in their vulnerability to disruptions caused by extremist factions or splinter groups within these communities.
- **Distrust**- Lack of trust in the government's commitment to fulfil promises outlined in peace agreement undermines its effectiveness.
- **Geopolitical factors-** The reluctance of neighbouring countries to support peace

processes or interference by external actors can destabilise the region.

What lies ahead?

- The UNLF Manipur Peace Pact represents hope for lasting peace, but the challenges need to be addressed.
- The road ahead requires commitment, transparency, and genuine reconciliation.

Quick facts

Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)
• **Aim-** To prevent and punish unlawful and terrorist activities that threaten the sovereignty and integrity of the country. • **Definition-** The Act defines unlawful activities as any action that - supports, propagates, or advocates secession from India, - disclaims or questions the territorial integrity of India, - causes or intends to cause disaffection against India, - supports any terrorist organization or individual. • **Declaration of unlawful associations**- The Act empowers the Central government to declare any **organisation or individual** as unlawful. • **Tribunal-** The declaration is subject to judicial review by a tribunal constituted by a sitting or retired judge of a High Court. • **Punishment-** - **Unlawful activity**- Imprisonment ranging from 5 years to life, and fine. - **Terrorist activity**- Death penalty or imprisonment for life, and fine • **National Investigation Agency (NIA)**- It is authorized to investigate any offence under the Act, and to arrest any person who is reasonably suspected of having committed such offence. • It also provides for the attachment and forfeiture of any property that is derived from, or used for, any unlawful or terrorist activity by NIA. • **Special courts**- It is established by the Central or State government to try any offence under the Act. • **Appeal-** It provides for the appeal and revision of the judgments of the special courts by the High Court and the Supreme Court.

References

1. Indian Express- Why one pact is not peace
2. Indian Express- History of UNLF

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