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**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

# Cycle of Violence — On Manipur and the Persistence of Hostilities

 **THE HINDU**

24 April 2026

**SECURITY & DEFENCE****POLITY****GS2****GS3**

CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

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# Cycle of Violence — On Manipur and the Persistence of Hostilities

The Hindu

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GS2

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4 tags



## INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Manipur's ethnic conflict is entering its fourth year with no resolution. Is this a failure of federalism, ethnic reconciliation policy, or security governance — and what lessons does it hold for India's internal security doctrine?"

## THE CORE ARGUMENT

The Manipur ethnic conflict, now three years old (since May 3, 2023), has claimed 217 lives and displaced 58,821 persons — yet no sustainable peace process is visible. The editorial argues that the Central and State governments have relied on security management (troop deployment, internet shutdowns, curfews) while neglecting political resolution. Three structural failures underlie the persistence: (1) the failure to address the legitimate grievances of both communities; (2) absence of meaningful dialogue facilitated by a neutral interlocutor; and (3) the political economy of conflict — where armed groups on both sides have material interests in continued hostilities. The editorial calls for treating Manipur as a political problem requiring political solutions, not merely a security problem requiring force.

## BACKGROUND — THE CONFLICT

### Origins (May 3, 2023)

A **Manipur High Court directive** suggesting the state consider extending **Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to Meiteis** triggered protests by Kuki-Zo tribal students (ATSUM). Violence quickly spread — churches were burned, houses looted, thousands displaced along ethnic lines, and the state effectively bifurcated into Meitei-controlled valley and Kuki-Zo-controlled hills.

## Communities in Conflict

COMMUNITY	POPULATION SHARE	LOCATION	ST STATUS
<b>Meitei</b>	~53%	Imphal Valley	Not ST
<b>Kuki-Zo</b>	~16%	Hill districts	Have ST status
<b>Naga</b>	~24%	Hill districts	Have ST status; largely uninvolved

## WHY THE CONFLICT PERSISTS — THREE YEARS ON

### 1. Unresolved Structural Grievances

#### Meitei grievances:

- Demand for ST status to access benefits under Forest Rights, land protections
- Allegations of encroachment on reserve forest by Kuki-Zo groups
- Alleged links between Kuki-Zo armed groups and Myanmar drug trade

#### Kuki-Zo grievances:

- Fear that Meitei ST status would dilute tribal land protections in hills
- Demand for separate administration — either a UT with legislature or separate state
- Accusations of state bias and selective security response

### 2. Failure of Political Process

POLITICAL FAILURE	DETAIL
No neutral interlocutor	Centre has not appointed a credible peace negotiator
CM neutrality questioned	N. Biren Singh seen as partisan by Kuki-Zo groups
No formal dialogue	Both communities negotiating only through civil society, not structured process
Article 356 not imposed	Questions persist about why President's Rule was avoided

### 3. Political Economy of Conflict

Armed groups on both sides have acquired weapons (5,000+ looted from police armouries), territory, and influence. Peace threatens the leverage these groups hold — creating a spoiler dynamic where armed actors resist resolution.

## SECURITY RESPONSE — WHAT WAS DONE

MEASURE	DETAILS
Central forces	50,000+ CRPF, BSF, AR personnel deployed
AFSPA	Maintained in hill districts
Internet shutdowns	Repeated; over 200+ days of shutdown in 3 years
SIT investigations	Formed but slow
Arms recovery	~3,000 weapons recovered; ~2,000+ still missing
Relief camps	350+ camps across valley and hills

**Assessment:** Security measures have prevented large-scale massacres but have failed to create conditions for peace or return of displaced persons.

## CONSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS

### The Sixth Schedule Question

Kuki-Zo groups demand Sixth Schedule protection (Autonomous District Councils) for hill areas. Manipur's hill areas are not currently under the Sixth Schedule — a constitutional gap that has long been a grievance.

### Article 355 vs. Article 356

PROVISION	WHAT IT ALLOWS
<b>Article 355</b>	Centre's duty to protect states from external aggression and internal disturbance
<b>Article 356</b>	President's Rule — takeover of state administration

The Centre invoked Article 355 obligations without imposing Article 356 — a political calculation to avoid displacing an elected government. Critics argue this left the state in a constitutional limbo — Centre responsible but state government unaccountable.

## UPSC ANGLE

PAPER	ANGLE
GS2 — Polity	Article 355, 356; Sixth Schedule; federalism in conflict zones
GS3 — Internal security	AFSPA; armed non-state actors; insurgency management
GS2 — Governance	Centre-state relations during internal conflict

**Mains Keywords:** Sixth Schedule, Fifth Schedule, AFSPA, Article 355, Meitei ST status, Kuki-Zo, internal security, ethnic conflict, insurgency, Northeast India

**Probable Question:** “The Manipur conflict illustrates the limitations of securitising ethnic disputes. Examine India’s approach to internal ethnic conflicts.” (GS2/GS3 Mains)

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