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Three Years of Manipur Ethnic Violence — May 3, 2023 to May 3, 2026

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CURATED & WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

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Three Years of Manipur Ethnic Violence — May 3, 2023 to May 3, 2026

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WHY IN NEWS

May 3, 2026 marks the **third anniversary** of the outbreak of ethnic violence in **Manipur** between the **Meitei** and **Kuki-Zo** communities, which began on **May 3, 2023**. The **Thadou Inpi Manipur** — the apex body of the Thadou-Kuki community, the largest single sub-group within the Kuki-Zo tribes — called upon churches and community members across the state to observe the day as a “**Day of Peace and Prayer**”, remembering the victims of the violence and calling for justice and reconciliation.

As of May 2026, the conflict remains unresolved with over **250 dead**, more than **60,000 displaced**, and continued reports of sporadic violence in fringe areas.

WHAT HAPPENED: ORIGINS OF THE MANIPUR CONFLICT

The Trigger — May 3, 2023

On May 3, 2023, a protest march by the **All Tribal Students Union Manipur (ATSUM)** against the proposed inclusion of **Meitei community** in the **Scheduled Tribe (ST) list** turned violent in Churachandpur district. The violence spread across the state within hours, escalating into the worst ethnic violence Manipur had seen since the 1990s.

The Underlying Fault Lines

- 1. ST Status Demand.** The **Meitei community** — comprising approximately **53% of Manipur's population** and concentrated in the **Imphal Valley** — sought inclusion in the Scheduled Tribe list. The **Meitei community** currently holds **OBC status**. If granted ST status, Meiteis would become eligible for ST reservation benefits and crucially, for **tribal land rights** protected under the Hill Area Committee (HAC) provisions and other tribal land protection laws.
- 2. Hill-Valley Geography.** Manipur's geography is acutely divided: the **Imphal Valley** (~10% of area, 57% of population — predominantly Meitei) and the **Hill Areas** (~90% of area, 43% of population — predominantly tribal: Naga, Kuki-Zo, and others). This geographic imbalance creates structural tension over resources, political representation, and land rights.

3. Kuki-Zo Tribal Land Rights. The **Kuki-Zo communities** (Thadou, Hmar, Paite, Zou, Gangte, and others) in the hill areas fear that ST inclusion of Meiteis — who have greater economic and political power as valley-dominant community — would enable Meitei **encroachment** into hill tribal land, where non-tribals are currently restricted from purchasing land.

4. Demand for Separate Administration. After the violence, **Kuki-Zo political groups** escalated their longstanding demand for a **separate administration** — either a **Union Territory** carved from Manipur’s hill districts or a **separate state** — arguing that coexistence with Meiteis in a single political unit was no longer viable.

CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK — MANIPUR’S TRIBAL PROTECTIONS

| PROVISION | CONTENT |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Sixth Schedule | Applies to tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram — does NOT apply to Manipur hills (Manipur hill areas have Hill Area Committee provisions instead) |
| Article 371© | Special provision for Manipur — empowers President to ensure Governor has special responsibility for the Hill Areas Committee (HAC) — a legislative committee whose report on hill-area bills must be tabled before the Legislative Assembly |
| Hill Areas Committee | A special committee of elected MLAs from hill constituencies — has oversight on bills affecting hill areas; cannot veto legislation but raises concerns |
| Inner Line Permit (ILP) | Manipur has ILP — non-locals require a permit to enter; aimed at protecting tribal demographics |
| Forest Rights Act, 2006 | Grants tribal communities rights over forest land they have historically cultivated/used |

THE THREE-YEAR BALANCE SHEET

| CATEGORY | STATUS (AS OF MAY 2026) |
|-------------------------|---|
| Dead | 250+ (official figures; ground reports suggest higher) |
| Displaced | 60,000+ (in relief camps in Imphal Valley and hill districts) |
| Properties destroyed | Thousands (houses, churches, temples, vehicles) |
| Peace talks | Limited; no formal bilateral dialogue between Meitei and Kuki-Zo leadership |
| Central intervention | AFSPA extended in fringe areas; Army/CAPFs deployed; National People's Party (NPP) in coalition |
| Kuki-Zo demand | Separate administration; Central government studying report |
| Meitei demand | Investigation of alleged Kuki-Zo narco-terrorism links |
| Tribal community demand | Withdrawal of ST petition for Meiteis |

THADOU INPI MANIPUR — WHO ARE THEY?

The **Thadou** are the **largest single sub-group** within the Kuki-Zo community. The **Thadou language** (also called Thadou-Kuki) is the most widely spoken among Kuki-Zo tribes. **Inpi** means “apex body” in Thadou — the Thadou Inpi represents the Thadou community in political and social matters. The Thadou Inpi’s declaration of May 3 as “Day of Peace and Prayer” is an annual commemoration of the 2023 violence.

WHY THE MANIPUR CONFLICT MATTERS FOR UPSC

The Manipur crisis intersects with nearly every major governance topic:

- ① **Federalism and Article 356** — demands for imposition of President’s Rule at various points
- ② **Tribal land rights** — conflicting claims under Forest Rights Act, PESA, ST classification
- ③ **Internal security** — role of AFSPA, CAPFs, Army deployment
- ④ **Ethnic conflict and state capacity** — failure to prevent or quickly contain ethnic violence
- ⑤ **Sixth Schedule** — why it does not apply to Manipur and the implications
- ⑥ **Minority rights and community protection** — obligations under Articles 29, 30, 371C

UPSC RELEVANCE

| PAPER | ANGLE |
|-------------------------|---|
| GS2 — Polity | Article 371©, Hill Areas Committee, tribal protections, Centre-State relations, AFSPA |
| GS1 — History/Society | Ethnic identity, tribal communities, Northeast India culture |
| GS2 — Social Issues | Ethnic conflict, displacement, relief camps, minority rights |
| GS3 — Internal Security | Ethnic violence, AFSPA, insurgency dynamics in Northeast |

Mains Keywords: Manipur ethnic violence, Meitei-Kuki conflict, Scheduled Tribe classification, Article 371©, Hill Areas Committee, Sixth Schedule, Inner Line Permit, Thadou Inpi, Kuki-Zo tribes, AFSPA in Northeast, separate administration demand

Prelims Facts Corner

| ITEM | FACT |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Manipur ethnic violence start | May 3, 2023 |
| Communities involved | Meitei (valley, majority, OBC) vs. Kuki-Zo (hills, tribal) |
| Deaths | 250+ |
| Displaced | 60,000+ |
| Trigger | Protest against Meitei ST inclusion demand |
| Meitei ST status | Currently OBC |
| Article 371© | Special provision for Manipur — Hill Areas Committee |
| Sixth Schedule | Does NOT apply to Manipur hills |
| Thadou | Largest Kuki-Zo sub-group; Thadou Inpi = apex body |
| ILP | Inner Line Permit — applicable in Manipur |
| Kuki-Zo demand | Separate administration (UT or new state) |

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Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

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