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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Breaking Manipur's Cycle of Reprisal: A New Fault Line Opens

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Manipur now has a Meitei Chief Minister with Kuki and Naga Deputy Chief Ministers, and the violence has continued. Does that tell us power-sharing does not work, or that power-sharing is not the same thing as reconciliation?"

Source: [Original editorial](#)
[The Indian Express](#)
 Every fact web-verified against primary sources

THE LIFT LINE

Manipur now has a Meitei Chief Minister, a Kuki Deputy Chief Minister and a Naga Deputy Chief Minister. It also has four more Naga civilians dead in Kangpokpi. Power has been shared. The State has not been.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

Manipur is the country's most demanding live case study in internal security and federalism at once, and it is unusually rich because it now contains almost every instrument the Indian state possesses: Article 356 imposed and revoked, Article 355, a Suspension of Operations agreement, an ongoing Naga peace process, Scheduled Tribe classification litigation, Article 371C, and a humanitarian displacement crisis. Examiners like Manipur precisely because a good answer has to hold internal security and constitutional design in the same frame.

GS Paper 2: Federalism; issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure; mechanisms for the protection of vulnerable sections; the role of the Union in States. **GS Paper 3:** Linkages between development and the spread of extremism; internal security challenges; role of security forces.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Manipur's demography is the starting point of every explanation. The **Imphal valley** occupies roughly a tenth of the State's area and holds the majority of its population, predominantly the **Meitei** community. The surrounding **hill districts** cover about nine-tenths of the area and are home to the **Naga** and **Kuki-Zo** tribal

communities. Land law reinforces this: valley land is transferable, hill land is protected, and the Meitei community's demand for **Scheduled Tribe status**, which would allow land acquisition in the hills, is the single most combustible issue in the State.

The current phase of violence **began in 2023**, on **3 May**, when a Tribal Solidarity March in the hills, called against the prospect of Scheduled Tribe status being extended to the Meitei community, escalated into clashes that have not fully stopped since. The State has since been effectively partitioned along buffer lines, with populations displaced into relief camps by community.

President's Rule under Article 356 was imposed in February 2025 and revoked in February 2026, when an elected government returned under Chief Minister **Yumnam Khemchand Singh**, with Deputy Chief Ministers drawn from the **Kuki** and **Naga** communities. That deliberately inclusive arrangement is the backdrop against which the editorial's argument must be read, because it removes the easy explanation that the violence continues for want of representation.

The newer element is the **Kuki-Naga fault line**. It matters disproportionately because the Naga question is not confined to Manipur: it runs through the **Framework Agreement of 2015** between the Government of India and the **NSCN (Isak-Muivah)**, and any deterioration in Naga-Kuki relations inside Manipur feeds directly into a national negotiation.

THE ANALYSIS

The editorial's first contribution is to name the mutation. Public understanding of Manipur is still organised around Meitei versus Kuki. That framing is now incomplete. **Kangpokpi**, a Kuki-dominated district, sits between **Naga-dominated Senapati** to the north and the Meitei-majority valley districts to the south. It is therefore the pressure point at which all three communities meet, and it is where the newest killings have occurred.

The second contribution is to show the reprisal chain as a chain. The sequence given is specific: the murder of **Kuki-Thadou church pastors in May**, followed by **retaliatory abductions on both sides**, followed a month later by the recovery of the **bodies of six Naga men**, followed now by the killing of **four Naga civilians** in Kangpokpi. Each act is presented by its perpetrators as a response to the previous one. This is the defining property of reprisal violence: it becomes self-financing, requiring no fresh grievance to continue, only a memory of the last incident.

The third is the blockade economy, which is where conflict becomes governance failure.

Blockades imposed by Meitei, Kuki and Naga groups have turned highways into contested space. In a State where **National Highway 2 (Imphal to Dimapur)** and **National Highway 37 (Imphal to Jiribam)** are the only meaningful supply arteries, a blockade is not a protest, it is a siege. Supplies stop, food and fuel prices rise, and access to healthcare fails. Because Kangpokpi straddles the main route, the district that is most contested is also the one whose closure hurts everyone else most, which gives every armed group a permanent instrument of leverage and every other community a permanent grievance.

The fourth is the humanitarian figure, and it deserves to be the most-cited number in any answer on Manipur. Right to Information data show that **more than 700 internally displaced people have died in relief camps**. These are not battle deaths. They are the deaths that accumulate when people live for three years in temporary shelter without adequate healthcare, nutrition or sanitation. A conflict is conventionally measured by its casualty figure; this number is a reminder that the larger toll is usually indirect, delayed and uncounted.

The fifth and most analytically important point is the editorial's conclusion about representation. The State government is as inclusive as its composition can be made. It has still found little success. The editorial's explanation is exact: *political representation alone cannot resolve the conflict when the communities remain socially segregated*. Power-sharing operates at the level of the cabinet. Segregation operates at the level of the road, the market, the school and the hospital. If the second is not addressed, the first floats above a society that has already partitioned itself.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

The current sequence:

- **May 2026:** Kuki-Thadou church pastors murdered; retaliatory abductions on both sides follow
- **June 2026:** bodies of **six Naga men** recovered
- **Late August 2026:** **four Naga civilians** killed in **Kangpokpi** district

Key figures:

- Conflict duration: **more than three years**, the **origin** being **3 May 2023**
- Deaths of internally displaced persons in relief camps: **more than 700** (per Right to Information data)

Political timeline (background):

- **3 May 2023:** Tribal Solidarity March; violence begins
- **February 2025:** President's Rule imposed under **Article 356**
- **February 2026:** President's Rule revoked; elected government restored
- Chief Minister: **Yumnam Khemchand Singh** (Meitei), with Deputy Chief Ministers from the **Kuki** and **Naga** communities

Geography for Prelims:

- **Imphal valley:** about **10 per cent** of area, majority of population, predominantly **Meitei**
- **Hill districts:** about **90 per cent** of area, **Naga** and **Kuki-Zo** communities
- **Kangpokpi** lies between **Senapati** (Naga-dominated, north) and the valley districts (Meitei-majority, south)

- Lifeline highways: **NH-2** (Imphal to Dimapur), **NH-37** (Imphal to Jiribam)
- Manipur borders **Nagaland, Assam, Mizoram** and **Myanmar**
- **Loktak Lake**, the largest freshwater lake in the North East, with its floating *phumdis* and **Keibul Lamjao National Park**, the only floating national park, home to the **Sangai** deer

Constitutional and legal instruments:

- **Article 355**: duty of the Union to protect States against external aggression and internal disturbance
- **Article 356**: President's Rule; imposed February 2025, revoked February 2026
- **Article 371C**: special provision for Manipur; the **Hill Areas Committee** of the Legislative Assembly
- **Article 342**: specification of Scheduled Tribes; the Meitei ST demand runs through this route
- **Manipur (Hill Areas) District Councils Act, 1971**: Manipur's hill areas are **not** under the **Sixth Schedule**, unlike Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram
- **Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958**: in force in parts of the State
- **Inner Line Permit**: extended to Manipur in **December 2019**

Peace-process instruments:

- **Suspension of Operations (SoO)** agreement with Kuki militant groups, first signed in **2008**, with ground rules on designated camps and weapons in double-locked storage
- **Framework Agreement, 2015**, between the Government of India and the **NSCN (Isak-Muivah)**; the **Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs)** are the parallel track
- **Kuki National Organisation (KNO)** and **United People's Front (UPF)** are the two SoO conglomerates

THE DEBATE

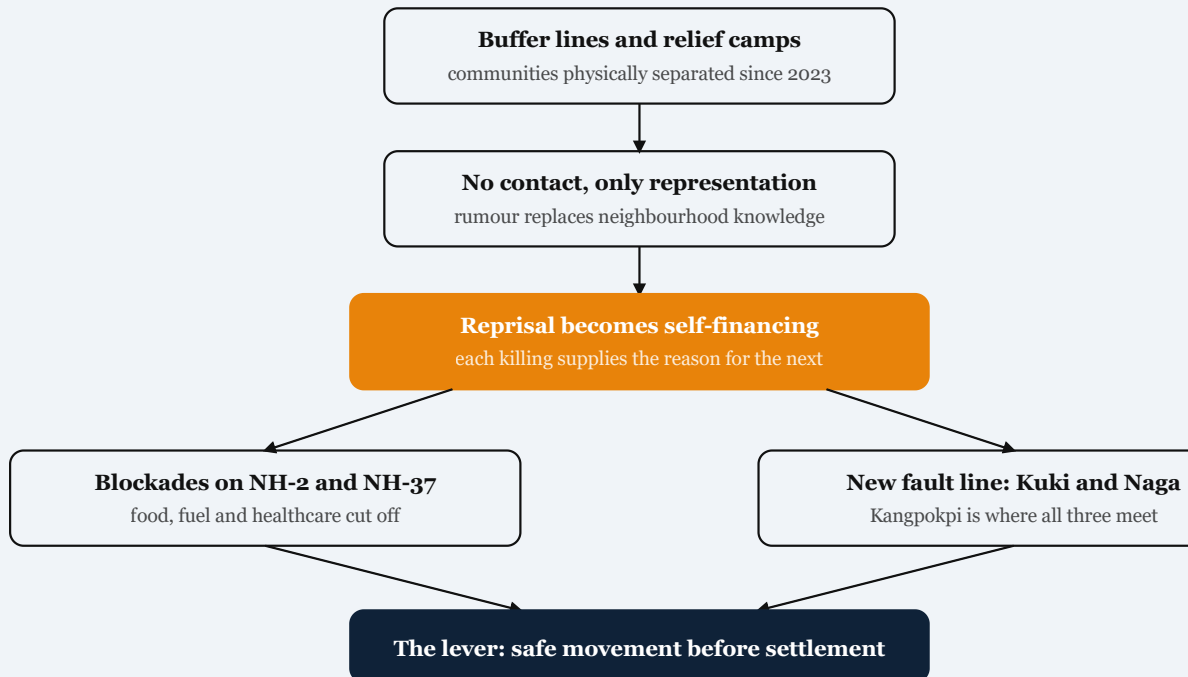
The case for patience is genuine. The inclusive government has been in office only since February. Ethnic reconciliation after three years of killing is measured in years, not months, everywhere it has been attempted, and no democratic instrument stronger than a representative State government exists to be tried. Judging the formula this early risks discarding the one approach that has not yet been given time.

The case for urgency is that the reprisal cycle does not wait. Each unpunished killing lowers the **threshold** for the next and widens the set of parties with a claim to revenge. The expansion from a two-community to a three-community conflict happened during the period of restored government, which is evidence that time alone is not working in the direction reconciliation requires.

The sharpest disagreement is over sequencing. One view holds that a political settlement on land, identity and Scheduled Tribe status must come first, because the violence is downstream of unresolved status questions. The other, which the editorial endorses, holds that the immediate objective must be a framework in which people can *safely move, trade and live as neighbours*, with the harder questions deferred. The second view is the more defensible, because negotiations over identity conducted between populations that cannot physically meet have no constituency capable of ratifying them.

There is a real tension in the disarmament question too. Enforcing the Suspension of Operations ground rules and cracking down on extremist elements is necessary, but selective enforcement against one community would confirm the partiality that each side already alleges. Simultaneity is not a nicety here; it is the whole of the legitimacy.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS



Segregation is not a consequence of the violence alone; it is the mechanism that keeps the violence running. Because reprisal needs only the memory of the last incident, restoring ordinary movement is not a reward to be granted after a settlement but the precondition that makes a settlement negotiable.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS

The transferable frame is that **ethnic conflict is sustained by segregation, not merely expressed by it**, and that **representation and reconciliation are different goods**.

Power-sharing solves the question *who governs*. It does not solve the question *who trusts whom*. When populations are physically separated, each community's information about the other comes entirely from rumour and from the last atrocity, because the ordinary corrective of daily contact has been removed. This is why inclusive cabinets can coexist with continuing killings, and it is a finding that generalises well beyond Manipur.

Test it against the standard comparisons. **Northern Ireland's** Good Friday Agreement delivered power-sharing in 1998, and the peace walls are still standing decades later, which is the same gap in a more studied form. **Bosnia's** Dayton settlement created a functioning representative formula over a society that remained segregated. In each case the sequence that worked was: stop the killing, restore movement, rebuild contact, then negotiate status.

For an Indian answer, add the federal layer. Manipur's hill areas are governed not under the **Sixth Schedule** but under the **Manipur (Hill Areas) District Councils Act, 1971**, with **Article 371C** providing a Hill Areas Committee in the Assembly. The autonomy instruments available in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram are therefore weaker here, which is one structural reason hill communities have historically sought remedies outside the State framework.

For GS4, the ethical core is **impartiality under conditions of suspicion**. When every community believes the State is partial, the only way to establish impartiality is symmetrical and visible enforcement, including against the group the enforcing officer belongs to. Justice that is merely fair is insufficient; it has to be demonstrably fair to people predisposed to disbelieve it.

WAY FORWARD

Identify and prosecute the perpetrators of the Kangpokpi killings, and do it visibly and symmetrically. The editorial's first demand is also the minimum test of State capacity. Every unprosecuted killing is an argument for private revenge.

Make highway movement the first measurable deliverable. Convoy security on NH-2 and NH-37 is a concrete, auditable objective on which the State government can be judged monthly, and it directly relieves the food, fuel and healthcare crisis.

Empower civil society and church leadership as interlocutors. In a segregated society, the institutions that still hold cross-community legitimacy are rarely political. Women's organisations and church bodies in Manipur retain reach that parties do not.

Enforce the Suspension of Operations ground rules and disarm militant groups, simultaneously across communities. Sequential disarmament will be read as disarming one side, and will fail.

Address the relief camps as a public health emergency in their own right. More than 700 deaths in camps is not a byproduct of the conflict; it is a separate, fixable failure of nutrition, healthcare and sanitation delivery.

Separate the immediate from the eventual. Safe movement, trade and coexistence now; land, identity and Scheduled Tribe status through a **deliberate** process later. Attempting the second before the first has produced three years of evidence about how that ends.

PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

Connects to standing UPSC themes on **internal security challenges in the North East, the role of the Union under Articles 355 and 356, Sixth Schedule and alternative autonomy arrangements, and development-extremism linkages.**

Practice question: *“Inclusive political representation is a necessary but insufficient condition for ending ethnic conflict. Critically examine this proposition with reference to the situation in Manipur since 2023.”*
(250 words)

Sources: *The Indian Express, Ministry of Home Affairs*

Source: Breaking Manipur's Cycle of Reprisal: A New Fault Line Opens — Ujjyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS
Editorial Analysis

● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

The Indian Express argues that Manipur's conflict has mutated rather than subsided: more than three years after the Meitei-Kuki clashes began, a political settlement remains out of reach and a new Kuki-Naga fault line has opened, with the killing of four Naga civilians in Kangpokpi district the latest link in a chain of reprisals that an inclusive State government has been unable to break.



SUPPORTING

- The reprisal sequence is documented and continuous: the murder of Kuki-Thadou church pastors in May was followed by retaliatory abductions on both sides, the bodies of six Naga men were recovered a month later, and four Naga civilians were killed in Kuki-dominated Kangpokpi this week.
- Economic blockades imposed by Meitei, Kuki and Naga groups have turned Manipur's roads and highways into contested territory, disrupting supplies, raising food and fuel costs and restricting access to healthcare, with Kangpokpi worst affected because it lies between Naga-dominated Senapati to the north and the Meitei-majority valley to the south.
- Right to Information data show that more than 700 internally displaced people have died in relief camps, and security forces have had very little success in guaranteeing safe passage for convoys carrying essential supplies.
- The return of an elected government in February under Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh, after almost a year of President's Rule, put a Meitei Chief Minister in office with Deputy Chief Ministers from the Kuki and Naga communities, and even that formula has not produced reconciliation, which shows how far the social separation has hardened beyond the reach of representation alone.



COUNTER

Restoring an elected government and distributing the top offices across all three communities is not a token step but the strongest instrument a democracy has, and it has been in place only since February; expecting a three-year conflict with contested claims over land, identity and Scheduled Tribe status to unwind within months mistakes the timescale of ethnic reconciliation everywhere it has been attempted.



WAY FORWARD

Prosecute the identified perpetrators of the recent killings without regard to community, restore highway movement as the first measurable deliverable, empower civil society and church leadership as interlocutors alongside the political process, disarm militant groups and enforce the Suspension of Operations ground rules, and separate the immediate goal of safe movement, trade and coexistence from the long negotiation over land and identity.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK
QUESTION

Ethnic conflict in Manipur has expanded from a two-community confrontation into a multi-community one despite the restoration of an elected, representative government. Examine the structural drivers of this expansion, and evaluate the adequacy of the constitutional and administrative instruments available to the Union and the State. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

The violence that began in Manipur in May 2023 between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities has not been settled; it has widened. The emergence of a Kuki-Naga fault line, in a State where the Naga question is already tied to a separate national peace process, converts a two-party conflict into a three-party one and correspondingly reduces the value of any bilateral settlement.

BODY

The reprisal chain is now self-sustaining. The killing of Kuki-Thadou pastors in May, retaliatory abductions on both sides, the recovery of six Naga bodies a month later and the killing of four Naga civilians in Kangpokpi in late August form a sequence in which each act supplies the justification for the next. The geography does the rest: Kangpokpi sits between Naga-dominated Senapati and the Meitei-majority valley, so every blockade there simultaneously punishes and provokes. The humanitarian cost is measurable, with Right to Information data showing more than 700 deaths of internally displaced people in relief camps.

The institutional response has been unusually accommodating in form. President's Rule under Article 356, imposed in February 2025, was revoked in February 2026, and the restored government pairs a Meitei Chief Minister, Yumnam Khemchand Singh, with Kuki and Naga Deputy Chief Ministers.

That this arrangement has not halted the killings establishes the editorial's central point: representation allocates power among communities, but it does not restore contact between them, and where populations are physically segregated by buffer lines, elected inclusion operates above a society that remains partitioned below.

CONCLUSION

The realistic near-term objective is not a settlement of the claims over land, identity and Scheduled Tribe status, which will take years, but the restoration of ordinary movement, trade and neighbourliness. Free highways, credible prosecution irrespective of community and disarmament of militant groups are the preconditions of any political process, not its rewards.

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