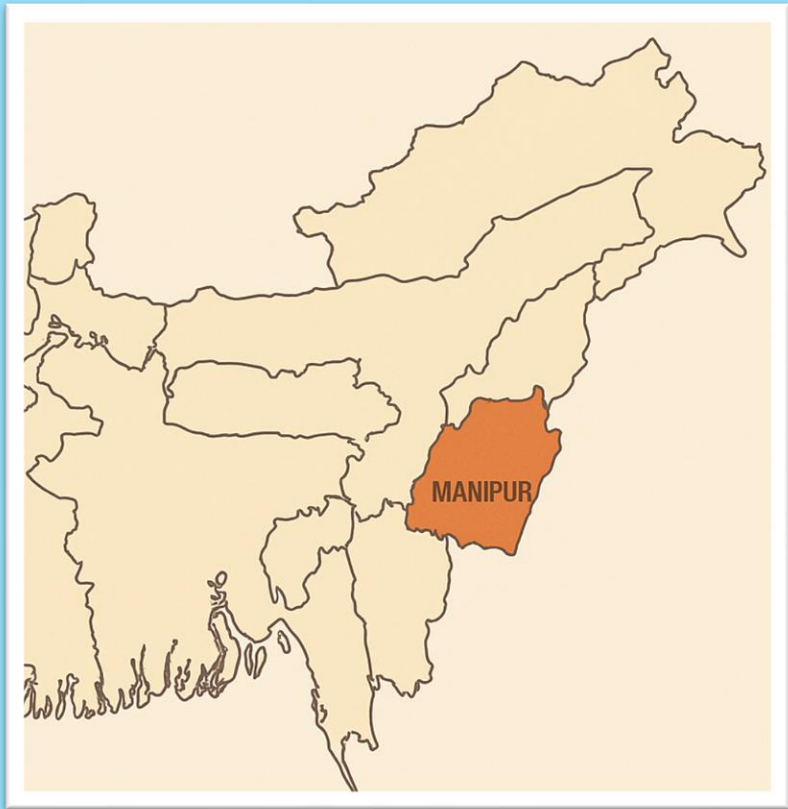




United Service Institution of India Manipur Quagmire



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About The Occasional Paper

This Occasional Paper critically examines the ethnic conflict in Manipur, which escalated in May 2023 between the Meiteis and Zofate communities. It delves into the socio-political and cultural fault lines that have led to a prolonged cycle of violence, displacement, and deep communal mistrust. With over 250 fatalities and the emergence of armed vigilante groups, the situation has strained the capacity of the state and central authorities. The paper highlights the nuanced role of the Security Forces (SF), particularly the Assam Rifles, in managing the conflict while facing allegations of bias, operational constraints, and legal ambiguities. It evaluates their strategic responses—ranging from buffer zones and community engagement to restraint in volatile conditions. Emphasising the importance of impartiality, coordinated actions, and perception management, the paper offers practical recommendations for restoring order and fostering long-term peace. It underscores that sustainable resolution lies beyond military means, in inclusive governance and reconciliatory dialogue.

Introduction

The ongoing violence and mayhem between the Zofate communities¹ and Meiteis in Manipur since May 2023 stem from unique socio-cultural issues. Lives have been lost on both sides of the conflict, and members of each community have seen their homes and hearths destroyed by arson. The dispute has also disrupted education and daily lives due to its unpredictable violence cycle. Innocent women and children have been targeted in the cruellest ways by each side. The sides have raised demands which appear to be peculiar and would have far reaching consequences with respect to setting of precedence, if accepted as it is. These politically turbulent times mark rough period for inhabitants of valley and hills amidst rising graph of violence, as both communities have raised objections with respect to perceived partisan approach of Security Forces (SF). They allege SF to be biased and adopting a spectator approach throughout the violence. That said, whatever appears in the print or social media should not be construed as gospel truth. Casting aspersions on conduct of the SF deployed in turbulent and disturbed areas always has ulterior motives—ranging from putting them at backfoot for pursuing tactical operations to seeking their eviction from the troubled areas. Hence, it is imperative to understand the factual correctness of the situation and chart out course of action expected from the SF.

Political Landscape

The ethnic violence broke out on 03 May 2023 after the ‘Tribal solidarity march’ in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community’s demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status, and the state government’s endeavour to clear ‘Supposed reserved forests’ of encroachers in the hills.² Since then, the Tribal people (Zofate communities) have levied charges of inaction, biased approach, and misuse of power on the dispensation of ex-Chief Minister (CM) N

Biren Singh. The Meiteis had even targeted Members of the Legislative Assembly of the then-ruling dispensation to protest the failure of the state government in maintaining law and order and deliver justice (in response to the Jiribam Killings of helpless women and children). In the interim, the opposition parties at the centre upped the ante on the charges of reactive and ineffective governance, due to which the population bears the brunt of lawlessness and insecurity. The ex-CM had lost support of some of his own MLAs, and the alleged audio leaks, which have surfaced on social media and in the courts, remain shrouded in mystery.³ The gist of the matter is that the Meiteis are disillusioned, while the Kukis are feeling that they are being marginalised. The political imbroglio is seemed at an impasse, with various quarters of media, political circles, and academia raising questions—Why was the CM not removed? And why was no President’s Rule imposed in the state until Feb 2025? The former CM’s dispensation was steadfast on defending its actions based on the issues with respect to increased cross-border illegal immigration, drug nexus, narco-funded terrorist factions, and some hints towards larger agenda of anti-national elements desirous of carving out Kuki-Chin nation from contagious areas of Myanmar and India. Some elements of the previous government had also given out blueprints of the so-called anti-national/social concerns, which commence from illegal immigration, land grabbing, displacement of original inhabitants, formation of Kuki-Chin dominated districts, establishments of autonomous district councils, and upgradation of these areas into ‘Scheduled Areas’. Amidst the fractured political landscape, with CM having resigned in Feb 2025 and President’s Rule now imposed, lies the geopolitical importance of Manipur,

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which the national planners do not want to sacrifice on the altar of local politics.⁴

Insurgent Organization	Ethnic Group	Primary Location	Demands	Current Status
National Socialist Council of Nagaland- Isaac Muivah (NSCN-IM)	Naga	North of Imphal Valley	Creation of independent Nagalim – Nagaland	Secret Framework agreement signed, temporarily ending hostilities
Kuki National Organisation (KNO)	Kuki/Zomi	South of Imphal Valley and Sadar Hills areas to the north	Creation of new Kuki (Zomi) State – “Zalengam,” or Freeland	Signed secession of operations agreement, currently in political negotiations
United People’s Front (UPF)	Kuki/Zomi	Same as KNO	Creation of new Zomi (Kuki) State or territorial council within Manipur	Same as KNO
Various “Valley-based” organizations	Meitei	Imphal and on eastern border with Myanmar	Independence or increased autonomy of Manipur	Most refuse to negotiate with India

Table 1: Factions at Play in Manipur⁵

Geopolitical Importance of Manipur

Daily print and social media publications sometimes neglect to emphasise the overarching perspective. These fragmented narratives are readily disseminated as truth and, subsequently, magnified by rival stakeholders. Manipur, as a frontier state, possesses considerable strategic importance due to its geopolitical location. The efficient security and comprehensive development of Manipur is essential for countering the incursions of hostile entities, necessitating the suppression of insurgency, cessation of indiscriminate violence, and eradication of illegal operations by the anti-social elements. Manipur serves as the gateway to the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, facilitating trade and mobility of the diaspora, with Moreh functioning

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as the trade hub. The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project and other infrastructural economic initiatives in the region can only succeed with peace in Manipur.⁶ Hence, the promotion of inclusive development and encouraging inter-community communication are essential for achieving socio-economic success.

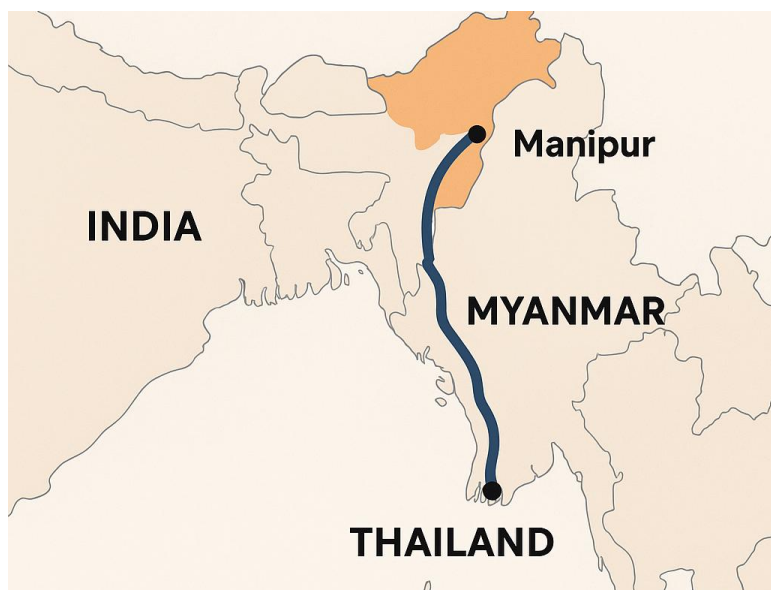


Figure 1: India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway

A comprehensive examination of political activity or the lack, thereof, can only be conducted after appreciating the significant issues get involved. From the perspective of a psephologist, Manipur is unlikely to be advantageous for any political party seeking to attain a majority at the national level. Given just two Lok Sabha seats, it is unlikely that any political party would regard Manipur politically in the same manner as Uttar Pradesh or Maharashtra. Merely ensuring the political survival of the state government would contradict the political rationale of the Centre. The resolution to this political stalemate is in the profound strategic importance of Manipur, which the Centre seeks to address.

Social Landscape

The answers must be found out for the most important questions of the hour, i.e., how to end the incessant cycle of violence for ensuring seamless functioning of government machinery and smoothen daily lives of the population. The state as well as the central apparatus have to bring about peace, prevent killings, stop destruction of property, maintain integrity of the state, and oppose fragmentation of the area. In all this milieu, it must be noted that the silver lining in the clouds is that there are no instances of secessionist violence.

Existing Social Tensions

Many social media users, political analysts, and even security analysts use the terms ‘Tribes’ and ‘Communities’ interchangeably. It should be noted that all hill tribes are not Kukis, and all the valley people are not Meiteis. The current social landscape of Manipur is diverse and picturesque. Salient differences between the Meiteis and Kukis, while highlighting some concerns of both the tribes, is attempted in Table 2.

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Issues	Meities	Kukis
Secessionist demands	As per the Ministry of Home Affairs, there are eight terrorist and unlawful associations (except United National Liberation Front-Pambei [they are secessionist groups])	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No Secessionist demands• Division amongst various factions, with some aspiring for separate state/union territory while others are

Issues	Meities	Kukis
		demanding autonomy
Uneven distribution of land	Meiteis (50 per cent of population) inhabit 10 per cent of total landcover of Manipur	Nagas and the Kukis (constituting approximately 40 per cent of population) live on the remaining 90 per cent of the land share
Political representation	60 MLAs, of which 40 are in the Imphal Valley and 20 are in the surrounding hill districts (economic development and political power has been valley-centric)	
Fears	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illegal immigration by Kukis and tribes from Myanmar • Kuki armed groups are breaking Suspension of Operations (SoO) • Kuki armed rebels are being supported by Myanmar's rebels/Chinese • Drugs production by Kukis • Assam Rifles (AR)'s biased approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear Loss of land and political power in case Meiteis are granted ST status • Fear marginalisation • Fear biased approach of state machinery, especially Manipur Police supporting Meitei rebels/vigilantes • Anxiety over citizenship

Table 2: Concerns of the Tribes

Law and Order Situation

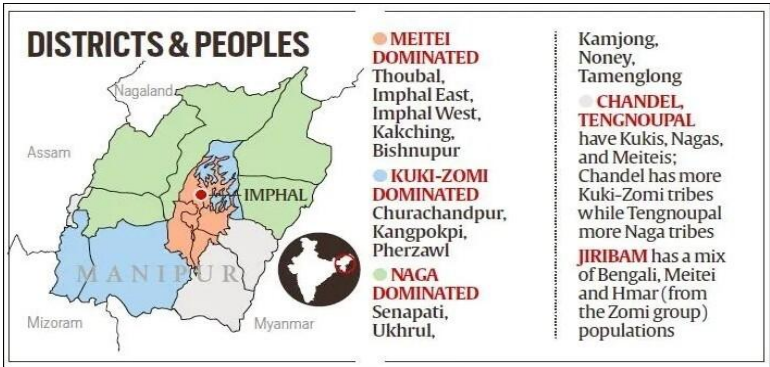


Figure 2: Districts and their Control⁷

Since May 2023, the current ethnic conflict has witnessed brutal killings, violence against women and children, arson of both government and personal properties, propagation of ethnic nationalism by new violent groups, and vigorous role of insurgent groups on both sides. At least 258 people have been killed and more than 60,000 have been displaced so far.⁸ Social media disinformation and misinformation has fuelled further violence. The looting of about 6,000 arms and ammunition from police stations and state armouries has exacerbated the conflict.⁹ The violence has split Manipur into stark enclaves—the Meitei-dominated Imphal Valley and the Kuki-controlled hill districts, separated by strips of no man’s land, which are guarded by central forces. In addition to the forces deployed in the state, since late Nov, the Centre has deployed 20 companies of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs)—15 from the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and five from the Border Security Force (BSF)—thus, bringing in an additional 7,000 troops.¹⁰ The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has since taken up cases of

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civilian killings and has been actively probing the role of some volunteer groups. Arrests of some high profile individual/members rekindles the violence.

Armed Vigilantes

The political power is perceived to be with the Meiteis. Arambai Tenggol (who are seen as armed versions of community defenders) are a Meitei group involved in extra-judicial activities. Though a Meitei himself, the former CM had declared that any element involved in the anti-social activity would not be spared.¹¹ The Zofate groups are well-funded, allegedly by narcotics money, and supported by illegal migrants from Myanmar.¹² There have been reports that Zofate groups, though under SoO agreement with Centre, have disregarded the same and have targeted the Meities, a charge which has not been cleared till now.¹³ In this milieu, there are allegations against the valley-based insurgent groups who have turned their weapons against Kuki civilians. This clearly brings out the war of narratives of different communities and their armed vigilantes. With limited state machinery functioning, as it is supposed to ensure law and order, expectations are with the SF/AR troops to control the situation.

Tactical Operations and Law and Order Concerns

What have the Troops Achieved Till Date? Prior to discussing the challenges to tactical operations and assisting state government machinery in maintaining law and order faced by SF/AR deployed in the state, the professionalism and tenacity of the forces while operating in an ambiguous environment must be applauded. The ambiguity emanates from the social and political landscape, while high degree of patience defines the tenacity. If not for

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timely response and immediate reorientation to the emerging environment, the casualty rate and displacements would have increased manifold. Following actions have been taken by the SF/AR troops deployed in the state:

- **Reorientation.** The SF/AR rose to the occasion, swiftly adapting to the evolving situation and saving countless lives without bias. They shifted their focus from neutralising secessionist groups to ensuring physical separation between the warring communities, all while maintaining operational balance. This reorientation was executed with skill and efficiency.
- **Strategic Patience.** Though ethnic clashes are not new to the region, the rapidity, scale, and modus operandi of the current violence surprised everyone in political circles and governmental machinery. The complexity increased due to loss of weapons from police armouries. The SF/AR deployed in this situation acted with strategic restraint and tremendous amount of patience, which the vernacular media has occasionally termed as helplessness.
- **Adaption: Changing Nature of Violence.** What started as unruly mobs targeting helpless people from opposing communities in their local areas soon metamorphosed into organised armed volunteers (equipped with looted arms) attacking villages, killing people from opposing communities, and resorting to arson. It has to be remembered that the

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perpetrators of the violence, though anti-social elements, are common people, who often act under the shield by common people. Legally, they cannot be tried for seditious charges but for laws against killings, rioting, arson, loot, and possession of weapons. The SF/AR have displayed maturity and restraint while working through not only legally challenged environment but also in high intensity violence-prone areas.

- **Tolerance for Ambiguity.** A major reason for perception of 'Bias' against the SF/AR troops equally by both communities emanates from the balancing act, which the troops and commanders on the ground have to perform. The SF/AR have to walk a tight rope, maintaining balance while ensuring SoO in the hills, while they function in the absence of Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in the valley. These two facts have shaped the opinions of the population and designed the operations of the forces. Working through grey areas in existing conundrum has brought out the traits of resilience and mental mobility in Indian armed forces to the fore. Mature handling of the situation has been twisted by naysayers as ineffectiveness of the SF/AR, with SF hierarchy allegedly adhering to the bureaucratic red tape.

- **Ensuring Separation and Community Engagement.**

The forces have handled two seemingly dichotomous subjects very maturely. The concept of buffer zones stands testimony to the commitment and operational acumen of the commanders. While working through certain

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disadvantages, the forces have proactively engaged with both communities and their leaders. The facts that roads are opened despite resistance from hard-nosed members of various factions speak highly of the diplomatic skills of the commanders and the troops on ground. The way in which the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) were taken care of by ensuring medical camps, and ensuring safety and honour while accompanying them in convoys, speaks volumes of professionalism and empathy with which the forces have approached the situation.

- **Command-and-control Dynamics.** Apart from the SF/AR and the state police, there are many stakeholders in the internal security dynamics of Manipur. Additional forces of the CRPF and BSF have been infused and mandated to replace some AR battalions. Though every force is working towards the same aim, the command-and-control issues at tactical level must be approached with a synergistic methodology.

Challenges

Maintaining law and order is the subject under a state. Manipur police, with the additional manpower from CAPFs, is mandated to provide protection to people without any bias. The SF/AR deployed in the grid are mainly responsible for conducting counter-insurgency operations against the secessionist groups and ensuring non-interference of anti-national elements in the functioning of the state. The ethnic strife has, however, presented the following peculiarities:

The ethnic strife originates from peculiar socio-economic and cultural understandings/mis-understandings.

- **Law and Order Situation.** The ethnic strife originates from peculiar socio-economic and cultural understandings/misunderstandings. This requires the community leaders at local and apex levels to have discussions and bring about a political solution. Getting two warring communities on discussion table at apex level is not within the charter of the SF/AR deployed in Manipur.

- **Hostile Crowds and Non-cooperative State Machinery.** Due to the peculiarities of their job and experience, the SF/AR have learnt to engage with hostile crowds. There, too, it requires support from state machinery as the SF does not have police powers and authority. It stems from the requirements of the SF/AR, i.e., they are for the people against the anti-national elements. However, there have been instances, plastered all over the social media, showcasing confrontation of the SF/AR troops with the state police. There are also instances when *Meira Paibi* (Women Torch-bearers) have stopped the AR troops from interfering in arson and release of apprehended militants.

- **Legal Protection.** The majority of confrontation between the Meitei civilians and the SF/AR troops have happened in areas where the AFSPA has been revoked. The absence of AFSPA would have emboldened the locals and state police to challenge the operations of the SF/AR in such regions.

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- **Proscribed Groups.** The build-up to the May 2023 violence was marked by diminishing relevance of the various proscribed groups. The existing fractured landscape has provided a smooth playing field to these groups who have performed a significant role in the crisis. They have actively participated in the pogrom against opposite communities and even got killed while engaging opposite faction groups and the SF/AR.

- **Proliferation of Arms.** The attacking and looting of arms and weapons from police stations commenced immediately after 03 May 2023 and lasted for approximately one month, with most of the instances in Meitei-dominated areas. The Meitei groups pleaded that the weapons were required to arm the volunteers for protection of the community from the Kuki militants, while uncorroborated reports suggest that the Kuki groups, under the SoO agreement, have also distributed arms to the their volunteers for protection of Kuki settlements. Out of the 6,000 weapons looted, only 3,000 have been retrieved so far. Presence of weapons in the hands to civilians who do not identify themselves either as secessionist groups or under the SoO agreement is a significant challenge for the SF/AR deployed in the valley and the hills.

- **Social Media: Catalyst for Violence.** Posting and proliferating unverified videos and doctored statements acted as catalyst to fuel the violence cycles and weaken the law and order situation. Unverified media houses and nefarious elements

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amplified the messages, giving no reaction time to the SF to take concrete actions. In fact, the movement of arsonists and anti-social elements was coordinated through social media.

- **Competing Narratives and Battle of Perceptions.** The perception built up amongst the Meiteis and the supporters of the valley-based insurgent groups is that the SF/AR have always utilised Kuki groups under the SoO agreement to target proscribed Meitei secessionist groups. This allegation, coupled with past instances of the SF operations which resulted in collateral damage, have significantly turned the Meitei community suspicious of the SF/AR. Similarly, the Kuki groups have levied charges against the state forces of abetting the local Meitei communities.¹⁴ These biased charges have largely hampered meaningful operations.

- **Lines of Communications.** To add to the incessant cycles of violence is disruption of lines of communications. Major road arteries are blocked by the communities, preventing urgent movement of the SF/AR columns, thereby, delaying the response time. The closure of roads also had effect on transit of relief material, daily needs, and movement of casualties.

- **Buffer Zones.** The concept of buffer zones not only strain manpower but also limit the use of surveillance devices that could have been employed to monitor the groups under the SoO agreement and track the movement of banned Meitei groups.

The concept of buffer zones and ability to man them has affected the operational capability of the Security Forces/Assam Rifles.

Immediate Concern: Violence Cycle

The violence, though reoccurring due to mistrust amongst the communities, has ebbed in severity with the passage of time due to following reasons:

- **Efficacy of Buffer Zones.** The buffer zones established by the SF/AR, and strict implementation of policies and orders with respect to movement of armed miscreants, has deterred violence seekers.
- **Situational Awareness.** The SF/AR troops are now situationally more aware with respect to the locations of congregation of mobs, instigators, and the likely targets and routes which they would take.
- **Better coordination.** Efficient coordination between the SF/AR and the state government machinery in sharing intelligence and planning operations has borne favourable results.

Breaking of Violence Cycle

The immediate concern still remains around the cessation of violence. The SF/AR have made the grounds for the governmental mechanisms to commence their next steps towards normalisation of situation. However, the additional deployment of CAPFs may not be the only correct answer to halt the violence, as demonstrated by the latest Jiribam killings of Meitei women and children. The suggested measures to break the current violence cycle are tabulated below for easy assimilation.

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Immediate Tactical Actions (SF/AR and police level)	Intermediate Actions (Political level)	Actions at political and government level
Active surveillance, enforcing curfew, suspension of internet, deployment of anti-riot police, and use of tear gas	Imposition of AFSPA (in sensitive and required areas) and physical separation between communities	Transparent judicial probes, rehabilitation for displaced people, fostering community dialogues, and ensuring equitable distribution of resources
Note: <i>These actions are only meant to cease and control the incessant and spontaneous violence cycles. Further, the focus should shift from military solution to long-term peacebuilding efforts. The holistic approach of combining political, social, and economic reforms for long-term lasting solution are not discussed in detail.</i>		

Role of Security Forces/Assam Rifles in the Current Ethnic Conflict

It is a law-and-order situation, hence, it is obvious that the Army/SF should not be drawn into managing the issue. The current imbroglio is clearly in the realms of socio-politico-economic sphere, compounded by years of mistrust and simmering ethno-nationalistic fervours. The discussion below is not a prescription to stop the violence, but a few suggestions/recommendations for the SF/AR, specifically while operating in the region:

- Addressing Trust Deficit.** Institutionalising ad-hoc measures due to the absence of coherent policy has left the communities unconvinced with respect to the sincerity of central government apparatus (including the SF/AR). The vernacular media has branded this

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indifference as ‘Strategic Ambiguity’, which they claim has been utilised by the central government to harm interests of the respective communities. Indian government is perceived as playing both the sides, i.e., running with the hares and hunting with the hounds. The SF/AR must seriously address this bias (balancing the role of being impartial and not being seen as biased at the same time) by actively involving the community leaders and explaining the rationale of deployment and operations. Attempting op-eds in vernacular media like Imphal Times and E-pao newspaper is the need of the hour. Every SF/AR unit/sector should contribute with well-cited and argued research articles to convey the ideas. It is to be kept in mind that only tweets will not be able to move the cerebral audience that the SF/AR wish to address.

- **Impartial Mediator.** Should the SF/AR play the role as mediators? Many scholars and television debaters second this thought. Their rationale stems from the proximity and effective liaison which they enjoy across the communities. But, again, there is no sincerity visible in the idea. Though, the SF/AR can get the people on table, they cannot further the talks, as the decisions for the demands does not depend on them. Rather than being mediators, they should be seen as facilitators for mediation in the local areas which are prone to violence. Preparation of neutral venues, ensuring security of premises and movement of members, coordination of media, etc., can be done by the Security Forces/Assam Rifles.

etc., can be done by the SF/AR. This can be seen as incubator of sorts for similar ideas to be implemented at district and state levels. Seemingly an arguable suggestion, which might annoy many SF/AR personnel is that the AR should, for time-being, avoid overt use of the motto of ‘Friends of the hill people’, at least in the areas where the valley people are in majority. It might not seem as a smart move, but is an honest endeavour towards avoiding any perception bias. The subtle change might even go unnoticed, but would end up having a profound effect in correcting the bias of the valley people.

- **Image of Guardians.** The unique case of Shri Laishram Kamal Babu, a Meitei worker from Assam who went missing from the Leimakhong Garrison with effect from 25 Nov 2024, is a stark reminder as to how the SF/AR come under accusations and unwarranted legal limelight.¹⁵ These issues are ready cannon fodder to either of the communities. This flare-up could have been avoided with anticipation and accurate intelligence of the event. There is a need to reformat the sector-level war games to include brainstorming on various issues which are anticipated unfold at tactical level. In the above case, the Manipur High Court has directed investigation, which further has maligned the image of the SF/AR as being protectors. Isolated and centralised closed-circuit television networks, maintained logs of operations,

To protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity, border fencing is must, while re-imposition of AFSPA for limited period (in the affected areas) to ensure retrieval of arms and stop violence is imperative.

and proactive interactions with the state police should be incorporated in the deployment plans.

- **Macro Enablers.** The imposition of AFSPA and expediting of the border fence are two major factors which would enable the SF/AR not only to control the existing situation, but will also assist them in arresting the easy movements of secessionist groups, ingress of illegal immigrants, and free flowing of drug trade. However, both the issues are highly debatable at the state level. Both communities have contrary views on the imposition of AFSPA in the remaining 13 police stations in the valley, which the Meiteis oppose and the Kukis desire. Meanwhile, border fencing is the demand of the Meiteis which the Kukis are staunchly against. Both the decisions have to be Centre-led. The SF/AR should be totally unbiased in their views and approach to these two issues. To protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity, border fencing is must, while re-imposition of AFSPA for limited period (in the affected areas) to ensure retrieval of arms and stop violence is imperative.

- **Adaptability.** The scrapping of the Free Movement Regime and reinstating of protected area permit has been announced by the Centre.¹⁶ The AR troops have an important contribution towards operationalisation and implementation of the interim measure of the Border Pass arrangement. In consonance

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and coordination with the state machinery, the AR troops have to man and manage border crossings with Myanmar.¹⁷ The troops have to ensure that all provisions in the new arrangements are upheld and followed/implemented in letter and spirit.

- **Social Media.** Harsh reality of the violence-ridden landscape is miscommunication and mischievous rumour mongering by nefarious elements on the social media. Suspension of the internet and blanket blank on communication media are temporary measures at the best. Sensitising the stakeholders is the most correct and ethical way, but enforcement of good practices in a fractured society cannot be achieved instantaneously. Dedicated efforts have to be undertaken to identify the perpetrators, assume their future course of action, and take proactive measures to thwart off any misdemeanours or violence. Again, close coordination with state police and intelligence machinery is the apt way ahead. Social media monitoring cells at Corps level can be made responsible to gather the data, which can further be fed to the operational units and formations. Deliberate efforts towards vilification of the SF/AR should be countered with full capacity, albeit with right tools. Coordination with state machinery and other central agencies assumes importance here.

- **Meaningful Civilian Welfare.** Effective unified command-and-control should not only be restricted to the conduct of operations. All the

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echelons of the SF/AR should be geared up to ensure genuine civilian welfare. The conduct of medical camps, ferrying/donation of necessary livelihood items to the IDPs, and protection to the vulnerable elements of the society should be carried out in a coordinated manner. It will have two-fold effect—firstly, it will ensure that no element of welfare/diaspora is left out and secondly, the economy of effort can be achieved. Propensity to carry out Operation Sadbhavna activities for photo operations only should be curbed ruthlessly at all levels. Communication and empathy with the affected diaspora would be the key enablers for ensuring success of these civilian welfare activities. Any action which is not deliberate and precludes uniform effect should be perceived as a divisive agenda directed towards alienating one particular community.

- **Personal Conduct.** Taking any responsibilities lightly, as common as of interaction with belligerent crowd, is a recipe for perception disaster, which can be wilfully used against the operations of the SF/AR. The behaviour of all the members of the SF/AR communities must be professional and humane while interactions. Even when pushed to the corner by the women folk, who are generally at the forefront of all the agitations, the conduct should be immaculate and above reproach.

- **Role of the Security Forces/Assam Rifles in Recovery of Post-Conflict Society, Peacekeeping, and Confidence-building**

Measures. Tasks at hand, immediately post-cessation of violence, would be that of

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balancing security and making genuine attempts for community building. The first phase towards that would be marked by taking steps which would reaffirm the faith of people in the government functioning. The buffer zones have to collapse, suitable grounds must be prepared to remove AFSPA from less volatile regions, border management should be reoriented (including expeditious construction of border fence), solidarity meetings should be conducted, and people-to-people connect should be established. On the operational front, intelligence-based surgical operations must be launched to retrieve the weapons from the civilians to prevent further misuse, along with carrying out effective surveillance on the ring leaders and preventing free movement of armed miscreants by road or through jungles.

Conclusion

The present scenario comes with challenges as well as opportunities to ensure long-term peace in the region, only if all the stakeholders are ready to carry out meaningful dialogues. Participation of the SF/AR in this environment must set the suitable premises for peace to foster. Simultaneously, the SF/AR have to ensure prompt actions to save lives and prevent arson and unwanted violence.

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Endnotes

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