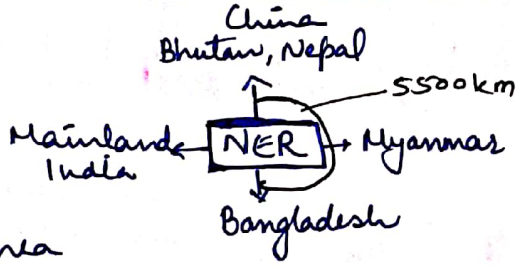
Introduction

India's NER is a land, resource and water surplus region but is facing backwardness or deficits in security, power and socio-economic aspects. This backwardness has resulted in insurgency in the region.

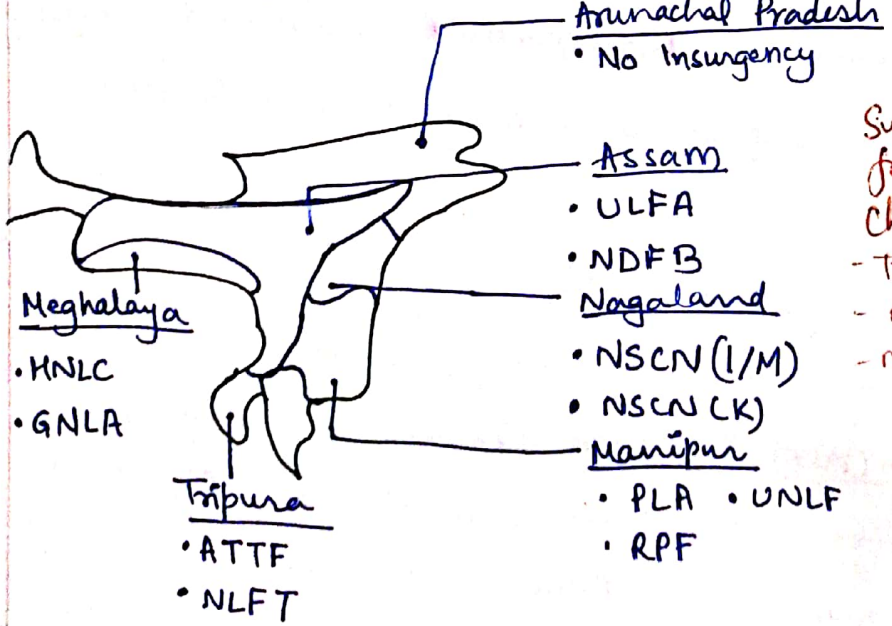
Key Facts

→ NE India shares about 5500 km borders with 5 countries.



→ NER:
- 8% of India's geographical area
- 4% of India's population
- > 200 ethnic groups

→ Major insurgent groups in NER



→ Security Situation

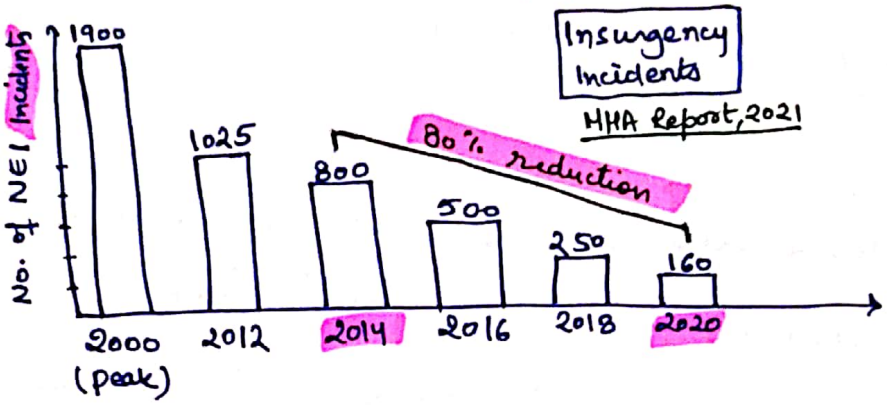
2013 — Insurgency → 2019
- 70% reduction in incidents
- 80% " " civilian deaths
- 80% " " Security forces casualities

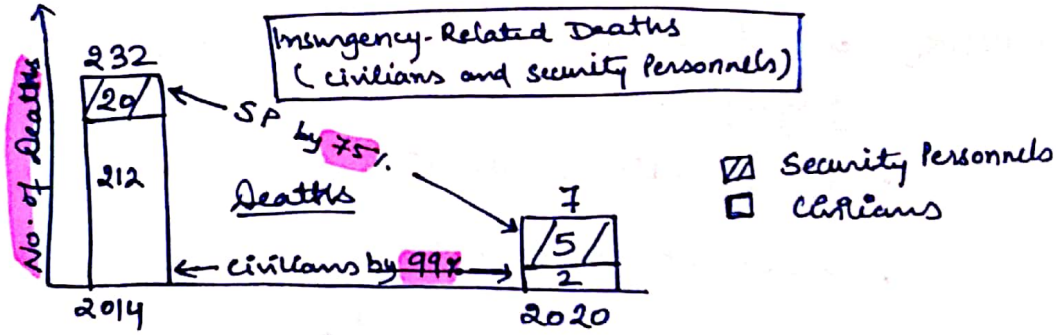
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2014 — North East Insurgency (MHA 2020-21) — 2020

→ Incidents dipped by 80%.
→ Civilian deaths by 99%.
→ Security personnels deaths by 75%.

→ Security Situation





- The highest, i.e. 2,644, no. of insurgents belonging to various outfits surrendered to security forces in 2020.

→ Reasons for Reduction

1) Improvement in the security situation
2) AFSPA (1958) has been removed completely from Meghalaya and Tripura and its application has been reduced in Arunachal Pradesh.
3) Signing of a Memorandum of settlement of the NDFB (all four factions) with the Union Government
   ⇓
   1,600 NDFB member surrendered in 2020
4) Ceasefire agreements with the government by major

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~~includ~~ insurgent groups, including NSCN.

5) Regional diplomatic cooperation between India and neighbouring countries including Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar eg. Op. Sunrise II

⇓

denied insurgent safe havens

6) Economic development in the region

7) Movement of younger generation to the mainland for job opportunities → bring the recruitment pool for insurgent groups

8) Strong sentiment against rebel action among people

9) More recruitment rallies for the Indian Army in the NE

Geo-strategic Significance of NE Region

1) Geographic : • Mountainous terrain, Porous Border,
• Siliguri corridor, Riverine Border with Bangladesh (shifting course)

2) International : • China claims AR as 'South Tibet',
• Act as a bridge between India and SE Asia
• Focal point for India's Act East Po

3) Economic : • Resource rich (uranium, coal, Hydro-carbon, lime, water)
• world's largest producer of Tea
• Medicinal plants

4) Environment : • Biodiversity Hotspot
• Rich flora and fauna

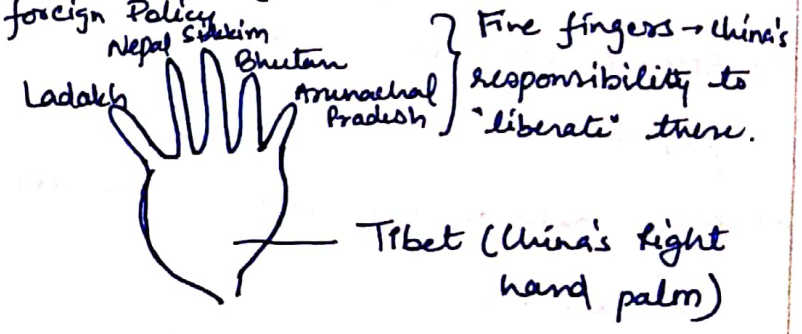
5) Connectivity : • Kaladan Project, BBIN-MVA

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6) Cultural :- >200 ethnic groups
- Austro-Asiatic language
- Partially integrated with rest of India

7) Security :
- Insurgency issues
- Cross-border links between insurgents
- Proximity to Golden Triangle
- Arm and drug trafficking
- Smuggling to gain finances

8) Political
- The Five Fingers of Tibet - a Chinese foreign Policy



Drivers of Insurgency in NE Region

1) **Historical Factors**: NER was treated as buffer zone between India (British) and Eastern countries, thus, British followed 'Policy of Isolation'. As a result, NER not integrated into Indian Union.

2) **Geographic**:
→ Isolated from mainland due to connectivity barriers (Siliguri corridor)
→ Difficult Terrain → Poor infrastructure development
→ Riverine Border
→ Proximity to Golden Triangle
advantage to insurgents in hiding and for Guerrilla warfare, etc.

3) **Social**:
→ Poor indicators with respect to education, health, sanitation, basic amenities

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Data

→ Exploitation at the hand of outsiders

→ Feeling of Relative Deprivation and alienation

④ **Demographic**

→ Illegal Immigration from Bangladesh and Myanmar

→ Immigration from Mainland India

⇓

Change in demography of the region

+

Increased competition for jobs & resources

→ High IMR, MMR, etc.

eg. Marwari & Bengali merchants lead to competition for resources & land.

⑤ **Political**

→ Lack of representatives at centre

→ NE leaders are seen as political 'outcastes'

→ Corruption → Politician - Police - Criminals Nexus

→ Factional infighting among insurgent groups

→ Lack of visionary leadership among tribal community and Political Motivation

→ Popular support Base for purposes of funding, base areas, recruitment, food supply and intelligence networks

⑥ **Governance**

→ 'One size Fits all' approach of government

→ Apathetic attitude of the bureaucracy

→ Non - implementation of VI Sch. provisions

→ Corrupt and insensitive administrators

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- Justice Santosh Hedge Committee to investigate fake encounters in Manipur described AFSPA as a "Symbol of Oppression".
- Justice Verma Committee - AFSPA legitimises impunity for sexual violence. Eg. Kunan Poshpora Incident

→ Poor decentralisation wrt. 3 Fs ← Funds, Functionaries, Functions
→ Lack of Administrative will
→ Insufficient autonomy to Tribal groups

7) ~~International~~ Cases of misuse of AFSPA, excesses (enforced disappearances, fake encounters, sexual assault) by the security forces and HRs violations

7) **Economic**

→ Unemployment → High Indebtedness
→ Land Alienation → Poverty
→ low per capita Income → High Regional disparity
→ Lack (poor) of Infrastructure, Industrialization
→ lack of alternate mode of employment
→ Encroachment of land by outsiders

8) **Ethnic** → Cultural Imposition Eg. Gorkhas vs Bengali, Bodos vs Assamese
→ Weak cultural affinity with Mainland
→ Inter-ethnic conflicts (e.g. Naga-Kuki)
→ Feeling of 'US vs Them' (Incidents of Racial discrimination e.g. Recent murder of a NE student in Delhi)
→ local vs. Migrants (e.g. Assam)

Bodo-Muslim Clashes of 2012 ↓ Exodus of NE from South India

9) **International / External / Trans-National**

→ **Myanmar**: Porous Border and Free Movement Regime (16 km) ⇓ Safe havens, Training, Shelter, Drug trafficking & trade, Cross border links with Myanmar Insurgent groups such as Karens, Kachins, etc, easy availability of arms, ethnic affinity (Demand for greater Nagalim)
→ **Bangladesh**: Riverine Border ⇓ Safe havens, easy availability of arms, Funds
→ **China**: Arms and Funds
→ **Bhutan**: Inaccessible forested areas ⇒ temp. bases + safe haven

A 2010 RAND study on Insurgencies indicates that without external support and available sanctuaries & arms, no internal insurgency can thrive over a period of 10 years.

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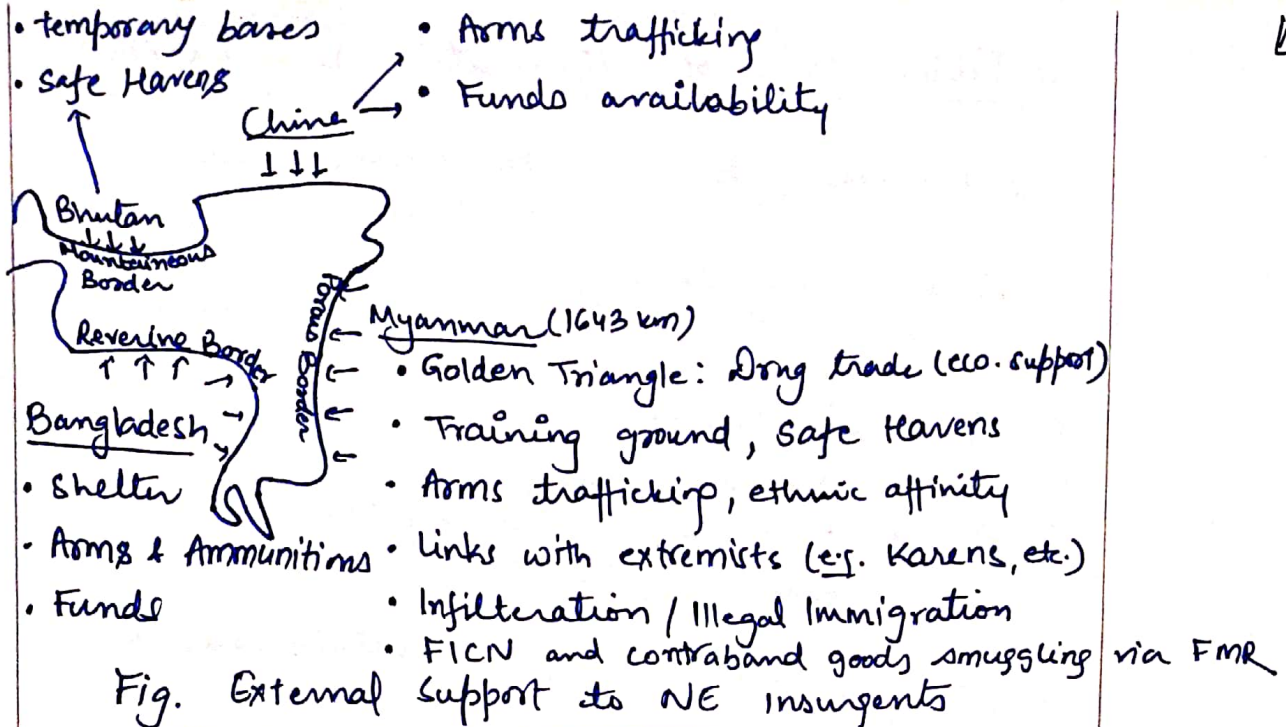


Fig. External Support to NE insurgents

Challenges in Handling Insurgency in NE

(1) Dual Responsibility of the Security Forces

→ Ex. Assam Rifles provides dual service of guarding the porous border with Myanmar and counter insurgency operations

(2) Guarding Open Border

→ Free Movement Regime

→ Porous Border with Myanmar

→ Riverine Border with Bangladesh

→ Mountaineous Border with Bhutan + China

(3) Multiplicity of bodies and agencies

→ like North East Council, DoNER, North East Forum ⇓

confusion regarding their roles

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④ Taking care of diplomatic sensitivities as Myanmar, Bhutan, Bangladesh are friendly neighbours.

⑤ External Support

→ Alleged { Money smuggling / Arm smuggling by China / Arm training }

⑥ Delay in project implementation due to environmental concerns, governance vaccum

⑦ Shortage of funds

Government Measures : Composite Strategy

1. Proportionate Use of Force against those who are responsible for violent activities

① Joint operations

→ Operation All Clear with Bhutan in 2003 to flush out Assamese insurgents

→ Operation Sunrise with Myanmar

→ Cooperation with Bangladesh vs ULFA

② Deployment of Armed forces & paramilitary forces

2. Dialogue and Negotiations to arrive at

① negotiated peace deals or ceasefire

→ Mizo Peace Accord (1986)

→ Bodo Peace Accord (2020)

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→ Ceasefire Agreement with NSCN (I/M)

→ Suspension of Operations agreements with ULFA

→ Scheme for Surrender-cum-Rehabilitation of Militants

→ 'Four Corner Agreement' for Bru Repatriation from Tripura to Mizoram

→ Karbi Anglong Peace Agreement (2021)

③ Structural Changes

→ Granting Statehood to provide autonomy to people

e.g. Manipur, Tripura made state from UTs

Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram were carved out from Assam as separate states

→ Institutions

e.g. NE Forum, NE zonal Council

→ Constitutional Provisions

e.g. • Art 244 (2) of 6th schedule - creation of Autonomous Districts and Regional autonomous councils

• Art 371 (A) - special status to Nagaland

④ Developmental activities

→ A special ministry (DoNER) in 2004 to be responsible for the development of NE region.

→ NITI Forum for NorthEast to review the development status in the NER and suggest reforms

→ Special Economic packages and schemes

- North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (1600 crore)
- North East Venture Fund (100 crore)
- North East BPO promotion scheme
- 'Invest Assam' Initiative, • NE Gas Grid
- Proposed NE Industrial Corridor - From

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- Dawki, Meghalaya (on Indo-Bangladesh Border) to Moreh, Manipur (on Indo-Myanmar Border)
- World Bank aided North East Rural Livelihood project

→ Science and Technology Interventions in NER (STINER) to bring relevant technologies to farmers/artisans

→ Improving Connectivity : "HIRA"

- North East Road Sector Development Scheme
- Daporijo Bridge (AR)
- Bogibeel Rail-cum-Road Bridge
- Bhupen Hazarika Bridge
- UDAN 3.0 : establishment of airports
- India Myanmar Thailand (IMT) corridor
- BBIN MVA
- Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport ~~route~~ Project
- Rhi-Tiddim Road Projects

→ Promotion of Bamboo and Horticulture cultivation via National Bamboo Mission and National Horticulture Mission

⑤ Act East Policy focuses on:

- connecting projects
- cooperation in science, space and technology
- people-to-people exchanges
- economic cooperation
- developing strategic relationship with SE Asian Countries

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Regional integration, Prosperity, Development

⑥ Other Recent Initiatives NER District SDG Index

- AFSPA has been removed from Meghalaya
- In AR, areas under AFSPA has been reduced
- Implementation of NRC in Assam
- Non-application of CAA (2019) to Sch. VI Tribal areas
- Capacity building of the security forces by providing them with better weapons and surveillance capabilities. Eg. CIBMS
- Protected / Restricted Area Permit i.e ILP system currently ope in AR, NA, MI
- Smart Fencing - BOLD-QIT under CIBMS on Indo-Bangladesh Border

Currently AFSPA is operational in states of Assam, Nagaland and Manipur and some parts of AR

⑦ Way Forward : PAUSED Strategy

P → Peace Accord Conclusion and Implementation with the Consent of all stakeholders via DNA approach : Dialogue ⇄ Negotiations ⟶ Actions

A → Administrative and Governance effectiveness
- Effective delivery mechanism
- decrease corruption
- Increase people participation
- Reduce Illegal immigration
- Protect and conserve Tribal way of life

U → Utilizing the institutional structure for NE e.g. TAC, NITI Forums etc

S → Securing international collaboration for socio-economic development and

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counter insurgency

E → Economic development for empowerment
e.g. Tourism, Horticulture, etc.

D → Development oriented security forces
e.g. Civic Action Programme

② Way Forward: 2nd ARC Recommendations

(i) Capacity Building in Administration

Better opportunity, Incentive, regional training to administrative officials and technical officials of the state

(ii) Capacity Building in Police

- ~~Ma~~ Upgrade North Eastern Police Academy (NEPA) and staff
  - ↳ to cater large number of officers at induction level
  - ↳ to impart training to civil police officers from other regions
- Introduce a scheme of deploying police personnel from NER to central police org. and to encourage deputation of police officers from outside the region to NE states.

(iii) Capacity Building in Local Governance Isti

- Strengthen Sixth schedule councils, Tribal specific councils in Assam, Hill district councils, ~~village~~ Gram Sabha (PESA Act 1996)

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- Initiate confidence and mutual trust building measures ~~(Alternative Conflict Resolution)~~

(iv) Capacity building in Regional Institutions

- NEC and DONER must design a 10 year perspective plan
- Cultural programmes
- Eco-tourism hot spot
- Enhance Education
- Better infrastructure and transport links can bridge the ~~ethno~~ ethno-cultural fault lines over time

Conclusion

'Road to "New India" Runs through 'New North-East India'. Hence, 'Tribal Panchsheel Policy' need to be followed in letter and spirit.

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The common thread of running through the insurgency infested NE is of Identity and development.

Hence, common solutions are-

B) Alternative Conflict Resolution would assis in -

→ Communication
→ Mediation
→ Negotiation
→ Neutral Fact-Finding
→ Neutral Grievances Evaluation
→ Forum for Dissent, Disagreement, Demonstration and Discussion
→ Prevention of Misuse of Media to fuel Division

③ Way Forward

① Cultural Sensitisation: Sensitising the rest of the country through cultural interaction so that inclusive socio-economic development can be ensured. e.g.: Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat, Migration policy in Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya.

② Meeting political aspirations by giving them autonomy. Implement VI Sch. provisions

③ Economic development should be sustainable and should have the participation and acceptance by the locals.

④ Dialogue and Negotiations should be an ongoing process and should involve all the stakeholders

⑤ Coordinating operations with the neighbouring countries

⑥ AFSPA (Draconian law) should be repealed

⑦ Coordination: (i) Between centre & states for decision making

(ii) Between state police and central forces on intelligence sharing, investigation and operations against militants

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Way forward (General)

1) There is a need to enhance communi-cation and connectivity to integrate the region with the mainland India.

2) Satisfying the political aspirations of various ethnic groups by strengthening micro-democratic institutions such as VIth schedule councils, and Gram Panchayats, etc.

3) Economic development of the region by giving due importance to culture, traditions, and ecology of the region. Attempts should be made to develop industries along indigenous patterns. for eg. bamboo production, food processing industries, etc. (ie, basically non-polluting industries).

4) Greater opportunities and incentives should be provided to officers serving in North Eastern region.

5) Establish clear accountability mechanisms for the civil servants serving in the region to improve the effectivity of governance mechanisms.

6) Greater cultural interaction with the rest of the country by promoting studies on heritage and culture of NE India in Central and State Universities.

7) Greater coordination between central and state security forces for an effective counter insurgency response.

8) Gradual repealing of laws such as AFSPA in order to win over the hearts and minds of local population.

9) Speeding up of work on projects such as Kaladan Multi-modal transport, Trilateral

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Highway, etc in order to improve the infrastructure and bringing in greater economic activities in the region.

10) Comprehensive implementation of look East Policy for long term growth of the region.

11) Setting up of Centres of Excellence for profession and higher education in the region in the form of IIMs, IITs, AIIMs, etc.

12) Upgrading the surveillance and security infrastructure at border areas to prevent illegal immigration and to keep a check on cross-border insurgency.

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- **Multi-stakeholder approach:** A wider representation not just of civil society, scholars and others, but also of professionals is required at any forum addressing the concerns in the North-East.
- **Understanding emotional and psychological aspects of the problems of the different states of the North-East:** Any meaningful policy for the North-East should address the specifics of each state and region.
- **Economic development:** Opening up of economy of this region may be expedited making way for new investments, acquiring of productive assets, reaching potential in tourism etc.
- **Tackling illegal immigration from neighbouring countries:** Identity cards and work permits for those who come for work should be made mandatory.
- **Stress on Dialogue** as an ongoing process to reach concrete solutions by involving all the stakeholders and not a single group.

5.1. NAGA PEACE TALKS

Why in News?

The deadline set by the Union government to conclude the Naga peace talks ended on a somewhat ambiguous note.

More about news

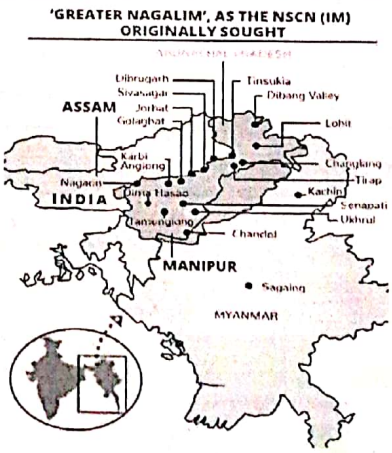
- The deadlock between the government and the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) (NSCN (IM)) over a **separate Naga flag and constitution** were the issues holding up a final agreement.
  - Now, NSCN (IM) agreed to a settlement **without a Constitution and with a conditional flag** that can only be used for **non-governmental purposes.**
- Further, it was clarified that before any settlement is arrived at with Naga groups, **all stakeholders including States of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh will be duly consulted** and their concerns will be taken into consideration.

Timeline of Naga conflict and peace talks

- **1946:** Formation of **Naga National Council (NNC),** under the leadership of **Angami Zapu Phizo,** which declared Nagaland an independent state on August 14, 1947.
- **1952:** Phizo formed the underground **Naga Federal Government (NFG) and the Naga Federal Army (NFA).**
- **1958:** The Government of India **sent in the Army to crush the insurgency and enacted the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act.**
- **1975:** A section of NNC leaders signed **the Shillong Accord,** under which this section of NNC and NFG agreed to give up arms.
- **1980:** A group of about 140 members led by Thuingaleng Muivah, who were at that time in China, refused to accept the Shillong Accord, and **formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland in 1980.**
- **1988:** the NSCN split into NSCN **(Isak-Muivah)/(IM)** and **NSCN (Khaplang)/(K).**
- **1997:** Government of India signed a **ceasefire agreement with NSCN (IM),** after 80 rounds of talks.
- **2015:** NSCN-IM, **gave up the idea of Naga sovereignty and "agreed for a settlement within the Indian federation".**
- **NSCN (IM) demand:** A "Greater Nagalim" comprising "all contiguous Naga-inhabited areas", along with Nagaland. That included several districts of Assam, Arunachal and Manipur, as also a large tract of Myanmar.
- **NSCN (K) is** opposed to the talks, continues violent methods, though Khaplang died in 2017, weakening it.

Roadblock to Naga Peace talks

- **Nature of demand:** It is considered that the flag and constitution issue is integral to the core issues of the process and, therefore, a final settlement cannot be reached without these.
  - This requires **fundamental changes in the country's federal dynamics.**
- **Existence of Article 371A:** An **amendment to this Article is critical to the ongoing Naga peace process** in order to resolve another substantive issue of settling the question whether Nagas have the right over land and resources, both above and beneath it.
- **Integrity of other states:** None of the three states i.e., Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh would allow their territories to become a part of the 'Greater Nagalim'.



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- For example, in **Manipur, Meiteis** (form a majority in the Imphal Valley) and the Nagas and Kukis, dominate the tribal districts of the hills. For decades, the communities have made **competing demands for ethnic homelands.**

- **Similar demand from other groups:** Political instability has undermined the role of democracy in the state and has fueled apprehensions leading to separate agendas and demands by various factions and organizations. For instance, the **Kuki groups**, also in talks with the government, fear the Naga solution would **carve up their imagined homeland.**

The situation and the negotiations get further complicated due to **continued violence in the region, continuance of Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act** and **People losing faith** in the overall management of the conflict.

Way forward

- Government should **address the confusion due to many interpretations** to "special arrangement" implied in the 2015 agreement, particularly on how the shared sovereignty will be exercised.
- The government should not rush into a solution by declaring deadlines. It should **involve all stakeholders from within and outside the state of Nagaland,** and work towards a solution through a peaceful dialogue process that satisfies all.
- **Other sections' sensitivities** also will have to be kept in mind. **For example, Kukis,** a tribe engaged in tussle with the Nagas in the Manipur hills, have to be politically assuaged.
  - For instance, recently, the **Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) and Kuki National Organisation (KNO)** have signed a joint declaration to work together, as they used to separately negotiate political settlements with the Union of India.
- Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur are wary of the NSCN-IM's concept of Nagalim that could lead to a redrawing of their boundaries. The government and the NSCN (IM) must be completely **transparent** in their approach and must take into **confidence all genuine political formations, civil society and ethnic groups.**
- **People-to-people contacts** need to be built up so that real problems of the people can be voiced on a larger platform. There is a need for **more cross-cultural openness**, not only between mainstream India and the Northeast, but among the north-eastern states as well.

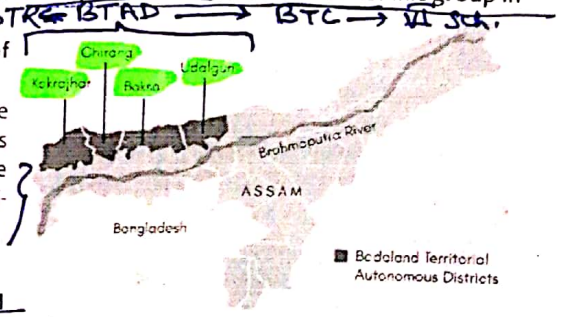
5.2. THE BODOLAND DISPUTE

Why in news?

Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has extended ban on the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) by five more years, under provisions of **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.**

More on the news

- NDFB is an **ethnic insurgent organization demanding** an independent state for the Bodo ethnic group in Assam, formed in 1986.
- It shares close ties with the **United Liberation Front of Assam** (ULFA).
- According to the MHA, NDFB poses a threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India and has been involved in illegal and violent activities like extortion, terrorism, obtaining assistance from anti-India forces, ethnic killing, secessionist activities etc.



About Bodoland

- It is a state demanded by a **tribal community called Bodos** in Assam, who comprise of 5%-6% of the state's population.
- It consists of regions located extreme north of north bank of Brahmaputra river in the state of Assam, by the foothills of Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh.

Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC)

- It has legislative, administrative, executive and financial powers over 40 policy areas in the **Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD).**
- **BTAD** comprises four districts **(Kokrajhar, Baksa, Chirang and Udalguri)** of Assam.
- It functions under the provision of the **Sixth Schedule of the Constitution** of India.

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Timeline of the Bodoland dispute

- **1960s and 1970s** - There were calls from Bodos and other tribes for a separate state of **'Udayachal'** as immigrants were accused of illegally encroaching on Bodo-inhabited lands. Demand was raised under the banner of the **Plains Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA)**, a political outfit.
- **1993** - The **Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC)** was constituted after the Centre, the Assam government and the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) signed **a tripartite agreement.** However, BAC failed due to non-implementation of various provisions of the Accord.
- **2003** - The **Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC)** was formed after the Centre, the Assam government and the BLT sign a tripartite agreement. The BLT is disbanded.
- **2005** – NDFB agreed to a ceasefire with the Assam government and the Centre. After the treaty was signed, the group splits into three factions. One of those factions, the NDFB (S) continued to carry out violent attacks.
- **2020**- The **3rd Bodo Peace Accord** as tripartite agreement between the **Centre, Assam Government** and **the banned Assam-based insurgent group National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) was signed** on 27th January 2020, for bringing a lasting peace in Bodo-dominated areas in Assam.

Key elements of the Bodo Peace Accord

- **Ensuring peace and harmony in the BTAD:** Over 1,615 cadres of different factions of the NDFB surrendered their arms and joined the mainstream within two days of the signing of the agreement.
- **Soothing the sentiments of the Bodos:** The BTAD, will now be known as **Bodoland Territorial Region.** The changed nuance from districts to region is significant as it acknowledges **a Bodo homeland within the state of Assam.**
- **Balancing the aspirations of all:** The new Accord has decided to **demarcate the border** of the Bodoland Territorial Area (BTR). **This is expected to address the issues of both tribal currently outside** the Bodo Council as well as non-tribal currently living within the Council.
- **Strengthening the BTC:** Accord has provided more **legislative, executive, administrative and financial powers** to BTC and amendment to the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.
- **Protection of Bodo culture and welfare measures: The accord has provided for** setting up of a **Bodo-Kachari Welfare Council** for 'development' of Bodo villages located **outside** the Bodo Council area and declaring Bodo language in Devnagri script as an associate official language of Assam.

Reasons for the demand of independent State

- **Massive Illegal Immigration from Bangladesh:** It has led to certain concerns among the Bodos-
  - **Changing Demography:** It might turn them into a minority in their own land.
  - **Inclusion of illegal migrants in the voters list:** It is viewed as a deliberate ploy to empower an outside group, so that the Bodos lose their political power.
- **Threat of loss of distinct language and culture:** Due to forced assimilation.
- **Growing Unease:** Due to the political empowerment of the minority communities in the BTAD in recent years.
- **Failure of The Bodo Territorial Council (BTC):** Weak administrative institutions and divisive politics of the members of the BTC have also added to their insecurity.

Way Ahead

- The government should **strengthen the autonomous, administrative** divisions in Assam established on the basis of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.
- Establish a **land record system** that is computerised and accessible to the local people, and which can address the fear of loss of land to the outsiders.
- **Improve** the presence of both the **state civil administration and the law enforcement agencies** in areas that are identified as highly susceptible to ethnic violence.
- The government should take measures to **improve the other economic sectors** of the region like development of agro-based industries, tourism and hydroelectricity etc.
- **Measures** to protect their **language and cultural identity** should be taken.

5.3. BRU REFUGEE CRISIS "Four Corner Agreement"

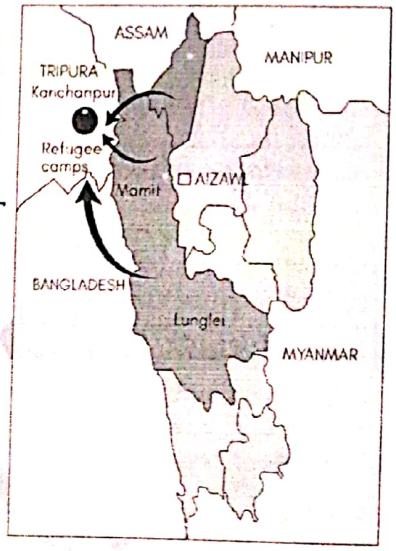
Why in news?

A four-party agreement among the Centre, Mizoram government, Tripura government, and leaders of Bru community was signed to end the 23-year old Bru-Reang refugee crisis.

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About the Crises

- The Bru community, also referred to as Reangs, resides in Mizoram, Tripura, and parts of southern Assam, and is ethnically distinct from the Mizos of Mizoram.
- There are over 40,000 Brus living in four districts of Mizoram. At present, over 30000 Brus are living in the refugee camps in Tripura after they fled Mizoram following ethnic clashes with the Mizo tribes in 1997.
- The **first signs of conflict** between the two communities emerged in 1995 when Mizo organizations - the Young Mizo Association and the Mizo Students' Association - **demanded that Brus be left out of the Mizoram's electoral rolls** as they were not an indigenous tribe.
- The Brus retaliated by forming an armed organization, Bru National Liberation Front, and a political body, Bru National Union. The two demanded more political autonomy for Mizoram's Brus and a **Bru Autonomous District Council (ADC) under the Sixth Schedule** of the Constitution.
- In 1997, following ethnic tension over an incident in Mizoram, **around 5,000 families comprising over 30,000 Bru tribals were forced to flee the state and seek shelter in Tripura.**



Efforts made by the Union Government

- **Since 2010**, the Union government has been assisting the two State governments for taking care of the refugees. Till 2014, 1622 Bru-Reang families returned to Mizoram in different batches.
- In 2018, **an agreement was signed between the Union government, the two State governments and representatives of Bru-Reang refugees,** as a result of which the aid given to these families was increased substantially.
- Subsequently, 328 families comprising of 1369 individuals returned to Mizoram under the agreement. But there had been a **sustained demand of most Bru-Reang families that they may be allowed to settle down in Tripura**, considering their apprehensions about their security.

Key features of present pact

- Around **34,000 Internally Displaced Brus will be settled in Tripura** and would be given aid from the Centre to help with their rehabilitation and all-round development, through a **package of around Rs 600 crores.**
- These people would **get all the rights** that normal residents of the States get, and they would now be able to enjoy the **benefits of social welfare schemes** of Centre and State governments.
  - The Bru refugees in Tripura will be given aid for their rehabilitation and would be given the tribal status and included in the **voter list of the state.**

Persistent Challenges

- It is **doubtful** whether the land that is allocated to **Brus in Tripura will be accepted by the domicile tribes in Tripura.**
- Till the pact, the Tripura Government was eager to repatriate the Brus to Mizoram. As the new pact settles the Brus in Tripura, it needs a **lot of political will from Tripura to implement welfare programmes for the Brus.**
- The **existing Bru families in Mizoram are still opposed by some ethnic organizations of Mizoram,** which might trigger another exodus if there is no settlement at the place of the conflict.

Conclusion

The pact is hailed as a settlement for the **over two-decade old ethnic disturbances** between the tribes of the North East and consistent approach towards a peaceful North-East India. This also provides a **model on how to deal with Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).**

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4.6.4 Cross Border Linkages in North-East Insurgency

The armies of India and Myanmar carried out a coordinated operation called Operation Sunrise 2 in their respective border areas, targeting several militant groups operating in Manipur, Nagaland and Assam.

Operation Sunrise 2

- The armies coordinated with each other to bust camps of militant outfits, including the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang), the United Liberation Front of Assam (I) and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland.

- The first phase of "Operation Sunrise" was conducted in February 2019 along the Indo-Myanmar border, during which a number of camps of northeast-based militant groups were busted in Bhutan, Myanmar, Bangladesh and even China and Nepal.

Reasons for cross border insurgency

- Safe Havens: The shelter and support that the Indian insurgent groups receive from across the border have been one of the most important factors which has helped them in sustaining their rebellion.

- Economic support: The Golden Triangle (comprising Myanmar, Laos and Thailand) has provided an economic boom for the insurgent groups to sustain themselves.

- Availability of weapons: Easy availability of small arms in neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar has been another factor behind the sustenance of insurgency in the region.

- Ethnic affinity: Many ethnic groups in the region, especially in the areas bordering the international boundaries, have more in common with the population living across the boundary than with their own nationals.

- Border issues in North east

  - Terrain of Border: Difficult terrain along the border with different countries in the north east make means of transportation and communication difficult and as a result, the border area remains sparsely populated with depressed economic development.

    - ✓ High mountains, deep river channels together with lush forest characterize the borderland with Myanmar.
    - ✓ Inaccessible forested areas along the Assam– Bhutan border continue to serve as temporary bases and safe havens for the insurgent groups.
    - ✓ River line borders in Bangladesh tend to change course periodically, leading to a host of disputes associated with the difficulties in establishing ownership of the newly created territories.

  - Boundary issue: Even though the international boundary between countries like India and Myanmar had been formally delimited and demarcated following the boundary agreement in March, 1967, the boundary has not crystallised on the ground as lines separating two sovereign countries.

  - Free movement regime: India-Myanmar border has a unique arrangement in place called the Free Movement Regime (FMR). The FMR permits the tribes residing along the border to travel 16-km across the boundary without visa restrictions.

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Way Forward

- Sensitization of people: The border community should be sensitised to participate in the nation building project through sustained community interaction programmes.
  - Increase cultural exchanges, tourism and people-to-people contact, including provision of job permits and work visas, for the South Asian countries.
- Cooperation with neighboring countries: International borders are best managed when neighbours cooperate to secure their mutual borders. For such cooperation to materialise, political and diplomatic initiatives are required to be carefully crafted.
- Strengthening of Regional Forums: Regional groupings like SAARC, BIMSTEC, BCIM can help in enhancing economic and security cooperation with these countries which will lead to a better understanding of the benefits of peace in North-East India.
- Effective Border Management through smart borders which ensure quick and easy, legal flow of people and goods, while maintaining a steady momentum in the process of improvement of infrastructure and other facilities at checkpoints.
- Joint Training and operations: Exercises like "Hand in hand" with China, "Operation Sampriti" between India and Bangladesh etc. can help to combat terrorism.
  - 'Operation All Clear' by Bhutan was a landmark operation which was conducted against Assam separatist insurgent groups in the southern regions of Bhutan. These types of joint operations can help fight insurgency in the north east.

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4.6.5 Bezbaruah Committee recommendations on racial discrimination against North-Eastern Indians in metros

The Bezbaruah Committee Report headed by M.P. Bezbaruah, Member, North Eastern Council, was set up in February 2014 after the death of Nido Tania. TheCommittee'smandate was to listen to the issues raised by people from North East living especially in the metro cities. The committee was also asked to suggest measures which could be implemented by the government of India. The major recommendations by the Committee include

New law against Discrimination:

- Either a new law should be promulgated as directed by the High Court of Delhi or the Indian Penal Code should be amended.
- The offence should be cognizable and non-bailable. The investigation of the FIR should be completed in 60 days by a special squad and investigated by a police officer not below the rank of deputy SP or ACP.
- A special prosecutor should be appointed to handle all such cases of atrocities. And the trial should be completed in 90 days.

Fast-track Courts and Special Police Squads:

- The Committee strongly suggests the creation of fast-track courts for handling the cases relating to the North East people, particularly those which are racially motivated and involving heinous crimes against the North East women and children.
- Specially designated public prosecutors should be appointed for cases involving people from the North East. They should also be properly trained and sensitised.

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Interventions in Education

- Suitable innovative ways should be devised to integrate each and every aspect of the North East into the consciousness of people outside.

- The Committee recommends that when the next the NCERT takes place, one, all teacher training institutes be advised to make their syllabus in a way that can sensitise their trainees on the North East and, two, universities and schools outside the NorthEast make projects on North East a mandatory part of the course curricula.

- A detailed socio-economic study of the nature of student migration from the North East would be worthwhile as it will provide valuable insight for planning of higher education in the region.

Social Media outreach and Legal Awareness Campaigns:

- The committee recommends legal awareness campaigns in neighbourhoods that have a significant presence of members from the North East community and on introducing lectures on legal rights for university students.

- It underlines the role of social media in improving connectivity and communication with the community.

- A dedicated Facebook page should be created and nodal police officers should be in constant touch with members of the community on WhatsApp

Bonding Power of Sports:

- The committee recommends that the Ministry should take steps to hold regular national and international events in the North East as such events will create greater harmony and better understanding. The ministry should, therefore, review the status of present facilities and make an assessment if they are suitable for such events.

- If not, such facilities should be created in every state of the North East. Indigenous games of the North East should be promoted.

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Assam is currently updating NRC to identify its citizens. The update, mandated and monitored by the Supreme Court, is a fallout of the Assam Accord of 1985, which sets March 24, 1971 as the cutoff date for citizenship. Those who entered Assam before that date are recognized as citizens.

Significance of NRC Process

- **Restricting illegal influx** of immigrants - It was seen as the reason behind growing demographic change in NE region and increasing social tensions.
- **Resolving major economic grievance** - by ensuring entitlement of state's resources to indigenous people.
- **Removal of uncertainty & fear** - Those enlisted in NRC now need not live in the fear of being deported and can live freely without stigma and suspicions.
- **Human rights protection** – better social cohesion and checking human trafficking across borders.
- **Better National security** - Documented NRC in bordering areas could also help curb drugs/arms trafficking, radicalisation, religious extremism, terrorism etc. → a consequence of illegal immigration.
- Putting to rest **political opportunism** and vote bank appeasement.

Challenges of NRC Process

- **Incorrect Inclusion & exclusion** issues - 19 lakh people are left out of NRC.
- **Flawed source of data** - Inherent flaws in NRC of 1951 and electoral rolls from 1961 to 1971, which forms majority of legacy data. Most documents are in Bengali, which are not translated.
- **Difficulty in gathering proof of identity** - burden of proof rests with the NRC applicant. People have to prove that they are descendants of Indian citizens by providing documents dating back to 1951 or 1971, which is an onerous condition in a country which has poor data collection record.
- **Criticism on humanitarian grounds** - Since the people have been in India for so long, and have built their lives and become part of local economies and communities, it is inhuman to uproot them.
- **Lack of clarity on citizenship status** - No clarity on the citizenship of children and grandchildren of illegal migrants. While Citizenship Act of 1955 recognizes citizenship by birth, NRC doesn't recognize it.
- **Lack of clarity on Post identification course of action**
  - Bangladesh doesn't recognize them as their nationals, thus, illegal immigrants cannot be deported.
  - Option of sending them to detention camps, until their deportation, is being criticized after the reports of inhumane conditions at such camps.
  - Non recognition may create fear of creating a group of stateless people (like the Rohingyas)
  - Rehabilitation and livelihood alternatives have not been laid out, yet.
- **Promote barriers within nation** – fear of targeting and excluding religious minorities esp. when seen in context of **Citizen Amendment Act.**

Way Forward

- India has no definite policy with respect to refugees and asylum seekers. It needs to **end uncertainty** faced by finally excluded individuals and provide them with basic rights on **humanitarian grounds**. For e.g. it must cautiously explore the possibility or giving right to work, identity card etc.
- **Diplomatic deliberation and bilateral agreement with Bangladesh** over repatriation of illegal immigrants.
- **Comprehensive management of the borders** - including fencing, total surveillance 24x7, use of new imaging technology etc.
- Facilitate better **documented movement of people** across border through **easy work permits.**
- Seek assistance from international organisations such as **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Organization for Migration (IOM)** etc to address this complex socio-economic issue.
- India should engage with other regional countries to **develop a SAARC convention** or a regional declaration on refugees.

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Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA)

- AFSPA was enacted in 1958 amid the nascent Naga insurgency.
- The Act comes into operation after a declaration is made under the act that a particular area is "disturbed".
- **Declaration of region as 'Disturbed'**
  - Section (3) of the AFSPA empowers the Governor of the state/UT to issue an official notification in the Gazette of India, following which the Centre has the authority to send in armed forces for civilian aid.
  - Further, if an area is termed 'disturbed', it has to maintain status quo for a minimum of 3 months.
  - The state governments can suggest whether the act is required to be enforced or not. But under Section (3) of the act, their opinion can be overruled by the Governor or the Centre.
- **Wide-ranging powers to Armed forces: Opposed by Human Rights activists**
  - Power to use force, including opening fire, even to the extent of causing death if prohibitory orders banning assembly of five or more persons or carrying arms and weapons etc, are in force in the disturbed area
  - Power to destroy structures used as hide-outs, training camps or as a place from which attacks are or likely to be launched.
  - Power to arrest without warrant and to use force for the purpose.
  - Power to enter and search premises without warrant to make arrest or recovery of hostages, arms and ammunition and stolen property etc.
  - It also protects them from legal processes for actions taken under the act.
- **Commission recommendation /SC ruling related to AFSPA**
  - **Jeevan Reddy Commission** and **2nd Administrative reforms Commission (ARC)** recommended AFSPA to be repealed.
  - **Santosh Hegde Committee** investigated six separate cases of possible AFSPA abuse in Manipur. According to the report, five out of six killings were encounters fabricated by both the Assam Rifles and the Manipur Police.
  - The **Supreme Court in its July 2017 verdict**, ordered an investigation by CBI into cases of suspected extra-judicial killing in Manipur.
  - SC ruled that
    - ✓ AFSPA does not offer blanket immunity to armed forces.
    - ✓ The armed forces cannot escape investigation for excesses even in places where they enjoy special powers.
    - ✓ The legal protection provided by Armed Forces will have to yield to principles of **human rights.**
- **AFSPA Current status** – AFSPA was removed from Tripura in 2015, and Meghalaya in 2018. At present, AFSPA is imposed in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Jammu and Kashmir.

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