

7. Manipur Development Projects – Internal Security

Strengthen dialogue to build strong bridge of harmony between Manipur's hill and valley districts – PM. Amidst a fragile peace, the government is pushing development projects in Manipur following the deadly ethnic conflict between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities. Key unresolved issues include rehabilitating over 60,000 displaced people and the Kuki-Zo's demand for a separate administration, which the Meitei vehemently oppose.

Context – Development Initiatives Amidst Ongoing Tensions

The Prime Minister recently inaugurated and laid the foundation stone for a series of development projects in Imphal, Manipur, aiming to boost infrastructure, governance, and economic opportunities in the state. These initiatives come against the backdrop of a deep-rooted ethnic conflict and a fragile political situation.

Key Highlights of the Development Projects

Infrastructure and Connectivity

1. **Manipur Urban Roads Project** – A significant investment of over ₹3,600 crore has been launched to enhance road connectivity and upgrade urban infrastructure in Imphal.
2. **Jiribam-Imphal Railway Line** – This major project, valued at ₹22,000 crore, is set to connect the state capital, Imphal, to the national railway network, marking a milestone in regional connectivity.
3. **Imphal Airport Expansion** – The airport has been expanded with a ₹400 crore investment, and new helicopter services have been inaugurated to improve air connectivity to remote areas.
4. **Strengthening Governance** – A new Civil Secretariat building (worth ₹538 crore) and a Police Headquarters (worth ₹101 crore) were inaugurated to modernize administrative infrastructure.

Digital and IT Initiatives

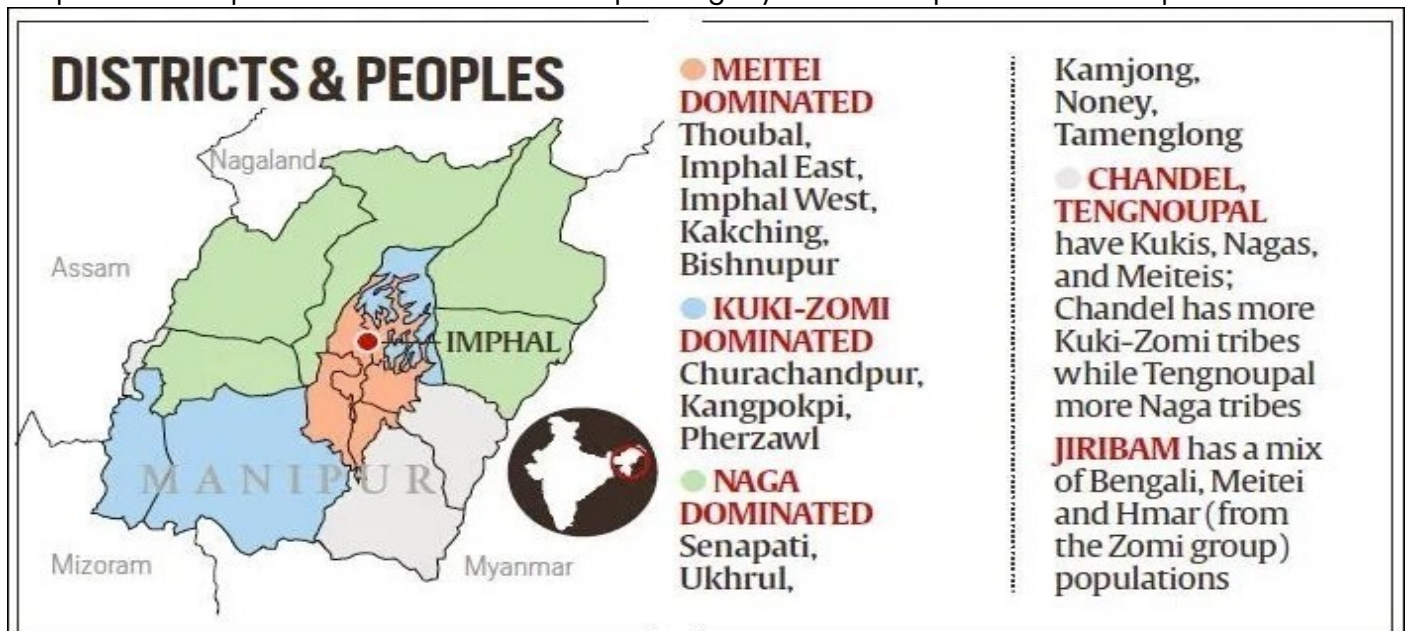
Manipur Infotech Development Project – This project is aimed at fostering the Information Technology (IT) and startup ecosystem within the state, creating new employment opportunities.

Women Empowerment

1. **Ima Markets** – Four new Ima Markets (traditional women-only markets) were inaugurated, reinforcing Manipur's unique tradition of a women-led economy.
2. **Working Women's Hostels** – To support women's education and employment, hostels are being constructed at nine different locations across the state.

Sports and Culture

1. **Sports Infrastructure** – The government reaffirmed its support for the National Sports University and Khelo India initiatives to nurture sporting talent.
2. **Promotion of Polo** – The Marjing Polo Complex, which features the world's tallest polo statue, is being promoted to preserve and celebrate Manipur's legacy as the birthplace of modern polo.



Background of the Ethnic Conflict

The Conflict – A violent ethnic conflict erupted in May 2023 between the Meitei community, who are pre-dominant in the Imphal valley, and the Kuki-Zo community, who mainly inhabit the surrounding hill districts.

Humanitarian Impact – The violence has tragically claimed over 250 lives and displaced more than 60,000 people, leading to a severe humanitarian crisis.

Root Cause – The conflict was triggered by the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. The Kuki-Zo and other tribal groups opposed this demand, fearing it would undermine their existing rights and protections.

Why Meiteis Demand ST Status – To gain access to constitutional safeguards like reservations and, crucially, to acquire the right to purchase land in the hill areas, which are currently reserved for tribal communities.

Political Crisis – The escalating violence and administrative breakdown led to the resignation of the Chief Minister and the subsequent imposition of President's Rule in the state.

Key Unresolved Issues in Manipur

Rehabilitation of Displaced Families – There are currently more than 280 relief camps sheltering about 57,000 people, many of whom have been displaced for over two years and face an uncertain future.

Restrictions on Movement and "Buffer Zones" – During the conflict, militarised "buffer zones" were established to separate the valley and hill districts. These zones have severely restricted free movement, cutting off Meiteis from services in the hills and preventing Kuki-Zo people from accessing Imphal for healthcare, education, and administrative work.

Porous International Border with Myanmar – Meitei leaders allege that unchecked migration of Chin people from Myanmar (who are ethnically related to the Kuki-Zo) is exacerbating demographic anxieties and resource conflicts. In response, the government has scrapped the Free Movement Regime (which allowed tribes to travel 16 km across the border without a visa) and plans to fence the border. These measures are opposed by Kuki-Zo and Naga communities, who have deep-seated cultural and economic ties across the international border.

Political Vacuum and Lack of Dialogue – The state is grappling with a need for effective governance and justice to restore stability. While large-scale violence has subsided since late 2024, there has been no sustained or meaningful dialogue between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities to address their grievances.

Demand for a Separate Administration

The Kuki-Zo Demand – The Kuki-Zo Council has formally demanded that their hill areas be carved out into a separate administrative unit, specifically a Union Territory (UT) with a legislature, under Article 239A of the Constitution.

Article 239A – Inserted by the 14th Amendment Act of 1962, it empowers Parliament to create a local legislature and/or a Council of Ministers for certain Union Territories.

The Meitei Opposition – Meitei organizations, such as COCOMI, vehemently oppose this demand. They view it as a direct threat to Manipur's territorial integrity and a step towards an "ethnic partition" of the state.

The Way Ahead – A Path to Sustainable Peace

Inclusive Dialogue – A sustainable peace process requires a genuine and inclusive dialogue between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities, facilitated by neutral mediators.

Prioritize Rehabilitation – The government must prioritize the dignified rehabilitation of all displaced families, providing them with secure housing and livelihood support.

Balanced Governance – There is a need for balanced border management that addresses security concerns without alienating border communities, alongside the strengthening of local governance institutions.

Long-Term Political Settlement – The ultimate goal must be a political settlement that safeguards the rights of all tribal communities while preserving the territorial integrity of Manipur.

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