

PM Modi's Manipur Visit: Key Challenges in the Conflict-Hit State

September 13, 2025 • vajiramandravi.com



PM Modi Manipur Visit Latest News

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Manipur on September 13, his first trip since ethnic clashes between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo erupted in May 2023.
- Over 27 months, the state has endured violence, mass displacement, weakened law and order, the rise of armed groups, President's Rule, and national elections.
- While tensions have eased somewhat, five key issues — displacement, security, governance, inter-community trust, and political resolution — remain central to Manipur's fragile recovery.

Rehabilitation of Manipur's Displaced Population

- Over 57,000 people remain in 280 relief camps across Manipur, displaced for over two years due to ethnic clashes.
- Displacement occurred mainly in two ways:

- Kuki-Zo people forced out of Imphal and valley towns, and Meiteis from border and hill towns like Moreh, Kangpokpi, and Churachandpur; and
- those from “fringe areas” at the valley-hill frontiers fleeing attacks or threats.
- In July, Manipur govt announced a three-phase resettlement plan to close all relief camps by year-end, beginning with phased return of fringe-area residents, followed by prefabricated housing for others once normalcy is restored.
- While around 5,000 people had returned before the plan, progress has since been slow.

Restricted Movement and Buffer Zones in Manipur

- During the conflict, sharp boundaries between the valley and hill districts have turned into “buffer zones” manned by security forces, blocking safe passage between Meitei and Kuki-Zo areas.
- Meiteis remain confined to the valley without highway access, while Kuki-Zos cannot reach Imphal or use key facilities like the airport.
- After President’s Rule in February, the Centre attempted to enforce “free movement” on highways, but violence erupted, leaving one dead and many injured.
- Currently, Kuki-Zo groups permit only essential goods to reach the valley but refuse Meitei movement across buffer zones.
- Meanwhile, no reciprocal arrangement exists for Kuki-Zo passage in Meitei-dominated areas.

Lack of Dialogue and Ethnic Tensions in Manipur

- Over 250 people have died in Manipur’s ethnic violence, the last major outbreak in November 2024.
- While large-scale clashes have ebbed, officials warn the state remains fragile, as both Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities are heavily armed and lack inter-community dialogue.
- The Centre continues separate talks with both sides, recently renewing a **Suspension of Operations pact with Kuki-Zo insurgent groups**.
- These groups agreed to uphold Manipur’s “territorial integrity,” but still demand a Union Territory with legislature, contradicting the pact’s spirit.
- Meitei groups see the agreement as legitimising insurgents, while Kuki-Zos allege past bias by ex-Chief Minister Biren Singh’s government favouring Meitei militias, fuelling mistrust.

Political Transition and President’s Rule in Manipur

- Former Chief Minister N Biren Singh resigned in February after opposition from both Kuki-Zo and many Meitei BJP MLAs.
- Soon after, President’s Rule was imposed, fulfilling a key Kuki-Zo demand and initially welcomed across communities.
- However, nearly two months later, valley-based and Naga MLAs began pressing for restoration of an elected government, citing public pressure.
- Despite this, the Centre has shown no urgency to lift President’s Rule, preferring stability over political transition in the conflict-hit state.

Border Tensions and Fencing with Myanmar

- **Manipur's porous border with Myanmar** remains a flashpoint, with Meiteis blaming illegal Chin immigration for fueling unrest.
- In response, the **Centre scrapped the Free Movement Regime** — which allowed cross-border tribal travel up to 16 km — and announced fencing.
- This decision has angered both Kuki-Zo and Naga communities, who share deep ethnic, social, and economic ties across the border.
- Ahead of PM Modi's visit, the United Naga Council protested by imposing a "trade embargo" on major supply routes but has since suspended it temporarily.

Source: IE | MC

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/pm-modis-manipur-visit-key-challenges-in-the-conflict-hit-state/>

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