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GS 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS/INSTITUTIONS

1. Manipur's Worsening Humanitarian Crisis

Context: The India-Myanmar borderlands have long been a region of geopolitical significance, yet they remain critically under-researched, particularly concerning the ongoing humanitarian crises. The Manipur conflict, characterised by armed violence, displacement, and resource scarcity, has created severe humanitarian challenges. However, restricted access, security concerns, and a lack of comprehensive data collection have obscured the true extent of these crises. Therefore, it is important to critically examine the implications of these information gaps, the humanitarian challenges faced by displaced populations, and the urgent measures required to alleviate their suffering.

Key points

- **Fragmented and Incomplete Data Collection:** The official estimates suggest that approximately 58,000 individuals have been displaced and are residing in relief camps across Manipur's Valley and Hill districts. However, these numbers fail to account for several categories of displaced persons. Many individuals remain unregistered because they are living with relatives, staying in temporary shelters, or have relocated across multiple locations. Furthermore, those who have fled the state

due to conflict-related circumstances, seeking safety, employment, or education, are largely unrecorded.

- **Physical Segregation and Breakdown of Information Channels:** A significant factor contributing to the data deficiency is the physical separation of the Meitei and Kuki-Zomi communities, which has led to the collapse of shared information channels. In times of conflict, when communities are divided along ethnic lines, obtaining accurate and unbiased data becomes a challenge. The conflict has led to the forced segregation of populations, with Meitei and Kuki-Zomi individuals relocating to areas dominated by their respective ethnic groups.
- **Challenges:** The lack of comprehensive data has serious implications for humanitarian aid distribution and policymaking. Relief efforts are often based on official figures, meaning that unregistered displaced persons may be excluded from essential services such as food distribution, healthcare, and shelter assistance. The absence of systematic documentation also results in the underreporting of key humanitarian concerns, including mortality rates, malnutrition, and disease outbreaks in relief camps.
- **Some Other Aspects of Manipur Crisis:**
 - Health and Humanitarian Concerns* - One of the most alarming consequences of the conflict is the deterioration of healthcare accessibility. In Kuki-Zomi-dominated hill districts, major tertiary healthcare centres in Imphal are no longer accessible, forcing residents to seek medical treatment via circuitous routes through Mizoram and Nagaland.
 - Mental Health Issues* - The psychological toll is equally severe, with studies showing that 65.8% of displaced individuals in Imphal East suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and many others experience moderate to severe anxiety. The worsening mental health conditions have led to a rise in suicides among displaced individuals.
 - The Humanitarian Crisis in Relief Camps* - Despite the establishment of relief camps more than two years ago, necessities such as food, water, and shelter remain largely inadequate. With over 22,000 children still living in camps, the lack of educational access has exacerbated long-term developmental challenges.
- **Way ahead:**
 - Increased External Humanitarian Support* - Private and corporate social responsibility (CSR) entities should step in to provide aid, ensuring that vulnerable populations receive adequate resources.
 - Improving Water Accessibility* - With a significant portion of household incomes being spent on obtaining water from private sources, government and aid agencies must prioritize clean water distribution.
 - Establishing Humanitarian Corridors* - Emergency medical evacuation corridors should be set up to facilitate the safe transfer of critically ill patients from conflict-affected areas to hospitals.
 - Restoring Supply Chains* - Essential commodities, including food and medical supplies, must be transported between valley and hill districts through neutral communities to ease inflationary pressures and ensure equitable resource distribution.
- **Conclusion:** The Manipur conflict has resulted in an acute humanitarian crisis, exacerbated by data deficiencies, displacement, and healthcare inaccessibility. While violence may have subsided in some areas, forced displacement continues to threaten the livelihoods and well-being of thousands. Without immediate intervention, the situation will further deteriorate, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations, particularly children and the elderly.

2. President's Rule and the road ahead

Context: The imposition of President's Rule in Manipur on February 13 marks a significant political development in India, particularly considering the protracted violence that has gripped the state for over 21 months. The decision, taken after the resignation of Chief Minister N. Biren Singh, underscores the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) strategic retreat rather than an outright resolution to the ongoing turmoil. This move highlights not only the limitations of the double-engine sarkar but also raises broader concerns about governance, state legitimacy, and institutional trust in Manipur.

Key points

- **Consequence of the Prolonged Crisis:** One of the most critical consequences of the prolonged crisis has been the erosion of citizens' trust in the state and its institutions. Reports suggest that the Manipur government under Biren Singh played a partisan role, aligning with Meitei ultranationalist sentiments. This favouritism has fractured the shared territorial space and contributed to deeper communal divisions.
- **Challenges:**
 - Erosion of State Authority and Legitimacy* - One of the most fundamental challenges facing governance in Manipur is the erosion of the state's authority. The concept of 'infrastructural power,' as described by political sociologist Michael Mann, refers to a state's capacity to implement policies and maintain effective control over its territory.
 - Politicisation of Law Enforcement and Administrative Machinery* - A significant challenge in restoring order is the politicisation of the law enforcement agencies and the administrative machinery. Reports suggest that the Manipur police and security forces have been accused of taking sides in the conflict, either through inaction or direct complicity with certain groups.
 - Failure to Maintain Neutrality and the Rise of Majoritarian Narratives* - One of the most dangerous developments in Manipur's crisis has been the rise of majoritarian nationalist narratives, which have exacerbated tensions between communities. The state government under N. Biren Singh has been accused of adopting a populist, Meitei-majoritarian approach, which has alienated other ethnic groups, particularly the Kuki-Zomi-Hmar tribes.
- **Manipur's Administrative Structure:** One of the proposed solutions to address Manipur's political turmoil is to declare it a 'hill state,' which could potentially neutralise demands for a separate administration by the Kuki-Zomi-Hmar groups. However, such a move must be carefully evaluated for its constitutional implications, particularly concerning Article 371C, which provides special provisions for Manipur's hill areas.
- **Way forward:** The long-term solution to Manipur's crisis lies in decentralisation rather than centralisation. The President's Rule period should be used to conduct a thorough institutional audit to address existing gaps in political representation, resource distribution, and governance. Marginalised communities must be given a voice in decision-making processes, and meaningful autonomy must be devolved to tribal regions to ensure a fair balance of power.
- **Conclusion:** The imposition of President's Rule in Manipur represents both a challenge and an opportunity. While it provides a temporary mechanism to stabilise the region, it also exposes the limitations of the BJP's governance model and the fragility of state institutions in the face of ethnic and political conflict. To achieve lasting peace, the government must go beyond mere law-and-order approaches and work toward fostering genuine trust and legitimacy through equitable governance, fair representation, and adherence to constitutional principles.

3. RBI's rupee challenge

Context: It was earlier indicated that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) should allow the Indian rupee to depreciate, intervening only to curb extreme volatility. The rationale behind this perspective is rooted in the global trend of capital outflows from emerging markets to safer assets like the US dollar. This shift is linked to policy uncertainties triggered by the Trump administration, which has led to a general strengthening of the dollar.

Key points

- **Overview:** The article discusses the RBI's dilemma over whether to allow the Indian rupee to depreciate amid global capital outflows and a strengthening US dollar, while managing the risks of investor panic and currency instability.
- **Global Context:** *Capital Outflows* - Pressure on the rupee stems from global capital seeking safe havens (e.g. the US dollar) due to geopolitical uncertainties and Trump-era policies.
Dollar Strengthening - The US dollar's rise reflects global risk aversion, impacting emerging market currencies, including the rupee.
- **RBI's Challenge:** *Depreciation Acceleration* - A sharp rupee fall could trigger further capital outflows, creating a self-fulfilling cycle.
Signalling Effect - Non-intervention by the RBI may signal weakness, worsening expectations.
Trade-offs - Defending the rupee drains forex reserves. Allowing depreciation risks inflationary pressures (e.g. higher import costs for oil).
- **Export Competitiveness:** *Weak Manufacturing Exports* - Lack of competitiveness limits FDI inflows tied to export-oriented sectors.
Dependence on Volatile Capital - Reliance on portfolio flows (vs. stable FDI) increases vulnerability to sudden outflows.
- **Forex Reserve Management:** *Reserves as a Buffer* - RBI uses reserves to stabilize short-term volatility.
Limitations - Reserves are finite; prolonged intervention erodes capacity. Reserves depend on capital inflows exceeding current account deficits.
- **Risks of Currency Crisis:** *Historical Precedent* - Global examples (e.g. East Asian Crisis 1997) highlight risks of sudden, sharp depreciations. Periods of stability punctuated by irreversible drops (e.g. 2013 taper tantrum).
Persistent Vulnerability - Liberalization Legacy: Post-1990s reforms increased exposure to volatile capital flows. No Structural Fix: Depreciation has not corrected trade deficits or boosted export competitiveness.
- **Policy Implications:** *RBI's Balancing Act* - Manage Expectations: Avoid signalling panic while preventing excessive volatility. Inflation Control: Tackle domestic inflation to reduce depreciation pressure.
Structural Reforms Needed - Export Competitiveness: Boost manufacturing via policy incentives and infrastructure. Reduce Import Dependency: Diversify energy sources to mitigate oil price shocks. Stable Capital Flows: Encourage FDI over volatile portfolio investments.
- **Conclusion:** India's exchange rate management has avoided a full-blown currency crisis but remains structurally vulnerable. Addressing root causes (trade deficits, inflation, export weakness) is critical to reducing reliance on volatile capital and ensuring sustainable stability.

4. Why global sea ice cover has dipped to record low — what this means?

Context: Between February 8 and 13, the total area of sea ice in the Arctic and Antarctic shrank to 15.76 million sq km, breaking the previous record low of 15.93 million sq km from early 2023, according to a BBC analysis of data from the US National Snow and Ice Data Centre (NSIDC).

Key points

- **Reasons for low record:** *Warm Air and Ocean Temperatures* - Elevated air and sea temperatures have significantly contributed to the melting of both Arctic and Antarctic Sea ice. Warmer conditions, particularly towards the end of summer, have led to increased melting rates, especially in the Antarctic region.
Wind Patterns - Changes in atmospheric dynamics, including stronger westerly winds associated with the Southern Annular Mode (SAM), have disrupted sea ice formation and stability. In the Antarctic, these winds can break apart ice more easily due to its thinner and more mobile nature compared to the thicker Arctic ice.
Delayed Freezing - In the Arctic, a delayed freezing process around regions like Hudson Bay has occurred due to unusually warm ocean temperatures, preventing the formation of new ice during winter.
Feedback Mechanisms - The loss of sea ice creates feedback loops that further exacerbate warming. As less ice remains to reflect sunlight, more solar radiation is absorbed by the ocean, leading to increased temperatures and further melting of ice.
- **Impacts:** *Accelerated Global Warming* - Less sea ice means more ocean water is exposed to sunlight, absorbing heat instead of reflecting it. Example: The Arctic is warming nearly four times faster than the global average, leading to extreme weather patterns worldwide.
Disruptions in Ocean Currents - Melting Sea ice releases freshwater into the ocean, reducing salinity and slowing down deep-water circulation. Example: The Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC), which influences global climate patterns, is weakening due to increased freshwater from melting Arctic ice.
- **Measures taken:** *International Year of Glaciers' Preservation (2025)* - The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and UNESCO have declared 2025 as the International Year of Glaciers' Preservation. This initiative aims to raise awareness about the importance of glaciers and ice sheets, which store a significant portion of the world's freshwater, and to promote actions to mitigate their melting.
Climate Action Frameworks - Global climate agreements, such as the Paris Agreement, encourage countries to commit to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, which are a primary driver of climate change affecting sea ice.
Public Awareness Campaigns - International organizations are engaging in campaigns to educate the public about the significance of sea ice and glaciers in regulating global climate systems.
- **Way forward:** *Strengthening Climate Mitigation Efforts* - Nations must enhance commitments under the Paris Agreement by accelerating renewable energy adoption, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and implementing carbon pricing mechanisms to curb global warming.
Enhancing Polar and Oceanic Monitoring - Strengthen international collaboration for real-time satellite monitoring, expand scientific research on polar ice dynamics, and develop adaptive strategies to protect vulnerable ecosystems and coastal communities.