

## **SUSPENSION OF OPERATIONS (SOO) AGREEMENT – INTERNAL SECURITY**

**NEWS:** The **Union Home Ministry (MHA)** in an ongoing discussion with **Kuki-Zo insurgent groups** to review the ground rules of the **suspension of operations (SoO)** agreement.

- **The fresh episode of violence led to a review meeting.**
- **Opening of National Highway:** The opening of **National Highways-2 and 37** (connecting the land-locked **Imphal valley** to **Nagaland and Assam** respectively) which pass through **Kuki-Zo inhabited areas**.
- **Demand For Union Territory:** The insurgent groups reiterated their demand for a **union territory with legislature for the Kuki-Zo people**.
- **Ground Rules Violation:** The Kuki-Zo insurgent group were conveyed about ground rules violations and were also **asked to shut down or relocate camps close to the Meitei-inhabited areas**.

### **WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?**

#### **About the Suspension of Operations (SoO) Agreement**

- The Suspension of Operations (SoO) Agreement was signed on **August 22, 2008**, by the **Government of India**, the **Government of Manipur**, and the **Kuki National Organisation (KNO)**.
- The agreement aimed to **end hostilities and initiate peace talks** with Kuki insurgent groups.
- It includes **25 out of 30 Kuki insurgent groups**, mainly under the **United People's Front (UPF)** and the **Kuki National Organisation (KNO)**.
- These groups are housed in **14 designated camps** across the hill districts of Manipur.
- The SoO was a response to **Kuki–Naga ethnic clashes in the 1990s**, which led Kuki groups to demand a separate homeland.
- It functions like a **ceasefire**, reviewed and **renewed annually** depending on compliance and progress in dialogue.

#### **Current Status and Developments**

- On **February 29, 2024**, the **Manipur government unilaterally withdrew** from the SoO agreement.
- The withdrawal was based on allegations that the Kuki groups **violated ground rules**.
- The **central government has not fully endorsed** this withdrawal, leading to uncertainty over the agreement's status.

#### **Structure and Monitoring Mechanism**

- A **Joint Monitoring Group (JMG)** was created to ensure implementation of the SoO terms.
- It includes the **Principal Secretary (Home)**, **senior police and intelligence officers**, and representatives from the **Army**, **paramilitary forces**, and **Union Home Ministry**.

- The JMG meets **monthly** to review compliance with the agreement.



### Key Terms of the SoO Agreement

- **All armed activities must be suspended** by the insurgent groups.
- The **government halts counterinsurgency operations** against those observing the SoO.
- Cadres must stay in **designated camps**, receive a **monthly stipend of ₹6,000**, and participate in **rehabilitation programmes**.
- Camps must be **away from villages, highways, and international borders**.
- **All weapons are stored** in an armoury with a **double-locking system** (one key with the group, one with security forces).
- Groups are **barred from acquiring new arms, recruiting members, or forming new fronts**.
- They cannot **hoist flags, organize armed parades, or construct memorials**.
- The SoO provides a **platform for non-violent political dialogue** between the state and the insurgent groups.

### Triggering Factors Behind Manipur Ethnic Violence

- The **Meitei community**, backed by the **Scheduled Tribes Demand Committee of Manipur (STDCM)**, has been demanding **ST status since 2012**.
- In **April 2023**, the **Manipur High Court directed the state government** to consider the Meitei community's inclusion in the ST list.

- Tribal groups, especially Kukis, **strongly opposed this**, fearing it would dilute their **reservation benefits and land rights**.
- The state government conducted **eviction drives** in Kuki-inhabited hill areas, citing **illegal encroachments**, which were perceived as **ethnically targeted** actions.
- The **state's withdrawal from the SoO agreement** during ongoing tensions has further eroded **trust among tribal groups**.

### **Historical Background of Kuki Insurgency**

- The **Kuki armed movement began around 1987**, parallel to the **Naga insurgency**.
- During the early 1990s, **violent Kuki–Naga ethnic clashes** prompted Kuki groups to take up arms to **defend their territories and identity**.
- Both Kuki and Naga insurgents claim overlapping areas in **Manipur's hill districts** as part of their envisioned homelands.
- The **NSCN-IM massacre in Tengenoupal (1993)**, where over **100 Kukis were killed**, is remembered as a **Black Day** by the Kuki community.
- These historical events contribute to the **deep-rooted ethnic tensions** that continue to affect peace and governance in Manipur.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/mha-to-resume-talks-with-kuki-zo-insurgents-says-camps-near-meitei-areas-must-be-closed-before-renegotiating-soo-pact/article69669106.ece>