

## **Formation of a panel to look into withdrawal of AFSPA from Nagaland is a welcome move.**

The announcement by the Nagaland government that a high-powered panel will be set up to look into the withdrawal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in the State addresses a key concern in the Northeast following the Mon massacre where a botched ambush by an armed forces unit led to the deaths of 15 civilians earlier this month.

As is typical of how the Union government has dealt with issues concerning Nagaland in the recent past, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) — whose Additional Secretary (Northeast) is to head the committee — has been tight-lipped about the proposed panel with the information about it emanating only from the Nagaland government.

Nevertheless, the gesture to set up a panel, even if it is acknowledged only by the Nagaland government, should help in assuaging some concerns of citizens of the State who had immediately associated the massacre with the impunity afforded by the unpopular Act. The Indian Army has also reiterated that it deeply regretted the loss of lives and that a probe into the incident was progressing, even as the Nagaland government in its statement mentioned that a court of inquiry will initiate disciplinary proceedings against the Army unit and personnel involved in the incident.

The Act is in place in Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, three districts of Arunachal Pradesh, and areas falling within the jurisdiction of eight police stations of the State bordering Assam, with the authority to use force or open fire to maintain public order in “disturbed areas”. The Meghalaya Chief Minister has already sought its revocation in the Northeast, while Manipur is also set to discuss the demand for its repeal.

People in the Northeast associate the series of civilian killings in the region over a number of years with the Act being in effect. The Justice Jeevan Reddy Committee set up by the previous UPA-led government at the Centre in 2005 had recommended the repeal of the Act calling it “highly undesirable” and that it created an impression that civilians in the Northeast were being targeted for hostile treatment. But the Act has remained in place because of the resolute opposition to its repeal by the Army.

The panel can take recourse to studying precedents — Tripura revoked the Act in May 2015 after noticing an improvement on the ground in the State while Meghalaya did the same on April 1, 2018. Both States did so after the Act was in force for decades. A clear-cut understanding on the definition and the extent of “disturbed areas” in Nagaland following discussions among the State, the MHA and armed forces’ representatives will go a long way in working towards a rethink on the Act’s relevance in the entire region.

### Expected Question (Prelims Exams)

- Q. Recently, the central government has constituted a panel to review the AFSPA law in the northeastern states. This law is not applicable in which of the following northeastern states?**
- (a) Assam
  - (b) Nagaland
  - (c) Manipur
  - (d) Sikkim

### Expected Question (Mains Exams)

- Q. Would setting up of a panel to review the AFSFA law after the incident in Nagaland be considered a right step, especially considering the security challenges present in the northeastern states?**
- (250 Words)**

**Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC main examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.**