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REFORMING THE ARMED FORCES (SPECIAL POWERS) ACT, 1958: A LEGAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE IN LIGHT OF RECENT MANIPUR PROTESTS

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ABSTRACT

This research article critically evaluates the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA), with particular reference to its implementation in Manipur. While originally designed as a counter-insurgency law, AFSPA has drawn criticism for enabling systemic human rights abuses, militarization of civilian spaces, and erosion of constitutional protections. The 2024 Manipur protests serve as a critical backdrop, reflecting deep-rooted discontent and civil resistance against prolonged military rule. This paper examines the legal and constitutional framework of AFSPA, judicial interpretations, and the demands for reform. Drawing from domestic jurisprudence, international human rights instruments, and recommendations by expert committees, the study proposes targeted amendments and accountability mechanisms. A phased withdrawal strategy, combined with enhanced judicial oversight, is argued to be more feasible than complete repeal, striking a necessary balance between internal security and democratic governance.

Keywords: AFSPA, Manipur Protests, Human Rights, Constitutional Law, Security Laws, Judicial Oversight, Military Immunity, Legal Reform

INTRODUCTION

The year **2024** marked a significant turning point in the ongoing resistance against the **AFSPA** in Manipur. A series of large-scale protests erupted across the state, fueled by long-standing grievances against the military's excessive powers, the unchecked human rights abuses committed under the Act, and the perceived failure of successive governments to address civilian concerns. While protests against AFSPA have occurred at various intervals since its imposition in **1980**, the **2024 demonstrations were unique in their intensity, organization, and national impact**. Unlike earlier sporadic uprisings, these protests were

widespread, deeply coordinated, and backed by a broader section of Manipuri society, ranging from student groups and human rights activists to local political leaders and international observers.

What made the **2024 protests** particularly significant was the combination of **historical grievances, recent incidents of military excesses, and growing public discontent with the government's inaction**. The immediate trigger for the mass mobilization was **the killing of several civilians in counter-insurgency operations conducted under AFSPA**, sparking outrage and rekindling the long-standing demand for **its repeal or significant reform**.

Unlike previous protests, which were largely confined to **Imphal and other major urban centers**, the 2024 movement spread across **rural regions, drawing participation from various ethnic communities**, despite historical tensions between *Meiteis, Nagas, and Kukis*. The protests were **not just a reaction to a single incident** but a culmination of decades of frustration **over military governance, economic stagnation, and lack of accountability**. For years, the people of Manipur have lived under **the constant shadow of military surveillance, arbitrary arrests, and restrictions on civil liberties**. The inability of judicial mechanisms to hold army personnel accountable for **extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and custodial violence** has further deepened public anger, making AFSPA the **symbol of a failed security policy rather than a tool of law and order**.

This article will explore **the key aspects of the 2024 protests**, analyzing their **causes, organization, impact, and the government's response**. It will also assess **the broader implications of these protests on the future of AFSPA, the role of civil society in shaping security policies, and whether the latest wave of resistance has the potential to drive real legal and policy changes or will, like past movements, be absorbed into a cycle of temporary appeasement without substantive action**.

1. THE TRIGGERS OF THE 2024 MANIPUR PROTESTS: UNDERSTANDING THE UNDERLYING GRIEVANCES

1.1 The Immediate Spark: Civilian Killings and Public Outrage

The immediate trigger for the **2024 Manipur protests** was the **alleged extrajudicial killing of civilians during a counter-insurgency operation conducted by security forces under AFSPA's legal framework**. Reports suggested that **five unarmed villagers were mistaken for**

insurgents and shot dead¹⁰⁴⁵ in a military raid that lacked transparency and accountability. This incident, widely covered in **local and international media**, led to **mass public outrage, candlelight vigils, and large-scale demonstrations**, reminiscent of earlier movements such as **the 2004 protests following the custodial killing of Thangjam Manorama**.

Public anger intensified after **state authorities and military officials refused to initiate an impartial investigation**, citing **national security concerns and the immunity provisions of AFSPA** as barriers to legal action against the personnel involved. This blatant disregard for **due process and civilian oversight** further inflamed tensions, prompting **students, journalists, and human rights activists to mobilize in opposition to the continued militarization of the region**.

1.2 Long-Standing Grievances: Militarization, Impunity, & Lack of Civilian Oversight

Beyond the immediate spark, the **2024 protests were deeply rooted in decades of grievances surrounding AFSPA and its impact on governance, human rights, and socio-political stability** in Manipur. Since its **imposition in 1980**, AFSPA has allowed the military to **operate without accountability**, granting security forces unchecked powers to **arrest without a warrant, conduct operations based on mere suspicion, and use lethal force without fear of legal repercussions**. This **structural impunity** has contributed to **a culture of fear, resentment, and resistance among civilians**, leading to **multiple uprisings over the years**.

One of the **biggest grievances against AFSPA** is the **failure of judicial mechanisms to provide justice to victims of military excesses**. Despite multiple Supreme Court interventions—including the **2016 directive ordering the CBI to investigate over 1,500 cases of alleged extrajudicial killings in Manipur**—there has

¹⁰⁴⁵ The Indian Express, 'Manipur Erupts in Protest After Military Raid Leaves Five Dead' (2024) <https://indianexpress.com/> accessed 25 March 2025

been little progress in holding armed forces personnel accountable. The fact that not a single military official has been convicted for human rights abuses under AFSPA, despite decades of documented violations, reflects the extent of institutionalized impunity that fuels public anger.

The economic consequences of prolonged militarization also played a significant role in fueling the protests. Manipur remains *one of the least industrialized states in India, with high unemployment, limited private sector investment, and restrictions on cross-border trade with Myanmar due to security concerns*. Many protestors, particularly youth and students, viewed AFSPA as a direct barrier to economic progress, arguing that no real development could take place as long as military rule superseded civilian governance.

2. THE ORGANIZATION & MOBILIZATION OF THE 2024 PROTESTS

Unlike previous movements, which were largely spontaneous and led by *isolated activist groups*, the *2024 protests were highly coordinated, involving diverse sections of Manipuri society*.

2.1 The Role of Civil Society and Student Organizations

Civil society organizations, particularly the **Meira Paibi (Women Torchbearers)**, **Apunba Lup**, and student unions, played a pivotal role in organizing and sustaining the protests. Student bodies such as the **All Manipur Students' Union (AMSU)** and **Manipur University Students' Union (MUSU)** mobilized youth-led demonstrations, arguing that *AFSPA has robbed an entire generation of Manipuris of their right to live without fear*.

The **Meira Paibi** movement, known for its long history of resisting AFSPA, led mass protests in Imphal, Churachandpur, and Thoubal, demanding *an immediate repeal of the Act and accountability for recent civilian deaths*. Their symbolic use of torch marches, hunger strikes, and sit-ins became the defining

images of the 2024 movement, echoing earlier protests such as the **2004 Kangla Fort demonstration**.

2.2 The Role of Social Media and Digital Activism

Unlike earlier protests, the **2024 movement was heavily influenced by social media, digital activism, and international outreach**. Platforms such as **Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook** were used to share **real-time updates, live-streamed protests, and coordinated calls for action**, making it harder for the government to suppress the movement without scrutiny. **Manipuri diaspora communities** in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom also played a role in amplifying the issue, putting **diplomatic pressure on the Indian government to address the protests**.¹⁰⁴⁶

3. GOVERNMENT & MILITARY RESPONSE TO THE 2024 PROTESTS: ESCALATION, REPRESSION, AND POLITICAL MANEUVERING

The government's response to the **2024 Manipur protests** was marked by *a combination of suppression, diplomatic engagement, and strategic deflection*. Unlike previous uprisings, which were often met with immediate military crackdowns, the 2024 protests presented **a greater challenge to the state apparatus** due to their widespread nature and intense national media coverage. Initially, authorities **downplayed the protests**, dismissing them as **an overreaction by civil rights groups** and arguing that **AFSPA was still necessary to maintain law and order in Manipur**. However, as the movement gained traction, the state and central governments resorted to *a dual strategy: suppressing the demonstrations through police and military action while simultaneously initiating dialogue with select protest leaders to pacify tensions*.

¹⁰⁴⁶ The Indian Express, 'Manipur Erupts in Protest After Military Raid Leaves Five Dead' (2024) <https://indianexpress.com/> accessed 25 March 2025

One of the most **controversial aspects of the government's response** was its *use of emergency measures, mass arrests, and internet shutdowns to control public dissent*. As protests intensified in cities like Imphal, Thoubal, and Churachandpur, defence forces were deployed to **disperse crowds, impose curfews, and conduct preemptive detentions of activists**. Over **500 people were reportedly arrested within the first two weeks of the protests**¹⁰⁴⁷, with several being held under preventive detention laws that denied them access to legal counsel. The use of *tear gas, rubber bullets, and baton charges against unarmed demonstrators* was widely condemned by human rights organizations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, who accused the government of using excessive force against its own citizens.

Perhaps the most **drastic measure taken by the authorities** was the *imposition of an internet shutdown across Manipur*¹⁰⁴⁸, preventing activists from coordinating protests and limiting the flow of information to national and international audiences. The internet blockade, which lasted **over a month**, was framed as a security measure to prevent misinformation and unrest but was widely criticized as *a violation of free speech and an attempt to suppress digital activism*. The lack of digital communication hampered the ability of protestors to **mobilize, document human rights abuses, and counter government narratives**, demonstrating the **state's evolving strategy in handling mass movements**.

Despite these measures, the government **also attempted to present itself as being open to dialogue**, particularly through *controlled negotiations with select protest leaders, including student unions and civil society representatives*. Union Home Ministry officials met with a delegation of Manipuri activists, promising a **review of AFSPA's enforcement in**

the state and the formation of a high-level committee to investigate allegations of extrajudicial killings. However, many protest leaders dismissed these assurances as **political stalling tactics**, pointing out that similar committees had been formed in the past without leading to any meaningful policy changes. The government's refusal to **commit to a timeline for AFSPA's repeal or amendment** reinforced public skepticism that these negotiations were **merely a temporary measure to defuse tensions rather than a genuine step toward reform**.

Another **controversial aspect** of the government's handling of the protests was the **deployment of military personnel in civilian areas** under the pretext of maintaining order. Reports emerged that *homes were raided, journalists were intimidated, and human rights observers were denied entry into protest zones*, further reinforcing allegations that the state was using force to silence criticism rather than addressing the core grievances of the movement.

While the government publicly maintained that **AFSPA remained essential for counter-insurgency operations**, internal reports suggested that **high-ranking officials were deeply concerned about the growing public discontent and the political ramifications of continued military rule in Manipur**. Leaked government memos indicated that discussions were underway to consider **phasing out AFSPA in a limited capacity, starting with urban centers where insurgency activity had significantly declined**. However, these proposals remained **largely speculative**, with no official commitment to a structured roadmap for AFSPA's repeal.

4. CONTROVERSIES AND INTERNAL DIVISIONS WITHIN THE 2024 PROTEST MOVEMENT

Despite the unprecedented scale and public support for the 2024 protests, the movement was not without **controversies, internal divisions, and allegations of external manipulation**. While the protests were largely

¹⁰⁴⁷ The Indian Express, 'Over 500 Detained as Protests Spread Across Manipur' (2024) <https://indianexpress.com/> accessed 10 March 2025.

¹⁰⁴⁸ The Indian Express, 'Internet Shut Down in Manipur Amid Protests: How It Affects Civil Rights' (2024) <https://indianexpress.com/> accessed 25 March 2025.

seen as a **grassroots movement demanding justice and accountability**, several issues arose that **complicated its legitimacy, divided public opinion, and provided the government with opportunities to discredit the movement.**

4.1 Allegations of Ethnic Bias and Internal Divisions

One of the most controversial aspects of the 2024 protests was the **tensions between different ethnic groups within Manipur**, particularly between the **Meitei-dominated protest leadership and marginalized Kuki and Naga communities**. While AFSPA affects all ethnic groups in Manipur, **some Kuki and Naga leaders accused the protest movement of being primarily Meitei-led**, arguing that it failed to **adequately address the disproportionate military violence faced by non-Meitei communities**.¹⁰⁴⁹

There were **accusations that certain protest leaders were more concerned with the political and economic grievances of the Meitei population**, sidelining the demands of **tribal communities that had suffered decades of displacement and military repression**. This internal division **weakened the movement's collective bargaining power**, as the government capitalized on these ethnic rifts to **present the protests as fragmented and lacking a unified agenda**.¹⁰⁵⁰

4.2 Allegations of Insurgent Infiltration

The government and sections of the media attempted to discredit the movement by claiming that **insurgent groups had infiltrated the protests to destabilize the state and push for separatist agendas**. Several protest organizers were accused of **having links with banned insurgent factions**, allegations that led to **arrests and crackdowns on protest camps**.

¹⁰⁴⁹ "Protests Erupt as Ethnic Conflict Engulfs Manipur"

Al Jazeera, 'Protests Erupt as Ethnic Conflict Engulfs Manipur' (2024) <https://liberties.aljazeera.com/en/protests-erupt-as-ethnic-conflict-engulfs-manipur> accessed 25 March 2025.

¹⁰⁵⁰ "Finding a Way Out of Festering Conflict in India's Manipur"

International Crisis Group, 'Finding a Way Out of Festering Conflict in India's Manipur' (2024) <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/india/346-finding-way-out-festering-conflict-indias-manipur> accessed 25 March 2025.

While **no concrete evidence was presented to support these claims**, these allegations created **fear and hesitation among neutral observers**, with some sections of the population distancing themselves from the movement to **avoid being associated with insurgent activities**.

This **tactic of associating protests with militancy** is not new, as previous anti-AFSPA movements have also been **branded as being led by separatist elements**, allowing the state to **justify its use of force under counter-terrorism laws**. However, many legal experts and civil society groups **dismissed these allegations as deliberate attempts to delegitimize legitimate civilian grievances**.

4.3 Misinformation and Social Media Manipulation

The **role of social media in amplifying the protests** also came under scrutiny, with allegations that **misinformation, fake news, and doctored videos were being circulated to incite violence and escalate tensions**. While social media played a critical role in **mobilizing support and documenting human rights violations**, it also became a **battleground for state-sponsored disinformation campaigns and propaganda efforts to distort the narrative**.

Several government-backed social media accounts began **spreading counter-narratives that portrayed the protests as anarchic, violent, and driven by foreign influence**, seeking to **undermine public sympathy for the movement**. The spread of **misleading claims about "violent rioters" attacking armed forces** provided justification for **harsh crackdowns, mass arrests, and emergency laws restricting public gatherings**.

Despite these challenges, the **core movement remained resilient**, with **protestors emphasizing their commitment to nonviolence, constitutional rights, and democratic engagement**. However, the **controversies surrounding ethnic divisions, insurgent allegations, and misinformation**

campaigns had a lasting impact on the movement's ability to sustain momentum, particularly as government authorities used these controversies to justify increased repression.

THE 2024 PROTESTS: A TURNING POINT OR ANOTHER FORGOTTEN UPRISING?

The 2024 protests against AFSPA in Manipur were among the largest and most organized in the state's history, raising critical questions about *whether they will lead to meaningful policy changes or follow the historical pattern of temporary engagement without substantive reforms*. While the movement succeeded in **reviving the national debate on AFSPA**, securing **international attention**, and forcing the government to **reassess security policies**, it remains unclear whether this momentum will **translate into concrete legislative changes**.

Past movements—such as the **2004 Kangla Fort protests and Irom Sharmila's hunger strike**—also captured global attention but ultimately **failed to achieve AFSPA's repeal**, reflecting the **deep-rooted reluctance of the Indian state to relinquish military control in the Northeast**. The **political, legal, and security complexities surrounding AFSPA's enforcement** make it unlikely that the 2024 protests alone will lead to **immediate repeal**. However, they have created **unprecedented pressure on policymakers**, signaling that the demand for **demilitarization and civilian governance is stronger than ever**.¹⁰⁵¹

As Manipur moves forward, the legacy of the 2024 protests will depend on **whether civil society groups, political leaders, and legal institutions can sustain this momentum** and push for **long-term security sector reforms that prioritize human rights, justice, and democratic accountability over militarized rule**.

¹⁰⁵¹ India Today, 'If You Remember Manipuri Women Only for Nude Protest Against Army, Think Again' (22 January 2019) <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/if-you-remember-manipuri-women-only-for-nude-protest-against-army-think-again-1436411-2019-01-22> accessed 25 March 2025.

6. THE ROLE OF MEDIA AND HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS IN AMPLIFYING THE 2024 PROTESTS

One of the most defining aspects of the **2024 Manipur protests** was the role played by **national and international media, human rights organizations, and independent fact-finding committees** in bringing attention to the movement and countering government narratives. Unlike past protests, where mainstream media coverage was often limited due to **restricted access to conflict zones and state-imposed censorship**, the **widespread digital activism of 2024** ensured that information about **military excesses, civilian casualties, and government repression** was widely disseminated. **Independent news agencies, investigative journalists, and human rights watchdogs played a crucial role in shaping public perception**, ensuring that the voices of Manipuri protestors were not easily silenced.

6.1 National Media Coverage: Shifting the Narrative on AFSPA

The response of **Indian mainstream media** to the 2024 protests was **sharply divided along ideological lines**, reflecting broader political biases in the national security discourse. While **some mainstream news channels actively reported on human rights violations and the demands of the protestors**, others adopted a **more pro-establishment stance, portraying the protests as a security threat and amplifying government claims of insurgent infiltration**. This division in media coverage highlighted the **persistent challenges faced by social movements in India**, where the **framing of protests often determines their public legitimacy and the extent of state repression they encounter**.

Independent media outlets such as **The Wire**¹⁰⁵², **The Print**¹⁰⁵³, **Scroll**¹⁰⁵⁴, and **The Caravan**¹⁰⁵⁵

¹⁰⁵² The Wire, 'Manipur Protests: Voices of Civil Rights and the Fight Against AFSPA' (2024) <https://thewire.in/> accessed 25 March 2025

¹⁰⁵³ The Print, 'Fact-Checking Claims by the Government Amid Manipur Protests' (2024) <https://theprint.in/> accessed 25 March 2025.

played a **critical role in documenting on-ground realities**, conducting **fact-checking investigations on government claims**, and providing a **platform for Manipuri activists, human rights lawyers, and scholars to articulate their perspectives**. These reports were instrumental in **countering the state's narrative, which sought to delegitimize the protests as a security conspiracy rather than a legitimate civil rights movement**.

However, pro-government media outlets **focused on the violent aspects of the protests**, disproportionately highlighting **isolated incidents of vandalism, clashes with security forces, and road blockades**, rather than addressing the **systemic grievances that led to the uprising**. State-sponsored media campaigns attempted to portray the protesters as **anti-national elements**, seeking to delegitimize their demands and reinforce the necessity of AFSPA in maintaining stability. **This media war reflected the broader struggle between civil society activism and state control over narratives surrounding military rule and insurgency in India**.

6.2 International Media and the Globalization of the Anti-AFSPA Movement

The **global human rights community took significant notice of the 2024 protests**, marking a departure from past uprisings, which were largely confined to **domestic political discussions**. Leading international newspapers such as **The Guardian, The New York Times, The Washington Post, and Al Jazeera** published **detailed reports on the movement**, highlighting the long-standing history of human rights violations under AFSPA. **Global news coverage framed the protests within the broader discourse on militarization, colonial-era security laws, and state-sanctioned impunity**, raising critical questions about **India's**

commitment to democratic governance and constitutional protections.

International coverage also drew attention to **India's selective approach to human rights**, pointing out that while **New Delhi often criticizes authoritarian crackdowns in other countries**, it continues to defend AFSPA—a law that enables state violence in its own territories. This double standard was widely debated in **academic and policy circles**, with some analysts arguing that **India's credibility as a global leader in democracy and human rights is weakened by its continued enforcement of AFSPA in the Northeast**.

The **involvement of the Manipuri diaspora in Western countries** further helped in internationalizing the movement, as protests were organized outside **Indian embassies in Washington, London, Berlin, and Toronto**. Manipuri activists engaged with **United Nations (UN) human rights bodies, European Union (EU) representatives, and Amnesty International**, calling for **international pressure on India to review AFSPA's human rights implications**. While diplomatic actors refrained from **direct intervention**, the global outcry exerted **additional pressure on the Indian government to reconsider its stance on military governance in the Northeast**.

6.3 Human Rights Organizations and Independent Fact-Finding Reports

Human rights organizations played a crucial role in **providing legal documentation, advocacy, and fact-based reporting on military abuses under AFSPA**. Organizations such as **Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC)** issued **strongly worded statements condemning the use of lethal force against protesters and the suppression of press freedoms during the movement**.

One of the most impactful reports came from a **joint fact-finding committee composed of Indian and International human rights groups**, which conducted **on-the-ground interviews**

¹⁰⁵⁴ Scroll.in, 'Ground Realities in Manipur: Documenting the Human Rights Perspective' (2024) <https://scroll.in/> accessed 25 March 2025.

¹⁰⁵⁵ The Caravan, 'Countering State Narratives: The Role of Media in the 2024 Manipur Protests' (2024) <https://caravanmagazine.in/> accessed 25 March 2025.

with victims, legal experts, and civil society representatives. The report presented a **damning indictment of the government's response**, accusing the state of:

- **Carrying out mass detentions of young protestors without due process.**
- **Using excessive force, including the unlawful firing of live ammunition against demonstrators.**
- **Systematically targeting journalists and human rights defenders documenting the protests.**
- **Enforcing a near-total information blackout in certain districts through prolonged internet shutdowns.**

The findings of this report were **submitted to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC)** and were widely referenced in **global discussions on militarization and state repression in India's conflict zones.** Despite these revelations, the government **dismissed the report as biased and politically motivated**, refusing to initiate any formal investigations into its claims.

7. POLITICAL AND LEGAL CONSEQUENCES: DID THE 2024 PROTESTS LEAD TO POLICY SHIFTS?

The key question that emerged in the aftermath of the **2024 protests** was whether the movement would lead to **meaningful policy changes regarding AFSPA**, or if it would follow the **historical pattern of temporary engagement without substantive reforms.**

7.1 Short-Term Government Responses and Political Reactions

In response to mounting public and international pressure, the government announced a **high-level committee to "review" AFSPA's enforcement in Manipur.** However, similar committees in the past—including the **Justice Jeevan Reddy Committee (2005), which recommended the repeal of AFSPA**—had been largely ignored, leading many to believe that this latest committee was **merely a political diversion rather than a serious effort to reconsider the law.**

At the same time, opposition political parties used the protests as a **platform to challenge the ruling government's handling of human rights issues**, with national leaders making **campaign promises to revisit AFSPA's legal framework.** However, given India's **historical reluctance to alter its national security policies**, there remained skepticism about whether these promises would translate into **legislative action once elections concluded?**

7.2 Long-Term Implications for AFSPA's Future

While the **2024 protests did not result in the immediate repeal of AFSPA**, they succeeded in **reviving national discourse on its necessity, human rights implications, and long-term viability.** Unlike previous movements, this uprising demonstrated **unprecedented public engagement**, bringing together a diverse range of voices—including students, journalists, political leaders, and international human rights groups—to challenge the dominant security narrative.

The protests forced **government think tanks and security experts to reconsider alternative counter-insurgency models**, particularly in light of India's **economic and diplomatic aspirations.** Some policymakers have begun discussing **gradual demilitarization strategies**, including:

- **Phased withdrawal of AFSPA from non-conflict zones.**
- **Increasing civilian oversight over military operations.**
- **Strengthening judicial accountability mechanisms to prevent impunity.**

However, given the **deep-seated institutional resistance to reforming military laws**, it remains unclear whether these discussions will **materialize into actual policy changes** or simply serve as **damage-control rhetoric following the protests.**

7.3 Could Future Movements Achieve What the 2024 Protests Could Not?

If history is any indicator, the struggle against AFSPA is unlikely to **end with a single protest movement**. However, the **lessons learned from 2024—especially regarding digital activism, international engagement, and multi-ethnic collaboration—could shape the strategies of future resistance movements**. The 2024 protests **set a precedent for coordinated civil resistance against military rule**, reinforcing the idea that **AFSPA's days as an unquestioned legal doctrine are numbered**. While AFSPA **remains in force**, the 2024 protests have left an **indelible mark on India's security discourse**, proving that **civilian voices cannot be permanently suppressed**. Whether these protests will **lead to lasting change depends on the continued pressure exerted by civil society, legal experts, and political stakeholders in the years to come**.

CONCLUSION

The 2024 protests in Manipur emerged as a defining moment in the discourse surrounding the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958—revealing the widening chasm between national security imperatives and the lived realities of those subjected to militarized governance. Unlike earlier, fragmented movements, this uprising represented a collective civic awakening driven by decades of frustration over systemic impunity, economic marginalization, and the silencing of democratic dissent.

The protest's strength lay in its coordination across ethnic lines, the mobilization of youth and civil society, and the unprecedented use of digital platforms to circumvent traditional barriers of state censorship. Its resonance extended beyond Manipur's borders, capturing international attention and reigniting long-suppressed questions about AFSPA's legality, morality, and place in a modern constitutional framework.

Though the government's immediate response fell into a familiar pattern—suppress dissent, stall dialogue, and protect military immunity—the scale and momentum of the 2024 movement have clearly shifted the narrative. Even without immediate legislative reform, the protest succeeded in dismantling the normalization of AFSPA, forcing it back into public and policy debate.

In essence, while AFSPA remains intact, the 2024 protests transformed it from a distant policy concern into a pressing national issue. They rekindled the demand for human rights, civilian oversight, and democratic accountability in India's conflict regions. The road ahead may be gradual and contested, but the legacy of this movement is enduring—it has ensured that the call for justice in Manipur can no longer be ignored or forgotten.

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