# Manipur’s illicit poppy cultivation threatens environment and security, calls for urgent action



The northern Indian state of Manipur is facing a significant challenge with the widespread illicit cultivation of poppy, raising concerns about environmental degradation, governance issues, and national security implications. Despite multiple efforts by law enforcement agencies, the problem persists and has intensified in recent years, calling for urgent and sustained intervention.

A comprehensive report by the Manipur Remote Sensing Application Center (MAR-SAC), based on satellite imagery collected from September 2023 to January 2024, estimates that poppy cultivation currently spans approximately 11,288 acres across 141 clusters in the hill districts of Manipur. Notably, the Noney District, which was not previously known for poppy growing, has now emerged as a site of cultivation. Satellite data also indicates that poppy fields are increasingly being relocated to more remote, forested, and mountainous regions, complicating efforts at detection and eradication by state authorities.

The environmental impact of this expansion is severe. Indian State of Forest Reports (ISFR) from 2019, 2021, and 2023 reveal that Manipur has lost 883.30 square kilometres of forest cover between 1987 and 2022, with over 91 per cent of this deforestation occurring in the last six years, a period that coincides with a rise in poppy cultivation. Such rapid deforestation has significant ecological consequences and undermines the state’s natural resources.

The Safe Environment Campaign Committee (SECC), based in Heingang, conducted an independent survey during 2020–2021 to investigate the root causes and consequences of illicit poppy farming. Their findings were submitted to various central and state authorities, including the Union Home Minister and the Chief Minister of Manipur, through official representations in February 2021 and January 2022. Despite these efforts, no substantive action has followed. Subsequently, a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) was filed in the Manipur High Court on 25th March 2022. In response, the court ruled on 18th February 2025, recommending the formation of a High-Level Committee tasked with overseeing efforts to eradicate poppy cultivation.

However, multiple hurdles impede effective eradication. These include issues such as:

* Lack of transparency, as official reports of poppy destruction often conflict with field observations, and media coverage of eradication drives is minimal.
* Corruption and collusion, with reports indicating that only harvested fields or small areas are destroyed, leaving substantial plantations untouched.
* Difficult terrain, which restricts access to newly relocated poppy farms situated in rugged, remote areas.
* Economic factors, as poppy farming provides returns approximately fifteen times higher than conventional crops, making farmers hesitant to switch livelihoods despite alternative proposals.
* Cross-border dynamics, with the porous Indo-Myanmar border facilitating the movement of narcotics and migrant labourers involved in cultivation.
* Weak governance and political apathy, highlighted by numerous First Information Reports (FIRs) but few significant arrests or convictions.
* Limited enforcement of legal frameworks, notably the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, which until 2020 had not led to any arrests; even since then, no convictions have been recorded.
* A nexus involving insurgents, village chiefs, and drug cartels, with armed militants reportedly taxing farmers and providing protection, while local leaders allegedly orchestrate parts of the illicit cultivation network.
* Absence of independent monitoring of eradication efforts and lack of documented land ownership complicate enforcement.
* Inadequate application of environmental laws by the Manipur Forest Department, resulting in further degradation contrary to Article 48A of the Indian Constitution, which mandates state protection of forests and wildlife.

These interlinked problems have exacerbated the drug crisis among youth in the region and undermined state governance. In response to this multifaceted crisis, the SECC has made an urgent appeal to the Honourable Governor of Manipur, recommending the formation of a High-Level Monitoring Committee to oversee year-round anti-poppy initiatives. Proposals include enhanced enforcement of the NDPS Act, improved surveillance measures through satellite and drone technologies, and efforts to dismantle the alliance between insurgents, village chiefs, and drug networks.

Mutum Inaobi Singh, Chairman of the Safe Environment Campaign Committee and author of the analysis, emphasises the critical need for political will, transparency, and a long-term strategy to tackle the issue. "The time for symbolic gestures has passed. The future of Manipur’s environment and security depends on meaningful and sustained action," he states.

This report was published by The Sangai Express and webcast on 27th April 2025. The detailed findings underline the complexity of illicit poppy cultivation in Manipur and its far-reaching consequences, suggesting that multi-tiered intervention is essential to address the ongoing crisis.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/exclusive-end-of-opium-poppy-farming-in-manipur-soon-marsac-data-using-satellite-imagery-indicates-so-5439079> - This article supports the claim of reduced opium poppy cultivation in Manipur, highlighting a significant decrease in cultivation areas due to government efforts and satellite imaging by MARSAC. It also mentions the 'war on drugs' campaign in the state.
2. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2024/Dec/02/manipur-goes-hard-destroys-poppy-plantations-in-19135-acres-in-last-seven-years> - This article confirms the extensive destruction of opium poppy plantations in Manipur, with over 19,135 acres destroyed between 2017 and 2024, and highlights the ongoing challenge of illicit cultivation in the state's hill districts.
3. <http://cbn.nic.in/en/opium/overview/> - This webpage provides information on licit opium cultivation in India, contrasting with the illicit cultivation discussed in the article. It emphasizes the legal aspects of opium cultivation nationwide.
4. <https://economictimes.com/news/india/3010-acres-of-illegal-poppy-cultivation-destroyed-in-manipur-governor/articleshow/108083224.cms> - This article discusses the efforts to destroy illegal poppy cultivation in Manipur and notes the reduction in cultivated areas over recent years, reflecting the state's ongoing 'war on drugs'.
5. <https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afghanistan_Drug_Insights_V1.pdf> - Though not directly related to Manipur, this document highlights global trends in opium poppy cultivation, providing context on how different regions are dealing with similar challenges of illicit cultivation.
6. <https://www.indianforestsurvey.org/forest-reports/previous-frs/forest-report-2019.pdf> - This report from the Indian Forest Survey supports the claim of significant forest cover loss in India, aligning with the environmental impacts mentioned for Manipur. However, note that specific data for Manipur's recent losses would require the latest reports.
7. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMixAFBVV95cUxQdlhocWtwejRVVk55bzB0eEU5WjdqYnd1OUJPaXN0bTZlUV9HajJMNEhoZURkcFNzbTJabTlnRmlmbTNRTnUwVlBQTVBSTjBjR0ItUEdQRlM2QXRtM1ZHWVFhMW1nM2UtMkhpQ1F4TTM4dUVSOEwzZ1FHTmZoVkJZMkdHckxHai1tdXZqcmtLWE52M05UT21ET2RGcEh0TWVlcmJoOTFMSkRWeVRKbDFSRFhIM09YbVNwQVF1UE5ld2RQR3Nm?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data