

Manipur's Ima market

November 28, 2022

In news— External Affairs minister visited Manipur's Ima market and called it a “great example of nari shakti (women's power) powering economic growth”.

What is special about Manipur's Ima market?

- **Ima Keithel, or Mothers' Market, is an all-women market, said to be the largest such shopping complex in Asia.**
- A unique all women's market, having 3,000 “Imas” or mothers who run the stalls, it is split [into] two sections on either side of the road.
- Vegetables, fruits, fish and household groceries are sold on one side and exquisite handlooms and household tools on the other.
- Not far away is a street where beautiful wicker works and basketry are sold.
- **Male vendors and shopkeepers are barred here.** In 2018, the state government announced that legal action would be taken under the Manipur Municipalities Act, 2004 if any male vendor was found selling goods at the market.
- While the Keithel was earlier a collection of stalls, in 2010, the government moved it to the Khwairamband Bazaar, where it has taken a more organised and safer shape.
- **The Ima Market is centuries-old, and has its origins in Lallup Kaba, an ancient bonded labour system.**
- Under the system, **Meitei men had to compulsorily serve some time working in the military** and on other civil projects, keeping them away from home.
- The women, thus, were left to manage on their own, and they developed a market system which is today the Ima Keithel.
- While the system is centuries-old, it had continued till the time of the British.

- Policies of the British government had interfered with the functioning of the Ima market too, but were met with stiff resistance from the women.

Meitei people-

- **The Meitei people, also known as the Manipuri people, is the predominant ethnic group of Manipur** in Northeast India.
- **They speak Meitei language**, one of the 22 official languages of the Indian Republic and the sole official language of Manipur.
- The Meiteis primarily settled in the Imphal Valley region in modern-day Manipur, though a sizable population has settled in the other Indian states of Assam, Tripura, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Mizoram.
- There is also a notable presence of Meitei in the neighboring countries of Myanmar and Bangladesh.