

VIEWING INDIAN POLITY FROM THE PRISM OF MANIPUR

A Compendium on the
Continuing Manipur Conflict and Crisis

Compiled by
Dr. Syeda Hameed
Clifton D' Rozario

In Association with



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FACTS ABOUT NORTH EAST INDIA



PREFACE

“Viewing Indian Polity from the Prism of Manipur: A Compendium on the continuing Manipur Conflict and Crisis” which is in your hands is an effort by a number of persons and organisations who are not only seriously concerned about what is happening in Manipur but also in Northeast and the country. They are also deeply worried about the denial of dignity, democratic rights of all the citizens, especially those who do not subscribe to the present regime. Above all, this compendium in your hand is the timely contribution of all those who are deeply concerned that the conflict in Manipur between the majority Meitei community and the Kuki-Chin minority has reached the stage of unprecedented ethnic segregation, while violence continues unabated for more than 10 months now from 3rd May 2023. Meanwhile this abysmal reality of Manipur fades from public consciousness and slowly disappears from the minds and discourses of Indians.

This ongoing violence in Manipur has been variously called as a civil war, genocide, pogrom, low intensity war, ethnic cleansing, etc. It is also said that this is an ethnic conflict with two ethnic groups at war in Manipur. Those who have been following the violence in Manipur as well as northeast India, allege that, whatever the justifications of the Meitei narrative, this is a State-sponsored campaign targeting the Kuki community which is also facing violence perpetrated by radicalized Meitei armed groups such as Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun. This they argue that since the Chief Minister of Manipur is from Meitei community, the Meiteis get protected while the Kukis are at the receiving end.

Or maybe it is proper to state that it a consequence of the divisive politics of the Union and State governments which are pitting ethnic groups against each other – a State orchestrated conflict. This violence is nothing but a manifestation of struggles over claims to autochthony and belonging and the Union and State governments have opportunistically taken advantage of historical differences to further its political ambitions and entrench its communal agenda in Manipur’s society and polity.

Even as the violence broke out from 3rd May, news to most Indians used to trickle in bits and pieces. The viral video on 19th July 2023, of the sexual assault on two Kuki women being paraded naked and taken into a field, brought the situation in Manipur to the forefront. The video triggered outrage throughout India, with protests organised in various cities. It was also an international news which discredited the country. As reported the Chief Minister, instead of swinging into action acknowledged that there have been hundreds of such cases and FIRs.

It is hard fact that the government of Manipur has been unable to bring the situation under control. The actions and statements of the Manipur government including the Chief Minister N. Biren Singh have given credence to allegations of their partisanship and complicity in the ongoing violence. The Prime Minister refuses to visit Manipur and only made a statement when the sexual assault video went viral. Given the fact that it is the same party in power at the state and centre, there is no escaping the common sense that the Union governments is hand in gloves with the state

government to maintain the crisis and conflict and reap the fruit of it.

Heading into March 2024 the situation remains grim in Manipur with no respite from the conflict and violence. It is at this juncture, some of us felt that need to bring out a compendium of four reports which are by teams from different backgrounds, different socio-political affiliations but who were and are concerned with the crisis, conflict and violence that is continuing there. All these four reports, like many other reports, were aimed at bringing out the narratives of various segments of the population of Manipur and try to make the facts to speak for themselves. All these teams took the risk of travelling to what is essentially a conflict zone, to meet with the people, bureaucracy and state government. Their reports have played a vital role in putting out to the public the current reality in Manipur. Remember that the internet ban, partisan media coverage and lack of accountability and information from the Union and State governments, meant that people outside the State were left with no credible sense of events unfolding on ground in Manipur.

This compendium is also aimed at reminding people of the ongoing crisis and conflict in Manipur; an effort to not let people forget the injustices and inhumanities heaped on the people there. With regard to Indians, if we fail to take serious note of what is happening in Manipur, we would also miss out all that is happening in India now. An all round attempt to destroy the Constitution, country and citizens is staring at our face. Hence, we need to examine the factors and forces behind the crisis, conflict and violence in Manipur so that we can understand northeast and by extension, India.

The first section in this compendium is the report by an all women team titled, 'Who Gains and Who Loses?'. This report tries to capture the anguished narratives of those affected by violence. Further, this report also raises the question 'what we should be thinking about the violence' which leads us to make a response.

The second in the selection is 'Report of the Fact Finding Mission on Media's Reportage of the Ethnic Violence in Manipur: Editor's Guild of India'. This report as the title indicates is totally focused on the role of media in reporting the violence particularly the concern that the media in Manipur was playing a partisan role in

the ongoing ethnic conflict. On July 12, 2023, when the conflict had already been going on for a little over two months, the EGI also received a written complaint from the Indian Army's 3rd Corps headquarters citing specific examples of the media in Manipur suggesting that it may be playing "a major role in arousing passion and not letting sustainable peace to come in". It is significant to note that the Chief Minister of Manipur N. Biren Singh on 4th September said at a press conference that his government had filed a First Information Report (FIR) against the president and three members of the EGI and accused them of trying to provoke clashes in the State.

The third report is 'Violence in Manipur, Northeast India: Investigative Report to the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance'. As the report states, 'At the 15th May 2023 meeting of the Council of Experts to the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance (IRFBA), concerns were raised about the recent violence in Manipur, following which this investigative report was prepared in the month of July, 2023. With eye witness testimonies, this report captures the violence that was unleashed and the consequences there after.

The last in the series of this compendium is the report titled, "Manufacturing Ethnic Segregation and Conflict: A Report on the Violence in Manipur" by the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation, All India Progressive Womens Association (AIPWA) and All India Lawyers Association for Justice (AILAJ). This lengthy report presents a comprehensive perspective of the ongoing violence, as it is a product of visits to various affected areas in the valley districts of Imphal and Bishnupur, and the hill districts of Kangpokpi and Churachandpur to meet persons from all walks of life in Manipur including victims of violence residing in relief camps, representatives of civil society organisations, prominent political leaders, legal professionals, media professionals, retired bureaucrats, a senior police official and Smt. Anusuiya Uikey, the Governor of Manipur.

There are many more reports about the ongoing violence in Manipur. There are also reports from Meitei and Kuki organisations. But only these four are chosen so as to present the various narratives as they emerge. All these reports also give concrete and valuable suggestions. It is hoped that those in power centres both in the State and Union governments would care to look at these and initiate dialogue with various individuals, groups,

communities, institutions both formal and informal so that the violence can be curtailed and eventually stopped and thus paving the way for normalcy in the state of Manipur.

We are grateful to the following members and organisations for giving us the necessary permission to reproduce their reports in this compendium Dr. Syeda Hameed: Mentor - Bharat Jodo Abhiyan, Founder member South Asians For Human Rights; Dr. Roshmi Goswami: National Council Member Bharat Jodo Abhiyan, Co-Chair South Asians For Human Rights, Co-founder, North East Network; Jarjum G Ete : All India Union of Forest Working Group; Angela Rangad : TUR - Thma U Rangli Juki, KAM Meghalaya; Seema Guha, Sanjay Kapoor, Bharat Bhushan of Editors' Guild of India and its President Ananth Nath; David Campanale, Chair of this Investigative Report and Member of the Council of Experts to IRFBA; Clifton D' Rozario (CPIML Central Committee member and Party State Secretary, Karnataka), Krishnaveni (All India Progressive Women's Association), Du. Saraswathi (Dalit rights activist and prominent cultural activist, Karnataka), Sucheta De (CPIML Central Committee Member, Delhi), Bibek Das (CPIML Central Committee member and Party State Secretary, Assam), Pratima Engheepi (CPIML Central Committee Member and AIPWA leader, Karbi Anglong), Avani Chokshi (AILAJ and CPIML activist), Madhulika T. (AILAJ).

We are grateful to Mr. Derek O'Brien, Member of Parliament, All India Trinamool Congress Party, Dr.

Syeda Hameed of Muslim Women's Forum, Dr. Harsh Mander of Karwan-e-Mahobbat and Irfan Engineer of Centres for Secular Studies for writing four different Forewords to capture different narratives related to Manipur conflict. We express our gratitude to *Karawan-e-Mahobbat*, Muslim Women's Forum and Delhi Solidarity Group who were gracious in doing a joint publication of the compendium. Vijayan and Priyadarshini were a big support. We gratefully acknowledge the contribution of Prof. K.L. Mehra, a Mathematical Scientist for his support at this critical time.

Finally, we are grateful to Mr. Yadav of Manak Publications of Delhi and his team for doing everything to get these different reports into the compendium form. If not for Mr. Yadav, we would not have been able to bring out this compendium in this short time. We thank everyone who have been part of this small endeavours.

Above all, we bow before the people of Manipur, especially those who were and are forced to take the brunt of state sponsored violence, yet hold on to the great culture and tradition of Manipur, and uphold constitutional and democratic values, without losing hope in the possibility of unity, peace, happiness and life itself. We salute all those individuals and agencies who have been standing solidly in solidarity with the affected people of Manipur. May justice, reconciliation, peace and humanity prevail.

Dr. Syeda Hameed
Clifton D'Rozario

MANIPUR'S BEST ATHLETES



sportskeeda

STATEMENT BY ALL INDIA TRINAMOOOL CONGRESS (AITC) AT THE ALL-PARTY MEETING ON MANIPUR (BELATEDLY CALLED BY THE HOME MINISTER)

To boost the confidence of the people of Manipur and to provide the healing touch, the All India Trinamool Congress demands that an all-party delegation be sent to Manipur, in the next one week. The message till now from the Union Government has been one of ignoring; that needs to change to healing, caring, restoring peace and harmony.

A situation like this has never arisen since independence

On 4 June, a seven-year-old boy, his mother, and a relative were burnt alive in an ambulance by a mob. The boy was being taken to a hospital after receiving bullet injuries.

This is one story. There are thousands of other such heart-wrenching stories. Manipur is in a treacherous situation, and the Union Government has failed miserably. When Manipur burns, Assam is affected, Meghalaya is affected, the entire North-East is affected. The whole nation is affected. Is the Union Government trying to turn Manipur into Kashmir?

There is a pervading sense of hopelessness, fear, and desperation in the state. Precious lives have been lost. Students are affected, they cannot attend schools or colleges or appear for national entrance exams. Patients are affected, they cannot be moved to hospitals or access

other healthcare services. Prices of essential commodities have skyrocketed. People live in fear. Over 4000 houses have been attacked and destroyed, 60,000 people have been displaced. Internet services have been suspended indefinitely across the state for over 50 days, violating the Supreme Court judgment. There is complete collapse of the constitutional machinery in the State.

The Home Minister visited Manipur (albeit after almost four weeks since the violence began), but he only went to the camps, and met selected people. He heard only the echo chamber. He did not meet the people on the streets who have been affected, who are living through the trauma. The three-day visit by the Home Minister did not improve the situation at all. In fact, it deteriorated after that.

No response to the crisis

Examine these dates

29 May: Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee writes a letter to the Home Minister requesting permission to travel to Manipur for a one day visit. No response from the Minister in over three weeks.

15 June: Derek O'Brien, leader of the AITC Parliamentary Party (Rajya Sabha), writes a letter requesting an urgent meeting of the Parliament Home Affairs Committee to discuss the crisis in Manipur.

21 June: Office of Mamata Banerjee receives acknowledgement of her letter from the Home Minister (just an acknowledgement of receipt after three weeks, nothing more!). The Home Minister announces an all-party meeting on the same day.

21 June: Chairman of the Parliament Committee on Home Affairs replies that due to the “next series of meetings, it is difficult to hold a discussion on the issue raised.” There are serious issues of insurgency, land ownership, law and order. These have to be addressed in a sensitive manner. Peaceful resolution can be achieved only through discussions involving all stake-holders. By regaining the confidence of the people in Manipur, and the North-East.

The conflict, which began as an ethnic issue, has now taken a sharp communal turn. As many as 250

churches and 17 temples have been burnt, damaged, and destroyed by mobs on a rampage. Just trite photo opportunities between the Prime Minister, the Home Minister, and church leaders are not the solution.

The Union Government has to decide whether it wants to create divisions to suit the interests of a political party, or whether it wants to create lasting unity and peace. We are here not to do politics, but to offer constructive suggestions. The Union Government must first acknowledge its failures and course correct. Immediately.

Manipur, the rest of the North-East, and all of India are craving for peace

Courtesy: Derek O’Brien, MP – All India Trinamool Congress

CRY MY BELOVED COUNTRY MANIPUR – FEW FLASHES

On May 3, 2023 massive violence erupted between Meitei and Kuki community in Churachandpur. Today nine months later, more than 200 people have been killed and over 70000 displaced. Even after nine months, violent incidents continue to occur and the state continues to be severely polarised. The Prime Minister has uttered no more than trite platitudes about this massive human tragedy.

Eight months later. Cut to 8 January 2024: Forces ambushed in Moreh. The Manipur town bordering Myanmar turns in to battle ground once again. Security forces repel a militant ambush. Attack on state forces in and around Tengnoupal. More than 31000 (Kuki/Chin) from Manipur have sought shelter in Mizoram since Feb 2021)

Cut to 14 January 2024: Today Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra is being flagged off from Thoubal near Imphal. I think of my own visit to Manipur with three *humsafars* (fellow travelers) on 3 August 2023 three months after the killings began. More about that later. The Manipur CM denied permission to the Yatra to commence from Imphal. He was echoed by his mentor, CM Assam. Regardless, the *yatris* ignored their invectives, placed their trust in the people of India and began their trek from a state which will forever be entrenched in human history as the fulcrum of injustice.

Here is a brief snap shot of Manipur: Manipur, a hill state in the North East bordering Myanmar, has faced various forms of violence over the years. The region has experienced both ethnic and insurgent-related

violence, impacting the lives of the local population. It has been affected by several insurgent groups seeking political autonomy or independence from India. These groups have been involved in armed conflict with the Indian government. Insurgency has resulted in violence, including attacks on security forces, bombings, and clashes between different insurgent groups.

Ten percent of area of the state is Imphal Valley which is inhabited primarily by the Meitei community. Rest are hills on which tribal communities live; Kukis in the North, Nagas in North East. Total population of the state is 3.5 million of which 53 percent are Meitei, mostly Hindus (Sanamahis), small percentage of Muslims and Buddhists. 40 percent are tribals primary Kukis and Nagas who follow Christianity. Non tribals can't own land in the hills without sanction by local district council. State Assembly has 60 seats; 19 reserved for scheduled tribes. BJP has 39 seats and wield State Power. In terms of seat distribution, in 2022 BJP had 32 seats, Congress 5, NPP 7, Naga Peoples Front 5, Independents 3.

In February 2023, the government ran a campaign to uproot forest workers calling them encroachers. They were from three hill districts Churachandpur, Kangpokpi and Tengnoupal. In March the government terminated the truce with Kuki militants. The issue of NRC was also raised. Vocal sections of Meitei community raised a demand for ST status. On 20 April 2023, Manipur High Court passed a verdict directing the state government to work on Meitei's demand. This triggered deep resentment in hill region tribal community. On 3 May, all tribal

communities organised state wide protest. Meitei crowds retaliated. The Government and administration let them lose and clashes broke out between the Meitei and Kuki population in and around Churachandpur district. Brutal atrocities against Kuki women took place. Hundreds of churches were burnt.

There have been allegations of human rights abuses by both security forces and insurgent groups in Manipur. Extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and torture have been reported, leading to gross violation of human rights. Manipur is characterised by a diverse population with various ethnic groups. Inter-ethnic tensions have, at times, escalated into violence, with communities expressing grievances related to issues such as land, resources, and political representation. The civilian population, particularly women and children, have borne the brunt of the violence. Civilian casualties, displacement, and disruptions in daily life have been significant consequences. Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) which grants special powers to the armed forces in conflict zones, has raised grave concerns about human rights abuses.

Images from our visit persist on my mind. We were on our way to Churachandpur. We reached Kwatka Bazar, a Pangal-Muslim village. It was raining. Hundreds of women were sitting in partly covered shelters along the road which led to the 'LoC' which divided Bishnupur from Churachandpur. Hundreds of men swarmed in the area, many with guns. Dead bodies of three Meiteis, father-son and their friend were butchered then shot at 3 AM. They were still lying in the house. 'Pay your respects' someone asked. I covered my head with my namaaz scarf and walked where I saw throngs of women. In their midst was the young wife of the victim. Her anguish reminded me of the intense grief during Moharrum. I

recited the Fatiha. My colleagues bent down to hug her trembling form and let their tears mingle with hers. We heard more shots, cross firing very close; youth with guns slung over shoulders were ubiquitous. My heart lurched. This could be the end; but I could not move. With the massacre at Karbala on my mind I thought, Bishnupur, Churachandpur, Tengnoupal are also Karbala.

A man approached me. Someone said, 'He is Nobo Volcano, beloved Manipuri singer.' In a loud voice he shouted into the cameras being held before his face. 'Modi! We voted you in; in the centre and state. And you? You have betrayed us. You have let us butcher each other, rape and kill our daughters while you and your colleagues are watching us from your far off high *gaddis*.'

Four of us one each from Kashmir, Delhi, Assam, Arunachal, Meghalaya, plus two of the brightest and kindest women from this state who accompanied us, sat in stunned silence. We were just 15 kms from the Line of Control 'LOC', the line between Bishnupur and Churachandpur.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz's lines are a clarion call to all of us who have been witness to the Manipur tragedy:

*Ai zulm ke maato lab kholo
Chup rehne walon chup kab tak
Kuchh hashr to unse uththega
Kuchh dur to naley jaenge*

O victims of violence now speak out
Until when will you remain silent?
Your cries will brew a storm
Your tears will flow far, so far

Syeda Hameed

'AS THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, LET US CARE AND STAND WITH THE MANIPURI PEOPLE'

An Appeal from Harsh Mander to Members of Parliament

To all Members of the Indian Parliament,

I am taking the extraordinary step of writing to all Members of the Indian Parliament after I travelled in Manipur seven months after it had exploded with violence and hate. I encountered there a land still badly broken - smouldering, wounded and aching.

I found first that the informal border that separates the two bitterly warring communities, the Meiteis and Kukis, remains as stubborn and unbending as it was when they first took up arms against the other. Half a dozen check-posts manned by a variety of military, paramilitary and police formations search you for weapons as you pass, like in a war zone.

This informal border between the Meitei valley and Kuki hills is so unyielding that even the ten Kuki MLAs, including a state minister, cannot still cross from the hills into the Imphal valley for fear for their lives. Kuki doctors, nurses, police persons, teachers and other government officials similarly fear that they will be killed if they return to the valley to work, as do Meitei health, education, police and other public officials if they are to journey from the valley to the hills. Public officials have redistributed themselves between the valley and the hills based on their respective identities. Many specialisations lie vacant in the Churachandpur Medical College because Meitei doctors had to flee to the valley and cannot return.

The border is also pitiless. 109 bodies of Kuki men, women and children killed during the violence lay in the mortuary of the medical college in Imphal for seven months, until finally the Supreme Court intervened and bodies of 64 victims were airlifted on 14 December. Up to then no arrangements had been made to secure their safe transport from the valley to the hills, and it was not possible for the families of the dead to travel to Imphal to claim their dead for fear of being murdered along the way. In the mortuary of the Churachandpur Medical College, another 46 bodies lay. The Kuki people awaited the return of the corpses from Imphal before all the killed people were buried side by side in keeping with their customs.

The movement of trucks from the valley to the hills transporting supplies of food and medicine and security personnel have been blockaded all these months. The result is that even the government medical college in Churachandpur is forced to depend only on citizen contributions to secure food and medicines for the patients and medical students. These stocks are delivered after an arduous 14-hour journey through mountain roads from Mizoram instead of the one-hour drive from Imphal.

Wrenching also are the conditions in the 119 relief camps in the hills from which the state is almost entirely absent. An estimated 45500 children, women and men



continue to languish seven months after the savagery began in the most inhospitable makeshift camps to which they fled after their villages and homes were looted and burnt to ashes. The large majority of these camps in the hills are in the courtyards of churches. Food is austere, sanitation primitive and children unschooled.

The loss of the residents in relief camps in both the hills and the valley is profound – of homeland, loved ones, home, friends, trust and an entire way of life. The senior pastor who leads a lot of the relief work spoke to me of the sharp spike in drug usage by young people who found themselves trapped in the darkest of despair. Despair deepens further because people battered by the violence encounter few public expressions of remorse, little legal justice, too small an attempt to confiscate the massive cache of firearms looted from police armouries, and no let-up on the propaganda of hate.

Even after seven months, a very tiny trickle of people has returned to their villages, barely a few hundred. These too are only young men trying to cultivate their fields even at risk to their lives to better feed their families in the camps. People of both communities are convinced that it is impossible for them to return to their old burnt down habitations to live side by side with the estranged community again.

But they also recognise that they cannot live in relief camps forever. The critically urgent task that lies ahead is of reconstructions of homes, habitations, livelihoods, schools and health-centres in locations and ways that communities feel safe to restart and rebuild their lives again. I found that many people subsisting in camps are ready for this. They have detailed plans in place. What they need now is resources to operationalise these plans.

We must of course call upon the central and state governments to open up their purses and massively contribute to these tasks of reconstruction. However, this will take time. The humanitarian imperative is that we must collectively find ways to ensure that children, women and older people do not have to continue to live in relief camps a day longer than is absolutely unavoidable.

It is for this reason that I am reaching out to each of the Members of Parliament to consider contributing a significant grant for this rebuilding process from their discretionary fund of MPLADS (Members of Parliament Local Areas Development Scheme).

For this purpose, I have identified two leading and highly reputed community citizen organisations that work for relief and rehabilitation with the Kuki and Meitei people respectively. These are the Kuki Khanglai Lawmpi, Churachandpur, and the United Voluntary Youth Council, Imphal. Their details are in the annexure to this letter. I have no association of any kind with these organisations. But I have enquired and trust these organisations that they will use every rupee sent to them responsibly for the purpose of rebuilding the homes, habitats, livelihoods, schools and health centres of the people internally displaced as a result of the conflict in the state.

If people's representatives from every corner of the country indeed contribute to the task of rebuilding Manipur, it would constitute a gesture of luminous solidarity of the people of India with the suffering people of Manipur. It would demonstrate that Manipur has not fallen off the national conscience. That the people of India care and stand with the Manipuri people.

Harsh Mander

THE SILENCE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

The ethnic riots in Manipur between Meiteis and Kukis, that were triggered off since 3rd May 2023 following a call for bandh (stoppage of all commercial activities and movements) by the All-Tribal Students Union, Manipur (ATSUM) to protest the Manipur High Court's judgement directing the state government to recommend that Meiteis should be given the status of Scheduled Tribes, were one of the most horrible violent conflicts in India. The ethnic violence engulfed almost entire Imphal valley and Kuki inhabited hill areas in Manipur. It has cost about 180 lives, led to displacement of more than 67,000 people and destruction of properties worth millions of rupees. The social, emotional and mental trauma caused to the survivors of the conflict in particular and the communities in general is incalculable. The riots led to near complete segregation of the two ethnic communities and displacement of Kukis from the Imphal valley and Meiteis from Kuki dominated areas. The violence continued for days with horrible stories of sexual assaults on women. In fact, sporadic violence erupts even now. More than eight months after the riots began, the displaced are still in highly overcrowded relief camps living in horrible conditions with meagre rations and lack of toilets, private space for women. Children in the camps for displaced people are deprived education, playing facilities, and even adequate nutrition. The displaced persons are living in hell like conditions, merely continuing to live like animals. There is no hope that they would be rehabilitated in near future or how long they would have to stay in such conditions.

It is unbelievable that unarmed civilians would loot sophisticated fire arms and ammunitions from the police

armoury. According to the government, more than 4,500 fire arms were 'looted'. No serious attempts have been made to recover these weapons. They are in the hands of militants in a charged atmosphere with heightened animosity between ethnic groups and probably being used.

The Kuki BJP MLA Vungzagin Valte was critical after being attacked by a mob in Imphal because of his ethnic identity. The mob left him for being dead. Two Kuki Cabinet ministers' houses were burnt to ashes. No Kuki government employee in Imphal valley can attend their offices. The 10 Kuki MLAs did not and could not have attended the Manipur Assembly session on August 29, 2023, due to the threat to their lives. In the session, business could be conducted only for 11 minutes before it being adjourned sine die. 6523 FIRs have been filed on the charges of murder, inflicting grievous injuries, sexual assault, outraging modesty of women, desecrating places of worship, arson and destruction of property etc. More than 250 churches have been destroyed and similarly, many Hindu places of worship were desecrated. All this demonstrates that governance cannot be run in Manipur in accordance with the constitution.

Yet, the Prime Minister of India has chosen to remain silent, hasn't visited the state or met the violence afflicted survivors and not even appealed for peace. The opposition had to introduce a no confidence motion in Lok Sabha to make the PM speak on the issue in parliament. The PM spoke only for about 2 minutes and only to condemn the sexual assaults on Kuki women who were later paraded naked and the video of the event becoming viral.

The state government has taken no initiative to restore peace in the state. There is no dialogue between the warring ethnic communities and no attempt to settle the conflict politically or through any process. The state ensured exchange of communities between Imphal valley and Kuki inhabited hill areas. Members of “wrong community” in both areas were forcibly moved out and transported to the relief camps in “their” areas. There is now a “buffer zone” between the valley and the hills – something that is unheard of in India, or perhaps in any civilized country. On road from Imphal to Churachandpur there is a ‘border’ with several check points and levels of security rings manned by Indian Army, BSF, Assam Rifles, Manipuri Police and CRPF and bunkers manned by Meiteis and Kukis in their respective communities. A 70 km long one hour journey from Imphal to Manipur can take more than two hours as vehicles are stopped at all check points manned by many rings of security mentioned above. Vehicles, luggage and identity of the passengers, are checked thoroughly at each security ring. It is easier to cross international borders than to negotiate the borders by proving one’s non-Kukis, and non-Meiteis identity. Kukis and Meiteis are not allowed to cross this border and they would do so in order to commit suicide. For a Kuki living in Churachandpur, the nearest airport is just one hour’s road journey, or two hours’ with check points. However, that is not accessible to them. Their exit gateway from the state by air is through Aizawl airport in Mizoram state, which takes 12 to 14 hours of travel by road.

It is in these circumstances that many human rights organisations (HROs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) have come forward to document the incidents

of violence, and listen to the voices of victims and survivors. These organisations have taken a big risk to document the violence and cross check the facts being reported. A team led by All India Democratic Women’s Association was threatened with arrests by the state government after a FIR was registered against them. This was to deter other CSOs from visiting the state and expose the role of the state in the entire conflict. However, HROs, CSOs and organisations working for peace and harmony visited Manipur, were not deterred. They heard different voices and perspectives of various stake holders and documented them. They documented the voices of survivors, women, community leaders, experts, academics, intellectuals, journalists, legal professionals, those in security forces, bureaucrats and politicians. A credible documentation by non-partisan organisations and bodies is the first step towards reconciliation, resolution of the conflict and peace.

All the four reports look at the ethnic conflict in Manipur from different perspectives and enrich our understanding of the conflict. The authors of all the four reports are known for their expertise, integrity and depth and most important, they are non-partisan. We therefore get Editor’s perspective on how the role of media in the conflict, the all-women’s team unpack the gender aspect in the conflict, besides the general perspective as well, CPI (ML)’s report gives us a comprehensive left’s perspective, analysing the social, economic and political roots of the conflict. We can also draw upon these reports to get a broad framework on peace-building process in intensely polarized situation.

Irfan Engineer

SO THAT WE MAY NOT FORGET

Sunita Paite of Churachandpur of Manipur lamented, “Over 100 bodies of those killed in the violence are rotting in the mortuary of Churachandpur. Some of them are from 4th May, 2023. It is extremely difficult to cross that way”. If this is the case of the dead what is the state of the living. She went on to state, “Medical needs of the people affected by the ongoing conflict are very high but those are not addressed at all. The Chief Medical Officer of Churachandpur does not receive medicine from the government agencies but he is dependent upon welfare agencies for medicine”. People reported that for serious illness and treatment one has to go to Imphal.

But with the blockade imposed by the Meitei population between Bishnupur and Moirang the Kukis cannot travel. If they dare to travel, they would either be shot dead or beheaded.

In Lamka of Churachandpur, the Kukis as per their religious custom bury their dead. But since, these dead did not die in a normal course but in this violent conflict, they have refused to bury their dead and are demanding justice. Hence, they have place over 100 empty coffin boxes at the road side of a main junction in the town. They have called this memorial “Wall of Remembrance”. The people flock to this place to pay



their homage since they call those died due to violence ‘martyrs’.

The violence that began on 3rd May 2023 continues unabated even after 4 months. It looks due to the inability of the Manipur government, the violence would continue for many more months and even years. Maybe it is better to say that since the Manipur and central government planned, financed, executed and continue to refuse to say anything about the ongoing violence and do not show necessary political will to put an end to the ongoing violence, the violence is continuing.

This ongoing violence in Manipur has been called, civil war, genocide, pogrom, low intensity war, etc. It can be stated that there are 2 ethnic groups at war in the northeast. Or maybe it is proper to state that no one group is pitted against the other by the state, centre and Nagpur. Both official and unofficial reports state that around 200 people have lost their lives. Many are still missing and the relatives are waiting for their return. Around 70,000 have become Internally Displaced People in their own land, forced to live with little children, pregnant and lactating women. Some of these camps are in the worst of the conditions. The Youth Hostel in Lamka which has housed around 480 people is at the verge of collapse due to lack of drinking and bathing water. It is also facing huge crisis due to lack of toilets and septic tank. The District Commissioner has expressed his inability to provide water purifiers since these cannot come from Imphal due to the blockade imposed.

Further, over 250 churches and 17 temples were destroyed. More than 4,000 weapons were ‘stolen’ from the police station and armoury by the Meitei underground cadres which were used to shoot the Kukis. Kukis in retaliation procured their own arms. It is reported that

drones are being used by the powerful group to identify the Kuki underground cadres and people to shoot them. From 29th August to 1st September, shooting resumed in Moirang area. Meitei people around that area gathered in thousands to witness the shooting from the road. Human beings are hunting human beings and the government is pretending to not to bother. Moreover, 6,523 FIRs have been registered so far but no action has been taken. The Chief Minister expressed his inability in responding to the situation.

It is significant to note that the heinous crimes committed in this ethnic violence as reported by many orchestrated by the state and central governments would have gone unnoticed by those outside Manipur. Only when the video went viral of the sexual assault which took place on 4th May but became public after 80 days then the world took seriously note of the violence going on in this northeastern state. While the citizens of the country, some of the media, politicians, human rights activists condemned these crimes and demanded from the government to save the affected, punish the guilty and establish peace and harmony in Manipur. But till date nothing has happened.

There seemed to be some let up from the Meitei and Kuki side. But blocking of the road by the women-led vigilante groups have given a death blow to travel, transportation of people and essential items. In the past, the women blocked around six arterial roads rendering many parts of the state inaccessible. The blockade by the Meitei women continues from Bishnupur to Moirang and beyond making it difficult to travel from Imphal to Churachandpur and other Kuki areas. If this blockade are removed then one can reach from Imphal valley to Churachandpur within 4.30 hours. But due to the





blockade, now one has to come to Churachandpur and other hill areas through Aizawl which takes more than a day. It is also risky to travel on that road since the road is bad and with rain vehicles overturn causing huge damage.

There are at least six arterial roads that have been blocked completely. They are Bishnupur-Churachandpur; Thoubal-Nangjing; Thoubal-Yairipok; Yairipok-Chandrakong; Kakching-Lamkai, and Uripok-Iroisemba. There is a pattern to these blockades. Whenever a village or a property is to be targeted, around 200-300 women block the road. A mob that follows them then carries out the violence. Even if the affected villagers make distress calls, the forces are unable to reach,” the source said. The source said that on June 12 and 13, when Kuki villages were being burnt by a Meitei mob in Kangpokpi, women protestors blocked the movement of the Army contingent from Imphal to the affected areas. Army personnel marched on foot to reach the affected areas in Kangpokpi district.

Anyone who dares to travel from Imphal to Churachandpur, would feel that he or she is travelling in a war zone. Bunkers have been made not by law enforcing agencies but by the people. If the army personnel

manage to reach those areas and clear the bunkers, the next day it is back in the same place. But what is even more deplorable is that whenever any attack of the Kukis by the Meiteis have to take place, it is planned well. The underground cadres march ahead to attack the Kukis while 200 to 300 women make a unformidable blockade not to let the army to go and enforce law and order. This is the case, even 8 months have passed after the beginning of violence. Even if the people who are surrounded by those who are coming to attack them make distress call to the army, the army cannot reach on time to save them.

In a state which has just 28 lac population and limited geographical area, it is a matter of few days for the state government to enforce law and order through the army. But as has been alleged by vast segment of Indian population and international observers that the ongoing violence is a state orchestrated violence, neither the state government nor the central government are taking the necessary steps to counter violence. The Chief Minister of Manipur expressed his inability to handle this crisis. What is even worst is that one Kuki minister who after meeting the Chief Minister was coming out of the CM’s house was attacked and was set on fire. Vungzagin Valte a BJP MP sustained grievous injuries when a mob attacked him in Imphal. Valte is undergoing treatment in Delhi. None of the BJP members visited him in the hospital.

The immediate reason that triggered off the violence between the Meiteis who constitute 53% of the population and Kukis 16% was the attempt by the BJP government of Manipur to give Scheduled Tribe Status to the Meiteis. It is reported that Meiteis were Tribals and in 1700 they were converted to Hinduism by the Bengali and Assam Hindu priests. The Meiteis mainly live in Imphal valley while the Kukis like the Nagas and other Tribals live in the hills. With the expansion of the



population, the Meiteis are eyeing the mountains for land and expansion. This is being opposed by Kukis and Nagas. Protesting against the move to give ST status to the Meiteis the Kukis took out a protest march on 3rd May in Churachandpur. Trying to counter this the Meiteis went on an attacking spree of the Kukis wherever they are, especially in Imphal Valley and buffer zones.

But this was only a triggering point. Conflict has been there between these ethnic groups and other ethnic groups for many decades for land and natural resources. While the Meiteis control the Imphal valley and adjacent areas, the Tribals control the hills. There is deep-seated resentment and distrust among these ethnic groups. The government instead of addressing these issues has fuelled it for its own electoral interest. The ongoing violence will further deepen the distrust and resentment among these segments of the population of the state.

There have been many reports which have been exposing and explaining the fact that with the ascent of BJP in Manipur in particular and northeast in general had its impact not only on polity but in society, economy, culture, education and finally religious harmony. The Wire in its article, 'BJP's Communal Politics Has Deepened Historical Conflicts in Manipur' captures some of the facts and forces behind the crisis and conflict in the past and the violence now. In the 1980s, Manipur as a whole was categorised as 'disturbed' and brought under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), 1958. Disregarding the cauldron of internal divisions, Manipuris' focused on the 'external threat', the '*mayangs*' (a disparaging reference to Indians) rather than consolidating their pluralistic identity.

Congress MLA Alfred Kanngam Arthur exposed facts about disproportionate budget allocation between the hills and the valley. Between 2016 and 2021, from a budget allocation of Rs 22,000 crore in plan funds, the tribals received less than Rs 500 crore. There is also political and economic asymmetry as 20 MLAs represent the hill areas as opposed to 40 from the Valley. The state refutes allegations of large-scale corruption and diversion of funds designated for tribal welfare. The Kuki people report huge everyday inconveniences owing to lack of basic facilities and development. Increasing poverty makes buying essentials unaffordable.

Meiteis always held the upper hand in Manipur. Their demand to be recognised as Scheduled Tribes is

dubious. Tribal communities see through the ploy as an attempt to acquire domination over the hill areas. The hills have a measure of autonomy because of their ST status. The Constitution and other laws safeguards tribal rights through special provisions for the hill areas of Manipur. Other laws prohibit tribal lands from being transferred to non-tribals.

Tribal communities feel that the BJP-led state government is participating in perilous communal politics by backing the Meiteis as 'Hindus' against the hill people who are predominantly tribals and Christians. Hindu nationalism is the reason why there is growing religious fundamentalism in the valley. The religious extremism of the majority community feeds minority religious subjugation. Meitei youth have now organised themselves under the banner of an organisation called *Arambai Tengol*. The BJP has appropriated the traditional religions in the North East under their banner.

One of the factors which keep coming up constantly in Manipur is identity and ownership of resources. People have repeatedly spoken, written and argued that land distribution and unjust political representation in favour of the Meitei community are escalating tensions in the region. Instead of resolving these issues, the present state and central government have been adding fuel to the fire for short term political gains.

Political analysts say the rise in Meitei nationalism coincides with the BJP assuming power in the state in 2017. There are stark similarities between the militias' tactics and Hindutva outfits that are blamed for Ram Navami procession violence in several parts of the country.

Attacks on the Kuki community and churches follow the blueprint of violence against minorities elsewhere in India. Radicalised young people from these groups have caused upheaval by setting Kuki homes and shops on fire. The outfits that organised and carried out these attacks obviously had the government's backing. How else did they obtain addresses of Kuki households? The vigilantes reportedly marked these homes with red paint before launching targeted attacks.

Kukis blame the BJP government's "politics of hate" for the communal strife. There are visuals of the Meitei militias entering police stations and police training centres and capturing armouries while cops watch on. Kukis had meanwhile been disarmed in a planned

manner months before these attacks. Kukis are primarily a hunting community and many retain licensed arms. These were confiscated by the administration, illustrating that the attacks were premeditated and Kukis were left vulnerable.

Even as a passing note one should say something about the response of the state so far. At the start of the violence, there was a notable silence from the central government. This elicited criticism from opposition parties, which have accused the BJP of focusing more on the upcoming elections and using silence to foster violence. With the violence ongoing for nearly one month, India's Home Minister Amit Shah arrived in Manipur for a four-day visit aimed at "restoring normalcy" to the state, while India's chief of army staff also visited Manipur to assess the situation. At a press conference in Manipur on June 1, Shah announced that a judicial probe that would "investigate the violence" on behalf of the central government, led by a retired High Court judge. He further announced the creation a peace committee between members of different communities, additional fencing on the Myanmar border, and called for the return of an estimated 1,420 weapons looted from local police since the start of the clashes.

Even after eight months, only one of the Home Minister's proclamation has been put into action. That is, fencing on the Myanmar border. This is on the pretext of people of Myanmar crossing over to Manipur whom the state and central government terms 'infiltrators'. This is a short sighted response to massive problem that has been going on for ages. Fencing the border is only one response but ensuring that the border dispute with Myanmar should be settled first and foremost is not in the purview of the government.

It is significant to note that Moreh town is the major border trading hub in the North Eastern Region (NER). The region is considered as the gateway to South, South East Asian and ASEAN economies. It has an immense potential for international trade and commerce through its borders thereby developing the local economy and people living at the borders. It is mostly occupied by Kuki tribals. Instead of developing this into a business hub under the 'Look East' policy with the people who have been there for ages, now there are attempts made to move the Kukis out and settle the Meiteis there. Manipur police and army are as reported pressed into this task.

This would continue to escalate violence not only in the hill region but in the entire Manipur and its fall out would be in northeast.

One of the parents in the hills lamented the fact that our children and youth are badly affected by the ongoing violence. This will have long lasting impact on their mental framework. If this is the case with the families who are in their homes, imagine what would be the state of affairs of the children and youth of those families who are displaced due to violence and are forced to live in the relief camps in a sub-standard living condition. Due to the Corona, these children lost education for 2 years. Now once when things appear to be normal, this ethnic violence has put an end to education again. This is the same with regard to agriculture. After COVID-19 the farmers were able to cultivate paddy the staple food. This year, due to lack of rain they could not transplant paddy. Also, due to violence they had leave their homes and run away to some place for protection. So cultivation is badly affected. But neither the central nor the state government is saying anything about this additional crisis faced by the people.

Another fact that has gone unnoticed by many is the 'evacuation' of around 10 Kuki families who decided to stay put in New Lambulane, Imphal West in spite of the threat looming large on them. They were under the protection of army 24x7. But the government evacuated them at mid night on 1st September without giving any time to pack up at least their clothes and other essentials. They are relocated in the hills in Kuki area. Few pertinent facts need to be highlighted here. 1) By this act, the government has agreed that is totally unable to protect the Kukis who are the citizens of Manipur. 2) With this move the state has cleverly 'cleansed the Imphal Valley of Kukis', which was its economic, political and civic objective and plan. 3) Now all these properties have become the properties of Meiteis which was the wish of some of the Meiteis.

On the other hand, this has further strengthened the resolve of the Kukis to demand for an Autonomous Hill Council or a Union Territory, away from Manipur jurisdiction. The government has lent itself in soup instead handing the situation with necessary political will to ensure peace and harmony in Manipur. But instead, the government is filing cases on anyone who is trying to bring out the truth. For instance, the Editors'

Guild of India brought out a report titled, 'Report of the Fact-Finding Mission on Media's Reportage of the Ethnic Violence in Manipur' on 2nd September, 2023. The Chief Minister in a Press Conference announced that a FIR has been filed against the Editors' Guild of India accusing the report to be biased. But the same CM has not come out to call for peace and harmony among the citizens of Manipur.

On 4th September, 2023 the Meiteis of Moirang announced *bundh* to do the last rites of 2 of their dead in this violence. For 4 months, the schools were closed and in the third week of August, it was opened. But due to violence again it was closed in the fourth week. The school management wanted to open the schools from the 4th. But the *bundh* paralysed this too. But no announcement is made by the government that the people cannot take law in their own hands and decide what they want. Since, a stern warning does not go to the perpetrators of violence, the situation has not and may not return to normal in the near future that is even after eight months. The political parties in power and the government for short term electoral gain are abdicating their constitutional rights and are denying of the people of all ethnic, religious segments their constitutional rights, dignity and justice.

Manipur due to its rich geo-eco system and strategic location has become a victim of state politics. The people of Manipur have been subjected to distress, despair and disaster which is human made, especially by those who are supposed to govern the state.

As events unfolded in Manipur, it appears that normalcy is not going to return even after the violence enduring over 8 months. Over these eight months of violence, life in general and schools, colleges and other institutions, business, marriage, celebrations, besides disrupting transportation and communication networks have been fundamentally affected. With curfew imposed at regular intervals, education has taken a bad beating. It also affected the agrarian sector, considered the mainstay of the state economy. Those who fled the state are not willing to return risking their lives. Those who are in relief camps are not ready to go to those areas where there are potential risks of violence.

Over 100 coffins representing over 100 bodies lying down in Churchandpur bore testimony to the violence that is going on unceasing in Manipur. With the intervention of Supreme Court of India, these bodies were handed over to their kin. As reported in Decan Herald on 14th December, 2023 around 64 bodies of Kukis and 4 bodies of Meiteis were given last rites following



the order of the Supreme Court on November 28th, 2023 which asked for dignified disposal of the bodies. Various Tribal organisations called for 12 hour bandh for the funeral services.

On 6th January, 2024 Pratap Bhanu Mehta wrote in the Indian Express, Manipur crisis reveals the limits of BJP's politics in the Northeast. He went on to state that the continuing violence in Manipur ought to be shocking for many reasons. But its sheer scale, endurance and brutality is still not getting national attention. As is typical, the prime minister who is never shy of taking leadership credit, is completely absent when there is an actual crisis that goes to the heart of both constitutional values and national security. In this instance, it seems like the double-engine sarkar, even after invoking Article 355, is unable to control the violence. It takes nothing away from the culpability of the present dispensation to acknowledge the long-standing and irresolvable contradictions of Manipur politics. Whenever the central organising axis of politics is a distributive conflict. He proposed that what is needed is an all-party mediation to lift the state out of a fatal zero-sum identity politics.

But from the last eight months violence what is becoming crystal clear is that the ruling establishment both in the state and centre do not lack political will but have strong political will to remain apparently silent to ensure that the violence goes on and the BJP can reap electoral gains out of this. Hence, forget about governance,

even semblance of government which should have been in place to address the crisis and conflict squarely and engage in dialogue with all the groups in Manipur and ensures constitutional remedies for those affected and lead to normalcy in Manipur.

It has been repeatedly pointed out that the people of Manipur across all communities, have suffered immensely for years as they saw their rice fields turned into battlefields, as they are forced to bury their loved ones due to violence, the education of their children being repeatedly affected, uncertainty prevailing for months and even years, peace be taken away by a few power-hungry people who have engineered division and sown violence. What is needed at this juncture is community based, citizen-centric dialogues and engaging civil society to broker peace even if it would be lengthy and tedious process. Indigenous peace making initiatives, truth-telling and forgiveness ceremonies, setting up of peace and reconciliation committees, along with ensuring alternative livelihood options for all the people would be a way forward. People with credibility in the entire northeast could be roped in, in this process and outcome. Role of children, youth and women becomes very crucial in this. If this is not done at the earliest, Manipur will continue to burn. Along with Manipur, the northeast will burn, leading to crisis and conflict in India.

WHO GAINS? WHO LOSES? Interim Reflections from Manipur

SYEDA HAMEED, ROSHMI GOSWAMI, JARJUM G ETE, ANGELA RANGAD

WAS IT THE RIGHT TIME TO VISIT MANIPUR?

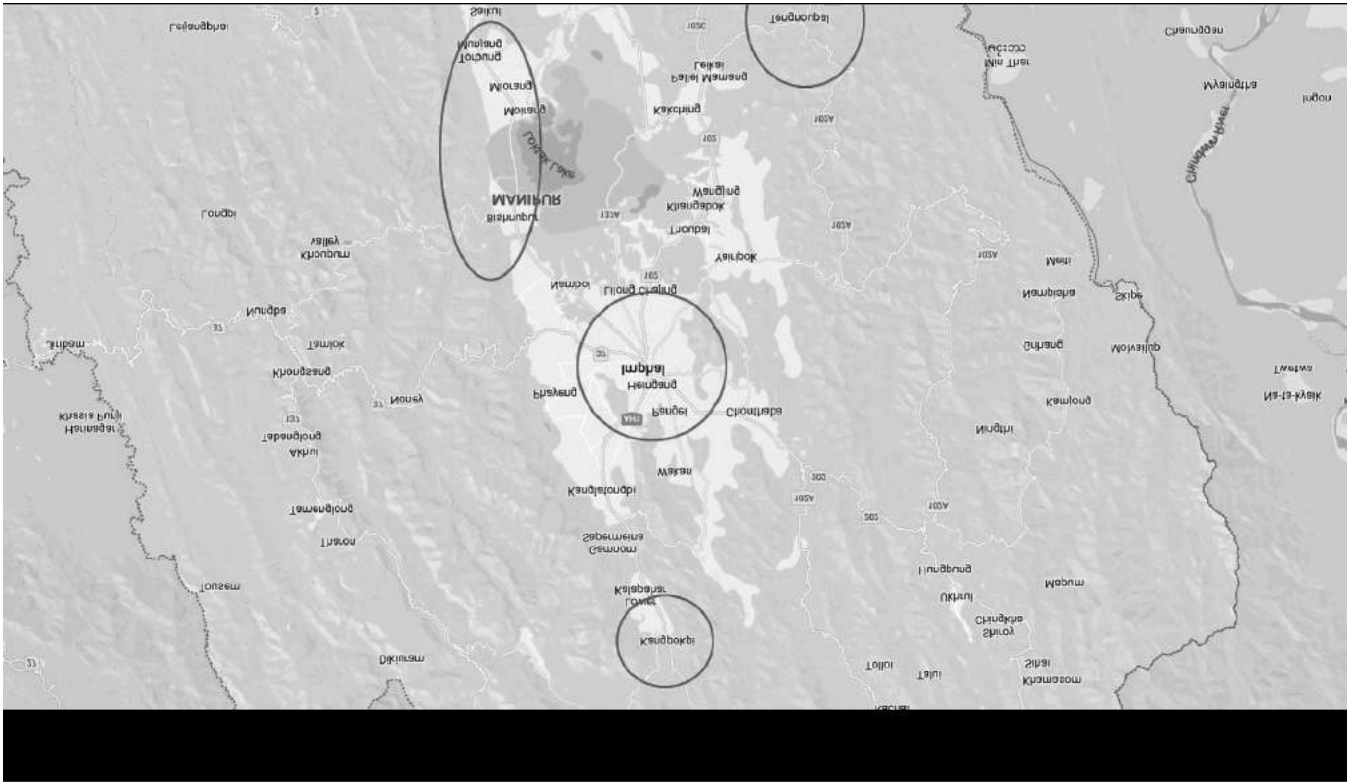
We were a team of four women from different places and having different affiliations. Three of us from the North East and one from Delhi, having different ethnicities and four different religions-Christian, Hindu, Muslim and Indigenous tribal faith. For one of us the process of connecting with Manipur during this moment of unprecedented crisis had already begun by way of a three day closed door meeting in a very private enabling feminist space where women from five different communities of Manipur were able to come together to talk. This visit came about from that closed door meeting and was initially planned as a Goodwill visit. But as we travelled through battle ravaged Manipur the objective of our visit kept evolving, incorporating new perspectives and taking different directions. Eventually it was just a 'mission of listening'. It was also the first in a series of proposed visits that we are committed to undertake.

We landed in Imphal on the 3rd of August. A most contentious day to arrive as it marked three months since the fateful day of May 3rd, and the Kuki community had proposed to hold a mass burial programme of their dead on that day. The proposal was to bury 35 dead including 3 women lying in the Churachandpur district hospital morgue at S. Boljang village. The proposed burial was turning out to be a hugely controversial and charged event as the proposed burial grounds were being claimed by both sides - for the Kukis primarily led by the Indigenous

Tribal Leaders Forum ITLF and by the Coordination Committee For Manipur Integrity (COCOMI) for the Meiteis. Mass condolence ceremonies paying tribute to the deceased were conducted at the peace ground at Turbong and in other Kuki areas and were already over by the time we reached our destination, and the burial was however deferred for another week by the Manipur High Court, which asked both the Kuki and Meitei communities to maintain status quo and to arrive at an amicable settlement during the period.

Starting with this flashpoint of fresh confrontation, the entire period of our visit was indeed a 'flare up' period which was highly charged, each day bringing new challenges of heightened aggressive and combat posturing by all actors - Kuki and Meitei groups, Meira Paibis, Armed volunteers, State and Central security forces and the Military. We were therefore literally in the middle of 'events and incidents'. It was a lived experience of the 'Manipur battleground'. This also determined where we could go and where we could not.

On arrival at Imphal, we met a cross section of Meitei civil society people - old friends who we had journeyed together with in earlier struggles and movements as well as new acquaintances. The conversations that evening were very open and trusting and provided some context as well as questions. We were to visit Churachandpur or as some like to call it today Lamka, the very next day after our arrival. But after the tensions of 3rd August, we were



advised to visit Tengnoupal - another Kuki stronghold District instead. An important District that has the Asian highway connecting Moreh, here we witnessed the massive community mobilisation particularly of women not only to support and run Relief camps but also as a part of the resistance / defence efforts. Next day, the 4th of August we decided to leave Imphal at the crack of dawn to head for Churachandpur, only for us to get caught up in events of yet another volatile day this conflict had seen. After having managed to negotiate our way through several Meira Paibi barricades, we managed to reach the border village of Kwakta, when our Pangal (Meitei Muslim) driver flatly refused to go any further after we had cleared every other hurdle. The incessant shelling and sniping from the surrounding hills unnerved him. It was the morning when three people had just been killed at 3 am while still sleeping, and the bodies were yet to be retrieved. Meira Paibis from every nook and corner of Bishnupur district and armed volunteers were pouring in to join the mourning family members and were also readying themselves to protest/retaliate. It was a very charged situation, and yet we might have taken a chance and walked through no man's land across what everyone there describes as the LOC, where our Kuki

friends were waiting to receive us, but there were people with limitations in our team and we had to be mindful. Our return journey across Imphal towards our hotel was also fraught with tension as the anger and anguish about the deaths that day was palpable when we were stopped at every crossing by groups of people, mainly women who demanded to see our IDs.

Our journey to Kangpokpi the next day was relatively easier and smoother, but what we heard and saw there left us heartbroken.

During our short visit we interacted and had wide ranging discussions with a cross section of people (Meitei, Kuki-Zo as well as Naga). We met organizations, women and student leaders, concerned individuals, experts from human rights and environmental movements, peace activists and negotiators, journalists, researchers, filmmakers, writers and theater personalities, students, relief providers, church workers and others. We also met survivors of sexual violence, assault and killings, families of disappeared peoples, displaced people and individual voices against the drug cartel. There were several narratives - some more dominant than others and also constantly changing as the situation on the ground changed.

ANGUISHED NARRATIVES

The most striking expression cutting across both the Kukis and Meitei people we interacted with, regardless of their situation, was their unequivocal assertion that the present regime both at the Centre and in the state are clearly and solely responsible for the continued violence and complete anarchy in the state. People were unanimous in saying that if the violence was controlled and reined in in the first few days of its outburst in May, it would not have accelerated the way it did and they would not be in the present state that they are in. They also pointed out that many of the sexual violations and killings that happened after the 3rd and 4th of May could perhaps have been avoided. The issue of command responsibility and state accountability rang loud and clear from every quarter and category of people. In Kwakta when we knelt down to pay our condolences to the grief stricken widow of Prem Kumar Yumnam who was brutally killed just a few hours earlier, she screamed out - ‘ If Narendra Modi had controlled this violence three months ago my husband would be alive today. Why is he still silent?’ Both sides believe that the violence and aggression has been deliberately left to fester and as new elements are added the situation

gets aggravated every single day. The Manipur crisis is therefore a clear indication of both the culpability and incapability of the BJP government led by Narendra Modi. In addition, the PM’s petulant and arrogant silence and lack of empathy for the affected people shows a complete disregard for the state of Manipur and is deeply insulting to its people.

State institutions have collapsed and there is a clear sense of state inaction with bodies lying in the morgues and the state not enabling a process of identification and closure for grieving families. Instead, the BJP regime (Cf: Tushar Mehta’s claims) is seen indulging in its typical diversionary blame game by labeling the unclaimed bodies as those belonging to illegal immigrants, while families wait in anguish and grief.

Concerns were also raised about under-trials in the jails in Imphal and other Meitei dominated districts, with Kukis having no access to their loved ones and of not even knowing if they are still alive. As one person pointed out, the state has been ‘strategically absent’. This strategic absence seems to have become the DNA of the ruling regime when they are unable or unwilling to take action either because of incapability or calculations around some electoral gains or losses. People simply do not seem to matter.



The question of the state’s strategic absence and the Manipur government’s culpability was particularly glaring in the incidents of violence against the Kuki- Zo community. While we had read about the extent and depth of the violations that had taken place since May 3, the first hand accounts of brutality and mayhem was extremely shocking, especially accounts of the sexual violence and the complete breakdown of any norms of humanity. Serious doubts were also raised about the partisan and communal role played by higher ups in the administration.

Another narrative is that the core issue is not even the formation of a separate Kuki administration or clash with militants in different locations but that it is essentially a geo-political conflict driven by people with a deep rooted political agenda. The ‘strategic absence’ and silence of the Centre seems to lend credibility to this narrative. Along the

same narrative a question that was raised by several people including those who have been directly affected is “Who gains?” from allowing this impasse to continue and for the violence to fester. Is this lingering conflict a cover up or a diversion from other things that are going on? Linkages to the poppy cultivation and the drug cartel and drug money being used for electioneering was made by several people - some alluded to it while others were very vocal with ex police officer Thounaojam Brinda going public with evidence in asking ‘Is CM Biren Fighting a War against Drugs or For Drugs?’ She spoke to us at length on the various aspects and operational strategies of the drug mafia and the inextricable nexus with the seats of power and of the involvement of the higher ups of all the communities. And as the impasse continues, there is a growing realization on both sides of the divide that ultimately all communities are expendable.

On the ground, the ties between the two communities in conflict seem to have been severely snapped at least for now. Colleagues and friends who had lived together and worked together still maintain contact but the strains of everyday strife are pressing down and here and there fissures and doubt were visible. Amongst the women on both sides, this breakdown of ties is deeply felt. There is immense sadness, grief and regret for the loss of lives and the incidences of barbaric violence. There is also huge rage and anger. It is very early yet and too fraught to talk about peace. For now, the need is to focus on the practical requirements that have arisen and to find ways to build trust through a sense of urgent concerns common to both sides of the divide. But most importantly, it is for a cessation of violence and hostilities. Most felt that this was possible only with the removal of CM Biren Singh. The call for his removal came from both the communities and debunked the narrative that he has unanimous support from the Meiteis.

The Kukis across the board reiterated their demand for separate administration as trust has been broken and they no longer feel safe to be under the same jurisdiction as the Meiteis. No doubt the demand for separate administration precedes the May 3rd outbreak of violence but since then and whatever has happened during this three month period strengthens the demand and the resolve of the Kukis to be separate.



Our visit to the relief camps and our conversations with family members and women support groups of the disappeared and a survivor of sexual violence has provided practical and some telling gendered insights which is being included in the section on Relief and Rehabilitation. The meeting with a survivor of sexual violence and getting to know her story and its aftermath from her detailed FIR and from people around her was especially painful and shook us profoundly. Her mother (a person who worked as a cleaner in Imphal) was emphatic about justice, seeking life imprisonment for the perpetrators but not capital punishment. The silence and the blank expression on the face of the survivor - a mere child barely 18 years of age, spoke volumes. We tried to draw her out and finally got the hint of an impish smile when we urged her to think about herself and to tell us what she wants rather than what others want for her! She was able to articulate what she wanted and that was enough.

The role and power of women on both sides of the divide is simply astounding and also very complicated. As one of our team members put it, she has never seen this kind of spirit and resistance across the country. We met Kuki women sitting in the pelting rain and thick fog at Tegnoupal day in and day out blocking the movement of RAF Commando trucks on the Trans Asian highway to the border town of Moreh. We saw too the sensitivity and gentleness of a group of young women who have

encircled a young survivor of sexual violence and her family moving them out from a very public relief camp and helping to set up a home in a beautiful and secure homestead enabling healing and freeing them from constant media and public focus and supporting the whole family on a daily basis.



We encountered the absolutely formidable force and power of the Meira Paibis as they enforced a Public curfew in Meitei districts, blocked access to Kuki dominated areas or organised/participated in collective mourning for a slain youth from the security forces. We saw their power but have come back with troubling as well as complex questions about their 'agency' in a strong patriarchal society like theirs. What was quite evident though was that unlike women from the Kuki and Naga communities the Meira Paibis and the Meiteis in general do not appear to come under any Unified Command Structure and therefore defy any attempts at disciplining. In our team itself there were disagreements about this structure of the Meira Paibis but it was obvious that while a loose and amorphous structure allows for autonomy and resilience at the local level as each Leikai or locality has its own group of Meira Paibis with different operating styles and norms; it can also be hugely chaotic and unrestrainable. A keen sense of justice and defiance against subjugation or oppression is deeply embedded in the political consciousness of Meitei

women in general and in the Meira Paibis in particular. For lack of autonomy within the four walls of their home, the expression of this political consciousness in the public space is immensely important to the Meira Paibis and to their sense of being, and this is their driving force. While this is their strength, it is also their vulnerability, as vested interests from even among them, can so easily manipulate it in any which way. There is enough evidence coming in to show that 'lines were crossed' and extremely negative roles were played by sections of Meira Paibis in the present conflict and that at certain moments of the conflict there was manipulation. There can be no justification for these roles, but neither can there be sweeping generalizations and condemnation for all. The question then is how to 'channelize' this political consciousness and this resistance to stay focussed on a community enhancing rather than community dividing approach, that can form the core of peace building efforts. It is a daunting task but not impossible, and very tiny baby steps have already been initiated quietly at the local level by women who do not wish to be named or identified.



On the Kuki side we also met and interacted at length with young women, educated in Universities outside Manipur but who are now back in their villages, who provided a refreshingly different and gendered perspective and analysis of the conflict, the ethnic divide

and the stereotypical role of men in general including men from their own community. They were enraged that men who cannot manage their personal lives are entrusted with managing the country, with the mess that men as 'decision makers' from Delhi down to the local level have created and of women being caught in between, and having to attend to and clean up the 'mess'! These women were grateful and appreciative of the opportunity to interact with our team, air their frustrations and share their thoughts, as they were fed up of answering mechanical questions posed to them by visiting media teams and others. They were also able to discuss at length and in a balanced and unbiased manner the role that social media and fake news has played in fuelling the conflict. Many of the older women also felt that the strategy of the Biren Singh government, of having appointed advisors from outside with right wing links, as opposed to listening to voices from the ground is also a critical contributory factor to the present catastrophe and to determining the hate filled political narrative of the state in general.

WHAT SHOULD WE BE THINKING ABOUT?

Manipur has witnessed several episodes of violent conflicts over the years. But this time, civilisational control and norms seem to have been lost, and lines of control crossed like never before. If this is a 'war', as has been pointed out by both sides, then the basic principles of the Geneva Convention as well as the principles of the Meitei War principles and the Tribal war principles which predate Geneva have been grossly violated. The fact that lines have been crossed is indeed alarming as is indicated by the numerous cases of brutal sexual violence as well as the fact that ambulances carrying the injured were waylaid and attacked even as convention dictates that hospitals and health services be exempt from attacks in even the most brutal of wars. These tragic instances raise the question as to why such lines were crossed. In any process of peace building this question will have to be thoroughly probed and factored in.

Killings and death is inevitable in a 'war' or in the process of 'defense' but what is not acceptable and was strongly condemned across sections are the levels of barbarity. We were able to initiate some conversations on the levels of barbarity with the Meiteis but it was only with the more progressive people. More in-depth engagement

is required and with a wider cross section of people of both the communities including with the Meira Paibis.

The systematic clamp down on civil society organisations and dissenting local voices by the BJP government, and the promotion and patronisation of vigilante groups that toe the political line has obliterated or systematically suppressed an important section of credible voices that help to maintain a level of checks and balances that keeps together the social fabric of communities. In conflict affected Manipur this has always been of particular significance. The BJP regime's coercive approach has enabled the hijacking of rational and societal building voices by the divisive and hate filled agenda of the state supported non state groups. The blanket impunity provided to such forces and select CSOs by the State has totally emboldened such groups, given them a sense of complete security and enabled them and not the progressive voices to control the narrative.

There is a huge proliferation of arms and ammunition ranging from light machine and combat guns to mortars and rocket launchers. We were told that the arms were both looted or handed over upon production of 'aadhar cards' from the police stations and depots! We saw people moving around with AK 47s casually slung over their shoulders clad in casuals or in military fatigues! As army fatigues were also looted and widely distributed, oftentimes it was difficult to distinguish between a civilian in 'defence' role versus state security forces! The availability of this level of arms and ammunition in a state with an extensive international border is deeply disturbing and totally incomprehensible from a National Security point of view. It totally defies one's understanding and sense of 'internal security' and of the responsibility of the Government in question to be in control. In Manipur today who is in control has become a guessing game.

The issue of 'toxic masculinity' and the need to form a network of exposed young men from both communities to work against it was also raised by a PhD researcher - a young man from the Meitei community.

We encountered shelling, gunshots and aggressive tear gassing at different places and at different moments of our visit. One night we were housed with a friend and his family and prevented from going back to our hotel by the relentless onslaught of peppered tear gas and gunshots and witnessed the reaction and trauma

of his little children. We wondered about the collective trauma of children across the ethnic divides in Manipur for the last three months! And yet instead of working towards finding a sincere solution, it is whataboutery that members of the ruling regime indulge in. What if their own children were caught up in such a situation was our question?

The issue of illegal migration of people from across the 1700 km long border with Myanmar was repeatedly mentioned as a key trigger of the present conflict by the Meiteis. There were allegations by both sides that border management which lies with the Centre is pathetically run or deliberately mismanaged. Picking up on the question of poor management of the border issues, the Kuki leaders pointed out that with the ongoing war in Myanmar and the extensive human rights violations by the military junta, crossing over of refugees from Myanmar is inevitable. India needs to urgently formulate a clear Refugee Policy guided by International standards and play a role on Refugee protection as an Asian leader. They further reiterated that there should be clear guidelines to identify refugees so that genuine Indian citizens are not repeatedly harassed.

The immediate as well as long term fallout of the present conflict is the issue of internally displaced people, which needs urgent attention. In the relief camps, apart from the conditions of the relief camps itself and the horror that drove people to these camps, the large looming question on everyone's face was about their uncertain future and status. The issue of IDPs has repeatedly been raised by human rights and relief workers in the past and the situation in Manipur certainly calls for urgently pushing for an IDP policy to be drafted and adopted.

There is undoubtedly an angle of dwindling land resources and increased populations making claims on the limited land and the tension around this. An opinion that was expressed from the Meitei as well as the Nagas was that perhaps there is a need to stop the 'recognition' of new villages.

The clear cut agenda of bringing about a communal divide along religious lines by the right wing Hindutva forces was strongly pointed out by the Kuki side with documented evidence. On the Meitei side, while the role of the Meitei Leepun and the Arambai Tenggol (which appears to be more like Biren Singh's private

army) is loud and clear, opinions are divided about the actual control and power of the communal forces over the Meitei ethos. Some are reluctant to give them more importance and power than they actually have, some wonder whether they can be used while yet others see them being at the root of the hate filled agenda. Whatever be the various opinions, the insidious inroads of Indian right wing forces into Meitei society, having a clear cut agenda especially in districts like Bishenpur, where there are large numbers of followers of the indigenous Sanamahi faith cannot be trivialized. They are there with their agenda advancing stealthily, fraying and diluting the social fabric of the Meitei ethos and sense of pride.

Narco Terrorism is a phrase that is bandied around by all and sundry but it is also an issue of great concern. That there is a nexus between the politically powerful, the 9 corporate world, elections and drug cartels is obvious enough but it is an extremely murky and violent world and beyond the reach of common analysis.

SURVIVING: ON RELIEF AND REHABILITATION

We visited relief camps in Moirang, Tengenoupal and Kangpokpi. Camps in Moirang had mostly Meitei people and the camps in other two places had displaced people belonging to Kuki-Zo communities. These camps were housed in school and college premises. This has meant that educational activities in these spaces have come to a halt since the last 3 months.

State presence appeared to be absent or minimal in the relief Camps. We were told that when the conflict began much of the relief arrangements were being done by community groups particularly the localities where these camps came up. In fact it is only now, 3 months later that the state is attempting to intervene by way of relief. However, the relief is still far from satisfactory. The living conditions in the camps continue to be difficult. Only two substantial meals consisting mostly of rice and dal are served twice a day and not much is provided in between, not even morning tea, which the people have expressed is very difficult especially for the elderly and the children. Children have no access to other snacks. Mattresses have been spread out on the floors of the rooms and with the rains the rooms double up as a space for drying clothes. This makes the atmosphere damp and poses a health risk.

There is no privacy. Men, women and children are sharing the same space. Pregnant and lactating

mothers are also not provided separate space. Mothers and pregnant women lacked necessities such as thermos and hot water bags which were then provided by the community groups in some places. PDS provisions have not reached the camps. In fact PDS has not reached the districts in the past 3 months.

There are no dedicated health services in the camps, just informal arrangements with locality medicine shops for providing medicines where necessary. No psychosocial counselling is being provided and as one of the camp persons expressed that she feels there is no one she can share her sorrow with even though there are many people in the camps.

Education has come to a complete halt and is a big concern especially for parents of those who are in class 10 and 12. There are concerns about their board exams and preparations for the same.

Many camp members have also expressed the need for work and some camp residents are compelled to leave the camps in search of work. Some community groups have initiated livelihood activities in some camps but have expressed that this is merely a stop gap arrangement.

Some persons who arrived at the camps have subsequently also moved out of the camps and are residing with relatives in the state or outside the state.

A big question that is left unanswered is rehabilitation. How and when can those in the camps safely return? How will they rebuild their homes that have been destroyed? Many including community relief camp committee members are raising this concern.

Given the observations and information gathered after interactions with those in the camps and the volunteers and community groups the following suggestions are being made:

1. SOPs for camps need to be developed along with camp residents, local groups in the area, community and volunteer groups and the state administration that should be shared with everyone.
2. Safety and security audits of the camps need to be carried out.
3. Audit of health and sanitation in the camps needs to be done individually for each camp to ensure that living conditions including toilets are adequate.
4. Administration should ensure that PDS, Mid day meal and ICDS entitlements reach the camps and local areas.
5. A system be put in place for regular and assured health check up and access to medicines and healthcare in the camps including referrals.
6. Immediate educational support be extended to the children in the camps by way of extension of SSA teaching.
7. Psychosocial support through counsellors be provided in the camps.
8. Support service for pregnant and lactating mothers be ensured in the camps.
9. Support to the local community hosting the camps by ensuring timely, regular and uninterrupted supply of PDS and other entitlements. Ensuring supply of medicines and medical essentials to the local area dispensaries and PHCs.
10. Ensuring access to information in the camps, including internet access.
11. Putting in place an accessible and transparent grievance redressal mechanism in the camps
12. MGNREGS should be immediately implemented for the displaced people for income support.
13. Legal support teams should regularly visit the camps for support and providing information and updates on FIRs lodged by camp residents.
14. Many residents who lost their family members and whose bodies lie in Imphal morgues need immediate support in identifying the dead and for getting the bodies back so they may be given a dignified burial. State administration should proactively support such families in this.
15. Budgetary support to neighbouring states where relief camps have come up, and ensuring an SOP for internally displaced persons is put in place at the earliest.
16. A Special and comprehensive provision for all the survivors of sexual violence which includes a series and as many as required gender sensitive psychosocial counselling for the survivor as well as the family members including siblings, partners etc, survivor centric economic and social reintegration packages.

CAN THERE BE ANY FINAL THOUGHTS?

People go back from the Manipur battleground with a high level of despondency. Our team experienced

the same sadness, depression and sense of futility. The strange refusal of the PM to say anything till pushed, speaks volumes about the apathy of the Centre to the state and to the sufferings of the people on both sides of the conflict. At another level though, it also appears to be part of the larger militaristic strategy of tiring out your opponents by making them 'wait' it out. We could see the fatigue on the faces of the women on both sides who were out protesting or grappling against emerging crises on a daily basis. The class and economic dimensions of peoples suffering and how they will rebuild their lives is also quite apparent. Without a doubt, it is the poor and primarily the rural poor who will face the greatest challenge in rebuilding their lives for a long time to come. That peoples and communities are expendable was a clear message that seemed to run through all the State action or inaction. Yet at the end of the day, we could not but be affected by the 'spirit' of the people and the continued 'resistance' against all odds. We heard numerous accounts of people cutting across communities helping each other during the height of the violence. These voices have mostly been drowned in the overwhelming narrative of violence, but needs to be picked up and heard. Finally, it is Regina's words that we carry back with us. She said " We have hope and we cling to it for it cannot be taken away from us. Hope



is all that we have left after our houses and homes have been burnt, our fields have been destroyed,, our places of worship gone and our social lives ripped apart". We parted in hope that we would find more such voices in the period ahead and that we may join hands towards healing and rebuilding.

POSTSCRIPT / SNAPSHOTS FROM MANIPUR

Syeda Hameed

There is a sense I am in a foreign country. The word LoC is bandied around. Barricades are visible everywhere. It is a war zone. It's as if two countries are struggling to be born. Meiteis and Kukis, in full battle gear, are ranged on either side. AK 47, bombs, hand grenades. Sights and sounds which send a chill body signal. I am in Manipur.

A small delegation of 4 women. 3 from the North East and me. I, Kashmir born, partition torn, stand on the debris of a land that is rightly known as the most precious jewel of India. I stand here because since the last 20 years when Kangla Fort was handed to people, I have identified with Manipur. Today we are in mourning. Wamiq Jaunpuri wrote these lines 'Who will answer?' when Gandhiji was assassinated. Today they resonate with Manipur

- *Ye kaun qatl ho gaya?*
- *Ye kaun dil ka raaz sabse kehte kehte so gaya*
- *Jawab iska kaun de?*
- *Ke khud hamare haath iss lahu mein hain rangey huey*
- *Who has been killed?*
- *Who has been put to sleep while pouring out his heart?*
- *Who will answer?*
- *We? But our hands are dyed in the same blood.*
- *Here are some of my thoughts which I need to express while they rage within me.*

Scene One

Images rise on the mind. We are on our way to Churachandpur. We reach Kwatka Bazar, a Pangal-Muslim village. It is raining. Hundreds of women are sitting in partly covered shelters along the road which leads to the LoC dividing Bishnupur from

Churachandpur. Hundreds of men swarm around, many with guns. 3 Meiteis, father-son and their friend have been butchered then shot at 3 AM. Their bodies are still lying there. 'Pay your respects' we are asked. I cover my head with my namaaz scarf. We walk towards the women. In their midst is the young wife of the victim. My colleagues bend down to hug her trembling form and let their tears mingle with hers. We hear shots, cross firing very close; my heart lurches. This is the end but we cannot move. I have just finished mourning for the martyrs of Karbala; Bishnupur and Churachandpur are also Karbala. We get up and move to the car; a man appears at the window. 'He is Nobo Volcano, beloved Manipuri singer.' someone says. In a loud voice he shouts into the cameras being held before his face. 'Modi! We voted you in; in the centre and state. And you? You have betrayed us. You have let us butcher each other, rape and kill our daughters while you and your Manipur colleague are watching from your far off high perches.'

Four of us plus two of the brightest and kindest women from this state who have accompanied us, sit in stunned silence while word comes from the border that any further movement is fraught with danger. We turn back. We were just 15 kms from the Line of Control.

Scene Two

This time it were the Kuki we saw as we entered district Tengnopal from Imphal. The last post, Moreh is 30 kms

from Burma border. Moreh is where long ago we went for shopping for gadgets smuggled from Burma. From the car window, while it poured heavily, we watched the large sign Separate Administration. In the downpour we saw more than a thousand women and girls sitting in the open in defiance of both the elements and the central and state governments. Drenched but not subdued. Two women, equally strong, balanced and sensitive steered the meeting which was held in a shed, slightly set back from the main road leading to Moreh. Kuki Women's Union for Human 13 Rights Voices rose around us; 'We are betrayed so brutally; we don't believe in uniforms, in fake id-cards. Militias in army uniforms raze our homes and kill us; Arambai Tengot and Meitei Leipum. We demand separate administration for the Kuki- Zo Tribal People.'

I think of lines from Sahir Ludhianvi as the first glimmer of light in this dark tunnel:

*Laakh baithe koi chhup chhup ke kamein gahon mein
Khoon khud deta hai jalladon ke maskan ka suraagh
Saazishen laakh udhatien rahein zulmon ko naqab
Le ke har boond nikalti hai hatheli pe chiragh*

No matter how long they crawl in their hideouts
Each blood drop gives clue to executioners' hideouts
Conspiracies throw endless veils over injustice
Each blood drop emerges with a lamp on its palm

REPORT OF THE FACT-FINDING MISSION ON MEDIA'S REPORTAGE OF THE ETHNIC VIOLENCE IN MANIPUR

Sep 2nd, 2023



The Editors Guild of India (EGI) received several representations that the media in Manipur was playing a partisan role in the ongoing ethnic conflict between the majority Meitei community and the Kuki-

Chin minority. On 12 July 2023, when the conflict had already been going on for a little over two months, the EGI also received a written complaint from the Indian Army's 3rd Corps headquarters citing specific examples

of the media in Manipur suggesting that it may be playing “a major role in arousing passion and not letting sustainable peace to come in”.

They claimed that the media outlets of Imphal Valley have been indulging in “outright misrepresentation of facts” and in the process may be “one of the major contributors to the instigation of further violence” as the “bias of the media in favour of one community and against the other community emerges clearly in their reportage”.

The EGI had expressed its concern about the ethnic clashes in Manipur but after receiving representations about the uneven and biased reportage of the local and national media, it decided to send a fact finding team to Manipur. The EGI wanted to investigate whether there were other instances as well of incidents of the media’s incorrect reporting, purveying wrong facts and spreading fake news.

A three-member team comprising Ms. Seema Guha, Mr. Bharat Bhushan and Mr. Sanjay Kapoor was sent to Manipur to examine the media reportage in the state. The team visited Manipur from 7 to 10 August.

Its terms of reference were to examine the reportage of the violence by the media, to examine whether media was indeed ‘biased and divisive’ as alleged by several stake holders, to understand and document the way media’s coverage deepened the fissures and the impact of internet shutdown on the ability of the media to function.

The team met a cross-section of reporters, editors, representatives of the Editors Guild of Manipur, All Manipur Working Journalists Union, civil society activists, public intellectuals, women affected by the violence, tribal spokes persons and the representatives of the security forces operating in Manipur.

Social and Political Context of the Ethnic Clashes

It was not the mandate of the EGI team to examine the causes of the ethnic clashes in Manipur. However, it would be difficult to understand the media’s behaviour, without understanding the overall social and political context within which the ethnic violence took place.

Much before the violence erupted on 3 May Manipur’s tribal tensions, especially between the majority Meitei community and the minority Kuki-Chin-Zo community, were already reaching their boiling point. The state government seems to have facilitated

the majority’s anger against the Kukis through several seemingly partisan statements and policy measures.

For example, the leadership of the state labeled the entire community of Kuki-Zo tribals as “illegal immigrants” and “foreigners” without any reliable data or evidence. This despite the fact that the decadal census from 1901 to 2011 has not shown any unusual growth of the non-Naga (the other minority tribal community) tribal population.

The fact that there was a military coup in Myanmar which led to an inflow of about 40,000 refugees to Mizoram and reportedly about 4,000 to Manipur was used to brand all Kuki-Zo as illegal immigrants. This was presented as pressure on resources but was also a war for political space, with the Meitei leadership of the government using the fear of the outsiders to consolidate its political position.

In addition, without following proper procedure as laid down in the Hills Area Committee Act of 1972, the N. Biren Singh government declared parts of Hills as “reserved” and “protected” forest and “wet land reserves”. All land ownership documents within these areas were cancelled and a drive started to evict them in December 2022.

This led to violent confrontation between the state authorities and the Kuki-Zo community which had been living in these villages. The demolition drive which began in the Kangpokpi district, a Kuki-dominated area, extended by February 2023 to Churachandpur and Tengenoupal districts which also had a preponderance of the Kuki-Zo community.

What is significant is that the forest surveys, inquiries, evictions and demolitions were carried out only in the non-Naga inhabited tribal areas, once again leading the Kuki community to believe that it was being singled out.

In an inexplicable move, on 10 March 2023, the Biren Singh government took a Cabinet decision to withdraw from the tripartite Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement (a kind of a cease fire agreement) with the Kuki insurgent groups, Kuki National, the Zomi Revolutionary and the Kuki Revolutionary, with whom the Union government wanted a peaceful negotiation.

Two weeks later, on 24 March, the state government removed the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) selectively, only from the Imphal Valley even though the Kuki insurgent groups were in peace talks with the



Smoke rises from a Kuki house on 5th May 2023

Centre while the Meitei insurgents active in the Imphal Valley were outside any process of negotiation for peace. In retrospect, this was seen by the Kuki-Zo tribals as a partisan move in preparation for violence against the Kukis, which came a few weeks later.

Simultaneously, a state government committee headed by the Chief Secretary on 3 April, 2023, cancelled all land/property deeds and recognition of villages within the designated reserved and protected forest areas. All this was done without any rehabilitation plan for the evicted tribal population.

On 19 April it was revealed that in an unusual order the Manipur High Court had ordered on March 27 that the state government recommends the inclusion of the Meitei community in the Scheduled Tribes List to the Centre. This was seen by the Naga as well as Kuki-Zo tribals, as a Meitei land-grab move, as once they got ST status they could buy land in the tribal areas of the Hills, which is currently forbidden.

This was not appealed by the Biren Singh government immediately even though the order had

been issued without hearing the State or the tribal stakeholders. This once again made the tribals angry and raised suspicions about the state government's motives.

Yet another layer to the complex issue was Biren Singh's so-called "war on drugs". In this the Kuki-Zos were painted as villains who indulged in illegal poppy cultivation in the Hills. Manipur borders Myanmar and is a major route for drug smuggling through its border town of Moreh.

Experts claim that the 'Golden Triangle' of yore has shifted from the Myanmar-Thailand-Laos tri-junction to the borders of Myanmar, India and Bangladesh. The trafficked drugs of choice are: hero in, brown sugar, prescription painkillers, cough syrups and Yaba or WIY ("World is yours") pills. Biren Singh government's focus has targeted poppy growing to the detriment of the other components of the drug trade, the smuggling of synthetics to Myanmar and the smuggling in of drugs and their distribution through Manipur.

Poppy growing, done by the poorest farmers with financial advances for fertilizer and pesticides given by

the drug mafia, has also shifted towards Manipur from Myanmar because of extensive satellite observation by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime's illicit crop monitoring in Myanmar, which does not cover India (as poppy growing is licensed in the country).

Illegal poppy cultivation is done by all, Kuki-Zos, Nagas, as well as Meiteis. Yet Biren Singh popularised the epithets "poppy cultivators" and "narco-terrorists" only for the Kuki-Zos. That dangerous public posturing became evident when a highly decorated IPS officer, Thounaojam Brinda, filed an affidavit in court stating that the Chief Minister and the top police brass in the state forced her to let off a person from whose premises drugs worth Rs. 27 crore had been recovered by her team.

Civil society activists claim that the annual revenue from the drug business in Manipur is estimated to be to the tune of Rs. 50,000 crore while the state's annual budget is only about Rs. 30,000 crore. The implication being that the drug network is extensive and cannot thrive without political support.

These complex factors together stoked Meitei-Kuki ethnic tension still they reached a combustion point on May 3. The All Tribal Students' Union Manipur (the apex body of the state's tribal students) had organised a solidarity rally on that day, against the Meitei demand for ST status in Churachandpur.

As a counter to this, Meiteis blockaded all roads leading to the Hill districts. Rumours in the afternoon of some Meitei miscreants setting fire to the Anglo-Kuki War Centenary Memorial Gate (some reports say only a few tyres were burnt next to the gate) led to the tribal rallyists returning home to rush to the site. This became the spark that ignited violence between the two communities.

Rumours of some Meitei women at Churachandpur Medical College being raped led to 'counter-molestation and rape' of Kuki women, arson and killing of Kukis in the Imphal Valley. The night of May 3 saw the almost total destruction of Kuki-Zo churches, houses and other property in the Meitei dominated areas. This was also accompanied by looting of police armouries in the Imphal Valley, imposition of curfew and internet shut down.

Over the next few days Meiteis from Kuki areas and Kuki-Zo tribals from Meitei areas either escaped or were escorted by the security forces to areas dominated

by their ethnicity. The role played in rescuing civilians irrespective of their ethnicity by Assam Rifles, whether it was rescuing nearly 1,000 Meiteis from Churachandpur, about 500 Meiteis from Moreh or tribal women students and non-Meiteis from Manipur University, was exemplary.

Although an attempt was made to suggest that the Assam Rifles was only protecting Kukis later by Meitei radicals, that seems far removed from the reality. Violence continued sporadically thereafter but with a clear geographical division being established between the Meiteis and the Kuki-Zo areas.

The Central government neither imposed President's Rule in the state nor did it invoke powers under Article 355 to take over the law and order machinery. And yet the Governor issued shoot at sight orders, and the Centre appointed a Security Advisor reporting to the Chief Minister who had proved incompetent to control the violence. Some would say the CM's partisan actions had in fact pushed the state into turmoil.

The Union Home Minister created a unified command, once again reporting to the CM. In addition to the Manipur police forces under his command he also had Assam Rifles reporting to him. Having caused the problem he was rewarded by making him in-charge of finding the solution.

The first thing that the unified command did was to demolish the defensive structures/road-blocks created by the Kukis. When they wanted to do the same on the Meitei side, they were apparently "refused permission".

The state bureaucracy, police and political leadership got divided along ethnic lines and started behaving as such. The Chief Minister announced that while he and the Manipur Police would be responsible for law and order in the Valley, Union Home Minister Amit Shah had assured him that he would ensure peace in the Hills, presumably through Assam Rifles which reports to the Home Ministry.

This further crystallized the ethnic divide with two different laws for cement regimes in place in the same state.

What was clear to the EGI team was that the division along ethnic lines was not only in terms of people's consciousness, but a physical division or geographical separation had also taken place between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo inhabited areas.

The first thing that grabs the attention of visitors trying to reach the Hill areas from the Valley is the 'buffer zone' that divides the two communities, with women protesters on each side. Huge posters asking people to boycott Meitei goods have come up in the Hill areas. Women protesters were everywhere, checking vehicles, stopping trucks but not stopping cars carrying the media.

At check-posts manned by the Meira Paibis, Meitei women agitators, it was seen that Assam Rifles vehicles were prevented from entering. There have also been reports that trucks carrying supplies were looted by mobs. The Indian Tricolour is also seen at all Kuki protest sites, around checkpoints and public spaces, perhaps in a bid to emphasize the point that the Kuki-Zos are not asking for separation from India, but an autonomous administrative set-up where finances are not controlled by Imphal. A constant refrain from the Hill areas is that funds for development are mostly spent in the Valley and just about 10 percent reach the Hills.

Much as people in the Valley pointed fingers at the surrendered Kuki militant groups brought in to join the mobs that went on rampage in Churachandpur and other places against the Meites, people in the

Hills said that former militant groups like the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), the Pre Pak, and People's Liberation Army (PLA) insurgents armed with sophisticated weapons, led the frenzied Meitei mob attacks in Imphal.

Manipur police and commando units of the state were also partisan and allegedly openly sided with the civilians and raided Kuki villages in the outskirts of Imphal. "It is well known that the mobs did not loot the police armouries, the weapons were given to them by the police on orders of the state government," a senior member of the Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum in Kangpokpi told the EGI team.

Two other Meitei groups, the Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun have also been at the forefront of the violence. Reporters from Churachandpur said that the Meitei Leepun, an organization committed to preserving Meitei culture and tradition, took active part in attacking Kuki homes and killing tribals. Many civil society representatives as well as tribal journalists say it's patronised by Chief Minister N. Biren Singh.

The Arambai Tenggol, another vigilante group made up of aggressive young men who ride motorbikes



Meira Paibis block personnel from the Rapid Action force from intervening in the violence

and openly carry arms, is said to be patronised by the ruling leadership in the state. The general perception in the Hills is that these vigilante gangs, Manipur police commandos and former Meitei insurgents form the vanguard of marauding Meitei mobs are bent on displacing Kuki villagers from their habitations.

Over 180 people had died up to the time of writing this report, and over 54,000 were displaced running for safety to the majority areas of their ethnic community. Many had no hopes of ever returning to their homes as they had been destroyed in arson.

Although the violence came in phases and waves, the two communities now live in separate areas. The hatred is kept alive by activists from the two communities, most of all by Meitei women who seem to have taken to the frontline as defenders of their community.

Meira Paibis and Women In Conflict

Manipur's Meira Paibis are well-known civil rights activists much admired in the past for taking up progressive causes. Meira Paibis are embedded in Meitei society and have arisen organically, coming to the notice of the world in 1977. At that time, carrying burning torches they fought for the removal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act and holding the paramilitary forces accountable for human rights violations.

Meira Paibis hit the national headlines in a big way in 2004, after the rape and murder of a 32-year old Manorama, when she was detained on suspicion of being a militant. A dozen Meira Paibis stripped in front of an Army camp at Kang la Fort and held a banner that stated "Indian army rape us".

Forgetting their feminist past, the Meira Paibis show no remorse for what has allegedly been done to Kuki women. The idea is that there was now a "war" for the survival of the Meiteis, and the normal rules no longer applied.

Since the latest ethnic clashes began in Manipur, the Meira Paibis have become cheerleaders of the violent mobs attacking Kuki homes. Video clips where Meira Paibis have urged the youth to rape and molest Kuki women have surfaced.

The Meira Paibis have been accused by the Assam Rifles and Kuki media and civil society organisations of complicity in several mob attacks. They have blocked security forces from discharging their duties by

surrounding soldiers so that they are unable to prevent Meitei youths indulging in violence.

They have even forcibly freed 12 Meitei insurgents of Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL) who were detained by the security forces for indulging in arson and violence. This included a known insurgent, self-styled Lt Col Moirangthem Tamba alias Uttam, the "master-mind" of a 2015 ambush on a convoy of 6 Dogra Regiment in which 18 soldiers had been killed.

The Meira Paibis believe that they are doing nothing wrong and are merely protecting their "sons" by obstructing the Assam Rifles. They shout slogans, surround the vehicles and ensure that the ring leaders of the arsonists are protected. The Army and Assam Rifles have no idea how to deal with this kind of resistance. "We can't shoot at Indian citizens and civilians," a senior officer told the EGI team.

Apart from preventing the security forces from working, the Meira Paibis also check ID-cards of the Assam Rifles men and women and search their vehicles in a bid to hunt for Kukis hiding with them.

On 26 June, the Spear Corps of the Indian released a 2.12 minute video showing that Meitei women helped rioters flee, obstructed their operations, accompanied armed civilians in vehicles ostensibly going on violent raids to shield them from the security forces. The Meira Paibis pose a significant challenge to the Assam Rifles and the military. Rooted as they are to the protection of Meitei society, the Meira Paibis believe they are fighting a just cause much as Meitei women did in the past against the British. Women and children are often the worst sufferers in a conflict. The ethnic conflict in Manipur is no exception. The clip circulated of the undressing of three Kuki women by a mob is ample evidence of the torture and humiliation that women have to face.

Expectant mothers went through harrowing times. The pain and trauma in the faces of expectant mothers, and those who had just delivered babies was apparent, in the camps for the displaced that the EGI team visited.

Historically, the women in Manipur have played an important role in society. The Kuki women are also out in numbers holding vigils in tribal areas. The Wall of Remembrance for the dead in Churachandpur is managed largely by women. Kuki women also check vehicles at barricades that they have set up on the highways and other roads leading to the Hills.

Manipur Media and its Post-Truth Narrative

The media in Manipur was not left untouched by ethnic loyalties and the deepening divide between the Meiteis and the Kuki-Chin-Zo tribals. Manipur's media is largely Meitei owned.

While the EGI team met a cross-section of print (both English and vernacular), digital, TV and cable TV news media representatives, it was handicapped in terms of not being able to read the local language news platforms, or go through the archives of cable TV and TV news, which were not available.

Type of media	Valley-based (Imphal-based)	Hill-based (Kuki-Zo)	Hill-based (Naga)
News print/digital	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Sangai Express (English/ Meitei) 2. E-pao (English) 3. Imphal Times (English) 4. Imphal Free Press (English) 5. Poknapham (Meitei) 6. People's Chronicle (English) 7. Hueyen Lanpao (Meitei) 8. Naharolgi Thoudang (Meitei) Government: D D Imphal (in Meitei)	Eimi Times (in Thadou dialect - defunct since 2012)	Ukhrul times
Broadcast	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tom TV (731k subscribers) 2. Impact TV (691K) 3. IS TV Live (476K) 4. Elite TV (162K) 5. MAMI TV Network (157 K) (All news reporting is in Meiteilon language, but most telecast daily news in English prior to the conflict). 	Hornbill (YouTube): Weekly show TC News Network (fully functional since July 2023, 1 news broadcast/day) IS TV (One talk- show a day)	
Radio	AIR Radio (Meiteilon news)	AIR news (Thadou news, Paite news, Hmar news). All defunct since May 3, as the AIR station is in Imphal and cannot be accessed by Kuki-Zo news readers.	

While the EGI team met a wide cross-section of journalists and media-practitioners, in Manipur's post-truth world it was very difficult to distinguish fact from fiction. Competing and diametrically opposite narratives were spun out by the two sides.

There is extreme pressure on journalists whether Meitei or tribal, to reflect the dominant view of their ethnic societies. The situation in Manipur was made more difficult with the ban on the internet, that is an essential tool of modern journalism.

Imphal Media Transformed into Meitei Media

The Imphal Valley is much more developed and there are many more daily newspapers, television channels

and digital platforms than in the Hill districts of the state. When violence broke out on 3 May, a liberal senior Meitei editor said, "The local media in Imphal were left in total confusion. This would be the scenario in Churachandpur as well."

The violence reached Imphal by 7 pm, provoked by images of unrestrained arson of Meitei settlements first at Churachandpur and then Moreh by the Kuki mobs, but it was still not extensive and confined to only a few pockets of the city.

"But mob violence intensified and saw some of the worst carnages on 4 and 5 May. In response, the government shut down internet service, first mobile data only and then broadband cable lines were shut down as well," he recalled.



Burnt down houses in churachandpur district, on 31 May

This had a devastating effect so far as news flow was concerned. It meant that there was no way to cross check narratives and distinguish rumours from facts, by journalists on both sides of the ethnic divide.

“Our duty to inform the public was severely handicapped by the lack of phone and internet facilities during the initial days of the violence. The distinction between facts and disinformation was blurred. This ensured there was no filter and rumours circulated by interested quarters held sway,” an executive editor of a digital platform said.

On 4 May, rumours began circulating in the Valley that Meitei women doctors/students in Churachandpur Medical College hospital had been raped and that several women from the Valley were molested by angry Kuki mobs. These rumours were accepted as the gospel truth, and led to retaliatory action in the Imphal Valley.

It is not known if it was the rumours, that propelled the mob to tear off the clothes and parade three Kuki women naked, and rape the young girl in the video clip that went viral. However, the Meitei journalists the EGI team met claimed that they did not know about the terrible incident till it went public on the eve of the Monsoon Session of the Parliament.

As it turned out, no Meitei doctor or any other Meitei women/ girl was raped or molested in the Churachandpur

Medical College. This was confirmed by the Assam Rifles as well as the family members of the women. While Meitei houses were set on fire and there was looting and destruction of Meitei property, no physical harm came to the Meiteis residing in Churachandpur.

Later when the two sides were shooting at each other, Kukis and Meites were killed but in the first cycle of mob violence there was no physical harm done to the Meiteis living in Kuki-dominated areas. Although now one Meitei woman has claimed that she was raped in Churachandpur, this had not been firmly established till the time of writing this report.

It is also a fact that the Meitei journalists have condemned the Kuki women’s molestation. They are ashamed that the miscreants had tarnished the image of all Meiteis.

Many Valley newspapers had correspondents in the Hill areas, but the reporters could not get through to their offices because of the internet suspension. Later, perhaps there was so much anger that the Kuki, and other tribal journalists, did not wish to contribute to any Meitei publication.

The latter could be due to social pressure from society or that their reports were being not used or were shortened to make them devoid of any meaningful reporting.

At least one reporter from the Hills confided in the EGI team that even when he was able to send in his reports, they were “used selectively” by his Imphal-based newspaper.

For these reasons, the ground reporting from the districts in Churachandpur, Kangpokpi and Tengnoupal disappeared. This applied to All India Radio and Doordarshan as well.

“Newspersons informed me that their correspondents in the Hill districts had even stopped answering phone calls from around mid-May,” a senior civil society leader in Imphal said.

The Executive Editor of a local English daily said that the Hill reporters were “mostly untrained”, and even before the violence, the copies they filed had to be heavily edited and rewritten. Whether this became an excuse not to use the version of the tribals or the reports from the Hill districts was unclear.

However, such was the lack of trust in the reporters from the Hill districts that the EGI team was told that whenever a “major” story broke, reinforcements were sent out from the Valley.

This time, however, because of the conflict, no Meitei journalist could risk venturing out to the Hills, nor could the tribal journalists come down to the Valley.

At the moment, there is a clear divide in Manipur. The tribals in the Hills remain on their side of the divide, and the Meiteis are confined to the Valley.

Like in most regional media, advertisements for newspapers, television and digital media come mainly from the government in Manipur. Keeping the powers that be happy is a given for local media outfits that will sink without the state and ruling party’s support. For example, a popular Imphal newspaper group belongs to a ruling party MLA.

Despite revenue compulsions, newspapers are still peppered with criticism of the government on many issues including drug trafficking and poppy cultivation. However, as a senior editor put it, when it comes to drug trafficking everyone, Kukis, Meiteis, Nagas and politicians, were involved.

Kuki -Zo Media Perspective

In the two months of the ethnic clashes, the Imphal-based media by and large appeared to toe the majority Meitei line, as access to the Hill areas was restricted. The

narrative changed as the viral clip of two naked Kuki women grabbed eye balls around the country.

Journalists from across the country poured in, and access for the mainland media was much better as reporters were welcomed by both sides. The tribals were better organised when dealing with reporters, giving details of each incident, using their mobile phone cameras to record events and providing facts and figures to support their views.

In the Hills there are just a handful of English newspapers. Most newspapers are in tribal languages: Kuki, Paite and Hmar. Many are no more than one-page leaflets that cater to various ethnic tribal communities scattered across the Hills.

Every journalist the EGI team met in the Hills said that he/she reported what they saw on the ground. “We do not rely on rumours or heresy. The minute we hear of a firing incident or homes being burnt, we rush to the location and report from Ground Zero. We file what we see with our own eyes,” a reporter of a local daily claimed.

In the Kuki areas, the general view is that the Imphal press is biased. “Media houses in Imphal, owned by Meites reported their version of events. They showed little responsibility as news men as the papers and television reflected the majority community’s version in the initial days of the violence,” a local Kuki reporter explained.

He pointed out that when Home Minister Amit Shah was in Manipur, had travelled to Kangpokpi and held meetings with officials and representatives of the people, firing was still going on in the city.

“As far as I understand, the reporting in the first few days of the violence was not fair. The riots in Imphal Valley where Kukis were living were torched and looted, including the homes of the well-to-do. There was nobody to report that story from our side,” a volunteer of the Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum in Kangpokpi told the EGI team.

“Most of the newspapers and news channels in the Valley took ‘dictation’ from Chief Minister Biren Singh’s office. The blame for the violence was always on us, the Kuki-Zos”.

“The narrative from Imphal was that the riots were engineered by the SoO groups (the surrendered Kuki militants, covered under Suspension of Operation, or SoO), next the blame was on poppy cultivators and drug cartels operating in Kuki areas and across the border in Myanmar”.

“Then suddenly the explanation was that the violence was because of illegal migrants coming in with arms from Myanmar and settling in forest land and finally they hit on a new phrase – ‘Narco-Terrorism,’” a reporter explained.

The National Media

The Meiteis were unhappy with the ‘parachute journalism’ of the national press. They believe that the mainstream media have portrayed the ethnic conflict as a religious one and pitted the Hindu Meites against Christian Kuki-Zos. This was far from the truth, according to Imphal editors.

Also, the national press was most reluctant to send their correspondents to report from Imphal. Very few publications sent their correspondents during the ongoing violence.

Portrayal of the conflict in Manipur in the national media was mired in confusion. In the initial few weeks, the national media narrative was of the Hindu majority targeting the Christian minority to non-tribals persecuting tribals and the majority targeting the minority.

“These initial impressions were force-multiplied by seemingly organised social media campaigns. So

overwhelming did this narrative become that even the European Union debated and drew up a resolution condemning the targeting of Christian minorities in the state by the majority Hindus,” a senior journalist explained.

Angered at what the Meites’ believe to be a one-sided view presented by the national media, an editor of an influential daily read out a note addressed to all media persons covering the Manipur conflict to the EGI team.

He claimed that it was from a popular social media handle: “Did you observe the Meitei community’s lethargic response to your coverage request? Do you feel that you are not getting the kind of treatment you ‘deserved’? Well, that’s because we don’t care. We just hope that you do your duties as responsible journalists. Meiteis don’t have a central war room coordinating all the pieces. We leave it to professionals like you to do the right thing”.

“Did you observe that the VIP treatment you get from the Chin-Kuki groups is well coordinated? The contents always ready in your Whats App/ email, 24x7? Why is that? Who’s cooking the contents so fast, so well prepared?”

This reflected both their anger with the national media, and lamentation at not being as well organised



as the tribal groups (who were the larger sufferers in the violence and arson). Perhaps this also reflected how deep the Meitei ethnic identity, and resentment, had been etched even in the minds of Meitei journalists and editors.

Media Failure

Except for the early days of the unprecedented violence that swept Manipur when the media followed the Press Council guidelines in not identifying the warring communities, there was a steady slide in journalistic ethics and principles since.

On 3 May Tribal Solidarity March by All Tribal Student Union (ATSU) was a peaceful one asking their detractors to “come now let us reason together”. Their agitation was against the majority Vaishnavite Hindu Meitei community suddenly demanding a Scheduled Tribe status.

On 4 May, Imphal’s most widely read newspaper, ‘The Sangai Express’ described them as agitators and protestors rather than naming their ethnic identity. On Day-1, the newspaper report was compiled from different parts of the state and the newspaper was careful in not identifying perpetrators of the violence. This was perhaps one of the few occasions when its reporting was representative of the demographic profile of the state.

This changed dramatically when the videos of violence began to circulate widely through Whats App. Attacks and counter attacks began at settlements of both the communities, seemingly after the videos began to circulate in Imphal and other parts of the state.

A report in ‘Nikkei Asia’ said: “On the afternoon of 4 May, Mark Sonjalen was at home in Manipur’s capital of Imphal when he saw an irate mob approaching one of the few Kuki neighbourhoods in the city. He took out his phone and started recording footage, which went viral on social media before the internet went dark. His clips appear to show uniformed police standing by as houses and a church go up in flames, some of the first evidence of what critics allege is state-sponsored violence.

The internet cut on May 4 had a dramatic impact on reporting. It actually indirectly helped in constructing a majoritarian narrative. The reasons were obvious.

Imphal hosts all the eight newspapers of the state. More importantly, though, it “hosts the most subscribed and the viewership digital broadcast media houses

in the state. The most subscribed broadcast media are ‘TOM TV’ with 731k subscribers, ‘Impact TV’ with 691k subscribers, ‘IS TV LIVE’ with 476k subscribers, ‘Elite TV’ with 162 k subscribers, and ‘MAMI TV NETWORK’ with 157k subscribers” (East Mojo).

Shutting down the internet ensured that the Imphal based newspapers were denied any reporting from preponderantly Kuki town- ships/districts like Churachandpur, Kangpokpi and Moreh. Newspapers like ‘The Sangai Express’ and ‘Imphal Free Press’ or online publications like ‘Frontier Express’ realised that their correspondents could not send their reports from Churachandpur, Kangpokpi or Moreh.

The correspondents could not respond to instructions from their editors. The internet ban dried up the alternative perspective, or other points of view, and the narrative from Imphal began to dominate.

Banning The Internet

On 4 May, the government of Manipur shut down mobile data services for five days. The reason cited for internet suspension was that it was meant to “thwart the design and activities of anti-national and anti-social elements by stopping the disinformation and false rumours, through various social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. on mobile phones”. Next day, broadband services were also banned.

‘Ukhrul Times’ is considered to be a neutral media outlet located in Naga Hills. It had a satellite link due to its office in Delhi. According to *Asia Nikkei report* (<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Indias-deadly-Manipur-conflict-highlights-impact-of-internet-cuts>) when the newspaper reported in early May, 2023 an attack on Naga women by a Meitei mob in Imphal, the state government issued a notice call in gita ‘rumour’ that was ‘absolutely false, and there is no incident as such.’ The next day, the government backtracked, saying it had never ‘officially issued’ the notice.

The Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF) wrote to the state Chief Secretary highlighting the length of the suspension order and the legal, economic and social harms of the internet suspension. The IFF also pointed out the news reporting over the medium of internet was crucial in combating disinformation and fake rumours as such disinformation may equally well travel through offline means.

The IFF stated that the primary exercise of fact-checking and up to date verified information is carried out over the internet, and social media platforms. The IFF mentioned an empirical study by researchers Jan Rydzak and Nishant Joshi that found the internet shut-downs as an ineffective tool in pacifying protests, and often have unintended consequences of incentivizing violent forms of collective action which require less communication and coordination.

The IFF reminded the Manipur government of the Anuradha Bhasin judgement of the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court had ruled that an order suspending internet services indefinitely is impermissible under the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Service) Rules, 2017.

Though broadband services were partially restored on 25 July, 2023, which impacted only three percent of internet users in the state, the ban on mobile internet services has continued far beyond 100 days. The IFF found this endless internet ban illegal and in violation of the Supreme Court's judgment in the Anuradha Bhasin case. The judgment limits the ban to 15 days.

The IFF found that the Manipur government had not observed any of the guidelines ordered by the SC in its judgment. It was during the internet ban, that the chilling video of three Kuki women being paraded naked went viral outside the state. It conveyed to the rest of the world what was really happening in Manipur.

The internet ban did not yield the expected peace dividends for the state government, as the law and order situation continued to spiral out of control. What was worse was that the narrative began to blame those who did not have a voice in this conflict.

This is despite the fact that the Imphal-based newspapers like 'The Sangai Express' had been pleading to the state government for the restoration of the internet, arguing that their publication was not getting any reports from the areas that were under the Kukis' control.

The internet ban, accompanied by violent face-offs between Kukis and Meiteis began to change the nature of reporting from the ground. All moral restraints were given a go-by. Was this due to the internet ban or the fact that all the media entities were located in Imphal, where the majority community lived?

Suddenly, newspapers led by the video channels

started claiming that the culprits were the 'Kuki militants' or those militant groups that had given up arms under the Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement with the Centre and the State. In 'The Sangai Express' and other local newspapers there was a steady demand that the SoO should be scrapped.

The Kuki militants were accused of taking away their weapons from the camps and engaging in exchange of fire with either the Manipur Police or the Meitei militia group.

On many occasions these reports were contrary to the facts on the ground and they were severely contested by the Assam Rifles (AR). The AR claims that the weapons of the surrendered militants are greased rendering them unusable and kept under a triple locked armoury: one key with the militants, one with the civilian administration and one with the Assam Rifles.

During Home Minister Amit Shah's visit to Manipur, the demand from the civil society organisations in the Imphal Valley was that the SoO with the Kuki militant groups be scrapped.

The ethnic divide in the media was so deep that news stories, as well as editorials, began to blame Assam rifles for protecting the Kuki tribals. The Kuki tribals were described as "narcoterrorists" trying to enlarge their space in land strapped Manipur by liberally using drug money.

Chief Minister N. Biren Singh in one of his press briefings had used the term "narcoterrorists", thus further legitimising its use to malign the Kuki-Zo communities.

The opposition to Assam Rifles was ratcheted up in a concerted campaign run by the Imphal media. They were accused of helping the Hill tribes who were 'poppy planters'. There has been a long list of denials that has been shared by Assam Rifles with the EGI team against these news stories that hold them responsible for all that is going wrong in Manipur.

The Assam Rifles needs to be commended for saving Meitei lives in Churachandpur and Moreh, and the lives of tribal students trapped in Manipur University.

The EGI team would especially like to mention their rescue of A Frida, a journalist from 'India Today (NE)', who had exposed Meitei militants, A Rambai Tenggol vigilantes for its alleged role in violence against the Kukis.

A mob came looking for her and surrounded the

hotel she was at. A call to AR for help led to her being whisked away to safety.

Fake News and Disinformation

While the early days of killings and the role of social media has been well documented, it is now visible that the ethnic divide deepened progressively through fake news, which finds space only in Imphal media. The Kuki side has begun to put together publications, but they are far too spartan to get any visibility.

Some instances of fake news, and these are by no means exhaustive, are given below:

- 14 July: *'The Sangai Express'* carried comments of Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (Cocomi) saying that "visibly, the presence of Assam Rifles rankles the majority Meitei community and they want it to be removed at all costs." This fed into the public perception that the Assam Rifles was opposed to the Meiteis.
- 8 July: An edit page article written by one T. Biren Singh in *'The Sangai Express'* claimed that whatever was playing out in Manipur was pre-planned and part of a long term conspiracy to create a separate home land (for the Kukis).

The article is granular in detail about how the drug trade linked Kuki village chiefs hoped to achieve this objective, which stated simply includes infiltrating the bureaucracy and the army with the Kukis. The article also charged the Assam Rifles of allowing infiltration of Kukis from across the Myanmar border.

- 11 July: There was a report in the *'Imphal Free Press'*, which claimed that Myanmar nationals had been treated at the district hospital of Churachandpur, a Kuki stronghold. The implications of this report was that those treated in the hospital were infiltrators from Myanmar who had been injured in the violence with Meitei. The AR found no merit in the story and felt that this fake news was initiated by inimical elements.
- 13 June: There was an attack on Kuki villages of Khamenlok and adjoining areas on June 12, supported by Meitei women folk in the mob. Some members of both sides, without any intervention of the security forces, were blocked by the Meitei women folk from reaching the burning villages. Few amongst those who got killed were not locals and had been killed else



A woman sleeps in a relief camp for Meiteis, at school in Moirang, in Bishnupur district

wherein the counter-attacks the following day by the Kukis. The Manipur media inverted the role of the Meitei mobs and reported the incidents as being instigated by “Kuki militants” who attacked and killed Meiteis.

- 9 June: Armed miscreants in police uniform attacked the Kuki village of Khoken at 4 AM on 9 June, and three persons were killed. When news of the incident spread, a mob of Meitei women gathered in an adjoining village.

The Imphal media reported the incident once again reversing the role suggesting that “Kuki militants” had attacked the (Kuki) village and that all those killed were all Kuki militants, the victims included a 67-year-old woman, and a 70-year-old man.

- 4 June: In a shameful incident in the Iroisemba locality of Imphal, a seven-year-old Kuki boy, being taken to hospital in an ambulance with his Meitei mother and another woman relative, were attacked by a Meitei mob. As the father of the boy was Kuki, all of them were branded as a Kuki family and burnt alive inside the ambulance.

The Manipur media blacked out the incident as it showed the Meitei community in poor light. The national media picked up the story but even there an attempt was made to suggest that a Kuki mob had set fire to the ambulance. They were forced to retract the report after protests on social media.

- 20 June: There was a claim in *‘People’s Chronicle’* that 29 Meira Paibis were injured in a major scuffle with the Assam Rifles.

What was not reported was that the local police had asked for help from AR as they were on the verge of being overwhelmed by the protestors.

- 25 June: The *‘Imphal Free Press’* in an article claimed that the Committee to Preserve the Integrity of Manipur had asked for the removal of Assam Rifles as it had close ties with illegal immigrants and narco-terrorists and was not stopping the flow of immigrants to the state. In its reply Assam Rifles said, “Assam Rifles has played a crucial role in capture of many illegal immigrants. In Manipur only approximately 5500 such individuals have been apprehended

in the past 2 years.

“Through strict observation, some 4200 individuals have been motivated to voluntarily return to their home countries, while a total of 1290 remain under close scrutiny in the state and their details shared with appropriate offices. These actions aim to ensure national security while addressing the complexities surrounding the challenges of porous international border.”

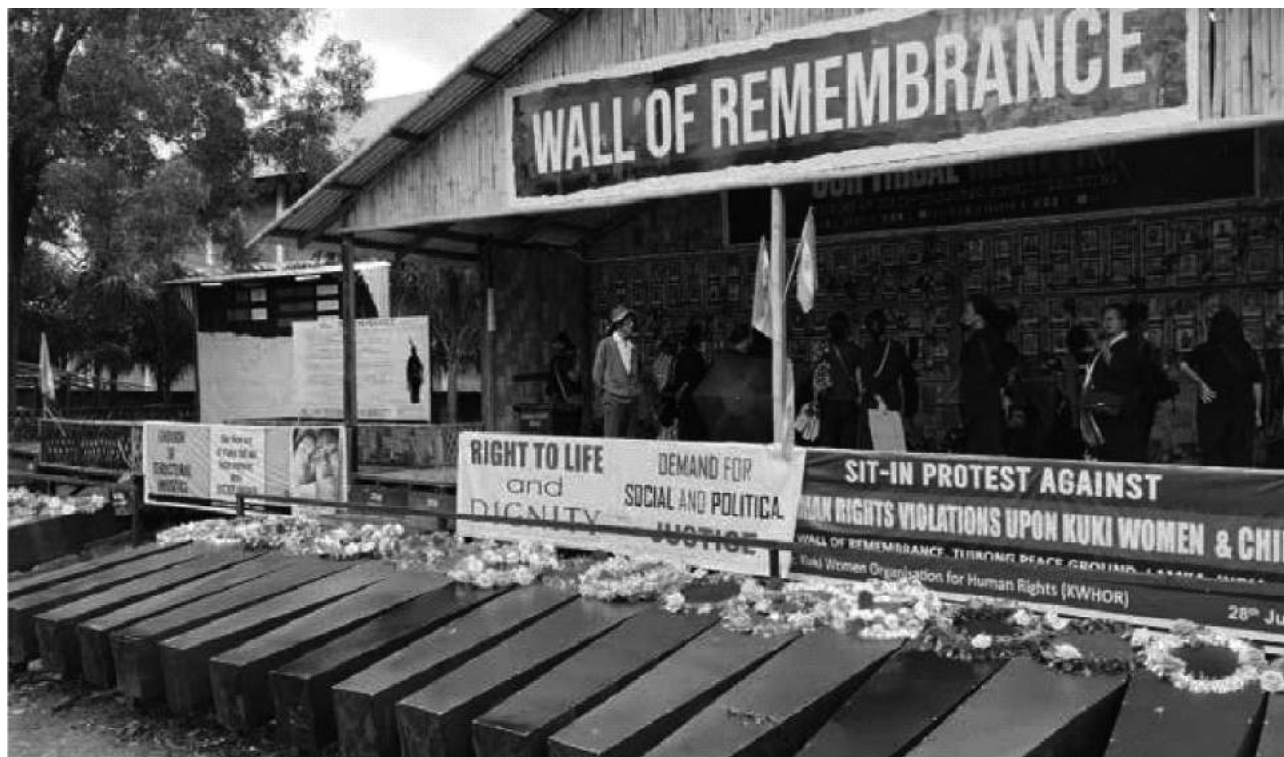
The Assam Rifles reply debunks allegations of helping narco-terrorism by claiming that they had seized some Rs. 6000 crores worth of drugs since 2016.

- 30 May: ‘The Frontier Express’ published a comment written by Yoihen ba Ningthouja targeting the Assam Rifles which suggested that it was engaged in setting up non-designated camps for Kuki militants to attack Meitei militants. This provocative claim was rebutted.
- 4 August: The Assam Rifles pointed out that four versions of the same event were reported by the Imphal press, including ‘The Sangai Express’, where the troops allegedly fired blanks to stop a group of women belonging to the Meira Paibis group.

The facts of the case according to Assam rifles are different. “At around 11:50 AM, a crowd of violent men and women aggressively started pelting stones, while miscreants in various Police Uniforms and Black Dresses present in the crowd fired at Security Forces with small arms and CHilli Grenades. In response to the threat, RAF used smoke grenade to disperse the agitated mob.”

Assam Rifles claimed that the mob tried to breach the buffer zone to reach the (Kuki) people in Kangvai. It accused the media of spreading mis-information.

- 3 August: ‘The Sangai Express’ reported that Kuki ‘narco-militants’ ‘dese crated a temple’ in Gwaltabi that was guarded by the army. A rebuttal by AR suggested that there was no activity of Kuki militants in that area and no damage was done to the temple. In the army’s view it was clearly a report meant to ‘disturb the fragile peace of Manipur.’



Conclusions and Recommendations

Several things became abundantly clear about the reportage from Manipur during the present conflict:

1. During the ethnic violence, journalists of Manipur wrote one-sided reports. In normal circumstances, they would be cross-checked and monitored by their editors or Chiefs of Bureaus from the local administration, police and security forces. However, this was not possible during the conflict.
2. The internet ban made matters worse. Communication blockade by the government had a deleterious effect on journalism as it directly impacted the ability of journalists to communicate with each other, their editors and their sources.

It also affected the media because local news gathered without any communication links was not sufficient to give a balanced view of the situation and often, even that was not enough to fill their pages or meet their news requirement.

3. The Meitei media, for that is what Manipur media seemed to have become during the conflict, acted collectively with editors consulting each

other and agreeing on a common narrative e.g., agreeing on common language to report an incident, referring to certain use of language or even not reporting an event. This the EGI team was told was because they did not want to inflame the already volatile situation further.

This practice apparently originated from the days when insurgent groups were active in the Valley and threatened newspaper editors for any adverse reporting. However, the downside of such an approach during ethnic violence is that it can easily slip into forging a common ethnic narrative and lead to a collective downslide of journalistic principles by deciding what to report and what to censor.

This seems to have happened to some extent during the present cycle of ethnic violence between the Meiteis and the Kukis.

4. With the internet suspended, and communication and transport in disarray, the media had to rely almost entirely on the narrative of the state government. This narrative under the N. Biren Singh dispensation became a narrow ethnic one playing up to the biases of the majority Meitei community.

5. The Meitei media became a party to the vilification of the security forces, especially the Assam Rifles. It failed in its duty by constant propaganda against the Assam Rifles claiming that it was only purveying the views of the public.

It failed to verify the facts, weigh them and then use them in its reportage. The state government also tacitly supported this vilification by allowing Manipur Police to file an FIR against the Assam Rifles, suggesting that one hand of the state did not know what the other was doing or this was deliberate action.

6. There are clear indications that the leadership of the state became partisan during the conflict. It should have avoided taking sides in the ethnic conflict but it failed to do its duty as a democratic government which should have represented the entire state.
7. This directly affected governance which was also seen as partisan. The net result is that the executive, its instruments (the police and other security forces of the state) and the bureaucracy are today divided along ethnic lines. There is a Meitei government, Meitei police and Meitei

bureaucracy in Imphal and the tribal people living in the Hills have no faith in them.

8. The State made a mistake in banning the internet. An internet ban only feeds rumours and blocks the views of the disadvantaged community as has clearly happened in Manipur.
9. The State has to be careful while imposing an internet ban. If ban becomes absolutely necessary, then news platforms should be exempted from the ban and a committee comprising the media representatives, civil society organisations and government representatives should monitor the ban and its duration.

In no circumstances should the state government go against the guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court in the Anuradha Basin case.

10. If curfew is imposed, the government should make provision for the distribution of credible news through newspapers, TV channels and online publications.

Fact-Finding Team Seema Guha, Sanjay Kapoor and Bharat Bhushan

VIOLENCE IN MANIPUR, NORTH-EAST INDIA

Investigative Report to the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance

21st JUNE 2023



*Executive Summary**Evidence gathering session*

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2. Protocols
3. Kuki eyewitness testimonies
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Seven weeks after communal violence broke out in Manipur in north-east India, a picture is emerging of grave abuses against human rights, human dignity and disruption of peaceful relations between people groups. As this brief report sets out in witness testimony, there are clear indications that ethnic and economic disputes have been weaponized against the acceptance of religious pluralism and the ability of individuals to freely worship.

Many tens of thousands of people have been displaced, numerous villages in Manipur are reported to have been destroyed, with church and tribal associations listing hundreds of Christian buildings leveled to ashes. All this is reported in Indian and some international news media. But the scale of the destruction of religious places of worship deserves far wider attention.

With access to Manipur restricted and the internet shut down, it is impossible to draw definitive conclusions on either the breadth of the violence, or whether it was pre-meditated and co-ordinated, as some allege. It is to be noted that if the conflict is explained by citing ethnic or economic disputes between valley people and tribals from the hills, account still needs to be given as to why churches among both Meiteis and Kukis were destroyed. There is a clear religious dimension.

At the 15 May 2023, meeting of the Council of Experts to the International Religious Freedom or

Belief Alliance, concerns were raised by a number of the members of the Council of Experts present about the recent violence in Manipur, following which this investigative report was initiated.

On Thursday 1 June 2023, a fact-finding webinar, chaired by me, was organized by some members of the Council of Experts to hear eye-witness testimony. This report summarises content from the session, together with supplementary evidence submitted for consideration. It is a snapshot - not a comprehensive assessment or evaluation of either motive or blame - and is the assessment of just those involved. The report includes consequential findings and recommendations, but the full facts must be established when peace is restored and for justice and reconciliation to be pursued.

David Campanale Chair of this Investigative Report and Webinar Evidence Gathering session Member of the Council of Experts to IRFBA

EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION**1. Overview**

Manipur, North-East India, is a state that shares its border with Myanmar and is characterized by its hilly terrain. The primary inhabitable area is the Imphal Valley, which accounts for approximately 10% of the state's total land area and is predominantly inhabited by the Meitei community of people. The tribal communities surround the valley from the surrounding hills. The hill tribes are classified as Kukis in the Southern region, and Nagas in the North-Eastern region.

The Meitei people comprise around 53% of the population of Manipur and mainly ascribe to Hindu religious beliefs and practices. The Land Reform Act of Manipur (1960) prevented the Meitei people from settling in the hill regions of the state. The tribal populations consist primarily of Christian Kuki and Christian Naga people and represent about 40% of the population of the state's 3.5 million inhabitants. The tribal people reside in the reserved hill areas, which account for around 90% of the geographic land space of Manipur. These people groups are not restricted in law from also settling in the Imphal Valley.

Politically, the Meitei people hold a dominant position in the Manipur Legislative Assembly. Out of the Assembly's 60 available seats, only 19 are reserved for

'Scheduled Tribes', which are specifically Nagas or Kukis. The remaining seats are unreserved. In the previous political election, Meitei candidates were elected to 39 of the 40 unreserved seats, to which the tribal groups expressed concerns about a disproportionate allocation of government resources directed towards the Meitei-dominated Imphal Valley.

This report details eye-witness testimonies from a violent clash that erupted between the Meitei people and the hillside tribal communities in early May 2023. The immediate cause of the violence can be traced to the High Court of Manipur's Order in April 2023, which directed the state government to consider the inclusion of the Meitei community in the 'Scheduled Tribe' (ST) list and submit such recommendation to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs in the Government of India. This status would constitutionally grant the Meitei people privileges similar to those enjoyed by the tribal communities.

Within 4 weeks of the Order, the tribal communities protested against the High Court's decision, as it raised concerns among the Kukis who feared that the ST would enable Meiteis to purchase land in the prohibited hilly areas. As a result, the All-Tribal Student's Union Manipur called for a peaceful rally and solidarity march to take place on 3 May 2023 in all the seven hill districts of the state. The rallies were carried out peacefully in at least 5 districts. However, during the rally in Churachandpu district, which borders the Imphal Valley, violence broke out between the 60,000 protestors and the Meitei and Kuki populations, and it escalated quickly and severely to 10 other districts of the state. These were Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal, Kakching, Bishenpur, Jiribam, Tengnoupal, Kangpokpi, Churachandpur and Phezwral.

Homes, churches, institutions, businesses, and commercial buildings predominantly belonging to Meitei Christians and Kukis were systematically destroyed by arson across the districts.

Large-scale violence, looting and arson continued from 3 May – 6 May 2023 while the state government failed to respond. Described internationally as a large-scale ethnic conflict, the violence that ensued over a matter of days resulted in the loss of at least 100 lives; 300 people being injured; in excess of 26,000 persons being displaced; and over 50,000 persons being forced

to relocate (ref: the Indian Express). According to a public statement (16 May 2023) by Archbishop Dominic Lumon of Imphal, the head of the Catholic Church in Manipur, around 13,800 refugees are in Imphal West, around 11,800 in Imphal East, around 4,500 in Bishnupur, 5,500 in Churachandpur, and around 7,000 people in Kangpokpi district.

In an updated assessment (15 June 2023) Archbishop Lumon described the "complete collapse of the constitutional machinery in the State," adding that "In the peripheries where sporadic violence keeps happening unabated, the mob is said to be marching alongside the State Police who do nothing when the mob goes about torching houses and looting at will." Assessing that 'it will be wrong to categorically say that it is a religious conflict', he concludes "the undercurrent of religious intolerance stands out", adding 'In the midst of these orchestrated propaganda, subtle attack on Christianity seems to have found a clean and unsuspecting space.

Adding to the complexity of the situation, access to reliable and verifiable information has been difficult to obtain due to internet services in the state of Manipur having been suspended since 3 May 2023, according to an order issued by the Home Department of the State government. A petition challenging the internet ban has been filed before the Supreme Court of India.

This report draws attention to eyewitness testimonies that state that the events in Manipur have sharply and severely impacted the freedom of religion or belief of thousands of people within the region. As well as hundreds of churches being burned or otherwise destroyed, many Meitei Christians have been threatened to renounce their faith and accept a tribal religion.

People from both the Meiteis and Kukis have been killed and displaced, and both groups were given an opportunity to present eyewitness accounts during the evidence gathering session.

2. Protocols

Chatham House rules governed the content of the webinar, which was presented live on 1 June 2023.

The International Protocol on Documenting Violations of Religious Freedom was consulted by the organisers of the webinar for best practice in the collection of evidence from eyewitnesses. The eyewitness survivors signed a consent form to confirm that they

were willing to present their testimonies, and they had the opportunity to physically conceal their faces during the webinar if they wished to do so. The consent form additionally informed the participants that their personal data would be kept confidential outside the closed webinar forum, and that their real names would not be used on the report.

The organisers of the webinar also took caution to ensure that the witnesses from the Meitei people were physically separated in a different building to the witnesses from the Kuki people, in order to add additional layers of protection.

The evidence collected was for a single use only; for the production of this report. If any member person or organization wishes to collect further evidence, they are recommended to obtain it separately.

3. Eyewitness testimonies – Kuki People

The following individuals from the Kuki tribe, whose names have been concealed for safety purposes, shared their eyewitness accounts about the events that they witnessed in May 2023. Their testimonies are written below.

(a) Ms G (of the Veiphei people, a Kuki ethnic group) – now residing in New Delhi

“I am from Churachandpur, Manipur, but I work in Delhi. I went to Manipur to visit my sick relatives and younger brother who was working at Manipur University. On 3 May 2023, after we had eaten and were relaxing, we started to hear that a peaceful march meant that we needed to stay alert. I felt uneasy so I locked the front door of the house. My brother then heard news that an angry mob entered the University, so he called the Security Offers. We heard that the men attacked the Boys’ Hostel, beat the residents, took their certificates, and burned the accommodation down. After a few minutes, they banged on my brother’s door, and we were very scared. They hit the door with bats and stones, and broke the front door down. We thought we must hide in our father’s bed-ridden room. When they banged on my father’s door, my brother decided to hide in the backyard in the bushes. I stayed with my sick father and hid my mobile phone. The mob kept asking for my brother and searching for him with a flashlight outside in the dark (it was approximately 8 pm). Fortunately, they did not find him.

Had my brother been inside the house, I cannot imagine what would have happened to him. I was protected though because I trust in the living God. Still, I soon received a phone call telling me to move to another place in the Campus, and the mob dragged my father from his bed to take him there. We could not get hold of my father’s medicine in this new place, and I saw many people whose houses were burned down. I could not help them – the situation was helpless. Finally, we escaped with the help of the security forces and I returned to Delhi.”

(b) Kuki survivor, Pastor T – now residing in Nagaland

I am Pastor T, representing the Kuki Christian Church and a Seminary that was established on the same Campus but burned down on 4 May 2023. The day before, on 3 May 2023, at around 2.45 pm, a Meitei mob (later identified as the groups called Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun) comprising of more than 500 people came on war footing and burned down the Church, the Kuki Christian Church Head Office, the Offset Press, the Book Room, and 12 residential living quarters. I had been a pastor at the church for two years.

I was in the campus just before the Meiteis broke in. I saw the Manipur police commandos, the paramilitaries standing on both sides of the entrance gate, but they appeared to not have any power to stop or control the perpetrators from burning down all the establishments in the Campus. The police did nothing to stop the fire in the campus but were busy just checking that the fire did not spread to our neighbours (despite their area not being vulnerable to catching fire).

I watched the burning fire with excruciating pain secretly from a distance. The agony will never be erased from my life.”

(c) Kuki survivor, Ms M – now residing in Assam

“I am a scholar from Manipur University, I belong to the Kuki community, and I am staying in a female scholar hostel. The attack on the hostel started on 3 May 2023, between 9-10 pm, and it quickly spread to other women’s hostels. During the attack, every woman hid – some in their bedrooms, some in the terrace, and some alone. 2 men holding guns entered my hostel and hunted for the Kuki women. I was staying on the top floor, opposite the staircase, and I was in the first room to be attacked by the mob. They broke through the doors of my room and I hid in my bathroom to see the entire scenario. Even

now, I still feel traumatized and spend most of my time sleeping, even though my body has become numb. At the time of the attack, I tried hard to remain silent so that the mob could not find me.

Thanks to my prayers, the mob did not find me. Yet, the mob still set fire to, and destroyed, all my important documents like my certificates, paper publications, theses, and computers.

The mob tortured some of the Kuki men and women, and bound their hands, assaulted, harassed and threatened them. On 4 May 2023, the authorities successfully stepped in and transported the Kuki people away. All of the other University scholars, students and staff members fled the Campus in fear for their lives”.

(d) Mr KV – now residing in Assam (of the Veiphei people, a Kuki ethnic group)

“I am a student of Manipur University and I am from the Veiphei community. I was staying in rented accommodation at the University when a mob forcibly entered on 3 May 2023. With other students, I ran into a field where we were caught and physically assaulted. I wounded my knee and feet on barbed wires while attempting to escape from the mob who were trying to murder us. They hit my friend with a cricket bat, and we cried out in fear. One person who was not drunk among the mob members convinced the others to stop, so we could be taken to the village authorities. On the way there the mob continued to physically assault and slap us and beat us with a stick. They also kicked my friend.

At the police authority chairman’s house, we were verbally assaulted and called illegal immigrants from Myanmar by the mob – they said we should go back to where we came from. They said, though, that since we had been living together with them for a year and a half they would be merciful to us. They called the police, but the police would not come because they were busy that evening. The mob told us that they would call the police in the morning and hoped we would go back to where we came from.

When we returned to our rented accommodation, a fellow roommate had already called a police officer and asked for an escort to take us to a police station. We went, but it was overcrowded. So we were escorted again to another location that we stayed in until 8 May 2023. From that date, I bought a plane ticket Assam where I currently am.”

(e) Kuki survivor - Pastor K – still in Manipur

“I am a pastor from Manipur, and I came to Nagaland for this hearing. On 4 May 2023, at approximately 11.00 am, two army Gypsies arrived at Newland Mission, where we were located. We appealed to them for assistance and requested to be taken along. However, they instructed us to use our own private vehicle, assuring us of protection and escort. boarded the Army Gypsy with three brothers and two sisters, while my wife, daughter, and other relatives joined us in three separate private cars. Unfortunately at around 11.30am, the Meitei mob stopped us, and they started pelting stones and beating us. They hit the private cars and burned them down. They used sticks and iron rods to beat us, and then forcefully pulled us out of the army vehicles. We were helpless and thought we would die that day. They also set fire to the private cars, intensifying our sense of impending doom.

Then, the Arambai Tenggol volunteers confined us to a room, locking us up in their office. To secure our safety, we barricaded the doors to prevent their entry. But, the Arambai Tenggol (who are Meitei religious actors) attacked us three times. We tried to block the main door. When they could not break the door, they started shooting at, and broke through, the windows to assault us and I instinctively shielded my daughter to protect her.

We were held captive as part of a human exchange proposition, as our people had also detained some of theirs. However, those who held us captive rejected the proposed exchange and attempted to execute us.

Fortunately, around 7 pm, 3 male leaders unlocked the door and rescued and transported to a camp. With the assistance we received, we subsequently relocated to the airport and made our way to Guwahati.

4. Kuki Political Analysis

(a) Political leader from the Kuki community, Dr L

“I wish to share about some issues that concern the people in trouble in Manipur. The issues that recently occurred were based upon many foundations that had already been laid.

Firstly, there is media manipulation and fake news that is well maintained by the state government. Yesterday [31 May 2023], a reporter from India Today was intimidated and threatened by the Meitei community and from people in official offices. I have also seen media

manipulation by the state government in other situations, for example in certain fact-finding teams.

Secondly, there has been a covering up of radical groups who have conveniently been getting arms and ammunition from the state armories – this has been reported on the local news and I can confirm it from my time on the ground. This has been very unfortunate. One army general has rightly put it that there has not been looting of arms or ammunition from the state on this occasion, and the reason is because the state has been complicit in handing it all over or not being resistant to it being taken.

Thirdly, it is remarkable how the narratives about the crisis have shifted frequently, from narratives about Kukis being illegal immigrants from the President; to the present narratives that call Kukis ‘narco-terrorists’. The Kuki community has been branded as having a link with the Chinese, which is a completely baseless claim.

We are therefore in a state of confusion with how the state and Indian governments are going to deal with the situation.

Next, the issue of security, imbalance and allegations of favouritism against the Kuki community from the state government. The Kuki people have been suffering immensely, including by being displaced on a large scale, but their concerns have not been met politically.”

5. Eyewitness testimonies – Meitei People

The following individuals from the Meitei people, whose names have been concealed for safety purposes, shared their eyewitness accounts about the events that they witnessed in May 2023. Their testimonies are written below.

(a) *Meitei survivor: Baptist Pastor S*

“The Meitei Christians are stranded in the middle of discussions about this crisis, yet 250 Meitei Christian churches have been vandalized or destroyed by fire so far by the violent mob. In many cases, the mob has burned a church or house belonging to a Meitei Christian but has not damaged their neighbour’s door if they are not a Christian. If the buildings are right next to each other, the mob will often carry the furniture of the Christian house or church out into the front yard and then burn it. The expensive furniture has been looted.

We are facing hostility by the Meiteis on the basis that we are Christians, and from the Kukis on the basis that we are Meiteis.

Churches have been burned in at least three Hill Districts – I have heard this information firsthand from Meitei Christians, and I started to compile a list. The headquarters of Manipur Baptist association, Meitei Presbyterian Synod, and the Church of God, Manipur have been destroyed. Another campaign by the extremists, is to convert church land into community centres, village gyms, and other buildings.

My church was burned, and when I rang the police, I was told that there were not enough policemen to respond or to guard properties at the time.

The state government has failed in its duty to protect life and property, and we can all just stand as mute spectators and watch our churches and properties be destroyed. The mobs have also burned many of our Christian documents and have forced people to convert away from Christianity and towards the indigenous religion of Sanahamism. One example I can give of the forced conversions is about a male Meitei Christian friend of mine who runs a private school. A mob came to the school and told him that the school had to hoist a flag of the regional community up place a picture on the wall of the indigenous religion called Sanahamism. The mob then told him to go and get his Bible, which the mob then said must be burned by him. When he refused to burn the Bible, the mob twice fired a gun in the air and then held him at gunpoint. The family members came running to the rescue and he managed to escape. However, the mob vandalized and destroyed the entire school building.

Christians are living in constant fear about being attacked at any time. Part of our identity and our churches are being destroyed. Our fundamental right to worship is being taken away, and as well as our churches being burned down, we have not been able to gather together for worship or prayer since 3 May 2023. We feel like a stranger in our own land, and we are in effect being required to choose between our faith or our land. We assess that the Meiteis are fearful of their community members converting to Christianity and so they are being violent. We ask the community around the world to raise a voice on behalf of us for our safety”.

6. Member of the Legislative Assembly of Manipur: Karhal District

“The Kukis and Meiteis have lived together in peace for a number of years, but now the Christians are forced to flee

from Manipur due to the clear danger to their property and lives. Families are being separated and destroyed, and I fear that their lives will never be the same again. The violence that occurred in Manipur since 3 May 2023 due to the government security and administrative failure is heartbreaking and unfortunate.”

7. Journalist Perspective

“To gather evidence, I was in the Imphal area for 3 days where the Meitei people live, and Churachandpur hills for 3 days where tribals live. 5 things surprised me and pointed to something dangerous.

1. The pace of the violence. In only 2-3 days, at least 3,000 homes and 290 churches were damaged, destroyed and burned – and this is conservative estimate because the actual number could double this. The conservative estimate of numbers equates to 60 houses vandalized every hour during those violent days, or 1 house per minute.
2. The precision of the violence. It is remarkable that the properties belonging to the Naga tribe were left untouched. So, if the violence was spontaneous, how did the Meiteis not vandalise the Naga homes? It's important to note that the people groups do not look very different from each other.
3. I was told several reliable sources that the Arambai Tenggol group of people appeared in almost every incident of violence; they were waiting outside homes and wearing black shirts.
4. The role of rumours. This is important because the Meitei people claim a particular timeline, but the tribal people claim a different timeline. We have been informed that it was the rumours that sparked the violence in the first area, and then there was retaliation to the houses being burned and people killed. Local people then joined in, because they heard through videos and photos that women had been raped and children had been killed by Kukis. People spread these rumours.
5. The erosion of trust. When I met ordinary Meiteis in Imphal, all were unhappy with the state government and its lack of response to the events. The people knew that the government had not done enough to prevent the violence

or protect the people, and was ineffectual in curbing the violence.

Regarding the violence, I have 3 observations

1. The government appears to have been biased for at least 5 years prior to the violence in favouring the Meitei people, including by creating policies that were against the tribal people. When the violence erupted, the state police were reportedly seen in the videos, which I can verify. It is reported that the police would come to a house before it was burned down, and they would ensure that the house was vacated so that the mob could burn it down.
2. The tribal people, especially the Kukis, were subjected to demonization through allegations of illegal immigration over 5 years. This was being alleged because there was a large influx of refugees from Myanmar; these people were also accused of cultivating poppies and being drug dealers. Misinformation usually always precedes organized violence.
3. Churachandpur sits on a vast reserve of oil and gas and successive governments, not just the BJP, but all governments have been eyeing this resource. As long as the tribals are there, they will not allow governments to give contracts to companies to extract oil. To me, in a way, this issue is similar to what happened in a state in Myanmar which was also rich in natural resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following action points are recommended:

1. The Indian government should send sufficient national Indian army units to protect and assure tribal villages vulnerable to attack. The violence must end and peace must be restored as a matter of urgency.
2. Refugees in relief camps, especially those in inaccessible regions, must have their needs met and be urgently assessed. Relief workers need to be given physical access to relief camps and the affected areas in the hill districts.
3. Full physical access must be given to investigative journalists into Manipur to be able to gather first-hand reliable information that can be reported internationally.

4. Inter-religious leaders should convene at the state level to diffuse the situation.
5. Due to the large-scale migration and travel from the state, additional flights should be made available with a cap on their fares.
6. Government helpline numbers must be set up to assist those still stuck in hostile territories.
7. Internet connection should be restored to provide citizens with access to information and ease of communication.
8. A Claims Commission should be set up to assess the scale of violence and the loss and to dispense adequate compensation to victims.
9. The rehabilitation of victims in relief camps and elsewhere to their homes, lands, and properties needs to be made possible.
10. A full investigation about the impact of the violence upon freedom of religion or belief and freedom of assembly should be undertaken by an independent commission.
11. The Courts should undertake a full and thorough review of the causes and perpetrators behind the violence, the use of media to spread false information, and the impact to freedom of religion or belief upon the Meitei Christian and Kuki Christian communities.
12. A specialist team of experts on freedom of religion or belief should be given access to affected regions by the state government to conduct detailed analysis about the impact to, and ongoing threats for, freedom of religion or belief in Manipur.

David Campanale

ANNEX 1: List of churches destroyed

Two lists of burnt and destroyed churches were supplied by individuals from Manipur that could be verified. It is recognised and anticipated that the real number of churches will be much higher than what is listed in this report, but due to a lack of internet access, it is difficult to verify further lists at this time.

List of burnt & destroyed Meitei Churches

No.	Name of churches/ associations	No. of churches destroyed
1	Presbyterian Church of India	55
2	Believer Eastern Church of India	39
3	Meitei Baptist Association	23
4	Meitei Evangelical Baptist Convention	13
5	Meitei Field	11
6	Evangelical Free Church of India	10
7	Meitei Mission Field	11
8	Independent Church of India	9
9	Evangelical Church of India	7
10	Viswa Vani	3
11	Evangelical Churches Association	2
12	Church of God Manipur	2
13	Assemblies of God	2
14	Good Shepherd Church of India	2
15	Meitei Christian Church	2
16	Manipur Evangelical Lutheran Church	2
17	Bengshok Church	2
18	Word of God for Asia	2
19	Brethren Church	2
20	Salvation Army	2
21	Independent (Other)	49
Total		250

No.	List of institutions/offices run by Meitei Christians
1	Calvary Theological Institute Manipur
2	Rapha Hospital and Research Centre
3	Breakthrough Mission India (Rehabilitation Centre)
4	Berean Grace Academy School
5	Hoi Children's Home
6	Meitei Baptist Association Head Office
7	Meitei Presbyterian Singlup Synod

Source: These lists were shared by a Meitei Christian leader, 1 June 2023

A. List of church buildings burnt and destroyed

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Name of Church</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Date of Attack</i>
EVANGELICAL CHURCHES ASSOCIATION (ECA)				
1	ECA Church building	Haokip veng	Completely Burnt	4 th May-23
2	ECA Church building	Iroisemba	Completely Burnt	3 rd May-23
3	ECA Church building	Game Village	Completely Burnt	3 rd May-23
4	ECA Church building	Tentha, Imphal	Completely Burnt	4 th May-23
5	ECA Church building	Khangabok	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
6	ECA Church building	Dopkon	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
7	ECA Church building	Lailampat	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
8	ECA Church building	Tollen	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
9	ECA Church building	Phoilenching	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
10	ECA Church building	Haotak Vajang	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
EVANGELICAL BAPTIST CONVENTION CHURCH (EBCC)				
11	ECA Church building	Taothong	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
12	EBC Church Building	Tribal Colony	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
13	EBC Church Building	Paite Veng	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
14	EBC Church Building	National	GamesVillage Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
15	EBC Church Building	Lamphelpat	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
16	EBC Church Building	Jiribam	Partial Burnt	3 rd May 23
17	EBC Church Building	Vengnuam	Partial Burnt	3 rd May 23
18	EBC Church Building	Langol	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
19	EBC Church Building	Paite Colony	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
MEITEI EVANGELICAL BAPTIST CONVENTION CHURCH (MEBCC)				
20	MEBC Church Building	Kwakeithel	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
21	MEBC Church Building	Kangmong	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
22	MEBC Church Building	Awang Jiri Leikai	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
23	MEBC Church Building	Thiyam Konjil	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
24	MEBC Church Building	Khunou	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
25	MEBC Church Building	Nambol	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
26	MEBC Church Building	Toubul	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
27	MEBC Church Building	Nachou	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
28	MEBC Church Building	Naranseina	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
29	MEBC Church Building	Thamnapokpi	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
30	MEBC Church Building	Thanga Salam	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
31	MEBC Church Building	Heisnam	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
32	MEBC Church Building	Chingkha	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
33	MEBC Church Building	Khordak	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
34	MEBC Church Building	Wapokpi	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
35	MEBC Church Building	Mangjing Leikai	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
36	MEBC Church Building	Thiyam Konjil	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
37	MEBC Church Building	Thoubal Khunou	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
38	MEBC Church Building	Maidram	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Name of Church</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Date of Attack</i>
NEW TESTAMENT BAPTIST CHURCHES ASSOCIATION (NTBCA)				
39	NTBCA Church Building	Changangei	Burnt Down & Destroyed	4 th May 23
40	NTBCA Church Building	U-Checkon	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
41	NTBCA Church Building	Ingorok	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
42	NTBCA Church Building	Tekcham	Burnt Down & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
ASSEMBLY OF GOD CHURCH (MEITEI)				
43	AG Church Building	Nongmaikhong	Burnt & Vandalised	4 th May 23
44	AG Church Building	Hawtak Kumbi	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
45	AG Church Building	Tentha	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
46	AG Church Building	Langmeidong	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
47	AG Church Building	Langmeithat	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
48	AG Church Building	Ishikha	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
49	AG Church Building	Hawtak Bethel	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
MANIPUR EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH (MELC)				
50	MELC Church Building	Chairen	Burnt & Vandalised	4 th May 23
51	MELC Church Building	Tentha	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
52	MELC Church Building	Imphal	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
ZOU PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH SYNOD (ZPCS)				
53	ZPCS Church Building	Bishnupur	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
54	ZPCS Church Building	Lamphel	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
INDEPENDENT CHURCH OF INDIA (ICI)				
55	ICI Church Building	Checkon	Vandalised	4 th May 23
56	ICI Church Building	Lamphel	Completely Burnt & Destroyed	4 th May 23
57	ICI Church Building (Meitei)	Moirangkhumou	Completely Burnt & Destroyed	4 th May 23
58	ICI Church Building (Meitei)	Kumbi	Destroyed	4 th May 23
59	ICI Church Building (Meitei)	Moirang College Gate	Vandalised	4 th May 23
60	ICI Church Building (Meitei)	Phubala	Vandalised	4 th May 23
61	ICI Church Building (Meitei)	Chana	Destroyed	4 th May 23
62	ICI Church Building (Meitei)	Khulakpat	Destroyed	4 th May 23
REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH NEI (RPCNEI)				
63	RPCNEI Church Building	Langol, Imphal	Burnt & Vandalised	3 rd May 23
64	RPCNEI Church Building (Meitei)	Keibul	Burnt & Vandalised	5 th May 23
65	RPCNEI Church Building (Meitei)	Keirenphabi	Destroyed	5 th May 23
66	RPCNEI Church Building (Meitei)	Tokpaching	Destroyed	5 th May 23
EVANGELICAL ORGANIZATION CHURCH (EOC)				
67	EOC Church Building	Game Village	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
68	EOC Church Building	Sualamphai	Completely Burnt	5 th May 23
69	EOC Church Building	Sarampatong	Completely Burnt	5 th May 23
70	EOC Church Building	Khawvaiphai	Completely Burnt	5 th May 23

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Name of Church</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Date of Attack</i>
EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH OF INDIA (EFCI)				
71	EFCI Church Building	Sangaiprou	Completely Vandalised	5 th May 23
72	EFCI Church Building	Lamphel	Completely Vandalised	4 th May 23
73	EFCI Church Building (Meitei)	Toupokpi	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
74	EFCI Church Building (Meitei)	Keinou	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
75	EFCI Church Building	Langpok	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
76	EFCI Church Building (Meitei)	Langmeidong	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
77	EFCI Church Building (Meitei)	Napat	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
78	EFCI Church Building (Meitei)	Ghari	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
79	EFCI Church Building (Meitei)	Leimaram	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
80	EFCI Church Building	Langol	Ransack	4 th May 23
81	EFCI, Church Building (Meitei)	Waikhong	Vandalised	4 th May 23
EVANGELICAL ASSEMBLY CHURCH (EAC)				
82	EAC Church Building	Wongoo Awang	Completely destroyed	4 th May 23
83	EAC Church Building (Meitei)	Saban E	Completely destroyed	4 th May 23
MANIPUR PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH SYNOD (MPCS)				
84	MPCS Church Building	New Checkon Road., Imphal East District	Partial Destroyed	3rd May 23
85	MPCS Church Building	Terakhongsangbi, Bishnupur District	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
86	MPCS Church Building	Keiren, (Leimapokpam), Bishnupur District	Complete Demolished	4 th May 23
87	MPCS Church Building	Chingphu, Bishnupur District	Partially Destroyed	4 th May 23
88	MPCS Church Building	Leimaram Awang Leikai, BishnupurDist.	Partially Destroyed	4 th May 23
89	MPCS Church Building	Leimaram MakhaLeikai, Bishnupur Dist.	Partially Destroyed	4 th May 23
90	MPCS Church Building	Waroiching, Bishnupur District	Partially Destroyed	4 th May 23
91	MPCS Church Building	N. Terakhong, Kangpokpi District	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
92	MPCS Church Building	L. Lhangnom, Kangpokpi District	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
93	MPCS Church Building	Sekmai, Imphal East District	Completely destroyed	5 th May 23
MANIPURI PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, MIZORAM SYNOD				
94	MPC Church Building	Awang Khunou, Imphal West District	Demolished	4 th May 23
95	MPC Church Building	Kwakeithel, Imphal West District	Destroyed	4 th May 23
96	MPC Church Building	Ngangkha, Bishnupur District	Destroyed	4 th May 23
97	MPC Church Building	Heisnam, Bishnupur District	Completely destroyed	4 th May 23
98	MPC Church Building	Chingkha, Bishnupur District	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
99	MPC Church Building	Ithai, Bishnupur Dist.	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Name of Church</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Date of Attack</i>
MEITEI PRESBYTERIAN SINGLUP SYNOD				
100	MPS Church Building	Kumbi, Bishnupur District	Destroyed	3 rd May 23
101	MPS Church Building	Kumbi Uyung Makhong, Bishnupur Dist.	Destroyed	3 rd May 23
102	MPS Church Building	Kumbi Thingel Leikai, Bishnupur Dist.	Destroyed	3 rd May 23
103	MPS Church Building	Moirangkhunou, Bishnupur District	Destroyed	3 rd May 23
104	MPS Church Building	Thanga Ngaram, Bishnupur District	Burnt & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
105	MPS Church Building	Moirang, Bishnupur District	Burnt & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
106	MPS Church Building	Moirang Turenban, Bishnupur District	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
107	MPS Church Building	Tronglaobi, Bishnupur District	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
108	MPS Church Building	Naranseina, Bishnupur District	Destroyed	3 rd May 23
109	MPS Church Building	Phubala, Bishnupur District	Burnt & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
110	MPS Church Building	Thinungei, Bishnupur District	Destroyed	3 rd May 23
111	MPS Church Building	Ningthoukhong, Bishnupur District	Burnt & Destroyed	3 rd May 23
112	MPS Church Building	Bishnupur, Bishnupur District	Destroyed	3 rd May 23
113	MPS Church Building	Nambol, Bishnupur District	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
114	MPS Church Building	Kakching Khunou, Kakching District	Destroyed by JCB	4 th May 23
115	MPS Church Building	Moirang Hanuba, Imphal West District	Demolished	4 th May 23
116	MPS Church Building	Kwakeithel Mission Compound, Imphal West District	Demolished & Burnt	4 th May 23
117	MPS Church Building	Lairok, Kakching Dist.	Demolished	4 th May 23
118	MPS Church Building	Sarik, Kakching Dist.	Demolished	4 th May 23
119	MPS Church Building	Tokpa Ching, Kakching District	Demolished	4 th May 23
120	MPS Church Building	Ngaikhong, Bishnupur District	Demolished	5 th May 23
121	MPS Church Building	Ngaikhong Khulen, Bishnupur District	Demolished	5 th May 23
122	MPS Church Building	Ngakchou, Bishnupur District	Demolished	5 th May 23
123	MPS Church Building	Keinou, Bishnupur District	Demolished	5 th May 23
124	MPS Church Building	Oinam, Bishnupur Dist.	Demolished	5 th May 23
125	MPS Church Building	Warukok, Kakching District	Destroyed	5 th May 23
126	MPS Church Building	Arong, Kakching Dist.	Destroyed	5 th May 23
127	MPS Church Building	Sekmajjing, Kakching District	Destroyed	5 th May 23
128	MPS Church Building	Thanga Ngaram, Bishnupur District	Burnt & Destroyed	5 th May 23
129	MPS Church Building	Thanga Salam, Bishnupur District	Destroyed	5 th May 23
130	MPS Church Building	Nachou, Bishnupur District	Burnt & Destroyed	5 th May 23
131	MPS Church Building	Thoubal, ThoubalDist.	Destroyed	5 th May 23
132	MPS Church Building	Yaripok, ThoubalDist.	Destroyed	5 th May 23
133	MPS Church Building	Salungpham, Thoubal District	Destroyed	5 th May 23
134	MPS Church Building	Charangpat, Thoubal District	Destroyed	5 th May 23
135	MPS Church Building	Ukhongsang, Thoubal District	Destroyed	5 th May 23
136	MPS Church Building	Mayang Imphal, Imphal West District	Destroyed	5 th May 23
137	MPS Church Building	Uchiwa, Imphal West District	Destroyed	5 th May 23
138	MPS Church Building	Langol, Imphal West	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
139	MPS Church Building	Heisnam, Bishnupur District	Completely Destroyed	

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Name of Church</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Date of Attack</i>
TANGPHAI PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH SYNOD(TPCS)				
140	TPCS Church building	B Phainuam, Kangpokpi District	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
141	TPCS Church building	Phainuam, Kangpokpi District	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
142	TPCS Church building	P Thianzawl, Imphal East	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
143	TPCS Church building	Mantripukri, Imphal West	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
144	TPCS Church building	Nongpokphaijang Kangpokpi	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
145	TPCS Church building	Game Village, Imphal West	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
146	TPCS Church building	Th.Salempai, Kangpokpi	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
147	TPCS Church building	New Lambulane, Imphal West	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
148	TPCS Church building	L Vaiphei Veng, Imphal West	Completely Burnt	5 th May 23
149	TPCS Church building	Chingmei, Bishenpur District	Completely Burnt	6 th May 23
150	TPCS Church building	K Sharonphai, Kangpokpi District	Completely Burnt	6 th May 23
151	TPCS Church building	Tuinuamphai, Kangpokpi District	Completely Burnt	6 th May 23
152	TPCS Church building	Heiroklen, Kangpokpi District	Completely Burnt	6 th May 23
153	TPCS Church building	K Tangnuam, Kangpokpi District	Completely Burnt	6 th May 23
154	TPCS Church building	GPC Langol, Imphal West	Completely Burnt	6 th May 23
KUKI CHRISTIAN CHURCH (KCC)				
155	KCC Centre Church building	Imphal	Burnt & Demolished	4 th May 23
156	KCC Centre Church building	Khongsai Veng	Burnt & Demolished	4 th May 23
157	KCC Centre Church building	Game Village	Burnt & Demolished	4 th May 23
158	KCC Centre Church building	Sadar Joute	Burnt & Demolished	4 th May 23
159	KCC Centre Church building	T. Mongjang	Burnt & Demolished	4 th May 23
160	KCC Centre Church building	VK. Mongbung	Burnt & Demolished	4 th May 23
161	KCC Centre Church building	Theilei	Burnt & Demolished	3 rd May 23
162	KCC Centre Church building	Moljol	Burnt & Demolished	6 th May 23
163	KCC Centre Church building	Chaningpokpi	Burnt & Demolished	6 th May 23
164	KCC Centre Church building	Haotah Phailen	Burnt & Demolished	6 th May 23
165	KCC Centre Church building	Aihang	Burnt & Demolished	5 th May 23
166	KCC Centre Church building	Bungbalkhawlien	Burnt & Demolished	5 th May 23
167	KCC Centre Church building	Sarampatong	Burnt & Demolished	5 th May 23
ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH (RCC)				
168	St. Paul Church	Sangaiprou, Imphal	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
169	Holy Redeemer Church	Canchipur	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
170	Holy Cross Church	Kakching Khunou	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
RONGMEI NAGA BAPTIST CHURCH (RNBA)				
171	RNBA Church Building	Imphal	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
KOMREM BAPTIST CHURCH (KBC)				
172	KBC Church Building	Imphal Area	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Name of Church</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Date of Attack</i>
BELIEVER'S EASTERN CHURCH (BEC)				
173	BEC Church Building	T Lhangkichoi	Burnt & Vandalised	3 rd May 23
174	BEC Church Building	Thumkhonglok	Burnt & Vandalised	3 rd May 23
CHURCH OF CHRIST (COC)				
175	COC Church Building	Changangei- Ucheckon	Burnt & Vandalised	3 rd May 23
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF INDIA-REFORMED (PCI-R)				
176	PCI-R Church Building (Meitei)	Nungshida	Burnt & Vandalised	4 th May 23
177	PCI-R Church Building (Meitei)	Naudakhong	Burnt & Vandalised	4 th May 23
178	PCI-R Church Building (Meitei)	Asha	Burnt & Vandalised	4 th May 23
SALVATION ARMY				
179	Salvation army (Meitei)	Chairel	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
180	Salvation army (Meitei)	Kwakeithel	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
VAIPHEI BAPTIST CHURCHES ASSOCIATION (VBCA)				
181	VBCA Church Building	Lairok	Completely Burnt	6 th May-23
182	VBCA Church Building	S Phaiza	Completely Burnt	5 th May 23
183	VBCA Church Building	Vaiphei Veng	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
184	VBCA Church Building	Happy Valley	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
185	VBCA Church Building	Salam Patong	Completely Burnt	4 th May 23
186	VBCA Church Building (Meitei)	K Wangkhem	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
CALVARY CHURCH (CC)				
187	CC Church Building (Meitei)	Sibhanagar Khongjom	Destroyed	3 rd May 23
FAITH COMMUNITY CHURCH (FCC)				
188	FCC Church Building (Meitei)	Tekcham Bazar, Khongjom	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
NEW TESTAMENT BAPTIST CHURCH (NTBC)				
189	NTBC Church Building (Meitei)	Tekcham, Khongjom	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF INDIA (ECI)				
190	ECI Church Building (Meitei)	Tentha	Destroyed	3 rd May 23
UNION BAPTIST CHURCH (UBC)				
191	UBC Church Building (Meitei)	Kakching Irum Mapan	Completely Burnt	3 rd May 23
MEITEI BAPTIST ASSOCIATION (MBA)				
192	MBA Church Building	Wangjing	Destroyed	3 rd May 23
193	MBA Church Building	Lamding	Destroyed	3 rd May 23
194	MBA Church Building	Moreh	Destroyed	3 rd May 23

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Name of Church</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Date of Attack</i>
GOOD SHEPHERD COMMUNITY CHURCH (GSCC)				
195	GSCC Church Building (Meitei)	Heirok Chingon	Destroyed	3 rd May 23
BELIEVER CHURCH (BC)				
196	BC Church Building (Meitei)	Tentha	Destroyed	3 rd May 23
197	BC Church Building (Meitei)	Kakmayai	Destroyed	3 rd May 23
198	Eastern BC Building	Narenkonjin	Destroyed	3 rd May 23
KUKI BAPTIST CONVENTION CHURCH (KBCC)				
199	KBCC Church Building	National	GamesVillage Burnt & Destroyed	4 th May 23
200	KBCC Church Building	Langol	Burnt & Destroyed	4 th May 23
201	KBCC Church Building	Lamphel	Burnt & Destroyed	4 th May 23
202	KBCC Church Building	New Lambulane	Burnt & Destroyed	4 th May 23
203	KBCC Church Building	Haokip veng	Burnt & Destroyed	4 th May 23
204	KBCC Church Building	Chassad Avenue	Burnt & Destroyed	4 th May 23
205	KBCC Church Building	Kamuching	Burnt & Destroyed	4 th May 23
206	KBCC Church Building	Leimakhong	Burnt & Destroyed	4 th May 23
207	KBCC Church Building	Tollen	Burnt & Destroyed	4 th May 23
208	KBCC Church Building	L.Jangnomphai	Burnt & Destroyed	4 th May 23
209	KBCC Church Building	Sajal	Burnt & Destroyed	4 th May 23
210	KBCC Church Building	TL Gamngai	Burnt & Destroyed	4 th May 23
211	KBCC Church Building	Gotengphai	Burnt & Destroyed	4 th May 23
212	KBCC Church Building	Gamnomphai	Burnt & Destroyed	4 th May 23
213	KBCC Church Building	H.Kholen	Burnt & Destroyed	4 th May 23
214	KBCC Church Building	S.Khopi	Burnt & Destroyed	4 th May 23
215	KBCC Church Building	S.Khothah	Burnt & Destroyed	4 th May 23
216	KBCC Church Building	Wakan	Burnt & Destroyed	4 th May 23
217	KBCC Church Building	P.Khonomphai	Burnt & Destroyed	4 th May 23
218	KBCC Church Building	H.Champhai	Burnt & Destroyed	4 th May 23
219	KBCC Church Building	Chayang	Burnt & Destroyed	31 st May-23
220	KBCC Church Building	S Phailengkot	Burnt & Destroyed	31 st May-23
221	KBCC Church Building	Chingdai Khullen	Burnt & Destroyed	31 st May-23
222	KBCC Church Building	C Zoulen	Burnt & Destroyed	31 st May-23
223	KBCC Church Building	Thingjang	Burnt & Destroyed	31 st May-23
224	KBCC Church Building	Lhanghoi	Burnt & Destroyed	31 st May-23
225	KBCC Church Building	Moljang	Burnt & Destroyed	31 st May-23
OTHERS				
226	Lamphel Baptist Church	Lamphel	Completely Burnt	6 th May-23
227	Hmar Christian Church	New Lambulane	Completely Burnt	5 th May 23
228	Independent Church	Langol	Vandalised	31 st May-23

Source: This list was shared by Churachandpur District Christians Goodwill Council, 31 May 2023

Data submissions were also received by the following groups or organisations about the number of churches destroyed during the violence. However, without full access to the state of Manipur and other primary sources, it has not been possible to independently verify them.

1. Zomi Students' Federation Media/ IT Cell, dated 13 June 2023. The total number of churches claimed to be burned or destroyed is 354.
2. Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum Media Cell. The total number of churches claimed to be burned or destroyed is 220.
3. A 15 June 2023 BBC news report states: "According to the information we have received, 508 churches have been demolished," said Alan Brooks, a spokesman for the United Christian Forum in Northeast India." (<https://www.bbc.com/nepali/articles/cp9d0dewn94o>)

ANNEX 2: Freedom of Religion or Belief Analysis

The issues in Manipur began as a political matter between two ethnic communities, borne out of the proposal to grant 'Scheduled Tribe' benefits to the Meitei community. While local leadership in Manipur has not explicitly called the violence out for being religiously motivated, the focus of violence between the ethnicities soon shifted towards targeting religious identity and religious structures, including a wide scale targeting of the Christians amongst the Meiteis Stakeholders among Meitei Christians were asked why they were being targeted in a predominantly Meitiei and Kuki dispute. It was clear that the predominantly Christian Kuki-Zomi tribal communities in Churachandpur had been accusing two Meitei community organizations in Imphal for inciting the violence - the Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun. It is worth noting that the Meitei people, who account for more than 50 percent of the state's population, are predominantly Hindu. The answers given by the witnesses in the region as to the reason for the violence were the following:

- (a) Meiteis who follow the indigenous religion i.e. Sanahamism (and even Hinduism) want to get rid of Christianity from their community. They want to revive their own religion. Many Meitei Christians have been threatened with their life

and have been given an ultimatum to renounce their Christian faith and accept Sanahamism.

- (b) Meitei Hindus fear that the Christians are growing in number and are at 4 lakh (400,000 in population) amongst the 14 lakh Meiteis (1,400,000 in population). Officials of the Meitei Christian Churches Council Manipur (MCCCM) believe that Christians number 1 in 50,000 to 1 lakh.
- (c) Christianity is seen as a tribal religion by the Meiteis, as it is practiced, in the main, by the tribal people in Manipur – mainly the Kukis. Christians among the Meitiei are therefore considered as 'tribals' by the Meitei community. It may be that the people who have attacked Meitei Christians are perceiving their attack to be against tribals more generally.

From the witness testimonies and wider reporting on the situation, it is evident that the large-scale violence is not sporadic and random. The Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun, Meitei extremist groups, have been observed to target Christians deliberately, either forcing them out of the land or requiring that they convert to another religion. Out of the 50,000 people who have fled their residences, as reported by the Press Trust of India, 35,000 are said to belong to Christian tribal communities.

Meitei Christians and Kuki and Naga Christians have lost their places of worship, their livelihoods, and their land. The basic rights to freedom of worship and assembly have been directly impacted by the displacement, and the resources required to rebuild churches and reestablish safe facilities to freely conduct Christian services will be significant.

While it cannot at this stage be established that the targeting of Christians accounts for all of the reasons for the conflict and as an explanation for the extent of the crisis in Manipur, some of those contributing to this report are of the opinion that Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which India ratified on 9 July 1993, has been breached by the failure of the state and national government to intervene to quickly resolve the situation which has severely impacted Christians.

It is hoped that through greater access being given to survivors at legal aid camps that are being established

in Manipur, the interviews will be able to shed more light on the specific violations to individuals' rights to freedom of religion or belief.

ANNEX 3: Evidence supplied by a Legal Expert in India

A human rights lawyer practicing in constitutional courts in India provided legal analysis. He travelled to Manipur in May 2023 to interview survivors and gather firsthand witness testimonies. He wishes to remain anonymous for safety considerations.

This evidence is being provided to detail what is currently before the Supreme Court in India right now, and where the courts have been lacking. I will also address some of the areas that need to be considered legally now that the Manipur crisis has been escalated to the Supreme Court.

Many petitions have been filed before the Supreme Court in India about the Manipur crisis, addressing a wide range of matters. The following comprised the relief sought in the legal petitions:

1. Legal challenges to the decision of the High Court of Manipur's Order of 2 March 2023. On 2 March 2023, the High Court had directed the Manipur State Government to consider granting the Meitei people 'Scheduled Tribe' status under the Indian Constitution. The court recommended this to the Union Government.
2. Following the outbreak of the clashes in early May 2023, petitioners asked the court for a range of Directions, including for central forces to be deployed for the protection of churches and other places of worship, and for compensation to be granted to the victims whose buildings had been damaged in the violence.
3. Petitioners moreover sought the creation of a special investigation team to look into the cause of the violence and provide relief for the victims. Some of these petitioners also sought protection and evacuation from the villages where the attacks were more likely to happen.

To most of these petitions, the Manipur Government responded to confirm that it will defer the implementation of the 2 March 2023 Order granted by the High Court by one year.

As regards to the humanitarian situation, the court reported that the State Government has opened 318 relief camps, and that 47,914 people have been provided relief in these camps. It also reported that security measures had been put in place to protect life, property, and religious places; and that an additional 46,298 people who were stranded had been assisted.

Nevertheless, reports keep coming in about fresh pockets of violence in Manipur. Due to the internet and broadband being down in the region, it is difficult to understand exactly the scale of the ongoing violence and what is happening on the ground.

The courts have a responsibility to do more to address the crisis.

The Honourable Supreme Court has been careful in the wording of its Orders and Directions to the government's concerns and has stated that it intends not to fuel further violence through its Orders. The Court has decided to focus on the humanitarian angle of the violence.

Whilst the approach of the Court is commendable, there are matters that it ought to consider further. First, the Supreme Court ought to direct the Union and the State Government to be more intentional about maintaining law and order, because the issues are only occurring in the State of Manipur. It is important for the State of Manipur to recognize that it is not geographically one of the largest Indian States, and it is therefore reasonable to expect it to act decisively to prevent further violence and restore peace.

Second, it is important to raise awareness about the complete state of lockdown in Manipur, which prevents relief workers and members of the media from being given the entry that is necessary to understand the scale and severity of the situation on the ground.

Third, the vast amount of lost life and property needs to be accounted for. Much wealth and resources that has accumulated over generations for people in Manipur has been destroyed in a number of hours. The survivors need urgent legal assistance, and legal aid workers need access into the State to help, as well as internet access to make the necessary arrangements to relocate people or provide relief. Due to the shutdown of the internet, I had to personally visit Manipur for effective client briefings. Due to the curfew in the state, I was unable to access some of the locations that I had intended to go to assist with legal action.

It is important to note that following a previous violent clash in Orissa, Kandhamal in 2008, many compensation claims are still pending in the courts to this day. This former crisis ought to provide a lesson for us with the Manipur crisis, that if the courts do not act quickly, it will be very difficult to compute losses and account for restoration in future years. Legal advocacy groups have been calling for the court or the government to set up a Judicial Commission of Inquiry to be established immediately to ensure that Manipur survivors can be rehabilitated swiftly.

ANNEX 4: Additional evidence supplied by the Experts

Open Doors UK & Ireland

The systematic and coordinated violence against Christians in Manipur state is deeply disturbing. Although framed as an ethnic dispute which has escalated, there is clearly a strong religious dimension, in which Christians are being targeted in order to be driven from their homes and land.

Vishnu Reddy*, a partner of Open Doors in the region says the ethno-religious hostility has been stoked by the growth of 'Hindutva' nationalism.

"Like so much mob violence directed towards non-Hindu minorities, this has been fuelled from outside the region," he said. "Members of the Hindu nationalist RSS [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh] group have been trying to radicalise the Meitei for many years now."

Alongside the destruction of hundreds of church buildings, Christian homes and entire villages have also been destroyed. With many killed and injured and thousands displaced, victims of violence continue to be in a desperate situation. There is an increasing number of tribal Christians fleeing the area – including local Open Doors partners – with many currently taking refuge in neighbouring towns. More than 10,000 Christians are taking refuge in rescue camps set up by the army, and there are reports of many hiding in the forest areas surrounding Manipur.

"People are taking shelter, afraid to return home ... That is, if their home hasn't already been destroyed," said one Kuki tribal Christian, Neha*.

Open Doors local partner Ngai Elam* said: "The Meitei's continue to attack and shoot each day

to terrorise the tribal groups ... Women and girls are sexually harassed and abused, men over 18 are trained with weapons by insurgent groups. The only safe places for the tribal people are refugee camps."

Open Doors partners have reported that the Hindutva group Arambai Tenggol are looting the homes and properties abandoned by Christians who have fled the violence. There are concerns that the Meitei groups are supported by state forces, and that the president's 'shoot at sight' order (as defined in the Criminal Procedure Code), is exacerbating the violence.

The attackers are very well armed. Kuki Christian Muan Samte* says: "The Meitei mob come in groups of hundreds with sophisticated weapons, they shoot us and even throw [mortar] bombs at us."

Although the attackers are Meitei people inspired by the Hindutva ideology, it is notable that Christians from both the Meitei and Kuki groups have been targeted, with many Christian Meitei's facing extreme pressure to renounce their faith and accept Hinduism by Arambai Tenggol. Forced conversion takes place via "Ghar Wapsi," ceremonies. Open Doors local partners report that the Arambai Tenggol group is actively searching for Christian leaders and pastors in order to kill them.

Local Open Doors partner Yohan Murray* has said: "The pro-Hindutva government has not taken any measures to stop the violence, though on the orders of the Supreme Court, military has been deployed to maintain peace and order. There has been no initiative from the pro-Hindu led state and central government."

Another local Open Doors partner Vishnu* explains that: "The fundamental reason for the escalation of violence was that the tribals, who are predominantly Christian, are being evicted [by the local government] from the forest land where they've resided for hundreds of years." He also reports that Christians have been especially targeted, and that in many areas "Almost all the churches have been burned down and reduced to ashes."

This is much more than an ethnic clash. Manipur is known for its large Christian population and strong church groups. This incident demonstrates how vulnerable Christians are in India. In most states Christians are small minorities, and if Christians can be targeted with impunity like this in a state like Manipur, there are grave concerns for their safety and welfare in other states.

Christians in Manipur are expected to face more persecution through forced conversion, physical violence and loss of life. There are also threats of spreading violence in Tripura, Assam, Meghalaya, & Arunachal state. Mass rallies have been held in Meghalaya, Assam by the Meitei. Decade long tensions have escalated and been co-opted by groups propagating Hindutva ideology.

Names changed to protect the identity of victims.

9 June 2023

The South Asia Forum for Freedom of Religion or Belief

South Asia Forum for Freedom of Religion or Belief (SAFFoRB) is a regional human rights network to protect and promote Freedom of Religion or Belief for everyone. SAFFoRB urges Government of India to stop the violence in Manipur

The South Asia Forum for Freedom of Religion or Belief (SAFFoRB) is deeply distressed and concerned about the sudden eruption of violence in Manipur. Fifty people are reported to have been killed, many of the places of worship including several Churches are attacked and burnt down. Unless the violence is stopped immediately and guilty are booked, the peace and harmony in the State will be ruptured beyond repair.

SAFFoRB urges Government of India to stop the violence in Manipur

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It must be noted that both Meiteis and tribals have lived together in Manipur for centuries. These communities have been living as neighbours and have shared social and cultural spaces. What was a protest against the government policy turned into a sectarian and barbaric violence, causing deaths, destructions and rendering thousands homeless overnight on both sides.

The state government's alleged inaction has allowed deaths and destruction to escalate. Partisan political interest has fuelled the violence spiral to cause severe loss of human life and property. Clearly the State

failed to curb the violence sooner and maintain law and order and peace. Had it acted promptly and strongly, the damage would have been limited.

However, what is very heartening is that there are signs of sanity manifesting in acts of humanity and solidarity. In Lamka town a video of the tribal women holding hands and forming a chain to protect the Meitei community against an angry mob was seen. In Churachandpur, tribal villagers were protecting the Meitei community in their localities in taking them to the army who could escort them to safety.

We urge the Government of India to intervene to stop the violence immediately. They should give protection to all the people and take stringent action against those who are indulging in violence. The places of worship of all faith communities should be protected. We urge the state governments should facilitate dialogues among all stakeholders on policy issues instead of supporting one community against others. The state government should function in an unbiased way in order to restore the traditional harmony and co-existence in the State.

8th May, 2023

David Campanale, Independent Journalist, Member of the IRFBA Council of Experts

In the process of reporting the crisis in Manipur for radio, I recorded the following statements that I consider to be a reliable reflection of events by eyewitnesses in Manipur and others in India:

"The destruction is massive. I mean, something like this has not happened in a targeted way against the Christians of that area. These are people who are already Christians. But it's identity of them as Christians and their worship places that are being targeted. We're hearing from our pastors as to how they're living and what they're doing, staying in shelters, crowded shelters, and looking at all the buildings that has been burned to the ground. And so as they look to the future, and as they are displaced, where do they go? And what do they do?"

—President of the All India Christian Council, Bishop Joseph D'Souza, claiming 36,655 people had been displaced and 1,700 houses and churches had been burned down, Premier Christian Radio, UK, 12 May 2023

"In that fateful night, on May 3, they were praying in their house, they were staying in the church, Pastor quarters, and

then there was a big bang on their gate. And as he went out and see some people, many the crowd and were just coming and ransacked the church. And then they begin to burn the church. And slowly they were burned, they managed to escape from the church campus. And they burned down the church and completely ransack.”

—Thangminlun Vaiphei, Asia Antioch Seminary, Assam, Premier Christian Radio, UK, 10 May 2023

“I was there, when the violence started, on May 3rd third of this year. In fact, it was not so far from where I live. On that day all the tribal Students Union of Manipur, that organise a peace rally to express their concerns about their identity, their land, their culture, and their future. And of course, it was also the day for people to pray. So the violence began from there. And within the first three nights, and three days, most of the tribal people, religious churches, institutions, including both those in the capital city of Manipur, Imphal, were burned down. I was scared. And many people had lost their life. So it was something that we have never experienced before”.

—‘Mang’, Kuki Christian leader, Premier Christian Radio, UK, 25 May 2023

“They were very, very angry. Very, very angry. I’ve never seen, you know, such intense anger actually... Many of my cousins my uncles and my aunts were living in Imphal. For decades, they’ve been in Imphal. They’ve been in the capital. On the night of the Third of May, their homes were completely attacked and burnt down. You know, they’ve even taken the doors off my uncle’s home in Imphal, and they all had to flee. Speaking to some relatives earlier, and they were telling me that the village next to them was completely burnt down. Even last night. 100 homes were burnt down. So we are receiving more and more displaced people. Every, every, every day in our district”

—‘Kim’, School teacher and Kuki, Premier Christian Radio, UK, 30 May 2023

“We have no help. We are helpless with this, this huge military forces, we have no help. We are helpless. Christians should come forward, speak for us and help us. I’ve seen my own eyes.

And I’ve seen how people fled from their homes. Many of my relatives have spent days and nights of fleeing from their homes, spending nights and days in the jungle and returning to a safer place. When churches burn, hope is gone. There’s no place to get consolation, there is no place to get encouragement, and there is no place to get hope. So

therefore church is so important to the people. Therefore, burning of the churches must be stopped.”

—‘Mang’, Manipur Kuki Christian leader, Premier Christian Radio, UK, 6 June 2023

“What we are also seeing is a very, almost a very strategic attack on churches. The churches are central to the tribal life here in Manipur. Our social life revolves around our churches, which is not just for spiritual well-being, but also forms a very important social institution for our communities. They’re seen as a very prominent symbol of our tribal identity, which is Christian and therefore, they’re being targeted and attacked. And it’s unfortunate that this violence is continuing unabated... events since 3 May are pre-planned, with systematic plans to attack our churches, to take away our land, and also to make us internally displaced in our own state.

Because at some stage, their ethnic identity either as Hindus or as non-Christians, and as belonging to a particular ethnicity, supersedes their professional identity of being policemen”.

—Golan Naulak, Spokesperson for the Zomi Students Federation in Manipur, Premier Christian Radio, UK, 14 June 2023

Whilst I cannot independently verify the following accounts because the internet has been deliberately switched off in Manipur. However, the next account was with a grandmother interviewed by a media team from Zomi Student’s Federation, a tribal group, recorded here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=UADlcoheNL8>

“The Meiteis bludgeoned both my elder brother and his youngest son to death. After this, they disrobed both my elder brother’s daughter and the wife of our village elder and paraded them naked. Then they raped them both and released them afterwards. But as for my husband and children they targeted my husband with an axe. On seeing this, two of my children rushed towards my husband and tackled him to a ditch to shield him with their own bodies and pleaded for the men not to kill their father.”

—This audio is from an interview with a Vaiphei family from B.Phainom village of Kangpokpi district, Manipur on what they experienced on the 3rd and 4th of May, 2023.

“It’s quite traumatising...we were on our knees hugging each other and bleeding from head to toe. We prayed that

we would not die in hate, and my wife quote Psalm 68 from the Bible. We heard men and women trying to protect us from the mob who had drunk alcohol and we could smell it. We were told that the mob were out to get the illegal immigrants from Myanmar. That night they broke the windows in the community hall where we were....a woman was crying at the window asking us to forgive her as she said the violence did not represent who they were.”

—Manggoulal, *Manipur Violence Victim*, 16 May 2023

I have also been sent the following accounts that have been uploaded to the internet, that may inform members on wider perspectives. The links are provided:

- ‘They hit us any way they could’: Manipur violence survivor recalls horror, escape’ – 2 June 2023
- IDs checked, skull cracked, ‘dumped alive’ in mortuary — 3 Kuki survivors recount Manipur mob horror – 1 June 2023
- Agnes Neikhohat telling her survival story – 23 May 2023
- Pi Thafamkim and sons, victims of the atrocities against the tribals in Manipur. *Husband Killed* – 1 June 2023
- Manipur violence: Untold story of a survivor – 16 May 2023
- ‘Faith in god, not govt’: Manipur survivors in Delhi say they were ‘forced to leave’ their homes – 19 May 2023
- Victims of Violence in Manipur Recount the Horrors - *The Quint* – 8 May 2023
- Manipur violence: Refugees at relief camps narrate ordeal, express worry over family well-being *ANI*—6 May 2023
- Manipur Violence: Eyewitness Accounts - Students of Manipur University Tell Their Stories on *News 18* – 16 May 2023
- Survivors’ stories: “...they paraded them naked” - B Phainom village, Kangpokpi district, Manipur – 15 May 2023
- The Onset of Meitei Atrocity: An Account from Kangvai – 1 June 2023
- No home to return to: Manipur violence survivors - *The Times of India* - 13 May 2023
- Survivors of Manipur violence recount shocking stories – *Matters India* - 21 May 2023
- ‘We Left Home on May 3 and Ran to the Hills’: A Manipur Violence Survivor’s First Person Account – *The Wire* - 9 May 2023
- Manipur riot survivors recount nightmarish ordeal - 15 May 2023
- Teacher tracing her roots to Manipur speaks up on the strife – *Telegraph India* – 9 May 2023
- 4 women from Ukhrul attacked by mob in Imphal – *Ukhurl Times* – 24 May 2023
- Narrowly escaped: Victims of Manipur violence share their ordeal – 16 May 2023
- “Can’t Go Back Home Now” - Anguished voices Inside A Manipur Refugee Camp - Mojo Ground Report – 23 May 2023

14 June 2023

ANNEX 5: Photographic evidence supplied by a local journalist personally known to a member of the Council of Experts to IRFBA

Kyamgei Church, Imphal West



EFCI Church Lamphel



Survivors in Churachandpur



A tribal church in Bishnupur District



Tabernacle Baptist Church, Salungpham



Imphal 1



Imphal 3



Imphal 2



Imphal 4



Imphal Camp



Graffiti 1

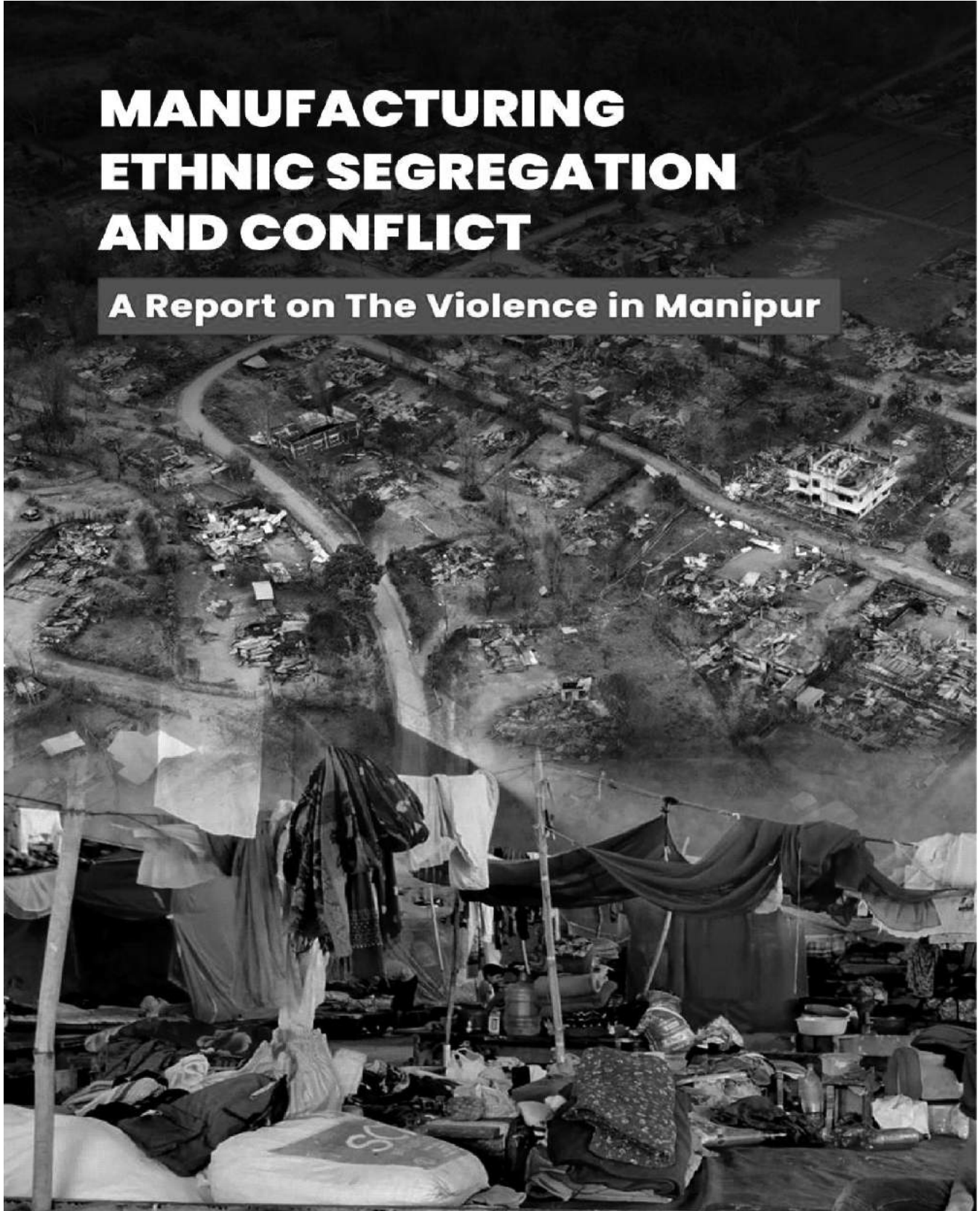


Graffiti 2



MANUFACTURING ETHNIC SEGREGATION AND CONFLICT

A Report on The Violence in Manipur



MANUFACTURING ETHNIC SEGREGATION AND CONFLICT: A Report on the Violence in Manipur CPI(ML), AIPWA and AILAJ

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Annexure II - Intervention of the Supreme Court

ABBREVIATIONS

AILAJ	: All India Lawyers Association for Justice
AIPWA	: All India Progressive Women's Association
ATSUM	: All Tribal Students Union of Manipur
COCOMI	: Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity
COTU	: Committee On Tribal Unity
CPI(ML)	: Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation
CSO	: Civil Society Organisation
IRB	: Indian Reserve Battalion
ITLF	: Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum
KSO	: Kuki Student Organisation
MLA	: Member of Legislative Assembly
MOBC	: Minorities and Other Backward Classes
MP	: Member of Parliament
NGO	: Non-Governmental Organisation
NRC	: National Register of Citizens
OBC	: Other Backward Classes
SOO	: Suspension of Operations
SC	: Scheduled Castes
ST	: Scheduled Tribe
UT	: Union Territory

Word of Thanks

The Team would like to offer its deep gratitude to the various Meitei and Kuki representatives and organisations who spent their valuable time sharing their perspective and analysis of the situation.

Thanks also to the conflict-displaced persons who are in the Relief Camps who, despite being in deep distress, spoke of their travails and loss.

In these dark times, the Team was glad to meet moderate voices that are able to empathise with the losses and suffering of both communities.

It is reflective of the situation that most requested the Team not to identify them in the Report and accordingly, the Team has avoided naming them.

Executive Summary

On 3rd May of this year, a violent conflict broke out between two ethnic communities, the Meiteis and the Kukis, in the north-eastern state of Manipur. Since then, the conflict has left over 175 persons dead, thousands injured, and over 60,000 persons displaced and residing in relief camps across the valley and hills of Manipur.

An early internet ban in the State, partisan media coverage and lack of accountability and information from the government meant that people outside the State were left with no credible sense of events unfolding on ground in Manipur. As violence raged in Manipur with no political solution in sight, CPI(ML) Liberation constituted a Team of 8 persons consisting of CPI(ML) Liberation leaders, representatives of All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA) and All India Lawyers Association for Justice (AILAJ), and an independent feminist activist, who visited Manipur from 10th to 14th August, 2023. The objective was twofold: to understand the prevailing socio-political situation in the State, and to meet and extend solidarity and goodwill to the impacted people in Manipur.

The Team visited various affected areas in the valley districts of Imphal and Bishnupur, and the hill districts of Kangpokpi and Churachandpur. The Team met persons from all walks of life in Manipur including victims of the violence residing in relief camps, representatives of civil society organisations, prominent political leaders, legal professionals, media professionals, retired bureaucrats,

a senior police official and Smt. Anusuiya Uikey, the Governor of Manipur. The Team also visited Guwahati and met displaced Kukis who had fled from Manipur following the breakout of violence.

This Report is the Team's endeavour to present to the larger public, the grave situation persisting in Manipur, with the hope that they will join their voices to demand for justice in the conflict-ridden state.

The violence has taken a substantially higher toll on the Kuki population in the State, in terms of the deaths, injuries, displacement and loss of properties, which the Kukis believe, reflects their subjugated position in Manipur's polity. Kukis point out to decades of discrimination they have suffered at the hands of the Meitei-dominated State, and the under-development of the hill regions, which they and other Tribals primarily inhabit. They juxtapose their situation to that of the valley, where the Meiteis reside, which has seen massive development and growth in infrastructure in the last several years. The Kukis believe that they are being demonised by the State and the Meitei community for no reason other than to capture their traditional lands and rich natural resources in the hills. They claim that the three planks of this demonisation of the Kuki community rests on the false narrative pushed by the Biren Singh government of the Kukis being illegal immigrants, forest encroachers and poppy cultivators.

The Kuki community strongly believes they have a natural claim over the hills by virtue of being its original inhabitants, confirmed by their status as heroes who fought the British. There is anger that despite having such a rich legacy, they have been short-changed since Indian independence. As far as the violence on 3rd May, and its aftermath is concerned, the Kukis say that while the all-Tribal rally in different hill areas against attempts to grant Scheduled Tribes (ST) status to Meiteis was peaceful, there was a conscious attempt to trigger violence by torching the Anglo-Kuki war memorial gate at the entrance of Churachandpur by Meitei chauvinist groups. Most Kukis believe that the attacks on them were pre-planned and orchestrated by the Arambai Tenggol and the Meitei Leepun with full support of the state government, and came at a time when the Union government was days away from declaring 6th Schedule status to the hill areas of Manipur. They believe that the pre-planned targeted manner in which barbaric

violence of this scale that they faced, as also the loot and destruction of their properties and religious places, is nothing short of a state-sponsored ethnic cleansing.

On the other hand, Meiteis too have suffered deaths, displacement and destruction of properties and a dozen religious places. The State's narrative, echoed by most Meiteis, is that while the immediate trigger for the conflict was the High Court order recommending that the State consider extending Scheduled Tribe status to Meiteis, the larger reason behind the conflict, is the Kuki backlash to the State government's clamp down on illegal infiltration of Kukis from Myanmar, the attempts to stop illegal forest encroachments by Kukis and the war waged on drugs by the State government targeting Kuki poppy cultivators. Underlying this narrative of the conflict, is the strong belief that Meiteis are original inhabitants of Manipur, while the Kukis are late-comers. They believe that the violence was entirely orchestrated by the Kuki community and SoO militant organisations. They argue that the violence on 3rd May was started by the Kukis, who, in the name of the protest march against the High Court order and granting of ST status to Meiteis, attacked government offices at first, and then after staging the arson at the Anglo-Kuki War Centenary Gate at Leisang Village, went about vandalising, burning and attacking the homes of Meiteis in numerous villages in Bishnupur, Churachandpur, Kangpokpi, Moreh, etc. This enraged the Meitei community, which thirsting for revenge began to spontaneously retaliate against the Kukis in Meitei dominated areas. They also believe that the illegal infiltrator Chin-Kuki militants are at the forefront of the attack on the Meiteis, and that they are heavily armed, and that the Kukis are engaged in continued heinous killings of Meiteis, arson and destruction of Meitei homes and religious places compelling retaliatory violence from outraged Meitei mobs.

Analysing the stark geographical, economic, and ethnic differences between hill and valley regions is crucial to understand the ongoing conflict. The disparity in development between the hills and valley is a serious socio-economic-political issue in Manipur. This has been accentuated by the lopsided and valley-centric policies of the BJP government. For instance while the state projects a war on drugs, there are reports of the state's complicity in Promoting the drug cartel. In addition to these elements, are the underlying economic factors

including control over land, and unlocking of precious mineral potential in the Hills which have animated the conflict.

The battle in Manipur is being fought not simply over competing ethnic claims to Manipur, but also over the production of historical “truth”. The recent spate of violence is nothing but a manifestation of struggles over claims to autochthony and belonging. It is apparent that the current BJP regime, by deploying its basic formula of divisiveness, has opportunistically taken advantage of historical differences to further its political ambitions and entrench its communal agenda in Manipur's society and polity.

The situation in Manipur today, is of complete ethnic segregation of the two communities, Kukis and Meiteis. There are no Kukis left in the Valley and similarly no Meiteis in the Hills. The Imphal valley and the Hills today stand divided by a "border". There are bunkers on either side of the "border" manned by armed squads from the two communities, while the state security forces are stationed in between to man the border. An undeclared blockade by Meitei organisations has been enforced to prevent the movement of relief material, medical supplies and essential supplies to the hills by the Government agencies and armed forces. This blockade is adversely impacting thousands of conflict-displaced Kukis in the relief camps in the hill districts. Indeed, the Kukis living in the villages and towns in the Hillstoo are suffering the devastating impact of this blockade. The Kukis, on the other hand, have periodically blockaded the national highways that restrict supplies to the valley, and impact the mobility of Meiteis out of the Valley. The blocking of the highways leaves a flightout of Imphal as the only way to leave Manipur.

The broader ethnic segregation witnessed in the region between the hill and valley also plays out in relief camps. The camps in the Hills were either run by local civil society organisations, NGOs, churches or on support from local politicians with little or no State support. Most have poor infrastructure, are overcrowded, have poor living conditions, lack proper sanitation, have limited access to medical supplies and personnel, and are unable to provide proper nutrition to displaced Kukis living in the camps. The relief camps in the valley are run by local clubs, CSOs and philanthropic organisations, with varying levels of state support and have their

own share of problems including overcrowding, lack of infrastructure and livelihood insecurity. Access to medical services is also in a much better situation given the proximity to the vast medical infrastructure in the valley. However, attention has to be paid to the nutrition deficit in the diet in the relief camps and to the needs of children, senior citizens and the infirm. It is a matter of grave concern that the situation persists even three months after the outbreak of the violence.

It is noteworthy that the Government has facilitated the admission of Meitei displaced students into schools and colleges in the vicinity of the relief camps thereby ensuring continuing of their education. In stark contrast, the education of the Kuki students both in the relief camps and in the hills is under serious crisis and immediate steps need to be taken to ensure that their education is resumed.

Furthermore, the economic destitution caused by the violence and displacement has resulted in serious impoverishment and financial insecurity for the Kuki displaced persons. The displaced Meiteis in the relief camps in the Valley too are facing a livelihood crisis and are trying to find work around the camps. It is helpful that the local clubs and philanthropic organisations have started livelihood training programmes to Meitei displaced persons in some of the relief camps.

Across camps in both the hills and the valley, displaced persons residing at relief camps are overcome by overwhelming grief of having lost their homes and livelihoods. People shared with the Team poignant stories of fleeing from violence, hiding in the forests and the arduous journeys they undertook to reach the relief camps. Almost all conversations ended with people sharing their fear and uncertainty about what the future holds for them.

As far as a political solution is concerned, the Kukis have taken a clear stand that separate administration is the only way out. Their demand is for Union Territory (UT) status with an elected legislature to be given to the Kuki-dominated hill districts. On the other hand, the Meitei community demands the withdrawal of Suspension of Operation (SoO) agreement with the Kuki militant groups, protection of territorial integrity of Manipur and strict action against forest encroachments, Kuki militancy and poppy cultivation as a precondition for any dialogue.

Beyond the intense division and hatred that the present conflict has created between the two communities,

is the unanimous view that the Government, be it the Centre or the State, stands to blame for this conflict. Indeed, the BJP, with Modi at the Centre and Biren Singh in Manipur, have overseen the complete decimation of Manipur's social fabric resulting in entire communities being totally ethnically segregated into distinct parts of a State.

If the ongoing conflict is evidence enough that Chief Minister Biren Singh has proven thoroughly incompetent and reluctant to put an end to the violence, then the prioritization of foreign visits over a visit to Manipur by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and his conscious silence, reveals grave apathy towards the people's suffering in Manipur. The twin-BJP governments at the State and Centre are squarely to blame for the current situation in Manipur and are trying to escape accountability for the situation, by fanning hatred between the two communities. Divide and rule is the clear policy; twin-BJP governments have orchestrated an ethnic divide, which they will communally exploit. The Chief Minister of Manipur himself has fanned the otherising narrative against Kukis by legitimizing was mongering terminologies such as 'illegal infiltrator'. Rather than governing Manipur based on constitutional principles of unity of people, the BJP-led government did what it is best at, that is to widen existing fault lines in a society and feed a chauvinistic narrative.

The resolution of this crisis ought to be considered within the broader context of restoration of peace in the state, and fixation of accountability on the twin-BJP governments. Accountability must start from the top, and Chief Minister Biren Singh, who has not only overseen but has fed into the polarising narrative that culminated in such unprecedented violence and segregation must resign. This government has no legitimacy whatsoever to continue.

Peace is possible on the basis of justice and reconciliation. For any political solution to emerge, restoration of peace and normalcy is a must and the first step in this direction is the fixing of accountability on the BJP government in Manipur. Further, it is in the interests of all that further hostilities are ceased, to ensure that the suffering masses in the relief camps can be properly taken care of, and the dead lying in the mortuaries are given a dignified burial, as a gesture of moving forward from the conflict and towards a resolution to the present impasse.

September 2023

1. INTRODUCTION

The nation watches in dismay, as violence and suffering engulf Manipur, as the conflict between two ethnic groups, the Meiteis and the Kukis, which broke out on May 3rd, 2023 continues unabated. According to an official report submitted by the Manipur government to the Supreme Court, the number of deaths since the conflict broke out stands at 142, and the number of people displaced at 54,488. Since these figures were presented to the Court on 10th of July, violence has continued leading to more deaths, injuries and conflict-induced displacement.¹ With an ongoing ban on mobile Internet, the relative lack of media access and unbiased reporting on the conflict and its origins, and a general vacuum of government accountability, credible information on the on-going situation is difficult to access.

Against such a backdrop, CPI(ML) Liberation constituted an eight-member Team to visit the state from 10th -14th August 2023, to express its concern about, and offer solidarity with, the people of Manipur. The Team consisted of CPI(ML) Liberation leaders, representatives from All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA), and All India Lawyers Association for Justice (AILAJ) and an independent feminist activist. They were: Clifton D' Rozario (CPIML Central Committee member and Party State Secretary, Karnataka), Krishnaveni (All India Progressive Women's Association), Du. Saraswathi (Dalit rights activist and prominent cultural activist, Karnataka), Sucheta De (CPIML Central Committee Member, Delhi), Bibek Das (CPIML Central Committee member and Party State Secretary, Assam), Pratima Engheepi (CPIML Central Committee Member and AIPWA leader, Karbi Anglong), Avani Chokshi (AILAJ and CPIML activist), Madhulika T. (AILAJ).

The Team visited various affected areas in the valley districts of Imphal and Bishnupur, and the hill districts of Kangpokpi and Churachandpur, and met persons from all walks of life in Manipur including victims of the violence residing in various relief camps, representatives of civil society organisations, prominent political leaders, legal professionals, media professionals, retired bureaucrats, a senior police official and Smt. Anusuiya Uikey, the Governor of Manipur. The Team also met at Guwahati, displaced Kukis who had fled there after the conflict. The Team discussed its preliminary observations with the press in Imphal, Guwahati, Kolkata and Patna

(Copy of the preliminary release of the Team is attached as **Annexure - I**).

2. MANIPUR: STATE AND SOCIETY

Post the Anglo-Manipuri War of 1891, the princely State of Manipur underwent drastic administrative changes and for all practical purposes, was under the rule of the British.² With the lapse of paramountcy, Manipur became independent on 14th August 1947. In the same year, independent Manipur adopted a Constitution titled the "Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947"³, which provided for a state assembly based on joint electorate. The Maharaja remained a constitutional head and governance of the state included representation and participation of the hills people along with other communities.

V. P. Menon, who worked closely with Sardar Patel to help integrate the princely states with India, wrote⁴

about the integration of Manipur with India: "Manipur is bounded on the north by the Naga district of Assam; on the east by Burma; on the south by Burma and the Lushai Hills, and on the west by the district of Cachar. The hill tribes fall into two main sections, Kukis and Nagas, the former name being the generic term applied to tribes whose home is in certain defined mountain tracts."

After merging with India, Manipur was initially a Union Territory, as a Part "C" State in the First Schedule to the Constitution, and was administered by the President. In 1971, the existing north-eastern states were reorganised under the provisions of the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971, and the present state of Manipur was formed comprising the territories previously under the Union Territory of Manipur. In the same year, Article 371C was inserted in the Constitution, empowering the Parliament to constitute a Committee



of Legislative Assembly for the Hill Areas of the State, and requiring the Governor to make an annual report to the President regarding the administration of the Hill areas of the State. Article 371C also provides executive power to the Union to direct the State in matters of administration of said areas. Pursuant to this, the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act, 1971 was enacted by the Parliament, which was replaced by the Manipur Hill Areas Autonomous District Council Act, 2000.⁵

Manipur, consists of two geographically distinct regions—a small and oval shaped valley at the centre covering 2,238 sq. kms. which accounts for the 10 percent of the total area of the state, encircled by nine hill ranges on all sides, which comprises 90% of the total geographical area of the state i.e., 20,089 sq. kms.⁶

The state is divided into 16 districts of which 10 districts are predominantly Tribal districts while the rest are inhabited by Meiteis.⁷ There is a high incidence of people migrating⁸ from the poorer and less developed hill region to relatively better-off and developed valley areas for employment opportunities and educational purposes. The reverse is generally rare. The stark geographical, economic, and ethnic differences between hill and valley regions, provide a major context for the ongoing conflict.

To analyse the conflict, an understanding of Manipur's ethnic and religious make-up is crucial. As per the 2011 population census, the population of Manipur is 28.56 lakhs.¹⁰ Manipur is a multi-ethnic state with Meitei Hindus being the majority. They constitute 41% of the population (including 3.41 percent scheduled castes communities)¹¹. The Muslims, colloquially known as Pangals or Meitei Muslims, constitute about 8.39% of the total population. According to leaders of the Meitei Christian community, the Meitei Christian population is about 1.25 lakhs, and as per Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), a Meitei organisation, the number of Meitei Christians is 1.7 lakhs.¹² The Meitei community, irrespective of religion, are predominantly settled in the valley regions. Other small communities like Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains also live in Manipur although their number is minimal.¹³

Besides Meiteis, there are the Tribal communities mainly consisting of two ethnic groups, the Nagas and the Kukis, who constitute 24 percent and 16 percent of

the state's population respectively. They live in the hills primarily. With the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Act, 2011, that came into effect on 8th January, 2012, there are 37 Tribal communities specified as Scheduled Tribes in 34 Entries in Manipur.¹⁴

There is a high degree of urbanisation in the valley, with nearly 40% of the people living in urban areas. In contrast, the hill areas of the State are almost entirely rural. The valley region is thickly populated while the Hills are covered by forests interspersed with habitations.

The economy of the State relies mainly on three major sectors – the primary sector consisting of agriculture including livestock, forestry and logging, fishing and mining/quarrying, the secondary sector which includes manufacturing, construction, etc. and the tertiary sector which consists of transport and other service sectors.¹⁵ At present, industries are largely traditional ones such as khadi, handlooms and handicrafts.¹⁶

Agriculture is most prominent¹⁷ sector of the state's economy. However, it is entirely dependent on contingent factors like timely rainfall and weather conditions. Permanent cultivation is generally practised in the valley districts; in the Hills jhuming (shifting) cultivation is widely adopted alongside small pockets of terrace cultivation. While the Meiteis thrive on wet cultivation, the Tribal population subsist largely on the slash-and-burn technique of cultivation and depend heavily on the valley for their basic needs.¹⁸ Incidentally, out of the state's total geographical area, the net cultivated area accounts for only 10.37 percent, of which 4.97 percent is in the valley and 5.55 percent in the hills. Cultivated areas in the hill and valley regions are 1,49,430 hectares and 1,94,190 hectares respectively.¹⁹

Non-timber forest produce (NTFP), medicinal plants, timber and bamboo operations including manufacturing of wood and bamboo products, form an important source of income for the Tribals in the hills. The people involved in collection of NTFPs and medicinal plants form an important node in the supply chain of food and pharmaceutical industries in Manipur.

The number of persons below poverty line is 7.45 lakhs (38.8 %) and 2.78 lakhs (32.59%) in rural and urban Manipur respectively.²⁰ The poverty profile of Manipur is closely connected to the physical characteristics of the terrain and the economic development of the region. The hill districts have a higher proportion of people living

in abject poverty in comparison to the valley districts. Poverty in the Valley is lower since the valley lands are fertile and irrigated. The valley being more urbanised also has better employment opportunities.

Official discourse pins poverty in Manipur on decades of economic backwardness, widespread unemployment, discrimination, rising population, poor infrastructure, and ineffectiveness of various development schemes.²¹ However, the fact that Manipur continues to be a poor state, despite its rich natural resources, can only mean that successive governments, both at the state and Centre, have ignored the State and its people.

Manipur, for years, has been viewed mainly through the prism of national security due to its geographical location as a border state, and its history of assertion against the Indian state. The lives and livelihood of people in Manipur have consistently taken a backseat for the ruling powers of India. The aspirational struggles for autonomy and freedom by various armed groups are part of the history of the state, as are the ethnic conflicts²² on issues ranging from "*exclusivity, dominance and integration*"²³ and "*questions of land, immigration and settlement, but also on the overweening fear of loss of identity itself*".²⁴

3. GENESIS OF THE CONFLICT: A RANGE OF NARRATIVES

The framing of the discourse, particularly around the causes for the conflict, is bitterly contested by both communities.

The version heard by the Team in its visit to the hills was that Kukis have been discriminated against for decades, and have suffered due to the lack of development in the hill region. As per the Kukis, this long-standing lack of development, is compounded by the aggressive State's campaign of demonising the entire Kuki community through false propaganda by referring to them as infiltrators, drug peddlers and forest encroachers. This is underlied by their belief that they have a natural claim over the hills by virtue of being its original inhabitants, confirmed by their status as heroes who fought the British, in particular highlighting the Anglo-Kuki War (1917- 1919). There is anger that despite having such a rich legacy they have been short-changed since Independence, which is evident from

the developmental disparity and budgetary allocation disparity between the valley and the hills. As far as the violence on 3 May 2023 is concerned, most Kukis believe that the attacks on them were pre-planned, led by the Arambai Tenggol/Meitei Leepun who enjoy state patronage, and came at a time when the Union government was days away from declaring 6th Schedule status to the hill areas of Manipur.²⁵

However, the dominant narrative pushed by the State, and one with which the Meitei representatives with whom the Team spoke with largely agree, is that this conflict was triggered by the March 2023 High Court order on Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to Meiteis. They also argue that the conflict arose due to Kuki backlash to the State government clamping down on illegal infiltration of Kukis from Myanmar, illegal forest encroachments by Kukis and the war on drugs by the State government targeting poppy cultivations by the Kukis. Underlying this narrative is the belief that the Meiteis are the original inhabitants of Manipur, and the Kukis are late-comers who are trying to alter the demography of the State, and win political power by facilitating illegal immigration.

Taking these competing narratives together, it is evident that the order of the High Court on granting ST status to Meiteis, was the straw that broke the camel's back, when in fact there are several legacy issues and political manoeuvres by the BJP that have together contributed to the inevitability of the present situation.

3.1. Hill and valley regional developmental disparities

The developmental disparity between the Valley and Hill regions, and the socio-economic and political exclusion of the Kuki community, was repeatedly brought up in the interactions Team had with members of the Kuki community.

A representative of Kuki Student Organisation in Churachandpur told the Team that since the Meiteis control the government and bureaucracy, the hilly areas have been underdeveloped, especially with respect to public infrastructure. He highlighted the concentration of public institutions including Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences (JNIMS), Manipur University etc. in Imphal as an example of this phenomenon. Even Tribal Institutions, such as the Indira Gandhi Tribal University are based in Imphal, he lamented. Manipur's sole airport

is at Imphal. He highlighted that political power, which determines development priorities, has always been denied to Kukis. Given that the Meiteis have at least 40 MLAs, and all of the Tribal communities together have only 20 MLAs, it is no surprise that development has been so skewed in the State.

The Kukis blame not just the State, but also the Centre, for underdevelopment in the region. One aspect that was repeatedly highlighted was the conscious denial of the Constitutional 6th Schedule status to hilly areas of Manipur, despite repeated demands from the Kukis. The spokesperson of Indigenous Tribal Leader's Forum (ITLF) said that granting 6th schedule status could have been one possible way for protecting the aspirations and interests of the Kuki community in a Meitei dominated state. Other members of the Kuki Student Organisation also stated that, under the Chief Ministership of Biren Singh, the Hill Area Committee under Article 371C, and the autonomous district councils²⁶, have been rendered practically dysfunctional.

A civil liberties activist from Imphal pointed out that while the regional disparity cannot be ignored, there is vast poverty and inequality even within the Meitei community, as a consequence of Manipur being a poor state. He alluded to the pathetic condition of Meitei displaced persons as evidence of poverty several members of the majority community in the State too are facing.

Notably, in contrast to the rest of the country, there is a perceptible developmental disparity in Manipur. The percentage of Manipuri population living below the national poverty line in the year 2011-12 was 36.89 percent as opposed to an all-India average of 21.92 percent.²⁷

Having said that, there is a general consensus that beyond the overall underdevelopment in the State, there is marked disparity in development parameters between the hills and valley. The incidence of poverty is much higher in the hills than in the valley. There is severe inequality in terms of population, area, sex ratio, literacy rate, infant mortality rate, expectancy of life at birth, poverty, per capita income, forest cover, electricity consumption and road length.²⁸ Agricultural development in the hills has been largely neglected and marginalised.²⁹

There is also a sharp contrast between the valley and the hill in regard to urbanisation.³⁰ A recent study³¹

revealed that the road density is 0.06 km per sq km in the hills, which is much lower than the 0.19 km road density in the valley. The valley also has better road conditions and greater access to cheaper transport facilities. The roads are unsurfaced and unmaintained in hill areas.

Raile Rocky Ziipao, an Assistant Professor of Sociology at IIT Bombay, argues that, embedded in this disparity, are layers of power and manipulation, manufactured by the dominant community and the state since the colonial period.³² He writes that, unlike the "valley state" and the British, the Tribals did not have a written history, and as a result, became victims of "colonizing by discourse". Consequently tribals experience two forms of domination: physical and narrative control³³. He also makes the point that the British consciously underdeveloped Tribal areas and engaged in the "politics of othering the tribes" by categorising them as "savages" and "uncivilised", a perception that was perpetuated and replicated by the Meiteis. As such "(T)ribes were ensnared on the one hand by racial inferiorisation and on the other by material/physical domination by the British, as well as the dominant communities in the region".³⁴

Importantly, the Manipur government's Vision document identifies reduction and ultimate elimination of regional disparities as necessary for peace, justice and balanced socio-economic and political development in the state.³⁵ The fact however, remains that the BJP, the present political party in power in the state, rather than positively addressing development disparity and bringing peace to the state, has manipulated existing tensions and caused unprecedented conflict and segregation in the State

3.2. BJP coming to power

Several members of the Kuki and Meitei community alike trace the origins of the present conflict to the BJP ascending power. For the 15 years between 2002 and 2017, Congress-controlled alliances held power in Manipur, with a sudden shift occurring the 2017 elections. The BJP, which had not secured a single seat in the previous elections of 2007 and 2012, managed to secure the highest vote, winning 21 of 60 seats, in the 2017 elections in the State. While the Congress retained its position as the single largest party, its seat share dropped from 42 seats in 2012 to 28 seats in 2017.³⁶ Even though Congress was the single largest Party, it was the

BJP that formed a coalition government with N. Biren Singh, a former Congress MLA, taking oath as Chief Minister of Manipur.

Five years later, in 2022, the BJP won the status of the single largest party, by securing a majority of 32 out of 60 seats. This included 7 Kuki MLAs from the BJP. The Kuki People's Alliance, which has two members in the Manipur Legislative Assembly, and an independent Kuki MLA, also supported the BJP-led government in the state.

A media professional from Imphal told the Team that out of the present strength of 60 MLAs in Manipur Assembly, 35 MLAs are Meiteis, 10 MLAs are Kukis, 10 MLAs are Nagas and 5 are Meitei Pangals. She added that the 10 Kuki MLAs are currently supporting the demand for separate statehood for Kukis.

A women's rights activist from Kangpokpi informed the team that in Manipur, there has always been a tendency for politicians to not stick by a political party, and instead gravitate towards the political party holding power at the centre. This explains how a large number of MLAs who were previously affiliated with Congress have now changed their allegiance to the BJP (including Chief Minister Biren Singh). She said that since the BJP came to power, they have pushed a narrative of victimhood of the Meitei community built on false propaganda that the Meitei majority will become a minority.

Similarly, an ITLF Spokesperson commented that since coming to power in Manipur, Chief Minister Biren Singh has embraced majoritarian politics, similar to the playbook used by the BJP in mainland India. He stated that like other majoritarian leaders across India, Biren Singh, drawing on the support of the local media, has built himself up as the champion for the dominant community by demonising the minority communities in the State. He calls this a "*conscious radicalization of the communities over the past few years*".

A member of the Kuki Student Organisation, said that Biren Singh was not openly communal in his first term as Chief Minister, and only began to viciously target Kukis in his second term.

The team was told that the Chief Minister, buoyed with confidence after winning power for the second time, began to openly target those who spoke out against him, by getting them detained and arrested. The example of 21 year old Hanglalmuan Vaiphei, who was arrested

and killed in custody after sharing a viral *Facebook post* blaming Biren Singh for the problems faced by the Kuki-Zo people was cited. The Team verified this narrative – a report in the Hindu reveals the following: "*Churachandpur district was on edge after 27 April, when Kuki-Zomi groups had, in a protest against CM Singh, burnt down a gym he was supposed to inaugurate. Amidst this, Vaiphei, a B.A. (Geography) student at Churachandpur College, had come across a viral post on social media by a user called 'Bon Lee', blaming Meitei politicians, including CM Singh, for the problems faced by Kuki-Zo people. He then reposted this on his Facebook and later deleted it in 24 hours, those who knew him said. However, police were quick to knock on his door on April 30, according to his family. It has now been revealed that the case Mr. Vaiphei was arrested in was in fact registered against 'Bon Lee'. The post alleged that political leaders of the Meitei community, purportedly with the support of the CM, were fuelling poppy cultivation in the hills and blaming Tribals for it in order to 'grab Tribal lands'. The post also painted the Meitei community as 'racist' and "anti-India", claiming they were the source of Manipur's problems*".³⁷ The report also notes that after grant of bail on May 3, Vaiphei was immediately arrested again in "*an identical case registered for the same social media post*". While being escorted to jail on 4 May, he was killed – purportedly by a mob in the violence. The Hindu report had verified the FIR in the case, which revealed that "*police were escorting 21-year-old Hanglalmuan Vaiphei from court to the Sajiwa Jail on 4 May, when they were stopped by a mob in the Porompat area. The armed mob robbed the police of their weapons and beat Vaiphei to death as the police 'escaped in different directions to save themselves*"³⁸

A retired Magistrate belonging to the Kuki community, who the Team met in a village in Kangpokpi, shared that another reason for the Kuki community's dissatisfaction with the Biren Singh government, was his manoeuvre of rendering the Autonomous District Councils as defunct. She shared that no elections to the Council have taken place since he took power in 2017.

The Team was also told that the ethnic fire was stoked by the State government's unilateral decision to withdraw the Suspension of Operation (SoO) pact with two Kuki militant umbrella groups—the Kuki National Army (KNA) and the Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA)—on 10 March 2023, alleging that they were instigating



Brinda Thounaajam with the Team

people against the government's anti-encroachment drive.³⁹ However, the Union government did not grant its approval to this withdrawal⁴⁰ and recently assured⁴¹ the implementation of the SoO agreement with Kuki insurgent groups.

Most Meiteis the Team spoke to were of the opinion that Biren Singh is leading a legitimate fight against poppy cultivations, forest encroachments and illegal immigration from Myanmar, and believe that Kukis are behind these illegalities. Very few civil society representatives in Imphal were sympathetic to the idea that the relentless propaganda has led to the demonisation and othering of the entire Kuki community.

Brinda Thounaajam, former IPS officer whom the Team met at her house in Imphal, unequivocally blamed the Chief Minister for starting the slogan that all Kukis are Burmese and narco-terrorists, which has affected the mindset of the Manipuri people towards Kukis.

Amom Malemnganba Singh, a research scholar at the Department of Political Science, Manipur University, Imphal, states as follows⁴²: "Since its resurgence, the BJP has worked to provide the Meitei community significant electoral positions while marginalising other religious and ethnic minorities. As a result, ethnic politics have become more intensified in Manipur. Since 2017, BJP karyakartas (party workers) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) pracharaks (full-time members) stationed in Manipur have been on an ambitious mission to incite

the valley's Vaishnavite Meitei (followers of Gaudiya Vaishnavism) to assert their Hindutva politics against religious minorities and 'illegal' immigrants while also providing the Meiteis with significant electoral positions. In Manipur, the RSS desires Meitei supremacy over other religious minorities... Manipur's top BJP leaders have used anti-minority and anti-immigrant rhetoric to strengthen their political base by reimagining the state's culture and traditions with a focus on majoritarian Meiteis to bring the state's various ethnic communities under the influence of Hindutva politics... Through vigilante activities and cultural policing, various Meitei-based organisations have begun to resemble the Sangh Parivar in mounting majoritarian politics, are promoting anti-minority rhetoric, and stirring communal tensions to exploit religious minorities, which further undermines the state's secular ethos. Such organisations have taken up massive recruitment programmes for the Manipuri youth. They are gradually gaining political ground by instilling a feeling of resentment among the Meiteis to portray 'illegal' immigrants as a threat and calling on them to defend their indigenous identity. The BJP has prioritised Meitei majoritarian politics in Manipur to peddle its mainstream Hindu nationalism. The party's top priority is to subjugate the state to Hindutva politics by igniting an ethnonationalism movement led by the Meiteis that targets the state's religious minorities and immigrants."

Ranjan Solomon, a writer, human rights activist and political commentator, writes⁴³ that: "*Tribal communities feel that the BJP-led state government is participating in perilous communal politics by backing the Meiteis as 'Hindus', against the Tribal people who are predominantly Christian. Hindu nationalism is the reason why there is growing religious fundamentalism in the valley. The religious extremism of the majority community feeds minority religious subjugation. Meitei youth have now organised themselves under the banner of an organisation called Arambai Tenggol. The BJP has appropriated the traditional religions in the North East under their banner.*"

The BJP managed to 'triumph' in Manipur for the first time in 2017. Within 6 years of gaining power, it has wreaked havoc on Manipur society. Not only has the BJP exacerbated pre-existing fault lines in Manipur's society, it has forced people of Manipur to experience hatred, segregation and violence that are sure to leave unerasable imprints on Manipur society. It is not coincidental that Haryana, another BJP ruled state, suffered the blow from similar polarising politics in the month of July-August, while Manipur still lay under the shadow of violence.

17. In the result,
- (i) The writ petition is disposed of.
 - (ii) The first respondent is directed to submit the recommendation in reply to the letter dated 29.5.2013 of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India.

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- (iii) The first respondent shall consider the case of the petitioners for inclusion of the Meitei/Meitei community in the Scheduled Tribe list, expeditiously, preferably within a period four weeks from the date of receipt of a copy of this order in terms of the averments set out in the writ petition and in the line of the order passed in WP(C) No. 4281 of 2002 dated 26.05.2003 by the Gauhati High Court.

3.3. Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to Meiteis

At the outset, most media channels reported that the conflict arose out of a judgement of the High Court of Manipur, in a petition filed for grant of ST status to the Meitei community. A brief background to this order of the High Court is necessary.

As per the petition, the Meitei community enjoyed the status of "tribe amongst tribes of Manipur" until the merger of Manipur with India; however, ever since then, the Meitei community had been deprived of the Scheduled Tribe status. The Petitioner had approached the Ministry of Tribal Affairs for inclusion of the Meitei Community, and received a reply in the year 2013, which stated that "*The recommendation of the concerned State Government is prerequisite to process the case further.*" Hence, the Petitioners sought for a direction to the Manipur government to recommend inclusion of Meitei community in the Schedule Tribe list and to direct the Ministry of Tribal Affairs to restore the Scheduled Tribe status of Meitei community.

In the judgement dated 27 March 2023, a Bench headed by the Acting Chief Justice of the Manipur High Court directed the State government to recommend the name of Meitei community for consideration of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India,⁴⁴ which triggered a massive reaction from the Tribals.

Subsequently, the Supreme Court while dealing with a challenge to this order, orally observed the High Court judgement to be "factually wrong" but refrained from passing any orders in view of the pendency of the appeal before the Division Bench of the Manipur High Court.⁴⁵ The appeal before the Division Bench of Manipur High Court is still pending consideration.

Brinda Thounaojam told the Team that Home Minister Amit Shah had falsely stated that the eruption of violence is linked with grant of ST status to Meiteis. She stated that large sections of the Meitei community are against their inclusion as Scheduled Tribes. Even an ITLF Spokesperson said that in 1949, when Manipur joined the Union Government, the Tribal communities were granted ST status and Meiteis were not, yet, they have traditionally never sought for such status, as they feel they are dominant and superior to the Tribals.

The members of the Kuki community who spoke to the Team unanimously stated that the demand for Scheduled Tribe status solely to enable purchase of hill

lands by members of the Meitei community, which is not permissible now without the permission of the council. It is for this reason that all the Kukis and the Nagas are opposing ST status to Meiteis.⁴⁶ It was stated that this true reason is discernible from the fact that Meiteis already have job reservations under the SC (Scheduled Caste), OBC (Other Backward Classes), and EWS (Economically Weaker Sections) categories.

Amom Malemnganba Singh writes⁴⁷ that: *“Although the Meiteis’ demand for ST status may undermine the BJP’s Hindutva agenda in the state, there are factions within the Meiteis that are divided over these demands. It is important to note that the Meiteis’ demand for the ST status is closely linked to the BJP’s majoritarian politics of inciting the Meiteis to further solidify their dominance over minorities through the benefits provided for the ST category.”*

Through the course of the visit, the Team found that the issue of grant of Scheduled Caste status to the Meitei community was only one amongst a number of disputes between the communities, highly aggravated by the polarising actions and words of the Government.

3.4. Land and Economic Interests in the hills

Land occupies a prominent place in this conflict. Most of the Meiteis that the Team spoke to expressed their discontent at the perceived discrimination in land governance in hilly areas and valley areas. In the words of a senior opposition party politician, *“Kukis are purchasing land day-by-day in the valley. However, as non-STs we are unable to purchase land in the hills.”* Brinda Thounaojam told the Team that, due to the discriminatory land law regime operating in Manipur, Meiteis have been compartmentalised to just 10% of the area in the state whereas Tribal communities are able to reside and purchase land anywhere in Manipur.

On the other hand, a women’s rights activist from Kangpokpi stated that the Meitei slogan that ‘10 percent of land for 90 percent people’ is patently untrue, since 90 percent of the land in the hills is not habitable. She added that Tribals are so poor compared to the Valley people that allowing for land transfers would open the floodgates and Tribals would become landless in no time.

In the hill region, the landholding system is predominantly based on common property rights where the Chief of each village has control over user rights

on jhum land, though terraced cultivation has private property characteristics. The Manipur government’s Vision Document notes that the hill region is yet to be cadastral surveyed, whereas in the valley region, private property rights have been fully established, and recommends that the land systems in the hills need to be “reformed” towards the notion of private property, however the choice and formulation of a new land system has to be left to the Tribals themselves.⁴⁸ This is perceived by the Tribals as an assault on their traditional method of governing land regimes in their community.

The potential plunder of resources is also acknowledged as a context for the conflict. A Meitei intellectual told the Team that Manipur is floating on a bed of oil, uranium, platinum and precious stones. He said that due to Tribal resistance, the government was unable to start mining in Churachandpur and Tamenglong districts, and hence, is using the bogey of narco-terrorism and land discrimination to gain control of the resources. Brinda Thounaojam said that Manipur is being communally divided in order to plunder the oil and other mineral resources in the Hills. Catholic church officials are also of the opinion that the main reason for the present conflict is the attempt to take over the land and minerals embedded in the Hills. They noted that the government has entered into contracts with various multinational corporations (MNCs) for survey work and exploration processes, without even consulting the owners of the land or the Tribal chiefs.

Incidentally, a news report appearing in one of the local newspapers in March 2023, states as follows: *“Eastern margin of Manipur, also known as Ophiolite Belt in geology, extending from Jessami (Ukhrul District) in the north to Moreh (Tengnoupal District) in the south is rich in metallic and non-metallic minerals like limestone, chromite, PGE (Platinum Group of Elements like platinum, nickel, vanadium, etc.). Western margin of Manipur including portions of the districts of Tamenglong, Jiribam, Churachandpur and Pherzawl is reportedly rich in hydrocarbons (oil and gas) and falls under Assam-Arakan Basin ”.*⁴⁹ This confirms what an ITLF Spokesperson told the Team, that a company by the name, M/S. Jubilant Energy, has been given licence to explore for oil and gas in two blocks spread over the districts of Pherzawl, Churachandpur, Tamenglong and Jiribam.

Another sector that Tribals fear is ripe for corporate exploitation is the non-timber forest produce, which point to immense potential for commercialization of various medicinal plants that already have established markets, which could be further exploited.⁵⁰

The signs are ominous. Clearly, natural resource plunder and Tribal land grab are perceived as the underpinning for the present conflict.

3.5. Competing historical claims to Manipur

An underlying belief of many members of the Kuki community is that they are being made scapegoats in the name of “illegal infiltration” They refuse the tag of outsider and state that having lived in the Hills for centuries, the land belongs to them. An ITLF Spokesperson said that it

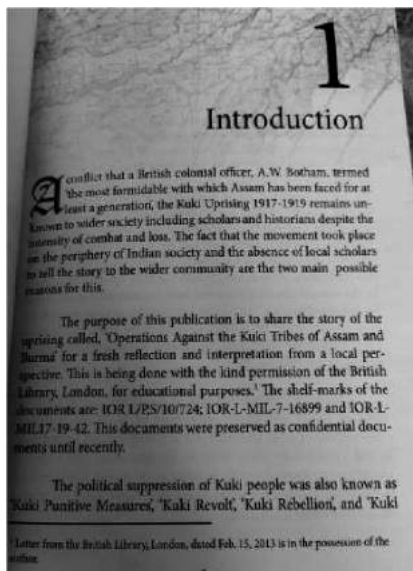
is documented history that the Meiteis ruled over the Valley and had no control or rule over the Hills, where there was sovereignty of the Tribal communities including the Kukis.

Members of the Kuki Student Organisation, Churachandpur also informed the Team about the substantial contributions of the Kuki community to the Independence struggle. It was stated that the Anglo Kuki War (1917-1919) centenary gate is a legacy of Tribal resistance against the British. The Team was informed that during World War II, Subhash Chandra Bose hoisted the Indian flag in Churachandpur before proceeding to Moirang. Several members of the Kuki community receive pension for being part of the Indian National Army (INA). In this view, one of the students said, though their forefathers have defended India, this contribution is undermined and the community itself is being branded as foreigners, immigrants and infiltrators.

In total contrast, the dominant Meitei narrative is that most of the Kuki population are illegal ‘infiltrators’, and only a few Kukis have been there for long periods. Most members of the Meitei community believe that Manipur i.e., its true indigenous community, and find the other communities to be outsiders.

Ima Ngambi, leader of the Meira Paibis told the Team that the Meitei communities are the indigenous people of Manipur. However, the Kukis are not indigenous, but are latecomers. The Meiteis believe that the Anglo - Kuki War itself is fictitious. Ima Ngambi denies the claim of the Kuki community having contributed to the freedom struggle. Incidentally, the United Naga Council has issued a statement⁵¹ denying the Anglo-Kuki War, calling it a rebellion that ended in massacres of Naga people, and accused Kuki tribes of distorting history in a bid to “legitimise their imagined Kuki homeland within the Naga ancestral homeland”.

The contestation around the narratives on the Anglo-Kuki war, which is said to be one of the biggest struggles of the Kuki community against British colonial rule, has been intensifying since the onset of the conflict in May 2023. Manipur Police has lodged cases against professors Jangkhomang Guite and Thongkhohal Haokip, editors of the book “*The Anglo-Kuki War, 1917-1919*” and against Colonel (retd.) Vijay Chenchi, author of “*The Anglo-Kuki War 1917-19: Victory in Defeat*” on the complaint by 'Federation of Haomee', a Meitei organisation which



has claimed that no Anglo-Kuki War had taken place in Manipur's history and described the event as an "armed Kuki rebellion".⁵²

Historians from the Kuki community are reported⁵³ to have vociferously decried the lodging of cases stating that "the police cases are attempts to delegitimise and omit Kuki history... By disputing that it was not a war, they want to discredit the fact that the Kukis are indigenous to the area. If they accept that the Anglo-Kuki War was true, they cannot say that Kukis have migrated from Myanmar in the recent past. Their theory of illegal migration would fall flat." Similarly, Thongkhohal Haokip, an editor who is booked by the police, reportedly stated that "A community that fought a colonial government twice during the two world wars cannot have their indigeneity questioned."

In sum, it is clear to the Team that the conflict is not simply over competing ethnic claims to Manipur, but also over the production of historical "truth" itself. The most recent spate of violence is a manifestation of struggles over claims to autochthony and belonging.

3.6. Illegal immigration

In the context of the larger claim to Manipur, the narrative of "rampant illegal immigration" from Myanmar is another issue which is hotly contested. Union Home Minister, Amit Shah, in Parliament, blamed illegal migrants for the conflict by stating that the violence was triggered by an influx of Kukis from Myanmar into Manipur, which "created insecurities among Meiteis".⁵⁴

The issue was inescapable in any conversation the Team had in Manipur. The Kuki representatives told the Team that the rhetoric of "lakhs and lakhs of illegal immigrants" was a devious fabrication of the State government and popularised by the Chief Minister Biren Singh himself. Reference was made to an interview⁵⁵, in October 2019, where he declared that the National Register for Citizens (NRC) would be implemented in Manipur and added that though there was no study, "unofficial estimates point towards lakhs of foreigners". Apparently in February this year, Chief Minister Biren Singh had declared the formation of a Population Commission to conduct a door-to-door survey to detect illegal migrants in Manipur. While making this announcement, he is reported⁵⁶ to have said that 200 new villages in Churachandpur district, around 500 villages in Kangpokpi district and some villages in Tengnoupal,

have been formed over the last few years and the State Government will verify whether these new villages are formed by indigenous people after displacing from their original village or were formed by illegal immigrants. The Team was also informed of Biren Singh's press conference on 2 May, a day before the violence erupted, where he said that illegal immigration from Myanmar to Manipur was an issue, and that so far 410 people from Myanmar have been identified as staying in the state without proper documents, and then added that there were reasons to believe that there must be many more Myanmarese residing illegally in Manipur.

The members of the Kuki community claimed that the numbers of poor refugees from Myanmar were small. A representative of Kuki Student Organisation said that the border is highly controlled by the armed forces, which conducts door-to-door checking of records and regular patrolling. He referred to the incident of July this year, about 718 new infiltrations from Myanmar and said that the State had exact numbers and full details of persons entering Manipur. He said that getting documents including Aadhar card for Kukis has become difficult since they are so demonised by the State-sanctioned propaganda that every Kuki is suspected to be an illegal immigrant. He further stated that if illegal immigration is indeed an issue, then the administration ought to take necessary action instead of branding the entire community as infiltrators.

A women's rights activist from Kangpokpi stated that only some refugees from Myanmar are entering India to escape persecution. She said that this wild allegation arises from the basic premise of the Meitei community that Manipur belongs only to them.

A CSO representative in Churachandpur said that it is incorrect to presume any increasing immigrant population only because Kukis do not know the Meitei language, because Kuki is an umbrella term used to refer to a number of tribes, each of whom have their own languages. She said that only 20 percent of Kukis speak Meitei, and instead English is the common language.

On the other hand, at the Relief Camp in Moirang and Imphal, the Team was categorically told that there is illegal mass infiltration, which is having catastrophic impacts and there is every likelihood that, if not stopped, very soon Meiteis will become a minority. The Team was also told the Kukis are consciously increasing

their population by bringing immigrants from Burma. Brinda Thounaojam, said that: *“Kukis are mostly Burmese. Infiltration is backed by Kuki militants who have been created by the Indian state. BJP is seeking to compartmentalise ethnic minorities and is encouraging, and will allow, the demand of separate administration. New Kukis didn’t come till 1961. Some Old Kukis have been here for 200 years. These old Kukis should be identified and allowed to live here. In fact, even the Old Kukis want the Burmese Kukis to be removed. Foreigners have crept into all administrative departments and even been elected to the assembly. Lakhs and lakhs of illegal Kuki infiltrators are coming into Manipur. We should identify and deport these immigrants. We are not signatures to the refugee convention; we are not bound by any law.”*

Ms. Anandi, adviser to the Meira Paibis, said that *“the Government of India is not responsive to the issues of the Manipuris, particularly in respect of illegal immigration. If, for example, Mujahideen infiltrate in Kashmir that would be a major issue. It is the central government and not the state government that is to blame, since Amit Shah said that he would control the hill side. Neither the military nor the security forces stop the entry of these Kukis from Myanmar. We love Kukis but only the ones who have been here for 100 years, and not the infiltrators, who after entering illegally, deforest the land, and plant poppy.”*

A Forest Conservation Professional working with the Manipur Government provides another assessment in regard to the numbers. He says that *“there has been a slow trickle of refugees for some time now and despite the absolute numbers not being very large, this influx of immigrants has a decided impact on the electoral situation of the hilly districts. Kuki villages are usually 10- 12 houses and under the village Chieftain, so ambitious Kuki men break away and form their own village. This is a possible explanation for the increase of Kuki villages, but there is every likelihood that illegal Kuki infiltrators from Myanmar are establishing new villages as well.”*

A retired Bureaucrat living in Imphal said that after the coup in Myanmar in 2021, a number of people have fled to Manipur as refugees. He said, *“The government constituted a committee, led by a Kuki minister, that found about 2400+ illegal Myanmar immigrants. Another indication of the increasing immigrant population is that the number of people who don’t know the Meitei language*

has increased drastically. Kukis learn it fairly quickly, but now if you visit the hill districts a large number of people don’t know the Meitei language. After 2021, we assessed the number of illegal immigrants at around 10,000. The UN Refugee office in Delhi found around 4000-5000 such immigrants and NGOs who operate with undocumented immigrants recorded around 5- 6000 further.”

It may be kept in mind at this juncture that the Manipur government issued a circular on 26.03.2023 to the Deputy Commissioners of districts bordering Myanmar not to open camps to provide food and shelter to refugees fleeing Myanmar, but later withdrew it. In another advisory, the Government asked the border district administrations to stop Aadhaar enrolment exercise.⁵⁷

On the other hand, neighbouring border states like Mizoram have accepted refugees from Myanmar and are granting relief to them.

The language of referring to the immigrants as “illegal infiltrators” as opposed to refugees is dehumanising and problematic. Furthermore, the country by now is well aware of the design and destiny of the narrative of “Illegal Infiltrator”. This narrative has become an effective tool in the hands of today’s ruling party, the BJP, to manufacture the otherisation of a targeted community. Before the 2019 Lok Sabha election, the same narrative was built up by the BJP; the Team was told that the biggest problem that the country is facing today is neither inequality, poverty, joblessness nor agrarian crisis, but “infiltration” from Bangladesh. There were targeted attacks against Bengali-speaking Muslim migrant workers in different parts of the country. To institutionalise the claim of “infiltration” the design of CAA-NRC-NPR was imposed on the country aimed at exclusion of the otherised population, the Muslims, from citizenship. Manipur, a border state of India, that has long been denied equal treatment, is now being made into the next testing ground of the narrative of “illegal infiltration”.

3.7. Forest encroachments

Kukis are shocked that a false narrative of forest encroachments has been created and driven to demonise their community. They say *“We are the custodians of the forest and have been here before even the country was formed or before any law was passed. How can we be encroachers?”*. However, allegations of forest

encroachments as a consequence of illegal infiltration are heard in official discourse and form part of the popular perception of the Meiteis the Team met.

A representative of Kuki Student Organisation, Churachandpur was of the opinion that Biren Singh has played a leading role in building false propaganda that Kukis are encroaching on forest lands, and throwing Kukis out of their traditional lands under this pretext. She took the example of the forcible evictions of Kukis from a number of forest regions including the Churachandpur- Khoupum protected forest. *"I am from a village K. Songjang which is within Churachandpur— Khoupum protected forest Area. This forest was notified in 1961. Thereafter, the village chieftains have objected to the notification of their respective villages. Hence, in 1971, the Government- appointed Forest Settlement Officers issued a notification excluding these genuine villages from the purview of protected forest notification. After this, villages peacefully continued living there. Shockingly, on 7/11/2022, the Biren Singh Government, nullified all FSO orders from 1971. How can the same government which excluded us do this? In late 2022, we received a show cause notice that our village falls in the protected forest area, but we did not reply. By January 2023, we got a second show cause notice and we were told by the district forest officer that we have to reply. Therefore, we replied, annexing documents dating back to the mid-19th century from the Magistrate reflecting our village name, the 1971 Settlement Officers orders excluding our village from the protected forest, as well as the gazette notification pertaining to our village. 11 days after our response, which was 29th February 2023, the Government officials came and razed our village to the ground. Ours was on the highway, and first to be razed. Several other villages covered by the 1971 Settlement Officers orders have all suffered the same fate".*

A Forest Conservation Professional justified State action in the Churachandpur-Khoupum protected forest issue. He said that the Settlement Officer passed 38 orders setting aside forest lands without authority during the 1970s and 1980s. Noting this the Government constituted a committee that enquired into this and reported that the Orders were not sustainable. The Committee Report was apparently examined by the Law Department and upheld, based on which the Cabinet approved cancellation of the 38 Orders of the Settlement Officer. Based on the cabinet decision, the

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) and Head of Forest Force (HoFF) cancelled the orders and similar orders in other Protected Forests on 7.11.2022. It is on this basis that the residents in all these villages were issued show-cause notices and thereafter demolitions ensued. When asked whether it was fair for such old orders to be unilaterally cancelled, he said that some Kukis have challenged this in Court. He informed the Team that majority of the forest encroachers who have been evicted are from the Meitei community, however the Kuki community has perceived this as an attack on them.

In this regard the Team queried about the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Rights) Act, 2006 which recognises and guarantees the rights⁵⁸ that Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers have over forest land including unclassified forests, undemarcated forests, existing or deemed forests, protected forests, reserved forests, Sanctuaries and National Parks. In fact the Ministry of Tribal Affairs itself recognises that in Manipur, the *"Tribal communities and Tribal chiefs are already holding ownership of forest land as their ancestral land in non-Reserved Forest Area. Therefore, implementation of the Forest Rights Act is perceived minimal in Manipur."*⁵⁹ To this, the reply normally was that, irrespective of traditional rights or laws, forests have to be protected.

Ms. Anandi, adviser to the Meira Paibis was emphatic in declaring that it was the infiltrators who had illegally entered Manipur from Myanmar and settled in the reserved forests, and are destroying the forests. She added that Meiteis follow Sanamahism – a religion where forests are revered, and hence destruction of forests hurts their sentiments.

Incidentally, the Manipur Vision document⁶⁰ quoting from the India State of Forest Report states that in 2017 Manipur had forests over 77.69 percent of its total area i.e. 17,346 sq.km, which was an increase of 1.18% from 2015, when forest cover was 76.51 percent of the total geographical area of the State. This increase of 263 sq.km. of forest cover has been attributed to the conservation and plantation activities as well as re-growth of shifting cultivation areas. The bi-annual change in forest cover of Manipur is stated to be as follows:

Year	Geographical area of Manipur (sq. km.)	Area under forest cover (sq. km.)	Increase (+) /Decrease (-) (sq. km.)	% of geographical area of the State
2005	22327	17086	-133	76.53
2007	22327	17280	194	77.40
2009	22327	17280	0	77.40
2011	22327	17090	-190	76.54
2013	22327	16990	-100	76.10
2015	22327	17083	93	76.51
2017	22327	17346	263	77.69

During 2019-20, Manipur⁶¹ had forest covering 17,418 sq. kms.⁶² which forms about 78 percent of the total geographical area of the state, and it is reported that the actual area under forest is reportedly about 15 percent higher than official records.

Numerous Meiteis informed the Team that thereafter the government has alleged that there has been loss of forest cover.

The Forest Conservation Professional working with the Manipur Government states that in 2019 the forest cover had reduced by 500 sq. km. to about 16847 sq. km., and it has further reduced by about 250 sq. km. He said that as of 2021, forest cover in Manipur was about 16598 sq. km. He added that the loss in forest cover was for a variety of reasons including illegal poppy cultivation, shifting cultivations, forest fires, mushrooming of new villages, encroachment and illegal felling.

Of course, in the midst of this crisis, the BJP has rammed through the amendment to the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, which effectively frees vast tracts, estimated to be 20-25 percent of India's forests, to corporate plunder. Another aspect of the amendment is the exemption of no forest clearance required for security related infrastructure within 100 km of international borders. Both aspects of this amendment spells doom for the forests of Manipur besides severely compromising the rights of the Tribals vis-à-vis Article 371C and the Forest Rights Act. Incidentally village councils in Nagaland have taken a pledge to oppose the amendment act as it challenges the "very essence of traditional customary and indigenous ownership-rights of the people over their land and forest" as guaranteed by Article 371A of the Constitution of India.⁶³ The duplicity in the concern for the forests could not be more evident.

3.8. Poppy cultivations / Drugs

No discussion was complete without conversations about drug abuse and poppy cultivation that are fuelled by the drug mafia and power brokers. The Team was told that there is a chain of actors involved here, stretching from the wealthy and elite down to the poor cultivator.

An ITLF Spokesperson told the Team the following: *"Drugs have been a problem for a while. However, the war on drugs that was started by the Biren Singh Government in 2018 was only targeting Kukis, whereas all communities are involved and it is grown in various parts of the State. Poppy farmers are all poor, and they have no finance to afford seeds or fertilisers. The main drug lords in fact are rich Meiteis, including MLAs. This problem is actually serious since poor farmers discovered the potential financial boom. However, these farmers are very poor people without any state support, who are getting some economic benefits out of this and are finally able to buy full rations even. Local Church and community are against it, but the farmers are poor and it is a financial boon. The Kuki village Chieftains have made a number of proposals, which focus on provision of alternative sources of livelihoods, but to no avail. There is also definitely a problem of drug abuse and we have a number of rehabilitation centres that were running till today. Poppy cultivators are very poor and get money from drug lords like the person released though Brinda arrested him. Biren Singh will never talk about drug financiers or drug makers but only the poor farmers. He's made this a communal issue and is trying to paint himself as the champion against drugs. This has made villains out of the whole Kuki community and helped in radicalising the people in the valley."*

Members of the Kuki community expressed deep anger at the branding of the entire community, and pointed to the role of highly-placed Meitei politicians in

funding the poppy cultivation and added that a few poor people being involved in cultivation cannot be used to brand an entire community as poppy cultivators.

However, most of the members of the Meitei community strongly believed that one of the causes of the present conflict was the backlash of the Kuki community to Biren's 'War on Drugs'. Ima Ngambi said *"Our Hills are covered by Kukis and we don't have the strength to go there. Kukis did this to get poppy and make crores and buy politicians, but Meitei people believe drugs destroy lives and society. Kukis want to do poppy cultivation and earn money by making brown sugar. This will destroy the lives of our young people. Society will be destroyed. They want to earn money through drugs which we want to stop. This is one of the main reasons why they started this conflict."*

On the other hand, a media professional from Imphal said that though narco-terrorism is a reality that cannot be ignored, the term is used to target Kukis, which has worsened since the violence. She said that the so-called war on drugs is only targeting poor farmers whereas the drug lords, who belong to all ethnic communities, are allowed to roam free.

This is confirmed by Brinda Thounaojam, who from her experience as a police officer in Manipur, spoke at length about the drug trade in Manipur. She said that her role in exposing the influential persons involved in drug trade has cost her job and now she is facing several cases. She said that drug cases in Manipur can be categorised into two categories: (1) accused involved with small drugs, an (2) high profile drug lords with political connections and politicians themselves. According to her, the second category people being high profile and with their nexus and connection are looting the state and destroying the youths of their future and the banner "WAR ON DRUGS" is only an eyewash coined by the present system to gain their political mileage. She detailed the incidents around the arrest of Lhukhosei Zou, a drug lord, in June 2018 and the manner in which members of the BJP government, including the Chief Minister did everything to get him released since he was the *"Chief Minister's second wife Olice's right-hand man in Chandel and that Olice was furious about the arrest"*.

A Forest Conservation Professional working with the Manipur Government said *"In respect of poppy cultivation, it may be true that members of all communities are involved in the drug trade and the attack is only on the poor farmers. It is a fact that it is difficult to get as much*

money from any other alternative livelihood. However, any chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Break the chain anywhere and it collapses."

The Team has seen that the issue of poppy cultivations and drug use in Manipur are concerns of all communities. It is understood that there is a nexus between politicians with drug mafias involved in drug trafficking, which is behind this and people are unanimous that they must be exposed and action be taken against them. However, this is not happening, and there is known political patronage for those engaged in drug trade. It is evident that the "war on drugs" rhetoric has been consciously deployed to demonise the entire Kuki community in the eyes of the others.

It appears to be widely understood by all that the farmers engaged in poppy cultivation are compelled to do so for want of secure livelihoods and state support. The poppy cultivators are poor, whereas the investment comes from politically and economically influential persons. It is useful to highlight here that experience⁶⁴ around the world is that destroying poppies using a coercive method is not the right approach and that this approach has failed, and instead, adopting alternative methods such as introducing development livelihood programmes for the cultivators to cultivate new crops such as ginger, cardamom, and lemongrass as substitute crops to replace poppy, facilitating proper rehabilitation, and a fair amount of compensation without targeting them as 'poppy victims' will gradually reduce the production of opium in the state.

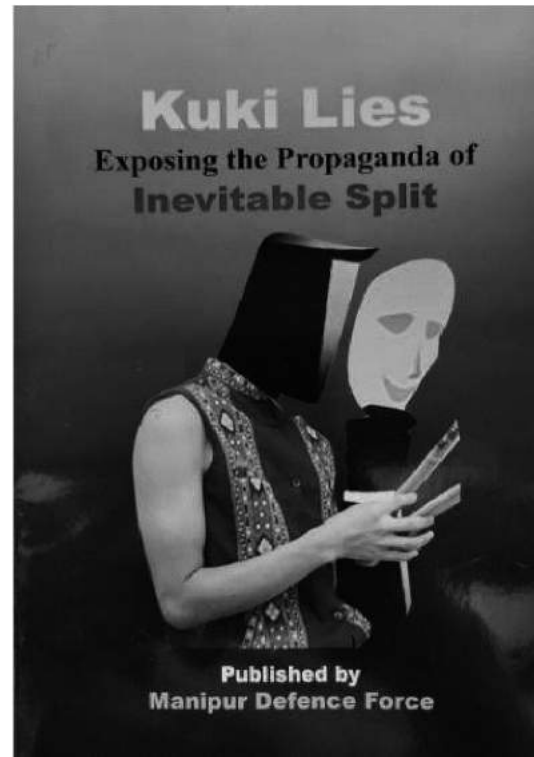
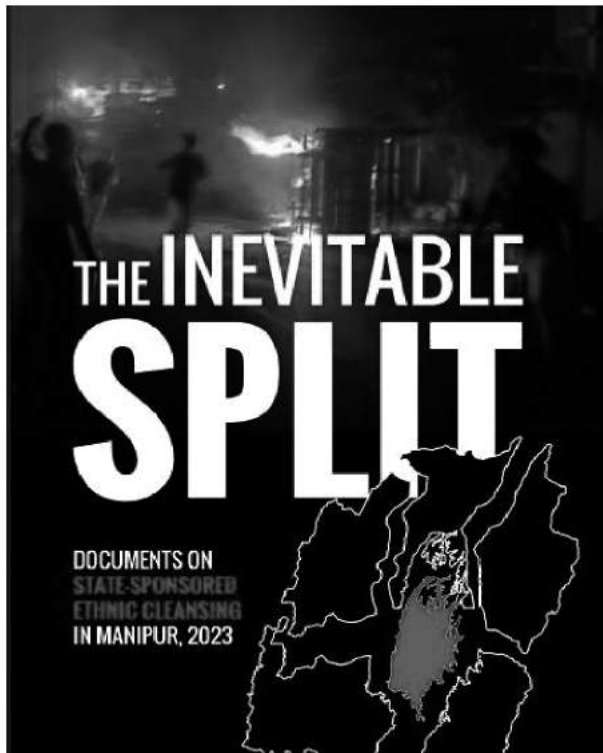
4. THE VIOLENCE AND ITS AFTERMATH

4.1. *Narratives of Violence and conflict-induced displacement*

As with most aspects of this conflict, the narrative by both communities, on how the violence broke out, are in stark contrast to the other.

The version of events from the Kuki side, as per conversations and a report titled *"The Inevitable Split (Documents on State-Sponsored Ethnic Cleansing in Manipur, 2023)"*⁶⁵, is as follows:

Before the violence broke out, the Union of India was days away from granting 6th schedule status to Tribal areas. However, because of the High Court order ATSUM proposed a joint rally on 3rd May against granting of



ST status to Meiteis. Valley-based Meitei organisations reacted to this call by organising counter-blockades in the valley areas the evening before the peaceful rally. On 3 May, thousands of Tribals came for the rally. The peaceful rally proceeded as planned in all the hill districts of Manipur, and saw widespread participation by all Tribals including the Zomi, Kuki, Naga, Hmar, Mizo etc. The rally ended peacefully at 1:05 pm after a memorandum was submitted to the Hon'ble President and Hon'ble Prime Minister of India through the Deputy Commissioner, Churachandpur by the Tribal civil society and students' organisations. By 1:30 PM on 3 May, Meiteis insurgents came and burnt the Anglo-Kuki war gate which memorialises the Kuki rebellion of 1917-1919. The Meitei mob also assaulted returning rally-goers who resided in the border areas of Churachandpur district. The problem escalated when one of those rally-goers, Pastor

Sehkhohao Kipgen was beaten to death by the chauvinist Meitei groups. The mob carried out a systematic pre-organized arson and extermination in the capital city Imphal and other valley districts. Having identified Kuki homes, churches, hostels, educational institutions, and even paying-guests rented homes a month before the ethnic cleansing through official

and unofficial means, the organised mobs were able to immediately identify all Kuki residences in a matter of hours. This ensured the targeted destruction of all Kuki homes, properties, and places of worship without any hindrance. The premeditated violence incited by the Manipur State and chauvinist Meitei organisations such as the Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun that ignited on 3rd May 2023 following the peaceful protests organised by the Tribals is a blatant disregard for human life, human rights and most importantly, human dignity. This is nothing short of a state-sponsored ethnic cleansing.

The dominant narrative according to the Meiteis as emerging from the various conversations with Meiteis, the report "*Kuki Lies*" prepared by the Manipur Defence Force and the report by Delhi Manipur Society titled "*Violence in Manipur: The Larger Story*"⁶⁶ is as follows:

For some months before 3 May, Kuki organisations were protesting Manipur government's certain policies against forest encroachments, illegal poppy cultivation and Kuki infiltrators from Myanmar. They scuttled the proposed visit of Manipur's Chief Minister to Churachandpur, on 27 April, 2023 to inaugurate an open gym at P.T. Sports Complex. The violence erupted on 3 May, during the protest march organised by the All

Tribal Students Union Manipur (ATSUM), against the High Court order and granting of ST status to Meiteis. Though the protest rally was proposed for all the Tribal areas of the State, it took place only in the Kuki dominated district headquarters of Churachandpur, Kangpokpi and Tengnoupal. The rally witnessed Kuki militants in combat clothes, brandishing sophisticated arms and marching in Churachandpur. Through the day from 10.30 a.m. onwards Kuki mobs attacked the Forest Beat Offices. They stage managed the burning of the Anglo-Kuki War Centenary Gate at Leisang Village at around 2.40 p.m. and then went about vandalising, burning and attacking the homes of Meiteis in numerous villages in Bishnupur, Churachandpur, Kangpokpi, Moreh, etc. News spread about 37 Meitei women having been raped in Churachandpur. Meiteis got enraged and thirsting for revenge they spontaneously retaliated in Meitei dominated areas. The retaliation by Meiteis against Kukis started at Moirang in Bishnupur district at around 6.45 p.m. This was followed by a series of attacks and retaliations and vice versa between Meitei mobs and Kuki militants till date. Illegal infiltrator Chin Kuki militants are at the forefront of the attack on the Meiteis, and they are heavily armed. Kukis are engaged in continued heinous killings of Meiteis, arson and destruction of Meitei homes and religious places compelling retaliatory violence from outraged Meitei mobs.

The Team spoke to numerous victims of the violence. Snippets of a few conversations are below. These are necessary to reflect on the horror, anxiety, fear and loss that people have suffered due to the conflict.

The Team met the family of David Thiek, a 31-year-old man from Lamza village in Churachandpur district, who was beheaded by a Meitei mob on 2nd July while guarding his family's house. As per his family, David was previously working as a waiter in Mumbai. He lost his mother at a young age, and was taken care of by his father who is disabled. His family narrated to the Team the heinous manner in which he was killed. David's arms were first chopped off, followed by his head. His decapitated head was then displayed at various locations, as per his family. Pictures of this went viral. When the Team met the family they were still reeling from shock. His father and sister spoke of the mental trauma the family is facing not only from this incident but more broadly the state-wide violence. They lamented that

they had never imagined that such a brutal incident was possible in India. They added that no action is being taken to ensure justice to the family. The Team was informed that Mairembam Romesh Mangang, a security guard of a BJP MLA, is accused of murdering David. They pointed to a viral photo of Mairembam Romesh Mangang holding David Thiek's head in one hand and a machete in another hand, which is available online.⁶⁷

A displaced Meitei woman the Team met at a Relief Centre at Ideal Girls College, Akampat, Imphal East, hailing from Moreh, said trouble in Moreh began on the evening of 3rd May. Huge Kuki mobs began to gather in the evening and vandalise and burn homes. She said that despite the Assam Rifles being adjacent to their locality, there was no help forthcoming in stopping the arson. The Assam Rifles, however, shifted them to their camp where they stayed for more than 10 days. They were brought to the Akampat relief camp between 13th and 16th May. She said that around 5 villages with Meiteis in the region were destroyed, and a few thousand Meiteis are displaced who now live in several relief camps in the Valley. She added that while fortunately there was no loss of life in her village from the conflict, all properties were destroyed and valuables looted.

A displaced Kuki person at Kangpokpi, who hails from Aihang village in Sugnu District spoke of how he reached the relief camp. According to him, his village, which has about 100 Kuki families, was completely surrounded by Meiteis. He says that his village was attacked by a mob of around 6000-7000 people, led by about 150 members of the Arambai Tenggol. When the violence broke out, the Nagas provided his family refuge for one night. But fearing reprisals, the Naga family asked them to leave the next morning. His family then hid in the jungle for days after which they somehow reached an army camp. From the army camp they were brought to Kangpokpi. He said that his family, like all other displaced persons, had lost all their valuables, money, savings and basic documents. He wondered about the plight of the people who had taken bank loans to build houses, which were either just completed or being built, which now stand destroyed.

A Meitei displaced person at the Moirang Relief Camp, said that she had come from Churachandpur with her husband and two-year-old child. She said that on the day of the Tribal March, Kuki people attacked



Destruction of property in Sugnu



their house and they had to flee. She said that she had named her daughter Koyelama after this camp.

The Team spoke with a group of Kukis at the ITI

relief camp, Kangpokpi, who were from Themdoi, a village in the Naga dominated district of Senapati. They said that their houses were burnt on the 5 May after which the Assam Rifles helped them escape to temporary shelter in Motbung.

Thereafter they were brought to Kangpokpi, Initially, families that fled mostly went to churches, which were the only places offering shelter. Since churches have community halls, they were able to be accommodated there before being moved to other places.

They have lost all their property and valuables. Entire villages were burnt and all their property lost. They were able to flee with just the clothes on their backs. Initially they thought that the violence would subside and that they would be able to return to their village after spending 1-2 nights in the jungle, but they were wrong. They lamented that they had fled only with the clothes on their backs and had lost all their possessions, and have nothing even for the save of memory

One of the Meitei displaced persons from Akampat relief camp in Imphal said that when the violence broke out on 3rd May, a Kuki mob attacked her village which is in the border region between the valley and hill districts. She said that she fell at the feet of persons in the mob and begged them not to burn her house. However they poured petrol on her house and set it ablaze.

At the Youth Hostel in Churachandpur, a Kuki displaced person from Gotangkot, Kangpokpi spoke of the dangerous passage over the mountain side that he

had to make to reach the relief camp. He said the journey lasted almost 12-13 hours. This road is often avoided by most because of landslides which poses a huge risk. He initially did not know about the May 3rd violence. Only when his neighbouring village got torched on 5th May, did he understand the scale of violence. On 6th May, he and his family, along with Kukis from the village fled by foot to the Assam Rifles camp. They stayed there for a brief while. They were then again shifted to Kangpokpi, but later came to Churachandpur. He says he feels much safer in Churachandpur than the other districts and would prefer to live here.

A Kuki student in Churachandpur said that this was a case of State sponsored ethnic cleansing. He said that from 3rd May there has been a concerted and planned

attack on Kukis to drive them out of the valley and into the hills. Mobs organised by the Meitei Leepun and Arambai Tenggol went from house to house of Kukis, looting their homes and killing at will. This was carried out in Imphal and all villages in the valley where Kukis were residing. Even Kuki villages at the foothills were not spared.

Whereas in Churachandpur where the business is largely controlled by the Meities, even two weeks after the outbreak of violence, Kuki organisations were handing over Meiteis to the Army and facilitating their safe travel to Imphal, yet, in Imphal every available Kuki was being targeted, beaten and even killed. Even Kukis who ran to the Deputy Collector's office for safety were handed over to the mobs by the police and they were killed.



Wall of Remembrance at Churachandpur

The destruction of house properties and displacement of thousands of people in the valley and hills, is one of the huge human costs paid in this conflict. A civil society organisation representative in Churachandpur informed the Team that around 10,000 Meiteis who lived in the Hills have been displaced to the relief camps in the Valley, and about 60,000 Kukis have

been driven out of the Valley and foothills and are now living in the relief camps in the Hills.

As per the Press Brief dated 10th June 2023 issued by the Government of Manipur a total of 50,648 “temporarily displaced persons” were sheltered in 349 relief camps as on 9th June 2023.



Some of the Meitei victims of the violence

Sl. No.	District	Number of camps	People in the camps
1	Imphal West	29	3769
2	Imphal East	40	7423
3	Churachandpur	100	14440
4	Kangpokpi	53	9008
5	Tengnoupal	6	723
6	Bishnupur	54	7095
7	Thoubal	12	1327
8	Kakching	32	4430
9	Senapati	1	30
10	Jiribam	4	131
11	Ukhrul	13	1834
12	Kamjong	5	438
Total		349	50648

Incidentally this the Press Brief dated 10th June 2023 also stated that guidelines for management of camps had been issued for guidance of Deputy Commissioners and Departments on 9th June 2023. The Team has visited 7 relief camps, the conditions of which are discussed later in this Report.

4.2. Dead bodies in the mortuaries

A Kuki student volunteer in Churachandpur told the Team that they are deeply hurt that scores of Kukis who were murdered in the Valley have still not been given a burial as per their customs. He lamented that there can be no thought of normalcy till they can bury, and mourn, their dead. They have no way of going to Imphal to identify and

recover the bodies. He said that there are about 150 bodies in 3 hospitals, Regional Institute of Medical sciences and Jawaharlal Institute of Medical Science, both in Imphal and the Churachandpur medical College.

The Team was informed that there are 35 bodies in the morgue in Churachandpur, who belong to the Kuki-Zomi community, but the ITLF had directed families to not claim those bodies until the State government brings the bodies of Kuki persons in the Imphal mortuaries to Churachandpur. With the passage of time, ITLF decided that the 35 persons would be given a decent burial as a *“final tribute to the Tribal martyrs”* on 3rd August in S Boljang village near Turbong, an area at the border of the Kuki-Zomi dominated Churachandpur district and the Meitei dominated Bishnupur district. This was objected to by certain Meitei organisations who moved the Manipur High Court, which directed that status quo be maintained *“taking into consideration the potentiality of aggravating the already volatile law and order situation and the possibility of igniting a fresh wave of violence and bloodshed...”*.

Several members from the Meitei community informed the Team that the choice of the burial site was provocative, since the proposed burial site was in the “buffer zone” and accused the Kuki organisations of playing “politics over dead bodies”. The ITLF informed the Team that this interference was symptomatic of their situation where they cannot even give their dead a dignified burial. *“The government, the police, the courts - everyone is with the Meiteis”*, they commented.

A representative of Kuki Student Organisation said that they are deeply hurt by the comments about the dead lying in the mortuaries in Imphal. He highlighted the statement made by the counsel for Government in the Supreme Court, that most of the “unclaimed bodies” are infiltrators who came with a particular design and got killed. He questioned how such an inflammatory and false statement is permitted to be uttered in the highest court of the land when the Kukis are unable to step into Imphal to identify and recover the bodies.

One representative of a Meitei civil society organisation told the Team that it was a matter of utter shame that dead bodies of those killed in the conflict were still lying in the mortuaries in Imphal and Churachandpur. They said that it was in their culture to treat the dead with dignity, but everything has been

forgotten in this conflict. The Team chanced upon a monograph that details the Chainoral, one of the 4000 puyas i.e. manuscripts written in the ancient Meitei script, which explains the ethical considerations and sacred code of conduct in armed combats as follows: *“strong undercurrent of humanity, a clear distinction between the combatants and non-combatants, an exemplary respect for the body of the dead warrior, and a conscious attempt to avoid both direct and indirect harm to the surrounding areas”*.⁶⁸

The Team believes that there is such abject failure on the part of the Union and State governments in addressing even this concern.

4.3. Destruction of religious places

The Team was informed that more than 350 Churches were burnt/destroyed in the conflict alongside several Meitei temples.

Several Catholic churches and institutions have been totally vandalised, looted, desecrated, burnt and destroyed. St. Paul’s Parish and Pastoral Training Centre (PTC): St. Paul’s Parish located in Sangaiprou, Imphal is a parish which has its members from all ethnic



communities of Manipur such Meiteis, Kabui, Tangkhul, Paite, etc. In the same campus is the Pastoral Training Centre where lay catechists have been receiving training for many years. It is learnt that between 3rd and 4th May, Meitei broke window-panes, doors, statues, crucifix, sound system, musical instruments, etc. and set afire the Church, altar, the PTC and vehicles. They entered the PTC, which housed 46 inmates (4 Priests, 37 trainees, one animator, one hostel warden, 3 domestic staff) and checked the identity of each of them to ascertain that there were no Kukis. They called for help and even the police Team that came for a while was nowhere to be seen when the mob arrived. All SOS calls to Emergency Nos. 100 and 112 without any response.

The Holy Redeemer Parish, Canchipur was also destroyed on 3rd May by Meitei mobs armed with iron bars, woods, stones etc. The private rooms of the priests and the staff were also ransacked and destroyed. The mob also set ablaze the boys' hostel for needy students and destroyed the school auditorium and Primary Section of the School and the garage. The miscreants also entered the Bethany convent and vandalised it and looted all valuables including the community computer, some cash, and other common home items. There were 3 to 4 police security personnel but they could not control the mob.

A representative of Evangelical Fellowship of India, confirmed that scores of Meitei churches were burnt by Meitei mobs. He said that Meitei Christians are also being threatened to undertake "Ghar wapsi" and relinquish their Christian faith.⁶⁹

Overall, the Christian leaders the Team met, expressed deep dismay at the targeted attack on the Churches and opined that some sections of the mobs, particularly the Arambai Tenggol had a deliberate communal motive. Claims were made that the churches were attacked as part of revenge for the destruction of a Meitei place of worship in some parts of the State. However, the number of attacks on churches indicates the strong and active involvement of some fanatical groups with communal intent. They added that it is shocking that the State has yet to evolve a compensation package for the total destruction of Christian Churches and institutions.

Even so, some Meitei organisations the Team spoke to, have rejected the view that there was any communal content to the attacks, which they believed is purely ethnic.

The report titled referred to above, *"Kuki Lies: Exposing the Propaganda of Inevitable Split"*⁷⁰, published by Manipur Defence Force, states that: "While this is an unfortunate turn of event, it was a retaliatory act driven by violent mob psyche. The anger against the Kuki aggression orchestrated by Kuki militants led to retaliatory consequences that affected Kuki churches. Nevertheless, in the violent act of arson, sanity prevailed and the Naga churches (also some Kuki churches) were left largely untouched.". The Report goes on to state as follows: "The antecedent to the church burning lies series of events where several Meitei places of worship in the hills (Koubru and Thangjing) were desecrated over a stretch of time. There





have been cases where due to strong resistance by these migrant Kuki population, constructions of indigenous temples were stalled in the hill districts. Often these sacred places and associated indigenous practices are treated with contempt and ridicule (recent case of one Christian pastor Ramananda in various Church gathering can be cited). In addition, several armed Kuki militants have been carrying out a series of attack on the Meitei/Hindu religious shrines and symbols in the past as well as during the recent unrest. A 200-year-old Shiva temple was destroyed using

bulldozer in Koubru Leikha under the Kangpokpi District administration, which is dominated by the Kuki tribes. The local administration turned a blind eye to the whole episode. Contrary to the Meitei unrest, this act shows a well-designed strategy to destroy the indigenous place of worship and the sacred sites. In addition, the seven-colour flag of the Meiteis have been desecrated by the Kuki militants.”

The Report then lists the following Meitei temples as destroyed by the Kukis.

Temples/Laishang	Place	Sub-Division	District
Mahadeva	Koubru Leikha	Saitu Gamp- hazol	Kangpokpi
Nungthong Lairem- bi (Goddess)	Serou	Waikhong	Kakching
Lainingthou Sana- mahi	Thinungei	Bishnupur	Bishnupur
Kondong Lairembi (Goddess)	Moreh	Moreh	Tengnoupal
Langol Lairembi (Goddess)	Langol	Imphal West	Imphal West
Thongak Lairembi (Goddess)	Langol	Imphal West	Imphal West
Ima Panthoibi (Goddess)	Torbung	Moirang	Bishnupur
Ingourok Mahadeva	Leimakhong	Kangpokpi	Kangpokpi
Ireima (Goddess)	Moreh	Moreh	Tengnoupal
Maikeingakpa	Zoveng Meitei Leikai	Churachan- dpur	Churachan- dpur
Ibudhou Pakhangba	Meitei Leikai	Churachan- dpur	Churachan- dpur

The Team saw a demolished temple just before entering Kangpokpi town and learnt that this was a Meitei temple which was destroyed by Kuki mobs in the violence.

One of the Meira Paibis said that the Meiteis went "wild" because of the destruction of their temples and repeated denial of access to their religious places in the hills in the recent past. She added that the Kukis do not have respect for every God and that is a problem. The Meiteis at the Relief Camp Moirang expressed their disappointment at the narrative of Hindus attacking Christians and strongly stated that this was not a religious question, but one of ethnicity.

4.4. Sexual Violence

The Team had visited Manipur a month after the video of the horrific sexual assault of two Kuki women surfaced in the public domain. Though the two Kuki survivors currently reside in Churachandpur, the Team decided against meeting with them since they had already given an extensive interview to Scroll⁷¹ detailing their horrific ordeal.

The older woman, who is 44 years of age, recounted how she and her 21-year-old neighbour and family were discovered while hiding in a forested path next to their

homes. She explained the manner in which the mob first killed her young neighbour's father and younger brother, after which both of them were subject to intense sexual assault. She also explained how the men who surrounded her, told her that they were committing revenge for the rapes committed on Meitei women by Kuki men in Churachandpur. An FIR was later filed in her case on May 18th by her relative in Saikul police station in Kangpokpi district, which mentions the Accused persons as "unknown miscreants" of "800-1,000".

Following the video going viral, the Prime Minister for the first time addressed the situation in Manipur on July 20th. Despite the fact that a civil war in Manipur had gone on for over 80 days at the time, Prime Minister Modi maintained a conscious silence on Manipur. While calling the incident shameful for any civilised society, Prime Minister Modi requested all Chief Ministers to strengthen law and order in their States, and alluded to rapes in Chattisgarh and Rajasthan, two Congress States. Even in the face of such brutality, Prime Minister Modi stuck to his ideological moorings and engaged in political whataboutery, which most Kukis the Team met found disrespectful and distasteful, and an attempt to deflect from the sexual violence the Kuki women had faced.

While referring to the video, Ima Ngambi, from the Meira Paibis, said that she strongly condemns the attack on the prestige of women on either side and the use of women's bodies in the war. She added that there were many Meitei women who were raped too, but since there are no videos of these crimes, no concern is extended to their trauma. She also said that since Meitei society is conservative, the Meitei women did not go public about it till now. But the Meitei mobs knew and went wild. She said that it is not fair that the Prime Minister only spoke of the Kuki women who were raped, which was because of the video, but ignored the suffering of Meitei women.

This was a view that the Team heard from several Meitei people it met that "*only the rape of 2 Kuki women became an issue because of the video. Our rapes are not a problem because there are no videos*".

In Kangpokpi, the Team was told of the rape and murder of two young Kuki women who worked at a car wash in Konung Mamang, Imphal. It is reported⁷² that their grieving family members have alleged that it was local Meitei women who handed over the young women

to the mob, and even urged the crowd to assault them “as a retaliation”.

Disturbingly when it came to rape, the Team often heard statements to the tune that “*they raped women from our community, so our men raped women of their community*” as justification, when the Team brought up the viral video of the sexual assault.

A Meitei displaced person from Moreh at the Relief Centre at Ideal Girls College, Akampat said that it was confirmed news she got on 3 May, that 37 women were raped by Kukis in Churachandpur, however only the rape of 2 Kuki women became an issue because of the video.

When the Team members informed her that this particular report of 37 Meitei women being raped was found to be fake news and the DGP has issued a statement in this regard, she did not agree and said that it is a fact that 37 Meitei women are raped.

During the time the Team was in Manipur, a Meitei survivor at a relief camp in Bishnupur, had just filed a complaint with the police about the sexual assault and rape she faced in Churachandpur on 3 May. The Team tried to meet with the survivor but was told that she was not comfortable meeting anyone right now.

A media professional from Imphal said that the reports of sexual violence are unsurprising, given the history of sexual violence against women's bodies in armed conflict situations that Manipur has seen for decades.

The use of women's bodies as pawns and weapons in ethnic violence is something that must be condemned. Moreover, the wilful neglect of the government to this aspect until the video of the violence went viral must not go unnoticed.

4.5. Arms and Ammunition

Kukis, in unanimity, said that the Police and the security forces had distributed arms to the Arambai Tenggol cadre and even to the common Meiteis. They laughed off reports that the Meiteis raided the armouries and stole arms and ammunition. Can anyone take arms forcibly from the police and armed forces in Kashmir or Chhattisgarh, they asked.

According to news-reports,⁷³ about 1000 weapons and 10,000 ammunition were “looted” from armouries in Imphal by “some Meitei groups” in the initial days of

the violence, and again more weapons and ammunition were “looted” by these groups on 27-28 May. Other reports⁷⁴ confirm that in all, mobs have looted around 4,000 weapons and 50,000 rounds of ammunition from police stations and armouries since the conflict began and that in another incident, around 500 people in more than 40 vehicles looted arms and ammunition from the Indian Reserve Battalion (IRB) camp at Naraseina in Bishnupur district. The Press Brief dated 10th June 2023 issued by the Government of Manipur confirms that more than 4500 arms and 611245 ammunition was “lost”.

Earlier on 31st May, 2023 the ITLF issued a press release⁷⁵ stating that the state's complicity in the selected targeting of Kuki- Zo Tribals becomes more evident from the “*handing over of 1500+ sophisticated weapons, covered by state media in the garb of looting weapons from the armoury of regular Battalion HQ of Manipur Rifles and Indian Reserved Battalions (IRB) in Imphal valley for the second time since May 3, 2023*”. It added that on 4th May too, arms looting happened at Manipur Police Training College, Pangei and at 9 Mahila IRB (Khuman Lampak), and that on 5th May, the 4 IRB and 5 IRB armoury at Korengei were looted, while on 28th and 29th May, the 3 IRB Thoubal, 7 MR Khabeisoi, 8 IRB Khabeisoi, 6 IRB Khabeisoi, and DGP Pool bullets inventory were also looted. ITLF called this a “*coordinated looting of government weaponry in the heart of the state capital by radicalised groups like the Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun*” made possible by the tacit support of the state police forces. ITLF also stated in their press statement that the weapons supplied to these groups were used to attack and destroy over 30 Tribal villages along the Imphal Valley's foothills.

Both communities admitted to being armed and said this was necessary for self-defence. A volunteer at the Relief Camp in Moirang told the Team that the Meiteis had no choice but to arm themselves and the only place where weapons were available were the armouries. Faced with armed Kuki militants, they were compelled to arm themselves to safeguard their villages. Similarly, in Churachandpur, the Team was informed by a CSO representative that, given the manner in which the Meiteis have armed themselves, Kukis are now being forced to carry guns and guard their borders and villages, and they cannot be called militants. She said

Government of Manipur Press Brief – 10th June, 2023

1. Arms Recovered (Hills / Valley):

Till 10th June, 2023

Sl.	Valley / Hills	Lost			Recovered		
		Arms	Ammn	Others	Arms	Ammn	Others
1	Valley	4014	548172	14807	888	13509	230
2	Hills	523	63073	2	102	17	
	TOTAL	4537	611245	14809	990	13526	230

District wise recoveries:

Sl.	District/ Unit	Lost			Recovered		
		Arms	Ammn	Others	Arms	Ammn	Othe
1.	Imphal West		261		37	760	8
2.	Imphal East	162	5591	9	458	5841	215
3.	Kakching	129	1695		187	6130	5
4.	Thoubal	58	3051		14	120	
5.	Bishnupur	46	2044		22	360	2
6.	Churachandpur	389	55026		54		
7.	Kangpokpi	107	6047		8		
8.	Tengnoupal	No data	No data		40	16	
9.	1-MR	16	140				
10.	6-MR	5	260				
11.	1-IRB	22	1740	2			1
12.	2-IRB	31	3599	1	6		
13.	3-IRB	72	5500	9			
14.	4-IRB	27	1750				
15.	6-IRB	827	1217	6	4	34	
16.	7-IRB	274	17294		50		
17.	8-IR(CDO) Bn	526	83977				
18.	9-IR(M) Bn	79	16860		21	250	
19.	7 MR	1607	405193	14782			
20.	MPTC	160			89	14	
	Total	4537	611245	14809	990	13526	230

that the community has been forced to start buying guns and bullets to defend themselves.

Both in the Valley and the Hills, most villages in and around the buffer zone have constituted armed village defence forces tasked with protecting their village and people. It is a war out there, with the belief that lack of arms cannot guarantee safety.

4.6. Relief Camps for IDPs

Our Team visited 7 relief camps across 4 districts: two in Imphal City, one in Moirang, one in Kangpokpi and three in Churachandpur. The relief camps too lay divided on ethnic lines. In camps at Imphal City and Moirang, there are only people from the Meitei community, and in camps at Kangpokpi and Churachandpur there are only Kukis.

List of Camps in Kangpokpi District Shyamsakhi School Relief Camp, Imphal:

Format for providing daily updates of Relief Camps & Inmates Data

Name of District: **KANGPOKPI** Date of Reporting: **8th August, 2023**

Sub-Division	Sl. No.	Camp Code	Name of Relief Camp	Camp/Centre Type	Inmates on Previous Day	Inmates leaving today	New inmates joined today	Total Inmates for the day
KANGPOKPI	1	KPI-1-01	ITI Relief Centre	ITI Building	765	0	0	765
	2	KPI-1-02	Mandap Relief Centre	Sadbhavana Mandap	200	0	0	200
	3	KPI-1-03	Changoubung Relief Centre	Community Hall	178	0	0	178
	4	KPI-1-04	Hengbung Relief Centre	Govt. High School, GC Hall, etc.	864	0	0	864
	5	KPI-1-05	L. Songlun Relief Camp	Community Hall	357	0	0	357
Sub-Division Total:					2364	0	0	2364
CHAMPHAI	6	KPI-2-01	Keithelmanbi HS Relief Camp	Govt. High School	450	0	0	450
	7	KPI-2-02	Keithelmanbi Relief Camp	Community Hall	239	0	0	239
	8	KPI-2-03	Gannomghal Relief Camp	Community Hall	85	0	0	85
	9	KPI-2-04	Bonghol Relief Centre	Community Hall	221	0	0	221
	10	KPI-2-05	Nghamun Relief Camp	Community Hall	185	0	0	185
	11	KPI-2-06	Khojang Relief Camp	Community Hall	81	0	0	81
	12	KPI-2-07	Washangbung Relief Camp	Community Hall	108	0	0	108
	13	KPI-2-08	DIET, Leikop Relief Centre	DIET Centre, Leikop	464	0	0	464
	14	KPI-2-09	HM Relief Camp	School Hall	161	0	0	161
	15	KPI-2-10	Hajpa Relief Camp	Community Hall	89	0	0	89
	16	KPI-2-11	Twineh Veng Relief Camp	Community Hall	155	0	0	155
Sub-Division Total:					2239	0	0	2239
WAICHONG	17	KPI-3-01	Chalwa Relief Camp	Police Station	232	0	0	232
Sub-Division Total:					232	0	0	232
SAITU	18	KPI-4-01	Motbung Bethlehem Veng	Community Hall	158	0	0	158
	19	KPI-4-02	U Songlung Relief Camp	Community Hall	529	0	0	529
	20	KPI-4-03	RM Fhajok Relief Camp	Community & School Hall	191	0	0	191
	21	KPI-4-04	Badminton Court Relief Camp	Badminton Hall	402	0	0	402
	22	KPI-4-05	Damde Relief Camp	College hall	388	0	0	388
	23	KPI-4-06	Bethsaida Relief Camp	School Hall	223	0	0	223
	24	KPI-4-07	Khunleho Kuki Relief Camp	Community & School Hall	362	0	0	362
	25	KPI-4-08	Jouyang Relief Camp	Community Hall	201	0	0	201
	26	KPI-4-09	Pangrol Relief Camp	Community Hall	235	0	0	235
	27	KPI-4-10	N Songlung Relief Camp	Community Hall	153	0	0	153
	28	KPI-4-11	Gannom Sapomeina	Community & School Hall	342	0	0	342
Sub-Division Total:					3184	0	0	3184
KANGCHUP	29	KPI-5-01	Kofen Relief Camp	Community Hall	355	0	0	355
	30	KPI-5-02	Meihol Relief Camp	Community Hall	199	0	0	199
	31	KPI-5-03	Leilon Khunou Relief Camp	Community & School Hall	353	0	41	464
	32	KPI-5-04	Leilon Fhalkot Relief Camp	Community & School Hall	322	0	32	354
	33	KPI-5-05	Twibul Lhang Relief Camp	Community Hall	351	0	0	351
Sub-Division Total:					1980	0	73	1983
BUNGTE	34	KPI-6-01	Khoripok Relief Camp	Community Hall	294	0	0	294
Sub-Division Total:					294	0	0	294
SAIKUL	35	KPI-7-01	Ichalgajang Relief Camp	Community Hall	220	0	0	220
	36	KPI-7-02	Thangkamphal Relief Camp	Community Hall	338	0	0	338
	37	KPI-7-03	Saikho Relief Camp	Community Hall	174	0	0	174
	38	KPI-7-04	Pangjang Relief Camp	Community Hall	220	0	0	220
	39	KPI-7-05	Saikul HQ Relief Centre	Sadbhavana Mandap & CC Hall	250	0	0	250
	40	KPI-7-06	Y Langkhong Relief Camp	Community Hall	49	0	0	49
	41	KPI-7-07	H Tuinongjang Relief Camp	Community Hall	30	0	0	30
	42	KPI-7-08	N Ziphai Relief Camp	Community Hall	135	0	0	135
	43	KPI-7-09	Nungka Relief Camp	Community Hall	161	0	0	161
	44	KPI-7-10	Saikul Village Relief Camp	Community Hall	181	0	0	181
	45	KPI-7-11	Seiang Relief Camp	Community & Temp. Hall	87	0	0	87
	46	KPI-7-12	Songpehjang Relief Camp	Community Hall	97	0	0	97
	47	KPI-7-13	Ekou Mullam Relief Camp	Community Hall	104	0	0	104
Sub-Division Total:					2048	0	0	2048
LHUNGTHIN	48	KPI-8-01	Gangpikon Relief Camp	Community Hall	42	0	0	42
	49	KPI-8-02	Lhungthin Relief Camp	Community Hall	31	0	0	31
	50	KPI-8-03	T Gannom Relief Camp	Community Hall	84	0	0	84
	51	KPI-8-04	Maojang Relief Camp	Community & Youth Club Hall	83	0	0	83
	52	KPI-8-05	Deriglen Relief Camp	Community Hall	50	0	0	50
	53	KPI-8-06	Mulkon Relief Camp	Community Hall	186	0	0	186
	54	KPI-8-07	Dongsum Relief Camp	Community Hall	50	0	0	50
	55	KPI-8-08	Tingpinung Relief Camp	Community Hall	54	0	0	54
Sub-Division Total:					690	0	0	690
DISTRICT TOTAL: 65 Relief Camps					12658	0	73	12731

Shyamsakhi School Relief Camp, Imphal

On the first day of the Team's visit to Manipur, it visited Shyamsakhi camp situated at the heart of Imphal city. Established and run by eight local community clubs, the camp houses 83 members of the Meitei community. It was set up 15 days after the first bout of violence broke out on 3 May. Here, the Team met people who fled from

several areas including Imphal East, Churachandpur, Moreh and Torbung. We also met a woman and her 1-month-old baby, which she gave birth to in the camp. The people told the Team that they wished to return home, however this was impossible due to violence. They were concerned that they could not even get information about the state of their homes, fields and properties.

In conversations with the relief camp convenor, the Team was told that a local MLA, also the speaker of the house, was helping the camp with relief efforts. He also mentioned that the Government provides Rs 80 per inmate per day, apart from some rice and dal, but that this was insufficient to keep the camp running. He also said that due to the passage of 3 months, local volunteers are finding it difficult to give time to the relief camps since they have to work as well and have their own commitments. Also, it is difficult to keep raising money so now the displaced Meiteis themselves have begun to cook whereas initially there were hired cooks.

With respect to education, the Convenor said that with schools opening in Imphal, the Government has provided the children at the camps with textbooks and had facilitated admissions to local schools and colleges. The Team was told that the education department authorities had ensured that the transfer certificates of students were promptly processed. To ensure that displaced Meiteis in the relief camp are able to make a livelihood, he said local groups have come together to provide people at the camps vocational training. He also said efforts are being made to provide counselling services for displaced Meiteis.

ITI Relief Camp, Kangpokpi

On 11 August, the Team visited the ITI Relief Camp at Kangpokpi. The Kukis living in this camp have fled from the fringe and buffer zones, mostly from Saikul and Thenodi. They are from several villages including Khanenlok, Imphal, Salem Palok, Kangchup, Lchonzchin and Themdoi. The camp was started on May 16th, and houses over 186 people. The Team was informed that the camp is fully run on aid from Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) based out of Nagaland and Mizoram, and received no help from the state except small consignments of dal and rice sent by the District Collector every fortnight. The extent of monetary aid that the State contributed to the displaced Kukis at the camp was a paltry one-time payment of Rs 500 per person.

Meals are provided twice a day and people take turns in cooking meals. Both meals consist only of dal and rice. The people at the relief camp said that their staple diet includes vegetables, beef and other meat, and they don't eat dal usually, but that is all that is given here

and due to lack of proper nutrition many people were falling sick.

Access to sanitation is a big issue here with there being only 2 toilets for the entire camp. Lack of access to health, education and livelihood also were concerns the Team heard from multiple people at the ITI camp. The Team was informed that no health Teams have visited the camp from the state, and that the few health check-ups conducted at the camps were all facilitated by NGOs.

Though there is a local district hospital, a couple of miles from the relief camp, the Team learnt that it is under tremendous strain, and is also under-equipped to handle complicated medical conditions and serious injury cases. In fact, when displaced Kukis first reached Kangpokpi, those with serious injuries were unable to receive help from the hospital and were transferred to hospitals in Nagaland. Due to lack of adequate number of doctors at the hospital, the medical Team has not been able to pay attention to relief camps and visit them regularly. Three staff nurses from JIMS, Imphal, who fled to Kangpokpi, are working at the hospital and they try to visit the camps. As such for any diagnosis, the nurses consult with doctors on the phone. The Team was told that there are a high number of cases of typhoid, diarrhoea, fever, etc. in the camps. Moreover, since the hospital did not have medicine stocks, the people in the relief camps and others visiting the hospital for treatment had to buy their own medicines.



Kangpokpi district hospital

Since schools in surrounding areas are shut, the Team was told that children of all ages at the camp have nowhere to go. We met a young boy of 17, an aspiring lawyer, who fled from Imphal, who shared his fears

of being unable to give his final exams, and prepare for entrance tests to attend law school. We also met several people who worried about not having livelihood options around the camps. A 39-year-old school teacher lamented the loss of her job back in her village, and how she had not carried a single piece of belonging from her house to be able to recollect her old life.

A representative of Kuki Student Organisation, Kangpokpi told the Team that there are about 55 relief camps in Kangpokpi district housing about 12,000 displaced Kukis.

Youth Hostel Relief Camp, Churachandpur

On 12th August, the Team visited 3 relief camps at Churachandpur starting with this camp run at the Youth Hostel. The camp was set up on May 25th, and in the initial days housed more than 800 displaced Kukis. Later several of them moved to other camps due to cramped space, bringing the number of people at the camp to around 400. The camp is run by YHA foundation which also runs 10 other camps in Churachandpur.

The living conditions were abysmal. More than 10-15 families lay cramped in a single room. Most people did not have mattresses, and they sleep on thin blue tarpaulin sheets. Partitions have been made by hanging a thin cloth and there is no privacy, especially for women. Women complained to us of being unable to change clothes and pads. Due to congested living conditions, various illnesses including measles, chicken pox, and viral fever have spread like wildfire among people in the camps.

Sanitation appeared to be a huge issue at the camp. With only 2 toilets, the Team saw long queues of people lining up to use the toilets on the morning of our visit. The camp was shrouded in a bad stench. Due to poor sanitation, the Team were told, several Kuki displaced persons have begun to fall sick.

The camp convenor told the Team that all relief being provided by the State is being routed to Valley, and that no resources come to the hills. *"We get 1-2 bags of rice. How is that enough for 100's of people"* he asked us. He said that there is a massive resource crunch and they are in need of bedspreads, mattresses, etc. He said almost all relief for the camp is coming only from philanthropic organisations, churches, and student organisations and

there is almost no help from the State except for a one-time paltry sum of Rs 500/- per displaced Kuki person living there.

In the camp, they receive 2 meals a day, which is dal, rice, and aloo. People are in desperate need of nutritious food. Lactating mothers have particularly been impacted by the sudden change in diet. Many of them lost milk and are unable to feed their children. There is a need for Nestogen (baby formula), which is in short supply.

A volunteer said all relief camps were run by volunteers and that none of them have had a single day of rest since the conflict began. She said that many volunteers are struggling with mental and physical exhaustion.

A representative of Kuki Students Organisation informed the Team that there are 108 relief camps in Churachandpur housing more than 40,000 displaced Kukis.

Relief Camp run by Himar Youth Association, Churachandpur

The second camp, the Team visited in Churachandpur, was housed in a community hall run by Himar Youth Association. Here, we met displaced Kukis from various villages in Churachandpur and Bishnupur districts. Over 100 people were living at the camp. We were told that all resources for the camp including beds, mattresses were all provided by the community and that no relief is being provided by the State to the camp, not even dal and rice. Only a one-time payment of Rs 500 was given for each displaced Kuki.

A problem raised repeatedly by displaced Kukis at the camp here was lack of waste disposal. The Team was told that garbage trucks come only once a week due to which huge piles of garbage end up getting stacked. This has led to several people falling sick at the camps due to the spread of viral diseases like measles, chicken pox and fever.

Women also complained to us of lack of privacy. Since there are no separate rooms in the camp, women say they struggle to change their clothes. The Team also noticed that the community hall had no proper windows. People at the camp had hung makeshift plastic covers for protection from rains.



Community Hall at Churachandpur

Immanuel Church Relief Camp, Churachandpur

The last camp the Team visited in Churachandpur, was the relief camp at Immanuel Church, which has been

running since 5 July. Over 156 people live in this camp. Similar to other relief camps, it is fully funded by CSO's and is run by the Kookie Kanglai Compi. The camp had people who had fled from Haokip, Imphal, Ai geng, Kangpokpi District. S Hengliam, Churachandpur; Lailampat Churachandpur. In this camp too, a huge problem was lack of toilets for the displaced Kukis. Though temporary toilets were being constructed, this does little to solve the problem. The displaced Kukis are using a temporary bathroom, which is without a roof.

At this camp, the Team met a woman of 35 years of age whose husband was burnt to death by a mob. She narrated to us her difficulties of raising two children single-handedly, and how she sells food outside the camps every day to earn money to buy diapers and food for her children.

The camp is cramped and about 18 people share one room. It has become very difficult for people to survive



Immanuel Church Relief Camp

and some of the displaced Kukis go out to earn by selling petrol, vegetables etc. on roadsides.

The Team met a Kuki displaced man, who was beaten by a mob in Imphal. The mob left him thinking that he was dead but he miraculously survived, and found his way to the camp.

Relief Camp, Khoyol Keithel, Moirang Lamkhai

On the way back from Churachandpur to Imphal, the Team visited a relief camp at Moirang which was housed in a marketplace. We were told that in the initial days the camp had over 400 Meitei displaced persons, but several people have now shifted to relief camps in Imphal West. At the time of our visit, there were a total of 269 people living in the camp.



The Team was told that no person currently in the camp had lost any of their family members in the violence

though one person came to the camp with a bullet injury, which was removed. Majority of the displaced Meiteis in this relief camp are from villages in Bishnupur, Thurbung and Churachandpur.

The Team was told that lots of people are getting sick at the camps. Only dal, chawal, potato provided from District Collector and the food is cooked in the camps itself by displaced persons themselves. They suspect that this might be due to lack of nutrition, given that they are only provided dal and rice and rely on the local community for vegetables etc.

Regarding health, the camp convenor told the Team that there are regular health check-ups being conducted at the camps, and that people who have lost their medical cards are being issued fresh ones. Medicines and doctors from RIMS are dispatched every week to the camps.

With schools having re-opened in and around Moirang, the Team was informed that children have been enrolled and begun to attend classes. A nodal officer from the State Health Department informed us that some displaced Meiteis at the camp have found jobs, and for others he is facilitating distribution of job cards to facilitate livelihood opportunities.

Relief Centre at Ideal Girls College, Akampat, Imphal East

On 13 August, the Team visited Akampat Relief Camp at Imphal which is housed in an educational institution. This is the biggest relief camp in the Valley and houses about 900 displaced Meiteis. Here we met displaced Meiteis who fled from Moreh and Churachandpur. We were informed that besides government relief, local



THONGJU KENDRA RELIEF CAMP
 At : Ideal Girls College, Akampat, Imphal East
 Organised by : Thongju Kendra Relief Committee
 SPONSORED BY : SHRI THONGAM BISWAJIT SINGH, Hon'ble Minister
 Opened On : 10th May 2023
TOTAL NO. OF CAMPERS - 720

PERSONNEL	1. TH. TILANANDA	2. RK. BRAJAKUMAR	3. M. SANATOMBA	4. KSH. BHUPEN	5. KH. ROJIT
	6. N. DUEN	7. TH. PRIYANANDA	8. KH. CHAOBA	9. HUIDROM RATAN	10. I. IBOHAL
OFFICER-IN-CHARGE	1. KSH. ARUNKUMAR (THOIBA)				
STAFF	1. SORAM BONO	2. A. BOINAO	3. KSH. PANIQY (BOTON)	4. KSH. ASHNIKUMAR (APAK)	5. KSH. KHELENDRO (NAOSA)
CLERK & WORKS	1. MAIBAM RATAN	2. KSH. JOHNSON	3. Y. NANAQ		
TECHNICAL	1. H. SHIBU	2. MAIBAM ISOYAIMA			
SECURITY	1. TH. TILANANDA	2. RK. BRAJAKUMAR	3. KSH. BHUPEN	4. N. DUEN	
PROSECUTOR	1. TH. VIVUEN	2. P. JAPAN			

WOMEN VOLUNTEERS:

Sl. No.	GROUP - A	Sl. No.	GROUP - B	Sl. No.	GROUP - C	Sl. No.	GROUP - D
1.	MAIBAM KAMALA	1.	H. NEENA	1.	KSH. MALASANA	1.	N. DINARAN
2.	KSH. ANANDI	2.	H. RENUKA	2.	SAPAM BABY	2.	N. BEMBEM
3.	SORAM ASHALATA	3.	KSH. THAIBEMMA	3.	OINAM URMILA	3.	S. SOMALINI
4.	MAIBAM GEETA	4.	KH. SUSHILA	4.	N. UMABATI	4.	O. PREMITA
5.	B. ASHAPREM	5.	G. BABY	5.	KSH. CHAOBA	5.	N. AIVINGBI
6.	KSH. DEBIKA	6.	RK. BUJYA	6.	KSH. THOIBI	6.	T. NIVEDITA
7.	KSH. NALINI	7.	L. KANMILA	7.	KSH. PREMILATA	7.	H. ROMILA
8.	KSH. BIBIKA	8.	TH. IBETOMBI	8.	KSH. PRIYA	8.	CH. RAMJETA
9.	KSH. BABLI	9.	P. SONIYA	9.	KSH. MEDONA	9.	K. RENU
10.	KSH. MEMA	10.	H. SHADHANA	10.	I. JAMUNA	10.	O. SHANTI
						11.	N. KALPANA
						12.	G. PREMILA

clubs, CSOs and the local MLA were contributing to the running of the camp.

The Team was informed that Government doctors visit often and that counselling services were provided in the camps on a weekly basis for displaced Meiteis on

the trauma they have struggled with. The government has released Rs 500/- per displaced person. The diet in the relief camp consisted of rice dal, vegetables and meat, including fish which is provided once a week. The residents themselves cook by taking turns. The Team was

Harrowing experiences of fleeing haunt camp dwellers

NIRANJAN OINAM

IMPHAL: Over 100 days have passed since the outbreak of violence, yet a viable solution remains elusive. Displaced individuals, forced to abandon their homes with only the clothes on their backs, continue to seek shelter in relief camps set up across the state. Although these camps provide safety from the violence, finding solace within them is still a distant goal. The harrowing experiences of fleeing for safety continue to haunt the camp dwellers, as their daily lives vividly reflect the horrors they endured.

Nestled at Chingmeirong Mamang Leikai Upper Primary School, a relatively small relief camp accommodates 35 inhabitants. Managed by local clubs, Shinglups, and Meiru Paibi Lups under the guidance of Wangkhei MLA Thangjam Arunkumar, the camp receives government support. Inmates participate in training on making incense sticks, candles, and dishwashing products,



which are marketed under the brand 'Punshi Mayol'. Several young women inmates have secured housekeeping jobs through Sangai Services, while young men engage in various menial tasks.

Of the 35 inmates, three hail from Torbung Bangla, three from Phougakchao Ikhai, and 29 from Charachandpur. Among them, 14 are children, including three under five years of age, who have received immunizations under Intensified Mission Indradhanush 5.0. Urban Primary Health Centre, Manipukhri conducts regular health check-ups with a team of two doctors and two nurses.

Unlike many other relief camps grappling with inadequate amenities, the Chingmeirong camp faces a distinct challenge despite its modest size. Adult inmates struggle to have peaceful sleep at night due to vivid nightly recollections of their horrific experiences. Some resort to sleeping pills to get rest, yet even these pills serve as reminders of their traumatic past.

Meanwhile, children in the camp also suffer from post-traumatic stress, experiencing panic at the sight of a red sky during evenings and

are frightful of the sound of thunderstorms. Some younger children even cry, claiming their homes are ablaze. Recognising the psychological toll, camp volunteers hope for government assistance in providing counselling service to support both children and adults.

In contrast, the Akampat Girls' Ideal College relief camp, overseen by the Thongju Kendra Relief Committee and sponsored by Minister Th Biswajit, presents a different narrative. Aside from government relief aid, Minister Th Biswajit personally fulfils the camp's needs. Any deficiencies are promptly addressed by the Deputy Commissioner and the Chief Medical Officer of Imphal East district. At Eastern Ideal High School, 140 displaced students are enrolled, receiving free private tuition from renowned Biology tutor Irengbam Loyangamba. Samananda, an inmate, plays a pivotal role in ensuring education for these displaced students.

Women inmates receive training in various crafts, such as Lei Nachom, dishwashing, silk thread production, paper bag making, floor phenyl preparation, snack production, and decorative flower crafts. These creations are marketed under the brand 'Mirungshi'. Furthermore, camp organizers plan to install around 10 handlooms in the community hall adjacent to the camp, offering women inmates opportunities for income generation. Regular health check-ups and immunisations for children are also provided.

However, a significant challenge faced by the camp is waste management. With a substantial number of inmates and limited space for waste disposal, the camp grapples with decaying waste that poses health hazards to both inmates and neighbouring residents. Despite appeals, the Imphal Municipal Corporation (IMC) has yet to initiate waste collection efforts, raising concerns among the camp organisers and inhabitants alike.

informed that there were two toilets on each floor and sanitation was more or less fine.

Many came to this relief camp from 9 May onwards. One of the displaced Meiteis said he was evacuated from his house on 3 May and then stayed in the army camp before being brought to this relief camp on 9 May. He said that he is able to earn very less money by going out to the city and finding daily wage work because the work is infrequent and wages are poor.

Saleibam Thoibi, said that most of the people in this camp are from in and around Moreh. She said that the children were enrolled into nearby schools and were attending classes as also college students

Some conclusions on the relief camps

The Team surmised that the broader ethnic segregation witnessed in the region between hill and valley region also plays out in relief camps. The camps visited by the Team in the Hills were either run by local civil society organisations, NGOs, churches or on support from local politicians with some or no support from the State. The relief camps are in abysmal condition and need immediate relief material and medical supplies in particular. Critical areas of concern include lack of adequate nutrition to displaced Kukis living in the camps, poor living conditions and sanitation resulting in illness, lack of access to medical aid, supplies and personnel, dilapidated and insufficient infrastructure. The education of the Kuki students both in the relief camps and in the hills is under serious crisis and immediate steps need to be taken to ensure that their education is resumed. Furthermore, the economic destitution caused by the violence and displacement has resulted in serious impoverishment and financial insecurity for the Kuki displaced persons. It is a matter of grave concern that the situation persists even three months after the outbreak of the violence.

The relief camps in the valley have their own share of problems including overcrowding, lack of infrastructure and livelihood insecurity. It has been helpful that the local clubs and various philanthropic donations have offset State oversight in the running of the relief camps, some of whom are also providing livelihood training to Meitei displaced persons in some of the relief camps. It is noteworthy that the Government has facilitated the admission of Meitei displaced students into schools and colleges in the vicinity of the relief camps thereby

ensuring continuing of their education. Access to medical services is also in a much better situation given the proximity to the vast medical infrastructure in the valley. Attention has to be paid to the nutrition deficit in the diet in the relief camps and to the needs of children, senior citizens and the infirm.

Across Manipur, the conflict-displaced people residing at the camps were overcome by overwhelming grief of having lost their homes and livelihoods. People shared poignant stories of fleeing from violence, hiding in the forests and the arduous journeys they undertook to reach the relief camps. Some people the Team met travelled on foot for almost 3 days before reaching safety. Almost all conversations ended with people sharing their fear and uncertainty about what the future holds for them. Having lived at the camps for close to three months, the big question looming for the people there was: what comes next? Was their stay going to be indefinite? Could they return home? What is the government planning as rehabilitation?

Displaced persons who have fled to Guwahati

On 14th August, the Team also visited conflict displaced persons who had sought refuge under Church authorities in Guwahati. The team was informed that initially, relief camps had been created to house over 125 families that had sought refuge. However, it was deemed better to settle the families across Assam. The displaced persons are a mix of class backgrounds - from working class to government job holders. The Team was informed that besides the children of these families, several other children had been sent from Manipur to be placed in schools in Guwahati. Further, more than 80 displaced persons had managed to secure jobs, but primary intervention, including financial support from the government, was lacking.

In a strong statement, the Church is attempting to keep the displaced persons from the Meitei and Kuki communities together. The attitude of both communities to living together was initially combative. One father told us *“Given that they have no alternative for food and shelter, they have adjusted to their situation. What they feel in their hearts is left to be seen.”*

4.7. Ethnic Segregation

A result of the violence has been a complete ethnic divide between the Meitei and Kuki communities, with

members of the Kuki community confined to the hills and members of the Meitei community confined to the valley.⁷⁶ No person of the other community is permitted to enter the other region, and stringent checks are carried out by community volunteers, extending to all levels including military forces. In one reported incident, even army jawans were made to produce identity Cards to pass by the Meira Paibis.⁷⁷

It has been reported that after the initial bout of violence, the armed forces carried out a 'repatriation' exercise in Manipur. Effectively, all members of the Meitei community in the hills were brought to the valley, and members of the Kuki community in the valley were moved to the hilly areas. What was portrayed to be a peace initiative effectively resulted in total ethnic segregation and creation of a conflict border zone.⁷⁸ Even doctors were not spared and were moved to areas of their community.⁷⁹

A fall-out of the conflict is the breakdown of the regular district administration across Manipur as the ethnic segregation extended to officials at the highest level. As a result of a "No work, No pay" order issued by the State government, a large number of officials have reported to duty, with Meitei officials reporting in the valley and Kuki officials reporting in the hills. However, with a number of main government offices being in the valley area, the Kuki-Zo employees are unable, and refuse, to comply, reportedly leading to exclusion of the Tribal community from decision-making in governance issues. In another case, a Meitei bureaucrat faced suspension after refusing to assume the post of Deputy Commissioner of a Kuki dominated district.⁸⁰ The result is that it has led to a "so-called separate administration" for the two communities.⁸¹

Members of the Kuki Student Association in Kangpokpi said that effectively, there is no government in the Hills. Hence, the community itself has set up an interim government with different departments, including the statistics department, legal department, and education department. One of main functions of this interim government is visiting the villages in the frontlines and enquiring with people there if they need relief – medicines, ammunition, arms, pads, medicines, groceries.

A consequence of this ethnic segregation has been militancy in the border region, with both communities

and armed forces performing intense checks on anyone seeking to pass through.

In Churachandpur, the Team was informed by a civil society organisation representative that Kuki youngsters are now being forced to defend their villages. According to her, without these defence mechanisms, the Meitei community will immediately attack.

A Meitei civil society representative informed the Team that the Meiteis had no choice but to arm themselves since the Kukis had weapons. That is the reason that the armouries were looted, she added. She also said that there is a 'LOC' between the Hills and the Valley with a buffer zone which is patrolled by the armed forces. She said that there are bunkers on either side with armed squads taking turns to guard their villages. She was relieved that the firing from both sides had seen a lull for the past few days but this can change anytime and they have to be prepared to face Kuki attacks.

Representatives of COTU said that Kukis were on the defensive and not offensive and the Kuki Zo community will defend their ancestral land till the last drop of blood in their veins.

The unprecedented ethnic segregation in Manipur is a blow to democracy and represents the decimation of the social fabric of the state. It is hard to escape that this has been manufactured by the state government in a state where despite previous conflicts, communities were able to reconcile and live together.

4.8. Undeclared Blockade

Apart from ethnic segregation, there has been an undeclared but complete blockade of movement of essential supplies as well.

An ITLF Spokesperson said that in Churachandpur, the nodal highway from Imphal has been blocked resulting in a total inability to access essential items from Imphal. Previously, all supplies used to come from Imphal. He said that "now, there is no public transport. Everything is coming from mountainous roads over 400 km away from Mizoram. This is very expensive. Even convoys are not coming through and the State is unable to send supplies past the blockade. The state previously used to try supplies across the blockade, but now they have stopped trying because they don't want to get into conflict with the people. The FCI Godown is in Imphal, but even PDS relief is being routed from Gauhati through

Mizoram. All essential supplies coming from Dimapur to Imphal and then to Lamka⁸². The only airport is also in Imphal - even people who wish to leave must somehow go through Mizoram. This is despite the fact that Lamka is the largest district in Manipur. Our relief camps are run on the goodwill of people, Civil Society Organisations and Mizoram government but we are running short on funds

A representative of Kuki Student Organisation, Churachandpur said that the situation in Churachandpur is worse than in Kangpokpi, in the sense that Kangpokpi has a direct route for supplies through Dimapur. He said that *“All our supplies came from Imphal, and have now been cut off. We are supported by the NGOs and community only. All supplies are now routed through Mizoram and we ourselves must exit via Mizoram, which is over 11 hours away.”*

A senior Catholic church official said while the blockade of essential supplies has hit the Kuki community in the Hills very hard, the blocking of the highways by the Kukis from time to time, has boxed the Meiteis into the valley, with the only possible way of leaving it being a flight to Imphal.

When Ima Ngambi, of the Meira Paibis was asked about blockade of essential supplies and relief material to the Hills, she said that the Meitei people stop this because *“the Kuki people have looted our lands”*.

The Imphal valley and the Hills today stand divided by a "border". There are bunkers on either side of the "border" manned by armed squads from the respective communities, while the armed forces are stationed in between to man the border. The Meiteis have blocked the movement of essential supplies, even by the armed forces, from the valley to the hills. The frontier between the valley and hills, and the undeclared blockade, has severely compromised the transport of essential commodities including basic relief food items, medicine affecting thousands of conflict-displaced Kukis in the relief camps in hill districts. The blockade is having a devastating effect on the Kukis in the relief camps in particular, and on Kukis in general. The Kukis, on the other side, ensure that no Meiteis enter their district and have periodically blockaded the National Highway, which hits supplies to the valley and impacts the mobility of Meiteis out of the Valley.

4.9. Education, Living Situation and Health

Following the outbreak of violence on May 3rd, everyday life—health, education and livelihood—came to be drastically impacted across the state, most particularly in the Hills.

Due to the violence, schools and colleges in the State shut overnight, and several school going children came to be displaced. Not only were several schools burnt but a sizable number began to be used as relief camps due to which classes were unable to resume quickly.

In Imphal valley, the Team were told that classes resumed in July. At the relief camps the Team visited in Imphal and Moirang, children had begun to attend school. College-going students have resumed their classes too. The Team was that the education department has extended help in distributing textbooks to students and facilitated admissions in schools and colleges, sometimes even without transfer certificates. However, Church authorities said that even with the opening of schools in the valley, a large number of students are absent for various reasons including fear.

In total contrast, in the hills (Churachandpur and Kangpokpi), the displaced Kuki school and college students have not been able to resume classes.

At Kangpokpi, the Team were told that schools have been shut since the violence broke out, and it's likely that the present situation will continue as such for a long time. At the ITI camp, the Team visited, none of the children at the camp were attending school. The Team was informed that schools in the surrounding district are shut, and that students have nowhere to go. There is only one functional school in Char Hazare, a Nepali village in Kangpokpi.

An independent journalist at Kangpokpi informed the Team that since local schools are not open, children from wealthier families have been sent to Guwahati and other areas to pursue their education. She also added that several students from Kangpokpi would travel to Imphal for school due to their close proximity, which is no longer possible now.

Even college students have been adversely affected, she said. Students from RIMS and JMIMS from Imphal had to flee without any of their essentials like laptop, documents and textbooks. Over 18 students from Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences, Imphal

and 8 from Regional Institute of Medical Sciences, Imphal have been displaced, according to her.

Despite various efforts by students to approach the army, chief secretary of the state and even current Naga students to extract these documents, they have had no luck. She also spoke of professionals who fled from Manipur University who left behind their laptops which contained their original thesis and life's work.

In Churachandpur the situation was similar. A representative of Kuki Student Organisation told us that schools remain shut due to regular firing in the area. The Team was also told that since the camps are housed in several educational institutions, it has been difficult to resume classes, though morning classes have begun for students between 9 to 10. An IITLF spokesperson said that for Kukis, protecting their lives has become a priority. *"We may lose education and health, but we need to protect our lives and land. Health, education are concerns for peace time. During war, the first goal is defending land and lives."* he said. However, he said that there is deep concern for the future of the students and added that talks are on-going with the Central Government regarding provision of prefabricated homes, and once that is supplied, the displaced Kukis would be shifted there, so schools can resume.

Livelihood has also taken a drastic hit for the people in the State especially the displaced persons. A camp convenor from Churachandpur told us that most displaced Kukis at the camp used to be agricultural labourers and small farmers who owned small plots of land where they would cultivate crops, or depended on agricultural land to earn their living. In fact, several people had grains stocked up, and were setting up to sow rice and seeds so they could harvest the yield later between December and January. Now with no access to their lands, they have lost all money they invested on their paddy field.

At the relief camps, finding alternative work has been tremendously difficult, leaving people with no means to earn their living. This is increasing the economic precarity of the displaced families, and threatens to engulf them in deep poverty.

At Kangpokpi, the Team were told by displaced Kukis housed there that none of the people in the camp have found work and have any source of livelihood. A school teacher at the camp told

us: *"Only those people in government services continue to receive salary, rest of the Kuki people have no money"*

In camps in Imphal, displaced Meiteis are struggling to find alternative sources of livelihood. A displaced Meitei the Team met in Akampat, a 36 year old mother of two, told us that she used to previously own a shop in Moreh where she sold goods that she bought from the Burma border and earned enough to feed her children. Now at the camps with nothing to earn, she says she's not able to buy her children anything, not even a biscuit or a chocolate.

At Moirang Camp too, a similar sentiment was awash. A young displaced Meitei woman shared her fears of not being able to work and earn money. She said that the camp convenor has promised her that they will be arranging sewing machine training for her in a couple of weeks, and that she will be able to earn. She told us that her husband who lives with her at the camp has found work operating a tractor nearby.

Even outside the relief camps, in the Hills, Kukis are struggling for sustainable livelihoods. At Churachandpur, a CSO activist told us that several establishments have shut down and constructions stopped halfway, leaving thousands of people without jobs. She also remarked that several teachers in schools have lost employment.

Daily life has come to a standstill as per persons the Team met in Churachandpur. Inflation has skyrocketed. We were told that a 25 kg bag of rice which cost Rs 1100 pre-conflict, is now selling for Rs 1800. Even prices of biscuits have shot up from Rs. 5 to Rs 8. She said that in Churachandpur, the market is open only on alternative days because of shortage of supplies due to the blockade, and banks are open only twice a week. In May and June, banks were fully shut. The Team saw that the petrol bunks were closed in both Kangpokpi and Churachandpur.

One of the major impacts of the crisis has been on the medical and health requirements of people living in the hill areas. Through conversations with doctors and nurses at the district hospital at Kangpokpi, and with activists and civil society organisations, the Team found several issues plaguing the medical and health needs of people in the hills. Firstly, there is a crippling shortage of medical supplies including life-saving drugs, medical equipment and even basic medical necessities like gauze at hospitals. Secondly, the exodus of medical

professionals including doctors, medical specialists, lab technicians and analysts from the hospitals in the hills has profoundly impacted the provision of medical services to the people in the hills. An employee at a Churachandpur-based Civil Society Organisation relayed to us a tragic story where her mother, who was in need of dialysis, passed away in Kangpokpi, after the sole lab-technician who administered dialysis in the area fled due to conflict. Thirdly, for people living in the hill areas, the present strain on existing hospitals and difficulties in accessing basic health needs is understood against the larger backdrop of underdevelopment in the area. In both Kangpokpi and Churachandpur district, there is only one district hospital each. While there are private hospitals in the area, we were told that even these hospitals were under incredible strain, and are strapped for resources. Lastly, on account of the blockade and lack of state support, even district hospitals are being forced to rely on resources from NGOs and CSOs to stay afloat

4.10. Access to justice and accountability

Our overall assessment is that as the present political situation evolves, there is an alarming lack of access to justice and accountability for communities, particularly conflict victims.

Concerns regarding access to justice

The conflict has had a serious impact on access to justice insofar as functioning of courts is concerned. The Team informed that three months into the conflict, the only district court in Kangpokpi is functional to some extent in respect of criminal matters, but no civil or family matters are taken up.

The Kuki community who fled from Imphal flagged the difficulty in access to justice in respect of destruction/vandalisation of houses and property. Several of them have gotten ‘zero FIRs’⁸³ lodged in the hilly areas, which have been transferred to the jurisdictional police stations. However, since then, they have not received any update. Moreover, it would not be possible to participate in the investigation process, or be present before the police for mahazar. Hence, there are grave apprehensions about whether the FIRs will reach their logical conclusions. A retired Magistrate belonging to the Kuki community told the team of her apprehensions regarding investigation of cases lodged by her in Imphal pertaining to the vandalism and destruction of her property. Even as a judicial officer, she is unable to get updates on the same.

She spoke about the need for neutral people to look after immovable property. She also expressed her



hesitance about the transfer of cases to SIT stating that the cases are extremely scattered, and SIT may not be able to monitor the investigation, and the only central zone is Imphal, where Kukis are not able to go. However, in respect of the zero FIRs lodged on either side, the Superintendent of Police, Kangpokpi, Mr. Manoj Prabhakaran said an independent force is being formed to go to meet the complaints and the police stations on either side will coordinate.

The lawyer representing COTU noted that the process of investigation in the valley areas is highly suspect at the moment due to intervention of Meitei militant groups. He pointed to the lack of progress in investigations into the heinous crimes against Kukis and various other apprehensions that makes justice seem like a distant dream.

A practising lawyer in Kangpokpi also noted that more than 230 original property documents have been shown to him by Kuki conflict-displaced persons, but he is unable to take any action to help them in respect of protection/sale of property. He referenced an order of the Chief Minister that prohibits sale of property, and said the same may have to be legally challenged. He also noted that Meitei tenants are no longer paying rent to Kuki owners of properties in the valley. He also pointed to situations where some Kukis in the process of purchasing land in the valley had paid considerable amounts which are all lost now.

A similar concern was raised by Meitei conflict-displaced persons, whose properties in the hills have been ransacked and destroyed. They are not able to get any information on what has happened to their homes or their possessions. Due to the total ethnic divide, most of them have no hope of accessing justice, and have lost their entire lives' work, including savings, possessions, documents, houses and lands. In respect of the issue of property and lands of the Meitei community of Kangpokpi, the Team questioned the Superintendent of Police, Kangpokpi, Mr. Manoj Prabhakaran, who said that 20 Meitei villages have been affected, with around 2000 Meiteis displaced. He said that the houses have been mostly destroyed in the conflict, but he is ensuring regular patrolling in the area.

The Team was informed by the retired Magistrate that there is no clarity on how many people have been arrested for various crimes, and this information is not available.

The Team was informed that Manipur has only two central jails both of which are located at Imphal (separate women's and men's jail). However, after the conflict, even when Kuki inmates are granted bail, they are unable to be taken out, even under army escorts. Only one Kuki inmate who got bail was somehow brought out, and that was under protection, by flying him out to Churachandpur on a helicopter. The Team was informed that there are around 200 Kuki prisoners, and the ITLF has written to the Supreme Court seeking for temporary jails to be established in each district. She mentioned that one Kuki was arrested two days ago, and the SP offered options of army camp or police which are both safer than jail. The Superintendent of Police, Kangpokpi, Mr. Manoj Prabhakaran said that a notification has been released by the Home Department directing for temporary prisons to be created in hilly areas. He noted that under him, the police are not pressing for judicial custody of any accused. He said that the Kuki inmates in the Imphal jail are being taken care of, but the situation does not permit them to be brought out. An independent journalist reporting from Kangpokpi said that previously, jails had been constructed in Chandel, Kangpokpi and Churachandpur, but they were never used, and were converted for other purposes.

The Team was informed by an ITLF Spokesperson that the Kuki community also lacks legal resources to pursue legal remedies in respect of the multiple false FIRs being lodged by members of the Meitei community and called for the support of non-BJP political parties.

The Supreme Court's interventions have played a significant role in seeking to increase access to justice, and a summary of the interventions are attached as

Annexure - II

Situations of Judges and Lawyers

Needles to add lawyers and judges have not escaped the wrath of the mobs. An application of the Manipur Tribal Forum before the Hon'ble Supreme Court lists as many as 5 Kuki judges who were forced to flee their homes, and whose properties were vandalised. Reportedly, two of the judges even contacted the High Court of Manipur seeking assistance in the form of evacuation and protection, but no help came.

The ethnic segregation has extended to even the legal community - and has had massive repercussions in view of the fact that the only High Court of Manipur is based in Imphal.

Prior to the conflict, lawyers of all communities were able to practise in the High Court of Manipur and the trial courts in Imphal, where several special courts, such as the consumer forum are located. However, the Team was informed of a significant lack of representation of the Kuki community in the High Court. A practising lawyer in Kangpokpi told us that the High Court consists of one Judge from outside Manipur, and the rest are from the Meitei community. Of the almost 30 designated senior counsels, only one belongs to the Naga community, one is from Odisha state, and the rest belong to the Meitei community. Similarly, there are no Kuki Government pleaders in the High Court.

In Kangpokpi, which is a primarily Tribal district around one hour's journey from Imphal, only two advocates regularly practised in the single magistrate court, with a large majority travelling to Imphal to practise. However, since the conflict, all the Kuki advocates have fled back to Tribal areas, increasing the number of advocates practicing in the single court to over 20 advocates. These advocates have sought to register a District Bar Association in Kangpokpi, but the same has not been possible since the Registrar of Societies is located only at Imphal. Given that regular functioning of the court has not yet resumed, these advocates are facing a serious livelihood crisis.

Our Team also met a practising lawyer in Kangpokpi who noted that all the advocates who previously practised in Imphal have had to give up their entire practice and briefs—most of which have been handed over to advocates from the Naga community. In view of the volatile situation, though he is able to appear through video conferencing online, now, even property matters and other civil matters are required to be filed through neutral advocates from the Naga community.

The legal practice has also been severely hit by the internet blockade, which has resulted in advocates being unable to access online resources for over 100 days, resulting in Kuki advocates being unable to access online resources and appear online through videoconferencing before the Court. Now, though the internet can be availed after lengthy compliance procedures, there is often an electricity cut.

It has also been reported that even lawyers of the Meitei community who represent Kuki persons before courts of law are unsafe. Recently, lawyers who were representing Professor Kham Khan Suan Hausing (Kuki professor accused of making alleged remarks against the Meitei community) were constrained to withdraw from the case in the High Court after facing threats and after the home of one of them was vandalised by a mob.⁸⁴

On the other hand, compelling stories of a Meitei Advocate who saved 16 Kukis from a mob and ensured that they reached safety have emerged. Unfortunately, due to this act, his farmhouse was burnt down and he received threats for helping the Kukis.⁸⁵

4.11. Internet ban

On May 3rd, 2023, the Manipur State Government enforced a state wide blanket prohibition on internet services, bringing to halt overnight, all information flow across the state. The ban, which was partially revoked on 25 July by the Government following directions passed by the Manipur High Court. However, the government order in force, which allows only broadband services to resume, provides little respite to the people of Manipur. Mobile internet, which is the most available mode through which people access the internet, continues to be suspended. In India, about 96 percent of the populations rely exclusively on mobile data for internet access.⁸⁶

Internet bans immobilise every facet of human life. In Manipur, people dependent on the internet for their livelihood have been particularly hard-hit. For people working from home internet shutdown means fear of job loss, and in several cases actual job losses.⁸⁷ Several people are being pushed to resettle in other states just to hold on to their jobs.⁸⁸ Speaking to *Scroll*, a court transcriber, Tonsing explained how the internet ban in Manipur left him with little choice but to resettle outside the city to be able to continue his job, and support his family financially. Several thousand people with similar transcribing jobs from the state – a popular occupation with Manipur youth – have been facing a similar predicament.

Business in Manipur has also been dealt a crushing blow from the internet embargo, and it has been reported that moving offline has completely immobilised many businesses. The internet ban has struck the legal community hard as discussed above.

The internet shutdown has also adversely impacted students, and the education sector. With schools and colleges coming to a grinding halt since May, the option of continuing education online could not be considered an option due to internet shutdown. College students staying outside the city faced difficulties contacting their loved ones in the state and receiving support from parents. Due to internet suspension, parents have been unable to transfer money to their children outside the city through internet banking, leaving students scrambling to pay rent and afford basic necessities. For students living in Manipur looking to study outside the city, internet suspension is just as difficult. Inability to access online admission forms of universities and attending online coaching has dampened dreams of better education.⁸⁹

Internet bans are levied with the justification that they curb the spread of violence by stopping the spread of disinformation and false rumours. However, many argue that the opposite is at play.⁹⁰ Without the internet, people have no tool to fact-check misinformation or fake news. As a result, rather than de-escalate, internet bans in effect can escalate violence. In fact, as per human rights activists in Manipur, internet shutdowns have aided in obscuring and hiding details of rights violations across the State.⁹¹ Many say that the video of two Kuki women being paraded naked, which cast global spotlight on the conflict in Manipur, would have surfaced much earlier if not for the internet ban.⁹²

Manipur is no stranger to internet shutdowns. The State has witnessed about 6 internet shutdowns bans between 2016 till date as per data collected by international digital rights group Access Now.⁹³ A statement released by Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF), a digital research and advocacy organisation notes that the internet shutdown in Manipur – one of longest outside of Jammu and Kashmir – may in fact be illegal. Commenting on the July 25th notification granting only partial restoration, IFF argues that it makes internet suspension indefinite, which violates Rule 2(2A) of the Telecom Suspension, 2017 and the Supreme Court order in *Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India* which notes that internet suspension cannot extend beyond 15 days, and that as such internet bans must be temporally and geographically limited.⁹⁴

5. UNDERSTANDING ROLES OF VARIOUS PLAYERS

5.1. Views on the State

The broad consensus across different communities is that the government, both at the Centre and the State, have played a principal role in the lead up to the violence and the continuance of the violence for so long. However, one trend that seemed to emerge was that the Meitei community broadly aligned themselves with the State government and allocated a broader portion of the responsibility to the Union Government. On the other hand, the Kuki community strongly blamed the State government and Chief Minister Biren who they identified as a Meitei Chief Minister who stood only for the Meitei community, whereas they feel that the Union government has at least entered into dialogue with them.

Brinda Thounaojam squarely blamed the BJP, at both the Central and State level. She said the conflict was not an ethnic conflict but violence promoted by the State. She was of the opinion that the BJP is allowing the violence to continue and said that this scale of violence is only possible with state backing. She told the Team: *“Chief Minister Biren has sponsored two fanatic groups, Arrambai Tenggol and the Meitei Leepun, who have torched the valley. The Central Government has refused to impose President's rule or even change the Chief Minister though violence has raged for more than 3 months”*. According to her, this reflects the arrogance of the BJP. She said, *“Prior to 3rd May, the Chief Minister was going to be changed due to internal problems, and suddenly the violence erupted. Chief minister could have sent troops to control. BJP is talking about Hindu Rashtra and playing with fire in Manipur. They want to break-up Manipur, but what they will actually achieve is the balkanisation of India. Manipur burns and the Prime Minister went to France and where-not! In fact, no one spoke of Manipur except until the video came out.”*

A women's rights activist from Kangpokpi noted that the plan clearly is to keep the pot boiling - the narrative has become one of state government-controlled police forces vs the union government controlled armed forces. According to her, *“These are subplots in a larger design of the double engine government to displace the accountability that they ought to be subjected to, and to deepen the hatred between the Kukis and Meiteis to such*

an extent that the BJP governments at the centre and state escape blame and instead the other community is identified as the enemy.”

An ITLF Spokesperson also blamed the BJP at Centre and State, and added that the State Government has done nothing to control the crisis and is in fact fuelling further violence. He further said “Since the Biren Singh government is from the BJP, the Central Government and the State Government are working as per their plan. Why else was President's rule not imposed? The question really is about their willingness and not their inability to control the violence. Since the conflict, Prime Minister Modi spoke about the crisis only once, and that was only after the video went viral. Now he's back to being silent. Amit Shah is accusing so-called Kuki infiltrators, and claiming that they have a role in the violence and in saying so he has hurt the sentiment of the Kuki people. He should refrain from using such language.”



A displaced Kuki from Imphal who has fled to Guwahati said that “The Chief Minister has been playing politics of division. The Government of India has been enjoying this fight between communities. On one hand, they have entered into SoO agreements with Kuki militant groups and on the other hand they have not removed Biren or imposed President's Rule. The media is also controlled by Meiteis. Since the second term of the Biren government, there was a constant narrative of terms such as Kuki militants, infiltrators etc. There has been a constant targeting of the Kuki community by the Chief Minister through use of words that are unbecoming of his post. Since the violence, Kukis have had no access to internet

or social media, but constant flow of Meitei narrative on media has been permitted by the government.”

Ima Ngambi, a Meira Paibi, said that Meiteis and Kukis are fighting each other because of negligence of Indian administration when in fact both communities struggle due to negligence of the Government. She said, “Modi only spoke after the viral video but until then he was fully silent. The State Government is suppressed by the Indian Government. This war happened when the State Government took action on drugs. Stopping the violence is in the hands of the Union government, and is not the responsibility of the State Government. Biren Singh is just a puppet of the Government of India. Any solution must come from the Government of India.”

Despite such scathing critique of the role played by the BJP and by its Governments at Manipur and centre, the extent of ethnic polarisation that has made enemies out of the two communities, means that the accountability that ought to be demanded from the State has taken a back seat and instead, hatred for each other predominates.

5.2. Views on the Arambai Tenggol / Meitei Leepun

By all accounts of the Kukis, and in the opinion of certain sections of Meitei CSOs, at the forefront of much violence and propaganda in Manipur, are two Meitei chauvinist organisations – Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun. Not much is known of the origins of these two organisations, which rose in sharp prominence in May when the violence began.

Started with the stated aim to promote and bring back the past glory of “Sanamahi”, a Meitei religion, members of the Arambai Tenggol (roughly translated as dart-wielding cavalry) have been spotted leading the brutalisation of Kukis at Imphal valley and frontier villages.

Several Kuki survivors have identified their assailants as ‘boys in blackshirts’ alluding to the Arambai Tenggol uniform: a black shirt with three pony-riding warriors.⁹⁵ A lawyer representing COTU explained to the Team that the Arambai Tenggol distribute thousand of these black t-shirts alongside alcohol and drugs to their cadres that make them like zombies. He added that the organisation focuses on young boys aged between 16 and 20 years, who feel that being identified as a member of the Arambai Tenggol is a matter of pride. According to



him, the leadership of the Armbai Tenggol is completely hidden. He shared that his village was attacked by mobs led by Armbai Tenggol.

The Armbai Tenggol's involvement in the violence has rich video and photographic evidence. A flood of videos and pictures of persons wearing the Armbai Tenggol uniform and attacking villages are available in free stock online. The Armbai Tenggol is also said to have police patronage. A human rights activist the Team met said that most arms and ammunition that the Armbai Tenggol wield are from the police and IRB armoury. Though not trained, they are fully armed, as per this activist.

In a viral video, the police are seen accompanying persons wearing the Armbai Tenggol uniform to the valley. Pictures submitted by Manipur Tribal Forum Delhi before the Supreme Court also show pictures of an Armbai Tenggol's leader Kourounganba Khuman surrounded with firearms including AKM, Benelli M2 shotgun and 1911.⁹⁶

A representative of Kuki Student Organisation said that the Armbai Tenggol began to function from 2015-16 with a goal to instigate fear and terror among Tribals

in the hills. He says hundreds of Armbai Tenggol members would come to the hill areas on motorbikes under the guise of conducting health and wellness campaigns and plant trees, when in actuality their intention was nothing less to create a spectacle of terror, and humiliate the Tribal community. This was echoed by an ITLF Spokesperson who explained to the Team how the Armbai Tenggol has taken out multiple motorbike rallies from Imphal to the Mizoram border with the sole intention of intimidating the Tribal community.

Several people, both Kuki and Meitei, that the Team met, strongly suspect that several prominent politicians, including Chief Minister Biren Singh are sympathetic towards the cause of these organisations.

As companions to Armbai Tenggol, are members of the Meitei Leepun, a movement claiming to unite Meiteis settled in different parts of the world.⁹⁷ Led by Pramot Singh, self-proclaimed former ABVP member, who many claim is close to the Chief Minister, the Meitei Leepun has amassed a substantial following. Pramot Singh, the founder claims that the Meitei Leepun has about fourteen thousand members in Imphal alone, and over 1000 members trained in handling arms.⁹⁸



File picture of Chief Minister Biren Singh posing with a cadre of the Arambai Tenggol.

Meitei Leepun has been active in the recent past. In fact, as per Scroll,⁹⁹ they were taking significant strides even prior to the violence breaking out. In response to the call for protest against the High Court judgment, the Meitei Leepun called for a counter-blockade proclaiming that no goods and people can leave Imphal valley.

ITLF believes that the Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun are the main initiators of the violence.

Several other Kuki and Meiteis persons told the Team that these two groups are either patronised or are fronts for Meitei valley-based insurgent groups (VBIGs¹⁰⁰) like the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and United National Liberation Front (UNLF). Many people believe it is very likely that the demand for a “separate Manipur” will resurface again. An independent journalist reporting from Kangpokpi said that she believed that the Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun are smokescreens for Meitei separatist organisations which have been dormant for a decade. These organisations show themselves as cultural revivalists but are in fact re-agitating the issue of a separate Meitei nation, though they could very well get subsumed within the larger Hindutva narrative.

Communalism appears to be one of the key ideological planks of the Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun. *‘Why else would 350 churches in the State be burnt immediately on the violence breaking out’,* asked

an ITLF Spokesperson. A representative of Evangelical Fellowship of India said that the war being waged by Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun is communal. He said that there is a serious issue of pressure being exerted by these groups on Meitei Christians to convert to Sanamahism in what he called Manipur’s version of the Ghar Wapsi movement. He claims that in fear of these two organisations, many Meitei Christians have fled the valley. There are over 1,25,000 Meiteis who are Christian who live in fear since the violence broke out.

In an interview, one of the leaders of the Arambai Tenggol is also noted saying that rising conversion of Meiteis to Christianity is an issue of concern for the Arambai Tenggol and bringing them back to Sanamahism faith is a key goal. Scroll also claims that the Arambai Tenggol first rose in prominence in April this year, when they attacked a Meitei Christian pastor by the name of Takhellambam Ramananda for allegedly insulting Sanamahism faith.

A Pangal Muslim told the team that both these organisations are like the RSS, they want Manipur reserved for the Hindu Meitis. In fact, they falsely accuse the Pangals of being Bangladeshi.

According to the Manipur Tribals’ Forum, the Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun outfits have been around for only about four to five years ago; Meitei Leepun owe their allegiance to Mr. Sanajaoba, who is not

just a Member of Parliament but also the titular king of Manipur, while

Arambai Tenggol has been known to be pro-State government and has consistently countered protests against the State government.¹⁰¹

From all accounts that the team heard, the role of these two organisations in the build up to the violence and the violence itself appears to be significant and needs to be thoroughly investigated

5.3. Views on SoO Groups

Members of the Meitei organisations and community have consistently claimed that the militant Kuki groups under the Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement are behind the violence. One senior politician demanded that the Government instead of making efforts to rein in these Kuki militants under the SoO groups has let them loose for electoral gains.

“SoO groups” refers to the Kuki nationalist organisations who are agitating for a Kuki homeland, and who have entered into “Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreements with the Indian state since 2008 onwards. According to the document *“Agreed Ground Rules for Implementation of the Suspension of Operations (SOO) with Kuki National Organization (KNO) in Manipur”*, the SoO agreement have been in force since 1st August 2005 onwards and that it was agreed between the Government of India, Government of Manipur and Kuki National Organization (as an umbrella for 11 Kuki

organisations) to *“formalise the Suspension of Operations and cease hostilities with effect from 22nd August 2008”*.

A similar agreement was entered into on the same day between the Government of India, Government of Manipur and United People's Front (as an umbrella for 8 Kuki organisations). These agreements, it appears, have been extended from time to time, and as per the information provided to the Team, the same are still in operation. It is reported that earlier this year in March the Manipur cabinet decided to withdraw the SoO agreements with the Kuki insurgent groups.¹⁰² However, the Union government did not give its approval for this withdrawal.¹⁰³ A more recent report¹⁰⁴ is that the Union and State government would ensure the implementation of the Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement with Kuki insurgent groups in the hill areas.

The Ground Rules mandates that these organisations would *“abide by the Constitution of India, the laws of the land and the territorial integrity of Manipur”* and would *“completely abjure the path of violence”* and in return the security forces (the Army, Paramilitary Forces and the State Police) would not launch operations against them. The Ground Rules contemplate the cadres of these groups to stay in designated camps, and are required that all weapons would be held within the Camp's Central Armoury in a double locking system, with one key being with the Group and other with the concerned Security Force. The Ground Rules require a reasonable amount as per Government norms to be paid by the Government



for maintenance of the cadre of the group who stay in the designated camps.

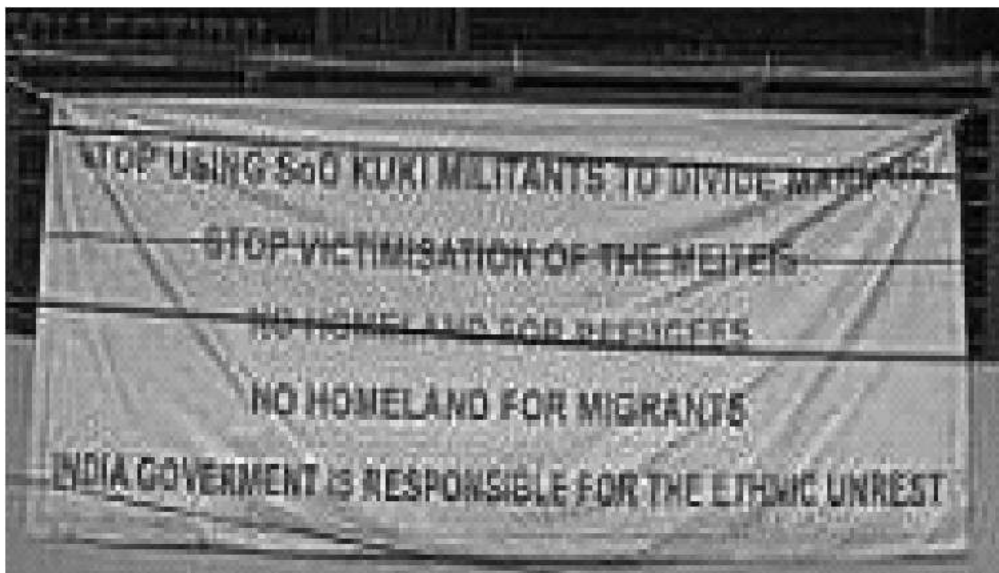
According to the news-report referred to above, SoO camps have been regularly checked, and all weapons, except two, were found to be intact during inspection in the past two months.¹⁰⁵

A learning from the conversations in the Valley and Hills has been the support that the SoO groups have given to the BJP in the 2015 District Council elections, 2017 and 2022 Assembly elections and the 2019 Parliamentary elections. While the Kuki representatives the Team met

believe that this was a major mistake and one of the causes for the present situation. On the Meitei side, this is seen as adding credence to their allegation that the Union government and the armed forces, particularly the Assam Rifles, are soft on the Kuki militants.

5.4. Views on Meira Paibis

One of the images that the Team came away with were the groups of women, on either side of the “border” taking charge of, and deciding who can travel the roads. In the nights, the women sit together or patrol their localities



File Photo of Meira Paibis

keeping vigil. However, the Kuki women are only present at the border, monitoring those entering the Hills, whereas the role of the Meira Paibis in the valley has been seen as disrupting peace-making efforts, shielding armed insurgents, preventing passage of essential supplies and there are allegations of their participation in violence against women. Tora Agarwala¹⁰⁶ offers a sober appraisal of the contentious role of the Meira Paibis in the ongoing violence reporting how the Meira Paibis – the women torch-bearers of Manipur.

Kuki leaders are extremely critical of the Meira Paibis as being active participants in the violence, as also protectors of the perpetrators of violence, against Kukis, and their role in enforcing the blockade to the Hills.

The lawyer representing COTU related the incident where Meira Paibis handed over a mentally challenged Naga woman to the mob, assuming her to be a Kuki, and the mob then killed her. On further enquiry the Team learnt that the victim was Lucy Marem from the Maring Naga community who was shot dead near the foothills of Keibi Heikak Mapal village in Imphal

East district and in regard to which the police had arrested 9 persons from the Meitei community, including five women. This heinous killing has been widely reported in the news.¹⁰⁷

One of the Kuki student leaders related a more recent incident where Meira Paibis blocked the security forces and compelled them to release 12 cadre of Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL), which is one of the Meitei valley-based insurgency groups (VBIGs). Further details about this incident as learnt by the Team are as follows: On June 25, the Indian Army's Spear Corps, during a search operation, apprehended 12 cadre of Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL), but were compelled to hand them over when a huge mob led by the Meira Paibis staged a blockade demanding their release. A news report¹⁰⁸ states that the BJP MLA from Andro constituency, Thounaojam Shyam kumar Singh, was the one who negotiated the release of the KYKL cadres—a charge that the lawmaker denies. Incidentally the same news report states that among those apprehended is the mastermind of the deadly ambush of an Indian Army convoy in Chandel district in June 2015, which resulted in the deaths of 18 troopers.

As detailed earlier in the report, the Meira Paibis have enforced a complete blockade of any essential

supplies, including relief material and medicines from being taken into the Hill districts.

This is a matter for grave introspection given the rich legacy of the women's movement in Manipur, whose roots lie in the Nupi-lan (Women's War) in the early 1900s and 1930s against repressive colonial policies and then in the post-Independence struggles into the 2000s where it protested the human rights violations by the Indian state and the armed forces epitomised by their well-known protest on 15 July 2004 when a group of Meira Paibis shed their cloths before the headquarters of Assam Rifles in the heart of Imphal holding a banner which proclaimed:

'Indian Army Rape us, Indian Army Take Our Flesh'.

The Meira Paibis also played an important role in the creation of women led economies in Manipur.

Thokchom Binarani Devi writes of the role of the Meira Paibis: *"By the late 1970s and with the beginning of 1980s the entire state of Manipur was under heavy combing operation by the army in order to flush out the extremists. During the operation a number of innocent people suffered a lot, including women. During that time women, who were directly affected by actions of the Police and Paramilitary forces, along with other local women started to guard their family members. This movement of women came to be known as the Meira Paibi movement. If there are any serious problems which are likely to affect peaceful social atmosphere of the locality, it is made compulsory for every house to join this movement, ever since the women in different parts of the state have been organizing themselves against the activities of armed personals, and other related issues."*^{[3]109}

5.5. Views on Naga Community

The Team had limited interaction with members of the Naga community. However, one point that was repeatedly raised by the Kuki community was that the initial rally on 3 May 2023 against the judgment directing the government to recommend Meiteis for inclusion in the Scheduled tribe list had been organised by *All Tribal Students Union Manipur (ATSUM)*. However, the Meitei violence emerged against the Kuki community only was the narrative. An ITLF Spokesperson said that the Nagas control highways inside Manipur, and if they are involved, they can block all supplies. He said that Nagas have their own political demands, and have been trying to remain neutral.

At the time of the visit, the Team was told that the Naga community had not responded to the Kuki demand for separate administration. Later, after the Kuki community made a clear demand for separate administration in 5 districts, the Naga community replied strongly through United Naga Council (UNC) stating *"With regard to land, the Nagas' opposition to the creation of new districts in 2016 remains alive as an unfinished issue. Of the districts, ones carved out from Senapati and Chandel districts are the handiwork of the Congress government's appeasement policy carried out in the name of administrative convenience. Hence the demand of separate administration which incorporates the so-called new two districts is necessarily opposed"*.¹¹⁰ It was reported that the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) has stated that *"The Naga community is not opposed to the Kuki-Zomi demand for 'separate administration' but it should not encroach 'even an inch' of Naga territory: "* the statement by James Hau, Information and Publicity Secretary of the United Naga Council read.¹¹¹

The Team was informed that the United Naga Council is vehemently opposing the inclusion of 'disputed' territory in the proposed Kuki-Zo administration. A Forest Conservation Professional working with the Manipur Government in Imphal told the Team that the current conflict will have a definite impact on Naga-Kuki relations, and his apprehension was that the Nagas agreed to the NRC because of perceived infiltration. He added that of every likelihood of Naga-Kuki conflicts re-emerging in the background of this demographic shift and claim for separate administration.

At the time of writing this report, the Kukis displayed an exceptional conciliatory gesture to the Nagas by refraining from observing 'Black Day' on 13th September, for the first time in the past three decades. As is known, 13th September marks the day on which 115 Kuki civilians were killed in 1993 by Naga militants.¹¹²

5.6. Views on Pangal Community

As per the 2011 census, there are 2.39 lakh Meitei Pangals in Manipur, which is more than 8 percent of the total population of Manipur. The Meitei Pangal community is classified as Minorities and Other Backward Classes (MOBC).

A member of the Meitei Pangal community told the Team that though his community is seen in this conflict

as a neutral body, in fact, the Pangals are being trapped in the middle, especially in Kwakta village which is on the boundary between Imphal and Churachandpur. He said that both the Meitei and Kuki communities believe that the Pangals support the other community.

5.7. Views on the role of the Armed Forces and State Police

Another aspect that repeatedly came up in discussions with the Team was the relationship between the various armed forces and the communities. It may be kept in mind that the state police force has faced equal ethnic segregation as the general populace and have been permitted to report to the districts dominated by their communities.¹¹³

In respect of armed forces, each community had a different opinion. A media professional from Imphal noted that there is concrete evidence of a good relationship between Assam Rifles and Kukis, and Kukis don't want their withdrawal. On the other hand, a relief camp volunteer in Churachandpur said that the Assam rifles are the only neutral force, since the state police have fled to the valley or hills depending on their ethnicity.

Another representative of Kuki Student Organisation, Churachandpur said that the State Police and Commandos regularly come from the valley and shoot in the buffer zone area. He said that when the same was sought to be stopped by the Assam Rifles, an FIR was lodged against them.¹¹⁴ A member of the Meitei Pangal community told the Team that the Assam Rifles are stuck in an awkward situation between the communities, just like the Pangal community. He noted that the Assam Rifles are bound by the SoO agreements and are unable to comply with demands for action from the Meitei community.

A retired Magistrate belonging to the Kuki community informed the Team that the Kuki community is unable to trust the Indian Reserve Battalion or the Assam Police which are broadly seen as supporting the Meitei community in this conflict.

This brings out another layer in this vastly complex conflict and the roles played by or attributed to the police and the various armed forces operating in Manipur.

5.8. Meeting with the Governor of Manipur

The Team met with the Manipur Governor, Smt. Anusiyi Uikey on 13 August at the Governor's house, during



which the team apprised her of the key issues around the conflict, including the ethnic segregation, plight of conflict-displaced persons in the relief camps, the undeclared blockade and the suffering it was causing to the Kukis and the overall failure of the Biren Singh- led State Government.

The Governor was conscious that the ethnic segregation and hatred was to such an extent that communities are not able to travel to the other area. The Governor was also aware of the blockades of two major highways being NH2 and NH37 and the impact that it was having. She informed the team that this was also resulting in government supplies not being able to be transported from the valley to the hills. She explained about the efforts she had been making to end the blockade and ensure that medical supplies were taken to Churachandpur, where she had herself gone on two occasions. She said that medicines were being transported by helicopter, and that necessary items are provided through the district administration including hygiene kits, medicines and grains. She added that due to the blockade from Imphal to Churachandpur, all the supplies are required to be routed through Mizoram.

Commenting on the situation, she said that each community is seeing a high level of unity and Hence the armed forces are unable to efficaciously take steps and that it was difficult to get peace in view of the repeated incidents on both sides especially in the border regions. She said that due to seizure of arms from the armouries more than



5000 weapons and 5 lakh bullets have been taken and both sides are now armed. As such unless the communities themselves agree to sit and give up their arms, it is very difficult to do anything. She said that the need of the hour was mediation and for civil society organisations from both sides to initiate Peace and reconciliation talks. She acknowledged that this wasn't a conflict that suddenly occurred but had been stirring for a long time. She said that she had publicly requested that the violence must be stopped and both the communities must speak to the Government of India in a peaceful manner.

6. SUMMARISING

A CSO representative in Churachandpur, like all other Kukis, confirms that the Kukis have suffered more,

whether in number of deaths, number of displaced persons, properties lost, places of worship destroyed and most importantly, have been made scapegoats at the hands of the government. *"Everyone has suffered, but the Kukis have suffered more than those in the valley because they are fighting on two fronts - against the state government and the dominant majority community"* is her conclusion. Another Kuki student representative summed the impact on the communities rather succinctly when she said that *"among Meiteis, it is mostly the poor who have suffered, whereas among Kukis, all have suffered in this state-sponsored ethnic cleansing"*.

"We are all victims here, though the Kukis have suffered more... Everyone is suffering... People are wounded... How are they going to stay together? The accommodating space that was Manipur is now destroyed... We are a state that has had Tribal Chief Ministers (Yangmaso Shaiza and Rishang Keishang) and a Muslim Chief Minister (Mohammed Alimuddin) in the past. I fear for the future of my state, Manipur, and its people. Is Manipur the next Kashmir? Will it be divided into three ethnic states? There are no sensible voices on either side courageous enough to speak the language of peace, justice and reconciliation?" This was the lament by a Meitei intellectual, who is deeply troubled by the brutal violence unleashed on each other. They added that there are numerous stories of people saving persons from the other community but no one is now willing to speak about this. Such is the ethnic divide and hatred.

The scale and design of the violence has resulted in the unprecedented complete ethnic segregation of the Meitei and Kuki communities into the valley and hills of Manipur, respectively. The BJP with Modi at the Centre and Biren Singh in Manipur have the ignominious credit of overseeing the complete decimation of Manipur's social fabric resulting in entire communities being totally ethnically segregated. The BJP government has manufactured this segregation in a state, which despite previous conflicts, was able to reconcile and live together.

Communities have been able to find ways to reconcile despite horrific ethnic conflicts, be it the Naga-Kuki conflict from mid-1992 till 1995, the Meitei Hindu-Pangal conflict of 1993 or the Paite-Kuki conflict during 1997-98. But this time around, it is not an

inter-community conflict, but one where a politically dominant majority community backed by the state, is up against the minority. This is one where the State has propped up chauvinist organisations to play out its communal agenda. Here the Team recalls the sentiment of Brinda Thounaojam: *"The present plan to construct prefabricated houses exposes their sinister design to force the two communities to live in total segregation and isolation. This is the gift of BJP on the 75th anniversary of India's independence."*

The Kukis have taken a clear stand that separate administration is the only way out. Their demand is UT status with an elected legislature. "Political solution first then peace", reads the huge hoarding in Churachandpur, and the walls of Kangpokpi and Churachandpur. A spokesperson of ITLF argues: *"How is dialogue possible? It has to come from the aggressor which controls the narrative. Also, everyday inflammatory content is put out against the Kukis, so why will we think of any dialogue? You can't perpetuate a view that we are encroachers, infiltrators and poppy cultivators and expect a dialogue. It has to come from a space of acknowledgement and acceptance."*

On the other hand, the Meitei community demands that the withdrawal of SoO agreement, protection of territorial integrity of Manipur and strict action against forest encroachments, Kuki militancy and poppy cultivation and the demand for separate state to be dropped, all preconditions for any dialogue.

A Meitei displaced person from Moreh at Akampat echoes another precondition for peace, which is the removal of the Assam Rifles. She says, *"Our houses are adjacent to the Assam Rifles camp and they did not do anything. When we asked, they said they didn't have orders from above. We want to live in love and peace even with the Kukis. We will live with them if they want peace. But the Kukis are not stopping. Why did innocent people get roped into this fight? Poppy and SoO have to be removed then things will settle. Though everything is in Modi's hands, we do not have any hope from him"*.

It is an almost unanimous opinion that the State was the biggest actor in this entire situation and it consciously allowed the situation to worsen, though the violence could have been stopped, if only the state had acted immediately. It has allowed Manipur to burn, and to segregate ethnically.



Even so, fixing the accountability on the BJP governments at the State and Centre, takes a backseat, while the deep animosity and hatred towards each other dominates.

The BJP, which has been in power in Manipur since 2017 onwards, and at the Centre since 2014 onwards, is to blame for the current volatile situation in Manipur and is trying to escape its role by fanning the hatred between the two communities. Divide and rule is the clear policy; it has orchestrated an ethnic divide which it is communally exploiting. The government is squarely to blame for the violence and loss of lives and property suffered by the affected persons. It is a matter of shame that the Supreme Court has had to intervene to ensure that basic steps are taken in investigating these gross and inhuman crimes.

Any necessary decisions and steps ought to be considered within the broader context of restoration of peace in the state and fixing of accountability on the BJP governments, both at the Centre and the State. Peace is possible on the basis of justice and reconciliation. For any political solution to emerge, restoration of peace and normalcy is a must.

It is the resignation of Biren Singh as Chief Minister that will mark the first step towards any feasible political solution to this humanitarian crisis. Indeed, the present BJP government has no legitimacy whatsoever to continue. The Team appeals to all concerned to cease hostilities and initiate dialogue and peace-building measures. This could be through the ending of the undeclared blockade to allow safe passage into and out of the Valley and, secondly, by expediting the return of bodies to the Kukis to perform a dignified burial. The Team hopes and wishes that these steps could help in securing some respite from the violence towards a peaceful political resolution to this crisis.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Team has met with the Governor, Smt. Anusiya Uikhey, and made several suggestions including communicating

the need for a change at the head of the Manipur government failing which any step forward in the tough path to a political solution seems unlikely. In conclusion, the Team would like to reiterate those suggestions, which are necessary to address the immediate humanitarian crisis particularly in the relief camps, and the survival crisis in the Hills.

1. Immediate steps are required to address the shortage in meeting the basic needs including food, water, infrastructure, sanitation, health care, education and other services, of the conflict-displaced persons living in the relief camps. The abysmal condition of the relief camps in the Hills requires immediate attention.
2. The undeclared blockade is wreaking havoc in the daily lives of not just the conflict-displaced Kukis but others as well. Free and safe movement of essential supplies, fuel, food, medical supplies and other supplies must be ensured.
3. Given the scale of violence, more than 6000 criminal cases are registered for various offences including murder, rape, assault, arson, theft, etc. Some clarity has emerged through the intervention of the Supreme Court, yet the manner of investigation is yet to be resolved. Ensuring justice to the conflict-victims ought to be an essential part of any path ahead.
4. The question of compensation for the loss of life, injuries suffered and properties destroyed is also of importance. For this purpose, expeditious access to justice for those has to be ensured.
5. Some livelihood activities have been initiated by civil society organisations in the relief camps in the Valley, which is totally absent in the relief camps in the Hills. This needs to be addressed

as the conflict-displaced persons are suffering a crippling financial crisis.

6. While educational institutions have resumed in the Valley and conflict-displaced children and youth have been helped to resume their education in educational institutions near the relief camps, this is yet to be done in the Hills. All steps must be taken to ensure that education of children and youth in the Hills does not suffer.
7. Students who have fled from various educational institutions in Imphal require immediate attention and all steps are required to be taken to ensure that their educational records and belongings are returned to them and steps taken for them to resume their education. In this regard it would be ideal for State governments to welcome conflict-displaced students to continue their education in these States.

ANNEXURES

Annexure - I: Press Release dated 16th August 2023

- Eight Member Team of CPIML, AIPWA, AILAJ and an Independent Activist Visits Manipur
- Team Holds Nexus of Biren Singh Led Manipur Government and the Union Government as fully responsible for the complete breakdown of constitutional machinery resulting in an unending saga of violence and untold human suffering in Manipur

An 8-member team led by the CPI(M)Liberation including Pratima Engheepi (CPIML Central Committee member and Vice-President, All India Progressive Womens' Association), Bibek Das (CPIML Central Committee member), Sucheta De (CPIML Central Committee member), Clifton D' Rozario (CPIML Central Committee member), Avani Chokshi (CPIML Karnataka State Committee Member), Krishnaveni (All India Progressive Women's Association), Madhulika T. (All India Lawyers Association for Justice) and Du. Saraswati (Dalit and women's rights activist, Karnataka) has visited affected villages and relief camps across Manipur, between 10 to 13 August, and are shocked at the political turmoil created by the double-engine

BJP governments in Manipur and at the Centre. The Team visited villages and relief camps in Imphal valley, Kangpokpi and Churachandpur districts. The Team also met with concerned authorities and the leaders and organisations of the affected communities including the Meira Paibis and Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum.

1. This unprecedented ethnic segregation of the Meitei and Kuki communities into the valley and hills of Manipur, is the gift of BJP on the 76th anniversary of India's independence. Neverbefore in the history of India has a government overseen such a complete decimation of society's social fabric that has resulted in entire communities within a state being ethnically segregated into different parts of a State. The double-engine BJP government has manufactured this segregation in a state, which despite previous conflicts, was able to reconcile and live together.
2. It goes without saying that this ethnic segregation and violence that has been raging for more than 3 months now, is the consequence of the actions of the BJP government. Even as the Chief Minister Biren Singh proved thoroughly incompetent and reluctant to put an end to the violence, Prime Minister Narendra Modi prioritised his visits to France and the US over Manipur. In fact the miserable response of the Prime Minister and the Home Minister in the Parliament exposes their bankruptcy in offering any comprehensive political solution to this crisis.
3. The situation in the relief camps is grim. Across the valley and hills thousands of internally displaced persons live in desperate conditions. Basic services are lacking, insufficient arrangements are being made as the government has wiped its hands off the suffering people.
 - The relief camps in the valley for the displaced Meitei are in shocking condition. It is learnt that only Rs. 80 per person in addition to some rice and dal is given by the state government at the relief camp at Shyamasakhi High School at the heart of Imphal, which is grossly insufficient. The Team also observed that no proper facilities are being provided at the relief camp at Moirang, which is currently being housed at a marketplace. Only Rs . 500/-per person has been distributed to the people at

the camp to date. The relief camp at Akampat run in the school campus is also congested with insufficient basic amenities.

- The situation in the relief camps for Kukis in the hills is extremely serious. At the youth hostel in Churachandpur, run by volunteers, the rooms are highly congested, and infectious diseases have begun to fast spread. Measles, chicken pox, viral fever are an everyday reality at the camp. Sanitation is poor, and the camps the Team visited, which each have internally displaced persons up to 500 in number do not have sufficient toilet facilities. Most relief camps are unable to provide nutritious food to the residents and are only given rice and dal twice a day. At Kangpokpi, the relief camps are in a similar situation with no proper nutrition and sanitation. The district has only one upgraded PHC which has been designated a district hospital and which does not have sufficient doctors, staff or medicines.
4. The frontier between the valley and hills, and the undeclared blockade, has severely compromised the transport of essential commodities including basic relief food items, medicine affecting thousands of internally displaced Kukis in the relief camps in hill districts. This also impacts the mobility of Meiteis out of the Valley.
 5. The government is squarely to blame for the violence and loss of lives and property suffered by the affected persons. It is a matter of shame that the Supreme Court has had to intervene to ensure that basic steps are taken in investigating these gross and inhuman crimes.

It is the resignation of Biren Singh as Chief Minister that will mark the first step in the journey towards any feasible political solution to this humanitarian crisis. We appeal to the affected communities to cease all hostilities to ensure that the suffering masses in the relief camps can be properly taken care of as a gesture of moving forward from the conflict and towards a resolution to the present impasse.

The Team met with Smt. Anusuiya Uikey, Governor of Manipur and informed of the alarming situation in Manipur and emphasized the immediate steps to be

taken in regard to the relief camps as also the need for Biren Singh to step down for any political resolution to materialize.

Annexure II - Intervention of the Supreme Court¹¹⁶

Soon after the eruption of violence in Manipur on 3 May 2023, two petitions were filed before the Supreme Court. First was a petition filed by the Manipur Tribal Forum Delhi seeking SIT probe into the violence and relief for the victims; and second was a petition filed by Chairman of the Hill Areas Committee (HAC) of the Manipur Legislative Assembly challenging Manipur HC on grant of ST status to the Meitei community.

When the matter was taken up by the Supreme Court on 8 May 2023, the Union govt stated that there had been no violence for the last two days and further stated that normalcy was returning to the state. The Solicitor General (SG) stated that the property of all people, regardless of religion, would be protected. However, Senior advocate Colin Gonzalves shared the apprehensions of the Kuki community that there would be more attacks in the coming days, and sought urgent orders for evacuation of people from certain areas. At this stage, the SG intervened and said that such statements may have an adverse impact.

On 17 May 2023, when the matter was taken up, the SG placed a status report on record showing deployment of 62 companies of CRPF and 126 columns of army/ Assam rifles in the state, opening of 318 relief camps giving aid to almost 48,000 IDPs etc. The report also noted that regular patrolling was being done and there was free passage of people from relief/safe locations to airport/native places was taking place. It was also placed on record that the Manipur Home department had given directions to police for registration of FIRs regardless of jurisdiction. The Court noted that “*Certain apprehensions have been expressed on behalf of petitioners. They have sought appropriate directions so that steps can be taken in sensitive areas. The apprehensions are taken into account by authorities who are monitoring the situation.*”

On 15 June 2023, the Manipur Tribal Forum filed an interim application stating on record that the Union of India and the Chief Minister of the State of Manipur “*have embarked jointly on a communal agenda for the ethnic cleansing of the Kukis*” by armed communal organisation being Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun. Directions

were sought for protection of the Kuki community by the army. The IA notes that despite the assurances of the SG, no relief had been given, and states *“After the giving of these assurances over 81 Kukis were killed, 237 churches and 73 administration building/quarter were burnt and 141 villages destroyed and 31410 Kukis displaced from their homes. The assurances of the authorities are not useful anymore and made in a non-serious fashion and are not even intended to be implemented.”* The Interim Application noted the need for cold storage and autopsy of corpses and commented on the inadequacy of relief camps. The forum provided testimonies of victims of violence to show that the law and order situation in the hands of the State government was still abysmal. Hence, directions were sought, inter alia, for the Indian Army to take control of law and order in the main affected

Districts, constitution of SIT and, reparation from the Union and State government for the Tribals killed.

On 20 June 2023, despite urgent mentioning of the situation, the Supreme Court refused to list the Interim Application of the Manipur Tribal forum, and directed listing on 3 July 2023

On 3 July 2023, the Supreme Court sought an updated status report. On behalf of the Manipur Tribal forum, it was submitted that the situation has worsened and the number of killings has increased from 20 killings on last date to 110 now. It was submitted that the violence was state sponsored, and Militant leaders had been calling for annihilation for the Kuki community. The beheading of Kuki Tribal David Think was also brought to the notice of the Court. On the other hand, the Solicitor General said that the situation was slowly improving with the deployment of forces, increased relief camps and reduced curfew. The Solicitor General is reported to have said *“My learned friend may not give this a communal angle- like Christians or something. Real human beings are being dealt with”*.

On 10 July 2023, when Senior Advocate Colin Gonsalves on behalf of Meitei Tribal Forum said that everyone was against the Kuki tribe in the state, Chief Justice of India is reported to have said that the court proceedings should not be utilised as a platform for escalating violence or exacerbating existing problems in the state. He clarified that the Supreme Court’s role was limited to the interpretation of the law and stressed the need to focus on the specific modalities of the case. He

said, *“We don’t want this proceeding to be used as a platform for further escalation of violence & other problems which exist in the State. We do not run the security apparatus or law and order. If you have suggestions we can take. Let’s not see this as a partisan matter, it’s a humanitarian issue.”* However, when Adv. Colin continued that armed groups are being used by the State, the CJI said- *“This is not the platform where we do this...we should be conscious of the remit of the Supreme Court. We cannot run the law and order on the ground, elected government does. We understand your feelings but there should be certain modalities of arguing before this Court.”* At this juncture, SG is reported to have urged Adv. Colin Gonsalves to refrain from giving interviews and expressed concern about his behaviour in discussing the case publicly

On 11 July 2023, the Supreme Court granted protection from arrest to Adv. Deeksha Dwivedi, a member of a fact finding Team of National Federation of Indian Women against whom an FIR was lodged. The Court accepted a number of recommendations of the Petitioners in respect of dead bodies, shortage of doctors and essential medicines in the hill districts, situation of students, situation of relief camps, looting of arms etc. and directed for positive action to be taken in this regard. The Court also directed that *“The Union of India and the State of Manipur should make sufficient arrangements to ensure the protection of the lives and properties of all citizens and residents of the State of Manipur.”*

On 19 July 2023, a video of naked women being groped and paraded went viral, which dated back to the 4th of May. On 20th, the matter was taken up by the Supreme Court, which ordered that *“The Court is deeply disturbed by the visuals which have appeared in the media since yesterday depicting the perpetration of sexual assault and violence on women in Manipur. What is portrayed in the media would indicate gross constitutional violations and infractions of human rights. Using women as instruments for perpetrating violence is simply unacceptable in a constitutional democracy. This Court must be apprised of the steps which have been and shall be taken by the government to (i) hold the perpetrators accountable; and (ii) ensure that such incidents are not repeated. The Union Government and the State Government are directed to take immediate steps - remedial, rehabilitative and preventive and to apprise the Court of the action which has been taken before the next date of listing on affidavit.”*

On 31 July 2023, the SC asked the Supreme Court why the police took 14 days to register the FIR in respect of the viral video. However, the SG said that seven arrests had been made within 24 hours of the video surfacing. On being questioned, the SG said that over 6000 FIRs had been registered in Manipur. The Supreme Court ordered for disaggregation of data around nature and stage of investigation of the FIRs. The representative of the women victims of sexual offences opposed the proposal for the Union of India to hand investigation of the rape case to CBI and to transfer trial of the case out of Manipur. In another petition where the Kuki population was effectively blamed for the violence, with issues of narco terrorism, poppy cultivation and deforestation raised, the Supreme Court suggested withdrawal of the case.

On 1 August 2023, the SC found an *“absolute breakdown of law and order and machinery of the State”* and directed for personal presence of the DGP of Manipur. The court found that in 6000 FIRs only 250 arrests had been made. The CJI also questioned if the policemen who handed over the women to the mob were questioned, and questioned whether enquiry had been conducted, noting that. *“It’s clear that for the two months, the state police was not in charge. They may have made per formative arrests but they were not in charge. Either they were incapable of doing it or uninterested”*. The court directed for disaggregation of the FIRs and noted that an independent body needs to be constituted to look into the issue. In respect of unclaimed dead bodies who were unable to be retrieved in communal tension, the SG made a submission that *“Most of the unclaimed bodies are those of the infiltrators who came with certain agenda..”*. The Supreme Court directed for identification of the bodies.

On 7 August 2023, the Court permitted transfer of 11 FIRs pertaining to sexual violence to the FIR, while identifying a high level overseeing officer over the CBI investigation. The Court also permitted the state to constitute 42 SITs to look after cases which are not transferred to the CBI, while directing for inclusion of inspectors from other state police forces in the Teams and directing for supervision by 6 high level officers from outside the State of Manipur. The Court also constituted a committee of three former female High Court judges namely Justice Gita Mittal (former Chief Justice of

J&K High Court), Justice Shalini Phansalkar Joshi (former Bombay HC Judge) and Justice Asha Menon (former Delhi HC judge) to *“look at diverse aspects on humanitarian nature”*. The mandate of the committee included to enquire into the nature of violence against women in Manipur, submit a report on steps required to meet the needs of the survivors, ensure that free and comprehensive medical aid and psychological care to victims of survivors is provided; ensure conditions of dignity in relief camps set up for displaced persons including suggestions for additional camps, ensuring the payment of compensation and restitution to victims of violence; and Issuing directions for the appointment of nodal officers at relief camps to ensure that they maintain a database of all persons who are housed in their respective relief camps to ensure reunification of families, and the provision of toll-free help lines to provide updates on any investigation, missing persons, and the recovery of dead bodies.

On 21 August 2023, the Supreme Court noted that three reports have been filed by the Mittal committee including

- A report highlighting the loss of documents of Manipur citizens in the riots which would enable relief and rehabilitation measures. This report calls for assistance in reconstruction of important documents such as Aadhar cards, bank details and disability certificates for such citizens;
- A report on necessary steps for compensation under the NALSA victim compensation scheme and the Manipur Victim Compensation scheme including compensation for new offences, directions for time bound implementation, involvement of Para Legal Volunteers/ Law students/ students be involved to go through FIRs and identify victims for compensation, grant of authority to Secretary of MALSA to take suo motu action, compensation for orphaned children, immediate payment of relief to victims who have lost all belongings etc. The report also seeks for directions of the Supreme Court to ensure appointment of secretaries in all 16 District Legal Services Authorities
- A Report that classifies directions of the Supreme Court in respect of compensation,

violence against women, Comprehensive psychological assistance, and mental health care and identifying experts to assist in evaluating and considering the same.

On 25 August 2023, the Supreme Court issued a number of directions in respect of the case transferred to investigation of CBI and jurisdiction of Assam. The Court requested that a special court be assigned in Guwahati to handle the pre-trial steps of CBI cases including applications for remand, warrant, extension of custody. The Court granted liberty to victims and witnesses to give evidence virtually or physically. The court also issued a number of directions in respect of implementation of directions of court and for effective functioning of the committee.

On 1 September 2023, the Supreme Court directed as follows “*We direct the Government of India and the Government of Manipur to distribute basic supply of food, medicine, and other essentials so that there is no denial of basic human facilities. The manner in which the blockade is dealt with is under law enforcement. However, considering the humanitarian aspect of the matter,*

Government should explore all options including air dropping if necessary. The court shall be apprised of the steps taken to ameliorate the situation in the next hearing.”

Note

1. The death toll has now crossed 175, while the number of injured keeps mounting, as fresh waves of violence break out. At the time of finalising this report (14th September), just a days after the 11-minute Special Assembly session in Manipur, in which Chief Minister Biren Singh moved an obituary reference and proposed a two-minute silence to honour those killed, fresh bouts of violence have regularly broken out resulting in more deaths.
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4. “Menon, V. P. (1955). “The Story of the Integration of Indian States”: p. 273
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8. *Supra* note 6: p. 5
9. Map available at <https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/manipur/manipur.htm>
10. *Supra* note 6: p. ii
11. Scheduled castes are Loi, Yaithibi, Dhobi, Muchi or Rabidas, Namsudra, Patni and Sutradhar
12. *The Hindu*. “Imphal civil society body COCOMI writes to European Parliament on Manipur”, July 23, 2023. Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/imphal-civil-society-body-cocomi-writes-to-european-parliament-on-manipur/article67112495.ece>
13. *Supra* note 6: p. 16
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15. *Supra* note 6: p. 25
16. *Id*: p. 83
17. *Supra* note 6: p. 43
18. Arun, I, Ed. (2021). “Chainarol: Way of the warrior”, Human Rights Alert.
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20. *Supra* note 6: p. x
21. *Supra* note 14: p. 191
22. Prior to the outbreak of violence in May 2023, Manipur has witnessed a series of ethnic conflicts over the past three decades alone: Naga-Kuki clash of 1992-1995, Meitei - Pangal conflict of 1993#, the Kuki-Paite clash of 1997-98 and the much more covert Meitei-Naga tension around the 2000s.
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24. *Ibid.*
25. The Sixth Schedule provides for the creation of Autonomous District and Regional Councils and accords a host of legislative, executive and judicial powers to these autonomous bodies. It applies to certain Tribal areas of the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. Manipur is governed by Article 371-C as well as the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act, although this does not compare with the considerable autonomy conferred on Tribal areas by the Sixth Schedule.
26. Constituted under the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act, 1971
27. *Supra* note 6: p. 276
28. *Supra* note 14: p. 191
29. *Ibid*
30. *Supra* note 14: p. 202
31. Reimeingam, M. and Haokip, T. T. (2021). "Infrastructure Led Livelihood: A Comparative Analysis of Hill and Valley in Manipur", Working Paper 513, Institute for Social and Economic Change.
32. Ziipao, R. R. (2020) "Infrastructure of Injustice: State and Politics in Manipur and Northeast India", Routledge, New Delhi: p. 20
33. *Ibid*: p. 9
34. *Supra* note 32: p. 13
35. *Supra* note 14: p. 93
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38. *Ibid*
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44. Judgement dt. 27.03.2023 of the Hon'ble High Court of Manipur at Imphal in Shri. Mutum Churamani Meetei v State of Manipur [WP(C) No. 229 of 2023]
45. As early as 2000, the Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court in State of Maharashtra versus Milind had held in November 2000 held that "any tribe or Tribal community or part of or group within any tribe can be included or excluded from the list of Scheduled Tribes issued under clause (1) of Article 342 only by Parliament by law and by no other authority,"
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48. *Supra* note 14: p. 22
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- right to hold and live in the forest land under the individual or common occupation for habitation or for self- cultivation for livelihood by a member or members of a forest dwelling Scheduled Tribe or other traditional forest dwellers;
 - community rights such as nistar, by whatever name called, including those used in erstwhile Princely States, Zamindari or such intermediary regimes;
 - right of ownership, access to collect, use, and dispose of minor forest produce which has been traditionally collected within or outside village boundaries;
 - other community rights of uses or entitlements such as fish and other products of water bodies, grazing (both settled or transhumant) and traditional seasonal resource access of nomadic or pastoralist communities;
 - rights including community tenures of habitat and habitation for primitive Tribal groups and pre-agricultural communities;
 - rights in or over disputed lands under any nomenclature in any State where claims are disputed;
- rights for conversion of Pattas or leases or grants issued by any local authority or any State Government on forestlands to titles;
 - rights of settlement and conversion of all forest villages, old habitation, unsurveyed villages and other villages in forests, whether recorded, notified or not into revenue villages;
 - right to protect, regenerate or conserve or manage any community forest resource which they have been traditionally protecting and conserving for sustainable use;
 - rights which are recognised under any State law or laws of any Autonomous District Council or Autonomous Regional Council or which are accepted as rights of Tribals under any traditional or customary law of the concerned tribes of any State;
 - right of access to biodiversity and community right to intellectual property and traditional knowledge related to biodiversity and cultural diversity;
59. Any other traditional right customarily enjoyed by the forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes or other traditional forest dwellers, as the case may be, which are not mentioned in clauses (a) to (k) but excluding the traditional right of hunting or trapping or extracting a part of the body of any species of wild animal.
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116. An outline of the intervention of the Supreme Court into the issue of violence in Manipur, derived from legal reporting in Livelaw (livelaw.in)

Epilogue

Historically and geographically speaking, the northeastern part of India is linked to the rest of the country by a narrow corridor through the hill districts of West Bengal state. Surrounded by Bhutan, Bangladesh, Burma, and the Tibetan region of China, the northeast is a strategically sensitive area. A large deployment of troops has long been stationed to guard the borders. With the 'Look Towards the East' policy, this region has further become a flashpoint for those who want to utilise the resources and access to eastern countries.

The region is populated by diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups, including a number of indigenous tribes. It makes up roughly 7 percent of India's total area and is home to about 3 percent of its total population. The northeast now includes the states of Manipur, Assam, Nagaland, Tripura, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, and Sikkim. Many of these states were created to win the allegiance of ethnic groups and to accommodate political aspirations. This has been the history in the pre-independence era and also in the post-independence period. This is often forgotten by many 'Indians', especially the politicians and government who adhere to 'divide and rule policy'.

Integrated into India after the end of British colonial rule in 1947, most people from this region have little ethnically in common with the bulk of the Indian population. The landlocked region has endured decades of neglect, widespread corruption, and a failure by successive governments to deliver economic growth and sustainable development. Separatist armed groups from the Naga tribes first started resisting integration with India in the mid-1950s. This resistance and revolt continues to go on unabated. Earlier governments both at the state and centre and the present regime do not pay heed to this history, geography and geo-politics. But engage in electoral politics and eye on the resources of the region. Thus, disrespect, distrust and disturbances has been the saga of northeast.

The government in Manipur, regardless of which party comes to power, has always been dominated by plainsmen Meiteis, who account for about 53 per cent of the state's population and live mostly in Imphal Valley. The Meiteis also garner all the development plans, policies and resources that are allotted for the entire state. Most of the state and central government institutions are located in the valley, leaving the hill tribes to fend for themselves. There are confirmed reports that only 10 per cent of the development funds go to the hills and 90 per cent is spent in the valley.

Consequently, the government's actions have often been viewed through the prism of suspicion by tribals, mostly Nagas and Kukis, who make up 40 per cent of Manipur's population and live for the most part in the hills surrounding the valley. What is more intriguing is that many reports as well as interviews have repeatedly revealed the fact that the three major ethnic groups the Kukis, the Meiteis and the Nagas live together outside Manipur. They intermarry too. But after every escalation of violence, even this strong thread has been weakened.

Drug Business in Moreh, the border town between Manipur/India and Myanmar is estimated to be Rs. 50,000.00 crores while the state budget is Rs. 30,000.00 crores. In addition to these, there was flourishing business in and through this border town like rice and oil from Myanmar. Due to this flourishing business here, most of the people who were mainly from the Kuki community took to business. Agriculture which is one of the main economic activity of Manipur and hill people was totally given up by them. Now these families are

suffering since there is ban on business, especially ban on the Kuki population.

The entire Kuki community was labelled by the state government in connivance with the central government as “illegal immigrants”, “foreigners” and “infiltrators”. This partisan approach and attitude has further accelerated the division, hate and conflict in the state between various ethnic groups.

Among the various narratives which were going on in Manipur in the past and pre-violence period and post-violence period, one can identify many factors for historical crisis, contemporary crisis and the ongoing violence. Some of the dominant ones are the struggle for identity, space and resources. This complicates the entire context, making it vulnerable for any flare up.

In the past too, the political leadership has been playing with the various aspects of ethnic, political, cultural, electoral and resources. Going many more miles than the past, the present regime in Manipur which is predominantly a Meitei leadership with the support from the central government has been using the ‘fear of outsiders’ as a ploy to get its dropping popularity converted into the mainstay for the Meiteis. Thus, it managed to consolidate its declining political position but in return it has given a death blow to the fragile nature of peace, justice and development of the state.

The present Biren Singh regime, by singling out surveys, data collection, eviction, surveillance and demolitions in non-Naga tribal area of the hills of Manipur have created tension and distrust, leading to crisis and conflict. While, the electoral politics of Biren Singh achieved what it wanted but it has pushed the state into a huge crisis from which it is not easy to return to normalcy.

The planned removal of Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) from Imphal valley to permit the free movement of Meitei militants like Arambai Tenggole during the conflict raises questions about the objective behind this move. The Armed Forces

Special Powers Act itself had come under scrutiny in the past repeatedly. But doing this now, has given free space for the Meitei militants to engage in violence. This on the other hand has forced the Kukis to demand impose the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. Thus, the state’s intension is very clear leading to more distrust and disappointment.

Identity politics has been one of the mainstay of the politics of Manipur and northeast. Meiteis were so far seen, considered and enumerated as Hindus. There is a small stream which is also attempting to go back to its original religious tradition known as ‘Sanmahi’. But the dubious attempt by the politicians and the government to include Meiteis in the Scheduled Tribe status has created huge hue and cry. The Kukis as well as the Nagas see this as a ploy of the central and state governments to displace the Kukis and later Nagas and settle the Meiteis and eventually hand over the area to corporate interests.

The much publicised ‘war on drugs’ is only a propaganda mechanism to stay in power. More and more people are seeing this as not ‘war on drugs’, but ‘war on the hill tribal people, especially the Kukis’. In addition, the politicians and the government went on to the ridiculous extent of calling the Kuki-Zo as ‘narco-terrorists’. This is similar to the practice in mainline India where those who have a different view point, opinion are called ‘urban naxalites’. This is the age old policy and program of the ruling class to name, shame and blame and act against those who they fear are opposed to their vested interests.

One of the tasks of the government is to curtail rumours and ensure that false rumours do not spread and the source is identified and action taken. But the present Biren Singh government utterly failed to curtail rumours. Just imposing ban on internet and telephone is only a small step. One need to guard oneself from uttering statements which can lead to mistrust and distrust. Further, those in power have the responsibility to identify the rumours being

spread among the communities and attend to them to ensure peace and harmony.

The role of the central government has come for serious criticism. Especially the manner in which the Home Minister addressed this crisis issue and the silence of the Prime Minister has been criticised both in India and abroad. When finally, Narendra Modi opened his mouth to speak on Manipur issue, he was busy ridiculing the opposition than addressing the crisis that is going in Manipur. The central government irrespective of the violence going on for the last 9 months, neither imposed President's rule in the state nor did it invoke powers under Article 355 to take over law and order. This goes to establish that the central government has hidden plans to reap fruits out of this conflict.

As days passed by, state bureaucracy, police, politicians and people got divided along ethnic lines, further complicating the matter. What is more deploring is that women's groups, militants pose great challenge to all the citizens. This has denied any chance of the situation returning to normal.

Lots of things have been spoken and written about Manipur media. The statement that media is a pillar of democracy has been shattered in this country. This is even more the fact of Manipur media. Manipur media is as known mainly Meitei owned. Since these media centres are located in the valley where the infrastructure is better, Meiteis had greater share of media. In this conflict, the media all the more became partisan and contributed to the crisis.

Most of those who visited Manipur, and those how managed to move from Imphal to Bishnupur. Churachandpur, Tengnopal, Kangkopki, etc., have reiterated the fact that the Assam Rifles have done an exemplary job. This is irrespective of the fact that the valley people had raised objections to the placement of Assam Rifles in the past. The word appreciation also could be extended to the Border Security Force, Central Reserve Police Force, Gorkha Regiment, who in an uncertain situation are trying maintain peace.

For the last nine months, education, skill enhancement, development programs, higher education, health care, travel, agriculture, self-employment, celebrations like marriage, burial, etc., have been badly beaten. Only, the government officials are getting paid. All the rest are pushed to the brim of starvation. Banks in the hills work only 2 hours in a day. This is due to the scare of violence and lack of electricity and internet. Having being pushed to a 'cashless economy' if the banks are closed, how can any transaction take place and how can the people procure materials for basic needs.

At least three delegations of politicians from conflict-ridden Manipur – two from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and one from the state Congress – have failed to have an audience with Prime Minister Narendra Modi so far in spite of having camped at the National Capital for some days now. While Manipur has seen a series of violent incidents since early May, leading to loss of over a hundred lives and property worth lakhs and tens of thousands displaced, PM Modi has not spoken a word about the issue. This was in the month of June, 2023.

To make the matters worse, the Meitei militant groups have started dictating terms to the elected representatives. As reported, the Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF) has sought presidential rule in Manipur. "For the first time in history, a militia that led attacks on innocent civilians because of their ethnicity and which openly displays sophisticated weapons stolen from police armouries was able to order state lawmakers, including the chief minister, to attend a meeting it had called and made the MLAs endorse their demands. Manipur state police and central security forces remained mute spectators as Arambai Tenggol leader Korounganba Khuman arrived at the venue in Imphal in a police vehicle, and the militant group proceeded to administer an oath-taking ceremony to the MLAs. All these happened even as a special team sent by the central government is camping

nearby in the city. Why did the world's largest democracy allow this?..."

Realising that they are being pushed to the walls, the ITLF leaders managed to reach Delhi to meet the Prime Minister in the first week of February, 2024. But they were not given an appointment. This clearly shows the intent of the present regime. This would further estrange the ITLF and the crisis instead of getting addressed will get accelerated.

As in any conflict situation, it is the poor, the vulnerable and the marginalised who are the sufferers. Those who are better off or those who

have a steady income and those who could afford to move out of Manipur both among the Kukis and Meiteis have ensured that they are not affected by the crisis, conflict and violence. But the poorest of the poor among both the communities are the victims. While, electoral democracy seems to be the main plank of the politicians and government at the state and centre, it is the people of Manipur who are forced suffer violence for the ninth month. Will peace and justice be restored in Manipur is a million dollar question.

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