

People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL)
presents the report of the

Independent People's Tribunal

On

The Ongoing Ethnic Conflict
in Manipur

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Glossary of Abbreviations and Terms used in this Report

Abbreviation/ Term	Full Form	Description
AFSPA	Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958	A Central law which allows for the government grants special powers to the armed forces in designated "disturbed areas". It allows them to use force, including firing upon or arresting individuals, even without a warrant, and provides them with legal protection for actions taken under the act. It's a very controversial law
AR	Assam Rifles	The Assam Rifles is a paramilitary force of India responsible for border security, counter-insurgency, and maintaining law and order in Northeast India and in Jammu & Kashmir.
AT	Arambai Tenggol	An organisation of Meiteis. AT means 'Dart wielding cavalry'. It was formed around 2020 by Manipur's titular king and Rajya Sabha member Leishemba Sanajaoba. AT was reportedly supported by former CM, Biren Singh. It presented itself as a revivalist organisation seeking to re-establish pre-Hindu Sanamahis religion. The group was heavily armed and media reports spoke of the AT cadres moving about in many parts of the violence hit areas of the state with modern weapons.
ATSUM	All Tribal	Apex body of all tribal students in

	Students Unions of Manipur	Manipur state.
COCOMI	Coordination Committee of Meitei Organizations	An umbrella organisation of Meitei organizations.
CRPF	Central Reserve Police Force	The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) is the largest central armed police force in India.
DC or DM	District Collector or District Magistrate	Every state in India is sub-divided into Districts for revenue and administration purposes. The DC or DMs are the administrative heads of the District.
DoPT	Department of Personnel and Training	DoPT refers to the department of the Government of India.
FIR	First Information Report	Refers to a criminal complaint accepted by the police and registered as a crime.
FMR	Free Movement Regime	The Free Movement Regime (FMR) refers to an agreement between India and Myanmar that allows individuals residing within a certain distance of the border to cross without needing a visa or passport.
FRA	Forest Rights Act	FRA is an abbreviated form for Forest Rights Act, or the 'Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006'.
IDP	Internally Displaced People	Refers to people forced out of their homes due to violence and seek refuge/ housing in Camps set up by the State Government.
ITLF	Indigenous Tribal Leader's Forum	Established in June, 2022, comprising of recognised tribes in the district.
KCP	Kangleipak	Kangleipak is the ancient name for

	Communist Party, Manipur	Manipur. The KCP is a Maoist separatist militant group in Manipur engaged with armed conflict with the Government of India. There are several factions known as KCP – with the name of the faction.
KKL	Kangleipak Kanba Lup	Meitei group.
KIM	Kuki – INPI Manipur	Apex body of Kuki organizations in Manipur
Kuki – Zo or Kuki-Zou	Members of the Kuki – Zo tribal communities in Manipur	In the context of Manipur, Kuki-Zou and Kuki-Zo are generally used interchangeably to refer to the same group of communities. These communities are part of the broader <u>Kuki-Chin-Mizo</u> linguistic and ethnic group. While some within these communities prefer the term "Zomi" or other specific tribal names, "Kuki-Zo" is a common umbrella term encompassing various tribes within this broader group
MP	Meira Paibis	An exclusive organisation of Meitei women.
Meitei		Members of the Meitei community which forms the majority of the population of Manipur
ML	Meitei Lipun or Meitei Leepun	An organisation of Meiteis seeking to revive old Meitei Sanamahi religion. During the 2023 conflict, the ML were accused of being heavily armed militia group of people belonging to the majority involved with the violence against Kukis in Imphal Valley and other parts of the state. It is headed by Pramot Singh

NRC	National Register of Citizens	The National Register of Citizens (NRC) is a record of Indian citizens. Its primary purpose is to identify and document all legal citizens of India, potentially leading to the identification and deportation of illegal immigrants.
Pangal		There are Meitei Pangals, and Muslim Pangals as well.
RIMS	Regional Institute of Medical Sciences, Imphal, Manipur	A public institution operating as a teaching hospital in Imphal
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh	A Hindu nationalist organisation
SC	Scheduled Castes	The Indian Constitution lists all castes who face untouchability caste discrimination in a special Schedule called the SCs. In Manipur, xx% of Meiteis are listed as SCs
ST	Scheduled Tribes	The Indian Constitution lists all recognised Tribal Communities in a Schedule to the Constitution. The demand for inclusion of Meiteis in ST list was one of the core issues which sparked the violence of 3 rd May, 2023.
STDCM	Scheduled Tribe Demand Committee of Manipur	A Committee formed demanding ST status for Meiteis.
Sanamahi	A Meitei community	A section of the Meitei community who practice indigenous faith practices, claimed to be distinct from Hindu

		religion.
SoO	Suspension of Operations Agreement	An agreement between the Government of India with 3 hill-based insurgent groups (of Kukis) by which the groups agreed to confine themselves to notified camps and suspend their operations.
UNLF	United National Liberation Front (of Manipur)	A separatist group of Meiteis formed with the aim of establishing a sovereign and socialist state of Manipur.

Acknowledgements

The Tribunal report on the ethnic violence in Manipur of 2023 - 2024 is finally in our hands. The herculean effort of putting it together has to be credited to a large number of people, whose names we are withholding for reasons of confidentiality and security.

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As we conclude this report we would like to acknowledge and pay our respects to the families of all those who lost lives, the injured and the violated, and those who continue to be in relief camps or living in the neighbouring states of Mizoram, Nagaland, Assam and Delhi, the security of the farms, homes and hearths still seem far.

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We hope this report will help in a small way in forcing the authorities to be accountable towards the people, build mechanisms of reconciliation between communities, restore peace and the loss incurred by families and ensure Justice to the violated.

Kavita Srivastava
(President)

V. Suresh
(General Secretary)

People's Union for Civil Liberties

Executive Summary

The People's Tribunal on the Ethnic Conflict in Manipur documents the origins, nature, and consequences of the devastating violence that began on May 3, 2023, between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities. It identifies the roots of the conflict in deep-seated ethnic divisions, socio-political marginalization, land disputes, and a series of provocative state actions—including the Manipur High Court's directive recommending Scheduled Tribe (ST) status for Meiteis. This order, perceived as a threat by tribal groups, catalyzed protests that were met with violent counter-mobilization. The report emphasizes that the violence was not spontaneous but orchestrated, enabled by armed Meitei vigilante groups like Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun, and facilitated by state complicity and law enforcement failures.

The Tribunal presents overwhelming evidence of targeted killings, destruction of homes and places of worship, sexual violence, and the forced displacement of over 60,000 people. It describes the emergence of ethnic enclaves, mass looting of weapons from police armories, and the breakdown of governance, law enforcement, and judicial accountability. Relief efforts were marked by discrimination and neglect, especially in tribal camps. Meanwhile, the health and mental well-being of displaced persons—particularly women, children, and the elderly—remain severely compromised. The media and segments of civil society often acted in a partisan manner, spreading misinformation and inflaming hostilities rather than fostering peace.

In response, the report lays out a framework for justice and reconciliation grounded in constitutional safeguards, restorative justice, and global peacebuilding models. It calls for urgent legal accountability, including independent investigations and a Supreme Court-monitored Special

Investigation Team (SIT). Long-term peace strategies include stakeholder-based dialogues, the dismantling of armed groups, reparations for victims, and civic education to counter hate. The report concludes that Manipur's crisis represents not just a regional tragedy, but a national constitutional failure that demands urgent political, legal, and moral redress.

Chapter 1: Setting the Context

This chapter introduces the onset of one of the most serious ethnic conflicts in recent Indian history, beginning on May 3, 2023, in Manipur. The conflict primarily involves the Meitei community, which constitutes the majority in the valley (53% of the population), and the Kuki-Zo community, a minority largely based in the hills (16%). The Nagas (24%) are largely uninvolved but deeply affected.

The conflict's root causes go beyond immediate triggers. It is embedded in long-standing ethnic rivalries, unresolved land rights issues, demographic anxieties, and political disenfranchisement. The report highlights the failure of both state and central governments to fulfill constitutional obligations. Particularly egregious is the partisan role allegedly played by former Chief Minister N. Biren Singh and the complicity of state security forces in arming non-state actors and allowing widespread violence to occur unchecked.

Militant Meitei groups such as Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun were reportedly instrumental in organizing attacks on Kuki-Zo settlements. Simultaneously, the Kuki-Zo groups also retaliated in the hills. Entire populations have been ethnically cleansed from regions: Meiteis are absent from hill areas, and Kukis are no longer present in the valley. Over 60,000 people have been displaced and now live in under-resourced relief camps.

The chapter documents how sexual violence, including gang rapes, and desecration of religious places have been used as tools of domination. The role of digital media in inflaming tensions through viral videos is emphasized. Political leadership, especially the Prime Minister's prolonged silence and the Home Minister's ineffective responses, has contributed to the deepening of the crisis. The tribunal was set up to provide an independent platform to investigate these systemic failures and document the lived experiences of victims.

Chapter 2: Manipur – The State

This chapter delves into the demographic, geographical, and socio-economic structure of Manipur to contextualize the conflict. Manipur is divided into valley and hill regions, with 90% of the land being hilly but inhabited by only 41% of the population. The Meiteis, primarily Hindu, dominate the valley and control political power, while the hill regions are home to Christian-majority tribal groups like Kukis and Nagas.

Census data from 2011 and projected figures illustrate how the population is unevenly distributed along ethnic and religious lines. The Meiteis are not classified as Scheduled Tribes (ST), unlike the Kukis and Nagas. This differential classification has implications for land ownership, access to affirmative action, and political representation.

Economic indicators challenge the narrative that Meiteis are significantly more privileged. While the valley is more urbanized and has slightly better infrastructure, data on poverty levels, literacy rates, and employment suggest that the socio-economic gap between Kukis and Meiteis is not as stark as commonly perceived.

A critical insight from this chapter is the urban-rural divide. While the urban population is mostly Meitei and slightly more advantaged, rural

areas, where Kukis dominate, are underdeveloped but not dramatically worse in terms of access to education or services. The complexity of inequality in Manipur defies simplistic ethnic explanations and underscores how the perception of injustice may fuel inter-community tensions.

Chapter 3: Constitutional Status, History, and ST Claims

This chapter explores the legal and historical background of Manipur's integration into the Indian Union. Manipur had its own constitution and elected assembly even before it formally merged with India in 1949. This unique constitutional history fuels contemporary Meitei nationalism and underlines a long-standing friction with the Indian state.

The chapter scrutinizes the contentious Meitei demand for Scheduled Tribe status. While the Meiteis argue historical deprivation, tribal groups like the Kukis and Nagas see this as a threat to their constitutional protections and land rights. The High Court order of March 2023 directing the government to recommend ST status for Meiteis acted as a catalyst for mass tribal protests and subsequent violence.

The chapter also evaluates how SC, ST, and OBC reservations function in Manipur, highlighting the uneven distribution of resources and political influence. It critiques the High Court's order for lacking data-based justification and analyses the volatile aftermath, suggesting that this judicial intervention triggered ethnic insecurities and acted as a flashpoint for conflict.

Chapter 4: Events of Violence

This chapter provides a comprehensive and detailed account of the build-up, eruption, and escalation of ethnic violence in Manipur starting on May 3, 2023. It captures both the long-standing tensions and the immediate

sequence of events that led to what the report describes as a state-enabled campaign of ethnic violence.

Drawing from survivor testimonies, civil society documentation, and media reports, this chapter lays bare the systematic nature of the violence, the role of radical groups, the failures of state institutions, and the immense humanitarian fallout that followed.

The seeds of the 2023 violence were sown over several months, even years, through a toxic mix of political agitation, judicial overreach, administrative actions, and hate propaganda.

a. Meitei Demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) Status

- A long-standing demand by sections of the Meitei community to be granted ST status escalated in 2022–2023.
- The claim was fiercely opposed by tribal communities—particularly the Kuki-Zo and Naga groups—who argued that granting ST status to the dominant Meiteis (already enjoying OBC benefits and controlling political and economic levers) would dilute tribal protections and enable Meitei access to reserved forest and hill lands.

b. March 27, 2023 – Manipur High Court Order

- The tipping point came when the Manipur High Court directed the State Government to recommend ST status for Meiteis to the Centre.
- The order was passed without robust anthropological data or tribal consultation, and was widely perceived as judicial overreach.
- It triggered immediate protest from tribal communities, who viewed it as a direct threat to their constitutional safeguards.

c. Other Escalating Factors

- Illegal eviction drives in tribal areas and forest lands were aggressively carried out by the State Government under Chief Minister N. Biren Singh. These were perceived by tribal groups as anti-Kuki moves, particularly when they coincided with aerial surveys and bulldozing of villages alleged to be encroachments.
- A series of hate campaigns labeling Kuki-Zo people as “illegal immigrants,” “narco-terrorists,” and “foreigners” created a hostile atmosphere. These narratives were amplified by Meitei nationalist groups and echoed by state officials.
- Communal media content, including YouTube channels and Facebook pages, spread alarmist and dehumanizing messages.
- Tribal protests were often met with state repression, and peaceful gatherings faced arrests or use of force.

This background created a volatile environment, where ethnic mistrust had peaked and institutional mediation had failed. Against this backdrop, the events of May 3 served as the match that lit the fire.

A peaceful protest march organized by the All Tribal Students’ Union of Manipur (ATSUM) in Churachandpur turned into a flashpoint:

- Meant to oppose the High Court’s ST order, the rally drew thousands from hill communities.
- Violent counter-mobilization erupted, especially in the valley, where armed Meitei youth groups began targeting Kuki homes and churches.

Within hours, the state plunged into communal violence:

- Mobs rampaged through Kuki settlements in Imphal and nearby areas.
- In Churachandpur and Kangpokpi, retaliatory violence emerged against Meitei homes and properties.

The violence spread rapidly across 10 districts, marked by:

- Targeted arson, lynching, and house destruction.
- Destruction of over 250 churches and other minority institutions in the valley.
- Killings of civilians, including women and children, some burned alive or shot at close range.
- Displacement of entire neighborhoods—often pre-marked or identified using voter records and community surveillance.

This was not random mob action, but organized ethnic cleansing, executed with precision and enabled by access to arms, vehicles, and coordination.

Two groups stood out in planning and executing violence:

- **Arambai Tenggol:** A radical group of Meitei men dressed in black, equipped with arms, who led attacks and checkpoint surveillance.
- **Meitei Leepun:** A group with similar ideology, responsible for inciting valley youth, training vigilantes, and spreading hate narratives.

Both operated with what survivors described as “state protection or non-interference”. There were accounts of police handing over looted guns to these groups or standing by during attacks.

More than 4,000 firearms and lakhs of rounds of ammunition were looted from police armories—most in full public view:

- Police and Home Department officials failed to protect these stores.
- There was no immediate effort to recover arms, and few arrests were made even months later.
- State officials offered inconsistent accounts about how the looting occurred.

Security forces, including state police, often appeared ethnically partisan, protecting Meitei mobs while ignoring Kuki appeals for help.

The violence led to the forced displacement of over 60,000 people:

- Kuki-Zo communities were driven out of the valley.
- Meitei communities left tribal-dominated hill areas.

The outcome was a de facto ethnic partition:

- Valley districts became Meitei strongholds, patrolled by armed youth groups.
- Hill districts became Kuki-Zo strongholds, inaccessible to Meitei police or politicians.

No official policy supported this division, but it was effectively enforced on the ground through fear and arms.

Chief Minister N. Biren Singh did not step down, despite mounting calls from tribal MLAs and civil society. The state government:

- Downplayed the violence as “clashes” or “disturbances.”
- Made no significant arrests of radical group leaders.
- Denied the scale of displacement and suffering.

The Prime Minister and Home Minister remained silent during the most critical days, while the Supreme Court delayed hearings. By the time relief arrived, entire communities had been uprooted.

The conflict has continued, evolving into a protracted war of attrition, with:

- Shootouts across buffer zones.
- New violence in mixed-ethnicity areas like Jiribam.
- Constant tension in relief camps, where arms are feared to be circulating.

There is no roadmap for reintegration or restitution. Communities remain trapped in ethnic enclosures, with trust completely eroded.

Chapter 4 is a critical exposé of the systematic ethnic violence that unfolded in Manipur, rooted in long-standing grievances but triggered by political and judicial insensitivity, and enabled by organized militias and state complicity.

It concludes that the violence was:

- Planned, not spontaneous.
- Ethnically targeted,
- Facilitated by state failures.

Chapter 5: Gender-Based Violence

This chapter presents the gendered impact of the conflict. It begins with a historical overview of women's roles in Manipur's public life, noting how women's groups like Meira Paibi have been instrumental in peace movements but are now divided along ethnic lines.

The report documents widespread sexual violence during the conflict, including cases of gang rapes and parading of naked women. Many incidents went unreported due to fear, trauma, and lack of institutional support. Victims have received little justice, and the police have often been complicit.

The chapter also examines how women have been both victims and perpetrators. In some instances, women actively participated in looting and violence, while in others, they protected their communities and helped in negotiations. It analyzes the disproportionate burden faced by displaced women in relief camps—lack of nutrition, reproductive care, trauma support, and safety.

It concludes by emphasizing the need to include women in peacebuilding efforts and ensure gender-sensitive justice and rehabilitation mechanisms.

Chapter 6: Tracing the Causes

This chapter systematically investigates the multitude of historical, geopolitical, and socio-political causes that triggered and prolonged the conflict. It emphasizes that the violence is not merely a product of spontaneous communal hatred, but rather the result of layered narratives, state failures, and long-term systemic issues.

Refugees from Myanmar and the Free Movement Regime (FMR):

The chapter outlines how demographic anxieties were exacerbated by the steady flow of refugees, mainly from the Chin-Kuki-Zo community, fleeing military repression in Myanmar. While Meitei groups and some Naga voices described this influx as “infiltration,” the tribal communities saw it as a humanitarian crisis. The absence of a clear refugee policy and the existence of the outdated FMR—allowing limited movement across borders without documentation—worsened tensions by blurring the line between asylum-seekers and illegal immigrants.

Geo-Political Considerations:

Manipur’s proximity to international borders (Myanmar, Bangladesh) makes it a geopolitical hotspot. The state's instability is further influenced by regional insurgent groups, arms smuggling, and alleged Chinese strategic interests. The militarized border region allows non-state actors to exploit cross-border ethnic linkages, complicating peace enforcement.

State Failure and Complicity:

Testimonies reveal a deep-rooted belief among victims that the state either allowed the violence to happen or actively participated in it. Many victims and observers attribute the flare-up of violence to the political and administrative decisions of former Chief Minister Biren Singh. There are claims that the state chose to act in the interests of Meitei majoritarianism, weaponized narratives of "illegal migrants," and ignored early signs of violence.

Poppy Cultivation and the Drug Trade:

The chapter connects the expanding drug economy in Manipur—particularly poppy cultivation—with political patronage. Kukis are often vilified as “drug mafias,” but evidence shows that cultivation is driven by poverty, lack of alternatives, and sometimes encouraged by local political or militant networks. This narrative has been used to demonize the entire Kuki population and justify military-style policing.

Disruption of Inter-Community Harmony and Propaganda:

Propaganda through social media and communal messaging has fueled hate. Both Kuki and Meitei narratives have dehumanized each other, invoking histories of violence, betrayal, and religious difference. Rumors and manipulated information have led to paranoia and mob justice.

Rise of Armed Militias:

New radicalized groups, especially Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun, have emerged, armed, and seemingly protected by state forces. Their role in orchestrating violence, with direct access to weapons and impunity, is deeply concerning.

Chapter 7: Popular writings in the media

This chapter analyses the complex role of media—traditional, digital, and social—in the escalation and narrative framing of the Manipur conflict. The media is not just a passive observer in this conflict—it actively shaped public perception and escalated tensions. The report introduces two key frameworks:

- **Information Disorder Theory:** Differentiates between misinformation (false but not harmful), disinformation (false and harmful), and malinformation (true but used maliciously).
- **Media Effects Theory:** Emphasizes how media impacts societal beliefs, behaviors, and policy responses, especially in crisis contexts.

The Manipur media landscape, especially in the valley, was deeply embedded in ethno-political affiliations. Local print and YouTube media disproportionately favoured Meitei narratives and vilified the Kuki-Zo community. State-controlled narratives branded Kukis as “illegal immigrants,” “narco-terrorists,” or “drug mafias”.

- **Print Media:** Continued to play a dominant role, but suffered from partisan bias and lacked investigative rigor.
- **YouTube and Digital Channels:** These gained massive popularity for real-time updates, often spreading unverified or inflammatory content. Some channels became echo chambers for communal hatred.
- **Social Media:** Platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp were used to organize protests, circulate hate messages, and amplify one-sided accounts.

The Editors Guild and testimonies before the Tribunal confirm widespread media bias. Inflammatory reporting and misinformation contributed significantly to public panic and inter-communal hostility. Journalists who attempted neutral or critical reporting were intimidated. Veteran journalists revealed a chilling uniformity in stating that the violence was orchestrated and could have been curtailed in days had the

state government acted responsibly. Their accounts pointed to the complicity of the state and media in fueling and sustaining the crisis.

Chapter 8: Relief, Rehabilitation, and Rebuilding Lives

This chapter evaluates the humanitarian response to the crisis, focusing on the quality of aid, living conditions in relief camps, and long-term recovery efforts. Relief and rehabilitation are framed not just as administrative challenges but as human rights obligations. The report assesses state performance against:

- The Disaster Management Act, 2005
- The National Guidelines for Temporary Shelters (2019)
- International disaster relief standards.

Over 60,000 displaced people were housed in 350+ camps. Initial state aid included ex-gratia payments, ration kits, and temporary shelters. However, these measures were grossly inadequate, delayed, and unevenly distributed.

Relief camps suffered from:

- Poor sanitation and hygiene
- Inadequate healthcare
- Absence of mental health support
- Lack of education and livelihood restoration

The Tribunal also observes a stark disparity between Meitei and Kuki camps. Camps in the valley (mainly Meitei) received more consistent support than those in the hills (mainly Kuki).

The Joint Rapid Needs Assessment (JRNA) and Gita Mittal Committee found severe deficiencies in state efforts. Their recommendations—covering shelter, nutrition, sanitation, education, and psychosocial support—were largely unimplemented.

Chapter 9: Navigating Health and Mental Well-Being

This chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of the public health and mental well-being crisis that has unfolded as a result of the ongoing ethnic conflict in Manipur. It highlights the stark failures in healthcare delivery, the collapse of mental health support systems, and the deep psychosocial trauma experienced by survivors—particularly among displaced and vulnerable groups such as women, children, and the elderly.

Even before the outbreak of violence in May 2023, Manipur's healthcare landscape was marked by regional disparities and systemic neglect, especially in tribal-dominated hill areas. The state's health indicators—such as maternal mortality, immunization rates, and access to institutional deliveries—were significantly worse in districts inhabited by the Kuki-Zo and Naga communities. Infrastructure in the hill districts suffered from:

- Inadequate numbers of Primary Health Centres (PHCs) and Sub-Centres.
- Shortage of doctors, nurses, and essential medicines.
- Geographic inaccessibility and underfunded mobile health units.

This legacy of health inequity formed the backdrop against which the conflict-induced humanitarian emergency unfolded. Once violence erupted, the fragile healthcare system crumbled completely in affected regions. Several critical developments were noted:

- Targeted attacks on hospitals and clinics, particularly in tribal areas.
- Evacuation or flight of medical staff due to safety concerns.
- Looting and destruction of medical supplies and ambulances.
- Complete breakdown in referral networks and transport infrastructure.

As thousands of people were displaced and forced into relief camps, healthcare access became even more limited. Many people died not

directly due to violence but from preventable and treatable conditions such as:

- Diarrhoea, respiratory infections, and fever due to overcrowding and poor sanitation.
- Lack of access to insulin, antiretrovirals, and chronic disease medication.
- Inability to access pregnancy-related care, leading to stillbirths and maternal mortality.

In some cases, patients were denied treatment on communal lines, highlighting how the conflict undermined the ethics of medical neutrality. Relief camps—where over 60,000 people now reside—were found to be grossly underprepared to manage even basic health needs. Field investigations and testimonies reveal:

- No structured healthcare system or stationed doctors in most camps.
- Irregular medical visits by government teams and NGOs.
- Acute shortages of medicines, hygiene products, and clean water.
- Lack of screening and quarantine for communicable diseases.
- Absence of maternal and neonatal care.

The state's failure to follow its own Disaster Management protocols has led to secondary health disasters. Women have given birth in unsanitary tents without skilled birth attendants, and the elderly often go without essential medications.

While the physical health toll was visible, the mental health crisis remains an under-addressed and potentially longer-lasting consequence of the conflict. Key psychological impacts include:

- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among survivors who witnessed extreme violence, including killings, rape, and arson.

- Acute anxiety and depression among displaced individuals facing uncertainty, loss of livelihood, and family separation.
- Children suffering from sleep disturbances, emotional withdrawal, bedwetting, aggression, and learning disabilities.
- Women survivors of sexual violence experiencing shame, silence, and lack of safe spaces for redressal or care.

There is no systematic mental health intervention currently in place. Relief camps lacked even basic counselling services. Psychiatrists and trauma specialists are either unavailable or not integrated into emergency health responses.

A major theme in this chapter is the invisibility of health suffering in public and political discourse. Despite widespread suffering:

- Government reports often omit or underplay health crises.
- Relief allocations prioritize security and logistics over public health.
- Official media and political speeches rarely mention trauma or long-term rehabilitation.

This silence around health, especially mental health, reinforces cycles of abandonment and undercuts the dignity of survivors. The chapter argues that healing must be at the heart of recovery, and not merely infrastructure rebuilding. Despite systemic failures, the chapter also documents acts of community resilience:

- Informal support networks organized by women's groups and NGOs have provided first-aid, emotional support, and food.
- Mobile health units set up by faith-based groups have reached some isolated camps.
- Local doctors and nurses in non-conflict zones have volunteered to support displaced populations.

These efforts, while commendable, remain insufficient without institutional backing and sustained resources. Chapter 9 paints a sobering picture of how the ethnic conflict in Manipur has devastated the health infrastructure, especially for those already marginalized. It emphasizes that any meaningful recovery must address not only homes and schools, but bodies and minds—with dignity, care, and commitment.

Chapter 10: Justice and Accountability

This chapter presents a searing indictment of the breakdown of legal, judicial, and constitutional mechanisms in Manipur during the 2023–24 ethnic conflict. It analyzes how justice was systematically denied, dissent criminalized, and constitutional safeguards ignored—resulting in a widespread crisis of impunity.

Drawing from field testimonies, legal records, government responses, and independent findings, the chapter explores the failures of courts, police, investigative agencies, and civil society. It paints a picture of not just institutional collapse, but also state complicity and political capture.

The chapter begins with a striking observation: no significant legal deterrence was placed in the path of those committing violence, looting weapons, or spreading hate. Rather than upholding the rule of law, the justice system in Manipur appeared paralyzed or partisan.

Key symptoms of this collapse include:

- Courts failing to issue urgent directives to protect life and property.
- Delayed or absent investigations into serious crimes like gang rapes and arson.
- FIRs being selectively filed, often against members of minority communities.

- Law enforcement officers actively participating in violence or protecting only one ethnic group.

Testimonies confirm that victims were too afraid to approach police stations, and even when they did, their complaints were often ignored or redirected.

While the conflict was triggered in part by a controversial Manipur High Court order in March 2023 directing the State to consider granting Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to Meiteis, the judiciary's post-conflict engagement was marked by:

- Silence or inaction on habeas corpus petitions and public interest litigations.
- Delayed response from the Supreme Court, which intervened only after national outcry over viral footage of women being paraded naked.
- Lack of effort to monitor compliance with court orders on relief, rehabilitation, and investigation.

Several lawyers and human rights defenders testified that they feared filing cases locally due to threats, lack of access, and erosion of judicial independence. Some recounted how judges themselves had to flee or were under pressure from the executive.

Instead of addressing public grievances, the state deployed coercive tools to silence protest and control information. These included:

- Internet shutdowns lasting months—disrupting communication, access to information, and relief coordination.
- Use of sedition and UAPA against activists, journalists, and tribal protestors.
- Surveillance and intimidation of civil society groups and independent media.

The chapter argues that these acts violated not only domestic laws but also international human rights obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

The most disturbing aspect of this chapter is the extensive documentation of police complicity and failure of security forces to maintain neutrality.

Key observations include:

- Selective deployment of police and paramilitary forces, favoring valley (Meitei) regions over hill (Kuki-Zo) regions.
- Failure to prevent the looting of over 4,000 weapons from police armories—despite advance warnings and ongoing tension.
- Visual and testimonial evidence of uniformed personnel escorting or failing to stop violent mobs.
- Absence of arrests in high-profile crimes, including mob lynchings and sexual violence.

In contrast, tribal protestors and survivors were often criminalized, evicted from relief camps, or arrested under vague charges. These dual standards undermined any semblance of impartial policing.

Despite mounting evidence of atrocities, there was no serious attempt to investigate or prosecute those responsible. The State Government:

- Failed to constitute impartial Special Investigation Teams (SITs).
- Did not seek external judicial oversight.
- Ignored requests for protection from witnesses and survivors.
- Rejected calls for the former Chief Minister's resignation or accountability.

Although the Supreme Court eventually appointed a committee led by Justice Gita Mittal and ordered CBI oversight in specific rape cases, these interventions were narrow in scope and lacked follow-through.

The Commission of Inquiry set up under a retired Chief Justice of the Gauhati High Court also faced delays, limited cooperation, and withheld evidence.

The chapter critiques not only the state, but also sections of the legal and civil society ecosystem:

- Bar associations in the valley discouraged or obstructed legal aid to Kuki-Zo survivors.
- Meitei-dominated lawyers' forums boycotted commissions perceived to be neutral.
- Some rights organizations took ethnocentric stances, undermining their credibility.

However, a few courageous voices—including independent journalists, women's groups, and lawyers—continued documenting abuses and providing legal support, often at great personal risk.

The impunity and breakdown of justice in Manipur, the chapter warns, could set a dangerous precedent:

- Normalization of vigilante justice, including ethnic militias operating without legal consequence.
- Permanent alienation of tribal communities, who no longer trust state institutions.
- Institutional erosion in a conflict-ridden federal democracy where law enforcement is communalized.

The report stresses that restoring the rule of law is not just about punishment—but about truth, accountability, reparation, and confidence-building.

Chapter 10 makes it clear that without justice, there can be no peace in Manipur. The absence of legal redress and the collapse of constitutional mechanisms have not only worsened the humanitarian crisis, but also deepened ethnic divisions.

Accountability is not optional—it is foundational to rebuilding trust, democracy, and coexistence. The report calls on India’s judiciary, Parliament, and civil society to reclaim this duty and ensure that Manipur does not become a template for future impunity.

Chapter 11: Strategies for Justice, Peace and Accountability

This chapter moves beyond diagnosis to prescription. It articulates a comprehensive roadmap to address the multi-dimensional crisis in Manipur—a conflict that has laid bare the erosion of the rule of law, the fragility of democratic institutions, and the need for inclusive peacebuilding. Drawing from constitutional principles, comparative global models, and grassroots insights, the chapter lays out strategies for justice, reconciliation, institutional reform, and social healing.

It underscores a central thesis: lasting peace in Manipur cannot be imposed by force or settled through short-term administrative fixes. It requires structural changes, community dialogue, legal accountability, and sustained moral leadership.

The chapter begins by outlining the existing constitutional mechanisms available to address the breakdown of governance in Manipur. These include:

- **Article 355:** Mandates the Union Government to protect a state against internal disturbance and ensure compliance with the Constitution.

- **Article 356:** Empowers the President to impose President's Rule when there is a breakdown of constitutional machinery.
- **Article 263:** Allows for the creation of inter-state councils for coordination.
- **Articles 256 and 257:** Enable the Centre to direct state governance when constitutional obligations are not met.

Despite the clear eligibility of Manipur's crisis for such interventions, the Union Government failed to act, even as constitutional order visibly disintegrated. The Tribunal views this inaction as dereliction of constitutional responsibility.

The chapter calls for urgent activation of these provisions, not as punitive tools, but as mechanisms to restore democratic governance, civilian safety, and institutional credibility.

Any meaningful peace process must begin with the identification and inclusion of all stakeholders. The chapter proposes a three-phase dialogue architecture:

Phase 1: Enumeration and Mapping

- Identify all formal and informal actors: tribal and Meitei communities, civil society organizations, religious leaders, women's groups, student unions, displaced persons, and victims' collectives.
- Ensure proportional representation from affected districts and ethnic groups.

Phase 2: Dialogue and Trust-Building

- Establish multi-tiered platforms for intra-group, inter-group, and state-level discussions.

- Facilitate confidence-building measures such as safe return agreements, resource-sharing negotiations, and joint memorialization efforts.
- Involve neutral peacebuilders and mediators, including human rights institutions, faith-based organizations, and international peace experts where needed.

Phase 3: Implementation and Monitoring

- Create Peacebuilding Task Forces in each district with judicial, administrative, and civil society members.
- Track commitments on justice, reparation, and rehabilitation.
- Monitor hate speech, communal violence indicators, and early-warning signs of escalation.

The chapter draws heavily on comparative transitional justice models, showing how other deeply divided societies have moved from conflict to reconciliation. Key examples include:

- **South Africa:** Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which emphasized truth-telling, amnesty in exchange for confession, and national healing.
- **Rwanda:** Gacaca courts for community-based justice post-genocide.
- **Northern Ireland:** The Good Friday Agreement that institutionalized shared governance and power devolution.
- **Colombia:** Transitional justice processes for FARC militants, emphasizing victim participation and land restitution.
- **Bosnia and Herzegovina:** Role of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in post-conflict accountability.

The report emphasizes that Manipur must adapt—not import—such mechanisms. The local context, including India's federal structure, cultural

diversity, and constitutional framework, requires homegrown innovations in restorative justice.

Building on Chapter 10, this section outlines concrete legal and institutional reforms, including:

- Special Investigative Teams (SITs) for high-profile crimes, monitored by the Supreme Court.
- Independent Prosecution Units to prevent political interference in trials.
- Victim and Witness Protection Programs, especially for survivors of gender-based violence.
- Fast-track courts for conflict-related crimes.
- Truth-telling processes: Public hearings, survivor testimonies, and community documentation initiatives.

It also advocates for restorative justice, which prioritizes acknowledgment of harm, reparations, and reintegration over mere punishment. This could take the form of apology ceremonies, symbolic reparations, or community-led resolution boards.

Justice alone cannot heal the social rupture in Manipur. The chapter stresses civic rebuilding through:

- Peace Education: Introduce curricula that promote empathy, constitutional literacy, and inter-community dialogue.
- Countering Hate Speech: Establish monitoring cells to identify, report, and respond to online and offline hate.
- Media Literacy: Promote critical thinking and digital awareness, particularly among youth.
- Youth Engagement: Mobilize youth leadership in peacebuilding and create employment programs that bridge ethnic divides.

It also emphasizes the central role of women and faith leaders as agents of peace, drawing from feminist peacebuilding traditions and interfaith reconciliation models.

To ensure sustainability, the chapter recommends:

- Setting up a National Peace Commission with a multi-year mandate.
- Funding long-term research on ethnic violence, post-conflict trauma, and institutional reform.
- Creating a Manipur Peace Index to track indicators of safety, integration, and justice delivery.

It argues that ad hoc or episodic interventions will not suffice. Only systematic, monitored, and resourced processes can rebuild trust between the state and its citizens.

Chapter 11 is a call to reimagine Manipur's future—not just through trials and compensation, but through dialogue, inclusion, truth-telling, and civic revival. It insists that peace must be built with the people, not just for them, and that the Indian state must fulfill its constitutional obligation to protect all its citizens equally.

The strategies proposed in this chapter are ambitious but not utopian. They draw from global lessons, local resilience, and constitutional values. If implemented sincerely, they can help transform Manipur from a site of ethnic rupture to a model of democratic recovery.

Preface

The PUCL has been deeply concerned over the state of continuing violence in Manipur ever since 3rd May, 2023, when the first incident of ethnic conflict broke out. The violence, which soon thereafter engulfed Manipur, has continued unabated for the last twenty-four months. The outbreak of violence has resulted in tremendous loss of life and seriously affected the everyday existence of people of Manipur.

The reports of unabated violence in Manipur shock the human conscience. Apart from the steadily growing number of people killed (which has crossed over 260 people as of December 2024), close to about 60,000 people remain displaced from their homes and fields, forced to seek shelter in relief camps where they have languished for many months, still hoping to return to their homes, hearths and fields. Livelihoods have been shattered, education of children and youth, seriously impaired and health access remains a matter of serious concern. There have been numerous horrific incidents including mass killings, rapes, forcible displacement and ethnic cleansing in parts of Manipur. The effect of such ethnic violence is that there are no Kukis living in the Imphal valley just as there are no Meiteis in the hill areas today.

What is perhaps most striking about the prolonged State-wide violence is the total breakdown of constitutional governance in Manipur State. There appears to be a partisan role played by the State Government, and the Central Government refuses to call for a just solution. There is a deep suspicion that the State security forces are not playing a neutral role, and the Army and paramilitary have also been criticised by the contending groups for not being neutral. The armouries of the security forces have been raided several times resulting in the theft of significant quantities of modern arms, weapons, ammunition and explosives which have reportedly

been used in ethnic conflict. Weapons-carrying vigilante groups and well-armed militants of the warring communities are alleged to freely move about without apprehension. Despite twenty-four months having passed, till today the situation of continuing violence persists, with peace seemingly a distant prospect.

Keeping in mind the fact that constitutional governance had been all but impossible and that deep faults and fissures have opened up in the social and cultural fabric of Manipur, in the month of March, 2024 it was felt by the members of the PUCL that an independent tribunal was required which could give a hearing to all sides, put together a consolidated picture of what happened, document people's suffering, ascertain the causes of the current constitutional breakdown as well as come up with recommendations to restore the rule of law and constitutional governance in Manipur. Considering the deep polarization and precarious law and order situation prevailing in Manipur, it was also felt that such an independent people's Tribunal will help restore a sense of confidence and trust in the constitutional order and public institutions.

About the PUCL

The People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) is one of the oldest and largest Human Rights organisations in the country, with a central office in Delhi and units in several States and districts. The main objective is to bring together all those who are committed to the defence and promotion of civil liberties in India irrespective of any difference which they may have in regard to political and economic aims. Its main aim is to uphold and promote by peaceful means, civil liberties and the democratic way of life throughout India. PUCL works through peaceful, non-violent actions including all forms of satyagraha to highlight issues of rights violations and demand for justice to the public and government. It uses dialogic and democratic tools of human rights and undertakes enquiry mechanisms like

Fact Finding Teams and Tribunals to expose the truth related to violations. PUCL also approaches courts whenever necessary and also reaches out to media and social media to inform people about issues. PUCL organises seminars, workshops and training programmes pertaining to human rights issues. More details can be obtained at our website www.pucl.org.

About the Independent People's Tribunal on Manipur

The PUCL announced the constitution of an 'Independent People's Tribunal' in the month of March, 2024, ten months into the ethnic violence in Manipur. The objectives of the Tribunal were the following:

1. Document the violations suffered by the people of Manipur with a specific attention to loss of life, sexual violence and violence suffered by children, women including pregnant women and the elderly.
2. Examine and analyse the performance and responsibilities of the constitutional authorities by documenting the action taken to prevent the violence, provide access to remedy and justice, investigate and prosecute crimes, and in all other ways to provide redressal of violations and make efforts to establish the rule of law.
3. Examine the role of all security agencies as well as government functionaries at all levels of the State and central governments in ensuring law and order and also examine the role of independent national and State based institutions in protecting human rights.
4. Examine existing documentation on the Manipur situation and analyse the reasons for the continuing violence
5. Propose recommendations to repair the torn social, cultural and political fabric of the State.

Some of the jury members and members of the secretariat spent about two weeks in Manipur between May and June, 2024, visiting a few

disturbed areas on both sides and talking to the affected people of all communities, at their homes, in market places, in relief camps, in Tribunal Sittings in the Hall and the camps, meeting a few police and administrative authorities and security forces personnel who were willing to talk, meeting members of the bar, women, youth and other civil society groups, journalists, political leaders. We also met the communities who were not directly involved in the conflict. Since we could not meet everyone in Manipur and since a large number of people were displaced, we also did a three-day sitting in Delhi and several online hearings of affected people and thinkers on the subject, that went up till September, 2024.

Members of the Jury

1. Justice (Retd) Kurian Joseph, former Judge, Supreme Court of India – Chairperson
2. Justice (Retd) K. Kannan, former Judge, Punjab and Haryana High Court
3. Justice (Retd) Anjana Prakash, former Judge, Patna High Court
4. Mr. MG Devasahayam, IAS (Retd), former Addl. Chief Secy, Haryana
5. Dr. Swaraj Bir Singh, IPS (Retd), former DGP, Meghalaya
6. Prof. Uma Chakravarti, Feminist Historian
7. Prof. Virginus Xaxa, Social Scientist and Author
8. Dr. Rosemary Dzuvichu, Peace and human rights activist, former Prof and Head of Department, Department of English, Nagaland University
9. Prof. Tanweer Fazal, Academic and Historian
10. Dr. Sandeep Pandey, Peace Activist
11. Ms. Manjula Pradeep, Feminist Activist and Scholar
12. Dr. Navsharan Singh, Writer, Researcher and Activist
13. Mr. Henri Tiphagne, Advocate, Madras High Court
14. Mr. Aakar Patel, Journalist and Author

Experts on the panel

1. Brinelle D'souza, Academic and Activist
2. Prof. Apoorvanand, Author and Activist
3. Sandhya Gokhale, Feminist Activist

Secretariat, mainly of PUCL members and public-spirited people

1. Kavita Srivastava, President
2. Advocate V. Suresh, General Secretary
3. Advocate Mihir Desai, Vice President
4. Advocate Lara Jesani, National Secretary
5. Prasad Chacko, National council member
6. Chayanika Shah, PUCL member
7. Aishwarya Ravikumar, PUCL member
8. Sayantan Chowdhury, PUCL member
9. Advocate Pritha Paul
10. Advocate Gaurav Cyclewala
11. Dr. Syed Zulfi, Scientist

Chapter 1: Setting the context

1.1. A State at War Within

An unprecedented ethnic conflict has been raging in the Northeastern part of India, in the State of Manipur. The last twenty-four months have seen the subnational majority Meitei – mostly Hindu and Sanamahi, constituting 53% of the population – pitted against the subnational minority Kuki Zou (a conglomerate of 8 tribes) – mostly Christians, who constitute 16% of the population. The other element in this mosaic of ethnic groups is the Naga Tribes, mostly Christians constituting 24% of the population. Though they are an important party in the cultural and political landscape in Manipur and the Northeast, they are not involved in this conflict.

What has been unprecedented in this conflict, is the ethnicization of the State apparatus including law enforcement agencies, as the then Chief Minister and State Government politically supported a section of the majority Meitei community. It is widely believed that the State also assisted in the arming of non-State actors by looking the other way to the looting of arms from State armouries and allowing the violence to go unabated, fanning the insecurities of the majority community and not addressing the issues of the minority Kuki Zou. It failed to take steps to resolve the issue by refusing to call for any dialogue between all communities.

In the initial twelve months, non-State actor armed groups from the majority community, the Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun, snuffed all dissent within the community and started the process of ethnic cleansing of Kuki Zous from their territories by vandalising the latter's properties, setting them on fire, indulging in killings, terrorising them and forcibly and violently displacing the Kuki Zous from the valley. Similarly, while the

violence against the Meiteis in the hill areas inhabited predominantly by the Kuki Zou resulted in fewer lives lost as compared to the valley, the forced displacement there too was complete, along with demolitions of settlements and places of worship.

It is deeply troubling that the Central Government completely failed in its constitutional responsibility to ensure that Manipur remained under the regime of rule of law and within the purview of the Constitution. The Central Government has the power and the responsibility under Articles 355 and 356 to ensure that the governance of every State is carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Indian Constitution. However, while the right to bodily integrity, life and shelter were being violated, the Central Government stood as a mute spectator to this desecration of the promise of the Constitution.

Brutality of the worst kinds on the “other” was at open display through pictures and videos on social media, provoking more violence. Sexual violence was used to express domination and victory of one group over another. The Supreme Court did intervene finally, when these videos were circulated widely through WhatsApp networks, but set up a committee with a narrow mandate to address justice for survivors and victims of sexual violence through rehabilitation, reliefs of compensation and shelter. It did not make the Central and State Governments accountable to take steps to stop the violence or to bring the perpetrators to justice. A commission of enquiry led by former Chief Justice of Guwahati High Court was set up under the Commission of Enquiry Act, 1956 on 4th June, 2023 requiring it to submit its findings in six months. The deadline was extended to 20th November, 2024 and now it has been further extended to 20th May, 2025. The Union Home Minister Amit Shah made some half-hearted attempts at putting together some unsuccessful dialogues, but the Prime Minister decided not to visit Manipur and meet the suffering people, uncharacteristic of any PM of a country. In twenty-four months,

there has been no effort to reassure the people that the Government and the country stands with them and that justice and peace will prevail.

The violence refuses to stop, except when it did for a short period in the run up to the Lok Sabha elections that concluded on 4th June, 2024. With territorial demarcations and buffer zones, armed militia and vigilante forces on both sides, the division of the hearts and minds has only widened. With the Kuki Zou demanding separate administration like an autonomous council for their territory and the Meiteis declaring that the territorial integrity of the State would not be compromised, the differences seem unbridgeable.

Despite an average deployment of more than 1,00,000 paramilitary, military forces and the internal State police, violence once again erupted in June 2024, this time in the western district of Jiribam, bordering Cachar district in Assam. Earlier on 17th May, 2024, a Kuki man's body was found in Vengnua village, Jiribam district. Thereafter, on 6th June, 2024 a Meitei man's body was found in Jiribam. This town, which had largely been unaffected by the ethnic conflict which erupted on 3rd May, 2023, suddenly started experiencing tensions after the May and June incidents. The simmering tensions broke out in a set of brutal killings including of a Hmar woman teacher in Zairawn who was found raped, shot and set on fire on 7th November, 2024. Simultaneously, a number of houses of the Hmars were set on fire. Thereafter, there were rising incidents of burning of homes and churches of Kukis. On 11th November, 2024, six people from the Meitei community including three women, and three children were found missing in Jiribam. Their dead bodies were found on 17th November, 2024. On 11th November, 2024, ten Kuki insurgents were shot dead by the CRPF, and autopsy reports suggested that the eyes of four of the men were gouged.¹

¹<https://www.newsreel.asia/articles/autopsy-reports-indicate-crpf-misconduct-in-manipur>



The Jiribam violence highlighted a shift in the site and context of ethnic violence in Manipur. Jiribam, often described as a cultural melting pot consisting of Meiteis, Kukis, Hmars and Bengalis, is also important for the economy of the area. Located on the Western border of Manipur, Jiribam is also home to an upcoming new railway head. Jiribam remained largely free of ethnic violence from 3rd May, 2023 till mid-2024, until the breakout of very brutal forms of violence in November, 2024. This marks a shift in the ethnic violence towards territorial control of economically important regions, where both Kukis and Meiteis have been displaced to camps.

According to the Security Advisor, Kuldeep Singh, as of 22nd November, 2024 the official death toll since the violence began on 3rd May, 2023 was 258 persons, with more than 50,000 people in relief camps and several injured seriously. Sanjib Baruah in an important paper titled 'When Civilizational Nationalism meets Subnationalism: A Crisis in Manipur' published on 25th March, 2024 quotes Donald L. Horowitz that "an ethnic riot might last anywhere from a few days to several weeks depending on several factors, particularly the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies.

It can be limited to one location or spread across an entire State. Once under control, it might stay that way; or it might smoulder and then pick up again at another opportunity (Horowitz, 2003, 1–2).”

Despite twenty-four months into the conflict, there seems not even a glimmer of hope for a return to normalcy for the kin of the 258 people who lost their lives, for the innumerable injured, for over 50,000+ ‘Internally Displaced People’ (IDPs) who live miserable lives in relief camps. Belonging to the two main conflicting communities, they have been awaiting some relief with respect to the rebuilding of their lives, wishing to restart and put behind the destruction of their home, habitats and belongings.

More than 50,000 IDPs, have been abandoned by the State and forgotten by the political parties. No one – not even the Chief Minister of the State, or the Union Home Minister and also the Prime Minister of India – seems to be concerned about their plight, or to work to bring back peace to the beleaguered people of the State. In a total violation of all constitutional norms and propriety, the State seemingly lives in two zones, with the Imphal valley and its surrounding districts closed to entry of Kuki – Zou community and roads passing through the Hill areas barred to the Meitei community. Hatred and anger were allowed to fester suspicion and hostility, allowed to permeate all narratives and discourse between and amongst the two ethnic communities – the Meiteis and the Kuki-Zos. Reconciliation, peace building and building harmonious relations appear as alien concepts.

While the political establishment in the State as also the Centre remains unbothered and unmoved by the continuing saga of violence, impunity from accountability and a sense of hopelessness haunt and pervade the people of Manipur. In all this, should we, in the rest of India remain mute spectators to what many commentators are calling ‘acts of ethnic

cleansing’, ‘human catastrophe’ and ‘crimes against humanity’? As concerned citizens, do we all, in the rest of India, not own up to our responsibility for what is happening to our own people, in Manipur, and intervene to help build peace and harmony in the State?

It was to address these human rights concerns as well as other humanitarian concerns that the ‘Independent People’s Tribunal on Manipur’ was constituted, comprising of persons drawn from different fields from all across India – amongst whom are former judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts, former bureaucrats, academics, women’s rights, Dalit rights and human rights activists and advocates. As a group, the jury and secretariat went on to visit and meet family members of the victims and survivors, talked to children, women, men, elderly and the displaced people living in camps, citizen’s groups, media professionals, academics and experts, officials and ordinary people in Manipur, to inquire into the question of what truly happened and what can be done to bring back peace and promote reconciliation among the people of Manipur.

1.2. Immediate reasons for the conflict: Retracing the mainstream media version

Mainstream media narratives stress that the immediate trigger to the ethnic conflict that engulfed Manipur seems to be an order of a single Judge bench of the Manipur High Court dated 27th March, 2023 in a Writ Petition filed in March 2023. The said order directed the State Government to consider the Meitei community’s demand to be listed as Scheduled Tribe and to send recommendations within four weeks to the Central Government regarding the same.

The demand for Meiteis’ inclusion in the ST list is not a new one. It has all along been opposed by other communities already listed as Scheduled Tribes, like the Nagas and Kuki-Zo communities, as weakening their

status. The immediate impact of the HC order was an announcement by the All-Tribal Students Union of Manipur (ATSUM), an influential students' body in the state, for statewide demonstrations in all the tribal districts of Manipur on 3rd May, 2023.

The hill districts of the state, including the nine tribes, the Kuki Zo and the Nagas, organised a peaceful rally on 3rd May, 2023, protesting that the order should not be acted upon. The rally by the Kukis Zo and the Naga Tribal groups all over the hill regions ended peacefully by mid-day of 3rd May, 2023. In Churachandpur, a historically and administratively important city, more than 15,000 to 20,000 Kukis marched, and by all accounts, the march ended peacefully by early afternoon.

1.3. Rumours galore and snowballing violence

But following the march, a series of incidents happened which triggered violence. According to ATSUM, even as many of the rally participants were dispersing, a rumour spread that some members of the Meitei radical groups, like the ArambaiTengol and Meitei Leepun, had set fire to a portion of the Anglo-Kuki War Memorial Gate situated in one area of Churachandpur. The situation in Churachandpur on 3rd May, 2023 was already very tense since a forest office in the district had already been burnt in the intervening night of 28-29th April 2023.

On hearing that the Memorial Gate had been set on fire allegedly by the Meitei radicals, agitated Kuki community members rushed to the area to find out what happened and to put out the fire. At that time, it is reported that members of Meitei vigilante groups – the ArambaiTengol and Meitei Leepun– were standing with the State police at the Memorial Gate. Soon a clash erupted between the Kuki and the Meitei groups and resulted in widespread violence and arson of Meitei settlements in Churachandpur. As a result, Meiteis living in settlements in Churachandpur moved into the

camps of the Assam Rifles in the city, fearing attacks. At the end of the day, a number of people were killed in the clashes.

Meanwhile, rumours spread amongst the Meitei community in Imphal that some Meitei women had been gangraped and killed in Churachandpur. Enraged groups of Meitei youth and members of the two vigilante groups of Meiteis, the Arambai Tengol (AT) and Meitei Leepun (ML), went around Imphal attacking Kuki settlements and neighbourhoods in Imphal. This led to the burning down of the homes of many Kuki Zo families in the valley along with the desecration of churches in the city. Fearing for their life, the Kuki Zo residents of Imphal fled to CRPF and Assam Rifle camps in the valley. In the ensuing violence, many Kuki women were gang raped and killed in Imphal city, videos of which surfaced many months later causing a national furore.

Brutality of the worst kinds on the “other” was at open display through pictures and videos on social media, provoking more violence. As always in such a situation, women’s bodies became the sites for the expression of the aggressive Manipur sub-nationalisms, contestations and assertion of ethnic identities. Sexual violence was used to express domination and victory of one group over another.

There are heartbreaking stories on both sides, with many people living with the trauma even today. With the AT and ML – assisted by the Meira Paibi women – taking control of the city of Imphal and other Meitei majority districts and parading the Valley, the Valley was in full control of the Meiteis. Similarly, with the Kuki Women’s association and the Kuki Students’ Organisation and other groups taking charge in the hills, the hill regions came under the control of the Kukis.

Over the days and weeks after 3rd May, 2023, the ethnic violence spread across many districts, leaving in its wake hundreds of people killed in the

most brutal fashion. Houses were burnt, crops were destroyed, belongings were looted, ransacked and destroyed and communities were made homeless.

More than 60,000 people fled their villages in the initial days and moved into one of the 302 camps for safety, which hardly had any basic facilities. The conflict resulted in disruption of people's livelihoods, children's education, health, loss of social security entitlements and simply being denied access to their home and hearth. Many people lost their lives due to lack of access to healthcare during and in the immediate aftermath of the conflict, including as a result of territorial demarcation. The conflict has also seriously affected the mental health of the people of Manipur with numerous suicides reported in the fall out. The numbers of both the camps and IDPs reduced a little but not substantially. As of November 2024, there were 50,000 people in relief camps.

In all this, the Nagas, who constitute a substantial part of the population of Manipur, have had to bear the consequence of this ethnic conflict in terms of territorial demarcation, through buffer zones, manning borders by either community, which affect their access and mobility to various regions. However, they have tried to remain neutral as far as possible and not enter the fray. Whether the ST status is granted to the Meiteis, or a separate administration and formation of an autonomous council is granted to the Kuki Zou community in the hill region, it will affect the Naga community in Manipur, since they are STs themselves and residents of the hill areas. They feel threatened by the demand of both the Meiteis and the Kukis.

1.4. Search for the Truth: Going beyond the mainstream narrative

As observed above, even after twenty-four months since the conflict started, the violence refuses to stop, except for a short period in the run up to the Lok Sabha elections that concluded on 4th June, 2024. Even in this, soon after the results of the Lok Sabha elections were announced, ethnic violence broke out in a totally new district previously untouched by the violence – the district of Jiribam, bordering Assam, where from the 2nd week of June, major clashes have erupted between the Meiteis, Kuki-Zos, and the security forces.

The sheer scale of cruel savagery and depravity exhibited in the violence by both communities, is both staggering and saddening. It raises the issue of what could have caused such extreme brutality, including dismembering of dead bodies and stringing body parts into necklaces and sharing them through videos which are widely viewed.

A careful scrutiny of the depositions of many victims, survivors, eyewitnesses and others clearly reveals a pattern of incidents which raises doubts about the mainstream media's version of events as being very superficial. This can be expressed in the form of the following concerns:

1. Can the violence of 3rd May, 2023 be explained merely as spontaneous or incidental eruptions of hatred pursuant to the Manipur HC order on inclusion of Meiteis in the ST list? Or is it the manifestation or culmination of a long process of ethnic hostility, suspicion and animosity which has been systematically built up using a variety of media including social media, print and audio-visual media and so on, especially in the days leading to 3rd May, 2023.

2. Put differently, is there factual material to show that some of the groups had already started planning to use the occasion of the Protest announced by the Tribal Groups on 3rd May, 2023, to unleash violence on the “other” community? Were some of these armed, vigilante groups present in places which witnessed violence, on 3rd May, and other days and did they play a role in organising attacks leading to looting, ransacking, injuring, killing, raping and other violent acts?
3. On 3rd May, 2023 the Vice-President of India was to visit Manipur, and security protocols in the normal course, would not permit mass protest events to be organised or conducted. Was the permission to the tribal groups to conduct the Statewide protests on 3rd May, 2023, including in places like Churachandpur, given only to use the occasion to attack the minority Kuki groups? This is especially so considering that a gym the CM was to inaugurate in Churachandpur on 28th April, 2023 had been burnt down by Kuki militants and there were other incidents of mass protests and violence.
4. What is the veracity of the allegation that the two non-State actor armed groups – the ArambaiTengol and Meitei Leepun –were formed, supported and/ or patronised by then Chief Minister, Biren Singh? And that, therefore they were found standing next to the State police in Churachandpur? And that, the police were directed to be indifferent to the looting of arms from the State armoury, and the State allowed the violence to go unabated by fanning the insecurities of the majority community?
5. To what extent have the State security forces – the police, Commandos and other special forces – been ‘ethnicised’ or divided on ethnic lines of Meitei and Kuki-Zo, Naga and other identities? Has this played a role during the violence of the last twenty-four months by way of action or inaction during times of mass crimes? Is ‘ethnicisation’ reflected in other administrative

processes like allocation of funds and resources, human power allocations, rolling out of Central Government and State Government schemes?

6. Is the contention correct that the Manipur police / security forces having a long history of confronting and controlling conflicts, could easily control the outbreak of violence within a short period of time following the outbreak on 3rd May, 2023? Is there validity in the allegation that they stood as bystanders when the violence engulfed the State and did nothing to prevent violent crimes happening in their presence and at times even participated in the crimes?

With territorial demarcations and buffer zones, armed militia and vigilante forces on both sides, the division of the hearts and minds has only widened. On the one hand is the demand of the Kuki Zo communities for separate administration like an autonomous council for their territory which is vigorously opposed by the Meiteis declaring that the territorial integrity of the State would not be compromised. On the other hand, the Nagas are opposing the demand for Separate Administration put up by the Kukis while also opposing the Meitei demand for inclusion in the ST list. With so much simmering conflict, the differences seem unbridgeable.

1.5. Role of the Central Government: Reluctance to act or Complicity in Conflict?

It is deeply troubling that the Central government completely failed in its constitutional responsibility to ensure that Manipur remained under the regime of both rule of law and the Constitution. The Central government had the power and the responsibility under Articles 355 and 356 to ensure that the 'government of every State is carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.' The rights to life, property and bodily

integrity have been violated and the Central government has stood as a mute spectator.

Despite the demand by many political parties, including from within the ruling BJP party that the handling of the crisis by the Chief Minister was itself part of the problem, the Central government and the BJP leaders have shown a marked reluctance to make changes. The efforts of the Home Minister, Amit Shah, have not had any effect in helping to calm the tempers in the conflict prone State and to bring peace to the State. He has made some half-hearted attempts at putting together a dialogue process.

More noticeably, the Prime Minister decided not to visit Manipur and meet the suffering people, uncharacteristic of any PM of a country, given the scale of violence suffered by the State. It is incumbent upon the supreme executive authority to make clear that unconstitutional actions will not be tolerated, to console the people who have suffered grievous loss, to ensure security of life to all the residents of Manipur and to promise to rebuild the broken lives of the people of Manipur. Most vitally the Prime Minister should have guaranteed that the people of Manipur are entitled to the Preambular promise of justice. An important element of leadership is to be able to console people in distress. The Prime Minister showed himself incapable of being such a leader. For several months after violence burst out, the Prime Minister was silent. He only broke his months-long silence after a video of two women being paraded naked and subjected to blatant acts of sexual assault by a group of men went viral in July 2023. He said the incident shamed India and that the guilty will not be spared. But since then, the PM has gone back to being silent and has not visited the State even twenty-four months after the outbreak of violence. The silence of the Prime Minister further marginalizes the suffering people of Manipur and implicitly denies their constitutional status as equal citizens of India.

The parliamentary opposition got the Prime Minister to speak only after they tabled a no confidence motion about the crisis on 10th August, 2023. The PM was mainly focused on narrating the accomplishments of his government and criticising the opposition, also adding that "there would soon be peace in Manipur" and that the whole country would get behind resolution efforts. But peace evades Manipur even after twenty-four months.

1.6. What makes this conflict different from earlier conflicts

In order to understand today's conflict, it is important to see how Manipur has existed over the last seventy-five years being a part of the Indian Union.

The Manipur Maharaja had declared the kingdom of Manipur a constitutional Monarchy, about the same time as India became Independent in 1947, and gave itself a Constitution in 1947 itself. They had their first election by 1948 with the formation of a State assembly and a Council of Ministers and a Chief Minister. The accession treaty and merger with the Indian Union was only signed in 1949. This treaty was protested by a section of Meiteis and the sentiment never died out. The territory that came with the merger was the territory that the British and Burmese recognised in their various treaties and put down on their maps. A small section disputed what comprised the territory of merger, asserting that the merger was restricted only to the valley.

The relationship between Meiteis and the Indian State has always been very contentious, very different from that of the Kuki Zou community and the Indian State. The latter were active in the Independence movement, by being members of the Indian National Army and many also laid down their lives. Several also joined the Indian National Congress

which led the independence struggle and felt connected to the Indian State and country as their own.

The armed secessionist movement by a section of the Meitei community since 1964, with the formation of the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) continues. Although many other subnational secessionist groups also sprang up, the defining feature has been the draconian Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), 1958, which has been in use against the people of the Northeast since pre-independence, when the Britishers enacted it in another name in 1942, to check the protests of the Quit India movement but expanded it to the North East region. This law gives exceptional powers to the Indian Army and paramilitary against the Indian people, wherever it is notified. For the last six decades, the Indian military and paramilitary have been at the core of State violence in the entire northeast including the valley region of Manipur. Encounters, rapes, disappearances, women being rendered 'half widows', have been the story of ordinary people's lives. Challenging AFSPA through long periods of fasts, like the historic satyagraha of Irom Sharmila for 15 years, and demanding its repeal defined the priority of civil society. Litigation in hundreds of 'encounter deaths' and disappearances are still ongoing in the Supreme Court. What is striking is that this time it is not about State violence against any community wanting to secede, but ethnic violence between two communities.

It is important to ask whether shifts have taken place in the Meitei nationalist discourse. From secession and autonomy, whether the dominant discourse now is seeking adjustment with the nationalist discourse of Hindutva and Hindu Rashtra and wanting space in the Indian elite spectrum. Or is it mere exhaustion of being a rebellious group, which has resulted in a decline for the demand for secession and sovereignty, as several groups, including the UNLF (P) and the KCP (People's War

Group) have surrendered to the Indian State while eight groups remain banned under the UAPA?

At this juncture it is important to note that the Kuki Zo tribes have felt very safe with the Indian security forces, particularly the paramilitary Assam Rifles and other wings of the military and have frequently argued for imposition of AFSPA for their security.

The contentious issues and the jingoism this time was built around the fault lines that have existed for a long time between the Meiteis and the Kuki Zous. The Meitei rhetoric is one that portrays the Kuki Zous as the outsiders, as tenants in their country, while the Meiteis were the original settlers of Manipur. It is one that propagates that the Meiteis would become a minority if the open borders and infiltration from Myanmar of the Kuki-Chin are not checked. The narrative is that the Kuki-Zou communities were involved in the illegal narcotics trade, with poppy cultivation and trans-border drug trafficking, and have developed a parallel economy, leading to narco-terrorism, which was a cause of concern for the entire society. And finally, they portray that the Kuki-Zou population was encroaching on as much as 90% of the forest lands on the hills and expanding their population through infiltration. However, the fundamental concern of the Meitei was their inability to buy land for cultivation in the hill regions, being non-tribals. The other grievance is that the Kukis and Nagas were present at all levels of the bureaucracy, including the higher echelons, which the Meiteis felt was due to reservation for STs.

It is important to ask as to why these prejudices have suddenly erupted and have led to a situation of intractable violence. The Meiteis and Kukis, in their 150 years history or longer, have never had such an ethnic war, they have lived together as neighbours with their differences and prejudices, with a spirit of fraternity. The Meiteis, Nagas, Kuki-Zous and

the Meitei Pangals (the Meitei Muslims), have been part of conflicts, leaving behind a horrific past. It is important to ask who is facilitating this present conflict when the State has the complete capacity to contain it. What is the State's interest in it continuing? Who is gaining from it? These are important issues that need to be addressed, as it is through these questions that the vital and fundamental question of achieving a political solution for peace and coexistence will emerge.

It has been well established in the visits by Tribunal members to the relief camps and by news reports that the ordinary people, both Meitei and Kuki, do not want this conflict to continue any more. It is in this context that the proposal of forming an 'Independent People's Tribunal' was initiated by the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) to probe into the history and context of the ethnic crisis that has engulfed Manipur and to propose measures to help heal the scars and wounds of the horrific violence suffered by people of all the various communities in Manipur. The scheme of the report is not merely to document the beginnings of the conflict and the ineffable human sufferings that have resulted but also to ask the hard questions on the state of non-governance and mis-governance. The report ends with an overview of the tragedy and possible ways forward.

Chapter 2: Manipur, The State

2.1. Demographic Structure

The State of Manipur is spread over an area of 22, 237 sq km. It constitutes 0.7% of the total geographic area of India. The State shares about 355 km of the international boundary with Myanmar. Manipur like all other Northeastern States is a landlocked State. It is marked principally by two distinct physical features- the valley and the hills. The valley stretches about 60 km north to south and 30 km east to west. The hills form 90 percent of the total geographical area of the State and the rest 10 percent comprises the valley.

The population of Manipur as per the 2011 census (provisional) was 23.89 lakh constituting 0.23 percent of the total population of India. The hill areas account for 41.20% of the total population of the State while the valley of 58.90 per cent. The density of the population is 107 persons per sq. km. for the State. However, it varies across the valley and the hills. Whereas the density is 730 per sq, km in the valley it is approximately 61 per sq.km for the hills.² However, often such comparison is misleading as much of the hills are unsuitable for habitation and cultivation leading to a relatively high density of population over the area under cultivation or habitation. The population inhabiting Manipur comprises majorly of three distinct ethnic groups- the Meiteis in the valley and the Naga and Kuki-Chin tribes in the hills. The Meitei Muslims referred to as Pangals form a small minority. Besides these, other ethnic groups are hailing from different States of India who have settled in the State forming a tiny minority.

² Conflict Studies Quarterly, Issue 48, July 2024, pp 72-95.

As per 2011 census, there were 33 Scheduled Tribes in Manipur which fell broadly into distinct ethnic and linguistic family groups of Naga and Kuki-Chin. The Scheduled Tribes population in Manipur was enumerated at 7.4 lakh (3.79 lakh males and 4.67 females) as against 6.32 lakh in 2001. There are 7 Scheduled Caste communities in Manipur.

The population in Manipur as mentioned earlier is unevenly distributed over its territory. The uneven distribution is further characterized by distinct ethnic, religious as well as caste, and tribe configurations. In other words, the territory inhabited by the population is not mere geographical territory but it also overlaps with distinct ethnic, religious, caste, and tribe divisions. This is best illustrated in the table below showing district-wise population alongside caste and tribe distribution. This in turn assumes distinct ethnicity and religious affiliation. The district-wise scheduled tribe and scheduled caste population is presented in Table 1³.

SL NO	DISTRICT	Population	Sex Ratio per 1000 males	Density per Sq. Km	Scheduled Caste			Scheduled Tribe		
					Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
1.	KAKCHING	4,22,168	998	708	33,969	16,640	17,329	4,274	2,200	2,074
2.	THOUBAL									
3.	TENGNOUPAL	1,44,182	981	36	210	107	103	1,08,779	54,692	54,087
4.	CHANDEL									
5.	PHERZAWL	2,74,143	944	50	205	179	26	2,12,482	1,07,002	1,05,480
6.	CHURACHANDPUR									
7.	KANGPOKPI	4,79,148	935	87	238	143	95	1,22,791	61,785	61,006
8.	SENAPATI									
9.	IMPHAL WEST	5,14,683	1004	856	13,276	6,646	6,630	21,118	10,478	10,640
10.	JIRIBAM	4,56,113	991	557	10,409	5,374	5,035	24,712	12,382	12,330
11.	IMPHAL EAST									

³<https://slbcne.nic.in/manipur/booklet/72th%20SLBC%20Booklet%20September%20%202022.pdf>, last accessed on 21st April, 2025

12.	BISHNUPUR	2,40,363	993	420	1,727	842	885	6,143	3,064	3,079
13.	NONEY	1,40,651	922	25	3	X	3	1,06,349	54,020	52,329
14.	TAMENGLONG									
15.	KAMJONG	1,83,998	916	31	210	X	X	1,34,493	68,696	65,797
16.	UKHRUL									
Total		28,55,794	8684	2770	60,247	29,931	30,106	56,247	2,67,317	2,61,342

Table 1 - District-wise Population, sex ratio, Density, etc. (As per the 2011 Census)

Language and religion are important markers of social identity in India. This is amply true. The reorganization of the Northeastern region in 1972 resulting in the creation of new States, has been a manifestation of it. The States in the region point to two distinct patterns. Whereas Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Manipur are predominantly tribal inhabited States, Assam, Tripura, and Sikkim which were added into Northeast in 2002, have a minority tribal population giving rise to distinct problems of identity and development. Manipur is linguistically divided into three distinct groups the Meiteis, Nagas, and Kuki-Zous. Each of these linguistic families is divided along religious lines. Hinduism is the majority religion in the State of Manipur with 41.39% followers. Christianity is the second most popular religion in Manipur State with 41.29 % following it. In Manipur, Islam is followed by 8.40 %, Jainism by 0.06 %, Sikhism by 0.05 % and Buddhism by 0.05 %. Around 8.19 % Stated 'Other Religion', approximately 0.38 % Stated 'No Particular Religion'. The table below presents the religious profile of the population of Manipur.

2.1.1. Their respective geographical distribution

While the valley region of Manipur is predominantly inhabited by the Meitei community, some Scheduled Tribes are also found in the peripheries and mixed areas. The majority of the SC population in Manipur resides in the Imphal Valley, which includes the districts of Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal, and Bishnupur. The Meitei

community, including its SC sub-groups, is concentrated in these areas. Most of the Scheduled Tribes in Manipur are primarily concentrated in the hill districts of the State. These districts include: (1) Churachandpur District: Home to tribes like the Paite, Simte, Zou, Gangte, and others. (2) Senapati District: Inhabited by tribes such as Mao, Maram, and the Kacha Naga (Liangmai, Zeme, Rongmei, and Inpui). (3) Tamenglong District: Predominantly inhabited by Kabui (Rongmei) and Zeme tribes; (4) Ukhrul District: Mainly inhabited by the Tangkhul tribe; (5) Chandel District: This district is home to tribes like the Anal, Lamkang, Moyon, and Monsang.

2.2. Religious affiliations

The distribution of population through religious affiliation gives a telling account of the demographics⁴.

Religious Communities	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Hindu	6,32,597	8,53,180	10,59,470	9,96,894	11,81,876
Muslim	70,969	99,327	1,33,535	1,90,939	2,39,836
Christian	2,79,243	4,21,702	6,26,669	7,37,578	11,79,043
Sikh	1,028	992	1,301	1,653	1,527
Buddhist	495	473	711	1,926	7,084
Jain	1,408	975	1,337	1,461	1,692

⁴ The table is excluding Mao Maram, Paomata and Purul Sub-division of Senapati District.

Others	83,167	35,490	14,066	2,35,280	23,3767
Religion not Stated	3,846	8,814	60	1,057	10,969
Total	10,72,753	14,20,953	18,37,149	21,66,788	28,55,794

Table 2 - Distribution of Population by Religion in Manipur (1971-2011)

For the hilly districts, the total Hindu population (2011) is 77,225 and the Christian population is 11,19,719. The Christians constitute 92% of the total hilly population of 12,22,122. For the valley the population details are as under: Hindus- 11,04,651 (68%); Muslims- 2,30,511 (14%); Christians- 59,324 (3%); Others- 2,28,661 (14%); Total- 16,33,672

The projected population figures (keeping the same decadal growth rate for 2001-2011) for hilly and valley regions are 18,04,683 and 19,86,023, giving a total population for the State as 37,90,706.

	SC	ST
Hill	2253	1110509
Valley	95075	56913
Total	97328	1167422

Table 3 - Social group wise population as per 2011 census

2.3. The urban- rural divide

Further, urbanisation, marked by improved consumption levels, education and employment through the presence of economic opportunities, marketing centres, government offices, concentration of infrastructural facilities, is slower in the Northeastern parts than the rest of India. The 2011 Census shows for the rest of India, it is 31.14% of the entire

population, while for Manipur, it stands at 29.21%. Wide intra-State disparities in the level of development exist between the valleys and the Hills, and widespread migration has taken place to the Imphal region for better employment opportunities, healthcare facilities and educational institutions. People in hilly areas have only limited occupations and are deficient in infrastructural development. Given the relatively higher population distribution among Meiteis and Kukis in Urban and rural areas respectively, the Planning Commission has recorded in 2011-12, 32.59% of the urban population and 38.80% of the rural population live below the poverty line in Manipur.

The present information on rural and urban performance with respect to a number of social indicators. They are concerned with some relevant educational indicators, provide information on access to certain basic amenities; deal with aspects of women's well-being; one deals with aspects of child welfare and health; and the other deals with aspects of adult nutrition, health and health-care. The contents of the tables require little elaboration: across the tables, information has been presented on some 28 social/developmental indicators, and in all but one case, rural Manipur is seen to be relatively disadvantaged vis-à-vis its urban counterpart which, as argued in the earlier section, offers some support for the view that Kukis are relatively disadvantaged vis-à-vis the Meitei community; only *relatively*.

Indicator	Urban %	Rural %	Ratio of Rural % to Urban %
Population living in households with improved drinking water source	90.4	68.9	0.76

Population living in households that had an improved sanitation facility	60.6	67.5	1.11
Women who have ever used the internet	50.8	40.4	0.80
Men who have ever used the internet	81.5	68.2	0.84

Table 4 - Rural and Urban Performance with Respect to Access to Select Amenities: Manipur, 2019-20

2.3.1. Matters of education

In terms of percentages, the total literates (excluding 0-6 age group) is 7,65,549 which constitutes 63% of the rural population. The total number of literates (excluding 0-6 age group) in urban Manipur is 11,42,927 constituting 70% of the urban population. The difference between the rural literacy rates and the urban literacy rates is not too wide. In fact, in Churachandpur which is dominated by Kukis the literacy rates are quite high. Even if the infrastructure development in rural Manipur is less, the literacy rates are on a higher side.

Indicator	Urban %	Rural %	Ratio of Rural % to Urban %
Female Population age 6 years and above who ever attended school	88.4	81.2	0.92
Children aged 5 years who attended pre-primary school during the school year 2009-20	31.3	21.8	0.70

Women who are literate	92.1	84.8	0.92
Women with 10 or more years of schooling	60.0	40.6	0.68
Men with 10 or more years of schooling	66.9	52.7	0.79

Table 5 - Rural and Urban Performance with Respect to Select Educational Indicators: Manipur, 2019-20⁵

2.3.2. Inequality dynamics in Urban Manipur

An interesting study has been undertaken (i) to decompose the total urban inequality to examine the importance of special factors (within and between-districts) in terms of their respective contribution to the change in total urban consumption inequality in the State and (ii) to analyse the inequality decomposition based on the regression approach at the household level to understand the role of household characteristics in explaining the consumption inequality dynamics in urban Manipur⁶. The authors observe that the existence of large inequality in any economy depends on how the opportunities, especially employment associated with economic growth, are shared among different sections of the population. Also, no significant study is made with respect to the regression-based inequality decomposition based on various household characteristics such as caste, household type, education, etc, in North-East India, particularly in Manipur. It is another way of saying that there is no hard data available on the level of distribution of wealth among *Meiteis* and *Kukis* or of education. Socio-economic indicators do not support the statement that Meiteis are far too well off as compared to Kukis. Other indicators could be agricultural holdings and the number of business establishments but

⁵ Source: Based on data in 'Manipur – Key Indicators,' *National Family Health Survey – 5 2019-20*, *State Fact Sheet: Manipur*, International Institute of Population Sciences

⁶ Inequality Dynamics in Urban Manipur, India: A decomposition analysis, Utpal Kumar De & Loitongbam Hena Devi, Social Indicators Research (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s 11205-023-03096-8> accessed on 25.8.24

the district-wise data for these two indicators are not available. The relative prosperity and command over resources are also gathered through per capita expenditure. The Monthly Per Capita Expenditure is Rs. 4360 for Rural Manipur while it is Rs. 4880 for Urban Manipur as of 2022-23. After taking into consideration the imputed value for free distribution under social welfare schemes, these figures are Rs. 4370 for Rural Manipur and Rs. 4902 for Urban Manipur. It is clearly seen that the difference between rural and urban MPCEs is not significant.

2.3.3. Income criteria

As per the Economic Survey, the per capita income in Manipur for the year 2019-20 is Rs. 85307 at current prices and Rs.54119 at constant prices. This information cannot be used as a measure of wealth. Instead, Monthly Per Capita Expenditure (MPCE) is used to measure the standard of living/level of poverty. As per the latest survey conducted by the National Sample Survey Office under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, the monthly per capita expenditure for Manipur for the year 2022-23 is Rs.4360 (for rural) and Rs.4880 (urban). From this it is seen, the rural folk are relatively disadvantaged, but it must be observed that there is not much difference between the MPCE in rural and MPCE in urban areas implying that the standard of living does not differ too much between Meiteis and Kukis.

2.3.4. Employment status

Decadal census gives the figures of workers and non-workers and these two add up to the total population which means that the population of all age groups is included in this. Instead, the data from Periodic Labour Force Surveys (PLFS) by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation are used for measuring the employment status. Here two concepts are used: the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) and the Worker Population Ratio(WPR). LFPR is defined as the percentage of persons in the labour force that is working or seeking or available for

work in the population. WPR is defined as the percentage of employed persons in the population. These data are available for Manipur for the year 2020-21 and these are with regard to age 15 yrs and above at usual status. The activity status, determined on the basis of either the usual principal economic activity or the usual subsidiary economic activity is called the usual activity status of the person implying a worker who performs some activity either in the principal status or in the subsidiary status during the year.

Rural

	Male	Female	Total
LFPR	65.4	19.5	42.7
WPR	63.0	18.8	41.1

Urban

	Male	Female	Total
LFPR	65.2	25.7	45.0
WPR	58.6	23.3	40.6

From the above, it is observed that the employment situation is more or less the same both in urban (dominated by Meiteis) and in rural (dominated by Kukis). In fact, the employment position in rural areas is slightly better than urban. However, it should be noted that rural Manipur has a very large proportion of those employed in the so-called ‘self-employed’ category which accounts for as much as 73 per cent of all categories of employment (including those engaged in salaried/wage work and casual labour), as compared to a corresponding figure of 56.5 per cent for urban Manipur. The ‘self-employed’ category is perhaps the most vulnerable category of employment, and its large relative presence in rural Manipur is probably indicative of nothing more than substantial informality and underemployment.

2.3.5. Poverty levels

As far as one can tell, the one piece of work that analyses poverty in Manipur with respect to its Valley and Hill populations is that due to Rakhee Bhattacharya (2021).⁷ The author has made use of National Sample Survey (NSS) unit data on consumption expenditure at the *regional* level, which is a level of disaggregation that is not available in the quinquennial NSS surveys on consumption spending. Unfortunately, the regional level survey dates back to 2009-10, but this appears to be the latest year for which disaggregated data are available.

While the precise poverty line employed in Bhattacharya's paper has not been explicitly mentioned, it appears from the surrounding discussion that she has employed the rural and urban poverty lines recommended by the Tendulkar Committee (these are commonly referred to as the 'Tendulkar lines'). Combining Bhattacharya's estimates of the headcount ratio of poverty for the Valley and Hill Districts, as well as for the urban and rural areas, with the corresponding Valley, Hill, rural and urban population estimates, one can generate the profile of poverty by region (Valley/Hill) and by sector of residence (rural/urban)⁸. (The assumption is that the relevant 2011 Census population proportions are also valid for 2009-10.)

Sector of Residence→ Category of Districts↓	Rural	Urban	Rural+Urban
Valley Districts	43.6%	45.1%	44.28%
Hill Districts	51.4%	87.4%	54.00%

⁷ Bhattacharya, Rakhee (2021): 'Number and Beyond: Poverty Debate and India's North Eastern Region,' *The Heritage*, Volume XI, Issue 1.

⁸ Source: Based on poverty estimates in Table 8 of Bhattacharya (2021) and population estimates in Census of India 2011

Valley+Hill	47.97%	49.60%	48.45%

Table 6 - Headcount Ratio of Poverty for the Tendulkar Poverty Lines by Region (Valley/Hills) and by Sector of Residence (Rural/Urban): Manipur, 2009-10

2.3.6. Land Distribution

Aggregating district level data on population and population-density available in the Manipur Handbook, one can construct land statistics for the Valley and Hill Districts, as presented in the Table below. It indicates that in terms of population density, the Valley Districts are about 12-times as congested as the Hill Districts; and while the former account for about 57% of Manipur's total population, they account for just about 10% of the total land area.

District	Population (in Lakhs)	Population Density (Persons per square kilometre)	Implied Land Area (Population/Density) in squarekilometres
Imphal East	4.56	643	709.18
Imphal West	5.18	998	519.04
Bishnupur	2.38	479	496.87
Thoubal	4.22	821	514.01
Sub-total for Valley	16.34	729	2239.16
Senapati	4.79	146	3280.82
Ukhrul	1.84	40	4600.00

Chandel	1.44	44	3272.73
Churachandpur	2.74	60	4566.67
Tengnoupal	1.40	32	4375.00
Sub-total for Hills	12.21	61	20095.22
Combined Statistics for Valley and Hills Districts			
District Category	Land Area in square kilometres	Land share	
Valley	2239.16	10.03%	
Hills	20095.22	89.97%	
Total	22334.38	100.00%	

Table 7 - Land disposition in the Valley and Hill Districts of Manipur: 2011⁹

2.3.7. Access to healthcare

Access to healthcare at the time of birth and infant mortality rates are significant markers of development.

Indicator	Urban %	Rural %	Ratio of Rural % to

⁹ Constructed from data in Statistical Handbook of Manipur 2017

			Urban %
Women age 20-24 years married before age 18 years	14.2	17.6	1.24
Men age 25-29 years married before age 21 years	11.9	17.8	1.44
Total Fertility Rate (children per woman)	1.8	2.4	1.33
Women age 15-19 years who were already mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey	7.6	9.1	1.20
Any modern method of family planning	19.3	17.5	0.91
Health Workers ever talked to female non-users about family planning	7.0	5.2	0.74
Mothers who had at least 4 ante-natal care visits	88.8	74.5	0.84
Mothers who received post-natal care from a doctor/nurse/LHV/ANM/midwife/other health personnel within 2 days of delivery	86.2	66.8	0.78
Children – ditto -	82.6	63.9	0.77
Institutional Births	92.5	73.9	0.80

Table 8 - Rural and Urban Performance with Respect to Select Aspects of Reproductive Well-being and Maternal Care: Manipur, 2019-20¹⁰

Indicator	Urban %	Rural %	Ratio of Rural % to Urban %
Children age 12-13 months fully vaccinated based on information from either vaccination card or mother's recall	75.1	65.9	0.88
Children under 5 years who are stunted (height-for-age)	20.1	25.1	1.25
Children under 5 years who are severely wasted (weight for height)	2.6	3.8	1.46

Table 9 - Rural and Urban Performance with Respect to Children, Children's Health, Child Nutrition: Manipur, 2019-20¹¹

Indicator	Urban %	Rural %	Ratio of Rural % to Urban %
Women whose Body Mass Index is below normal	6.1	7.9	1.30
Men whose Body Mass Index is below normal	7.6	8.3	1.09
Women age 15-19 who are anaemic	30.4	26.7	1.14

¹⁰ Based on data in 'Manipur – Key Indicators,' *National Family Health Survey – 5 2019-20, State Fact Sheet: Manipur*, International Institute of Population Sciences

¹¹ Based on data in 'Manipur – Key Indicators,' *National Family Health Survey – 5 2019-20, State Fact Sheet: Manipur*, International Institute of Population Sciences

Men age 15-49 who are anaemic	5.3	6.5	1.23
Women undergone a screening for cervical cancer, or breast examination for breast cancer, or oral cavity examination for oral cancer	2.3	1.1	0.48
Men ever undergone an oral cavity examination for oral cancer	1.1	0.6	0.55

Table 10 - Rural and Urban Performance with Respect to Adult Health and Nutrition: Manipur, 2019-20¹²

2.4. Political power

Kukis have 10 members in the 60-member Manipur Legislative Assembly, while the Meiteis have 40 members: in terms of 2011 Census population estimates, this suggests that Kuki representation in the Assembly is about on par with its population share (around 16 per cent), while Meitei representation in the assembly, at 66 per cent, exceeds its share of the population (53 per cent). There are two Meitei Members of Parliament in the Lok Sabha, and one in the Rajya Sabha. The Kukis have no Parliamentary representation.

If the Manipur Hill Areas District Councils Act of 1971 is perceived as a source of political autonomy and source of power, as it provides for the creation of Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) in the hill areas of Manipur, it must be observed that the Act divides the hill areas into up to six autonomous districts. Unlike the autonomous District Councils under the 6th schedule of the Indian Constitution, the District Council in Manipur has no legislative, judicial, and financial powers. Thus, the Councils have been ineffective in securing the interest of the tribal people

¹² Based on data in 'Manipur – Key Indicators,' *National Family Health Survey – 5 2019-20, State Fact Sheet: Manipur*, International Institute of Population Sciences

in the State leading to long-standing demand for an extension of the 6th schedule provision. The council in its present form has hardly been effective operative. Either it has been the State of dissolution or elections have either been not held or it has been boycotted.

2.5. State of Manipur v Rest of India and particularly the Northeast

The State of Manipur remains backward in both physical and social infrastructure trailing behind in almost all the indicators from the rest of the country. It is the poorest State in North-East India in terms of per-capita income (PCI). The PCI, which is an important indicator of development, is 43% lower than the all-India average (INR 54,119 as against INR 94,954 all-India average at 2011-2012 prices) in 2019-2020. Till now, Manipur has attained the highest growth rate of PCI (8.61%) in the year 2017-2018 and it dramatically declined to -0.06% in 2018-2019. Manipur experienced a much lower economic performance during 1999-2000 to 2002-2003 than that of all India average, which registered a negative growth rate of- 8.31 in 2000-2001. However, the State economy showed an improvement with a growth rate of 5.74% in 2019-2020, which is much higher than the all-India figure of 3.11%. Despite this, the per-capita Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) in Manipur is not only lower than the national average per-capita Net National Product (NNP), but the gap has also been widening over the years. This signifies the inconsistent growth of per capita NSDP and Manipur has been lagging behind the All-India average continuously.

State	Socio-religious group										
		HST	CST	OST	ST	SC	HOBC	HHC	Muslim	Rest	Total
Manipur	Row %	0.4	30.6	0.3	31.3	4.4	38.8	8.5	10.4	6.5	100
	Col %	0.2	11.4	0.7	6.1	2.4	10.9	3.1	2.6	16.5	5.7

Table 11 - Distribution of Population by Socio-religious group in Manipur (in %) 2011-12

(HST=Hindu Scheduled Tribes, CST=Christian Scheduled Tribes, OST=Other Scheduled Tribes, ST=Scheduled Tribes, SC=Scheduled Caste, HOBC=Hindu Other Backward Classes, HHC=Hindu High Castes, Muslims)

Like other States in Northeast India, Manipur also suffers from poor development infrastructure such as roads, railways, electricity, industry (large, medium, small), and institutions (educational, health, and others.) Yet within the poor infrastructure, there is a great divide with respect to its distribution between hills and the valley. This is most evident from the data presented in the following tables¹³.

Indicator	Area								
	IW	IE	TBL	BPR	UKL	TML	SPT	CCP	CDL
Road length per 100 sq km	120	120	144	84.68	24.47	22.77	24.73	21.23	19.32
Surface road as per cent of total road	85	93.9	92.16	88.81	70.56	68.21	77.65	70.01	71.53
Village electrified	84.33	95.59	84.47	87.76	91.41	81.87	77.92	73.08	82.27
Household Having tap water connection per cent	44.63	25.32	10.84	17.75	20.53	12.24	50.7	16.84	11.77
School per 1,000	1.42	1.56	1.37	1.55	2.33	2.48	1.91	1.91	2.35

¹³ Reproduced from Ziipao, R. R. (2021). Infrastructure of injustice, *State and politics in Manipur and Northeast India*, London and New York: Routledge.

population									
School per 100 sq km	121.97	86.74	97.28	65.32	7.22	6.29	16.6	9.52	8.39
Hospital beds per 10,000 population	16.60	16.60	3.9	5.38	9.52	9.87	5.04	7.99	6.25
Hospital beds per 100 sq km	142.12	92.44	27.63	22.58	2.95	2.51	4.37	3.98	2.23
Bank branches Per 10,000 Population	0.72	0.28	0.27	0.38	0.28	0.36	0.42	0.22	0.42
Banks per 100 sq km	6.17	1.55	1.95	1.61	0.09	0.09	0.37	0.11	0.15

Table 12 - District-wise infrastructure index of Manipur

(IW= Imphal West, IE =Imphal East, TBL=Thoubal, BPR= Bishnupur, UKL=Ukhrul, TML=Tamenglong, SPT=Senapati, CCP=Churachandpur, CDL=Chandel)

1) Number of Colleges in Manipur

Sl. No.	Districts (Hill (H) and Valley (V))	Number
1.	Imphal East (V)	7
2.	Imphal West (V)	8
3.	Thoubal (V)	4
4.	Kakching (V)	2
5.	Bishnupur (V)	7
6.	Kangpokpi (H)	1
7.	Ukhrul (H)	1
8.	Churachandpur (H)	2
9.	Senapati (H)	2
10.	Chandel (H)	2
11.	Tamenglong (H)	1
12.	Jiribam (V)	1
13.	Tengnoupal (H)	1

Total Number of districts: 16 (10 Hill and 6 Valley)

Total Number of Colleges: 39

Total in hill districts: 10

Total in valley districts: 29

2) Universities and Institutes of Higher Learning

Sl. No.	Name of Universities	Location
1.	Central Agricultural University	Imphal
2.	Manipur University	Imphal
3.	National Sports University	Imphal
4.	Indira Gandhi National Tribal University (Regional Campus Manipur)	Senapati

Sl. No.	Name of State Universities	Location
1.	Dhanamanjuri University	Imphal
2.	Manipur Technical University	Imphal
3.	Manipur University of Culture	Imphal

Source: Department of University and Higher Education

2.5.1. Status of land distribution

Land is one of the important resources for rural livelihood and land distribution plays a very significant role in the development of the rural households. Since the introduction of land reform in pre-independence to date, a continuous effort has been made to make the land distribution equal. The situation assessment survey and land and livestock holding of NSSO (2018-19) in India reveal a distinct trend of land distribution across different land types in Manipur.

Land Classification (All Land)	Percentage of HHs	Percentage of land Owned
Marginal (0.00 to 1.00 Hect.)	52.07	13.78
Small (1.00 to 2.00 Hect)	29.77	38.24
Semi-medium (2.00 to 4.00 Hect)	14.4	32.42
Medium (4.00 to 10.00 Hect)	3.76	15.57
Large (10.00 Hect and Above)	0	0.00
Total	100	100.00

Table 13 - Land Distribution in Manipur (incorporates all types of land including homestead land).

This shows the distribution of land ownership in Manipur. Overall, 52.07% of households (HHs) have marginal landholdings (0.00 to 1.00 hectares), which comprise only 13.78% of the total land owned. Small landholders (1.00 to 2.00 hectares) represent 29.77% of households but hold a larger share of 38.24% of the land. Semi-medium landholders (2.00 to 4.00 hectares) account for 14.4% of households and own 32.42% of the land. Medium landholders (4.00 to 10.00 hectares) are 3.76% of households and own 15.57% of the land, while there are no large

landholders (10.00 hectares and above). The data reveals inequality in landownership.

A similarly unequal distribution of land is also found when only Jhum Land and Other than Jhum land were considered. The data for the two types of land is presented in the tables below:

Land Classification (Jhum Land)	Percentage of HHs	Percentage of land owned
Landless (0.00 Hect)	78.32	0.00
Marginal (0.01 to 1.00 Hect.)	12.54	16.09
Small (1.00 to 2.00 Hect)	4.56	26.51
Semi-medium (2.00 to 4.00 Hect)	3.25	32.17
Medium (4.00 to 10.00 Hect)	1.33	25.23
Large (10.00 Hect and Above)	0	0.00
Total	100	100.00

Table 14 - Distribution of Jhum Land in Manipur

Land Classification (Other than Jhum Land)	Percentage of HHs	Percentage of land owned
Landless (0.00 Hect)	39.31	0.0
Marginal (0.01 to 1.00 Hect.)	26.29	14.5
Small (1.00 to 2.00 Hect)	27.52	56.3
Semi-medium (2.00 to 4.00 Hect)	5.64	20.9
Medium (4.00 to 10.00 Hect)	1.24	8.3
Large (10.00 Hect and Above)	0	0.0
Total	100	100.0

Table 15 - Distribution of land other than Jhum in Manipur

When considering Jhum (shifting cultivation) land specifically, the data shows that 78.32% of households are landless, with no ownership recorded for this category. Among those who do own Jhum land, marginal landholders make up 12.54% of households and hold 16.09% of the land, while small landholders are 4.56% of households owning 26.51% of the land. Semi-medium landholders (3.25% of households) control 32.17% of Jhum land, and medium landholders (1.33% of households) own 25.23% of the land. There are no large landholders in the Jhum land category.

For other types of land (excluding Jhum), 39.31% of households are landless, while 26.29% of households have marginal landholdings, owning 14.5% of the land. Small landholders make up 27.52% of households and possess 56.3% of the land. Semi-medium landholders (5.64% of households) own 20.9% of the land, and medium landholders (1.24% of households) hold 8.3% of the land. Again, there are no large landholders in this category.

This data highlights the predominance of small and marginal landholders across different land types, with significant landlessness among Jhum cultivators and a notable share of land held by smallholders outside of Jhum areas.

The economic status of Manipur from the lens of people falling below the poverty line presents an interesting picture if one is to compare the status of the region as a whole. From 1970 to the 1990s Manipur had a lower share of the people below poverty as compared to the figure for the region as a whole. Since 2004-05 onwards, however, the trend has been reversed. In 2004 -05, the number of people below the poverty line was 39.3 and 34.5 respectively for rural and urban populations. By 2019 -10, the figure was 47.4 for the rural and 46.4 for the urban whereas the average figure was 26.8 and 21.6 respectively for the rural and urban populations.

Table 16 - Economic Survey 2008-08 Manipur and MoDoNER¹⁴

Year	Area	Manipur	Northeast	All India
1973-74	Rural	52.67	54.09	56.44
	Urban	36.92	36.92	49.01
	Combined	49.96	50.79	54.88
1983-84	Rural	42.60	-	45.06
	Urban	26.38	-	42.2
	Combined	38.08	-	44.8
1993-94	Rural	45.01	45.01	37.27
	Urban	7.73	7.73	32.36
	Combined	33.78	34.60	35.97
1990-00	Rural	40.04	40.04	27.09
	Urban	7.47	7.47	23.62
	Combined	28.54	29.16	26.10
2004-05	Rural	39.3	28.9	42
	Urban	34.5	20.6	25.5
	Combined	37.9	26.8	37.2
2009-10	Rural	47.4	26.8	33.8
	Urban	46.4	21.6	20.9
	Combined	47.1	25.1	29.8

2.6. Application of land and forest laws

It is widely believed that the forest laws in Manipur are protective to people in hill areas, who have exclusive control over their resources, while the persons in the valley are denied equal access. Forest laws and land ownership, especially concerning tribal communities like the Kukis, are

¹⁴ Reproduced from Ziipao, R. R. (2021). Infrastructure of injustice, *State and politics in Manipur and Northeast India*, London and New York: Routledge.

shaped by a combination of Central and State-specific regulations. While there is not a specific "forest law" that grants exclusive ownership rights to the Kukis or any other tribe, several legal frameworks and customary laws play a role in how tribal land is managed and protected.

2.6.1. Key Legal Frameworks:

1. The Indian Forest Act, 1927: -

This central law governs the administration of forests in India, including Manipur. It defines different categories of forests such as Reserved Forests, Protected Forests, and Village Forests. The Act provides a framework for forest conservation but does not directly deal with tribal ownership rights. Of the 22,327 sq. km area of Manipur, the forest area is recorded at 17,418 sq. km. constituting 78.1 percent of the total area of the State. Of the total forest area, 11,780 sq. km, that is, 67.63 percent is unclassed forest, meaning other than reserved and protected forest. The unclassed forest includes those tracts of land that are owned by tribals; and those forests that are accessed, controlled, and managed by the tribal communities as per their traditional system of governance and customary laws. According to the Manipur government, "tribal communities and tribal chiefs are already holding ownership [4] of forestland as their ancestral land in non-reserved forest areas. Notwithstanding this, there are considerable areas in Manipur under reserved or protected forest. Such a category of forest in Manipur has come about through the extension of the Indian Forest Act over forest which was already under the control of the tribal communities. Thus, even under reserved forests, tribes have been dwelling in the forest and are engaged in various economic activities. As per the Forest Rights Act 2006, the prior rights of the tribes are supposed to be recognized rather than treated as illegal occupants and infiltrators. However, the tribal communities in most of the North East enjoy unbridled authority over forests, free from State control unlike the rest of the country, where the debilitating impact of the colonial-era Indian

Forest Act, of 1927 prevailed. Therefore, the Forest Rights Act of 2006 is generally perceived as irrelevant in the Northeast. However, the sweeping expansion of how “forest” is defined in law by the Supreme Court and its proposed incorporation into the Indian Forest Act (Amendment) Bill 2019 threatens the customary forest rights of these people. The Supreme Court defined ‘forest land’ in Section 2 of the FCA (Forest Conservation Act) to mean that it ‘will not only include ‘forest’ as understood in the dictionary sense but also any area recorded as forest in the government record irrespective of the ownership of the land.

2. Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act

The Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act (MLR&LRA) 1960 extends to the whole area of Manipur except the hill areas. This resulted in two distinct forms of land governance in the State which was based on the distinct geography of hill and valley. This allowed the tribal people to govern their land through their traditional customary practices. However, there has been a persistent effort made by valley-based groups and organizations for a uniform policy.

The MLR & LRA saw several amendments that were intended to incrementally extend the law to the hill areas. In 2015, the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Bill (Seventh Amendment) (MLR & LR – 7thA) was passed leading to massive protests against it by the tribal people of Manipur. This Act defines the Hill Areas as those areas in the hilly tracts of the State, declared to be hill areas by the State government through an official notification in the gazette. Thus, while the MLR & LR – 7thA does not clearly specify what makes the hills, the mandate given to the State to designate the hills now forms the basis of the applicability and non-applicability of the act. It is worth noting that even before this amendment was passed, its provisions were already extended to the hill areas by a gazette notification. The passing of the MLR & LR – 7thA only legalized the incremental extensions of the MLR and LRA that had been

going on since its enactment in 1960. The MLR & LR – 7thA brings to fore the contending demands to erase the hill-valley divide and ease the overcrowding in the valley, and the tribal people's concern of securing their land, identity and rights. All the same, even now a major part of the hill areas remain outside of the purview of this act.

3. The Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act, 1971: -

This Act provides for the creation of Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) in the hill areas of Manipur. These councils have the power to manage and regulate land, forests, and other natural resources within their jurisdictions, based on local customs and traditions. This gives the tribal communities, including the Kukis, significant control over their lands.

4. The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA):

Although this Act is more commonly associated with central India, it applies nationwide, including Manipur. The FRA recognizes the rights of forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers to land and resources they have been dependent on for their livelihood. It allows these communities to claim ownership, access, and management rights over forest lands traditionally used by them.

5. Customary Law:

In addition to statutory laws, tribal customary laws play a crucial role in land ownership and forest management among the Kukis and other tribes in Manipur. These customary practices often recognize communal ownership of land, where the village or clan has collective rights over land and resources. This form of land management is vital for the protection of tribal land rights against encroachment or external claims.

6. Exclusive Ownership:

The combination of the above laws and the recognition of customary practices allows the Kuki and other tribal communities in Manipur to maintain exclusive ownership and control over their traditional lands, including forests. This is particularly important in the hill areas, where these communities have historically lived and managed their resources.

Chapter 3: The constitutional status of the State, its history and basis of claims to ST status for its people

3.1. Accession of Manipur to India & Constituent Assembly Debates

The Maharaja of Manipur Bodhchandra Singh signed the Instrument of Accession on August 11, 1947, shortly before India gained independence from British rule on August, 15, 1947. Despite signing the Instrument of Accession in 1947, Manipur retained a degree of internal autonomy until it was fully merged with the Indian Union in 1949. Maharaja Bodhchandra Singh was constrained to signing the Manipur Merger Agreement on September 21, 1949, which led to the dissolution of the independent government of Manipur and its formal integration into India on October 15, 1949. This marked the end of Manipur's status as an independent princely State and its incorporation into the Republic of India.

At the Constituent Assembly, there was an Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights, Minorities, Tribal Areas, etc., and under it was formed the North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal & Excluded Areas Sub Committee.¹⁵ The hill districts of Manipur at the time of the Constituent Assembly debates included Ukhrul, Tamenglong, Churachandpur, Chandel, Senapati, Noney, and Kangpokpi. These districts were recognized for their distinct tribal populations and cultural heritage, playing a significant role in discussions around autonomy and governance during the Constituent Assembly debates. The hill districts were part of the State of Manipur and had unique cultural, social, and administrative characteristics compared to the plains regions of the State. The person

¹⁵ Constituent Assembly Debates, Official Report, Vol VII, 4.11.48 to 8.1.49

who had authority to choose the representatives in the Constituent Assembly was the Ruler of Tripura. In 2016, these districts were re-organised into 6 additional districts, that is, Kamjong, Kangpokpi, Jiribam, Noney, Tengenoupal and Pherzawl.

The first report of the Sub Committee gathered that the hill people feared that if suitable provisions are not made to prevent the people of the plains from acquiring land in the hill areas, large numbers of them will settle down and not only occupy land belonging to the hill people but will also exploit them in the non-agricultural professions. Thus, the hill people seemed to attach special value to the present system of an 'Inner Line' to cross which non-tribals entering the area required a pass, and the provisions prohibiting non-tribals from settling down or carrying on business without the approval of the district-officer. It was felt that even industries should not be started in the hill areas by non-tribals because that might mean exploitation of the people and the land by the non-tribals. In addition to these main points there was the question of preserving their ways of life and language, and method of cultivation etc. Opinions were expressed that there could be adequate protection in these matters only by transferring the government of the area entirely into the hands of the hill people themselves.

As part of the question of occupation of land, the transfer of the management of land classed as reserved forest had also been raised. The Sub Committee recommended that the legislative powers of the Local Councils should not cover reserved forests. While accepting the need for centralised management of the forests, the Sub Committee strongly emphasised that in questions of actual management, including the appointment of forest staff and the granting of contracts and leases, the susceptibilities and the legitimate desires and needs of the hill people should be considered, and commended that the Provincial Government should accept this principle as a part of its policy. The Hill People were

extremely nervous of outsiders, particularly non-tribals, and felt that they were greatly in need of protection against their encroachment and exploitation. It was on account of this fear that they attached considerable value to regulations under which an outsider could be required to possess a pass to enter the Hills territory beyond the Inner Line and an undesirable person could be expelled. The Provincial Government, in their view, could not be the proper custodian of such powers since they would be susceptible to the influence of plains/ valley people.

3.2. Special Status to Manipur

At the commencement of the Constitution, Manipur remained to be characterised as a former princely State as Part B State. By the 13th amendment, Part 21 was introduced after an agreement was reached by the Government of India with the leaders of the Naga People's Convention in July 1960 under which it was decided that Naga Hills-Tuensang Area (Nagaland), which was at that time also a Part 'B' tribal area within the State of Assam, would be formed into a separate State in the Union of India by introduction of Art 371A. Part 21 temporary and transitional provisions for the Central Government to frame laws for the subject in State List as though it was in concurrent list. Under the same part, by the 27th amendment, Art 371C was introduced on 15.2.1972 with the following provision:

371-C. Special provision with respect to the State of Manipur.—

(1) Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, the President may, by order made with respect to the State of Manipur, provide for the constitution and functions of a committee of the Legislative Assembly of the State consisting of members of that Assembly elected from the Hill Areas of that State, for the modifications to be made in the rules of business of the Government and in the rules of procedure of the Legislative Assembly of the State and for any special responsibility of the Governor in order to secure the proper functioning of such committee.

(2) The Governor shall annually, or whenever so required by the President, make a report to the President regarding the administration of the Hill Areas in the State of Manipur and the executive power of the Union shall extend to the giving of directions to the State as to the administration of the said areas.

Explanation.—In this article, the expression “Hill Areas” means such areas as the President may, by order, declare to be Hill Areas.]

The then President V.V.Giri issued the Manipur Legislative Assembly (Hill Areas Committee) Order, 1972 constituting a Hill Areas Committee with members of the Assembly from the Hill areas constituencies. The functions delineated included framing of questions of policy and all matters concerning Hill areas covered under a schedule and their special needs, and promote unity between the people of the Hill Areas and other areas of the State by aiming at an integrated and evenly based economic growth of those areas and augment the resources of the State as a whole. The schedule included management of any forest not being a reserved forest, establishment of village committees or councils with powers relating to village administration, social customs, etc. The declared Hill areas were:

- (1) Manipur North, Manipur East, Manipur West and Manipur South revenue districts;
- (2) Chandel, Chakpikarong and Tengnoupal revenue sub-divisions of the Manipur Central revenue district.

Explanation:- Any reference to a revenue district or revenue sub-division in this schedule shall be construed as a reference to the areas comprised within that district or sub-division, as the case may be, on the 1st day of April, 1972.

3.3. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the basis

The Constitutional provisions relating to reservation in the field of education and public employment are significant in that equality assured under Art 14 is achieved by making possible special provisions by way of reservation of certain percentage of seats in educational institutions and public employment. This is done through provisions contained in Part 16 that deals with special provisions relating to certain classes, through Art 335, where the claims of the members of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes shall be taken into consideration for making appointments to services and posts in connection with affairs of the Union or of State and enable a level playing field by relaxation in qualifying marks in any examination or relaxing standards of evaluation for the purpose of promotion in service. Articles 341 and 342 are significant in that they empower the President to specify castes, races or tribes to be notified as falling within the Schedule, after consultation with the Governor of State. The notification, issued under Constitution (scheduled caste) order, 1950 confers scheduled caste status only to the Hindus.

The tribes are often characterised by distinctive cultural traits such as language, customs, traditions, and rituals. This includes their way of life, economic patterns, and social organisation. Certain tribes are recognized for maintaining traditional modes of livelihood like hunting, gathering, and subsistence agriculture. Unique cultural practices, including marriage customs, festivals, and other societal norms, are considered as markers of tribal identity. Tribes often inhabit geographically isolated regions like forests, hills, and rural areas. Their relative isolation from the mainstream population is a factor in their classification. Many tribes are characterised by a reluctance or shyness to interact with outsiders. This feature reflects their self-contained and insular communities. Economic and educational backwardness are key indicators of tribal status. This includes low levels of literacy, primitive technology, and reliance on subsistence economy. Tribes

are often engaged in menial occupations or those not requiring specialised skills. The process of identifying Scheduled Tribes is primarily conducted by the government through legal mechanisms. The President of India, in consultation with State governments, has the authority to specify Scheduled Tribes in various States and Union territories. The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950, and subsequent amendments list the recognized Scheduled Tribes

The notifications once issued under the respective orders cannot be varied by any subsequent notification, but the list could be modified only through a law passed by Parliament through law.¹⁶ The list issued through the notification is exhaustive and it has to be given effect punctiliously. Even the State does not have legislative competence to alter the same.¹⁷

3.4. The Meiteis and Kukis, the principal contenders for claiming reservation

3.4.1. The data constraints, a caveat

In understanding the historical and on-going conflict between the Meiteis and the Kukis in Manipur, it would be of considerable assistance to have information on the relative status of the two communities, in terms of levels of development as measured by standard socio-economic indicators. Unfortunately, much of the data on aspects of Manipur's demography is more than a decade out of date: for such meagre information as is available, one still has to hark back to *Census of India 2011*. More frustratingly, there is little or no information to be had at the disaggregated level of specific communities. Regrettably, there is no help for it but to infer what one can about possible community-wise differentials in development status from various indirect methods based on specific

¹⁶ Constitution 7th amendment Act, 1956.

¹⁷Shree Surat Valsad Jilla KMG Parishad v Union of India (2007) 5 SCC 2056

assumptions and proxies. This is profoundly unsatisfactory, but something to be going along with in the absence of happier alternatives to hand. What follows in these notes is an account constrained by the considerations just mentioned.

3.4.2. An Indirect Approach to Ascertaining Inter-group Relative Disadvantage.

Suppose we have two groups, call these A and B respectively, and suppose further that we do not have data (or access to these data if they exist) on group-specific indicators of well-being or ill-being. Suppose further that Group A, unlike Group B, is *predominantly* characterised by a demographic feature that is commonly associated with relative disadvantage. Then, in an indirect way, it would appear to be fair to suggest that other things being equal, the likelihood of Group A being relatively disadvantaged vis-à-vis Group B is larger than the likelihood of the matter being the other way around.

Think of Group A as the Kukis and of Group B as the Meiteis. Suppose also that the demographic feature of relevance is that of *rurality*. It has long been held that in most societies, rural populations in comparison with their urban counterparts have poorer access to amenities and resources conducive to improved living standards, and worse records of overall development. This notion is encompassed, for example, in the well-known concept of what the economist Michael Lipton¹⁸ called ‘urban bias’. (He in fact went so far as to suggest that ‘...[the] most important class conflict in the poor countries of the world today is...between the rural and the urban classes’: Lipton, 1977, p.1).

¹⁸ Lipton, Michael (1977): *Why Poor People Stay Poor: Urban Bias in World Development*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass

Kukis belong to the Hill Districts of Manipur which, as we have seen in the previous section, are predominantly rural in their population composition, while Meiteis mainly inhabit the Valley Districts which are more urban than rural in their composition. An indirect means of ascertaining the relative levels of disadvantage of the two groups would be to look at the values of selected social indicators for the rural and urban areas of Manipur: if the rural areas turn out to be worse off than the urban ones in terms of these indicators, then this would be an indirect means of inferring that the Kukis as a group are worse off than the Meiteis. It is not suggested that this is an entirely satisfactory way of viewing the problem, but it may have the virtue of being the second-best option in a data-constrained world.

In what follows we look at the rural and urban profiles of achievement with respect to a number of social indicators, based on National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5) data for Manipur in the year 2019-20. For the most part, we will not do much more than present a number of tables whose data should speak for themselves and will therefore not require much in the way of commentary. For each of a number of indicators, we present the proportions of the rural and urban populations satisfying the criterion described by the indicator in question. We then compute the ratios of rural to the urban proportions. For an indicator of '*ill-being*', if the ratio is greater than one, the inference would be that the rural sector is relatively disadvantaged; if the ratio is less than one, the inference would be that the rural sector is relatively advantaged; and these inferences would be reversed for a '*well-being*' indicator. Relative rural disadvantage (advantage) will be taken to point to relative Kuki disadvantage (advantage). A *necessary* condition for including an indicator is that if the ratio of rural-to-urban proportions exceeds one, it should have a value of at least 1.08, and if the ratio is less than one, it should have a value of at most 0.93 (the idea being to include an indicator only if the rural-urban

difference with respect to it is of some significance, as captured in the – admittedly arbitrary – limit values of 1.08 and 0.93).

3.4.3. SCs, STs and OBCs and Reservations for each category

The 2011 census determined the geographical area of Manipur to be 22,327 sq km and the population in numbers is split through division by rural and urban, the former being 20,21,640 and the latter being 9,34,154. (Rural and urban ought not to be confused as synonymous to hilly and valley areas). The scheduled caste population is 97,328 and the scheduled tribe population is at 11,67,422. The percentage of reservation for STs is notified as at 31%, while the SC reservation is 2% and the OBC reservation being 27% that includes 10% reservation of economically weaker sections (EWS). SCs among the Meiteis in Manipur include specific sub-castes within the Meitei community that have been historically marginalised. The major SC groups in Manipur are: 1. Chamar; 2. Dhobi; 3. Madhesiya; 4. Moirang; 5. Namasudra; 6. Patni; 7. Sutradhar; 8. Yathibi. The majority of the SC population in Manipur resides in the Imphal Valley, which includes the districts of Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal, and Bishnupur. The Meitei community, including its SC sub-groups, is concentrated in these areas. The OBCs among them are the Lois, Yaithibi and some specific occupational groups within the Meitei community such as blacksmiths (Lairikyengbham) weavers (salam), and other artisans. The Meitis, however, do not have the exclusive claim to OBC status within the State. The Muslim population native to the State are called Pangals or Meitei-Pangals, who have a distinct cultural identity, blending elements of Islamic and local Meitei traditions. They speak Manipuri (Meiteilon) and follow Islam. They fall within the OBC category.

The 31% reservation for STs in Manipur are predominantly claimed by Kukis, if not exclusively because the Nagas in Hill areas also fall within

notified tribes in Manipur. The ST status is accorded to 28 named tribes, which are:

1. Aimol;
2. Anal*;
3. Angami;
4. Chiru*;
5. Chothe*;
6. Gangte;
7. Hmar;
8. Kabui (Rongmei);
9. Kacha Naga (Liangmai, Zeme, Rongmei, and Inpui);
10. Koirao (Thangal*);
11. Koireng;
12. Kom;
13. Lamkang*;
14. Maring*;
15. Mao*;
16. Mizo (Lushai);
17. Monsang;
18. Moyon*;
19. Paite;
20. Purum;
21. Ralte;
22. Sema*;
23. Simte;
24. Sukte;
25. Tangkhul*;
26. Thadou;
27. Vaiphei and
28. Zou.

(The ST names with asterix (*) include Nagas too.)

3.4.4. The reservation dynamics

At present Manipur has 2% reservation for SCs, 31% reservation for STs, 17 % reservation for OBCs and 10% for EWS making a total of 60% reservation. The following are the details of State-wise reservations of various social groups in Northeastern States¹⁹.

Table 17 - State-wise reservations of social groups in Northeastern States

State	SC	ST	OBC	EWS	Total
Arunachal Pradesh	-	80	-	-	80
Manipur	2	31	17	10	60
Meghalaya	-	80	-	-	80
Mizoram	-	80	-	-	80
Nagaland	-	80	-	-	80
Sikkim	7	18	40	20	85
Tripura	17	31	2	10	60

Except Manipur and Tripura, the rest of States have 80-85% reservation. The National Sample Survey Office vide its report number 563 estimated the OBC population in Manipur as 52.7% during 2011-12. The Meiteis constitute 41% Hindus and 8% Muslims. The Hindus have the sub-caste SCs and OBCs and among the Hindus, 19 % is reserved for these two categories whereas Kukis being STs have 31% reservation. As 53% is the OBC population as per NSSO estimate, one possibility is to increase the percentage of reservation under OBC for Meitis and increase the total percentage of reservation as many of other States in the North east, except Tripura, have 80% reservation.

¹⁹ Individual State Government websites

3.4.5. Drawing the right inferences for reservation among the diverse groups

Reservation shall be inversely proportional to the development parameters that indicate the relative standing of the various identifiable groups within the population. The matter, as mentioned earlier, is severely complicated by the considerable scarcity of group-specific data on development indicators that might throw light on questions of group-specific relative disadvantage. In order to achieve some informed awareness of the inter-group disputes and violence that have long been a feature of Manipur's history, one must have data on a number of pertinent variables disaggregated at the level of groups and communities. It is a pity that such data is very scanty. Having said this, on the basis of an admittedly quick and elementary review of such information as could be garnered, and on the basis of such indirect procedures for ascertaining group differentials as have been resorted to in this report, we arrive at the following 'minimalist' conclusion: there is a strong case for placing these data and analysis, as we have gathered in the previous chapter in the public domain.

3.5. Manipur High Court orders on ST status for Meiteis

Within the Constitutional framework, reservation is an important tool for improving the socio-economic status of SCs and STs in educational institutions and government employment. The SC reservation is 2% which is predominantly bagged by Meiteis, while ST reservation is predominantly claimed by Kukis. We have outlined the Constitutional provision relating to the pre-eminence of the Executive at the Union through the President to declare the order of inclusion of different castes among the SCs and different tribes among the STs. A writ petition had been filed by some named representatives of the Meitei community (Shri. MutumChuramaniMeetei and 7 others) in W.P. (c) 299 of 2023 on the file of the High Court of Manipur to consider the representation dated 24.1.2023 and submit recommendation in reply to the letter dated

29.5.2021 of the Government of India. The orders of the High Court were the flashpoint for much of the violence that erupted in Manipur.

On March 27, 2023, Justice M.V. Muralidaran of the Manipur High Court issued an order directing the State government to consider the inclusion of the Meitei community in the list of Scheduled Tribes (STs) under the Indian Constitution. The Court purportedly considered four issues, while directing a consideration of the petitioners' request:

1. Consideration of ST Status: The court directed the Manipur government to submit a recommendation to the Central government regarding the demand for the inclusion of the Meitei community in the Scheduled Tribes list. The court instructed that this process should be done expeditiously.
2. Historical Context: The Meitei community, which primarily inhabits the Imphal Valley, had previously been recognized as a tribe before the merger of the Kingdom of Manipur with India in 1949. However, they were not included in the ST list after the merger. The petitioners argued that this omission had led to their marginalisation, especially in terms of access to resources and opportunities reserved for STs.
3. Rationale for ST Status: The petitioners contended that despite being the majority community in the State, the Meiteis are facing challenges similar to those of the recognized Scheduled Tribes in Manipur, such as land rights and socio-economic disadvantages. They argued that ST status would help in preserving their culture and ensure their protection under the Constitution.
4. Government's Role: The court emphasised that it is within the powers of the State government to consider the inclusion of a community in the ST list and make recommendations to the Central government. The court urged the State to act on this matter promptly.

3.5.1. Flawed directions, without adequate data?

The assertions before the Court by the writ petitioners required detailed consideration of the data that we have brought out in the previous chapter on the demographics and development indicators. Before the court could call upon the State government to consider the claims of the writ petitioners, there was a duty for the court to record a finding justifying the consideration. There lies the problem about a popular judicial practice amongst some judges in deflecting what is essential to be considered to the executive. There is no doubt that the pre-eminence of determination of entitlement of any one or the other among the population as required to be brought under the Schedule rests constitutionally only with the executive. If the writ petition had been dismissed holding that it was not the remit of the judiciary to decide on the categorisation and entitlement, it was completely understandable. On the other hand, if the judiciary was holding that it had kept in mind the claims of the writ petitioners in its historical context and rationale for reservation demands and hence kept a timeline for the State to make its recommendations to the Central government, the direction was loaded and beyond what the plain provisions of the Constitution made possible. It was surely not an ‘innocuous direction’, as the court had observed later. However, it was pre-determined and done without any examination of data.

3.5.2. Aftermath and Controversy

The order sparked significant controversy and tensions within Manipur. The State's hill tribes, who already have ST status, opposed the move, fearing that the inclusion of the Meiteis, who are the majority community, could lead to encroachments on their lands and resources. These tensions contributed to unrest and conflicts in the State. The Manipur government was asked to submit its recommendation to the Central government, but the process involved consultations with various stakeholders, including the

State's existing Scheduled Tribes. The order has brought to the forefront the complex socio-political dynamics in Manipur, highlighting the challenges of balancing the interests of different communities within the State.

While the State was burning, the State Government moved the High Court to extend the time of four weeks granted to it for consideration of representation on a plea that there had been a serious law and order problem created and that the State must consult all stakeholders including NGOs, CSOs, religious leaders of all communities and that, further, it was imperative that the State Government must complete all technical formalities before the representations could be considered. The Court said on 9.5.2023 that the “language of the order dated 27.3.2023 in para (iii) (referring to the representation for consideration for inclusion of Meiteis expeditiously within a period of 4 weeks) is only an innocuous order”. It found the prayer of the State for extension of time to be bona fide and extended the time for a period of one year.

The Chairman of the Hills Area Committee DinganglungGangmei has filed a SLP to the Supreme Court. The limited information analysed in this report, as just stated, does not support an objective basis for the Meitei demand. In the light of this, the High Court order is, at the least, inexplicable. This is more so in the context of a long pre-existing history of inter-community dispute. When one adds to this the underlying demographics of the situation, and a ‘double-engine’ political dispensation with distinctive views on religion and citizenship—and the perceived relationship between the two—it is hard to see the High Court order as anything but a version of taking a lighted match to a tinder-box. Events in the wake of the judgment only confirm the tragic truth of this observation.

Chapter 4: Events of violence

This chapter aims to trace the events leading up to the violence which erupted in Manipur on 3rd May, 2023. While some speculate that the Manipur High Court order directing the State Government to consider inclusion of the Meitei community in the ST list triggered the violence, many others narrated a much more complex web of narratives pre-dating the High Court order. The present chapter focuses on these narratives in a detailed manner; the aim to establish a timeline of events leading up to the event of 3rd May, 2023, and thereafter following through the violence in Manipur which continues unabated till the writing of this report.

4.1. Immediate antecedents

Before the violence erupted on 3rd May, 2023, there were four parallel sequences of events taking place from February to April 2023:

1. Evictions and forceful demolitions of tribal villages followed by protests organised by ITLF
2. Agitations, protests and advocacy by Meiteis demanding inclusion of Meiteis and Meitei Pangals in the ST list
3. Protests against the violation of reservation norms for recruitment at RIMS.
4. Protests, meetings and advocacy by tribal groups opposing the Meiteis' demand

This chapter traces all four sequences of events relying on press statements by tribal organisations, media reports, government notices/circulars and court documents and the testimonies of witnesses who appeared before this Tribunal. While one of the main threads connecting the four sequences is the demand by Meiteis and Meitei Pangals for ST status and the environment of opposition and fear that it

created within tribal communities, it is important to note the other events that backdrop the violence.

The incidents of violence themselves are narrated in a chronological manner, primarily relying on testimonies of survivors, along with the documents they submitted to the tribunal and corroborated with legal documents and media reports wherever available.

4.1.1. Protests against evictions of tribal villages, land surveys and declaration of tribal lands as protected areas



Before the Meitei Tribes Union approached the High Court demanding the court's intervention in including Meiteis as STs, there was another sequence of events that preceded the May 3 violence. A report by Land Conflict Watch narrates that on 15th February, 2023, the DC of Churachandpur ordered a verification drive in Churachandpur and Mualnuam sub-divisions in South Manipur to identify

the villagers, whom they termed to be 'illegal immigrants' from Myanmar²⁰.

²⁰<https://www.landconflictwatch.org/conflicts/declaration-of-village-land-as-protected-forest-areas-in-the-hill-district-of-manipur-triggers-statewide-protests#> ,
<https://www.eastmojo.com/opinion/2023/03/10/understanding-the-ongoing-crisis-in-some-areas-of-manipur/>

The report states that on 20th February, 2023, the Noney Forest Division and police teams from Noney, Kangpokpi, and Bishnupur districts, evicted the residents of K. Songjang, a Kuki tribal village in Churachandpur, 30 kilometres from the Bishnupur district headquarters: “The state government notified and carried out the eviction drive, deploying hundreds of police personnel and paramilitary forces to evict around 12 families at K. Songjang, saying the village was recently set up and was encroaching on the Churachandpur-Khoupum protected forest stretch”.

A social media post on 20th February, 2023 from a local news agency suggested that there was a clash between the police force which had arrived with six bulldozers, and the villagers, due to which some villagers sustained minor injuries²¹. Houses, farmlands and a church were demolished by the officials. A detailed report of the demolition by The Print suggested, “these events at K. Songjang set off a chain of profound consequences — for the government as well as the local population, feeding into Manipur’s struggle with resentment among different communities on various issues”²².

This incident must be understood in the context of the allegation that there is increasing illegal migration from Burma and Bangladesh into Manipur. The demand for strong administrative action against illegal immigrants was made mainly by valley-based groups; a number of Naga groups joined them in the demand for the implementation of NRC²³.

²¹https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1152754528622964&id=188089755089451&__e__ntstream_source=permalink

²²<https://theprint.in/ground-reports/they-came-with-6-jcbs-how-eviction-of-a-tiny-village-sparked-fires-across-manipur/>

²³<https://thefrontiermanipur.com/manipur-from-demand-for-nrc-blasphemy-arms-looting-to-miss-india-pageant/>

Following the clash on 20th February, 2023, the Indigenous 'Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF) and the Kuki Students' Organisation (KSO) called for mass protest rallies in the tribal-majority hill districts of Churachandpur, Ukhrul, Kangpokpi, Tengnoupal and Jiribam²⁴ as well as Delhi's Jantar Mantar²⁵. Local media reported that the protest was proposed to be held on 10th March, 2023, to resist the forceful eviction and demolition of homes without rehabilitation, and to oppose the declaration of tribal lands as protected areas such as reserved forests and wetlands²⁶.

Prohibitory orders were issued under Sec. 144 Cr.PC on March 9, 2023 by the District Magistrate, Churachandpur²⁷ and Kangpokpi districts. Despite that, KSO²⁸ and ITLF²⁹ issued statements urging tribal communities to gather in large numbers on 9th March, 2023, in exercise of the fundamental right to freedom of assembly without arms.

However, this was not met with solidarity from all tribal communities. Groups representing other tribal communities denounced this call for protest, and distanced themselves from the ITLF too. In fact, a Naga group called Rongmei Naga Students Association issued a Statement on

²⁴<https://scroll.in/article/1045527/in-manipur-the-kukis-are-up-in-arms-against-the-majoritarian-bjp-government>

²⁵<https://groundreport.in/declaring-tribal-inhabited-hills-in-manipur-as-reserved-forests/>

²⁶<https://www.indiatodayne.in/manipur/story/manipur-kuki-students-organisation-carries-out-rally-against-eviction-in-churachandpur-524726-2023-03-10>

²⁷https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Oadg_qeTWHRU2v1AYyzdxZPYR1Jfuksy/view?usp=drive_link

²⁸https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cdbWa4G3UbY-wX7AkLRHnyF2TmUn2fbT/view?usp=drive_link

²⁹https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ABJZ6EqImPWAEqi0zxFc_21I7U3DdMIW/view?usp=drive_link

22nd February, 2023 immediately after the eviction drive welcoming and “lauding” the government’s initiative to identify “illegal encroachers”³⁰.

Additionally, the Thangal Union representing the Thangal tribe said that ITLF was a ‘self-styled group’ which called for a protest without consent of ‘actual indigenous tribes’, and that the indigenous Thangal tribes are in no way related to the ITLF³¹. In their Statement on 10th March, 2023, they also alleged that the sole agenda of ITLF was to mislead the general public. Similar Statements were issued by the Maram Community, the Thadous, the Rongmei Naga Council and the All Tribal Chiefs' Forum (ATCF).

The protest rally on 10th March was held peacefully, with thousands of people taking to the streets in Churachandpur, Moreh and Tengnoupal. However, in Kangpokpi the protest turned violent, when the police especially came down hard on the protestors for defying the prohibitory orders. A Statement by KSO alleged that the high handedness of the district police resulted in the injuries of civilians and police forces, as well as breach of law and order³².

On the same day as the violence erupted in Kangpokpi, in a late-night Cabinet meeting, the State Government withdrew from tripartite talks or SoO(Suspension of Operation) Agreements with three hill-based insurgent groups, which was announced through a press note³³. Ironically, this move

³⁰https://drive.google.com/file/d/1C44cRQZzVxBEDv_LAM3YVsr3sqvxSvJ7/view?usp=drive_link

³¹https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vXYUt1z0XTsDWRw72Ny4JuXrsK0hnD27/view?usp=drive_link

³²https://drive.google.com/file/d/1B1ja6y86NOkdSz5Z7FBJdbNEOMfYvHrK/view?usp=drive_link

³³https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KEYd67wLzPDlvKq99R9TMltnmwXDDd-D/view?usp=drive_link, <https://www.ifp.co.in/manipur/manipur-cabinet-resolves-to-withdraw-from-soo>

of the State Government contradicted the decision of the Central Government, which only ten days previously had extended the SoO agreement with Kuki militants in New Delhi³⁴. The SoO agreement with the UG groups was due to expire on 28th February, 2023 and the extension was to come into effect from 1st March, 2023 till 29th February, 2024.



As per a report by Border Lens, the SDO Churachandpur issued an order on 4th April, 2023 announcing land surveys in Bungmual, Pearsonmun, HQ Veng, and Sielmat villages scheduled to take place from 10th to 13th April³⁵. They were reportedly conducting a survey to verify the geo-coordinates of Churachandpur-Khoupum Protected Forest area. The

³⁴<https://ukhrultimes.com/manipur-center-extends-soo-agreement-with-kuki-militants-for-12-months/>

³⁵<https://www.borderlens.com/2023/04/15/land-survey-in-manipur-run-into-hurdles-villagers-oppose-move/>

report narrates that village authorities and leaders of the Kuki Students' Organization (KSO) and Zomi Students' Federation found out only after planning a protest against these surveys that some areas had already been surveyed and geo-tagged without informing or taking consent from village authorities³⁶. An article dated 15th April, 2023 in the Imphal Free Press reported that on 12th April, 2023, following heated exchanges, villagers of Sielmat village objected and stopped officials from conducting land survey³⁷.

MLA Paolienlal Haokip wrote to the Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister Biswajit Singh, questioning the legitimacy and legality of the surveys³⁸. He pointed out that unless such surveys are undertaken in all protected areas, it will be perceived to be selective and targeted in nature, causing public anger³⁹.

On 27th April, 2023, the ITLF called for an eight-hour shutdown on 28th April, 2023 in Churachandpur district from 8 AM to 4 PM. In a press release they issued on 27th April, they said, "The ITLF has submitted several memoranda to the Government of Manipur to voice our grievances and apprehensions...in light of the situation, the ITLF has heeded the cry of the people and to show our dejection and dissatisfaction with the unlawful activities of the Government of Manipur, the ITLF is compelled to resort to non-cooperation of all Government-related programmes..."⁴⁰ This call was also endorsed by other Churachandpur-based organisations such as All Lamka United Youth, Zou

³⁶<https://themorningbell.in/index.php/2023/04/12/kso-zsf-block-land-survey-in-churachandpur/>

³⁷<https://www.ifp.co.in/manipur/manipur-government-to-conduct-survey-at-khoupum-reserve-forest>

³⁸<https://www.ifp.co.in/manipur/mla-asks-government-to-stop-surveys-seeks-clarification>

³⁹https://youtu.be/-E_EkIp03g0?feature=shared

⁴⁰https://drive.google.com/file/d/1u7vytuHNeMDTQmcasMYXTn3DybtJhuKt/view?usp=drive_link

SangnaupangPawlpipi and Kuki Students' Organisation (Churachandpur) District Headquarters.

Independent of the call for protest by ITLF on 27th April, 2023, it is particularly important to note that it was already announced and confirmed that Chief Minister N. Biren Singh would be visiting the district to inaugurate an Open Gym at PT Sport Complex on 28th April, 2023. However, it was reported that suspected volunteers of the ITLF and supporters vandalised the open gym at around 830 pm on 27th April, 2023.

This incident led the Commissioner (Home) to issue a Memo No.1/1(3)/2008-H on 27th April, 2023 imposing a suspension of mobile data services for 5 days in Churachandpur and Pherzawl districts⁴¹. The memo stated that apart from the vandalism incident that occurred at around 8:30 PM, there was also opposition to the land and forest survey carried out by the concerned authority.

Additionally, the venue in which the CM was to address a public rally, Sadbhavana Bhavan, was also vandalised and torched on the previous evening by youth ahead of his visit. As per a report by the Indian Express, the Chief Minister called off his visit and clashes between the police and protestors continued till 28th April night⁴². On the same night, some people set a Forest Range Office in Tuibhung area on fire. The arson attack prompted the authorities to impose a night curfew from 5 PM to 5 AM in the entire Churachandpur district and prohibitory orders under

⁴¹https://drive.google.com/file/d/1IttzLT3c7n6F26a3DX2EkeLPOYOYPkHS/view?usp=drive_link.

A point to be noted here is that this government order dated 27th April, 2023 referred to the incident that occurred at 830 pm on the same day, i.e. 27th April and within the next 3.5 hours itself the order suspending operation of internet facilities came to be passed by the government of Manipur after obtaining the assent of the governor.

⁴²<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/violence-manipur-churachandpur-biren-singh-cm-kuki-8585138/>

section 144 Criminal Procedure Code from 5 am to 5 pm until further orders.

On 29th April, 2023 the ATSUM issued a press Statement which has been covered in multiple news websites (Ukhrul, The Hills Journal, E-Pao, Northeast Live) saying that the violent “street protest (are) not a spontaneous phenomenon” but an outburst of growing dissent against the adverse and regressive policies of the present N. Biren Singh-led Government of Manipur. The Statement also responded to media reports by ISTV which alleged that protestors were speaking in Myanmarese language, and branded them as illegal immigrants, by calling such comments outrageous. The ATSUM statement pointed out that the people were speaking Paitei language, one of the languages spoken by the Kuki-Zo-Chin tribes. ATSUM, in this Statement, appealed for peace and calm in the State, and valley-based organisations such as World Meitei Council and KKL must refrain playing divisive policies.

Hmar Students’ Association also issued a Statement on 29th April, saying that they were deeply pained that innocent civilians were injured in the incident⁴³. They called for peaceful resolution of issues including contentious forest and village land and reiterated that the State Government must strive to maintain utmost restraint while pursuing its noble cause of conserving forests and natural resources.

These incidents highlight the growing discontent amongst the tribal communities, and rising anxieties amongst them. The outbreak of violence in May, 2023 will have to be seen in the context of these incidents that occurred prior to 3rd May, 2023.⁴⁴

⁴³https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GzHQOpJ8MIS9_dUmRKA1nGMe1SiLv1Iz/view?usp=drive_link

⁴⁴CCpur limping back to normalcy, DGP assesses : 30th apr23 ~ E-Pao! Headlines, <https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=27..300423.apr2> accessed on 22nd Dec 2024

4.1.2. The Meitei Demand for the ST Status

Multiple media reports suggest that for several decades the Meitei Tribes Union (MTU) and other Meitei organisations have been demanding that the Meitei community be included in the Scheduled Tribes List. Over ten years ago, the Scheduled Tribe Demand Committee of Manipur (STDCM) filed a representation with the Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MTA) which was forwarded to the Government of Manipur (No. 1902005/2012-C&IM) on 29th May, 2013, requesting for specific recommendations along with the latest socio-economic survey and ethnographic report.

The STDCM continued to press for a reply from the State Government, and wrote to the Union of India again on 18th April, 2022. The Ministry of Home Affairs forwarded their letter to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, which wrote again (Letter No. 12026/09/2013-C&LM) to the Home Department, Government of Manipur on 31st May, 2022. The STDCM continued pressing for the demand for ST status during the 2022 Manipur Assembly elections⁴⁵.

The STDCM continued submitting representations to MPs and MLAs even while putting pressure on the State Government to conduct an ethnographic survey and submit their recommendations to the Central Government. They also continued regular protests and gathered support from Meitei organisations in various districts like the SugnuApunbaLup (United Body of People in Sugnu)⁴⁶ and in Thoubal. Protests were organised in February, 2023 in association with Meira Paibi women⁴⁷.

⁴⁵<https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2022/Feb/25/manipurelections-scheduled-tribe-tag-demand-formeitei-community-remains-hot-potato-2423502.html>

⁴⁶<https://www.thesangaiexpress.com/Encyc/2023/2/5/By-Our-Staff-ReporterIMPHAL-Feb-4-Boosted-by-the-immense-support-they-received-from-lawmakers-i.html>

⁴⁷<https://www.thesangaiexpress.com/Encyc/2023/2/12/By-Our-Staff-ReporterIMPHAL-Feb-11-The-Scheduled-Tribe-Demand-Committee-Manipur-STDCM-continu.html>

On 13th March, 2023, Mutum Churamani and 7 other petitioners filed a fresh writ petition, in the Manipur High Court which relied upon the details of the aforementioned correspondence. The petitioners sought directions from the Court to the State Government to reply to the 2013 letter sent by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India within a period of two months. The second demand was of course, the inclusion of Meitei and Meitei Pangals to the Scheduled Tribes List of the Indian Constitution.

The key contention in the new Writ petition was that before the execution of the Merger Agreement of 1949, Meiteis were “a tribe among tribes” who lost their tribal identity after Manipur merged with the Union of India⁴⁸.

On 27th March, 2023, a single judge bench of Justice MV Muralidharan, then Acting Chief Justice of Manipur High Court directed the State Government to submit their reply to the 2013 letter, and consider the case of including the Meetei/Meitei in the ST List expeditiously, within four weeks. This order was uploaded on the High Court website on 19th April, 2023, and thus made accessible to the public⁴⁹.

This was met with widespread opposition from organisations representing the 36 existing ST communities, especially from student organisations like the All Tribal Students’ Union, Manipur (ATSUM) and the All Naga Students Association, Manipur (ANSAM). They argued that this move

⁴⁸The point to be noted here is that this fresh Writ Petition was filed even when several older writ petitions seeking similar remedies were already pending before the Manipur High Court.

⁴⁹ W.P.(C) No. 229 of 2023 - Shri MutumChuramaniMeitei& Ors. v. The State of Manipur & Ors
NOTE: IF the affidavit of the WP is available, please provide the web link here.

would defeat the purpose of protecting tribal communities through reservations⁵⁰.

S Andria, General Secretary of (ATSUM), representing Naga and Kuki communities, declared April 19th as a Black Letter Day for the tribal people of Manipur. A media report dated 24th April, 2023⁵¹ quotes the president of ATSUM to say, “Non-tribals cannot buy land in the hill areas. But if the Meiteis get ST status, they can own and purchase land in the hills. If our land is taken away, what will we have? Nothing.”

On the next day itself, i.e., 20th April, 2023, the Hill Areas Committee (HAC) of the Manipur Legislative Assembly said it was ‘aggrieved or perturbed’ by the court directive which was passed despite strong opposition from the State’s tribal groups. They said that as a Constitutional Body, the HAC was neither made a party to the case, nor consulted.

⁵⁰<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/manipur-high-court-directs-State-to-consider-inclusion-of-meitei-community-in-scheduled-tribes-list/article66756719.ece>

⁵¹<https://scroll.in/article/1047865/why-manipurs-tribes-are-alarmed-by-court-push-for-scheduled-tribe-status-for-the-meitei-community>

**MANIPUR LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
SECRETARIAT**

Imphal, the 20th April, 2023.

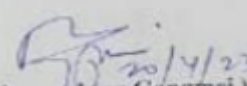
The Hill Areas Committee, Manipur Legislative Assembly, in its meeting held on 20th April, 2023 in the Office Chamber of the Hon'ble Chairman, HAC unanimously adopted the resolution:

RESOLUTION NO. 55/2023-(HAC)

The Hill Areas Committee, Manipur Legislative Assembly is perturbed/aggrieved by the Order of Hon'ble High Court of Manipur dated 19/4/2023 in Writ Petition No. 229 of 2023 directing the Government of Manipur to recommend for inclusion of Meitei/Meetei community in the Scheduled Tribe list of the Constitution of India in spite of strong opposition from the Scheduled Tribes of Manipur.

In this matter, the HAC as a Constitutional Body of the Hill Areas of Manipur was neither made a party to the case nor consulted. The HAC also has never given any recommendation or consent.

Further, it is pertinent to mention that the Meitei/Meetei community of Manipur are already protected under Constitution of India and categorized as (i) General (ii) Other Backward Classes (OBC) and (iii) Scheduled Caste (SC). **In view of the above, the Committee unanimously resolved to urge the Government of Manipur and Government of India to go for Appeals against the aforementioned Order of the Hon'ble High Court of Manipur, taking into account the sentiments and interests/rights of the Scheduled Tribes of Manipur.**


(Dinganglang Gangmei)
Chairman (HAC).

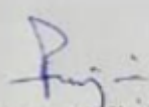
Manipur Legislative Assembly.

Imphal, the 20th April, 2023.

Memo No. 4/29/2022-2027-LA(HAC)

Copy to:

1. All the Hon'ble Members (HAC) Manipur Legislative Assembly.
2. The Secretary to the Hon'ble Governor of Manipur, Raj Bhawan, Imphal.
3. The Secretary to the Hon'ble Chief Minister, Manipur.
4. The Secretary, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi.
5. The P.S. to the Hon'ble Speaker, Manipur Legislative Assembly.
6. The P.A. to the Hon'ble Minister, TA & H, Government of Manipur.
7. The PS to Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India, Government of India, New Delhi.
8. The P.S. to Chairperson, National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, Government of India, New Delhi.
9. The Staff Officer to the Chief Secretary, Government of Manipur.
10. The P.A. to the Secretary, Manipur Legislative Assembly.


(Pammei Ningmei)
Deputy Secretary (HAC),
Manipur Legislative Assembly.

In Resolution No.55/2023 dated 20th April, 2023, they also pointed out that the Meiteis were already protected and categorised as OBCs, SCs and General. The HAC thus resolved to urge the State and Central Government to appeal against the order taking into account the sentiments and interests/rights of the STs of Manipur.

Following this resolution, on 3rd May, 2023 as per a report by The Hindu⁵², the Manipur High Court issued notices to the Chairman of HAC and the president of ATSUM for appearance “for instigating innocent hill people against the court judgment.” The High Court asked them to show cause on why contempt of court proceedings should not be initiated against them⁵³.

It must be noted that the paragraph of the High Court order passed on 19th April, 2023 was deleted almost a year later on February 21, 2024 when Review Petition No. 12 of 2023 was filed in the High Court on 21st December, 2023⁵⁴.

4.1.3. Flouting of Reservation norms during recruitment in RIMS

Another set of events that led to tensions between the Kuki and Meitei communities was regarding the number of seats reserved -for ST category in RIMS. On March 3rd, 2023, the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS) declared recruitment results for the appointment of nine Lower Division Clerks (LDC)⁵⁵, the job being of a clerical staff member who

⁵²<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/manipur-violence-government-issues-shoot-at-sight-orders-in-extreme-cases/article66812131.ece>

⁵³<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/manipur-violence-a-clash-between-valley-and-hills/articleshow/99996095.cms?from=mdr>

⁵⁴https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ffQM7iqx8bcOyiBcF61XA-0xJGtAek0/view?usp=drive_link

⁵⁵ Break up of seats as per 2005 notification – 50% of 9 = 4.5 ~ 5 for UR; 13% of 9 = 1.17 ~ 2 for OBC; 3% of 9 = 0.27 ~ 1 for SC; 34% of 9 = 3.06 ~ 3 for ST.

<https://www.rims.edu.in/secure/wp-content/uploads/result-LDC-3-3-2023.pdf>

performs routine office tasks in a government agency or department. According to a 2005 notification, which is further explained below, reserved seats for STs should have been 34%, which amounts to 3 seats. However, only one seat was allocated to a ST candidate.

Tribal bodies alleged on 4th March 2023, that RIMS flouted the reservation quantum prescribed by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) by prescribing lesser seats for ST candidates.⁵⁶ Speaking to the media in Imphal on that day, ATSUM General Secretary SR Andria condemned the results announced and demanded the nullification of the recruitment results with immediate effect.⁵⁷ This however has a longer history before 2023.

The 2005 Order

These allegations and demands must be understood in the context of the reservation norms stipulated by a notification dated 05.07.2005, the DoPT OM No. 36017/2/2004, wherein the DoPT fixed reservation quantum of SC, ST, and OBC for Manipur with respect to direct recruitment of Group C and Group D posts of central institutions, 3% for SC, 34% for ST and 13% for OBC.⁵⁸ Therefore, for nine LDC positions, it would

⁵⁶

<https://ukhrulimes.com/atsum-to-agitate-against-reservation-norms-of-recruitment-in-rims/>

⁵⁷

<https://www.thesangaiexpress.com/Encyc/2023/3/5/By-Our-Staff-ReporterIMPHAL-Mar-4-The-ATSUM-has-alleged-that-the-recent-recruitment-of-LDCs-in-R.html>

⁵⁸

https://ukhrulimes.com/atsum-to-agitate-against-reservation-norms-of-recruitment-in-rims/#google_vignette

https://www.ifp.co.in/manipur/rims-recruitment-atsum-to-launch-stir-from-april-3/#google_vignette

https://imphalreviews.in/controversy-over-the-recruitment-reservation-norms-in-rims-may-add-another-communal-dimension-to-communally-charged-environment-of-manipur/#google_vignette

<https://northeastlivetv.com/around-ne/manipur/atsum-calls-for-12-hour-bandh-in-hill-districts-of-manipur-on-april-4/>

amount to 5 seats for the unreserved category, 2 for OBCs, 1 for SCs and 3 for STs.

On 16th January, 2016,⁵⁹ RIMS advertised notifications for vacancies for 134 Multi-tasking Staff (MTS) positions. The comparison between the reservation quantum in this notification, viz. the 2005 stipulated norms is shown in the table below:

Category	2016 notification	Rules as per 2005
UR	68	67 (50%)
OBC	36	17 (13%)
SC	20	4 (3%)
ST	10	46 (34%)

As is visible in the table, the reserved seats for

STs was significantly reduced from 46 to 10. On 5th March, 2021, they issued a letter revising the MTS reservation roster, advertising posts for 67 UR, 4 SC, 46 ST and 17 OBC meeting the quantum as per the 2005 notification.⁶⁰

On 1st June, 2019, RIMS advertised notifications for vacancies for 9 LDC positions.⁶¹ In this notification, the reserved seats for STs should have been 3, but they were allocated only 1.

<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=4..190323.mar23>

<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=28..190323.mar23>

⁵⁹

<https://www.rims.edu.in/secure/wp-content/uploads/Advt-16-1-2016.pdf>

⁶⁰

<https://www.ifp.co.in/manipur/rims-recruitment-atsum-to-launch-stir-from-april-3#:~:text=Further%2C%20a%20joint%20meeting%20of,respect%20of%20134%20post%20of>
<https://ukhrulimes.com/atsum-to-agitate-against-reservation-norms-of-recruitment-in-rims/>
<https://www.rims.edu.in/secure/wp-content/uploads/Notification-5-2-2021.pdf>

⁶¹

<https://www.rims.edu.in/secure/wp-content/uploads/Advt-LDC-post.pdf>

Category	2019 notification	Rules as per 2005
UR	5	4.5 ~ 4 (50%)
OBC	1	1.17 ~ 1 (13%)
SC	2	0.27 ~ 1 (3%)
ST	1	3.06 ~ 3 (34%)

Negotiations and agitations from tribal bodies

On 23rd July, 2019, ATSUM called for different forms of agitations with 48 hours National Highways bandh which was to begin from 28th July, 2019 as the State government had kept pending the various demands pertaining to education sectors, health sectors, Scheduled Tribes reservation policy and Tribal affairs and hills that was made by ATSUM for couple of years but no action was taken⁶².

On 25th July, 2019, the Director of RIMS, A. Santa Singh invited the leaders of ATSUM and had a discussion on the violation of the ST reservation policy⁶³. The RIMS authorities gave assurance to rectify the ST reservation policy and to provide the seats accordingly to 2005 ST reservation policy and as well as MBBS course reservation⁶⁴. According to The Morning Bell's post, ATSUM lauded the RIMS hospital authority for taking up such kinds of measures and expressed belief that RIMS authority will rectify the reservation policy and announce the results of the post at the earliest.⁶⁵

⁶²<https://www.facebook.com/themorningbellnewspaper/posts/atsum-temporarily-suspends-its-48-hour-nhs-bandhtmb-reportimphal-the-all-tribal-/375253926373032/>

⁶³<https://www.facebook.com/themorningbellnewspaper/posts/atsum-temporarily-suspends-its-48-hour-nhs-bandhtmb-reportimphal-the-all-tribal-/375253926373032/>

⁶⁴<https://www.facebook.com/themorningbellnewspaper/posts/atsum-temporarily-suspends-its-48-hour-nhs-bandhtmb-reportimphal-the-all-tribal-/375253926373032/>

⁶⁵<https://www.facebook.com/themorningbellnewspaper/posts/atsum-temporarily-suspends-its-48-hour-nhs-bandhtmb-reportimphal-the-all-tribal-/375253926373032/>

On 27th July, 2019, ATSUM, KSO-GHQ, ANSAM with the Minister of Agriculture V. Hangkhanlian held a meeting at Imphal wherein they extensively discussed various issues brought out by tribal organisations, wherein one of the issues discussed was with regards to the Scheduled Tribes Reservation Policy⁶⁶. RIMS issued an order No. M/1/2019 – RIMS (49) dated 21st May, 2022, on the reservation quantum to be followed in RIMS as 3% for SC, 34% for ST, 13% for OBC and 50% for UR in case of direct recruitment to Group C and Group D posts.⁶⁷

From 3rd March, 2023 till 27th March, 2023 there have been several reports on ATSUM lodging complaints to the RIMS authority, the Ministry of Home and Family Welfare and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes to streamline the reservation as per the DoPT guidelines.⁶⁸ The same news reports also reported that there were multiple discussions held

⁶⁶<https://www.facebook.com/themorningbellnewspaper/posts/atsum-temporarily-suspends-its-48-hour-nhs-bandhtmb-reportimphal-the-all-tribal-/375253926373032/>

⁶⁷

<https://imphalreviews.in/controversy-over-the-recruitment-reservation-norms-in-rims-may-add-another-communal-dimension-to-communally-charged-environment-of-manipur/>
<https://ukhrulimes.com/atsum-to-agitate-against-reservation-norms-of-recruitment-in-rims/>
<https://thehillstimes.in/northeast/agitation-by-tribal-students-from-april-3>

⁶⁸

<https://imphalreviews.in/controversy-over-the-recruitment-reservation-norms-in-rims-may-add-another-communal-dimension-to-communally-charged-environment-of-manipur/>
<https://www.ifp.co.in/manipur/rims-recruitment-atsum-to-launch-stir-from-april-3>
<https://ukhrulimes.com/atsum-to-agitate-against-reservation-norms-of-recruitment-in-rims/#:~:text=The%20ATSUM%20claimed%20that%20it,tribal%20student%20body%20also%20said.>
<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=35..010423.apr23>
<https://www.thesangaexpress.com/Encyc/2023/3/31/Newmai-News-NetworkIMPHAL-MAR-30-The-All-Tribal-Students-Union-Manipur-ATSUM-has-announced-t.html>
<https://northeastlivetv.com/around-ne/manipur/atsum-calls-for-12-hour-bandh-in-hill-districts-of-manipur-on-april-4/>
<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=4..190323.mar23>
<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=28..190323.mar23>

between ATSUM and RIMS authority on the matter of rectification of the reservation policy.⁶⁹ It has also been reported that a joint meeting between a Parliamentary Committee, National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) and RIMS authority for necessary rectification of the reservation quantum was held.⁷⁰

Further, ATSUM filed complaints and memoranda in repeated attempts to rectify the disparity within the reservation quantum. On 27th March, 2023, ATSUM held its 3rd General Assembly⁷¹ and resolved to resort to various

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<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=35..010423.apr23>
<https://ukhrulimes.com/atsum-to-agitate-against-reservation-norms-of-recruitment-in-rims/#:~:text=The%20ATSUM%20claimed%20that%20it,tribal%20student%20body%20also%20said.>

<https://www.ifp.co.in/manipur/rims-recruitment-atsum-to-launch-stir-from-april-3>
<https://imphalreviews.in/controversy-over-the-recruitment-reservation-norms-in-rims-may-add-another-communal-dimension-to-communally-charged-environment-of-manipur/>
<https://northeastlivetv.com/around-ne/manipur/atsum-calls-for-12-hour-bandh-in-hill-districts-of-manipur-on-april-4/>
<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=4..190323.mar23>
<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=28..190323.mar23>

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<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=35..010423.apr23>
<https://www.ifp.co.in/manipur/rims-recruitment-atsum-to-launch-stir-from-april-3>
<https://ukhrulimes.com/atsum-to-agitate-against-reservation-norms-of-recruitment-in-rims/>
<https://northeastlivetv.com/around-ne/manipur/atsum-calls-for-12-hour-bandh-in-hill-districts-of-manipur-on-april-4/>
<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=4..190323.mar23>
<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=28..190323.mar23>

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<https://www.thesangaexpress.com/Encyc/2023/2/23/Mungchan-ZimikUKHRUL-Feb-22-The-All-Tribal-Students-Union-Manipur-ATSUM-is-set-to-hold-the-3.html>
<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=Snipp4..230223.feb23>

<https://imphalreviews.in/controversy-over-the-recruitment-reservation-norms-in-rims-may-add-another-communal-dimension-to-communally-charged-environment-of-manipur/>
<https://www.ifp.co.in/manipur/rims-recruitment-atsum-to-launch-stir-from-april-3>
<https://ukhrulimes.com/atsum-to-agitate-against-reservation-norms-of-recruitment-in-rims/>

forms of agitations from 3rd April, 2023 to demand the nullification of the declaration of results for the appointment of LDCs by RIMS.⁷²

ATSUM alleged that the RIMS administration was depriving reservation rights of the tribals in the direct recruitment to Group C and Group D posts.⁷³ Despite ATSUM's calls for rectification of reservation discrepancies, the RIMS administration did not relent.⁷⁴ ATSUM further alleged that they learnt that RIMS was trying to aggravate the pain of tribals by processing Departmental Promotion Committees (DPC) for other posts before the reservation quota of SC, ST and OBC is streamlined.⁷⁵

On 2nd April, 2023, ATSUM issued a press release calling for a 12-hour State-wide shutdown from 6 AM to 6 PM on 4th April 2023 because of the failure of RIMS to rectify the reservation discrepancies and failure to

⁷²

<https://ukhrulimes.com/atsum-to-agitate-against-reservation-norms-of-recruitment-in-rims/>
<https://www.ifp.co.in/manipur/rims-recruitment-atsum-to-launch-stir-from-april-3>

⁷³

<https://ukhrulimes.com/atsum-to-agitate-against-reservation-norms-of-recruitment-in-rims/#:~:text=B%2F3222%2F2018%20%E2%80%93%20RIMS,RIMS%20Director%20vide%20letter%20No.>

⁷⁴

[https://thefrontiermanipur.com/atsum-alleges-quota-discrepancy-in-rims-ldc-recruitment-threatens-stir/#:~:text=Despite%20repeated%20fervent%20appeals%20of%20ATSUM%20to,the%20Regional%20Institute%20of%20Medical%20Sciences%20\(RIMS\)](https://thefrontiermanipur.com/atsum-alleges-quota-discrepancy-in-rims-ldc-recruitment-threatens-stir/#:~:text=Despite%20repeated%20fervent%20appeals%20of%20ATSUM%20to,the%20Regional%20Institute%20of%20Medical%20Sciences%20(RIMS))
<https://imphalreviews.in/controversy-over-the-recruitment-reservation-norms-in-rims-may-add-another-communal-dimension-to-communally-charged-environment-of-manipur/>
<https://ukhrulimes.com/atsum-to-agitate-against-reservation-norms-of-recruitment-in-rims/>
<https://www.ifp.co.in/manipur/rims-recruitment-atsum-to-launch-stir-from-april-3>

⁷⁵

<https://ukhrulimes.com/atsum-to-agitate-against-reservation-norms-of-recruitment-in-rims/#:~:text=B%2F3222%2F2018%20%E2%80%93%20RIMS,RIMS%20Director%20vide%20letter%20No.>

nullify the LDC results.⁷⁶ Further, on 3rd April, 2023, a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) was signed between ATSUM and RIMS in the presence of Minister of Health and Family Welfare Dr. Sapam Ranjan, Minister of Tribal Affairs Letpao Haokip and Chairman of the Hills Area Committee DinganglungGangmei.⁷⁷ Accordingly, RIMS was to declare fresh results within 1 week with reservation for SC (3%), OBC (13%) and ST (34%) based on DPC already conducted. RIMS further agreed to cancel the results of LDC recruitment that was notified without following the prescribed norms and DoPT guidelines.⁷⁸ RIMS also agreed to follow the reservation norms in the recruitment of Group C and D posts.⁷⁹ To this, ATSUM announced the suspension of the total shutdown for 4th April, 2023.⁸⁰

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<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=6..030423.apr23>

<https://www.ifp.co.in/manipur/manipur-atsum-calls-12-hour-Statewide-shutdown-from-6-am-of-april-4>

<https://www.hoten.life/p/12-hours-total-shutdown-from-6am-to-6-pm-on-4th-april-2023-will-be-enforced-in-all-the-hill-districts-of-manipur-x59b8fs8pd94lma>

<https://imphalreviews.in/controversy-over-the-recruitment-reservation-norms-in-rims-may-add-another-communal-dimension-to-communally-charged-environment-of-manipur/>

<https://themorningbell.in/index.php/2023/04/03/atsum-calls-12-hr-shutdown-over-rims-imbroglio/>

<https://www.indiatodayne.in/manipur/story/manipur-kuki-students-organization-endorses-atsums-12-hour-bandh-call-on-april-4-536829-2023-04-03>

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<https://www.hoten.life/p/atsum-agrees-to-keep-in-abeyance-the-total-shutdown-called-by-them-7j5npezpd8y0pek>

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<https://www.hoten.life/p/atsum-agrees-to-keep-in-abeyance-the-total-shutdown-called-by-them-7j5npezpd8y0pek>

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<https://www.hoten.life/p/atsum-agrees-to-keep-in-abeyance-the-total-shutdown-called-by-them-7j5npezpd8y0pek>

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<https://www.hoten.life/p/atsum-agrees-to-keep-in-abeyance-the-total-shutdown-called-by-them-7j5npezpd8y0pek>

Meitei Response

On April 5th, 2023, Kangleipak KanbaLup (KKL), a Meitei group known to be radical, submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister, RIMS and the Additional Chief Secretary of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Manipur, demanding to nullify the MoA signed by RIMS, ATSUM and the Government.⁸¹ KKL in a press release termed the MoA as ‘illegal’ and denounced the demand raised by ATSUM.⁸² KKL alleged that the agreements signed in the backdrop of ATSUM’s call for a State-wide shutdown was unacceptable.⁸³ They also questioned the authority of ATSUM to sign the agreement and the Government’s approval.⁸⁴ KKL also cautioned that it will take up the matter to the High

<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=7..040423.apr23>

<https://ukhrulimes.com/atsum-calls-off-april-4-proposed-12-hour-total-shutdown-in-hill-dists-of-manipur/>

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<https://www.thesangaiexpress.com/Encyc/2023/4/6/IMPHAL-Apr-5Kangleipak-Kanba-Lup-KKL-submitted-a-memorandum-to-the-Chief-Minister-RIMS-and-Add.html>

<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=18..060423.apr23>

<https://imphalreviews.in/controversy-over-the-recruitment-reservation-norms-in-rims-may-add-another-communal-dimension-to-communally-charged-environment-of-manipur/>

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<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=18..060423.apr23>

<https://imphalreviews.in/controversy-over-the-recruitment-reservation-norms-in-rims-may-add-another-communal-dimension-to-communally-charged-environment-of-manipur/>

<https://www.thesangaiexpress.com/Encyc/2023/4/6/IMPHAL-Apr-5Kangleipak-Kanba-Lup-KKL-submitted-a-memorandum-to-the-Chief-Minister-RIMS-and-Add.html>

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<https://imphalreviews.in/controversy-over-the-recruitment-reservation-norms-in-rims-may-add-another-communal-dimension-to-communally-charged-environment-of-manipur/>

<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=18..060423.apr23>

<https://www.thesangaiexpress.com/Encyc/2023/4/6/IMPHAL-Apr-5Kangleipak-Kanba-Lup-KKL-submitted-a-memorandum-to-the-Chief-Minister-RIMS-and-Add.html>

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<https://imphalreviews.in/controversy-over-the-recruitment-reservation-norms-in-rims-may-add-another-communal-dimension-to-communally-charged-environment-of-manipur/>

<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=18..060423.apr23>

Court if RIMS authority fails to comply with the demands of KKL to follow the recruitment process as per the reservation policies Stated in the previous recruitment notice of RIMS.⁸⁵ According to the memorandum addressed to the Chief Minister of Manipur, the KKL said the application/implementation of DoPT Office memorandum issued on July 5, 2005 in the recruitment of Lower Division Clerk the result of which was declared on March 3, 2023 does not arise at all as it goes against the notification of vacancies to employment exchange issued on June 1, 2019 and over and above the notification precedes order dated 21/05/2022.⁸⁶ As such, the retrospective application of the same is ultra vires. It urged the government to revoke the agreement and to not to implement and operationalise the illegal memorandum of agreement.⁸⁷ KKL also said that it will take up intense form of agitation along with the support of the masses if their demands are not fulfilled.⁸⁸

<https://www.thesangaiexpress.com/Encyc/2023/4/6/IMPHAL-Apr-5Kangleipak-Kanba-Lup-KKL-submitted-a-memorandum-to-the-Chief-Minister-RIMS-and-Add.html>

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<https://imphalreviews.in/controversy-over-the-recruitment-reservation-norms-in-rims-may-add-another-communal-dimension-to-communally-charged-environment-of-manipur/>

<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=18..060423.apr23>

<https://www.thesangaiexpress.com/Encyc/2023/4/6/IMPHAL-Apr-5Kangleipak-Kanba-Lup-KKL-submitted-a-memorandum-to-the-Chief-Minister-RIMS-and-Add.html>

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<https://imphalreviews.in/controversy-over-the-recruitment-reservation-norms-in-rims-may-add-another-communal-dimension-to-communally-charged-environment-of-manipur/>

<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=18..060423.apr23>

<https://www.thesangaiexpress.com/Encyc/2023/4/6/IMPHAL-Apr-5Kangleipak-Kanba-Lup-KKL-submitted-a-memorandum-to-the-Chief-Minister-RIMS-and-Add.html>

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<https://imphalreviews.in/controversy-over-the-recruitment-reservation-norms-in-rims-may-add-another-communal-dimension-to-communally-charged-environment-of-manipur/>

<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=18..060423.apr23>

<https://www.thesangaiexpress.com/Encyc/2023/4/6/IMPHAL-Apr-5Kangleipak-Kanba-Lup-KKL-submitted-a-memorandum-to-the-Chief-Minister-RIMS-and-Add.html>

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Protests before 3rd May

On April 17th, 2023, ATSUM through a press release called for resuming the suspended agitation from 24th April 2023, against the violation of MoA by RIMS in recruitment of Group C and D posts.⁸⁹ ATSUM information and publicity secretary KhaiminlenDoungel alleged that apart from not notifying fresh results, another 15 LDC posts were recruited through backdoor without any advertisement by RIMS. He demanded action against the officials, materialisation of the MoA and nullification of recruitment results conducted without following DoPT guidelines.⁹⁰

On 22nd April, 2023, the All Naga Students' Association, Manipur (ANSAM), along with, Kuki Students' Organisation, Moreh Block (KSO-

<https://imphalreviews.in/controversy-over-the-recruitment-reservation-norms-in-rims-may-add-another-communal-dimension-to-communally-charged-environment-of-manipur/>

<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=18..060423.apr23>

<https://www.thesangaiexpress.com/Encyc/2023/4/6/IMPHAL-Apr-5Kangleipak-Kanba-Lup-KKL-submitted-a-memorandum-to-the-Chief-Minister-RIMS-and-Add.html>

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<https://ukhrultimes.com/atsum-to-resume-agitation-from-april-24-onwards-as-rims-fail-to-meet-agreed-terms/>

<https://www.thehilljournal.com/atsum-resolves-to-resume-its-suspended-agitation-over-rims/>

<https://morungexpress.com/rims-issue-atsum-to-resume-agitation-on-april-24>

<https://www.thesangaiexpress.com/Encyc/2023/4/19/OSR-NNNIMPHAL-Apr-18-A-12-hour-bandh-will-be-imposed-in-all-hill-districts-from-6-am-of-April-24.html>

<https://nagalandtribune.in/atsum-calls-12-hr-bandh-in-manipurs-hill-districts-over-rims-recruitment-issues/>

<https://thehillstimes.in/northeast/atsum-to-resume-suspended-agitation>

<https://e-pao.net/ge.asp?heading=5&mx=&src=240423>

<https://morungexpress.com/atsum-calls-for-12-hr-total-shut-down-on-april-24>

<https://themorningbell.in/index.php/2023/04/19/atsum-to-resume-stir-over-rims-recruitment/>

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<https://nagalandtribune.in/atsum-calls-12-hr-bandh-in-manipurs-hill-districts-over-rims-recruitment-issues/>

<https://www.ifp.co.in/manipur/rims-recruitment-atsum-firm-on-april-24-total-shutdown>

<https://www.ifp.co.in/undefined/rims-recruitment-atsum-to-go-ahead-with-strike>

MB), and Zeliangrong Students' Union (ZSUM) endorsed the April 24th bandh.⁹¹ Meanwhile, in a joint release, Meitei dominated groups such as All Manipur Students' Union (AMSU), Manipur Students' Federation (MSF), Democratic Students' Association of Manipur (DESAM), Kangleipak Students' Association (KSA), Student's Union of Kangleipak (SUK) and ApunbaImagiMaschasing (AIMS) appealed to ATSUM to call off the 12 hour shut down in public interest.⁹²

The ATSUM shutdown began at 6:00 AM, on 24th April, 2023, in Kangpokpi district like the rest of hill districts. All business establishments in Kangpokpi District Headquarters were seen closed for the day while educational institutions as well were seen shut down except those conducting examinations.⁹³ The bandh primarily affected National Highway 2 and Churachandpur district.⁹⁴ The shutdown was peaceful with no reported incidents. Major student groups KSO-CCP and ZSF supported the shutdown in Churachandpur.⁹⁵ Essential services like

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<https://www.thesangaiexpress.com/Encyc/2023/4/24/Newmai-News-NetworkIMPHAL-Apr-23-The-All-Tribal-Students-Union-Manipur-ATSUM-has-announced-t.html>

<https://northeastlivetv.com/topnews/ansam-kso-backs-atsums-12-hour-bandh-in-manipur/>

<https://thehillstimes.in/northeast/naga-students-support-bandh>

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<https://www.ifp.co.in/manipur/six-student-bodies-appeal-atsum-to-call-off-shutdown>

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<https://www.thehillsjournal.com/rims-director-appeals-an-appeasement-policy-mohfw-directives-not-a-solution-to-atsum-demands-atsum/>

<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=5..250423.apr23>

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<https://www.thehillsjournal.com/rims-director-appeals-an-appeasement-policy-mohfw-directives-not-a-solution-to-atsum-demands-atsum/>

<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=5..250423.apr23>

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<https://www.thehillsjournal.com/rims-director-appeals-an-appeasement-policy-mohfw-directives-not-a-solution-to-atsum-demands-atsum/>

<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=5..250423.apr23>

hospitals remained functional. RIMS Director had appealed to postpone the protest, but ATSUM considered it a late "appeasement policy."⁹⁶ The MoHFW had asked RIMS to provide details about the April 3rd tripartite agreement and advised against making precipitate decisions.⁹⁷ ATSUM indicated this was their "first phase of resentment" and plans to continue their struggle until their demands are met.⁹⁸ ATSUM has stated they will announce their next course of action after discussions with their subordinate units.⁹⁹

There have been no news reports about the bandh on 24th turning violent. While speaking live on a news channel, a member of ATSUM reported the bandh to be going smoothly.¹⁰⁰ Further, on April 24th, 2023, Zomi Student's Federation (ZSF) General Headquarters issued letter of gratitude to all tribal people in Manipur and Churachandpur District for participating wholeheartedly in ATSUM's 12-hour total shut down.¹⁰¹

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<https://www.thehilljournal.com/rims-director-appeals-an-appeasement-policy-mohfw-directives-not-a-solution-to-atsum-demands-atsum/>

<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=5..250423.apr23>

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<https://www.thehilljournal.com/rims-director-appeals-an-appeasement-policy-mohfw-directives-not-a-solution-to-atsum-demands-atsum/>

<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=5..250423.apr23>

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<https://www.thehilljournal.com/rims-director-appeals-an-appeasement-policy-mohfw-directives-not-a-solution-to-atsum-demands-atsum/>

<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=5..250423.apr23>

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<https://www.thehilljournal.com/rims-director-appeals-an-appeasement-policy-mohfw-directives-not-a-solution-to-atsum-demands-atsum/>

<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=5..250423.apr23>

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pBcyb8Tp1s>

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<https://www.ifp.co.in/manipur/rims-recruitment-atsum-shutdown-paralyses-normal-life-in-hill-districts>

The issue on reservations was particularly sensitive to ATSUM and tribal communities, as this was an expression of long-standing concerns about tribal representation in government institutions. ATSUM's initial diplomatic approaches through official channels and discussions attempts reflected their hope for an administrative solution. However, RIMS' perceived reluctance to address these concerns and alleged backdoor appointments, struck as systematic exclusion of tribals from government positions. This context helps explain why ATSUM viewed the situation not just as procedural oversight but as a fundamental threat to their rights.

4.2. Where was the Government?

Before we begin tracing incidents of violence from May 3, we must also closely examine the environment created by the State Government. Political leaders and State authorities were already playing a critical role in the issues detailed in the previous sections. However, this section focuses on activities and actions undertaken by State authorities, and how they affected the tensions between Kuki and Meitei communities before the violence burst out on May 3.

4.2.1. Resignation of BJP MLAs

In the weeks preceding the violence, there was growing discontent among BJP MLAs against the Biren Singh government. On 17th April, 2023, The Hindu reported that at least 10-12 MLAs were camping in Delhi, raising grievances against Biren Singh and demanded a change in leadership or at least a rejig in the State cabinet¹⁰². “BJP in Manipur and the North East

<https://www.thehilljournal.com/rims-director-appeals-an-appeasement-policy-mohfw-directives-not-a-solution-to-atsum-demands-atsum/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pBcyb8Tp1s>

¹⁰²<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/manipur-bjp-mlas-camp-in-delhi-trouble-breeds-for-biren-singh/article66747651.ece>

has gained ground because of the national leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah but of late because of State BJP and leadership of the State Government we are facing some issues. Leadership in Manipur is not democratic, more like a monarchy and as 2024 approaches we want these issues sorted out,” said one MLA to The Hindu, on condition of anonymity. The news report also confirmed from BJP office bearers that most of the MLAs were Kukis.

A report by The Quint quoted a BJP MLA in Imphal, who on the condition of anonymity, said that “there is a demand for a change of guard owing to a multitude of factors.” He alleged that the Chief Minister is “running the party like a family show, and no MLA or ministers have a say in it”¹⁰³. Another grievance raised by MLAs was that the Manipur government withdrew from the Suspension of Operations (SoO) with Kuki militant organisations. The MLAs said that “this withdrawal has resulted in crackdowns that are having an impact on everyday life in Kuki areas.” As written in the first section of this chapter, the Manipur government had withdrawn from SoO with Kuki militant organisations, after a protest by Kuki youth had turned violent in Kangpokpi on 10th March, 2023.

Between 13th April and 25th April, 2023, four BJP MLAs (all of them Meiteis) had resigned from various administrative posts. MLA Thokchom Radheshyam Singh, who resigned from his position on 13th April, as Chief Minister N. Biren Singh’s advisor, alleged that a dictatorial style of leadership has been prevailing in Manipur which has left many legislators disgruntled¹⁰⁴. On 17th April, MLA (Langthabal) Karam Shyam resigned from his post as head of Manipur Tourism Corporation, claiming that he

¹⁰³<https://www.thequint.com/explainers/bjp-mlas-resign-in-manipur-party-in-crisis#read-more>

¹⁰⁴<https://www.indiatodayne.in/manipur/story/manipur-another-bjp-mla-tenders-resignation-from-chief-minister-n-biren-singhs-led-government-545846-2023-04-20>

was not assigned any responsibility since his chairmanship began in November 2022, and that none of his proposed plans were met with a positive reply. On 20th April, MLA (WangjingTentha) Paonam Brojen Singh resigned from his posts as head of the Manipur Development Society and Kh Raghmani Singh, a retired IAS officer, tendered his resignation as the chairman of the Manipur Renewable Energy Development Agency (MANIREDA) on 24th April.

The Quint report also mentions that on April 21, the BJP's State unit convened a meeting of party legislators in Imphal. On the same day, in a Facebook post, BJP MLA Rajkumar Imo Singh, who is the Chief Minister's son-in-law, warned of "disciplinary action against member of... political party/MLA" for "acting or carrying on propaganda against any programme or decision of the government/party", or taking a party or government dispute to "any other agency including the print and electronic media".

4.2.2. Hate Speech by Political Leaders

While Chapter 6 delves into the propagation of hateful narratives in a detailed manner, this section sheds some light on the public discourse created in the months preceding the violence. Tensions between Kuki and Meitei groups were furthered by the proliferation of hate speech and divisive rhetoric, furthering stereotypes based on false information. The increasing use of social media platforms to spread inflammatory messages and foster distrust between the two groups created a volatile environment. Between the period of January 2023 and 2nd May, 2023, there were many instances of hate speech, furthering of stereotypes and false information that was spread against the Kuki communities. Members of Kuki Inpi Manipur, the apex body representing the Kuki community, said to the Tribunal:

“Fifteen days prior to 3rd May, there was lot of propaganda being spread in Imphal and loudspeakers promoted violence against Kukis, saying they are infiltrators, narco-terrorists, etc. The HC order is not the sole reason behind the conflict, the aim is to take our land.”

A citizen journalist, IGD6, based out of Imphal shared with the Tribunal that it was not just 15 days, but the propaganda must be traced back to much longer:

“The Meitei-Kuki conflict was not built up in a day but engineered over months and years. Trouble was stirred up from October or November 2022 by the BJYM (Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha) president, Barish Sharma. Though Barish is just the Youth President, he acts as though he is like the BJP President of Manipur, going around in convoys of cars. Barish does everything under Biren Singh. Barish was going to Kuki villages in the hills during that time to plant tree saplings for an environmental drive, but the Kuki chiefs stopped him and a gun-showdown happened.

That is when the divisive propaganda between Kukis and Meiteis started, with Barish alleging that poppy was being cultivated in those lands so they did not allow us to pass. The propaganda was built up in a big way, with Meitei Pangal peasants alleged to be peddling drugs, and then slowly shifting entirely to the Kukis growing and peddling drugs. A false urgency to act against these miscreants started getting built.”

During the months before the violence began, the then Chief Minister Biren Singh, has on multiple occasions made several inflammatory comments insinuating that the Kuki communities are illegal immigrants, poppy cultivators and drug dealers.

4.2.3. Biren Singh stereotyping of Kukis as poppy cultivators and illegal migrants

On 9th January, 2023, Biren Singh posted a photo¹⁰⁵ on Facebook of a person who made a comment about Meitei people being ‘jealous’ of Kukis ‘earning money from poppy’ (cultivation) along with the caption: ‘We have already warned the people not to support poppy planters, drug smugglers, forest destroyers and also corruption. We have started taking stringent action(s) against those involved.’

Thereafter, on January 11th, 2023, Biren Singh again posted in his Facebook in connection with the ‘war on drugs’ declaring the arrest of the chief of the M Songpijang village, which is a Kuki village, for illegal poppy cultivation¹⁰⁶. Very interestingly, the message of the then CM seems to have worked like a dog whistle in terms of the responses it elicited from people, who from their names appear to be Meitei. To illustrate, there are comments under this post that talk about how all the poppy cultivators reside in the hill areas, how they illegally come into Manipur from Burma and how Burmese migrants taught Kukis to cultivate, and other such comments, furthering a stereotype that paints Kuki as drug dealers, poppy cultivators and illegal immigrants. For example, a comment left under the post:

¹⁰⁵<https://www.facebook.com/NongthombamBirensingh/posts/pfbid02FmFDtassCp6dkEH3XKWvKNntSUynYFLdTrvHNcazsJ6gThYc1Jr7Z18DxbFyHZ5Kl?rdid=3e1tB97BUUKSKRp7>

¹⁰⁶https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0Ysr4Mjvzktw4Xoh1mcL3Rn4ymEG7Ezvfgq6zCGb4NvftEv3ofLFzY2C7KTLtyCl&id=100044170312445&post_id=100044170312445_pfbid0Ysr4Mjvzktw4Xoh1mcL3Rn4ymEG7Ezvfgq6zCGb4NvftEv3ofLFzY2C7KTLtyCl



Lukram Ingochouba Meetei ✓

Most of the poppy cultivators are from Burma, they came illegally to Manipur and started giving training to local tribes, then local tribes from south teaches to North. This is how Burmese to **Kuki** then **Kuki** to Naga. South to North of Manipur now from North to Assam

1y Like Reply

View 1 reply

On February 5th, 2023, through another Facebook post¹⁰⁷, Biren Singh posted pictures of people who are suspected of being “illegal Myanmarese” and said that legal actions will be initiated against the house owners who are “hiding illegal immigrants.” Comments under this post are further examples of continued hatred and communal distrust against Kukis.



Tara Singh

Dear CM Sir,

Most of the population in Manipur is the people of Myanmar who live in the hills area.

1y Like Reply

2 👍

View all 5 replies

1y Like Reply



Winston HuTen

They will make ahdaar card and then reside as a citizen of manipur. Mostly they'll belong to kuki community. And later on they'll also demand seperate district or form new village like the present situation. This kuki people ahre.... 🤔🤔 too much.

1y Like Reply

3 😂😂

On March 2nd, 2023, Biren Singh tweeted¹⁰⁸ about a meeting on verification drives to identify illegal immigrants to protect “indigenous people from the influx of illegal immigrants.”

¹⁰⁷

<https://www.facebook.com/NongthombamBirensingh/posts/some-more-illegal-myanmarrese-nationals-are-found-in-vaal-veng-new-laamkachuracha/744784420337228/>

¹⁰⁸

On March 15th, 2023, the Print reported that six student organizations representing the Meitei communities, namely, MSF, DESAM, KSA, SUK, AIM, and one other, protested¹⁰⁹ outside Biren Singh's house against the illegal immigration from Myanmar, Nepal and Bangladesh which is marginalizing the "indigenous people of Manipur." The Print, in the same article, reported that the six student organizations alleged that new villages were emerging and that the poppy plantations are spreading to newer areas.

To this, on March 18th, 2023, Biren Singh lauded the sentiment for the implementation of the NRC stating,¹¹⁰ "It is a positive sign of the indigenous people's concern regarding the escalating infiltration of outsiders in the State. I feel now the indigenous people of Manipur have started knowing the gravity of the seriousness of influx."

Indian Express¹¹¹ reported that in March, Kuki Inpi Manipur called for a peaceful rally in tribal areas against the forceful evictions. However, the rally in Kangpokpi turned violent, to which Biren Singh and his government alleged that the protests were organised for "unconstitutional purposes and that the encroachers were using the land for poppy plantation and drugs business."

<https://x.com/NBirenSingh/status/1631158551904415745>

¹⁰⁹

<https://theprint.in/india/flow-of-refugees-from-myanmar-reignites-ethnic-strains-in-insurgency-battered-manipur/1443271/>

¹¹⁰

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/others/cm-biren-singh-lauds-people-s-voice-demanding-nrc-implementation-in-manipur-101679141097370.html>

¹¹¹<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/violence-manipur-churachandpur-biren-singh-cm-kuki-8585138/>, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-politics/soo-agreement-kuki-tribal-manipur-bjp-8493734/>

Biren Singh also said that the protestors were propped up by the Zomi Revolutionary Army and Kuki National Army and withdrew from the ceasefire agreements with the two groups. The comment of “encroachers using the land for poppy plantation” alludes to the people from Kuki communities.

These statements and actions of Biren Singh demonstrate a consistent narrative of associating the Kuki communities with criminal activity, poppy cultivation, drug trafficking and being illegal immigrants. This rhetoric has not only reinforced harmful stereotypes but also deepened communal divisions and fostered an environment of distrust and hatred. Public platforms like Facebook and Twitter have amplified these narratives, further perpetuating prejudice through comments and discourse that scapegoat the Kuki communities. Biren Singh also openly welcomed the aggravated responses of the Meitei community, whose claims were that the Kukis threatened their status and lives as the ‘indigenous people of Manipur’.

4.2.4. Widespread Hate Speech against Kuki communities

A series of incidents involving hate speech against the Kuki community fueled communal divisions in Manipur from January 2023 to 2nd May, 2023.

On January 28th, 2023, Northeast Live reported an arrest of 80 illegal Myanmar immigrants that was made in Manipur. Northeast Live in its article stated that Manipur and Mizoram are facing illegal immigrants and refugees, wherein Mizoram is facing the influx of Kuki-Chin refugees from Myanmar and Bangladesh while Manipur is facing the problem of refugees coming in from Myanmar.¹¹²



Jimmy Zim

LET'S IMPLEMENT NRC AND DESTROY NARCOTIC PRODUCTS: MY TAKE ON CURRENT MANIPURS' SOCIO- POLITICAL SCENARIO (IN MANIPURI)

Manipur Khongsai/jai **Kuki** macha ama oina Manipurda leitaminariba jati/mioi kharana taba waba Illegal Immigrant ,Refugees , poppy cultivators haiba vahei sijinarega jati amada toina communal tag touraga social media da hero saba ichin inao singda wapham kharada khamthaminasi haina norlukchari! Aduga Manipurda leita minariba jati khdingda challenge amani haina loubira su akaiba leite.

LET'S IMPLEMENT NRC IN MANIPUR

1. Meitei Maheirol sangsthan 6 na rally chatpa gi khollao, amadi Meitei/ Naga social media hero singna toina laokhong liba illegal immigrant/refugees thidok minna si. NRC chatna hensie.Khongjai **Kuki** macha ama oina janinge, saruk jajage.

2.NRC implement toubas taradi Cut off Year amadi thamse. 1951 , 1961 or 1971? karamba chahi no NRC Cut off Year oina pambi basi?, Meitei/ Naga ichin inao singna leppi ju. Khongjai **Kuki** macha ama oina welcome toujage.

3. Manipur NRC Cut off Year aduna cover tougadaba jati sing adudi:

(a) Majang macha,

(b) Meitei Pangal

(b) Tripura , Cachar, Tripura, Bangladesh amadi Myanmar Meitei- **Kuki**- Naga macha sing cover tousi. Jabro? Khongjai **Kuki** macha ama oina challenge toujari aduga saruhsu jajage. Illegal Immigrants or refugees thidok minnasi, Manipur sengdokse.

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https://northeastlivetv.com/around-ne/manipur/80-illegal-myanmar-immigrants-arrested-in-manipur/#google_vignette

On March 6th, 2023, KKL through a Facebook post, exclaimed that the poppy cultivation should stop.¹¹³ The comments clearly show anti-Kuki sentiments. For example:

Thamjariba wapham sing ase munna khathaminnasi thabbak oina pangthokminna si, maduda Khongjai Kuki macha ama oina haidokkhiba phongdokkhiba waphamda maninghelloi. Thamjariba mapham sing asi thabbak oina pakthokpa ngamdraba tara di, ngasi dagi social media da hero sarega jati amada communal tag toubiriba ichin inao singna tokpiro. Tabada jam wai. Khurumjaree!

Taq Friends

@ Biren Meetei

@ Pradip Kumar @ Lamabam Laishram @Chinglemba Meitei

@Shimray Awoson @Buzote

@Shaingamla Shimzing

@Leiyarose Zingkhai

@Samson Silsi

@Kothil Maring

@Shongsir Dilbert Monsang

@Lett Lungdim

@Mangneo Touthang

@Simon Miphapa

@Paojel Chaoba

Source : Facebook

1y Like Reply

On March 15th, 2023, the Print reported that in a Statement released by the MSF, DESAM, KSA, SUK, and AIM demanding for the updating and implementation of the NRC in the State, they alleged that “there was an unnatural population growth in the hills, new villages were emerging in reserved forest lands, and poppy plantations had spread to newer areas.”¹¹⁴ The further claimed that “the outsiders coming from the other side of Indian boundaries, especially Myanmar, are taking full advantage of

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<https://www.facebook.com/KangleipakKanbaLup/posts/ngasi-ngasisu-date-5th-march-2023-thangjing-chingda-poppy-paktaknana-thahouriman/178118568306062/>

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<https://theprint.in/india/flow-of-refugees-from-myanmar-reignites-ethnic-strains-in-insurgency-battered-manipur/1443271/>

possessing similar facial composition, skin colour, and language as they create and expand their own villages, encroaching land which is owned by the State on the hills of Manipur,” adding that there was a “never-ending threat to the “indigenous people” of Manipur.”¹¹⁵

On April 1st, 2023, Ukhrul Times reported that the Konsakhul Village Authority claimed that the standing order of the President, Manipur State Darbar issued by T.A. Sharp called Kukis in the Naga areas in Manipur “aliens and refugees.”¹¹⁶

On April 5th, 2023, Asia News reported that the STDCM (Scheduled Tribe Demand Committee Manipur) called for the inclusion of Meitei in the Scheduled Tribes category for an added “protection of ancestral land, culture and identity which is being threatened by illegal immigration from Myanmar, Bangladesh and by people from outside the State¹¹⁷.” This rhetoric, the non-Meitei groups say is being used as a pretext to strip the hill tribes of lands.¹¹⁸

On April 27th, 2023, Ukhrul Times reported that the World Meitei Council is amused over the joining between Naga and Kuki-Chin communities over the Meitei ST inclusion issue, the WMC Stated that they do not equate indigenous Naga people with the “immigrant communities.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵

<https://theprint.in/india/flow-of-refugees-from-myanmar-reignites-ethnic-strains-in-insurgency-battered-manipur/1443271/>

¹¹⁶

<https://ukhrultimes.com/konsakhul-village-authority-counters-leilon-village/>

¹¹⁷

<https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Serious-interethnic-clashes-in-Manipur,-15-churches-set-on-fire-58317.html>

¹¹⁸

<https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Serious-interethnic-clashes-in-Manipur,-15-churches-set-on-fire-58317.html>

¹¹⁹

On April 29th, 2023, East Mojo reported that the KLA-L (Kuki Liberation Army-Letkholun) demanded an apology from ISTV for calling the protestors Myanmarese and illegal immigrants in a news report and further stating that the promotion of false narratives and propagandas advocate communal tensions.

The series of statements, reports, and social media posts highlighted above reflect a pattern of rhetoric that associates the Kuki community with illegal activities, immigration issues, and land encroachment. This narrative, coupled with public statements and demands for measures such as the implementation of NRC and the inclusion of Meitei in the Scheduled Tribes category, appear to have contributed to growing mistrust and division between ethnic communities in Manipur. The framing of Kukis as "immigrants," "aliens," or "refugees," and the portrayal of their activities as a threat to indigenous identities, suggests a targeted discourse that may have fuelled communal tensions during this period.

4.2.5. Widespread Misinformation

On March 14th, 2023, the Sangai Express reported that All Manipur Youth Protection Committee (AMYPC) questioned the circumstances under which the Kukis were inserted into the Scheduled Tribe list for Manipur in 1976.¹²⁰ It reported that AMYPC on the basis of a census report of Myanmar, claims that the total population of Burmese Kukis significantly declined in 1990. The committee further stated that due to the “advent of some nomadic/illegal migrants, the State’s environment and ecology has been destroyed.” The committee claimed that large tracts of hill/mountain

https://ukhrultimes.com/world-meetei-council-amused-with-naga-joining-hands-with-kuki-chin-on-meetei-st-inclusion/#google_vignette

¹²⁰

https://www.thesangaiexpress.com/Encyc/2023/3/15/By-Our-Staff-ReporterIMPHAL-Mar-14-The-All-Manipur-Youth-Protection-Committee-AMYP-Has-quest.html#/google_vignette

ranges were “rendered barren and extensive poppy cultivation was launched” with the aim to “exterminate all people.” The AMYPC further claims that because of the poppy cultivation and deforestation done by the “illegal immigrants” the rivers and streams have dried up and instead of “paying attention to the people’s voice” they started forest fires.

On March 20th, 2023, Kuki Hills on their Facebook page posted a screenshot of a comment wherein the person commented anti-Kuki sentiments.¹²¹

On March 26th, 2023, Liangmai Post through its Facebook page posted about a clash between Leilon and Konsaram/Konsakhul villages after an excavator (JCB) was vandalised by unknown persons.¹²² In another post on Liangmai Post’s Facebook page,¹²³ there are a slew of comments talking about how “Kuki’s need to realise that they are not the landowners but the refugees” and other comments of similar nature. For example:

Most relevant ▼



¹²¹

https://www.facebook.com/KukiHills/photos/manipur-has-reached-this-level-of-communal-hatred-lets-see-whether-the-law-of-th/590201969798528/?_rdr

¹²²https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=600309585447669&id=100064058978466&set=a.411935184285111&locale=hr_HR

¹²³<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1691647294623740>

Most relevant ▼



Lml Khongsai

Namhilak ML ar u the landlord brother.. do you think we the kuki are living in other territory if don't know what it is please shut up

1y Like Reply

2 👍 🤔



ML Namhilak ML Namhilak

Lml Khongsai where there is Kuki and Sema, there is crisis for land. So think it yourself Bro

1y Like Reply



Ratan Konjengbam

Where there is kuki there is always problem

1y Like Reply



View all 2 replies



💎 Top fan

Ch Gudson

Why refugee people act like a land owner 🤔

1y Like Reply



View 1 reply

In response to the incident, the Konsakhul (Konsaram) Village Authority in a press release dated 29th March, 2023, alleged that violent acts were “perpetrated by the illegal immigrants at LeilonVaiphei” on March 26th, 2023 and March 27th, 2023 wherein “two innocent civilians were brutally assaulted/attempted to murder and kidnapped by the illegal immigrants.”¹²⁴ The Authority claimed that the root cause for this was the “uncontrolled influx of illegal immigrants from Myanmar being facilitated

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<https://www.hoten.life/p/konsakhul-village-authority-condemned-the-savage-act-perpetrated-by-the-illegal-immigrants-at-leilon-vaiphei-n8fk56lnk45y0vq>

for the vote bank politics and electoral gain in Manipur.”¹²⁵ In the press release, Konsakhul (Konsaram) Village Authority Stated as a matter of fact that LeilonBillage was a tenant of Konsakhulbillage and that there was a lease agreement signed which still stands today between them.¹²⁶

The Ukhrul Times reported on April 1st, 2023 that The Konsakhul Village Authority (Kangkokpi district) is asserting that LeilonVaiphei was historically a tenant of Konsakhul.¹²⁷ They cited alleged tenancy agreements, tax records, and court orders from the early 20th century as evidence.¹²⁸ The Chairman of Konsakhul Village Authority accused LeilonVaiphei villagers of distorting historical facts, fabricating documents, and engaging in environmental degradation, illegal activities, and communal tensions.¹²⁹ They also alleged incidents of violence, harassment, and land encroachment by LeilonVaiphei villagers.¹³⁰

The Konsakhul Village Authority reiterated that standing orders from the President of the Manipur State Darbar historically classified Kukis in Naga areas as "aliens and refugees" and required Kukis to seek permission from Naga chiefs to settle.¹³¹ They linked these historical orders to their current

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<https://www.hoten.life/p/konsakhul-village-authority-condemned-the-savage-act-perpetrated-by-the-illegal-immigrants-at-leilon-vaiphei-n8fk56lnk45y0vq>

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<https://www.hoten.life/p/konsakhul-village-authority-condemned-the-savage-act-perpetrated-by-the-illegal-immigrants-at-leilon-vaiphei-n8fk56lnk45y0vq>

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<https://ukhrultimes.com/konsakhul-village-authority-counters-leilon-village/>

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<https://ukhrultimes.com/konsakhul-village-authority-counters-leilon-village/>

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<https://ukhrultimes.com/konsakhul-village-authority-counters-leilon-village/>

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<https://ukhrultimes.com/konsakhul-village-authority-counters-leilon-village/>

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<https://ukhrultimes.com/konsakhul-village-authority-counters-leilon-village/>

stance, arguing that the rapid growth of Kuki villages in the area reflects unchecked migration and threatens regional stability.¹³² The Chairan of Konsakhul urged the government to address what they described as the issue of “illegal immigrants” and prevent further escalation of communal tensions.¹³³

The Sangai Express on April 1st, 2023 reported that the LeilonVaiphei Village Authority refuted claims by the Konsakhul Village Authority, denying any historical tenancy or land lease agreement between the villages and dismissing the alleged 1920 document as fabricated, even calling for forensic testing to prove its inauthenticity.¹³⁴ They highlighted their established historical presence in the region, citing records from 1917-18 that documented 62 tax-paying households in LeilonVaiphei compared to 16 in Konsakhul. The authority also emphasized that five Kuki/Kom villages existed in the area before the 1950s, countering the claim of the Chairman, KVA that only one Kuki village existed at that time. Labeling LeilonVaiphei villagers as "illegal immigrants," despite their deep historical roots and larger population in the area, was described as unjust and misleading.

The recent tensions, according to LeilonVaiphei, stemmed from misunderstandings over fence destruction related to Mithun rearing, which involved members from both communities. They denied allegations of abduction, assault, obstructing pilgrims, and polluting water sources, instead asserting that Konsakhul villagers attacked their village on March

¹³²

<https://ukhrultimes.com/konsakhul-village-authority-counters-leilon-village/>

¹³³

<https://ukhrultimes.com/konsakhul-village-authority-counters-leilon-village/>

¹³⁴

https://www.thesangaiexpress.com/Encyc/2023/4/1/By-Our-Staff-ReporterIMPHAL-Mar-31-Reacting-to-the-several-claims-and-allegations-made-by-the-Ko.html#/google_vignette

28, 2023, causing injuries and property damage, including an attempt on the village chief's residence. The Statement criticized Konsakhul and certain Liangmai civil bodies for escalating communal tensions through unfounded claims and divisive rallies. Emphasizing their historical roots and peaceful intentions, Leilon Vaiphei urged the government to address these issues responsibly, counter misleading narratives, and foster peaceful co-existence while appreciating ongoing mediation efforts.

4.2.6. Visit of Governor to border town Moreh

A news report on April 27, 2023 by Northeast Live said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi requested the Governor, Anusuiya Uikey, to visit the border town Moreh in Tengnoupal district. During the visit, officers of Assam Rifles briefed the Governor about the security preparedness along the border to check infiltration, smuggling of various contrabands including drugs and numerous border crimes¹³⁵. Border Roads Organisation (BRO) tweeted about the visit of the Governor and inspection undertaken¹³⁶. A former member of the BJP who spoke to the Tribunal said: “On 27th April 2023, the Hon. Governor Sushri Anusuiya Uikey visited the Myanmar border fencing in Moreh and issued a statement in the press that drug traffickers, illegal immigrants and infiltrators and anti-social elements are trying to infiltrate into Manipur.”

4.2.7. Vice President in Imphal on May 3

The Vice President of India, Shri Jagdeep Dhankar, visited Manipur to participate in two interactive programmes with faculty, students and scientists in Dhanamanjuri University and Manipur University in Imphal

¹³⁵https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/govt-erecting-barbed-wire-fencing-along-400-km-manipur-myanmar-border/articleshow/99821767.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

¹³⁶<https://x.com/BROindia/status/1651631468693831683>

on May 3¹³⁷. A former IPS officer, IGD8, who testified to the Tribunal said:

“He is a VVIP in a border State. Over 27 intelligence agencies were working through various establishments and organisations of the State. There is a standard protocol when a VVIP is expected to visit. The Chief Minister should be informed about security threats and communicate the same to the office of the VVIP. Just the previous week on April 27, the Chief Minister had cancelled plans to inaugurate the open gym because of violent protests by Kukis, who vandalised and arsoned the gym. How is it that the May 3 rally was not understood as a threat?

On 3 May when the VP was visiting - for any VVIP security, State police is sufficient. Sometimes for the PM we may use paramilitary or central forces. But on 3 May, Rapid Action Force which is a specialty force to deal with riots were deployed in Imphal.”

In their testimony, they raised questions about the preparedness of the State forces, and the reason behind the granting of the permit for the rally by the DC.

4.3. Protest against the ST Demand

Tribal leaders and student organisations registered their strong opposition to the Meitei and Meitei Pangals’ demand even before the High Court issued directions to the State Government on March 27, 2023. This was in response to the increasingly frequent protests by Meitei groups across the State, demanding that the Manipur State Government pushes for their inclusion in the ST list.

¹³⁷<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1921420->
<https://x.com/VPIIndia/status/1653693303014174721>
https://youtu.be/V_D1mFC5ai4?feature=shared

ATSUM called for a consultative meeting on March 23, 2024 in Imphal, inviting leaders from tribal communities, CSOs, political leaders, academics, intellectuals and all stakeholders of the tribal regions, as per a Statement by S. Andria on March 21, 2023 to Northeast Live, a TV news channel¹³⁸. The report further States that various tribal organisations had already been raising objection to the ST demand in their own capacities, and ATSUM said the objective of the meeting was to pass a resolution on a common way forward to deal with the matter.

ATSUM reported that two resolutions were adopted in the meeting¹³⁹. Firstly, they reaffirmed the opposition to the ST status demand, secondly, they endorsed the ATSUM to continue lobbying the matter and chalk out action plans to consolidate the voice of the people¹⁴⁰. They also stated that they will hold talks, which must be “reasonable and respectful to the aspirations and rights of all communities.” A statement by ATSUM was that during the discussion, members from different hill districts expressed their well-founded fear and anxiety if ST status is given to the Meiteis.¹⁴¹

In a press conference, ATSUM leaders said, “We hope the government will take a decision based on facts and circumstances and procedures laid out by the Indian Constitution and not due to pressure by any community¹⁴².” ATSUM President PaotinthangLupheng said, “This demand has been creating fear and insecurity in the minds of hill area communities. Everyone knows that the motive behind this demand is to

¹³⁸<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cEuZ7kofh4A>

¹³⁹<https://youtu.be/yywjXy1RL04?feature=shared>

¹⁴⁰<https://ukhrultimes.com/atsum-meet-reaffirms-to-oppose-meetei-meitei-meitei-pangal-st-status-demand/>

¹⁴¹https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vVUMWQIQdd0R2hSYYG-566bL5OQybKWe/view?usp=drive_link

¹⁴²<https://youtu.be/yywjXy1RL04?feature=shared>

grab land. Even MLAs from the valley have said it, along with the proponents of the STDCM. Therefore, this is a land issue. Land is the only valuable commodity that the tribal people of the State has.”

4.3.1. Solidarity March called by ATSUM

It is in the backdrop of all the above sequence of agitations and existing unrest within the State, that the Tribal Solidarity March was announced for May 3, 2023.

On April 21, 2023, a meeting of tribal students’ organisations resolved to organise a tribal solidarity march on May 3, 2023. This meeting had representatives from both Naga and Kuki communities in all districts. This was endorsed and further planned on April 27, 2023, as per an office memorandum released by ATSUM¹⁴³, which assigned coordinating teams in Senapati, Ukhrul, Kangpokpi, Tamenglong, Churachandpur, Chandel and Tengnoupal districts. The announcement for this march started getting covered by all media channels and went viral on social media from April 30, 2023.

The theme of the march was announced to be “Come now, let us reason together”. The Delhi Tribal Students’ Forum, Sadar Hills Tribals Union on Land and Forest (SHITULF) and Tribal Churches Leaders Forum¹⁴⁴ (TCLF), Manipur, also expressed their support for the march. Similarly, Churachandpur-based Students organisations like the ZSF, KSO, HSA have also extended their support¹⁴⁵. Churachandpur District Private Schools and Colleges Association (CDPSCA) also issued a circular

¹⁴³https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UC04_Plr7DelKxtkwv5wKoCIRwPsygtk/view?usp=drive_link

¹⁴⁴https://drive.google.com/file/d/1IhdFuxIAuAJzkjdJstY0uB0Thn2NScxT/view?usp=drive_link

¹⁴⁵<https://www.borderlens.com/2023/05/02/atsum-calls-tribal-solidarity-march-in-manipurs-hill-districts-on-may-3/>

declaring a holiday on May 3 and urging schools to send students from Class 10 and above with their teachers, to participate in the rally¹⁴⁶.

Thousands of people took to the streets in hill districts to participate in the May 3 rally. A record crowd, estimated to be more than one lakh, including students, youth as well as community elders started the march from Lamka Public Ground, Hiangtam Lamka and culminated at Peace Ground, Tuibong in Churachandpur district, said a report by Imphal Free Press¹⁴⁷. This news report also said that there were no reports of any untoward incident till 1 PM. It also describes in detail the memorandums to the President of India that were submitted to District Deputy Commissioners and rallies that took place in Tamenglong, Chandel and Kangpokpi too. A report by The Print also mentions similar reports from Naga-dominated Senapati district, Noney, Tengnoupal and Ukhrul districts. It also reports that about how villagers from interior areas in the hills came in open trucks and buses to their nearest district headquarters.

4.3.2. Signs of impending conflict as shared by Meiteis

MeMD27-1 was a 38-year-old Meitei man who deposed before the Tribunal along with his sister. They narrated that they were born and raised in Churachandpur, a Kuki-dominated district, in a village called KhugaTampak. He indicated that, while communities lived together with no issues to the most extent, there were existing tensions they felt as a minority in the area:

“We have been living with all communities without any issues. In my childhood, because we are a minority, there were some incidents. All the

¹⁴⁶https://drive.google.com/file/d/1iR68VpFUNOXCX10trK4CVX6UR8oLgaX4/view?usp=drive_link

¹⁴⁷<https://www.ifp.co.in/manipur/thousands-march-against-st-demand-in-manipur-hill-districts>

people here are not bad, but some people do not like us as Meiteis and did not want us to live here.”

He also narrated seeing that there appeared to be threats to safety before the rally:

“On May 2nd so many people gathered to get their T Shirt printed. All the people from communities who don’t like Meiteis were saying to us, that we should be careful and be safe. My wife is also Kuki.”

Kukis allegedly destroyed a Meitei temple in their house. He said:

“On 27 April, in Thingkangphai village, 4-5 km away from the police station, where there is a majority Christian (implied that they were Kukis) community, a Meitei temple in a house was burnt down. We did not say anything but the Kukis themselves condemned the incident. The village authority condemned a notice issued by the local (Kuki) chief saying that such vandalism should not take place.”

4.3.3. Threats faced by Kukis and marking of Kuki houses in Imphal before May 3

Several Kuki people testified to the marking of their houses before the violence began. For example, KMS15, a 63-year-old man, who has been living in a relief camp with his family since he escaped on May 7, 2023, shared that Meitei mobs attacked his area in Imphal on May 3, 2023. He also said that he had noticed that many Kuki houses had been marked with red colour. KMD23, a 66-year-old Kuki man, and resided in Imphal shared:

“People kept visiting home, saying they were from the government but it did not look like it. You can smell people from the government. They

came 2 or 3 times. They were collecting data such as tribe name, family name etc. I asked what is this for. They said it was a survey for building a smart city. They also came towards the end of 2019, and even the next year.

They also visited a property in Mantripukhri, in which I was investing my retirement funds. When they asked how I got this property, I said my wife inherited it from her father, (they were Muslims) but after she had passed away due to illness, the land came to me. I was not sure whose name did the land belong to. They also appeared unsure. They went to their office, and returned to re-verify. Then they put a mark, which appeared like a slash, on my gate. I was already suspicious. Why would they be mapping the ethnicity of the owners of properties?”

KMD15, a 56-year old Kuki man who was residing in Imphal shared, “If not more, 4-5 generations of my family were born and raised in Imphal.” He also said that his father was one of the first tribal IPS officers in the Manipur Tripura cadre. “He was also part of the Indo-Pakistan war in 1965 till the liberation of Bangladesh.” He reported to the Tribunal:

“6 or 7 months before, there was a survey conducted by the Imphal Municipal Council, saying that the pattas will be computerised so they came to verify properties. We shared the details with them, as asked. That could have been the basis on which they identified our homes. For example, in New Lambolen in Imphal, Meiteis, Kukis, Nagas and Muslims reside together - how would the mob know which is whose house? How were they able to single out the houses of the Kukis? Kuki intellectuals said that the State was complicit.”

KFK4, a 55 year old Kuki woman, resided in a village on the outskirts of Imphal. She said:

Some houses were already marked. Some survey was going on a few months ago under its pretext, and that is when houses were being marked.

In a meeting with the Tribunal, members of a Kuki body shared (CCPurGD1):

“Speaking of houses, Kuki houses in Imphal were marked in red in the guise of a geological survey, weeks before the violence erupted. After violence erupted on May 3rd, each of those marked houses were looted and burnt to the ground.”

The Tribunal also met with a senior official of the Assam Rifles, IGD13, who said:

“In villages, you often know which house belongs to a Meitei and which belongs to a Kuki but the same is not known in the cities. However, in Imphal, all Kuki houses were marked from before the conflict which made them easily identifiable. So, the Meiteis were prepared and better organized initially. Later, however, the Kukis organized themselves and were much better prepared than the Meiteis, and they were equally brutal in their treatment of the Meiteis.”

KFD20, a Kuki woman who was raised in Churachandpur, deposed before the tribunal sharing:

“My relative’s home in Imphal was marked with red marks. They said to show the land paper. Their last question was about their ethnicity. They said it was a smart city survey, which took place 3-4 months before the conflict happened. Something was brewing.

Again in my mama’s [uncle] village, they came to collect the mountain and hill paper- saying they are from the government. They submitted all

property papers, when asked. They heard the office which had the papers was burned down. Most village chiefs did not have papers, my uncle said. He does not have the documents anymore. Licensed guns given by the British were also collected.”

Another testimony by a former IFS officer, NmMD19 also echoed the allegation that houses were marked under the guise of a survey weeks before the conflict:

“There is considerable circumstantial evidence to suggest that this was pre-planned, but it is also true that much of it has been whipped up since May 3, 2023... first...second...third, the systematic targeting of Kuki-Zo localities and houses many of whom had been marked in the weeks before by ‘surveys’ conducted under some official guise.”

There were also signs of impending conflict, in the threats faced by Kukis.

KFC10-1 and KFC10-2 were Kuki women from Churachandpur, one of whom was the mother, and the other, the sister of the deceased Hanglalmuan Vaiphei. Their story was one in which the police, on April 30, 2023, abducted a person accused of inciting hatred by sharing a Facebook post. Hanglalmuan was later killed by a mob, while being transported by the police in a private vehicle.

“On April 29, 2023, he shared someone's Facebook post to a jokes group. The gist of the post was:

‘Dear Indians, Please note that Meiteis are evil and racist. They have raped so many tribal women. They are using poppy plantation as an excuse to steal tribal lands while they are the biggest investors in poppy. Even Biren Singh. They are using BJP and Congress leaders. They are also anti-India

as they do not respect the Indian flag, and have banned the Hindi language. Do not fall for the lies by anti-Indians.'

By the morning of the 30th, he had already deleted the post. On April 30th night, the police came at 10 PM and questioned him about whether he had posted it on Facebook. The police knew he had not written it, but said they needed to take him to the police station. They took him to a Meitei-run police station instead of the nearest one. Within 5 minutes of reaching the police station, they said they will take him to the SP's office. Instead of taking him to the SP, they took him to Imphal. Throughout the night we waited at the SP's office. Someone told us he was taken to the Cybercrime Unit.

On the next day we visited him in Imphal. They had interrogated him and he had explained the same thing multiple times. They beat him very badly, also on his buttocks. They let us meet him just for a few minutes. We had reached the police station at 10 AM and stayed till around 7 PM. They kept trying to take him in different vehicles and didn't allow him to meet us.

The police kept trying to ask me (the mother) to sign some papers. I said I am illiterate and that I won't sign anything until they explain to me what is written. They threatened me and blackmailed me until I signed. My son said he had not eaten anything.

On May 1, we returned home around 7:30 PM. There was a court hearing that day and we were asked to furnish surety. Then they took him from the court to Imphal Police Station. On May 4, they took him to another judge and he was told that he has to appear in the High Court after 10 days.

After the violence began on 3rd, we couldn't even visit him. He was then taken in the Investigating Officer's private car, when they came across lots of Meitei mobs. One mob started demanding that they hand over the prisoner to them. The police tried their best to protect him, and were even injured in the process. We found out about all this only on May 5th at 5 PM. We could not even get to identify his body. His body was given to us in December along with other Kukis' and was buried in the Martyrs cemetery.”

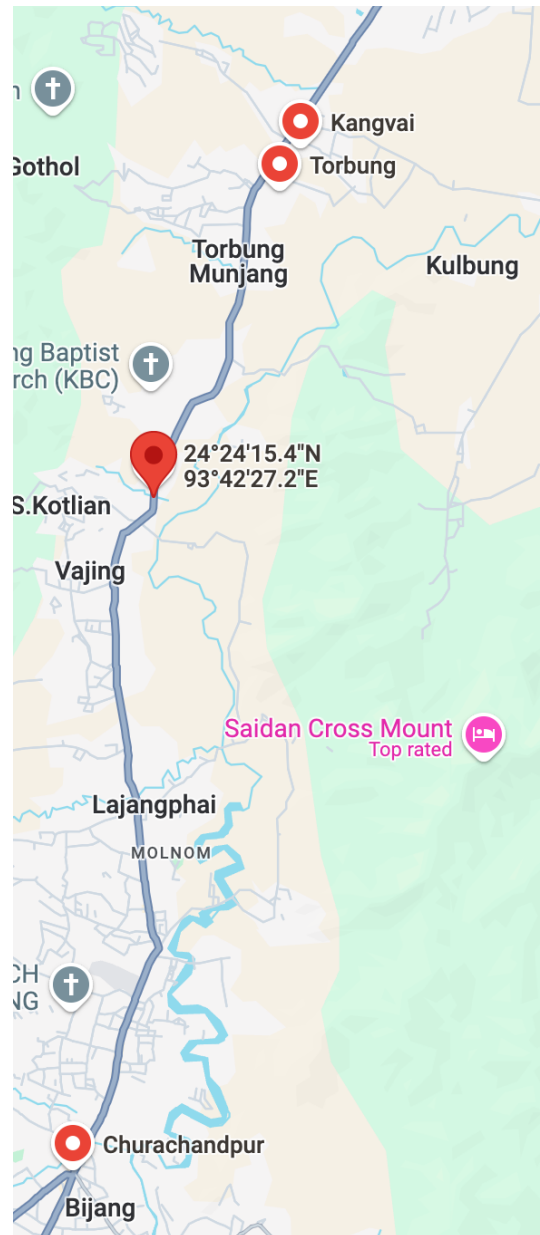
KFC4, a 27-year old Kuki woman, who resided in National Games Village, Imphal, shared a story about how her mother went missing after she left the house on May 2 morning. In her written testimony, she shared that her mother, who was from Sekmai, Imphal, visited her house on May 1, 2023. She reportedly went missing when she left her daughter's house to return to Sekmai, and nobody was able to contact her as she did not possess a phone.

“My mother who is 63 years old went missing after she left my house early morning at 6 AM on May 2, 2023. I went checking most of the relief camps in the district. I am a very shy. So I wasn't able to visit leaders for help. I have searched for her everywhere. My sister advised me to register an FIR. It has been more than a year. I think she might be dead.”

4.4. *Beginning of Violence from May 3*



As is clearly indicated in the sections above, the situation in the State was already volatile, especially the tension felt by tribal communities, growing instances of hate speech against Kukis, increasing pressure by Meitei groups for the ST demand and other factors. It can be easily inferred that the violence which began on May 3, 2023, was neither a spontaneous and abrupt beginning, nor a conflict taking place in isolation. There were a number of signs of impending conflict. The incidents narrated in this section rely on the testimonies of survivors and witnesses, and those who have direct knowledge of the conflict with the approximate timelines and sequence of incidents and the severity of the violence.



The first set of events of violence were traced to the border between Churachandpur and Bishnupur districts, denoted by the red square in the map on top. The map on the right zooms in for a closer look to the coordinates of the Anglo-Kuki War Centenary Gate (24°24'15.4"N, 93°42'27.2"E) and the nearby towns and villages, Kangvai and Torbung where the first instances of violence were reported.

4.4.1. Anglo Kuki War Centenary Gate and Counter-Blockade by Meiteis

On National Highway 2, in Leisang village, Churachandpur district, the Anglo Kuki War Centenary Gate was inaugurated in 2019 to commemorate the 1917-19 war fought by Kukis against the British. An article from The Hills Journal reporting on the 107th anniversary of the war in 2024 said that Kuki



intellectuals discussed the significance of the war in shaping Kuki identity and the importance of preserving this critical chapter in history¹⁴⁸. “...Leaders called on all Kuki-Zo people and their supporters to recognize the importance of this historical event as a reminder of their journey toward self-determination and justice. The commemoration served not only as a remembrance of past struggles but also as a beacon of hope for future generations.”

In a statement published on May 10, 2023, ATSUM recalled, “On May 2, at 6 pm the Meitei Leepun in order to thwart the democratic rally of the

¹⁴⁸<https://www.thehillsjournal.com/107th-anniversary-of-anglo-kuki-war-observed-with-national-seminar-in-churachandpur-moreh/>

tribals, started enforcing "Counter Blockade" on roads and highways leading to hill areas though there was no blockade or bandh enforced by ATSUM. Many tribal people were met with harassment and threats in the hands of Meitei Leepun through selective targeting of a particular tribal community.”

This can be corroborated by a Facebook post by Meitei Leepun alleging that people may use different names for a “blockade”, but the official position to counter the blockade still stands. They called on Meitei groups to enforce a counter-blockade starting from May 2 night, within and outside Manipur.



In a news report published on May 3, 2023, a Statement by ATSUM is shared in which they said a counter-blockade was imposed by Meitei Leepun in the valley areas the previous day¹⁴⁹. They termed this as ‘unjustified’ and that it will worsen the already volatile situation in the State. They also stated that there was no call for bandh or blockades by tribal organisations. Members of a Kuki organisation, CCPurGD1, also said to the Tribunal that:

“On 2nd May, the Meiteis started restricting movement of ATSUM-led rallies, amongst other groups.”

An ex-IPS officer who met the Tribunal said that the chief of Arambai Tenggol foolishly admitted to the media that he was in Churachandpur.

¹⁴⁹<https://www.ifp.co.in/manipur/counter-blockade-unjustified-atsum>

She also shared that the BJYM president Barish Sharma also had made it public that he was in Churachandpur. A Meitei journalist who met the Tribunal shared that Meitei Leepun's Chief, Pramot Singh said on record that they were prepared for an attack in Churachandpur before the conflict started. Meitei Leepun people were present near the police forces in Churachandpur.

However, how and where the violence began, which group instigated it, has been an extremely contentious question. It has been difficult for any non-partisan report and even experts who testified to the Tribunal, to ascertain the accurate chain of events.

A statement by ATSUM¹⁵⁰ said, "... At around 2 pm in the afternoon Meitei volunteers came and set fire to the Centenary Gate at Leisang in Churachandpur and beat up rally participants who were returning home at Kangvai. This agitated the tribal people of Churachandpur and instigated a violent scuffle between the Meitei volunteers and tribals who gathered at Kangvai. A fight broke out between the two groups at around 4 PM at Kangvai and escalated to burning of houses belonging to both sides in Torbung and Kangvai area."

A statement by Kuki Students' Organisation dated October 3, 2024¹⁵¹ stated that Meitei Leepun had conspired to derail the rally called by ATSUM against the ST demand by Meitei communities. The Statement said, "On May 3, 2023, after the Tribal Solidarity March, rallyists from Churachandpur who returned home were confronted by Meitei youths

¹⁵⁰https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vEBlyBX3tXIshKagKMhsD_U3cg9Ob0k5/view?usp=drive_link and

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rlpGsAogfuVtU2F2ETHCzi6LUtxMpPw1/view?usp=drive_link

¹⁵¹https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zEQmcAJicZwF3tXBiKv3AmHrKBLfs6M3/view?usp=drive_link

allegedly affiliated with Meitei Leepun, in the Kangvai area bordering Churachandpur and Bishnupur...Moreover, Anglo-Kuki War 1917-1919 Centenary Commemoration Gate at Leisang was indeed burned using old tires. While the Kuki-Zo community did not claim that the gate was reduced to ashes, some Meitei miscreants attempted to raze it to the ground and had started burning the gate using old tires. The perpetrators understood well that the gate is held dear by the Kuki-Zo people, and burning it would definitely provoke the community¹⁵².”

A Kuki organisation, in their meeting with the Tribunal (CCPurGD1) said,

“On 3rd May, members of Arambai Tenggol came to Churachandpur, and tried to burn the 100-year old Anglo-Kuki (1917-19 war) Centenary gate. Mass hysteria and panic spread amongst everyone, including Kuki protesters, and full-fledged violence broke out”.

A senior officer of the Assam Rifles in Churachandpur, CCPurGD2, shared:

“The violence mainly started in Imphal valley on the 3rd of May, and that is also where the police got separated (police from Meitei and Kuki communities respectively) ...Initially reports of killings started coming from the valley, but as the days prolonged, similar killings started taking place in the hills as well.

While tensions were in the air on the 3rd of May, what really triggered the violence was the act of piling tires and setting them on fire near the base of the Kuki Centenary Gate. This was a premeditated attack. Within moments rumours started spreading that the gate was being burnt down

¹⁵²<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=29..041024.oct24>

by Meiteis, and a huge Kuki mob started gathering in Churachandpur, armed with guns. After that the violence really broke out in the area.

No one really investigated the burning of the Gate, which began the entire conflict. It was shoved under the rug”.

An artist and youth activist, IGD10, who met the Tribunal in Imphal shared:

“It is difficult to say what is the truth now. We know that Arambai and Meitei Leepun were already present in Kuki areas. We were predicting that a conflict would erupt between Meiteis and Meitei Pangals. The tribal march was announced on 1 May for May 3. Tensions were brewing since 27th April when the Forest office in Churachandpur was burnt down by Kukis. The government didn’t do anything to stop what was already on the boil.

“The ATSUM rally was supposed to be from different communities. It was held in different districts but violence broke out in Churachandpur. Many people question why the violence erupted only in Churachandpur. But it also started in Moreh. Nothing happened in Naga dominated areas. Only in Kuki dominated areas. The rally was called by ATSUN – both Nagas and Kuki, but many people assume that Kukis instigated.”

A Bihari trader in Churachandpur deposed before the Tribunal to share what he witnessed:

“I took part in the rally on 3rd May and also distributed water. I participated to express solidarity and that we are all independent. The rally was peaceful. I also went to the DC’s office along with the protesters, and then left the rally to come back home.

After the rally was over, I went back and opened my shop. Later I heard rumours about the Anglo-Kuki gate being burnt with tyres and kerosene. Some people from the Meitei community tried to burn down the gate. Shortly afterwards, there was news of violence having erupted. Had the government wanted, they could have imposed Section 144 in the area and enforced curfew, cut off all communications and prevented the spreading of panic and rumour and solved everything. But instead, they encouraged the violence.”

The tribunal has accessed government orders in which curfew was imposed, and mobile internet was shut down after the violence seems to have begun.

On May 3, 2023, the Home Department, Government of Manipur issued an order (No. H-3607/4/2022-HD-HD) stating that there were incidents of “fighting amongst volunteers/youths of different communities” and that the “situation is tense and volatile in the districts of Bishnupur and Churachandpur¹⁵³.” In this order, the government suspended mobile data services in the entire State for 5 days.

In an order by the District Magistrate, Imphal West District (Crl. Misc Case No. 6 of 2023) under Sec. 144 CrPC, movement of any person outside of their residence was prohibited from 7 PM, May 3, 2023 until further orders¹⁵⁴.

The District Magistrate, Churachandpur also passed an order (No. 4/28/2020-DC/CCP) imposing a total public curfew, with no time

¹⁵³https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HHIhL1IKI8LzSBVyBGVWOH-18v8_76BZ/view?usp=drive_link

¹⁵⁴https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LZUpUyreIuaTCLhbu0kDfZN_nCfbrmO0/view?usp=drive_link

specified, in the district, specifically mentioning Kangvai, Tuibong and Churachandpur sub-divisions¹⁵⁵.

Few testimonies from Meitei survivors in Kuki-dominated areas, as shared in the next section, narrated that Kukis also resorted to violence against Meitei homes that afternoon. The following sections trace the instances of violence based on victims, survivors and people who had direct knowledge of incidents, who deposed before the Tribunal.

4.4.2. Churachandpur and Bishnupur border

The previous section quotes an ATSUM Statement that said that the Centenary gate, Leisang, Churachandpur was burnt at 2 PM. The towns nearby were Churachandpur, PhougakchaoIkhai, Kangvai and Torbung. The first three testimonies here narrate that the rally had finished peacefully, and the violence had only erupted in Kangvai after the rally was completed.

MeMD27-1, a Meitei man from Churachandpur, narrated what he saw before the rally began on the morning of May 3, 2023:

“On May 3rd we were not allowed to open our shops because of a rally. I have a shop near the Police station. When anything like a rally happens, we go to the main road to see. So, I was sitting on the road to see what was happening. Lot of rallies have happened in the past, but this one was very different. So many vehicles were ferrying people to the rally.

I was waiting for the rally to start. People started chanting abusive words about Meiteis. I was not feeling good so I went back. In the afternoon, so many ambulances started going up and down, and all rally participants

¹⁵⁵[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1q4tD6Pfr41CNb-eUY2X_MucydFBb7blx/view?usp=drive link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1q4tD6Pfr41CNb-eUY2X_MucydFBb7blx/view?usp=drive_link)

were being ferried to the Imphal side of the Churachandpur district... We started receiving messages on Whatsapp about the violence that had begun. We started getting videos of what the Kukis were doing. Because I have so many friends among the Kukis and my wife is a Kuki herself, we even started getting videos from the Kuki side about what was happening to them. Violence started around the Torbung Bangla area, where Kuki and Meitei settlements were located.

We thought it was still ok to stay in the town area. I was born and raised there, and have so many Kuki friends. Despite some biases, we still had good friends in the Kuki communities. But that night we started getting messages. A Kuki friend of mine told Kukis, 'Any Meitei person, anything belonging to Meiteis, whatever you get in front of yourself - just finish.'

Messages on Whatsapp showed that in the Tuibong side and Khumujamba side also houses were burning. News that clashes were happening around the Kangwai area. We started seeing burning houses in the Khumu Jamba village. At night, we can see the light, fire. In our village, men and youngsters gathered to safeguard the village entry and exits. All the women and children - gathered in the centre of the village. My home is right next to Kuki village. We started getting a message that our village is next. We never thought they would come and burn our homes.

We were guarding the villages when they came with guns and started attacking us. I was the one standing closest to the road. They started shouting that they will finish us off. I shouted back saying that we will not run away and we will defend our village. When they started shooting we started to hide.

Since the road was a kachha road, there were stones around. We started pelting stones at them. They ran away on the other side and started

burning houses. I almost got hit by a bullet. My younger brother got shot in the chest but he survived.”

A 30-year-old Kuki woman, KFC1, deposed before the Tribunal to share a story from Kangvai. She said that her husband, a railway worker, had finished participating in the rally, and returned home. In her written testimony, she said that he heard about the news of violence perpetrated by Meiteis and insisted on leaving the house. She wrote that he remained in contact with the family until the period of severe violence. She said:

“When news started spreading about the escalation of violence, I called him and told him to come home immediately. I also prepared meals for our dinner. When he had left the house, my youngest child cried a lot asking him not to go. He told me not to worry and went. People in my village started shifting to safer places and I was getting worried. My husband's phone was already unreachable. We got to know when a photo was sent of a dead body and a video, and my brother identified it. He was wearing the same T-shirt to the rally.”

She also submitted the videos, photographs and a copy of the FIR to the Tribunal. A 43 year old Kuki woman, KFC9, deposed before the tribunal to share another harrowing story indicating that the violence began in Kangvai:

“On May 3, 2023, the violence started in a nearby village, Kangvai. Our village chief said we all need to evacuate. I have 4 children, a daughter - 2.5 years, 2 other daughters (12, 9) and a son (13). We sat in a car and went to Lamka / CCPur. Others came by foot. The chief told them not to take the road so they took the route of forests and fields. Men stayed back and stayed near the houses because the mob would come to attack the homes. My husband went towards the house to get some of the livestock. The mob started to burn the houses down then and all our houses were

burnt down. My husband was attacked and they burnt him alive. They also mutilated his body. The remaining men who went searching for him found his body and they took photos of it and left.”

A Kuki survivor, KMD11, shared his story with the Tribunal, saying that he heard that the Centenary Gate was set on fire after lunch hour:

“I was there when the rally happened. I was in Churachandpur, in the march. I came down to Imphal right after. I didn't finish the march and came to Imphal on May 3, post lunch hour. Then I heard that the Centenary gate was set on fire by unknown Meitei people. This angered people from Churachandpur. We in Imphal did not know anything.”

Based on all the above testimonies, it can be inferred that violence erupted in Kangvai after the rally had concluded.

Meitei survivors in Kangvai testified that the violence against their homes began at 2:30 PM. MeMMo2, a 59-year-old Meitei man, narrated how Meira Paibi women, collectives of Meitei women, helped them stay in a safe place.

“On May 3, 2:30 PM, we were in our homes. We heard that Kukis were coming towards Bishnupur with weapons. Immediately, we went and informed a nearby police station. They came inside Bishnupur district in large numbers and with guns in their hands. They started throwing tear gas shells and burning homes. There were 3-4 police jeeps that also ran away. We started running with our families through our fields and farmlands. We did not know where we will go, but on the way, Meira Paibi women and some youth met us. They took us to this land, which is now this relief camp. The next day, with just the men of our village, we went back to see the village and get our livestock and goods.

My house was burnt not once, but twice or thrice. There is an Assam Rifles camp nearby our house. They burnt houses right next to that. One of my relatives even suffered burns.”

MeFMo5, a 27-year-old Meitei woman from the same village, implied that Arambai Tenggol members were there too:

“On 3rd May, 2023 afternoon around 2.30 PM, Kuki people holding weapons marched till Torbung. Suddenly they started burning houses. At that time, I was taking my child for tuition classes. Since the number of Kuki people increased, we left our houses and with the help of my sister and her vehicle (Bike/Car) fled for our life towards Keinou. After travelling around for some time looking for shelter, we reached Santhong Community Hall (which is now a Relief Camp).

At that time due to the pelting by the Kuki people even the State Force fled for their lives. Looking at the difficult situation at that time, Arambai came to help us. At that time if the State forces had done their duty, this kind of situation wouldn't have reached.”

Another 60-year-old Meitei woman, MeFMo23 from the same village reported how the Arambai Tenggol ‘helped’ the State forces:

“On the 3rd of May 2023 in the afternoon around 2.30 PM, Kuki people holding weapons were going on a rally till Torbung and suddenly they started burning houses. When I was at home, our villagers tried to fight the Kuki people with whatever weapons available. The State forces did not use weapons against the Kuki people, and they ran to save their lives. The Arambai Tenggol saw the difficulty faced by the State forces and helped them hence we are a bit safe.

The number of Kuki people in the mob increased hence we ran through the paddy fields and went towards Saiton. I sat in the vehicle of MLA Premchandra who helped me reach Saiton. My family members and I thereafter found our way to Santhong community hall.”

MeFMo3, a 50 year old woman, originally lived in PhougakchaoIkhai too.

“On May 3, around at 3 PM, a large number of Kukis came and they had started to burn houses. We heard blasts when gas cylinders caught fire and when tear gas shells were thrown. My 7-year-old granddaughter also got lost, and we found her only the next day. We were taking shelter in another village and had a very difficult time trying to search for her and other missing people. Then we were all brought here by a vehicle. We did not know about this village. Some people were injured, because of stones pelted using catapults.”

Twelve other Meitei people who fled from the same village, (MeFMo6, MeFMo7, MeFMo8, MeFMo9, MeFMo11, MeFMo12, MeFMo13, MeFMo14, MeFMo16, MeFMo18, MeFMo19 and MeFMo21, MeFMo22) and sought safety at the same relief camp, shared similar stories that reported armed Kuki mobs attacking homes around 3 PM to 4 PM. MeFMo11’s story was particularly tragic. She is a 75 year old woman, whose brother was locked inside a house before it was torched by a Kuki mob. He survived, but his treatment costs have become hard for the family to bear.

“As we were running for our lives, from a distance we began to see houses being burnt around the neighbourhood I lived in. We were taken aback with what was happening around us as we were running for our lives, with tears in our eyes. We reached Santhong. Amongst the people who we fled together with, there were so many people who fainted and had fractured their legs.

Around 10 pm, when we couldn't hear any more noises of the Kukis attacking our villages, some people started going to check the houses that were burnt and found my brother who was locked inside the house that was burnt by the Kukis. Immediately after he was found, the members of our local club took the body of my brother to the nearest hospital. After seeing the critical condition of my brother, the doctors gave him first aid and referred him to another hospital.

As my brother's body was severely burnt, even after a year he is still being treated medically. As so much money has been spent on his treatment, we don't know if we can even afford further treatment for him."

In his written testimony, MeMMo19, a 28 year old man from the same village referred to Kuki mobs as narco-terrorists:

"On May 3rd 2023 after I finished working, I reached back home. It was not even 3 PM and I was taking rest in my house. I heard gun sounds from the back side and I thought the police were firing tear gas to control the mob. But as the gun sound was getting louder and closer I realized it was not the tear gas sound but actual gun sounds.

When I heard people screaming, I went out and saw the houses in front of my house getting burnt. So, I went and asked those who were burning down the houses who gave you the permission to burn somebody's house. The Kuki narco-terrorist pointed the gun at me and said, 'do you want to die?' Since they were all holding weapons, in order to save my life I ran along with my sister's daughter and my father.

When we reached the street, the police, instead of stopping the Kuki narco-terrorists from entering and attacking the civilians, were standing and doing nothing. They said that they did not get any orders and they

were just watching. As the Kuki narco-terrorists were approaching, the police were the first ones to run away.”

Therefore, from the testimonies of Meitei survivors who resided in the area between Churachandpur and Bishnupur, it may be inferred that the violence by Kuki mobs started around 2:30 PM to 3 PM. However, one Meitei teacher, MeMB3, who lived 5 minutes walking distance from Kangvai, shared:

“I thought nothing would happen, but when violence started in Kangvai, the entire village started sounding alarms. I was 5-minutes walking distance from that place, and around 6.30pm I heard loud horrible sounds, Of bells, pipes on poles, etc. Even now when I hear the sound of bells, it still scares me. We were all hiding in our house, when the Kukis started throwing molotov cocktails (bottles full of inflammables with a fire lit at the top).

Our 3-year baby was crying throughout. We tried to muffle her cries in the bathroom, where me, my wife and two sisters (19, 23 respectively) hid. After the molotovs, they started shooting at our house with guns. Amidst the fire, we carried the baby and jumped fences and hid in the neighbouring houses.

Everybody was fleeing, and finally we hid in the Don Bosco school.”

iii. Imphal



KMS15, a 63-year-old Kuki man shared that he was living in East Imphal in a Kuki locality. He said from the afternoon till evening, he started receiving warnings over social media.

“By the afternoon of 3rd May, 2023, I received warnings over social media that mobs of Meitei groups were gathering to attack Kuki settlements and houses. Soon, big armed mobs of Meiteis

started attacking our areas. In the evening, I was hiding in the neighbour’s house when one Muslim family saved us. The Muslim man helped me, my wife and two grand-daughters to shift to the Assam Rifles camp.”

He shared that some of his Meitei and Pangal friends took videos of the house, showing that it was looted, vandalised and occupied by a Meitei person. In his oral testimony to the Tribunal, he estimated that he lost property worth Rupees 8 to 10 lakhs.

KFK2, a Kuki woman who resided in New Lambulane, Imphal with her husband and children, said that they got to know about the news at around 5 PM on May 3.

“We lived near some Meitei households too. We thought of moving to a safer place because things didn't seem to be getting better. My husband tried to assure me and say that there are many police and security forces.

He also said there are many Kuki households nearby and that we will be safe. When we went out and saw, all shops in the market area were closed.

I came home and fed my children. By then the mob had reached our locality. The mob started hitting gates made of tin sheets. I took my children and fled into a nearby building. I hid my children and went back out to see and I found my husband and another boy who was a tenant badly beaten up. The mob was from Arambai Tenggol.

I started begging them to stop and they started beating me up too. My clothes were torn in the process. They stopped for a while and the whole place had filled with blood. They slashed my husband's back with knives and demanded him to say 'I am a Kuki refugee'. I pleaded and said agreed, but still they dragged the boy outside the compound but my husband and I tried to drag him back inside. We managed to drag the boy back and he was unconscious.

Outside the gate, the Manipur Police commandos were standing and not doing anything. I kept saying to the mob that I am sorry! We are wrong. Please stop beating us. I didn't recognise anyone in the mob.

They stopped for a bit. But they were on a destruction spree. They destroyed all belongings in our compound, including our tree, our car. I think our house was the first to be attacked in Imphal. The fencing was becoming loose.

We went to a (Kuki) neighbours house and switched off all the lights. It was more secure. We called up all emergency numbers including those for health, but nobody came to help us. One of the boy's relatives, who worked in the police came and took him to the hospital. But left my husband behind because they could not lift him up.”

When she was rescued, she said she was forced to leave her husband behind temporarily, “as he was more or less dead.” In her written testimony, she also mentions that after their rescue they went to Kohima for his treatment, where he was admitted for more than two months. She submitted photographs of her husband’s deep wounds from knives, as well as a copy of the FIR. She said that her husband has not been able to get back to work after the incident.

A citizen journalist, IGD6, who testified before the Tribunal said,

On May 3 evening, I was coming back from an interview. I saw news of houses burning in Churachandpur and at the same time I saw huge Meitei mobs here in Imphal. They stopped our car, but they recognised me and let me go. I was afraid despite being a Meitei among my own community.

KMD21, a 34 year old Kuki man testified:

“Around 7 PM on May 3, there was a lot of ruckus. We have an area WhatsApp group and a family WhatsApp group. There are four zones, the school is situated in Zone 2. It is a residential area. I received a message from that group around 7 PM saying there was a lot of ruckus. Around 7:30 - 8, another update was given in the family WhatsApp group that a church in Zone 3 was burnt down - the Evangelical church. The people living opposite that church had shared this update.

Even around 8 / 9 PM the violence continued, and I received messages about houses being burnt in Zone 4, etc.. Everyone made calls. It is a government residential area, so we made calls to ask for security forces to be sent to protect the residents. There were rumours that they were being deployed. In a brief while, we received an update that the police and security forces were posted around that time.

Sadly, even after that, the violence continued, and we don't know where the security forces had disappeared. We kept on receiving updates that houses were being burnt down. Around 2 AM that night, there was an update that sounds of tear gas could be heard.”

Therefore, it may be inferred that the violence hit Imphal around the afternoon and evening of May 3.

4.4.3. Moreh, Tengenoupal District



MeFI1, a 53-year-old woman in Moreh was out for the Lehrouba festival, a traditional wrestling sport. Moreh is a border town on the India-Myanmar border, located in the Tengenoupal district (red square on the map on the left). She shared with the Tribunal that historically, whenever there was violence in Churachandpur, it usually spread to Moreh.

“And sure enough, there were firings in the bazaar soon, where we were celebrating Lehrouba. The Kukis started piling clothes together and burning them at hotels in the area. People staying in those hotels started fleeing and could take only what they had on them. The rest of their belongings all had to be left behind. In between the hotel and my house there is a river, and on seeing the burning hotels on the other side, I had fainted. I have a heart condition. All Meities who were escaping gathered at Eastern Science English School. There was a hospital nearby and shots were fired in the air

in front of the PS as well. The 5th Reg. of the Assam Rifles picked people up from there and two trucks carried 35-40 people to a nearby temple, the Ima KondongLairembiKsubam temple in Morei (supposedly the most imp. temple for Meiteis).

She also shared that after being kept in the camp till May 11:

“Before we could be safely taken to Imphal, we Meiteis from Morei had to be exchanged with the Kukis from Imphal.”

4.5. Testimonies of murder, rape, arson, looting and others

It would be unfair to compare the impact of the violence on different people's lives. Some have died brutal deaths, many have gone missing leaving families without any closure or opportunity to bid their farewells and most have been displaced from their homes and are living in relief camps with uncertain futures and facing dire conditions and material losses. While some of these losses can be quantified, and relief can be provided to address health and food crises, it may be fair to point out that ordinary people belonging to both Kuki and Meitei communities continue to reel from immeasurable loss and destruction caused by the conflict. This section of the chapter hopes to capture stories of victims of some of the most brutal murders, arson or other types of assault. Many reports have narrated how the Kuki community suffered more in the initial days.

A senior official in the Assam Rifles in Churachandpur told the Tribunal¹⁵⁶:

“Initially reports of killings started coming from the valley, but as the days prolonged, similar killings started taking place in the hills as well. So how

¹⁵⁶ CCPurGD2

can someone blame only the Meiteis? The Kukis were on the defensive initially, but as the violence prolonged, they responded in a tit-for-tat fashion.”

Another senior Assam Rifles official in Imphal told the Tribunal¹⁵⁷:

“In the first three days of the conflict, 133 persons were killed out of which 115 were Kukis. Till the day of the meeting, 225 had been killed out of which 140 were Kukis. In the first 48 hours, Kukis suffered immensely. In villages, you often know which house belongs to a Meitei and which belongs to a Kuki but the same is not known in the cities. However, in Imphal, all Kuki houses were marked from before the conflict which made them easily identifiable. So, the Meiteis were prepared and better organized initially. Later, however, the Kukis organized themselves and were much better prepared than the Meiteis, and they were equally brutal in their treatment of the Meiteis.”

When the Tribunal met with members of the Naga community, they said¹⁵⁸:

“We have maintained neutrality and extended any possible help to both communities. In their fight with each other they have disturbed us terribly. We have faced intimidation, threats, burning of houses, Many Naga houses were also burnt down. Many Nagas were beaten by Kukis. Nagas have also been killed by Meiteis. Even women.”

A report in The Wire which tried to dispel myths regarding the Manipur conflict pointed out in a portion titled, “Non-Manipuri Hindus in Kuki

¹⁵⁷ IGD13

¹⁵⁸ KGD2

areas attacked”¹⁵⁹, highlighted a myth that “Allegations about Kukis who are predominantly Christians, attacking Hindu temples in tribal-dominated areas were circulated in social media since May 3.” The Report pointed out that in a joint Statement was published on 9th May, 2023 on behalf of the Bengali, Bengali-Muslim, Bihari and Marwari communities to clarify that “there was no difficulty, persecution or attack on any individual or on any place of worship based on origin, caste, creed or religion from the local people residing in the town and district [Churachandpur]¹⁶⁰.”

The Tribunal spoke to several victims and survivors from Meitei and Kuki communities. Their testimonies, as shared below, narrated a range of violent and gruesome acts of terror by armed and unarmed mobs. Solely based on whether their identity was Kuki or Meitei, they faced threats of the following types of violence:

1. Murder – Mobs have killed people by beating them to death, shooting with bullets, or in other extremely painful ways such as burning them alive. Several times, the bodies of the murder victim were burnt by the mob, and in some cases, they were mutilated and photographed.
2. Arson and looting of villages – Villages inhabited by either community in an area dominated by the other have faced large mobs, usually hundreds of people, who have vandalised homes, set them on fire and looted people’s belongings. Kuki survivors who have escaped such incidents narrated that such mobs usually banged on the electric poles with rods, before entering a village. In such attacks, Kukis who were unable to escape were often killed by the mob in brutal ways. Most people escaped such

¹⁵⁹<https://thewire.in/rights/manipur-violence-claims-counterclaims-meitei-kuki>

¹⁶⁰<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KBMC4sTvKi36YeL9ATmxG2rdZfpTnROo/view?usp=sharing>

attacks and are living in relief camps. They have spoken about the losses they have faced, of land, livestock, ancestral belongings, crops and their homes, with great detail to the Tribunal.

3. Mob lynching and abuse - Verbal abuse and slurs by mobs had become normalised, while a narrative of hate was continuously propagated on social media, from both communities.
4. Missing persons – both Kukis and Meitei survivors spoke about family members and local villagers whose whereabouts are still not known and who are presumed missing, though the reality may be that they may have been killed.
5. Sexual violence – In such attacks by mobs, women were especially vulnerable to threats of sexual violence at the hands of mobs. Mobs resorted to parading women while abusing them, and even claimed that such acts were in retaliation. For example, when there were rumours spread that Meitei women were raped in Churachandpur, Kuki women were told in Imphal that the Meiteis want revenge.

Below are narrations of some of the most gruesome incidents of murder, rape and arson inflicted on civilians by armed mobs.

4.5.1. Murder

Two young women, Olivia (aged 21) and Florence (aged 24), originally from KhopibungKangpokpi Village worked in a car wash facility in Imphal. When KMK6-1, Florence's father, called on 4th May, the phone was picked up by a woman, who asked him if he wants the girls to be dead or alive. In an interview with dw.com her mother, KFK6-2, said, "Both Olivia and her friend Florence Hangshing were raped and brutally murdered by marauding mobs on 5th May. The rooms the two were renting were reportedly surrounded by men belonging to the Meitei group.

Then, the women were dragged into a different room and assaulted.” In a conversation with the Tribunal, KMK6-2, Olivia’s mother said:

“We never expected this day to come, because we have been very close with Meiteis all our lives. We never thought that things could escalate this way. Our daughters worked in a car wash in Imphal. On



May 3rd, my daughter said the manager said everything will be alright. He had assured the girls and they assured me about their safety. I was worried, and I didn’t sleep the entire night. When I called her at 5 PM on May 4th there was no answer. Then, someone else answered the phone and said, “Do you want your daughter dead or alive?” And they hung up the phone. I didn’t know how to react, whom to call, what to do, whether to cry. All my children were in different boarding schools. I was so worried, I accepted in my heart that my daughter was dead. Even if things became violent, I never thought girls would be treated this way. I thought they would be spared. Since we had good relations with Meiteis, we never imagined this day would come.

All our people got the news about my daughters. but nobody got the courage to tell us, the parents. Their coffins also came, but we don’t know what was inside the coffin. People who were once our friends, were the ones who looted and burnt our homes in our village on June 12th. We left the village in the morning and the mob came that day itself in very big numbers. Men who were guarding the village said they burnt down the village.”

MeFC8, a 32-year-old Meitei woman was married to a Kuki man, who was a construction worker. She shared that her husband had returned to work to Imphal on May 2, 2023:



“I had spoken to him on the phone on May 3 in the morning and afternoon, even after the violence had begun. On May 4, when I spoke to him in the afternoon, he was angry that I had slept through his calls early in the morning. His voice had completely changed. He said they were surrounded and he kept calling out my name.”

In her written testimony and the documents submitted to the Tribunal, she also said that she filed a missing person complaint reporting that he had not been in contact, since 5 PM on 4th May, after a large mob of “Meitei goons armed with deadly sophisticated weapons had entered their work site and tried to attack them.” In her written testimony she added, “two among the five workers managed to escape, while her husband was dragged, beaten to death and his body was left unattended in the middle of the road.” In her deposition, she said:

“I found out about his death on 7th May, 2023. The aunt of another person who had died called me up and told me. His body was brought to us only in December along with others. [KMC7] was one of the workers who survived, but the two others died.”

She also submitted a photograph of his body, which was covered by multiple media outlets. She continues to live in a Kuki-dominated area. She said:

“I stay in Churachandpur now and look after my 5 children as well as my sister's 2 children in a rented house. Even though I am a Meitei, I will never live among them again. I am in full support of the demand for a separate administration for Kukis. How can it be moral? My husband was an ordinary man. How is this reality?”

One of the workers, KMC7, who survived the same mob attack narrated:

“When we were starting from Imphal to Churachandpur, the mob stormed where we were staying. We locked the door and stayed inside the building. 100-200 people wearing black attire came. 2 of the mob members pulled us out of our room and asked for our ID cards. They saw our surname was Zhou and thought we were not Kuki at first. Then someone ran to them and told them Zhou is a Kuki name.

We were immediately dragged outside and beaten. Out of the 5 of us, my father and one more person escaped and hid under a cupboard. The contractor, who was Meitei helped them. 3 of us were taken downstairs and thrashed with iron rods. I told my friend then that we were going to die. I was pushed down the stairs, got injured on my head and had to have seven stitches later. My jaw was also severely injured. They beat me on my ear too. They targetted my head so that I die instantly.

The mob tried to burn me and I still have those scars. Then a Naga person came and tried to help and fired his gun on the mob. If he didn't come I would have been burnt alive. I was left unconscious on the road and I gained consciousness only when I was in the morgue. People in the army took me there because they must have thought I was dead. A nurse saw

that I was alive so they took me to the ICU. For the next 7 days I barely conscious. I hadn't eaten or drank water.”

He said that he is now a youth volunteer protecting Kuki areas. He said, “I do not want revenge, but I want to protect my people. I will not have any peace of mind if I stay at home.” A particularly harrowing testimony was of KFO7, who testified from London, on behalf of her cousin who was an eye witness to an incident in the valley where she lost two people of their family – KFO7's aunt (58 years old) and KFO7's brother (28 years old). She was testifying on behalf of her cousin sister because she was unable to speak about the incident anymore, after having spoken on multiple platforms.

“From May 3rd they could hear a lot disturbance at night, from far they could see that some houses were on fire. Electric poles being banged and hit. They were scared and so for their safety The family decided to walk over to the area where the ministers houses are because it is close to the District Commissioner's Office. So, at 10 pm they all went from their home, there was no light and they did not want to make any noise. It is a five-minute walk. There were two other family members and there were 20 to 25 of them that stayed there.

Next morning on May 4th at around 5 am they all came back. At 6 am my cousin Goulalsang heard that at the CRPF camp there were arrangements to escort people who want to go to Churachandpur. This area Lamfel is full of government quarters and most of the tribal communities who are living there are there because of work at the offices in Imphal valley. So around 6 am my cousin Goulalsang took his two-wheeler to verify this information. The way was very quiet but he reached the camp and confirmed that there was escort available. He came back and they packed up and were ready to go by 10 am.

There were two cars. The first car was driven by my cousin Goulalsang. In that car there are seven members including him – he, his mother, his young wife Nancy, younger sister, another cousin and an aunt with a one-year old baby. There was another car also driven by my other cousin brother – 30 years. Him and his pregnant wife over eight months pregnant and other family members – the first car drove first. Second car went to pick up something they left behind. There was a big gap between them. They were two mins away from CRPF camp - I have lived in Imphal so I know - there were over 200 people in a mob – women, older men and teenagers. As soon as they saw the crowd they tried to go back but more mob surrounded the car so they were stuck. All were pulled out of the car. Someone brought kerosene and set the car on fire. Have a picture of that I will send later.

And after that everything was very loud around them. One of the first things the sister said they were asked about was their identity and ethnicity – and they asked for Aadhar and ID card as proof. They were asked what tribe they were. My family said they are Mizo – they said Mizo Kuki all are same – we will kill you all. They were beaten with iron rods and bamboo sticks, bricks and stones. It was all very chaotic. Someone in the crowd moved them to a bench and made them sit down. By that time, they were already bruised and the younger sister told me that by this time Goulalsang was already bleeding. My aunt showed them her id card – office card – she was the under-secretary in Manipur secretariat and worked at the veterinary dept. Someone said yes, she is speaking the truth. Someone said either we kill them or let them go.

By this time there were other families coming there as well. There was another car that came and the mob got distracted. In that distraction, one Meitei guy took them to a nearby crudely made house. He took them inside and they locked the door. The sister said they were there for five mins until the mob found out. The mom and younger sister stopped at the

door because they thought that the mob was only after the men and not the women. But then the house was not properly built and the owner was scared that his house would be burned down so he asked them to leave. So they forced the door open and went out. The younger sister was also beaten with iron rods. She was pulled by the hair out of the house by a really big man. The mob chased my cousin. At this time everyone was separated and they lost each other.

The sister said she was pulled by this man by her hair all the way out to the main road while the blows keep happening from the mob. On her right, she could see her brother was running, he fell near electric pole, and then the blows started raining down on him. She also saw her mom covering the son from the blows, but he was already unconscious. On the other side to her left she saw her aunt who had the baby. The women were slapping the baby's head, pushing and shoving and the aunt was trying to protect the baby and she was on the ground.

During this time the young bride of Goulasang was taken to a separate area and (there is a viral video of this) the women were shouting to the men we give you permission to rape this Kuki woman because of what they did to our women in CCPur. Some rumour about this was floating around. She was taken to a separate area and from her account, (I will send you the link to her testimony) she lost sight of her family. She begged them to take her back to her family, but they kept parading her. They kept asking her to walk faster, beating her at the same time. She got really weak. One woman took a wooden bark of a tree and she went to hit her on the head and the bride moved a bit so it hit her shoulder. Another man hit her on the head and so she fell unconscious.

The younger sister tried to reach her brother and her mom. One person in the mob whispered to her, if you don't want to die today, run away. He pointed her to another colony and she ran in the opposite direction. There

she met her cousin and they both went to get the aunt and the baby. The crowd was by then celebrating, whistling and clapping at what they had done to my cousin. This was a little diversion and my aunt with the baby managed to escape. Two young Meitei men took them to their place and they locked the gate and told them don't make any noise. We will find a way to get you to a relief camp. It is not safe now because the cars are being stopped and everyone is being asked for identity cards. They stayed in the locked place for over five hours.

In the evening, these two Meitei men, they also have been trying to find ways to save my family. In the night they said, we will bring our car and try to get you to safety. If you stay here, they will come and you will be dead anyway so lets try and escape and see if we make it. So they brought the car, shoved the three and the baby in the car boot. The driver played really loud music and baby was crying the whole time. From that place to the first Manipur Rifle camp, it was a 15 min drive. They didn't meet any large mob and reached the camp where they rejoined the other cousins in the second car. The second car were far away and could see the first car was surrounded. They took a U turn and took the longer route to the AR camp. They reached 4 May. We didn't know where the bride was until later at 1 am we heard that the police had got her and she was admitted to RIMs hospital. The young bride Nancy had blood clot in her brain, fractured arms and fingers and was unconscious, was in ICU for 10 days. After that we flew her out to Dehi and she got treatment in AIIMS for three months before she could go home. Golalsang and the mom we came to know through other police men that they did not survive. This is also second hand info. The sister had been trying to call 112 and other emergency numbers being shared online. No one had been picking up. One police picked up and said even they cant come out because the situation is very bad and the CM sent an instruction telling the police not to go out on the street.

The young bride – I found some things really odd. She was saying when they made her walk out to the main street, she could see the DC office, she was made to walk upto the DC office, and she was holding the gate and shouting asking for help. The security could see her being beaten but they did not do anything. We don't have any evidence that she was raped. She is still quite traumatized.”

On 3rd May, 2023, at around 9:30 PM, a mob of around 800 Meitei people were seen attacking a village P. Thianzawl. A 55-year-old Kuki man, KMS2, testified to narrate how his brother was killed:

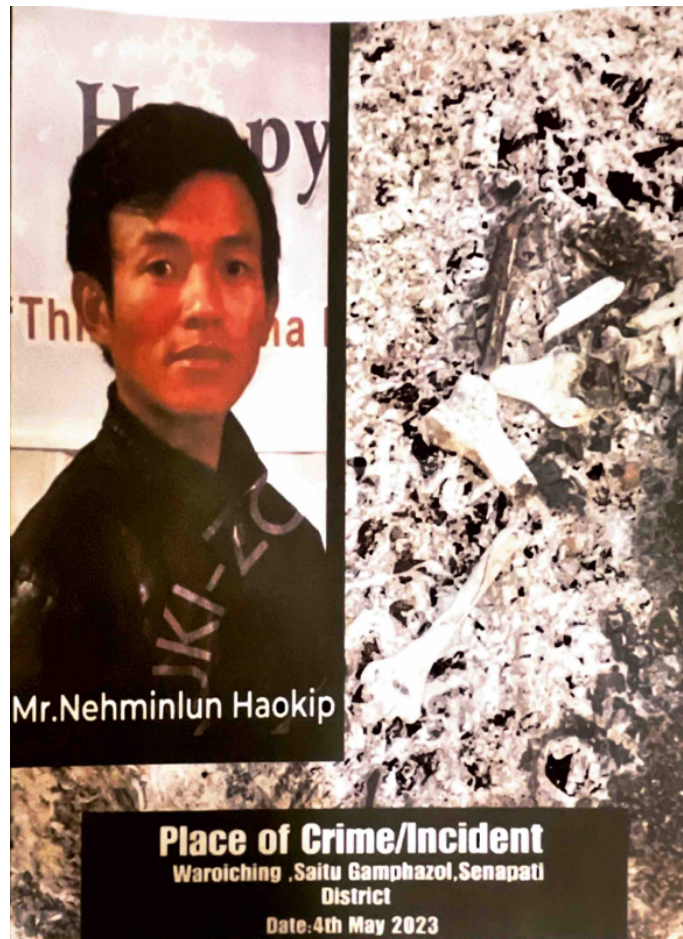
“My brother was in paralysis. Our village was so close to a Meitei village that they could hear the sound if I shout from my village. After dinner, when it was getting dark, we heard sounds of lots of people. Muslims near our locality told us that they are coming and told us to leave immediately and save ourselves. We ran away and when we were closeby, we could hear gunshots. We kept walking in the jungle and they started burning our villages. Our full village was burnt down. We stayed in the jungle all night, with no food or water.

My brother had started to crawl to try and leave the house. They had already begun to burn houses. The mob saw him, and shot him dead. His body was taken by police and informed through our local police station. Police sent a photo of the body and asked whose brother is this, and that is how they knew he was tortured and killed. Next morning, the village chief called the Saikul PS and Assam Rifles and brought us here to Kangpokpi district.”

In his written testimony, he said that his brother was tortured mercilessly, beaten and shot to death.

A 45-year-old Kuki man, KMC21, shared another harrowing story of the murder of his nephew on 4th May, 2023:

“He was my elder brother's son and 30 years old. On May 3, 2023, at 8 PM we were ready to leave the village. We left without taking anything with us. We spent the night in the forest. Around 9 PM the Meiteis came to our village and burnt it down. Next morning, Nehminlun said he will go to the nearby police station and the villagers proceeded to a nearby Thingkai village. He went with few of his Aimol friends in a Scorpio jeep to the police station. After 1.5 km, the Meiteis caught him - around



11 AM. According to one of the friends who was with him, he was pulled out because he was Kuki. He was tortured and burnt alive. His friends witnessed it but could not do anything. They saw him getting beaten and tortured but they had to keep driving. He was tied up, tyres were put on him and set on fire.

We got to know at 3 PM when his friends called us. They had gone to the police station and left their vehicle there. The next day they went along with the police and got his bones. Near his body, they found scrap metal and half burnt tyres too.”

Another story on 4th May, 2023 was of a tax assistant who worked in the IT department in Imphal. His 55-year-old aunt, KFC3, shared with the Tribunal:

“On May 4, 2023 around 8 AM, we started hearing about the news. We told him to look for ways to return home. There were many helpline numbers. So, I forwarded them to him. WhatsApp messages were not reaching him so I was calling him and read the numbers aloud to him. He said that those numbers were completely useless, and were either busy or not reachable. His sister also tried her best to share other phone numbers.

I spoke to him around 1 PM and he told us not to worry because the army had begun to rescue people. We contacted an army relative who went to the wrong address and could not end up helping. He was then dragged out by the Meitei mob around 2:45 PM, suspected to be Arambai Tenggol as they were wearing black and they starting beating him.

I saw the video that went viral which couldn't be recovered later on. His face and body were tortured beyond recognition. The last conversation with him was so promising. I found out at 4 PM about his death. His sister (now in Pune) spoke to him just before he was dragged out and he told her that he is scared and surrounded.”

She shared that the story of this atrocity had only warranted a tweet from Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, and a visit by the IT department to the victim's sister in Pune.

A 45-year-old Kuki mother, KFS4, from Govajung, Kangpokpi, narrated about the tragic and brutal death of her son in Imphal on 4th May, 2023:

“My son, LetgunchonTouthang (18) was working in Chingarel doing work with Iron and Steel in Imphal. He was our youngest child. My husband is

blind, and I have had a difficult life caring for four children on my own. On May 3rd we were going through the news and we knew it was getting worse. I called the head of his company and requested him to please do something to protect my son. It was not possible for us to go, so we requested him to arrange for him to be dropped home. He assured us that he will drop. I called my son and told him he will be dropped the next day. I told him to hide in the room and not show his face anywhere. I didn't sleep the whole night.

On May 4th, my son called and asked me when I am picking him up. He begged me to do something fast! I can still hear his voice: "Please do something. please. mummy please, I will die if you don't. Why can't you sacrifice your life?" I wanted to go but I knew I would not be able to reach him. I would have done anything for him, but I would have been kidnapped, raped or not survived the way towards him. My other son also stopped me. We really blame the owner of the place he was renting. He didn't do anything to protect my son.

One of his friends witnessed what happened and narrated the whole story to us. The mob came, took our son, tied one leg to one bike, another leg to another bike and pulled him apart. And then they chopped him to pieces.

He was someone who was willing to die for his people. But this is how his life ended. His body was given to us only in December. We fled our village on 28th May, the day it was burnt. I have been almost a single mother, trying to keep hope up, but every time I eat I remember him, every time I wash clothes I remember that his clothes are not there."

The village chief, of the same village, Govajung, also corroborated the story of this brutal death while narrating how the villagers had to flee a mob attack on 14th June, 2023.

A Kuki woman, KFC13, shared a story about her nephew, who was a 21-year-old, who was killed on 14th May, 2024:

“My brother’s son was killed. He was working in Chennai before but had come back home and it had only been 2 or 3 days. On the night of May 14, 2024, around 8 PM he left the house and did not return. He had stopped picking up everyone's calls, and his phone eventually stopped working. His mother, along with other villagers searched for her son throughout the village. On May 15, a 'missing person' FIR was filed. On May 17, some Bengalis



informed the family that they found his body in the Jheri River, near another village, Muljho. With the help of the police, his father took his body to Silchar for post-mortem.

He had never made any enemies or bad relationships with anyone. That is why we all suspect that it was the Meiteis. When the body was found, the eyes were removed from his body. His arms looked like they were boiled.”

A 38-year-old Kuki man, KMC17, shared a tragic story of the murder of his friend on 2nd July, 2023, the video of which went viral on social media:

“On July 2, 2023 at 4:30 AM in Langza village, Churachandpur, a Meitei mob came to our village and surrounded us from all directions. They first looted items from the houses and started burning them. Only David and I were the last two people remaining in the village. They started shooting and firing. When we were briefly separated, there was a lot of noise of guns firing. I tried to run and hide, but David got caught. The Meiteis captured him, abused him, beat him. I



heard them also say that they do not want to shoot him, but to keep him alive. After that I only saw the videos that went viral. David was beheaded, and his head was being carried by a Meitei person. That person can also be identified but is roaming free till date. They put his head on a fence and recorded themselves hurling abuses at his head. They then burnt the body

and only the bones were left. The FIR which was filed because of his father's complaint, mentions that the culprits were members of the Arambai Tenggol.”

KFK15, a 15-year-old woman, narrated the story of her brother-in-law's murder in Kangpokpi, on 31st May, 2023:

“On May 31, 2023, Meitei groups attacked the village S. Phailenkot in large numbers. They were armed with automatic weapons and came from up the hills. During a lull in the shooting, my brother-in-law went back into his house to take a bag left behind. His friend, LeithangKipgen, accompanied him.

Suddenly and unexpectedly, a group of armed Meitei people saw him and caught him. The accompanying friend stood hidden but was a witness to the whole incident. He later informed the family that the Meitei group killed him in a very cruel manner. They beat him up and even before he died, he was burnt alive.

Sometime after the group left, the friend came out, checked if her brother in law was dead, and thereafter ran out of the village to save himself. The next day after the killing, the village Chief and some others went to the village, recovered the burnt body of Nehmang and buried him in a graveyard where they normally bury their dead. There was no time to make a coffin and they just dumped him in a deep pit they dug, and covered him up.”

KMC20, a 44 year old Kuki man spoke about the murder of his mother on 9th June, 2023. This murder was also widely reported in the news¹⁶¹:

¹⁶¹<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/imphal/men-dressed-in-khaki-kill-67-year-old-woman-2-others-in-manipur-village/articleshow/100884971.cms>,

“On June 9, 2023, my mother who was 67 years went to the church to hide and pray when the Meitei mob came at 4 AM. The Meiteis went house to house and searched for Kukis.

Then they went to the church and they found her. They shot her dead. The army brought her body to another village where I was with my pregnant wife.”



On 5th August, 2023, at 2:30 AM, a Meitei man was brutally killed by Kuki armed insurgents in Kwakta. His wife, MeFB2, shared with the Tribunal:

“On 5th August, Kukis attacked my husband (Prem Kumar) and father-in-law (Pishak) at 2.30 am in the night. First, they were stabbed with knives then shot with guns. My father-in-law was killed with a headshot and my husband was tortured and killed. I was not at home when this happened. All I know is that both of them were out with friends till as late as 1 AM, then were attacked after they returned home. 3 people were killed with same surname. When I got to know, I was devastated, and had to leave that place. Now I live with my husband's brother in Bishnupur.”

One of the most recent stories, was a gruesome incident shared by KMS14-1, his wife, his mother and son's wife, about the death of another son, KamnimlalLupheng, on 13th April, 2024. The video of this incident also went viral after the perpetrators posted it online.

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-States/elderly-woman-among-three-killed-in-attack-on-kuki-village/article66950387.ece>

“Our 22-year-old son was murdered on 13.04.2024, his body was dismembered, recorded on video and widely shared on social media. But his body has not been physically recovered yet. We have eight children. This boy was our second son.

In a Kuki village, on the 13th, in the morning at about 7:30 AM I got a phone call from my 2nd son. Our son was part of a volunteer group of 20-30 people (villagers) formed to defend their village from attacks by groups of Meitei members of Arambai Tenggol. He told me that a 1000-member Meitei group, fully armed, was attacking. Some police commandos were also seen amongst the attackers.

After that call he lost contact with his son. Later that afternoon/ evening, he received a WhatsApp video showing the killing of the son. The video displayed his son’s palm cut off and nailed to the tree. The killer gang took photographs of it and then removed it from the tree. (In the video police in uniform can be seen.)

Along with his son, another villager, a 25-year-old man was also killed. From the video the deponent came to know that the bodies of both the deceased persons were taken to the Imphal valley where the mutilated bodies were dragged on the road and on a field.”

4.5.2. Arson and looting

A Kuki woman, KFD6, narrated how she was chased out of Imphal:

“They chased me out at around 8:30 PM on 3 May 2023. They chased me out. Around 500 people in a mob came into our colony at 8:30 and brought kerosene, rocks, rods and shouted saying Kill the Kukis (Kuki Hatlo). We heard the crowd surging into the colony. It was so sudden,

unexpected. We thought they will just throw stones and go. I was busy calling police and army friends to ask for help and reinforcements. We were hiding inside. Then we heard police teargas. Then 15 mins later again we heard them running and shouting - burn them down, burn the house.

Then my son who went up to the second storey, said that the church is on fire. A Meitei colony was right next to the church so they didn't completely burn the church down. We realised that we were the next target as they were approaching. When our neighbour's house was burnt, we were also watching from the window, we realised we needed to run out of the house. They overturned the car in front of the house and started hitting the car with rods.

They brought mashaals. We had four big houses - we came to know they burned the first house. My nephew (17 years) was reporting to us, he was running around to see everything. It lasted from 8:30 am till 3:30 pm. We had to rush out of the house. They systematically burned down my house and my brother's house. CM's car showroom Samaru fencing was close to my house so my house was not totally burned, because the fencing of my window and the car showroom of the CM was very close. If they burned my house, his car showroom would also get destroyed. But they totally gutted my brother's house. We rushed out. We went to a hotel. People came and told us we have to leave the hotel as well because that also belonged to a Kuki. We went to the road. They did not harm us because my mother is a Meitei, and my sisters-in-law are also Meiteis. Others were harmed and even killed. Fortunately, we were not harmed. My mother is 87 years old. My nephew was 2 years old. My nephew came out with his puppy and dog. And we went and stood on the road. The crowd was so busy burning and destroying our house, our furniture, gas cylinder. They didn't even notice us. There were not only men in the mob, but also women. Women had come to steal things from our houses. As soon as my sister came out of the gate, her luggage was snatched by the women in the

mob. We had to leave empty handed. I saw my brother's house in flames. I looked back and thought - will I be able to go back and see my brother's house again? I didn't even know I was crying.”

4.5.3. Mob Lynching

A Kuki survivor shared her experience with the Tribunal, (KFD14) who has sustained an injury too. She also shared about how Kuki women prevented security personnel from rescuing Meitei people until Kukis are sent back from Imphal, and also protected them from the Kuki mobs:

“I was in Churachandpur. On May 5, 2023 in the evening at around 5 PM, people started giving out messages that women should come out and stop security personnel who were trying to rescue Meiteis. We were afraid that if they took all the Meiteis out of Churachandpur, then our Kukis will not be sent back from Imphal. Meiteis were taken to a safe place in Churachandpur, and Kuki women also formed human chains to protect them from the mob.

Slowly more people gathered to block the road, to stop the security forces who were supposedly there to rescue Meiteis. At around 8 - 9 PM, many women were in the frontline. One young lady died that day too. One man was paralysed, the bullet went into his spine, and now he is in a wheelchair. The doctors are saying that a splinter is still in my lungs. I was bedridden for almost a year. I can't walk for long, and I have a lot of breathlessness. I survive on pain relief which is almost Rs. 10,000 per month. 3 rib bones had broken. I was taken by the army helicopter. I woke up and realised that I was on the bed in a district hospital.”

KMK5, a 48-year-old Kuki man and his wife testified to an incident when a large mob had attacked their village on 4th May, 2023. While trying to escape, he was caught by the mob, stripped off his clothes and beaten till he lost consciousness:

“The village next to our village was attacked on May 3rd. Next day afternoon at 3 PM, there were attacks on our village. A big number of people came and attacked. We tried our best to guard our village. We are about 30 houses and surrounded by bigger Meitei villages. On May 4th around 4:30 PM we ran out near the river bank and paddy fields. The mob was too large, with sticks. I fled in another direction, and my wife fled the other way. They found me and beat me badly. I fell unconscious after three beatings.”

Wife shared:

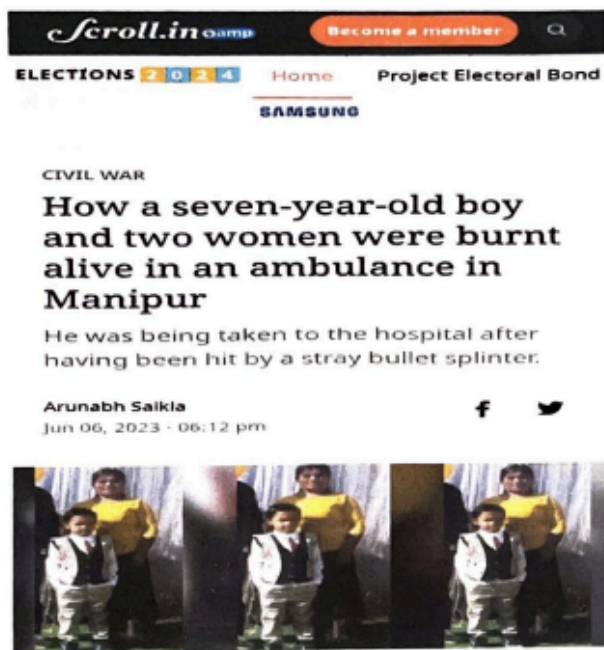
“We never expected this. We were always friendly with Meiteis. I thought I should wait it out. I never imagined that they would burn houses and commit the atrocities they did. Most of us fled to the next village. I was one of the last to leave the village. After the number in the mob had gone down, i started searching for him. Some of them shouted at me. Saw one chappal here, and other belongings here and there. Then i found his body



in a ditch and i thought he was dead. They had taken off his clothes. He was bleeding profusely. i was trying to call people from the village to help me retrieve his body. I was praying that if even he dies, let him die amidst relatives. He is still suffering, from being beaten up so badly. The pain was there for so long. There was one boy around, he helped me take the body out. One van was passing, so i took their help to go to the village. We stayed the night there and he received first aid.

He wasn't responding well to the treatment. Next day, we went to the Assam Rifles army camp near Somre. From there he was taken to a hospital in Senapati and spent one night there. Then from there we took him to Kohima where he was admitted for 3 days.”

A horrifying incident when a family was burnt alive along with the ambulance they were in was narrated by KMK8, the father:



“On 4th June 2023, the Meiteis started attacking the Assam Rifles camp. On that day there was not heavy firing, but there were snipers. I went to fetch water and left behind my wife and youngest son - 7 years old - on

the first floor of the water supply building next door. As I was getting water my son was at the window, a sniper shot my son. It was a deliberate attack. After my son was shot, we rushed him to the MI room in the Assam Rifles camp. There were 3 Meitei officers, the Commanding officer was not there. They called the Commanding Officer. Since we were living at the Assam Rifles Camp, the army decided to take the risk to take him to the hospital. The CO called the SP to arrange ambulance to take my son to RIMS. The Manipur police came with the ambulance and took the injured child to the hospital. My wife went along with her sister Lydia since they were Meiteis. After 30 mins I called my wife to check on them, but my wife did not pick up the phone, other Meitei people picked up the phone. No one told me what happened on 5th June 2023. I had no information about them after that until the morning of 6th June 2023 when I got a call. I was informed that the ambulance was stopped at Lamsang, where there was a block, but they were let go. But at the next village, Iroisemba the ambulance was blocked again and here they did not let them go and set the ambulance on fire. My child, wife Meena and sister-in-law Lydia were all burnt alive. My brother in law was following behind the ambulance, however he could not save them since the mob would have killed him as well. The Manipur police was escorting them with 3 escort vehicles but when the mob came they did nothing, they did not stop the mob.

I was not in a position to take any action after getting to know all this as my mental health was badly affected. But people asked me to take action and so I finally filed FIR on 14th June 2023. Witnesses informed that ArambaiTengbol, Meitei Leepun, Meera Peibi were part of the mob that killed my family. I contacted Lamphel OC with regard to my complaint. After the Supreme Court order, they brought the coffin back with the remains.

I have two more children, eldest son 17 years in class 10 and younger daughter 15 years in class 9. No one has contacted me for the case, all I know is NIA has taken over the case. No update on whether people have been arrested. Got 2.5 Lakhs compensation for my wife, only after court procedure. For Lydia also they got 2.5 Lakhs. However I have not received any compensation for my son. CM Biren on the other hand gave Meitei people 10 lakh on the spot.”

4.5.4. Missing

A 51-year-old Kuki man, KMC2, spoke to the Tribunal about his son who went missing in November 2023:

“On November 7, 2023 he left at around 4 AM. We received a call around 8 AM from the in-laws that he and those who were with him went missing. Till date, I haven’t received a photo or the dead body. A video shows that he was chased in the street, beaten in a Meitei dominated place. I did not want to see the video. But there is no news about what happened, whether he is dead or alive.

We filed a police complaint and they said they registered an FIR for a missing person in Churachandpur PS.

He was my eldest son (of two children). He was a driver, and 25 years old. I am really sad that i didn’t get to see even a strand of hair. If I cry, I feel like I am crying for nobody. I didn’t get to even see him. I feel empty.”

4.5.5. Sexual Violence

A testimony by Kuki activists highlighted that sexual violence had become rampant in the conflict. They also quoted Annie Raja, Secretary National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) who visited Manipur on a fact finding and said, “Women have been used as instruments to exact revenge

on the other community and all this is happening in a modern society and this has to be stopped.” They said:

“In the past and present days, tribal women and girls in NE especially in Manipur has been subjected to sexual violence within and outside their communities. We have witnessed a number of sexual violence experienced by tribal girls and women in many Indian cities, in their work place , rented house and in the streets.

The situation of tribal girls and women is heightened in Manipur. The State being in conflict zone for many decades that manifested in different faces and discourse, violence, suppression and injustice have become like a normal. Sexual violence in conflict situation has a devastating and coercive effect on society intimidating and terrorizing not just the victim but the family and the entire community. It is an act of domination, grounded in a complex web of gender. It is also a means to torture, humiliate or to punish an enemy – also consider as a symbol of victory over enemy.

We documented 33 cases of violence against tribal women and girls during this current conflict. Out of the 33 cases 8 were raped, 18 were murdered in cold blood, 2 missing and others are survivors of violence and torture.”

A Kuki member of a women’s rights organisation spoke about the plight of women, and the impact of the violence being especially more for women (CCPurGD9):

“While everybody is suffering in the wake of the ethnic violence since 3rd May, 2023, the plight of women is especially worse. Not only because of the targetted sexual violence but also because of the spirit of unity amongst women groups across ethnic line, which has been a casualty of the war. The Meira Paibis whom we fought beside, shoulder to shoulder against the AFSPA are now our sworn enemies.

Nothing can exemplify this fact more than the videos of Meira Paibi women instigating young Meitei men to torture, rape and kill Kuki-Zo women in an Imphal market.

The women in CCPur made human chains to save Meitei women. We guided them to the national security forces and even made human chain in front of the gate. I saved three Meitei boys. They came running into my clinic, I shut the door to keep them safe. In the morning, I opened the door and asked them to run to the police station. I was afraid I would be condemned by my own community. On 3, 4, 5 May, the Meiteis in CCPur reached Imphal safely because we made human chains till we reached the security forces.

The Kukis wanted revenge on the Meiteis after the 3rd of May, but the Kuki women (especially from the Maar community) saved the Meiteis from the Kuki mob whenever they could, often in collaboration with the army and the Assam Rifles. Why was there no such mercy and solidarity from the Meitei women? How did they become so polarized? They attacked our churches and our people.

In the past, when the Meira Paibi stood against the INA for repealing AFSPA, they were the women for humanity, now when they stand against Kukis and demand for ethnic cleansing, they are women against humanity. How can we hope for reconciliation?

Kuki women were raped and killed not because they were women, but because they were Kukis. And the violence meted out to them was twice as bad. The sense of betrayal is so deep that we don't see ourselves sitting with the Meira Paibis till justice is served. We told Rekha Sharma, National Commission for Women, the same."

When Meira Paibi women spoke to the Tribunal (KgGD2), they said:

“We never said women should be raped, no matter which side or which lady. We do not stand rape against women. The two girls were taken captive and tortured and handed over to the mob. But when we found out, we took action. We wrapped the girls and cared for them. The girl thanked us. Even Kuki women are our daughters. We also protested and condemned the act.

War is war – the youth were angry, they wanted revenge, they took revenge – how could we stop them? But when we found out, we protested in this very same spot, and also sent letters to the Governor.”

On 3rd May, 2023, a woman, KFK2, was abused when a mob attacked their home in Imphal, and her husband was attacked. Her testimony was:

“We lived in New Lambolem, Imphal and got to know about the news around 5 PM. We were very worried. We thought of moving to a safer place because things didn't seem to be getting better. My husband tried to assure me and say that there are many police and security forces. He also said there are many Kuki households nearby and that we will be safe. When we went out and saw, the market area all shops were closed. I came home and fed my children. By then the mob had reached our locality. The mob started hitting gates made of tin sheets. We lived near some Meitei households too. I took my children and fled into a nearby building. I hid my children and went back out to see - I found my husband and another boy who was a tenant badly beaten up. The mob was from Arambai Tenggol. I started begging them to stop and they started beating me up too. My clothes were torn in the process. They stopped for a while and the whole place had filled with blood. They slashed his back with knives and demanded him to say ' I am a Kuki refugee ' . I pleaded and said "Ok ok!" They dragged the boy outside the compound but me and my husband

tried to drag him back inside. Outside the gate, the Manipur Police commandos were standing and not doing anything. We managed to drag the boy back and he was unconscious. I kept saying I am sorry! We are wrong. please stop beating us. I didn't recognise anyone in the mob.

They stopped for a bit. But they were on a destruction spree. They destroyed all belongings in our compound, including our tree, our car. I think our house was the first to be attacked in Imphal. The fencing was becoming loose. We went to a (Kuki) neighbours house and switched off all the lights. It was more secure. We called up all emergency numbers including for health, but nobody came to help us. One of the boy's relative who worked in police came and took him to the hospital. But left my husband behind because they could not lift him up.

The next morning, a Nepali pharmacist came to clean my husband's wound and wiped his blood. My husband was more or less dead. I told my husband, "i am sorry i can't help you more. I will take the children and have to save ourselves." I couldn't even think clearly. Close to us, there was a Kuki locality, where I wanted to take my children to an army camp. A call came from our relatives telling us to just wait. They said the Army will come and rescue. But the mob was coming back to attack. While we waited for the army, an old woman told me to take her children and rescue them. The army came and took me, and all the children. They took us to a camp which was a Transit camp by the Assam Rifles / army and we stayed there for 5 days. We were moved to another Assam Rifles camp in Imphal near IGAR South. While transporting us, they would hide us. When they asked us where we want to go we said Kangkokpi, so they brought us here. After taking shelter at an office Kangpokpi, we then moved to a rented house. My husband cannot work anymore. He was in the hospital for 2 months in Kohima. We have 4 children and relatives are taking care of us. In Imphal, we had house and property. We lost everything. Both parents were even government employees.”

On May 4, 2023, a student, KFC18, was paraded on the streets by a mob, while being abused:

“On May 4, 2023 around 4:45 PM we were in the hostel in Porompat, Imphal in Nightingale Nursing Institute. I was charging my phone when I looked outside the window, and saw 5-7 men running towards our hostel. They banged on the electric poles and called everyone together outside. The hostel warden and seniors opened the gate. Lot of people were there. We were all very scared, all girls. They ordered us to wear our ID cards and took us to the grounds. I am Kuki and I knew they were searching for Kukis. I called my brother and told him, 'Meiteis are coming! They are coming to our hostel!' I started crying and said I don't know what to do. He was speechless.

I went to the washroom inside the room and called my mom and cried to her, “I don't know what to do and I may die.” I told her that it might be my last call. When I was searching for a place to hide, the mob found me. Two Meitei women held my wrists and asked me if I am Kuki or not. They went back to the room to search for my friends.

They were saying that because in Churachandpur, Meitei women were being raped, that is why we will face the consequences. Two of us were taken by the mob and made to walk on the street. They beat us and verbally abused us a lot while making us walk. I fell down, because of their beating. I was told by one of the women that if I hide from them then they will beat me more, and I should just follow their orders. They said they will keep us at a Meera Paibi house. One woman asked the mob why they were keeping us alive. She told them to chop us up and burn our bodies. They held knives and pointed guns at us. Some of them were holding stones. I was sure that I would not survive that day.

Suddenly I was unconscious and woke up only at JNIMS. They gave me first aid, did MRI scans. They gave me medicines which were expired. They allowed us to go outside the room for one hour a day. I talked to my parents and begged them to come and get me. After many tries, they got an army official to pick me up from JNIMS and drop me at KCC hospital [Churachandpur].”

In another testimony, activists reported that the two young women including KFC18, were raped, beaten with sticks, punched in the head and face until their teeth fell out, kicked on the stomach and back, till they lost consciousness in the hospital and managed to reach Lamka after few days.

On 31st May, 2024, KFC14, a victim’s sister-in-law, shared another harrowing tale of sexual violence of a woman taken by a mob from a relief camp. The shocking and condemnable detail of this story is that the mob had members of the Manipur Police as well, and that the FIR only reported that she was killed, and not raped as the family was informed.

“Hatbem was a Kuki woman, who worked as a waitress, married to a Meitei man and they have one son. She felt that she was Meitei, so stayed with him. After the violence began, we begged her to come home but she said no. They were staying at Kumbi Relief Camp for a while after which her husband stayed somewhere else (Napat village). Both of them were staying in Meitei areas. Their Meitei neighbours also tried to persuade them to send Hatbem away because she was being targeted.

On May 31, 2024, I got a call telling me that she was no more. Her husband tried to explain that the Manipur Police Commandos came to the relief camp and forced him to point out who his wife was. They pushed him aside and took her into the jeep.

Their son (3-4 years old) was screaming and crying. And they threw him aside too.

The Manipur Police who were Meiteis had already said the previous night that she should be killed. When her husband called, he said that he found her lying completely naked in a paddy field. Her body was swollen. An eye witness had heard her call out for her mother and said that she was gang-raped by the police. But in his complaint to the police, her husband did not mention that she was found naked and that she was allegedly raped. The FIR only reported that she was killed.

Their child has been very depressed and did not stop crying. When he was told that she was taken away by her grandmother, he called her up and begged her to take him along with his mother too. Her husband has been warned that he will be targeted if he tries to contact Kukis or pursue the case. Even now if we have to go forward to include the rape charges, keeping him safe will be very difficult.”

4.6. Desecration of places of worship

Outwardly, the violence in Manipur seems to be an ethnic clash between two communities. However, a closer view of the same reveals religious elements in the conflict. Particularly, the widespread attacks on religious places of worship reveal underlying religious animosity between the Meitei community which historically follows the Sanamahi faith which has over the years been assimilated into Hinduism and the Kuki community which largely follows Christianity.

One Meitei scholar and author that the Tribunal heard over a video conference, denied that the violence is a religious one. He stated as follows:

“To clarify, the conflict in Manipur is not between Hindus and Christians. There has been no widespread attack on Christians. For example, the Nagas, who are predominantly Christian, have not been involved in this conflict. I also want to mention that some public representations of the crisis have been misleading. For instance, a well-known activist posted a picture on social media, claiming there were no more churches left in Imphal, which is completely false. There are dozens of churches still standing, so such claims distort the reality of the situation.”

However, the others who deposed before the Tribunal highlighted the concerted attacks on religious places of worship. Especially, between the two communities, Meiteis and Kukis, are trapped the Meitei Christians who are ethnically Meitei but follow the Christian faith and are doubly affected by the conflict due to their unique identity. They have faced violence from both the Meiteis due to their religious affiliation and the Kukis due to their ethnicity.

The Tribunal met with a few representatives of the Meitei Christian Community (IGD14) in Imphal on 30.05.2024 to understand their experience of the violence. They narrated the events that unfolded on 3 May 2023:

“We were in the office close to Imphal airport and could not go back in the evening. We received phone calls in the night that Meitei churches have been attacked. We went to the police station but we were told that there are not enough police officials. They told us to hide and that individuals will not be attacked, only churches will be attacked. On 4th May, we got phone calls from all corners of Manipur – churches were burned, bulldozed. Caretakers of churches demanded money to demolish the churches. Between 4th and 5th, more than 100 churches were destroyed, not just in Imphal. Bishnupur was the most affected, with over 90

churches being destroyed. They did not attack individuals at that time, but just demolished churches.”

They said that they were attacked both by Meiteis and by Kukis, and that though majority of the churches were attacked by Meitei mobs, there were some which were in fact attacked by Kuki mobs:

“In bordering areas and Kuki dominated areas (Kangpokpi and Thoubal district borders), Kukis also destroyed churches. 1st church was destroyed very close to CCPur in Bishnupur district. The destruction continued till 9th when the last church was destroyed. We got report of 9 churches being destroyed by Kukis but only 4 are verified among which 3 were in the borders of Kangpokpi and Thoubal and the fourth was in Sugnu which is between Kakching and Chandel. 249 churches were destroyed in all. Therefore, the rest of the churches (apart from the 4), were destroyed by the Meiteis. In the first five days, 90% of Meitei churches were destroyed. Complaints were filed for some churches but no one was named. One of our pastors complained but he was threatened so he had to take back the complaint. Cannot tell for sure who were threatening. In the bigger picture, we see Arambai Tenggol, but it is very difficult to say.”

They told the Tribunal that due to their shared religion with the Kukis, they are looked upon by their ethnic community as outsiders. They said that they were also labelled as “informers for Kukis”. They explained that majority of the Meitei churches were destroyed by the Meitei radicals and many of the churches which were destroyed had been sponsored by Kuki communions, while the churches sponsored by Naga communions were left intact. This level of meticulousness in identifying the affiliation of churches and attacking only particular ones indicates detailed prior planning behind the attacks. In fact, the representatives said:

“We have also heard that the attack on Christians was pre-planned and some big leaders were here for a long time collecting information about churches.

This may also be a result of the baseless assumption that Meitei Christians have exceeded the Meitei Sanamahi population. There was an incident, some old videos of a pastor was circulating on social media where only portions of his speech were shared and his words looked like he was insulting the Meitei culture. He was then attacked and then rescued. We are not sure if an FIR was filed against him, but he was picked up by the police. He is in hiding, most likely. If FIR had been registered, maybe the reactions would not have been so violent.

On 4th March, there was a rally by the Christian community against poppy plantation and deforestation. Meitei Christians decided to support the policy on war against drugs because drugs hurt all communities. From Pukhao, you can see the poppy plantation which is done by the Nagas and Kukis and Meiteis and also by the State and Centre. Before poppy, other plantations were being carried out. At the end of the rally, some senior officials gave speech about strength of Meitei Christians, this also incited the allegation that we have exceeded the Sanamahi Meiteis. Anti-conversion sentiments and ghar-wapsi campaigns were also implemented here. In Sarek, two families were forced to re-convert to Sanamahism and forced to take a vow. One family did it and converted. The other did not want to, so we went to the Police station where the SP was kind enough.”

The representatives stated that in the valley, most of the churches which were destroyed were Meitei churches since there weren't many Kuki churches in the valley and the churches in the hills were not attacked. However, according to them, the Kuki community has included Meitei churches sponsored by Kuki communions in their list of Kuki churches destroyed in the conflict. Meitei Christians raised a grievance against this

and sought for their churches to be removed from the Kuki churches' list stating that such association poses a threat to them. The representatives told the Tribunal that the Meitei Christians have faced religious persecution at the hands of the Meitei radicals while the Kuki mobs have also not spared them due to their ethnicity while also destroying temples in the hills. Therefore, while between the Kukis and the Meiteis, the conflict is an ethnic one, Meitei Christians have suffered two-fold due to their religion.

A former IAS officer, IGD16, who belongs to the Meitei community spoke to the Tribunal in Imphal about the religious tensions underlining the conflict. His reasoning behind Meitei Christians being targeted by their own community was the same as the representatives of the Meitei Christians. He explained:

“There is a belief that because of religious ethnicity, the Meitei Christians are providing information to Kukis. But later it was discovered that all Meiteis are one. In the first three days, Meitei churches were destroyed. Kukis also destroyed churches. When other houses were burning, the churches also burned.”

Regarding destruction of religious places, he stated:

“The Shiv temple in Kangpokpi was desecrated on the night of 3rd May. In the second Shiv temple in Ingourak, there was a sitting Buddha. The first to be attacked was the purohit in the Shiv temple. We belong to the royal family. My father was looking after the Shiv temple. The purohit narrated how he escaped. Most churches were destroyed on 4th/5th.”

His testimony also provided an insight into the role of religion in the conflict between the Sanamahist Meiteis and the Christian Kukis. The IAS officer explained how Sanamahism and Hinduism, though the two are different religions, are similar in many aspects. Most importantly, both are

polytheistic. On the other hand, the Abrahamic religions like Christianity are monotheistic and stand as a stark contrast to Sanamahism. In the recent days, many Meiteis have experienced a desire to return to Sanamahism. In order for Hindus to re-convert, all they have to do is stop visiting the Hindu temples. However, Christianity is being viewed as a serious threat to the Sanamahi faith.

This also explains some of the allegations that the re-conversion processes for Hindu Meiteis and Christian Meiteis are very different, the latter being subject to stricter conditions. One news report published in *New Lines Magazine* wrote as follows:

“Meitei pastors have alleged that the terms of conversion and its enforcement have been different for Hindus and Christians. Hindus don’t have to sign an affidavit; they just need to keep the southwest corner of their home empty, dedicating it to Lainingthou Sanamahi, alongside Hindu deities. But for Meitei Christians, the conversion entails personally burning the Bible, removing all signs of Christianity from their homes, joining meetings and signing a legal affidavit declaring that they have converted to Sanamahism, said the pastor from Imphal Valley. Senjam told New Lines the reason for the difference was because most Meitei Hindus practice certain rituals of Sanamahism, unlike the Abrahamic faiths.

Several leaders in Manipur have told New Lines that the BJP leadership has applied pressure on Meitei Christian leaders to convert to Sanamahism. At least two public personalities said they were summoned to meet the Chief Minister in 2022 after videos of them speaking about their faith went viral. One of them alleged that in a meeting where Meitei Leepun chief Pramot Singh was present, they were indirectly pressured to abandon their Christian faith.

A member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) who belongs to BJP and did not want to be identified told New Lines that the Chief Minister had

pressured Paonam Brojen Singh, a Meitei Christian politician and BJP MLA, to convert to Sanamahism through his aides. “Both Sanajaoba and Leishanthe Susindro Meitei [another BJP MLA] were also present,” they said. Another pastor alleged that MLA Mayanglambam Rameshwar Singh, who belongs to the National People’s Party, offered him money to convert in 2022.

Meanwhile, the names of Biren Singh, Sanajaoba and Yasobanta Sharma, the acting President of the Manipur chapter of Vishwa Hindu Parishad, a prominent Hindu right-wing organization, on the plaque of a new building within the Sanamahi Temples complex in Imphal further showed a close working relationship between Meitei leaders and Hindu nationalist organizations.”

One pastor who fled from Imphal to West Bengal said that the Meitei mobs threatened to kill him like Jesus. It has been reported that pastors and Meitei churches are trying to distance themselves from the Kuki community in order to be accepted by the Meitei Community.

While the IAS officer stated that the Meitei radicals such as Arambai Tenggol who are part of the Sanamahi revivalist movement have no connection with the Hindu right wing organisation RSS, other experts seem to disagree on this point, supporting the narrative that the Sanamahi radicals and the Hindu radicals are working in tandem against the religious and ethnic minorities.

MeMD1, a Meitei human rights activist and lawyer, spoke to the Tribunal in Delhi on 06.07.2024. When asked about the relation and contradiction between the Sanamahi Meitei radicals like Arambai Tenggol and the Hindu radical group RSS, he stated:

“We clearly mention that it is Meitei Leepun - they are a known entity - functioning in official government properties - their identity is well

known. In terms of the connection between RSS and AT and ML - the new formulations are that as long as you are not a Christian or Muslim, they want to adopt religions like Sanamahi-ism as a part of Sanatan.

...

The understanding became that Meiteis can also be incorporated into the larger Hindu faith because there has been an effort to incorporate the Sanamahi faith into the Sanatan Dharm.”

Regarding the attack on churches, he said:

“This is not the kind of violence I have seen in all these years. There are new formations - named AT, ML etc. that have come up in the last 5-6 years. What is wrong is the policy of the government. We should direct our anger at the govt, not the people. This time, the government was being protected by the militants. And targeting one community. This is completely unbecoming of Manipur. Churches were being burnt down. In the matter of two days, almost 300 churches were dismantled.

Naga churches were not touched. In fact, groups of Nagas also said - don't burn this, this is a Naga church, go burn other churches. I don't know how these have been identified. Because there was definitely a level of planning.

Many Meitei Christians were forced to dismantle their own churches. From the Kuki side also many Meitei churches were burned. There is an overtone of ethnicity, but a sentiment of religion is definitely there. There has been an effort to wash out that and paint this only as an ethnic conflict.”

It is pertinent to note that the more recent Sanamahi revivalist groups, such as the Arambai Tenggol and the Meitei Leepun were founded by BJP Rajya Sabha MP Sanajaoba and former ABVP member Pramot Singh, respectively. Hence, the allegations that these Sanamahi revivalist

organisations are influenced by and in close connection with the Hindu right wing radicals are not entirely improbable.

A Meitei politician (IGD2) spoke to the Tribunal in Imphal on 29 May 2023. He said that the Kuki mobs had destroyed a temple at the time when they had attacked the Forest Range Office, prior to the commencement of the conflict on 3 May 2023.¹⁶² He stated that the Kuki mobs had also destroyed the Meitei Devi Temple called Ima KondongLairembi in Moreh¹⁶³ and the Shiva temple called KoubruLeikha in Kangpokpi¹⁶⁴ on 3rd May 2023. The latter is the same temple that the IAS officer referred to in his deposition before the Tribunal.

The temple destroyed at the time of the attack on the Forest Range Office, that the Meitei politician spoke of, was a temple in Thingkangphai village in Churachandpur desecrated on 29 April 2023 by Kuki mobs.¹⁶⁵ The Chairman of the village issued a press note condemning the desecration. MeMD27-1, a 38-year-old Meitei man from KhugaTampak village in Churachandpur, also referred to the destruction of this temple in his testimony before the Tribunal at Delhi.

In Churachandpur, the Tribunal visited one of the demolished sites of Meitei settlement called Zou Veng on 29 May 2023. The locals informed the Tribunal that the residents had left around 10-20 May 2023 and that the local Kukis



¹⁶² <https://imphalreviews.in/the-violent-conflict-between-kuki-zomi-and-meitei-erupted-on-may-3-in-manipurs-churachandpur-district-was-not-spontaneous-and-without-early-warnings/>

¹⁶³ <https://x.com/ahanthemx/status/1687517329754914816>

¹⁶⁴ <https://m.facebook.com/watch/?v=6516457621766226&vanity=100064467261439>

¹⁶⁵ https://x.com/Gooner_Homer/status/1751859761216364551

helped them to shift to the Mini Secretariat when violence broke out in Imphal on 3rd May, 2023, by forming human chains around them to prevent attacks by Kuki mobs. However, all the houses and other structures were destroyed after they left. The Tribunal saw a destroyed structure which resembled a prayer hall. The locals informed that the hall was destroyed around four months after the settlement was destroyed.



The Tribunal also visited the Kwakta Sericulture Relief Camp in Moirang, Bishnupur which was a Government relief camp with well-built, coloured, brick houses. It consisted of 146 families and the residents were from Zou Veng and Khumujamba villages in Churachandpur. A 70-year-old disabled Meitei woman who fled from Zou Veng, KhugaTampak on 3 May 2023 told the Tribunal that she fled from her home when the Kuki mobs attacked them and started razing their houses. She told the Tribunal that there was one village worship place in Zou Veng, an Umang Lai temple of the Sanamahi faith in the name of IbudhouMaikeiNgakpa which had been destroyed. However, the residents had left the village before the temple was broken. Another Meitei man in the camp, from Timurkon, Churachandpur, that there was a big temple in MandopLaikai, about 7-8 km away from Timurkon. It is an Umang Lai temple of the Sanamahi faith in the name of SalairelShidaba where he used to go to for prayers and religious ceremonies. He stated that this temple was destroyed.

MeFI1, a 53-year-old Meitei woman told the Tribunal at Imphal that on 3 May 2023, they were going for the Lehrouba festival at Moreh when the violence started and Kuki mobs started fires in the area. The Meiteis were

picked up by the Assam Rifles and taken to the nearby temple, known as the Ima KondongLairembiKsubam temple in Moreh. She said:

“On 4th May, twice we saw the burning of temples and saw our Deity being kicked by the attackers. Most of the area around the Deity was burnt, including garlands and the Garbha-griha.”

KMC5, a 58-year-old Kuki male from Haokongchin village, Kangpokpi, deposed before the Tribunal at Churachandpur regarding the attack on their church. On 4 May 2023, the Meitei mob that attacked also had participants from the neighbouring villages. They first attacked the church in the village and then burned the houses. Everyone who was left behind escaped except for his son-in-law who was burned to death.

KMC6, a 42-year-old Kuki male also from Haokongchin village, Kangpokpi, told the Tribunal at Churachandpur that their village was already destroyed on 3 May 2023. At that time, the villagers had fled to the hills. On 4 May 2023, they came back thinking the violence had ended. However, at around 1:30 pm, the Meitei mobs came in large numbers and started attacking the village church. They burnt it down and then the houses.

KFK4, a 55-year-old Kuki woman living on the outskirts of Imphal in Langol. Her village was around the quarters of Langol Housing Complex and was occupied by Kukis. She told the Tribunal at Kangpokpi that the violence had started on 3 May 2023. On 4 May 2023, her locality was attacked and the Meitei mobs burnt down the mill, the church and the pharmacy. KFK10, a 36 year old Kuki woman who was also living in the Langol Housing Complex, Imphal West testified before the Tribunal at Kangpokpi that on 3 May 2023, when the violence started, she came to know that churches were being burnt.

KMK12-1 and KMK12-2, are two Kuki brothers from the Khongsai village which falls under the Chief Minister's constituency Heingang, Imphal East. They told the Tribunal that the Meitei mobs were successful at entering their village on 4 May 2023 at around 2-4pm and their village church, Khongsai Veng Christian Church, was burnt down.

KMS7 is a 71 year old Kuki male from Jordanphai village, Saikul, Kangpokpi. KMS7 was the chief of the village. He told the Tribunal at Saikul that on 12 June 2023, the Meitei mobs attacked their village and everyone fled. On 12 January 2024, the mobs came back and destroyed their churches. He said, "They brought JCBs and bulldozed whatever was still standing."

KMS11 is a 73 year old Kuki male from Govajang village, Saikul, Kangpokpi. He is the village chief. His village was burnt on 14 June 2023 at 2 pm by the Meitei mobs. The mobs came back on 12 January 2024 and burnt the remaining houses, schools, churches:

"They burnt the Govajang Christian Church. In the neighbouring village, Aigijang Baptist Church was bulldozed on the same day."

KMS19 is a 32-year-old Kuki male from L. Langnom village, Saikul, Kangpokpi which is located near Pukhao, a Meitei dominated area. He told the Tribunal at Saikul that his village was attacked on 4 May 2023 by Meitei radical forces and the State forces who later returned to the village on 9 May 2023 to destroy and burn their church.

KFD10 is a 40-year-old Kuki female from Langol, Imphal West. She told the Tribunal at Delhi that her locality was attacked on 4 May 2023. The Meitei mobs started burning the Evangelical Baptist Convention churches around the survivor's house. After fleeing to the nearby CRPF camp, she could see the houses, churches, trees which had been completely burned.

KMD11 is a 39-year-old Kuki male who used to live in Imphal prior to the conflict but was displaced and had to shift to Delhi due to the violence. He deposed before the Tribunal at Delhi regarding attacks on churches:

“The first thing we heard is that my church in Kuki Baptist Convention got burned at around 7 - 8 pm on 3 May 2023. We heard about another church in Paitei Veng - close to Little Flower School in Imphal - that got burned. We heard, the people from the next locality were trying to flock into our locality. They came to our locality. Two blocks away, one locality got attacked, one person from that locality shot somebody. On 4 May 2023 morning they attacked again. My locality is right next to Manipur Baptist Convention. Meiteis started burning the church of KCC (Kuki Christian Church). It also affected the Thankul church.”

KFD12, a 65-year-old Kuki woman from Geljang village, Kangchup, Kangpokpi, owned a shop in Langol, Imphal and also witnessed the burning of the church of Evangelical Church Alliance. She told the Tribunal at Delhi,

“I had gone in the morning next day to check - all was burned to the ground.”

KMD16, a 56 year old Kuki male from Lamlonggei, Mantripukhri, Imphal also told the Tribunal at Delhi that the church he used to go to in Imphal was also destroyed.

KFD20 is a Kuki woman from Churachandpur who shifted to Delhi in 1993. However, her family lived in Manipur. She came to testify before the Tribunal at Delhi regarding the experiences of her family. When she was asked whether the churches destroyed were Kuki or Meitei, she said:

“I surveyed my people’s area, I did not survey the Meitei churches. I believe some of the Meitei churches also burned but I could not enter Meitei areas.”

She stated that the allegations that the Kukis also burned churches in Imphal is incorrect, that it would be impossible for them to do so when they were the ones getting attacked. When asked about the burning of temples, she explained:

“I grew up in Manipur. Hinduism in Manipur is very different. Most of the Meitei houses have small 3 ft by 3 ft elevated land with tulsi - these are the temples which may have been destroyed when the houses were destroyed. In Churachandpur we have one mandir - Hare Krishna Mandir - no one attacked it.”

KMD21, a 34-year-old Kuki man from Zone 2, Games Village in Imphal told the Tribunal at Delhi that there are four zones in Games Village. At around 7 pm on 3rd May 2023, he was notified of the chaos on a WhatsApp group of residents of the area. At around 7:30-8:30 pm, another update was given in the family WhatsApp group that a church in Zone 3 was burnt down - the Evangelical church. The people living opposite that church had shared this update.

In a newspaper report published by the *Indian Express* on 18 June 2023, the Archbishop of Imphal recorded 10 alleged instances of Catholic churches being attacked during the conflict, although Kukis largely belong to Protestant denominations.¹⁶⁶ This shows that the target was not only Kuki churches but also Meitei churches. He said that 249 churches belonging to Meitei Christians had been destroyed within 36 hours. He was quoted saying:

“The wonder is in the midst of the fight between the Kukis and the Meiteis, why did the Meitei mob burn down and destroy 249 churches

¹⁶⁶ <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/archbishop-imphal-claims-249-churches-burnt-in-manipur-8669677/>

located in the Meitei heartland? How is it that there was almost a natural attack on the church in the Meitei localities itself and how did the mob know where the churches were located if not previously planned?

...

Some pastors have been indicated not to rebuild the churches. There is systemic silencing of the minorities. Is this not another ‘Ghar Wapsi?’”

He connected the attacks on the churches with the newly growing Sanamahi revivalist movement and the Meitei radical groups like Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun and stated that the Meitei Christians are being threatened to re-convert to Sanamahism.

Some of the attacks which have been reported are as follows¹⁶⁷:

- i. 3 May 2023: Holy Redeemer Parish in Canchipur, Imphal
- ii. 3 – 4 May 2023: St. Paul’s Parish Church in Sangaiprou, Imphal
- iii. 3 - 4 May 2024, morning: Pastoral Training Centre in Sangaiprou, Imphal
- iv. 4 May 2023: Holy Cross Church in Kakching Khunou
- v. 4 May 2023: Mary Immaculate Church, Games Village
- vi. St. Mary’s Church in Salungpham, Thoubal
- vii. Sacred Heart Parish Church, Yairipok
- viii. 4 – 5 May 2023: St. George High School in Wangkhei, Imphal
- ix. 5 May 2023: St. Joseph’s Higher Secondary School in Sangaiprou, Imphal
- x. 28 May 2023 – 4 June 2023: St. Joseph’s Parish in Sugnu, Kakching

The religiosity of the ethnic conflict has also raised serious debate in the House of Commons in the British Parliament, with one British MP calling

¹⁶⁷<https://hubnetwork.in/a-look-at-recent-attacks-against-churches-in-manipur-timeline/>;
<https://www.pillarcatholic.com/p/manipur-archbishop-249-churches-destroyed>

the conflict “a silent attack on Christians in India.”¹⁶⁸ Democratic Unionist Party MP Jim Shannon who is also the chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for International Freedom of Religion or Belief (APPG – IFRB) said:

“The events in Manipur might be classed as originating in tribal or ethnic tensions, but the Manipur violence has silently been an attack on Christians in India. It is striking that local police and State government sat by as arson destroyed the properties, homes and lives of minority and religious groups. The perpetrators of the violence are understood to be from Hindu extremist backgrounds whereas the victims are predominantly Christians. Some 230 churches were destroyed over a four-day period. Many perpetrators of the violence did not act in a random manner; their violence was deliberately targeted at Christians, and they wanted them to flee their lands.”

It is clear from the testimonies that there was widespread desecration of religious places of worship. While Meitei temples were destroyed in the Kuki areas, churches, both Kuki and Meitei, were destroyed in the Meitei areas. Therefore, there is a strong religious element underlining the ethnic conflict. It is pertinent to note that deliberate attacks on religious sites by armed groups during a conflict amounts to serious violation of international humanitarian law. However, the State, as several survivors and experts have pointed out, has failed to address the issue. As the Tribunal was informed by the representatives of the Meitei Christians, the State failed to make a mention of their grievances in its status report filed before the Supreme Court. It is evident that every effort has been made by the State to ‘invisibilise’ the communal element underlying the conflict, but the effects of the same are glaring – in the form of burnt, destroyed and charred religious structures – and cannot be hidden by rhetoric alone.

¹⁶⁸ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/uk/violence-in-manipur-is-a-silent-attack-on-christians-in-india-british-mp/articleshow/103822051.cms>

4.7. Economic blockades and restrictions/ regulation of movement

One of the most devastating impacts of the conflict is the complete segregation of Meitei and Kuki areas, divided by ‘buffer zones’ manned by security forces as well as militants from Meitei and Kuki militant outfits. This segregation has led to the displacement of around 60,000 people, most of whom continue to languish in relief camps. This has also led to the imposition of blockades by militant groups from both communities, policing and restricting movements between the two areas.

Now, Meiteis reside in the valley, Imphal and its surrounding foothills. Kukis reside in the hill areas, which surround the valley from all sides. No person from either community can travel to the area inhabited by the other, without facing imminent danger. This has impacted ordinary people from both communities, especially the poor.

Infrastructure, development and commerce are all concentrated in the valley. This leaves no choice to the Kukis, but to travel much farther to Mizoram or Nagaland by road. This has affected their economy, education, access to essential commodities as well as healthcare. Poorer members of the Meitei communities who cannot afford to travel by flights, have no way of leaving the valley at all. This section specifically looks at testimonies of victims and survivors who have shared with the Tribunal about how the restriction on movement has affected them.

A 14-year-old Kuki girl, KFC16, testified to the Tribunal about the story of her brother:

“I was studying in Radhakrishna Foundation School. I was in my village but now I have shifted to a relief camp. My brother was 18 years old and

was now volunteering to guard the village. There is no military to defend us. When he needed medical attention, we were taking him to Mizoram on October 29, by road. Doctors said he got leukemia. He died in the ambulance itself on the way...”

Another testimony was by a civil society group comprising of Kuki youth, KMO3-1, KMO3-2 and KMO3-3, who worked on rescuing people trapped in the violence, and providing relief materials for those in relief camps:

“Meanwhile, transport costs became very high. From Lamka to Mizoram, hiring a vehicle would cost 25k, while previously the same passenger vehicle would cost 2-3k. Accessing healthcare became a big issue. People were compelled to travel to Mizoram and Assam at heavy costs. Those who could not bear the costs hope that the worst does not happen. There was a massive population spike in Churachandpur after the violence. The district hospital had not received regular healthcare supplies they were previously receiving, along with limited capacity of healthcare workers. With Meiteis leaving Lamka, most expert healthcare, lab professors, businesses (jewelry and other trades), and other skill/tech based requirements were deeply affected.”

In a group discussion in a relief camp in Churachandpur, CCPurGD6, members of the Kuki community said:

“Petrol pumps around Churachandpur are largely inaccessible and short on fuel, following the closing off of the Imphal border to Kukis.”

A member of the Kuki Students Organisation, CCpurGD3, also highlighted:

“Kukis in Kangpokpi can still go to the hospital in Dimapur, but for us, it’s almost 15 hours travel on one side, across perilous roads. The government had commissioned private helicopters for medical emergencies, but even then the KSO president could not get the helicopter for a medical emergency.

Every supply, be it food, medicine, raw materials for construction has to be rerouted through Silchar and Aizawl because of the conflict. This has increased the costs to go up manifold and the government has to intervene as a 3rd party to resolve the economic side of this crisis.

Currently, all DGPs, IGs, SPs, IAS/IPSs who are Kukis have been transferred from Meitei-dominated areas. No Kukis can enter Imphal, so nobody is getting government employment anymore despite having ST certificates, while all Meitei DSOs cannot enter Churachandpur. We have to mail all the letters that need his signature and then they have to mail it back to the DC’s office. There is already a separate administration that is going on indirectly.”

4.8. Violence impacting education

Since infrastructure and development are highly concentrated in the valley, students from tribal communities hailing from hill areas also went to Imphal for higher education. While authorities facilitated online classrooms and examinations in other centres, such efforts were barely sufficient to meet the needs of the thousands of displaced young people. Meitei households in hill areas or their foothills have also been displaced to relief camps deprived of access to education.

All displaced people who have been living in relief camps reported to the Tribunal that while some younger people managed to resume education in nearby NGOs or government schools and colleges, others had been

forced to quit education altogether. The violence had also impacted the hopes of many young people to resume education in the future: their forced displacement has led to the loss of important documents and certificates required by authorities.

In this section, the chapter specifically focusses on such events of violence that impacted people's education. Some instances are of incidents of violence that took place within the campuses of educational institutions, some are of those that led to a loss of access to education due to displacement and some are of hopeful stories, where philanthropic initiatives have helped people continue education.

4.8.1. Violence within institutions

On 4th May, 2023, a student, KFC18, was paraded on the streets by a mob, while being abused. Another story of violence that took within the Manipur University was shared with Tribunal by KFK10, a 36 year old Kuki woman:

“My sister was studying BE in Manipur University; she had called and she was crying. She was at Manipur University hostel, her friend locked her inside the room and she was hiding under the bed. My sister asked me to help and to call officials. I tried calling some officers, Kuki officers, including IPS Clay Khongsai, but they were not helping, asking me to call someone else, saying they don't have guns. Some others switched off the phone or were not picking up the phone. In the night there was no light or network, no whatsapp also.

We thought government would help, but no one came to our rescue. Our expectation that we would receive help from someone also did not happen. I finally contacted my uncle who works in the government. He managed to talk to some officer who went to MU and picked up my sister

and one more friend. Those who were left behind and could not get rescued, were beaten to death. Some of the students jumped out of the hostel to escape and died. My other sister was studying at RIMS in the 2nd semester, she has lost a year of her education since she has not got any seat for her outside the State, so her studies have got halted.”

KMC15, a 23-year-old Kuki man, was a student in Manipur University, Imphal. In his written testimony he shared that a mob of armed Meitei radicals entered the campus in the evening and attacked students, especially Kuki students:

“I heard the news in the evening that a Meitei mob came to Manipur University searching for Kuki students. Around 20-30 people came inside and I couldn’t escape from the mob. I recognised some of the people in the mob who were students of Manipur University. They made me stand outside the hostel along with 4 of my Kuki friends, they tied our hands with ropes and shouted slogans calling to kill us all.

When I got a call from my parents, they did not let me talk in my mother tongue and forced me to talk in Manipuri language. They took away our phones and locked us inside a hostel room.

After some time, the hostel warden who was also our teacher was with another faculty (Ranjit and Ajit). They were Meitei. We asked them to help us and told them that we were there to study and build our careers. They knew us very well. We begged them but both of them left without saying anything to us. We decided to try and escape, and we made our way to the nearest Assam Rifles camp by hiding in bushes till 2 AM. We were escorted to the Manipur Rifles Camp the next day. We got a call that our documents and belongings in our rooms were burnt to ashes.

I had planned to continue my higher studies in Manipur University. But I completed my Masters and now am still studying. Last exam was conducted online. Other students who had spent 5 years lost all that time and cannot continue their higher studies. Transfer of students of Manipur University to other States has been a demand but there has been no action from the State. The Vice Chancellor has even denied that this incident has happened. Only a separate administration for Kukis can resolve this. If India is a democratic country, and if Manipur is a part of the union of States, then why is a community's right to education being denied?”

4.8.2. Loss of education because of displacement

A Kuki man in a relief camp in Saikul, KMS5, shared with the Tribunal:

There are no proper schools for children. Even though admission fees are exempted we cannot afford travel, books etc. We want to work and support our family.

A group of Kuki medical students from RIMS met with the Tribunal to share their challenges in particular:

“Many of us are from the RIMS college, which comes under the central government. Others are from JNIMS and other colleges. We are totally 120 students studying our MBBS, Post-graduation and Dental (BDS).

Since May 3, 2023, we were unable to attend classes in our institute. Some of us have also been displaced multiple times. Since July, classes had begun in Imphal, but neither was there arrangements for our travel, nor for classes to continue for us. Such arrangements were however made for the Meitei students. They are also giving their exams as scheduled. But there isn't a single Kuki student left in Imphal. We have tried a lot to convince the university administrations to help us continue our classes.

We even reached out to National Medical Commission. After a few months, we gathered near the CMC to demand classes for us. We wrote to the Deputy Commissioner and Chief Secretary as well. Displaced teachers and faculties began starting some offline classes unofficially for us.

We wrote to Chief Secretary, NMC, DC. The government on November 29 (Issued letter) to start online classes. It started in mid-January and went on for a week and stopped again. NMC gave an order to Manipur University to organise our exams here, but they still haven't done it. Some exams were held one year late. The problem is with the Manipur University. They have been given powers but they are not doing anything. Practical exams were held 2 months after theory classes. Quality education and being taught in real time is crucial for medical education.”

Members of the (Kuki) Parents Body for Displaced Medical Students also met with the Tribunal to share¹⁶⁹:

“There are totally 120 medical students who are displaced. 75 of them are MBBS students, 19 of them are Post Graduate students and 16 of them are Dental (BDS) students. Even though a centre has been allotted and National Medical Council has issued an order saying that displaced medical students can continue their education in CMC, no action has been taken. Why are minority tribal students being ignored? Why is nothing being done to help them continue their education. When Government of Manipur has proposed and made alternative arrangements for Meitei students to continue their education why not our tribal students? NMC has also written to the Government of Manipur saying they have no objections, yet, Manipur University refused to conduct examinations. After a lot of pressure from students, they conducted it 3 months late and

¹⁶⁹https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1fcsCZxuJZEY99AHEQUYnYTWs3wOCMJhRo?usp=drive_link

in a disorganised way. Students who had already applied and paid fees for exams were not given the opportunity to write their exams.

In WP No 576-2023 on 11 July 2023, the Supreme Court issued an order saying that arrangements must be made for tribal students (Manipur Tribal Forum went and tried to appeal for justice.) NMC came to Imphal and issued an order saying that classes for displaced students should be continued using online and hybrid classes. Yet, it was only done for a few days. Federation for Civil Society Organisations (Manipur based association) objected to this and they stopped. Another big problem is that there is a shortage of faculty. Nothing is being done about this. We demand immediate action. No point giving an order that says classes can be held if there is no faculty. Finally, there is no Dental college nearby. So even if MBBS students can resume their education, nothing can be done about the education of BDS students. Similarly PG students will also suffer from a lack of faculty and education infrastructure required.”

In a relief camp for Meiteis, a community volunteer shared (BpurGD2):

“There are several problems – students’ matriculation exams have been announced, but they have no financial assistance for their admission in class XI. Govt. has told the student to go to govt. institutes but these institutes are not good. Students also have difficulty understanding Manipuri which is the language in most schools. Books are expensive (class 1 to 8 books should be provided but are not given to children in the relief camps). After class 12, their dreams of higher education have been crushed as they have no money even for transportation, books and other materials. They are only living here for survival.”

MeMB1, a Meitei man who met the Tribunal with his family said:

“I have two children, my son is 15 years old in class 10, and my daughter is 11 years old in class 6. Almost all our needs are taken care of at the Relief camp except my children’s education. There are nearby schools they can go to. But the children can’t concentrate and study at the relief camp. We want resettlement soon. With the attack on our village, not only was our home destroyed, but all hope and expectations for the future.”

KFD10, a 40-year-old Kuki woman who worked as a nurse at a hospital was one of the many Kukis who fled Imphal fearing violence. She has two sons and one daughter, and among other things she shared with the Tribunal, she spoke about how the violence impacted her children’s education:

“On 3 May, there was a rally happening in all tribal places in Manipur. I was taking care of one patient and was asked to stay back at the hospital. But I went home at around 5 PM because my son had school on 4 May, my daughter had exam in NIT Manipur, and my other son was also home. I had to prepare for dinner, so I went home instead of staying at the hospital to care for the patient.

While I was advised to leave and go to my brother-in-law’s house after violence erupted, my daughter wanted to stay and study for NIT exam which was in a few days. At around 9 PM in a small part in Langol, where we lived, houses started to be burned by Meitei mobs, who came in hundreds. Dinner was prepared but no one had courage to eat food. We were unable to go to the washroom, because we were scared the Meiteis would hear the toilet flush and attack us.”

Though their house was attacked and they hid inside the entire night, they escaped when the CRPF were patrolling and went to a CRPF relief camp.

“Once we reached the CRPF camp, we were given food, and asked where we want to go. I thought I will go to Lamka for a week and after that I will go back home. The whole time that I was in the camp, every time the Meitei mob would attack the camp and hit the poles. And even the army put up barricades.

My daughter’s friends from NIT were sending pictures and videos of Meitei mobs coming into hostels and looking for Kukis.

More than 6000 people were there in the relief camp. They were unable to provide food for everyone, because there were so many people. I only had one stole with me. At night, my younger son would use the stole to cover himself. By 9 May, we left Imphal and are staying in Delhi now. My eldest daughter is studying online in NIT, Manipur, younger just completed his 12th and the other child is doing B.Sc. Nursing in Shillong. My younger daughter is unable to continue her studies while her friends are able to.”

Members of a Kuki youth led civil society group worked extensively in providing relief and meeting the needs of displaced people, including education. They shared that the conflict has had devastating impacts on education (Onl3):

“Exam centers are located only in Lamka and Imphal. Post conflict, all access to the latter has been cut off. Students now have to travel to Aizawl, Guwahati, Mizoram to appear for any major examination. During the rainy season, both travel and construction work becomes risky. One can get stuck for almost 5-10 hours if a landslide happens.

Exam centers in Aizawl for NEET, SBC etc, are not equipped to house many students in one center. With the limited time for entering verification numbers before the examination, the situation is further complicated. Many Kuki-Zo students had applied to give their exams from

there, but with a crunch in both staff and resources, many lost valuable time during the test. It would've made sense to have examination centers in Churachandpur, but instead the Manipur govt choses to reimburse travel expenses. But now the travel is not to Imphal but to Aizawl. It's 15 hours of travel through accident prone roads. Young aspirants have been subjected to tensions regarding travel, money, time, safety on top of the exam pressure, ever since conflict broke out.

Concept of mental health is new to Churachandpur. Many are unable to express or are even aware that they are going through mental illnesses. People have lost the will to live, aspire towards a career, etc. There is a lack of enthusiasm in even retrieving personal documents.

We need help in retrieving documents from Manipur University (MU). We have to resort to using the address of another person to apply for them and recover them through Naga staff. All Kukis who had to leave Manipur Univ. had to pay extra money for certificates. The certificates were sent to Guwahati, or some other mainland India address and the even number had to be forged to retrieve them. The certificate issue with nursing students is still going on. Students are constantly harassed for documents. She had to flee because of the conflict and the nursing institute has not told her how to retrieve certificates, charged her academic fees, hostel fee, mess fee even after she fled. The institute demanded extra money in exchange for the certificates. We are trying to resort to other options, including filing petitions in the court to resolve this.”

A Kuki man in Churachandpur, KMC5, shared with the Tribunal:

My son-in-law has 4 children. They are all living in a relief camp. The loss of a human being cannot be compensated. I don't have a job, I don't know how to raise the children. We are suffering from a lot of financial problems. Education is difficult to afford. In the relief camp, food is free,

and we are given box for our luggage. No medical facilities. Diapers are given for children, that's it. No milk. No separate toilet for women.

A Meitei man, MeMMo1 shared the dire conditions in the relief camp: There are 430 inmates in this relief camp. 96 of them are currently students who face many issues:

1. Access to education is almost nil. The government is saying that the students should go to government schools and colleges, but they are sparse and not good at all. In the hills, they have education in English. But in the valley here, it is in Manipuri/native language.
2. Our volunteers cannot arrange for exercise books, textbooks and essential commodities. Government has given the right to free and compulsory education up until Class 8. But if we cannot afford transport, textbooks and are not provided any assistance, what becomes of their future?
3. Scholarships are given but because of loss of documents they cannot access.

4.8.3. Educators

KMC6, a Kuki deponent in Churachandpur shared:

“Our area has 17 villages. 11 villages were gazetted villages and other small hamlets. We have paperwork for our land. But the Meiteis have started cultivating in the paddy fields of our village. They have cut down our trees. One of the villages has been occupied too. We have our documents too. We have not only lost our property, but we are struggling for survival. We have no source of income now. Philanthropic organisations like the Young Vaiphei Association have helped with relief camps and schools. I could not send my children to school last year. I am now staying in a relief camp in Kangpokpi district. I used to be the administrator of a school and worked in the church as the Finance Secretary, also the Youth President

of Christian Youth Fellowship. I am a leader of around 30 people from my village and they trust me a lot to fight for them. We cannot go back to our own village. We also submitted a complaint through the Central Public Redressal System of the PMGSY.”

KMK9, ran a school in Kangpokpi. He shared:

“State government had objected 1 week after we got CBSE affiliation, so we have been disaffiliated. Total of 26 schools disaffiliated, 15 in Churchandpur, 11 in Kangkopki. District officials in charge of education, Nodal education officers were suspended. State government can give an NOC, we had applied for NOC to the State government by email on the website. When there was no response from the State government, we went to the Zonal Education Officer since CBSE, Delhi said they will accept ZEO's go-ahead. It is on that basis that the affiliation was accepted. CBSE affiliation takes place in couple of phases, starting with KYC. CBSE has filed caveat in the Manipur High Court, however we have not instituted any challenge yet. State govt asked us to apply through Deputy Commissioner, they put a long list of documents. We have given all documents except Fire Safety document which we were unable to get. So, we have applied without it, it is currently pending.”

KFO1-1, a Kuki woman, who deposed in front of the Tribunal online, shared:

“I used to teach but I had to stop because of the violence – I do not have access to the school anymore due to having been displaced. I am employed with the govt of Manipur, but the day I can put in my resignation, I will do so because I do not have any intention to travel back to Manipur as of now. I did not follow my husband to his postings because of my work. I still have the job but I can't go back. My employer knows I am displaced from Imphal, I had medical issues, I told them I am

not mentally and physically fit, so I can resign. They said they will get in touch with me but did not. The communication was through WhatsApp and phone calls, so there is no official communication. Most schools are also destroyed, I believe, because it was in the Kangpokpi-Imphal border area in the buffer zone.”

4.8.4. Philanthropy supported education

KMC11, a Kuki man in Churachandpur shared one such story:

My family escaped along with the other villagers are now staying in a relief camp. I am a student now pursuing my Diploma in Theology (first year). A philanthropist from Korea, Dr. Paul, has agreed to sponsor my education.

Members of a Kuki youth led civil society group whose testimony is included in the previous sub-section said:

“Most IDPs are completely helpless and couldn’t support their children’s private education in Lamka. Therefore, with the help of Christian missionaries, we were able to support some of them in Christian institutions like ITI Monfort (Chennai), BSc, GnM in St John, 9 in NIAGE, Darjeeling, and 5 GnM, St Joseph College of nursing. Additionally, we support 40+ young students to continue their education outside Manipur. Their travelling costs, safety and security has been supported very well. We would like to thank all our donors for that.”

The violence in Manipur has left deep scars on its people, impacting lives in myriad ways—murder, sexual violence, arson, desecration of places of worship, economic blockades, and the disruption of education. The testimonies reveal the devastating human cost of the conflict, compounded by the State's apathy and failure to address the crisis

effectively. The lack of timely intervention, inadequate support for displaced communities, and the invisibilization of critical issues have exacerbated the suffering of both Meitei and Kuki communities. As the State continues to falter in its responsibilities, the hope for reconciliation and justice remains distant, leaving the victims to grapple with the consequences of a conflict that has upended their lives and futures.

Chapter 5: Gender Based Violence

The striking feature of the systematic and organised gendered violence brings forth the stark normalization of violence in Manipur society and the impossibility of getting justice in the absence of command responsibility. Since the spate of violence started on 3rd May 2023, 24 months have passed but the violence seems unabated. Thousands of students staged demonstrations in Imphal on 9th September 2024 against renewed violence in Manipur,¹⁷⁰ wherein elderly Meitei man shot dead on 7th September 2024, in his sleep at Nungchappi village at about 5:30 a.m. Five members of armed groups – four from the Kuki-Zo community and one from the Meitei community – were killed in a retaliatory gunfight¹⁷¹. Exactly one year back thousands of students protested on 26th and 27th September 2023, after the pictures of dead bodies of two Manipuri students, who were reported missing on July 6th, 2023, surfaced on social media. In June 2024, until now the unaffected area of Jiribam district was engulfed in ethnic violence, when Kuki-Zo community had to take refuge in Assam. On 9th November 2024 once again one 31 years old woman of Hmar community, a schoolteacher from Zairawn village of Jiribam district was tortured, sexually assaulted and killed. Hours later a 27 years old Meitei woman farmer from Saiton area of Meitei dominated Bishnupur district was targeted and killed.¹⁷²

It needs to be noted that the Supreme Court as well as the whole of India woke up to notice the targeted nature of the brutal violence inflicted on women in Manipur, when in July 2023 a video (of 4th May 2023) surfaced

¹⁷⁰ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/manipur/manipur-students-protest-renewed-violence-pelt-stones-outside-raj-bhavan/article68622707.ece>

¹⁷¹ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/manipur/fresh-violence-in-manipurs-jiribam-on-september-7-2024/article68616791.ece>

¹⁷² <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/manipur/raped-burnt-alive-and-shot-dead-women-targeted-in-meitei-kuki-conflict-of-manipur-3270690>

showing a large mob of Meitei men parading and sexually assaulting two stripped naked Kuki women which went viral. The day after, one of the survivors told The Indian Express that they had been “left to the mob by the police”.¹⁷³ During the testimonies quite a few persons, including parents of the killed Kuki village volunteer and the parent of a missing Meitei student, told us that they came to know about the death of their dear ones, through gruesome videos uploaded on social media. They received very little or no help from the police or other authorities.

There is something extremely disturbing about the brutality of violence in which people were killed, butchered, tortured, dismembered, disrobed, sexually assaulted in public and then through social media displayed before the whole world. It indicates how violence is valorised and further normalized in society. There is every possibility that the display of terror and violence is to deter the other side from mounting attacks, precisely because neither side can rely on State forces or Military power to provide them protection.¹⁷⁴ The structured nature of violence, including sexual violence, can be foregrounded by looking at realities on ground, where instead of controlling the violence, the State Machinery has only fostered it further. What is of utmost importance is that even when women sought protection from police, the police not only refused to help them but also handed them over to violent mobs. There are recorded incidents when affected women, instead of reaching out to police stations,¹⁷⁵ due to complete loss of trust with State machinery, have turned back and sought protection from their own communities. It is hard to imagine that in Manipur, where apart from the state police forces, over 40,000 Central

¹⁷³ <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/manipur-sexual-assault-mob-video-women-police-8849995/>

¹⁷⁴ <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/manipur-chargesheet-women-paraded-naked-made-it-to-police-gypsy-but-told-no-key-left-to-the-mob-9297812/>

¹⁷⁵ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/ethnic-clashes-in-manipur-eleven-grisly-crime-cases-against-women-revealed-in-status-report-101691087858752.html>

Security forces, including the army, have been deployed,¹⁷⁶ people are forced to defend themselves. Manipur has experienced armed conflicts over many decades, but nothing like the kind of brutal, widespread, long lasting, targeted and armed conflict since 3rd May, 2023. What stands out is that the State, and even the Judiciary, refuses to take any resolute steps to end the conflict but in contrast, it fuels and allows the violence to go on unchecked.

5.1. History of women organizing in Manipur

5.1.1. In the valley area, predominantly occupied by Meitei community

Historically, there has been a long tradition of Women's social movement in Manipur valley to protect the interest of the community. Two such movements in the Meitei community, collectively known as '*Nupilan*' (Women's War; Women's Uprising), preceded the contemporary '*Meira Paibi*' (Women torch bearer) movement. The first one dates to 1904 when women of the Imphal valley protested against the Assistant Superintendent of British Authority in Manipur because of his directive to collect teak wood from Kabas to build his house. A second movement occurred in 1939 as a protest against forced rice exportation, which was causing starvation among the local people. They protested peacefully. The movement forced the closure of rice mills and eventually proved successful in halting the exportation of rice.¹⁷⁷

The '*Nisha Bandis*' women's movement developed in the late 1970s. Its origins are attributed to Meitei women's activism combating alcoholism and drug addiction. The women held night marches in the streets of

¹⁷⁶ Other than the State police, around 40,000 Central security forces, including the army, have been deployed in the State

¹⁷⁷ <https://www.thesangaexpress.com/Encyc/2022/12/10/Milan-Luwang-Manipur-lost-in-Anglo-Manipur-war-1891-in-the-hands-of-mighty-British-Accordingly-i.html>

Imphal and elsewhere in Manipur carrying lanterns, chastising the intoxicated, and setting fire to liquor shops.¹⁷⁸

The ‘*Meira Paibi*’ movement was established in 1977 in Kakching, Manipur, India. The women activists carry flaming torches and march through city streets, frequently at night doing a patrol duty, and as a way of protest seeking redress against human rights violations committed by paramilitary and armed forces units against innocent people. The movement evolved at a time when the people of Manipur were fighting for self-determination, political autonomy, and independence and against abuse of AFSPA which was operating in the whole of Manipur.

The entire world was made to take note of the army excesses and encounter killing, including sexual violence by the Security Forces, when on 15 July 2004 12 ‘*Imas*’ (Meitei mothers) disrobed in public in front of the Assam Rifles HQ in Imphal to protest against the rape and killing of a Meitei woman activist. The women protestors who went about protesting with banners that read “Indian Army rape us” and “Indian Army take our flesh” were successful in removing the army camp from that location.¹⁷⁹

KFO14, freelance Manipuri Journalist told the Tribunal:

“Meira Paibi is exclusively a Meitei women’s organisation. Every woman is automatically a member of the group by birth. Married women come out as Meira Paibis. They see themselves as protectors of their sons and hence their communities. When there are combing operations, they will come and protect their men. Even in communal conflict they are coming out to protect their men. Women of the enemy are also their enemies. They are not feminist. They are the army of the community protecting and being

¹⁷⁸ <https://www.trp.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ARSS-Vol.9-No.2-July-December-2020-pp.20-23.pdf>

¹⁷⁹ <https://www.amazon.com/Mothers-Manipur-Twelve-Women-History/dp/9384757764>

aggressive. They will come out against the State and the army.” (Note: Meira Paibi will abide by community and come out even against women who belong to “enemy” community)

5.1.2. In the hill area, predominantly occupied by tribal communities.

Many ethnic groups in India fought against the British administration to claim their rights. The women of Chandel district were at the forefront of the Kuki tribal struggle in Manipur in 1918–1919. Kuki women's participation in the war gradually transcended male dominance in crucial tasks such as carrying weapons, delivering messages, gathering materials needed for endurance, and scouting the area. Women used to carry the bullets. They were also skilled in the procedure of making gunpowder, keeping an eye on the apprehensive movements of the enemy, and raising the alarm. During the army's journey, it was the women who did the work of collecting rations from villages and preparing rice dishes, meat, and beer. Moreover, they used to treat the wounded and nurse them. Interestingly, many of them composed songs to give courage to the tribal army fighting the British administration.¹⁸⁰

Conversion of Hill tribes into Christianity since the early 20th century led the traditional tribal society towards westernization or modernization. However, the changes affected by Christianity did not mean a complete change of the social life of tribals. Great care was taken to preserve some aspects of traditional culture which were not in variance with the new religion. As far as women are concerned their conversion was dependent on the head of the family. The women had no role to play. The main teaching of the missionaries to women in the church was to be more

¹⁸⁰<https://indianculture.gov.in/digital-district-repository/district-repository/role-kuki-women-anglo-kuki-war-1918-19>

submissive to their husbands.¹⁸¹ Every church and community have a women's society/union connected with it.

Kuki Women's Union (KWU) was formed in October 1993, to help people displaced due to conflict between Naga and Kuki communities in 1992. It functioned at three levels: village, district and central. The KWU's aims are to safeguard rights and dignity of Kuki women, to promote peace, education, social and economic development and to promote peaceful existence with other communities. They had submitted a memorandum to then Prime Minister Mr. Narasimha Rao.

Kuki Mothers Association (KMA) was formed in 1995 in Imphal, to provide facilities for displaced persons, provide counseling, to look after deserted women, and to prevent prostitution, with a long-term perspective of bringing communal harmony, peace and peaceful co-existence, and promote welfare of Kuki women. In 2007 both KMA and KWU merged.

Zomi Mother's Association was formed in 1991 but became active only after ethnic clashes in Churachandpur in 1997. It's key aims were to help in relief and education of orphaned children.

Hmar Women's Association was formed in 1998, linked to agitation for a separate district for Hmar in Mizoram, with the objective of protecting women against violence, for rights of women and economic empowerment.

Women have no say in village administration. The chief of the village is always a male, it is an inherited position. They are denied a share in their

¹⁸¹ Position of women in kuki society of Manipur :A historical study by Arfina Haokip 2012
Manipur University

father's property. Though some as wives and daughters of village chiefs could have some influence.

KFO14, a freelance woman journalist from the Kuki community of Manipur, told us about women organizing in tribal areas: “Naga women organizations are very active. Kuki women too are active. So also, Kuki Zo community women as well. These are traditional women’s groups. Sort of working for the welfare of society. They mobilise money, running camps, looking after, educating children giving support to civil society organisations. I did a workshop in Churachandpur with women and felt they were not aware of their legal rights. When conflict happens, women suffer more because they are not able to make decisions.

These are traditional organisations limited to welfare and taking care of orphans. Helping the widows. These are ways traditional bodies contribute. They do this in tandem with the tribe's apex bodies. They will not do anything against the community’s decisions. They will not oppose the decisions made by Kuki community bodies. That is how they work. They do empowerment work and contribute to society. They do share their opinions in certain areas but not against the community. Women do not have property rights. Only if they can buy land will they own it. Traditionally sons become chief, in some cases wives or daughters of the chief.”

5.2. Socio economic status of women¹⁸²

[All this information is from NFHS-5 survey for all Manipur and does not provide community specific data.] In Manipur, there is a strong preference for sons with nearly one-quarter of women and one-third of men wanting more sons than daughters

¹⁸²https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR374/FR374_Manipur.pdf

5.2.1. Education:

Gender disparity is almost negligible in school attendance among children in the 6–14-year age group and in the age group 15-17 years. Ninety-five percent of children aged 6-17 years in Manipur attend school (96% in urban areas and 94% in rural areas).

5.2.2. Income and decision making:

Only 49 percent of all women aged 15-49, compared with 82 percent of men, were employed in the 12 months preceding the survey. Among employed women, 86 percent earned cash, including 18 percent who earned both cash and in-kind. A large majority (95%) of employed women work in non-agricultural occupations, compared with 72 percent of employed men. In Manipur 40% of women (rural as well as urban) have money which they can decide how to use, much higher among women with 12 or more years of schooling (46%), and is highest among women who are employed for cash (56%) than any other group of women.

5.2.3. Familial Violence:

Over two-fifths (44%) of ever-married (Married/Divorced/Widowed) women aged 18-49 in Manipur have experienced physical or sexual violence. In all, 37 percent of women experienced physical or sexual violence and 4 percent experienced both physical and sexual violence. For ever-married women who experienced physical violence since age 15, the most common perpetrator was the current husband. More than half of women (54%) who say they are afraid of their husband most of the time have experienced spousal violence. Spousal violence prevails across all groups. Although spousal violence is much lower among more educated women, over one-third women who have at least 12 years of schooling have experienced emotional, physical, or sexual spousal violence. The experience of spousal violence is higher among women in rural areas (45%) than in urban areas (37%); and among women who are employed for cash (52%) than women who are not employed (31%). At all India

level 32% women experience domestic violence, and Manipur appears to be the third highest State, the statistics being: Karnataka (48%), Bihar (43%), Manipur (42%).¹⁸³

5.3. Political representation:¹⁸⁴

The Valley has 33% reservations for women in the local bodies. However, in the tribal regions which come under the Autonomous District Council (ADCs), reservation for women in local bodies is not yet a reality. There has only ever been one woman MLA from the hill constituencies—HangmilaShaiza, who is also the first woman ever elected to the Manipur legislature, 18 years after Manipur got its Statehood. (The wife of Manipur's first tribal chief minister YangmasoShaiza, who was assassinated in 1989). Independent documentary filmmaker Meena Longjam believes that: “When it comes to important positions of decision making, we women in Manipur have not been given an opportunity or platform. We live in total hypocrisy”. Journalist Chitra Ahenthem writes that romanticisation of the role of women in the Manipuri society, whether as those running the markets which are a ‘remnant of the old feudal system in which the more privileged occupy the market space and the lesser privileged women are made to fight for space on the pavements or the protests against AFSPA, overlooks the inherent embedded patriarchy of the society, which might explain the low political participation of women in politics.

This was most evident in the electoral loss of Irom Sharmila in the 2017 elections to the State legislative assembly, say observers. Sharmila, who fasted for 16 years to demand the repeal of the AFSPA, contested

¹⁸³<https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR375/FR375.pdf>

¹⁸⁴<https://behanbox.com/2022/02/25/why-manipurs-women-remain-underrepresented-in-electoral-politics/>

elections under her party, People's Resurgence and Justice Alliance (PRJA).

“She gave us (Manipuris) 16 years of her life. Had it been a man, it would have been so different”, says Longjam on Sharmila's defeat in the elections.

5.4. Sexual violence

5.4.1. State Machinery fails survivors; police complicit with militant groups

NmMD24, a researcher, writer in Northeast India, armed conflict and foreign policy told us that

“When we talk about the creation of a militia State in the form of Arambai Tenggol (AT), what do we mean by militia State? Simply the existence of armed groups? No. The Northeast for many decades has had armed groups. We mean a direct nexus between armed groups and a State and incontrovertible evidence to prove that there is a connection between the State govt and the AT. The Chief Minister gave a speech on AT about why they are holding onto their arms. He said they are doing it for defense, till the other side is disarmed.¹⁸⁵ This is rationalization of the existence of AT and justification of their armed status. This reaffirms the belief that there is a relation between the Meitei political elite and the AT. There have also been instances of the AT riding Manipur police jeeps and using their assets. During the Kangla Fort event of 24 Jan 2023, they forced politicians to take a certain oath. The security cover was withdrawn. AT has gone from a ragtag militia to a State in waiting. This brings us to the question, as to why New Delhi isn't acting on AT. This needs deeper scrutiny.”

¹⁸⁵ <https://caravanmagazine.in/conflict/biren-singh-gives-a-free-hand-to-arambai-tenggol-militia-imphal-manipur>

KMD13, survivor, a man from Kuki community, who worked in Imphal, spoke about some sort of collusion between the militant groups and police.

“In our area it started around 7-8 PM on 3rd May 2023. Rumours had started that Meitei women were raped in Churachandpur. A mob filled with people wearing black T-shirts had started to approach, along with 2 jeeps and one Maruti 800 car. Meitei women tried to stop the youth and reason with them to prevent them from coming to our houses. But they had weapons. And the jeeps also looked like Manipur police vehicles, with some people wearing uniforms. The conversations began escalating in front of us. If they raped our women in Churachandpur, how can we spare them here?”

KMD16, survivor, a man from Kuki community who worked in Manipur police told us:

“My police commander, who is Meitei, did not take my calls. No one from the police helped. The police came but they did not do anything. I also contacted my colleagues and friends (Meitei) but they did not do anything. They said we cannot help you. I called some of my officers for help, but they had no means to help. They were also busy like us, the Kuki officers were also running away. The police present also did not control the mob.”

KFO7, a woman relative of survivors from the Kuki community, testified on behalf of her cousin who was an eyewitness to an incident in the valley where they lost two people from their family. On 4th May 2023, the survivors staying near the District Commissioner’s Office in Imphal narrated as here.

“The young bride was saying when they made her walk out to the main street, she could see the DC office, she was made to walk up to the DC office, and she was holding the gate and shouting asking for help. The security could see her being beaten but they did not do anything. The sister had been trying to call 112 and other emergency numbers being shared online. No one had been picking up. One police officer picked up

and said even they cannot come out because the situation is very bad, and the Chief Minister sent an instruction telling the police not to go out on the street.”

In testimonies people spoke of hostage exchange, that itself indicates that people did not trust the State. They had to protect themselves on their own.

KFD6, a woman from the Paitei, who has been chairperson of ST commission also told us:

“On 3rd May around 500 people in a mob came into our colony at 8:30 pm and brought kerosene, rocks, rods and shouted saying Kill the Kukis (Kuki Hatlo). When we went to the police station. Police said they cannot protect us from the mob and told us to go anywhere else. Then from the police station, we went to a Kuki woman’s house. Her colony was safe. Just because she was the wife of the son of ex-CM of Manipur, her locality, the Old Lambulane was not attacked. By 2-3:30 am in the morning of 4th May 2023, we were taken to the army camp.”

5.4.3. Role of social media in violence:

KFO14, a freelance woman journalist from Kuki community of Manipur, told us:

“During the Naga Kuki conflict we did not hear about sexual violence. Nothing came out in the public domain. Women were also killed even during the Muslim Hindu riot (Pangals and Meiteis in 1992) but have not heard about sexual violence. This time it started with social media when some mischievous information was circulated about Meitei women being raped and so incidents followed.”

KFO9, another woman journalist from Kuki community of Manipur, who has done a lot of work in different areas, added

“Until the viral video came out, for national and international media, they didn't understand what was going on because they don't have any understanding about Manipur and its community dynamics. They did not really understand if someone is really a majority or a minority, whether Meitei are tribal or not. They just essentially had this very blanket understanding of the entire northeast, thought in Manipur everyone's a tribal and everyone's just alike.

The humiliation that the Kuki women faced, and the kind of power dynamics also gets very clearly reflected through that video. Even if you think this is a war on an equal footing then you wonder why something of this sort hasn't happened with, Meitei women or the fact that the sheer number of complaints or incidents that have been reported involving Meitei women are almost next to nil, except for the one case?”

NmMD24, researcher in Northeast India, armed conflict and foreign policy told us:

“One was sexual violence and sexual aggression, digital violence on women's bodies, especially on Kuki Zo women where their bodies were sexualized using online rhetoric. One was the naked parade. But I'll give you one example beyond that. Certain Meitei accounts used pictures to indicate that Kuki women sleep with Assam Rifle officers. This was distinct. These were used to provoke retaliatory attacks. “They raped our women so we must rape them back.” We saw digital space as a weapon of war leading to rape as a weapon of war.”

KFO14, a freelance woman journalist from the Kuki community of Manipur, when asked: “Is the violence and impact on women any different this time as compared to before?”

“One is the presence of social media. For example, in the Kuki Naga conflict, it did not reach the capital. It stayed in the hills and there was no

social media. The conflict was mostly on land issues. Nagas were collecting tax and saying if you do not pay tax, you cannot stay there. Also, the State government was not involved, and other communities tried to mediate and bring peace. Both insurgent groups were involved, and it was between them. It did not disturb the whole State. Disinformation and misinformation were not there to this extent”.

[Note: We met with a Meitei woman survivor of sexual assault, wherein an FIR was lodged after three months. She had refrained from filing complaint fearing stigma. The survivor has preferred to stay away from any media interaction¹⁸⁶.]

5.4.4. Reported and unreported cases of violence against women:

As reported to the SC in a compiled report dated 16th May 2023: there are 11 FIRs cases of violence against women and children. National Kuki Women's Human Rights Organisation, Naga Kuki Mothers representative in Churachandpur told us that they have submitted to the Prime Minister's office and the Women's Commission 36 cases of gender-based violence. We met with sexual assault survivor X, from Meitei community, (Scheduled Caste) at undisclosed location. Even though she was assaulted on 3rd May 2023, she went to JNIMS hospital only on 8th August 2023. And then the FIR was filed on 9th August 2023.

KFC18 a 20-year-old woman student from the Kuki community, now in a relief camp, was staying in a hostel at the time of violence, she told us that they were attacked by the mob, which included women, on 4th May 2023, at around 4.45 pm. She faced threat of rape, parading, abuse, physical violence. She regained consciousness in JNIMS. She needs long term treatment including for memory loss.

¹⁸⁶ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/woman-alleges-gang-rape-in-manipurs-churachandpur-police-register-case/article67179096.ece>

KMO3-1, KMO3-2, KMO3-3, all three young men from Kuki-Zo communities, ex-student bodies (KJP, Zomi Students Federation) told us: “Many women IDPs report instances of sexual violence. So many of sexual assault cases, rape cases, have still not been taken up. Documenting all the sexual violence took a toll on me. I had to take a break. I started getting nightmares while transcribing interviews of victims. There are too many cases to recount individually.”

“There was a tribal woman who had a Meitei husband. She was raped and killed according to the reports of an army officer. Her corpse was without clothes. A zero FIR was lodged on 31st May in Sugnu, Lanzing, and Imphal. There was another woman married to a Meitei man. A CRPF camp was near their shop, yet the woman was shot and killed. A woman had to be left behind in RIMS, Imphal because she was sick and in ICU.”

KFO8, a woman researcher and activist from Kuki community of Manipur told us:

“For example, the number of women who were raped we had 20 as the number till March 2024 but now the number is 29. So, the numbers have been increasing. People are so traumatized but slowly, slowly, the counting has started again.

On 8th of March because by then we had come to know that 20 Kuki Zo women have been raped and killed we organized a press conference and we gave a letter to the President of India, and copy to the NHRC, the NCST, Smriti Irani, and two three copies to other departments. We in fact, got replies from NCST and NHRC.”

There have been some cases reported in newspapers.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/manipur-may-4-sexual-violence-survivors-recount-horrific-ordeal-including-begging-policemen-for-help-in-their-Statements-to-the->

5.4.5. Sexual violence goes unreported in most cases

In the current conflict there is a strong possibility of many sexual assaults being not reported by women from both communities. It is observed that the cases which were reported were either due to social media exposure long after the incident, or where the victims had perished or so severely injured that they had been admitted to hospitals.

When we discussed with some leaders of Meira Paibi in Imphal they told us:

“We met with 10-12 rape survivors, but only one of them came out. Others want to hide because of fear. Nursing students in Churachandpur complained about sexual violence. In a relief camp in Mekhola, women submitted a Statement without hesitation. Though we have met them, we don’t want to say more.”

In Bishnupur Relief camp BPurGD3, a volunteer/coordinator at the relief camp told us,

“Meitei in the border or interim areas could not survive the attack by the Kuki till the Army arrived. There are also plenty of cases of Meitei women being raped, but they do not want to come out and confess because of the stigma.”

All Tribal Student’s Union Manipur (ATSUM) representatives told us almost 36 cases of gender-based violence have been recorded since 8th March 2023.

[police/article67143037.ece&https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/video-of-sexual-violence-on-women-in-manipur-emerges-police-promise-arrests-soon/article67098429.ece](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/video-of-sexual-violence-on-women-in-manipur-emerges-police-promise-arrests-soon/article67098429.ece)

5.5. Impact on family ties, inter community/religious marriages/relationships

KFD6 a woman from the Paite community, who is a high-ranking government official, who had to leave Imphal on 3rd May 2023, as violence spread told us:

“Though my mother is a Meitei, she has not gone back to Imphal, she has gone to Churachandpur but she longs to go back to Imphal. Her house is gone, and no Meitei relatives will house us. If the Arambai Tenggol (AT) find out, they will cause trouble for the Meitei relatives if they house my mother. Meitei relatives will not take care of my mother either. My mother is very safe. My two Sisters-In-Laws are Meitei, but they are safe with us. They are part of the family. My elder sister-in-law is a widow, we are taking care of her and her son. Kuki women who are married to Meitei had to flee their homes. Could not stay in Imphal. They had to run away. Another lady - an IAS officer - is also living in Delhi; her husband is a Meitei. My good friend, Director General of Police (DGP), is in Delhi, because her house is not safe. AT kidnapped her husband asking for 50 lakhs (INR 5 million) because the wife is a Kuki. She is still executing her duty as a Kuki police officer married to a Meitei. No Kuki woman married to a Meitei is protected. All of them had to return to maternal homes.”

KMD15, a man survivor from the Kuki community, whose wife is Meitei, when asked about his relationship with his wife told us:

“The majority of them don’t like what is happening. But the authorities who are speaking on their behalf are in power. They are goondas towards their own community also. Arambai and such groups threaten people of their own community.”

MeMD27-1 and MeMD27-2, two young brothers, survivors from the Meitei community, who faced violence in one of the villages in Churachandpur, 4-5 km away from the police station, told us:

“I belong to the Meitei community. I was born and raised in Churachandpur. We have been living with all communities without any issues. My wife is from the Zomi community. My wife and children are still there back in their home in Churachandpur. My house has been destroyed. I think about my wife and children. I live with my brother in Delhi. Mom, dad, and sister all live in relief camps. I was depressed there. Sometimes I feel like committing suicide. My children are being asked by their Kuki friends – who do you support? My daughter said she has nothing to do with me. Even my wife’s sister does not want my children to go to that school because everyone there knows that they are the children of a Meitei. Now, their names are also changed to my wife’s surname. So, they don’t know that their father is a Meitei. Others asked them what their father’s name was. They only say my first name.

Our house was completely flattened. We were living together but my mother-in-law is physically disabled, so we used to take care of her. We still talk on the phone but not for too long. Because Kuki women who are married to Meitei guys are called to the office by the ITLF (Indigenous Tribal Leader’s Forum) and their phone is checked. Lot of things are going on in my mind which are taking me to places I am not supposed to go. I am suicidal.”

KFO14, a freelance woman journalist from the Kuki community of Manipur told us:

“Some Kuki women who are older, still stay within the Meitei community now and live like other Meitei women. Wearing their dress, speaking their dialect and being restricted to their house. The ones who have had to leave are visible and out on the streets. They were not comfortable staying there in Meitei dominated areas, so they had to come out. Otherwise,

Meitei women married to Kuki men are more accepted as Kuki. They are accepted and living like the Kuki women. Some Kuki women, who get noticed clearly, think it is not safe for them. My friend, who is Christian she is well known. She moved out until things cooled down. Her husband continues to stay there. Kuki women are not necessarily separated (from Meitei husbands) but have moved out.”

We spoke to MeFC8, a Meitei woman in Churachandpur, who was married to a Kuki man who was killed in Imphal in the violence after 3rd May 2023. She said,

“I found out about his death on May 7, 2023. The aunt of another person who had died called me up and told me. His body was brought to us only in December along with others. Even though I am a Meitei, I will never live among them again. I am in full support of the demand for a separate administration for Kukis.”

She stayed back in Churachandpur with her 5 children and 2 of her sister’s.

KFC14, a Kuki woman, gave her testimony in Churachandpur. She was sister-in-law of a Kuki woman married to a Meitei man, who was killed by the police. They were staying in a relief camp. She was forced to leave her home in Meitei village. Manipur Police Commandos came to the relief camp and forced the husband to point out who his wife was. They pushed him aside and took her into the jeep. Their son (3-4 years old) was screaming and crying. And they threw him aside too. Later the husband found her lying completely naked in a paddy field. Her body was swollen. An eyewitness had heard her call out for her mother and said that she was gang-raped by the police. But in the FIR, her husband did not mention that she was found naked and that she was allegedly raped. They only reported that she was killed.

KMS10, an elderly Kuki person, who had survived a brutal attack and now with his family was in a relief camp. He spoke to us: He was injured. He has a pregnant daughter who was married to a Meitei. When the violence started the son-in-law came to their house and said he cannot protect the daughter and left her and went away.

KMK8, 55-year-old survivor, a Kuki man, married to a Meitei woman spoke to us in a relief camp. Their son was hit by a sniper on 4th June 2023. They took him to Assam Rifle camp, and they organized an ambulance. The mother of the child and her sister were taking the child in an ambulance to the hospital on 5th June, when the ambulance was blocked and set on fire.

5.5.1. Intercommunity relations:

The divide between communities seems to get bitter with many prejudices and hierarchies built in Society. But outside of Manipur they can work together. KFD8, a 26-year-old Kuki woman survivor told us: After the violence and her house being burnt to ashes, she came to Delhi.

“We came to Delhi in August. 2023. I now stay in XXX. My husband and I opened a canteen called YYY in Noida Sector Z. We also have Meitei and Naga working under us.”

KMD11, a young Kuki man survivor told us:

“I am spokesperson of KSO, Delhi & NCR. Was in Imphal during violence, managed to reach Delhi. I am still in touch with Meitei friends, they are still in Imphal. We want to talk to the other side as well. But we do not want Biren (then Chief Minister of Manipur) on this table.”

KMD16, a Kuki man, Christian, survivor of the violence, who worked as driver with Manipur police in Imphal told us: (When his house was attacked on 3rd May 2023)

“Some of our Meitei neighbours helped me. My unit consists of Kuki and Meitei. but Meitei were more. Before 3rd May there were no problems. When the violence started, I also contacted my colleagues and friends (Meitei) but they did not do anything. Then from the back door we reached the nearby Assam Rifle camp. I am now transferred to Churachandpur, there are 4-5 like me I know. I think there are 40-50 here like me. Some are also going back. Sometimes when we call my wife, she gets startled. When we touch her from the back, she gets scared. My children are quiet, they do not talk at all. The small one when he plays, he says he will beat Meitei people - hits the pillow and says I will hit the Meitei people like this”.

KFD18, a Kuki woman survivor, who was in CRPF relief camp, with very inadequate food told us:

“We were not properly fed, and we were given only a little dal and rice. It was not sufficient for everyone, so they let the older and younger ones eat first. Since I did not get proper food, my BP was very low. When I told some of my old Meitei neighbours, they came to the camp and gave food to us in tiffin. Then we came to Delhi”.

5.6. Women in conflict zone

KFO8, from Kuki Women's Forum, researcher and activist from the Kuki community of Manipur when asked about conflict with army personnel and AFSPA, said:

“The first thing is that AFSPA has to be re-enforced in the Imphal valley. AFSPA was withdrawn in 2, 3 police stations before March 2023. But after the violence, in the whole of Imphal Valley, in 93 stations AFSPA was withdrawn, but still imposed in the hill districts. To tell you frankly, for the Kuki women we never knew about all this. The Manorama case and all the protests we have just heard about it. But then we never faced atrocities of that sort, because in our area, if anything is there, we sort it

out somehow, it's like people fighting in a family. So, it's sorted out. So, we don't get into so many things like that. So, we have never faced things like this encounter. Also, because our underground groups are in agreement with the government of India, they have the SOO agreement.

For the Meiteis they have had so many banned terrorist organizations. So, in that case, I think they have faced lots of things because they had separatist movement a long time ago. And then that's where they started having encounters, killings and everything. For us within our group we used to have problems but then we never faced problems of this sort. So we have never realized about human rights.”

5.7. Role of religion in conflict:

KFO14, a freelance woman journalist from the Kuki community of Manipur, told us:

“In Manipur ethnic identity is more dominant than religious. This time there were a lot of Meitei Christians who were also threatened, and they had to leave the State. They were also low profile and tried not to get any attention to them. There is tension amongst the Meitei communities around religion which is not coming out.

In other religions also there might be other frictions around religion, but they are under wraps right now. But Meitei Christians are in difficult situations. Usually, it has been tribal and non-tribal, not religion based.”

5.7.1. Response to sexual violence by Church

KFO14, a freelance woman journalist from the Kuki community of Manipur, told us:

“From local churches I do not see any public statement and they are quite silent about sexual assaults. Even the Naga churches have been quite quiet and not doing anything with sexual violence.”

[There has been condemnation of violence in Manipur by The National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) and Archbishop Thomas J. Netto but there is no reference to sexual violence in their statements¹⁸⁸¹⁸⁹]

5.8. Violence by women

5.8.1. On occasions women specifically have been involved in physical violence

National Kuki Women's Human Rights Organisation spoke to us:

“While everybody is suffering in the wake of the ethnic violence since 3rd May 2023, the plight of women is especially worse. Not only because of the targeted sexual violence but also because of the spirit of unity amongst women groups across ethnic line, has been a casualty of the war. The Meira Paibis whom we fought besides, shoulder to shoulder against the AFSPA are now our sworn enemies.

Nothing can exemplify this fact more than the videos of Meria Paibi women instigating young Meitei men to torture, rape and kill Kuki-Zo women in an Imphal market.”

KMD21, a 34-year-old Kuki man, who had graduated from NUJS, Kolkata, whose family members are survivors of the violence has filed a case in the Supreme Court, on behalf of two persons who were beaten to death. He said:

“One woman was a graduate in our school; she was beaten to death. Our prayer was for an investigation into their death and to apprehend the perpetrators. The names of persons involved were not available; but we mentioned that it was a Meitei mob attacking from the valley side. There is

¹⁸⁸<https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/national/manipur-14-million-indian-christians-deplore-inadequate-govt-response>

¹⁸⁹ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/church-leaders-slam-attacks-on-christians-in-manipur-and-north-india/article68006295.ece>

a video to support, where a Meira Paibi was saying “you have the right to rape this woman”.

KFO7 a woman relative of survivors from the Kuki community told us about the assault on her relatives in Imphal on 4th May 2023. On 4th May 2023, her relatives found out that they could be accommodated in AR camp, so they started in two cars, which were intercepted and attacked by a mob, people were pulled out and assaulted. She further added about a young bride who was also in the car.

“During this time the young bride of the village was taken to a separate area and (there is a viral video of this) the women were shouting to the men, ‘we give you permission to rape this Kuki woman because of what they did to our women in Churachandpur.’ Some rumour about this was floating around. She was taken to a separate area and from her account, she lost sight of her family. She begged them to take her back to her family, but they kept parading her. They kept asking her to walk faster, beating her at the same time. She got weak. One woman took a wooden bark of a tree, and she went to hit her on the head and the bride moved a bit, so it hit her shoulder. Another man hit her on the head and so she fell unconscious.

“The others from family reached AR camp on 4th May. We didn’t know where the bride was until later at 1 am we heard that the police had got her, and she was admitted to RIMS hospital. The young bride Nancy had blood clot in her brain, fractured arms and fingers and was unconscious, was in ICU for 10 days. After that we flew her out to Dehi, and she got treatment in AIIMS for three months before she could go home.”

KMS1, a 48-year-old Kuki male survivor, told us:



“On May 4th, 2023, Meira Paibis came to our house. Some men in the mob accompanying them forcefully opened the gates. Usually, they try to attack the men, so I was convinced that my brother and I would be killed. But they pulled out my two elder sisters and in front of us, mercilessly beat them. My mother was inside the house, and she was crying loudly hearing what was happening. They went inside and also beat up my mother very brutally. That was the last time I saw my mother (86 years) and my sisters (53 and 51 years).

Before we knew it, the photos of my mother and sisters were circulated all over the internet. Even relatives and friends outside the State sent the photos to us (photo attached).”

KFK10 a 36-year-old Kuki woman survivor staying in a relief camp told us:

“On 4th May we rushed to CRPF camp, there were many people running to reach there, including sick people, infants. It was overcrowded, there was water scarcity, only dal and rice were being given. There were rumours that Meitei people would attack the CRPF camp. Meira Peibi attacked the camp, however the CRPF defended”.

5.8.2. On other accounts women have been protectors of armed militia of the community

One of the responsible officers of Assam rifle relayed an incident to us wherein the Assam Rifles caught 11 cadres from the Meitei community openly roaming with weapons in Bishnupur.

“As soon as we caught them, they informed the Meira Paibis, who came and tried to manhandle the army men. First, the army tried to reason with them, then on the order of the Commanding Officer, a gun was shot in the air. However, the Meira Paibis kept on insisting on the release of the cadres. Finally, we kept the arms and released the cadres. We are negotiating for peace, that does not mean we are weak.”

Women have been creating blockade for movement of goods

One of the Convenors of Kakching area unit, which guards the road, gave us a schedule followed by women:

“Women stand vigil here all day, they take turns. From 6 am to 1 pm, the first colony’s Meira Paibis stand vigil. From 1 to 9, second colonies and from 9 to 6, third colonies. We stopped Assam Rifles for 2.5 months. We only allowed BSF with the company of State forces. The IGAR (South) came and negotiated but Meira Paibis did not want them. Assam Rifles never force us to pass through when we block the road. If they try to pass, we block the road by sitting in front of their vehicles. After 2.5 months, we allowed essential items and movement for the army but only with our permission. The AR reports to us and we coordinate with the police.”

What strikes from this conversation is that there is a complete withdrawal of the State and the Union when it comes to administration of maintenance of law and order. Buffer zones have been created which are being controlled by the local organisations or communities. The State is not acting as the State anymore.

5.8.3. Women response in hostage exchange

The hostage exchange issue has cropped in some of the testimonies. Kuki or Meitei people were held as hostages, until people from the other community were released from the other side of the buffer zone. This indicates complete failure on part of State machinery where people have to

resort to such techniques, to ensure the safety of people from their own communities who have sought refuge in military camps in the hostile region.

KFD10, a 40-year-old Kuki, a woman survivor from Imphal, told us:

“I stayed in Imphal, worked in a hospital as a Nurse, my husband is in the army stationed in Kashmir. When the violence started –My husband’s friend from Kashmir called us asking where we were. He advised me that the Meiteis have brought all their people from Lamka and are starting a war, so you have to evacuate.”

KFD14, a 30-year-old Kuki woman survivor, told us:

“I was in Churachandpur. On May 5, 2023, in the evening at around 5 PM, people started giving out messages that women should come out and stop security personnel who were trying to take away Meitei. We were afraid that if they took all the Meitei out of Churachandpur, then our Kuki people would not be sent back from Imphal. Just before this the Meitei people were taken to a safe place in Churachandpur and at that time Kuki women formed human chains to protect them from the mob.

Slowly more people gathered to block the road, to stop the security forces from taking away the Meitei people. At around 8 - 9 PM, many women were in the frontline. A security personnel member started firing shots at us. I was also hit by a bullet. One young lady died that day. One man was paralysed, the bullet went into his spine, and now he is in a wheelchair. I was flown to Delhi and admitted to AIIMS trauma centre. I started having hallucinations etc. I can’t sleep, I keep hearing sounds, and even panic a lot when I hear fireworks etc.”

5.8.4. Women involved in looting of houses

KFD6, a woman from the Paitei community who has been high ranking government officer, told us:

“It was not only men in the mob, but also women. Women had come to steal things from our houses. As soon as my sister came out of the gate, her luggage was snatched from her by the women in the mob.”

KFD10 40 years old Kuki, a woman survivor from Imphal told us:

“House in Langol is not burned, but everything is stolen and destroyed. I asked my friends in Imphal to send me some stuff, but the Meira Paibis have captured my house, and my friends were unable to enter the house”

5.8.5. Discriminatory treatment met with by tribal women

We met with three older leaders of Meira Paibi, they openly spoke with us that

“The character of Meitei women and Kuki women are very different. Whenever such an atrocity happens, Kuki women never come out. But Meitei women are speaking out against atrocities. They do dharnas and protests. Kuki women are having congenial relations with Assam Rifles. Such is their character.”

KFD12 a Kuki woman survivor told us:

“I escaped from Games Village in Imphal, I stayed there because my children were going to school there. There was no fight as such before the burning of the church. But just before the violence broke out, they behaved very badly towards us. They used degrading names like Haothu, minaimacha for us. Although we are poor, the standard of living, hygiene, cleanliness, and comfort is very nice for us. This is out of jealousy. Meitei do not care about the standard of living.”

[Meiteis had the name “Hao” to mean the hill people. Oftentimes, the word “Thu” was added to make it “Haothu” which is extremely derogatory, [Hao-Hill People; Thu-Women Private Part]. In a slightly less vulgar term, “Haomacha” [Hao-Hill People; Macha-Children] is also often used but carries the same derogatory tone.]¹⁹⁰

KFO14, a freelance woman journalist from the Kuki community of Manipur told us:

“Looking down on tribals has very much been there. In the younger people it is not so much. But in earlier generations it was there. My colleague married a Kuki woman, and his father would not eat the food cooked by the tribal woman. So, it depends and varies from family to family.”

5.9. Other difficulties faced by Women

5.9.1. Difficulties in Relief Camp:

At Sangai relief camp, we were told, one woman gave birth in the forests, while fleeing, from Sugnu. There is no private bathroom or urinal for the women. Women take a shawl or a wraparound to cover themselves when they urinate. There is one ring well near the 8 toilets where they can take a bath. There is also one canal through which water flows into a pond where the water is stored. The women wrap themselves and take a bath. The water is not clean in the pond; when it rains it gets polluted. And during summer the ring well does not have sufficient water. The women either change their pads in their rooms or in the toilets.

¹⁹⁰ <https://www.thingkholemalcha.com/everything-seems-to-be-fair-in-war-the-misconceptions-that-destroyed-the-fabric-of-manipur-as-a-political-entity/>

5.9.2. No nutrition for pregnant and lactating women

RWUS and other NGOs supply 2 to 3 boxes of Stayfree sanitary napkins which are stored in the godowns in the camps. The State government also provides sanitary napkins, but it is not much. The government provides 106 packets. One packet of 8 packs per family per week. There is no one supplying pads right now, so they buy from their own money. Even when they get sanitary napkins, it is not sufficient. The residents use stored rainwater for washing. Women have many problems like vaginal itching, lots of white discharge, etc.

KFD20, a Kuki woman while speaking about relief camps on behalf of survivors said,

“There were about 3000 persons in the camp- no toilet - no food except boiled dal and rice. We said we cannot be silent; I went to the Member of Parliament’s house, I stood up - I was the only lady. I said my bhabhi is menstruating, there are some young girls. It is easy for you to just talk. How do they hide their shame in an army camp with 3000 people.”

KFO14, a freelance woman journalist from the Kuki community of Manipur, when asked about the impact on women told us:

“In relief camps there are maternal health issues. Many women are uprooted from their livelihood, government servants are somewhat better off. Otherwise, the economy in the hills is dependent on Imphal. Pangals and Meiteis would come to Moirang with fish etc. Now they cannot come. So small business of food done with Meitei women is not happening. Now only some Marwaris get some items and goods from Imphal or Aizawl. Some people are trying to sell vegetables. Weavers are not able to function because yarns are not coming and where to sell the products. They also must be village volunteers and also make sure that there is food for them. There is a lot of fear and mental stress.”

5.9.3. *The gruesomeness of the violence and living with the memories:*

KFC13: A 35-year-old Kuki woman survivor told us her nephew went missing on 14th May 2023, on 17th May his body was found, with eyes removed with arms boiled!

KFK1: A 23-year-old Kuki woman survivor, who was then in an advanced stage of pregnancy, told us:

“The mob from Arambai Tenggol was too large and we all had to flee farther away on the 5th of May 2023. They burnt down our village. On the 7th I couldn't walk anymore, and my husband had to carry me. It was between life and death and the pain was really bad. We didn't know if I would survive. I was feeling guilty about my condition, in the middle of such a



difficult time for others. Even my brother helped my husband to lift me up. There was a small hut in the mountain. They had to help me give birth in a hut in the forest. We managed with very little food.

There were no midwives, and no one could help. But by God's grace I could give birth. We still had to continue our journey. My mother-in-law carried the baby, and I was carried in a plastic sheet. We came across a village on the way, and we were given shelter. The baby was also cared for. We had climbed a mountain before we reached a motorable road. We left in the night and reached a relief camp (Keithelmanbi Relief Camp) in a school early in the morning.”

KFK2: A Kuki woman survivor from Imphal told us,

“We lived near some Meitei households. I took my children and fled to a nearby building. I hid my children and went back out to see - I found my husband and another boy who was a tenant badly beaten up. The mob was from Arambai Tenggol. I started begging them to stop and they started beating me up too. My clothes were torn in the process. They stopped for a bit. But they were on a destruction spree. We went to a (Kuki) neighbours house and switched off all the lights. The next morning, a Nepali pharmacist came to clean my husband's wound and wiped his blood. My husband was more or less dead. I told my husband, "I am sorry I can't help you more. I will take the children and have to save ourselves." I couldn't even think clearly”

Finally, they all survived and escaped. They were government employees and also owned a car.

KFK3: A 34-year-old Kuki woman survivor told us:

“On 28-29 May Meitei came in big numbers to burn down the village. The army station in the village did nothing to protect the village. There was firing between Meiteis and our villagers in which my husband was shot. On 30th May, our village was burnt down. They couldn't bring back my husband's body. They just buried him there near our village. My husband was known around the village. The mob wanted to verify whether it was him. They had dug it up, chopped up the body and thrown it around. When some of our youth went back to where we had buried the body, they found his body parts.”



KMK5 a Kuki male survivor and his wife told us:

“The village next to our village was attacked on May 3rd. Next day afternoon at 3 PM, there were attacks on our village.”

Her husband had gone missing,

“After the number in the mob had gone down, I started searching for him. Some of them shouted at me. Saw one chappal here, and other belongings here and there. Then I found his body in a ditch and I thought he was dead. They had taken off his clothes. He was bleeding profusely. I was trying to call people from the village to help me retrieve his body. I was praying that if he dies, let him die amidst relatives. He is still suffering from being beaten up so badly. The pain was there for so long. There was

one boy around, he helped me take the body out. One van was passing, so I took their help to go to the village. We stayed the night there and he received first aid.”

MeFB2: A 32 year old Meitei woman survivor, from Bishnupur relief camp told us, her husband was deployed in the Village Defense-Force:

”On 5th August, 2023 the Kukis attacked my husband and father-in-law at 2.30 am in the night. First, they were stabbed with knives then shot with guns. My father-in-law was killed with a headshot and my husband was tortured and killed. I was devastated and had to leave that place. Now I live with my husband's brother. Did not name the suspect informer in the FIR so that we don't get retaliation. So now, I have no home, no husband, no kids, and no future”

MeMB3: A 30-year-old Meitei man survivor told us:

“I worked as a teacher in a private school before the conflict broke out.” On 3rd May when the violence broke out in the village “We were all hiding in our house, when the Kukis started throwing Molotov cocktails (bottles full of inflammables with a fire lit at the top). Our 3-year-old baby was crying throughout. We tried to muffle her cries in the bathroom, where me, my wife and two sisters (19, 23 respectively) hid.

After the Molotov, they started shooting at our house with guns. Amidst the fire, we carried the baby and jumped fences and hid in the neighboring houses. Everybody was fleeing, and finally we hid in the Don Bosco school. The army, BSF, nobody came to rescue us from there. We had to walk to the Assam Rifles camp ourselves. The future looks very dark to us. We did not receive any compensation for our house that was destroyed (which we had built with so much hope). My mother has been depressed ever since. For all the elderly, they have almost no hopes left. I had just one picture of dad... That also had been burnt.”

5.10. Role of various organizations

5.10.1. Participation of RSS:

KFD6, a woman from the Paitei community, who has been high ranking Government officer told the Tribunal:

“The RSS has entered Imphal - I have visited the camp in Pangei there in 2022. Surprised to see young boys undergoing training for 3 months, 6 months there. People who ran the camps were from Karnataka. They were trained in various issues. I didn't exactly discuss what it was, but they were radicalised, taught about Hinduism, culture of India. There were training for women as well. Only Meitei were participating, not the tribals.

It had gaushala there, and the food was vaishnavi. I asked my friend - what is the purpose of establishing such a camp here? They said Meitei are also Hindus, they are converted Hindus. They follow the Sanamahi faith and can be assimilated into Hinduism, but they wanted them to really become the real Hindus.

They have already established the International University of Manipur which was run by the chairman of RSS - very close to the airport - established right before COVID. They bought some land in the hill areas of Manipur.”

5.10.2. Meira Paibi

The role of Meira Paibi has been much in discussion since the current spate of violence broke out in Manipur. The role played in perpetuating violence by some Meira Paibi has been documented by the Kuki-Zo community, encouraging men to attack and even sexually assault women.¹⁹¹ When a fact-finding team of the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) went to Imphal in 2023 and blamed the Meira Paibis of

¹⁹¹ Crimes Against Kuki-Zo Women by The Meiteis_Since May 3, 2023_Vol01_ITLF_Media_Cell

being a part of the violence, Liben Singh filed a case of defamation against the NFIW team. An FIR was lodged on July 9, 2024 against the NFIW members at the Imphal police station on the charge of hurting the sentiments of Meira Paibis and terming the violence as State-sponsored without understanding the situation.

Unfortunately, the Meira Paibis have not played their usual role as peacekeepers, and they too have been pulled into the violence and seem to be complicit in it. They were the one group with the moral and political clout which could have played the role of peace makers.¹⁹²

5.10.2.1. Meira Paibis on Geopolitics:

We spoke with senior leaders of Meira Paibi in Imphal. They seemed to have definite political views, even views on the geopolitical international front.

“There is geopolitics involved. The Indian government's interest in Manipur is that. Kuki people have got lots of people in Myanmar. India needs to appease people in Burma. Kukis are immigrants who came from there. India's policy favours Kuki. Therefore, they have a soft corner for the Kuki.

By Geopolitics we mean the relationship between India and foreign countries, and the way those relationships have consequences etc.

For the success of the Kaladan project, India must have a good relationship with Burma. The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project passes through the Chin State which has Kuki population. So, for the sake of this project, India is nice with the Kuki.

¹⁹² <https://forceindia.net/cover-story/save-manipur/>

Along the hills, Kuki revolutionary groups are in Soo, they are friends with the Assam Rifles. Only for the sake of Kaladan project¹⁹³ government has to dominate all the hill areas. Meiteis also have revolutionary groups. But Kukis and Assam rifles have driven out the Meitei revolutionary groups. The Kaladan project is not the only cause - it is one of the many causes.”

Even the younger Meira Paibis from Kakching also had their political analysis of the situation. They told us:

“We complain against Amit Shah as well. This is a result of geo-politics by Modi. He wants something. If there’s trouble in Myanmar, there’s trouble in Manipur. He can’t make the army make Meitei and Kukis fight so, the Centre provides weapons to the Kuki. The Chief Minister has no power, Central Govt has power. The Chief Minister has no power to order the State Security Forces, he did not punish the Kuki MLAs. Most people think that Biren is on the side of the Meitei, but we think that he has not done anything for us.”

5.10.2.2. Meira Paibi on sexual violence:

Meira Paibis told us,

“We never said women should be raped, no matter which side or which lady. We do not accept rape of women. The two girls were taken captive and tortured and handed over to the mob. But when we found out, we took action. We wrapped the girls and cared for them. The girl thanked us. Even Kuki women are our daughters. We also protested and condemned the act. War is war – the youth were angry, they wanted revenge, they took revenge – how could we stop them?

When we found out about the women being sexually assaulted, we protested in this very same spot, and also sent letters to the governor.”

¹⁹³<https://www.northeasttoday.in/2024/12/21/kaladan-multi-modal-project-set-for-2025-completion-mizoram-mp-highlights-regional-concerns-in-parliament/>

5.10.2.3. View about Meira Paibi from within Meitei community:

MEFD4 a Meitei woman activist told us:

“Identity of women who are sexually assaulted should be protected. It was said that the women were instigating the violence. Meira Paibis saved the lives of Kuki women in many cases. But the boys were uncontrollable - they said we will also rape Kuki women. My own cousin, who has two grown-up sons, went with their hockey sticks to participate in violence. This incident cannot blacken the entire Meira Paibis and the entire community. The Meira Paibis went and burnt down the houses of the culprits of that violence. In one area the Meira Paibis were condemning the violence, but in some other places, they were supporting. So, it was area wise. In each area where there are different threats, they respond accordingly.”

When asked about Meira Paibis preventing security forces from intervening and taking any action. She answered,

“I am not aware. I know there were road blockages. But whether they are rumours, or true information - we don't know. Let the investigation take place. Let the law of land take its course.”

5.10.2.4. Views of other communities about Meira Paibi:

KFO14, a freelance woman journalist from Kuki community of Manipur told us:

“Meira Paibi is exclusively a Meitei women's organization. You are automatically a member of the group by birth. Similarly for all the tribal groups. Married women come out as Meira Paibis. They see themselves as protectors of their sons and hence their communities. When there are combing operations, they will come and protect their men. So even in communal conflict they are coming out to protect their men. Women of the enemy are also their enemies. Meira Paibis are torch holders. They are not feminist. They are an army of the community protecting and being aggressive. They will come out against the State and the army”.

NmMD22, an advocate, who practices in Delhi and other HC of the country told us:

“I have had a long association with Manipur, for more than 10 years now. There is a Ladies' organisation called Meira Paibis who have obstructed Assam Rifles from discharging their duties. Forced army personnel to hand over arrested militants back to the villages. They have played such roles that attract various penal laws.”

5.10.3. National Kuki Women's Human Rights Organisation

Some of the Organisation spoke to us. Talking about May 2023 violence, a member said:

“The Kuki women in Churachandpur made human chains to save Meitei women. We guided them to the national security forces and even made a human chain in front of the gate. I saved three Meitei boys. They came running into my clinic, I shut the door to keep them safe. In the morning, I opened the door and asked them to run to the police station. I was afraid I would be condemned by my own community. On 3, 4, 5 May, the Meitei in Churachandpur reached Imphal safely because we had human chains till the security arrived.

The Kuki wanted revenge on the Meitei after the 3rd of May, but the Kuki women (especially from the Hmar community) saved the Meiteis from the Kuki mob whenever they could, often in collaboration with the army and the Assam Rifles. Why was there no such mercy and solidarity from the Meitei women? How did they become so polarized? They attacked our churches and our people.”

This was narrated also to us by MeFD4, a Meitei woman activist. All Manipuri Tribal Student's Union (ATSUN) representative told us the Kuki boys were angry with those who tried to burn down the gate, but the

National Kuki Women's Human Rights Organisation stopped them and released the Meitei boys who had been caught.

5.10.4. Kuki Women Organization for Human Rights (KWOHR)

This organization held a mammoth rally in July 2023 and put forward three demands:

1. The establishment of a special investigation team to be monitored by the Supreme Court to bring swift justice to all those involved in atrocities since May 3.
2. Deployment of army personnel in the buffer zones for safety and security.
3. And establishing a separate administration for the Kuki-Zo tribes under the provisions mentioned in the Constitution of India.¹⁹⁴

KFO14, a freelance woman journalist from the Kuki community of Manipur, while speaking about organizations of Kuki women said:

“These are traditional organisations, limited to welfare and taking care of orphans. Helping the widows. They will do it in tandem with the tribe apex bodies. They will not do anything against the community's decisions. No opposing the decisions made by Kuki Inpi. That is how they work. They do empowerment work and contribute to society. They do share their opinions but not against the community.”

5.11. What role can women play in the future peace building process?

This is as much a rhetorical question as a worrying query, for it is disturbing that they have not already deployed their resources to work in

¹⁹⁴ <https://prathamkhabartv.com/en/kuki-women-organization-for-human-rights-kwohr-organizes-a-massive-rally-with-3-charters-of-demand/>

the direction of peace, which everyone wants. MeFD4, a Meitei woman activist, told us:

“During the Naga-Kuki conflict(1992), Manipur government sat with some of the leaders for three hours. Some of the Kuki women leaders and Naga women groups sat together to bring about peace. Now because the momentum is in the middle stage - Kukis are raising certain issues from their side. What they want from the government, till that is fixed, this time talk will not happen. The same happened in the conflict between Dimasas and Hmar. Till leader level talks didn't happen, the women refused to sit. Women are not coming out as women but as women who are members of the community.”

In most part the armed militants are deciding the fate of people of Manipur and the State does not seem to be bothered about it. Social media and print media too, have played a role in adding fuel to the conflict. For some decades now women's organizations/associations/unions set up in Manipur have identified distinct roles to work for welfare of society, for peace and peaceful co-existence. These organizations have been formed due to ethnic conflict, as well as against violence perpetrated by State Authorities. It is most pertinent that these women's organizations take the lead in establishing communication between the communities in conflict. But at this juncture they must be willing to listen to each other about the issues foremost in their mind, before putting down any conditionalities. It is most evident that both communities have hardened their stands regarding separate administration.

The extremely irresponsible role played by State and Central governments, as well as some officers in the Indian Army have created a situation wherein no one believes anything given as the official position either by the State or by the army. While both communities have lost faith in the Government administration in terms of curtailing the proliferating vigilante armed groups, there is a great divide and complete distrust

towards each other. The situation of women is especially devastating, uprooted as they are from their own homes and livelihoods, with families torn apart.

The complete segregation of communities has resulted in further disempowering women. Women from different communities used to trade in markets, regardless of ethnic or religious differences – that has come to a complete halt. Women who have fought against repression by State and security forces are forced into a situation where there is community level polarization. The Government, as well as male leadership within the communities leave no space for women in the decision-making process. Outside of the State of Manipur, same communities, especially women have come together at workplaces and are working together¹⁹⁵. Women from Meitei, as well as Kuki communities are protesting against the Government raising the main demand of peace in Manipur.

5.12. Justice to victims of sexual violence and Command Responsibility

How are cases of sexual violence to be redressed, when the perpetrators cannot be individually identified in the context of rioting mobs? In Manipur in 2023 a key moment in the violence in Imphal and other towns of the State came when two women were handed over to the rampaging mobs by the policemen. In the cases, there is only one way to both acknowledge and legally redress the harm done to the women who were assaulted in connivance with State police and that is to take recourse to the broad principle of command responsibility, which is laid out in the Akeyesu Judgment¹⁹⁶ of the ICC (1998) wherein the principle of command responsibility was evoked to acknowledge and redress the harm done to

¹⁹⁵ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/scent-of-coexistence-manipurs-women-find-hope-and-empowerment-in-delhi/articleshow/111269355.cms>

¹⁹⁶ <https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/b8d7bd/pdf/>

the survivors of sexual violence in Rwanda. At the very least the chain of command in the police will be able to identify the policemen on duty from the police diary and proceed administratively to hold them accountable for the violence perpetrated on the two women in the viral video and take suitable action against them. The policemen on duty who handed over the women to the mob clearly failed both in their duty to protect all citizens in a non-partisan manner and constitutionally sworn duty to prevent harm to vulnerable citizens endangered by the violent mobs taking recourse to violence. That is the very minimum that should be demanded of the administrative and legal apparatus that exists in the country.

Chapter 6: Tracing the Causes

From the depositions of victims in the earlier chapters, we have gathered enough grist to make appropriate inferences in tracing the predominant causes for the Manipur conflict and continuing violence. This chapter attempts to look into the multitude of historical questions, contesting claims and contemporary narratives fueled in large part by an active and unchecked propaganda machinery, that may have caused the violence and contributed to its escalation over a prolonged period and at an unprecedented scale.

6.1. Refugees from Myanmar

From the testimonies recorded by the tribunal, it emerges that the continuous immigration from neighbouring Myanmar is held out to be one of the major causes of the dispute between Meiteis and the hill tribes of Manipur. Notably, it was the testimonials of Meitei representative organisations and individuals (like MeMD27-2) that unequivocally laid stress on the problem of ‘illegal’ immigration or ‘infiltration’ of primarily Kuki and Zo people from across the border. The submissions by Naga activists (KGD2) too advance a similar argument. Members of the hill tribes, on the other hand, consider the current inflow of migrants from across the border as typically a matter of people seeking asylum to escape humanitarian crisis in the neighbouring regions of Myanmar where a long-drawn civil war is raging. This according to them is precipitated by the persecution of Chin people (a conglomerate of different ethnic groups including Kukis and Zos) in Myanmar under the Junta regime. The lack of a refugee policy that could identify, segregate and rehabilitate them in separately earmarked camps further aggravates the situation. This view is also shared by the human rights activists from the valley.

India and Myanmar share a 1643 km border which runs across the States of Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. The cultural and political boundaries do not coincide and as a result, communities with shared ethnicities, kinship ties and tribal affinity live on either side of the divide. This realization prompted the Government of India to permit free movement across the border with certain restrictions. Accordingly, an amendment introduced in 1950 in the Passport Rules allowed the ‘hill tribes’ residing within 40 kms of either side of the ‘Indo-Burmese frontier’ to travel without passport and other necessary documents. This pronouncement followed the 1948 Burmese (Myanmar) decision to allow tribes people from across the border to enter the country freely and stay up to 24 hours. In the GoI decision, the tribesmen could stay up till 72 hours. A Free Movement Regime (FMR) thus emerged, purportedly to enable cross border trade.

6.1.1. Free Movement Regime (FMR)

The FMR recognized the ethnic and cultural ties between tribes on either side of the border. Strategic considerations following the rise of Naga, Meitei and Mizo insurgencies in the 1950s and 60s, led GoI to revise FMR provisions. New restrictions were introduced that made securing a permit mandatory before embarking on crossing the border. Further restrictions were imposed in 2004 when cross-border movement of tribal people was restricted to merely 16 kms. Further entry and exit points were limited to three—one each in Manipur, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. A formal FMR came into being through a bipartite agreement between India and Myanmar in 2018. The Agreement on Land Border Crossing (2018), formalised the hitherto informal nature of FMR between the two countries. According to the press release, ‘the Agreement’ would ‘advance connectivity and promote interaction of the people’, ‘energize the economy’ by leveraging on the geographical connections with Myanmar by

boosting trade and people-to-people ties’, and ‘safeguard the traditional rights of the largely tribal communities.’¹⁹⁷In 2021 however, the Manipur government unilaterally suspended the FMR touting fears of illegal immigration, smuggling of arms and ammunitions, trafficking of drugs, environmental destruction and fomenting insurgency in the region. In agreement with the State government, the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India has recommended total scrapping of the FMR.¹⁹⁸Expectedly, the Nagaland and Mizoram governments have expressed their disagreement with any move to obliterate the FMR.

There are recorded cases of individuals and groups finding refuge in certain border districts of the State that the government has furnished. In August 2024, in response to an unstarred question in the Legislative Assembly, the Ministry of Home disclosed the presence of 10,675 ‘illegal immigrants’, out of which merely 2,480 had their origins in Myanmar while others belonged to Bangladesh, Nepal, China and Norway. The fear that Manipur is inundated with massive cross-border migration from Myanmar, appears unfounded in the light of facts on record. District-wise distribution of detected ‘foreigners’/immigrants too lends support to the above point. It is interesting that among the hill-districts, Churachandpur, despite its Kuki-Zo numerical dominance, seems to have attracted the least number of these immigrants. On the other hand, Chandel, Tengnoupal and Kamjong, with either predominantly Naga or mixed ethnic population have been preferred destinations for them.

¹⁹⁷ Land Border Crossing Agreement between India and Myanmar Approved | News | South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (sasec.asia)
<https://www.sasec.asia/index.php?page=news&nid=811&url=ind-myn-land-border-crossing>
accessed on 4.10.24

¹⁹⁸After Mizoram, Nagaland opposes Centre's move to fence Indo-Myanmar border, end FMR (deccanherald.com), <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/nagaland/after-mizoram-nagaland-opposes-centres-move-to-fence-indo-myanmar-border-end-fmr-2841720>, accessed on 4.10.24

Table (1): District-wise distribution of the illegal immigrants*

Sl.No.	District	Number
1.	Imphal West	11
2.	Imphal East	1
3.	Bishnupur	1
4.	Thoubal	1
5.	Kakching	6
6.	Churachandpur	150
7.	Chandel	1895
8.	Tengnoupal	2406
9.	Ukhrul	3
10	Kangpokpi	2
11.	Kamjong	6199

*question no. 83, Manipur Legislative Assembly, 02.08.2024

Thus, the question of immigration is far more complex than it appears as it is generally linked to the preponderance of poppy cultivation in the hills, the encroachment of forest land and now to the prolonged ethnic violence in the State. The Naga and the Meitei nationalists view the entire Kuki and Zo population settled on the hills as illegal occupants, not indigenous to the hills of Manipur. In March 2023, two months prior to the eruption of violence, students of several student clubs of Meitei origin protested against immigration induced ‘unnatural’ population growth in the hill areas of the State. This, for them, was a threat to the land, culture and livelihoods of the State’s ‘indigenous’ population (read Meiteis). In line with the exercise of National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, the students’ groups demanded its immediate implementation in the State. It did not matter that the NRC – Assam exercise resulted in rendering close to 1.9 million people virtually stateless. Indeed, the demand for NRC reverberated in the depositions made before the Tribunal.

6.1.2. Indigeneity and contestation over history

The allegation of ‘immigration’ is often associated with illegality as much as with the question of indigeneity. This in turn is fused with more intricate questions of nationhood and citizenship. Thus, in the dominant narrative, the hill tribes are held to be ‘aliens’ who, through successive waves of immigration, came to occupy the hills and the forests of Manipur. This account has often received support from the State through its various attempts at writing and re-writing of history. The tribal intelligentsia, on the contrary, vehemently disputes all such claims by citing the long history of Kuki and Zo residence in the hills and forests of present Manipur. History is frequently invoked in this clash over nativity and recognition, and the struggle for recognition has often led to conflicts over memory and memorializing. The re-naming of Kuki-Zomi populated Churachandpur as ‘Lamka’ by the tribal organisations, and the State government’s decree against any change signifies this symbolic battle over past and present existence being fought along with the physical violence between ethnic groups.¹⁹⁹

6.1.3. Shifting demography and migration

Unprecedented rise in population in certain tribal districts is frequently cited as evidence of an unconstrained flow of immigrants from Myanmar. The Manipur State Population Commission, for instance, drew the attention of the State towards the ‘abnormal’ trend of population growth in the State. The State Home Commissioner cited ethnically segregated

¹⁹⁹ Guha, Sukrita, Amid ongoing violence, why there is an open challenge to the name of Manipur’s Churachandpur | Explained, The Indian Express, July 10, 2023, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-history/manipur-churachandpur-lamka-kuki-zomi-meitei-history-8820659/> , accessed on 4.10.2024

population data over the last 130 years to suggest, how compared to the Meiteis, the growth rate amongst the tribals had reached ‘unnatural’ levels. Thus, over a course of 130 years, Meitei population grew from 1.3 lakh in 1881 to 12.5 lakh in 2011. The corresponding rise in the Naga population was from 60,000 initially to 6.04 lakhs in 2011, while the Kuki-Zo population grew from 17,000 in 1881 to 4.48 lakh in 2011.²⁰⁰ Inevitably, the population growth was supposedly associated with an influx of tribal population from the neighbouring country. The Home Commissioner’s population estimates aggravated Naga and Meitei nativism, and bolstered demands for expulsion of immigrants and implementing NRC (National Register of Citizens) in the State of Manipur.

The argument that population explosion is impelled by the Chin-Kuki-Zomi migration into the hill areas of Manipur is countered fervently by the tribals. The district-wise figures on population growth in the hills are revealing. The Decadal Growth Rate (DGR) of the various districts indicates a declining trend in Kuki-Zomi dominated districts. The surge in population, if at all, is noticeable in the districts inhabited largely by the Nagas.

Table 18 - Decadal Growth Rate of District Population in Manipur

	2001(P _o)	2011(P _n)	DGR $\frac{P_n - P_o}{P_o} \times 100$
Churachandpur	212482	254787	19.91
Ukhrul	134493	173606	29.08
Senapati	1,22,791	4,19,210	241.40

²⁰⁰ Correcting Population data, Imphal Free Press, Correcting population data (ifp.co.in)data (ifp.co.in): https://www.ifp.co.in/editorial/correcting-population-data#google_vignette, accessed on 4.10.2024

Tamenglong	1,06,349	1,34,626	26.58
Chandel	1,08,779	1,28,280	17.92
Manipur	2293869	2855794	24.49

Source: Scheduled tribe population by religious community, Manipur (Census India)²⁰¹

Among the above-mentioned districts, the recorded DGR for Senapati stood at a staggering 241 percent which does not match-up with trends of natural growth in population. However, Senapati district is primarily inhabited by different Naga tribes. In 2011, the total population of the district was 419,210 of which nearly 80 percent belonged to one or the other Naga tribes such as Poumai Naga, Marom, Mao and the Kancha Nagas. The likelihood of Kuki-Chin migration into Senapati district, a predominantly Naga area, defies logic.

Decennial Growth Rate (DGR), 1901-2011

Table 19 - Decadal Variation in Manipur's Population

	Year	Total population	Decennial Growth Rate
MANIPUR	1901	284,465	-----
	1911	346,222	+21.71
	1921	384,016	+10.92
	1931	445,606	+16.04
	1941	512,069	+14.92
	1951	577,635	+12.80
	1961	780,037	+35.04

²⁰¹India - ST-14: Scheduled tribe population by religious community, Manipur, District Senapati – 2001, URL: <https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/44857/study-description>

	1971	1,072,753	+37.53
	1981	1,420,953	+32.46
	1991	1,837,149	+29.29
	2001 *	2,293,896	+24.86
	2011	2,855,794	+24.50

Source : Decadal Variation in Manipur's Population, Census 2011²⁰²

Besides, for over a century (1901-2011), the state's population has grown steadily. The DGR peaked in 1971 (37.53%), and thereafter, there is a gradual decline. Further, historical records and census data suggest that there has been little alteration in the spatial and ethnic distribution of population in the State. In 1886, for instance, the population of Manipur was 2,21,070, of which 61.04 percent lived in the Meitei dominated Imphal valley; and the rest 38.6 percent comprised various Naga and Kuki-Zo tribes residing in the Hills. At this point of time, Churachandpur and Pherzawl, the two tribal dominated districts, were yet to be integrated with the State of Manipur.

The 1961 Census, held a decade or so after Manipur's merger with India (1949), recorded a significant increase in the population of the valley (66 percent). Consequently, the share of the hill population shrunk to 34 percent. In 2011, about a century and a quarter after the first enumeration, the size of the State's population multiplied more than ten times to 28,55,794. There were still 57 percent of the people living in the valley and the rest 43 percent in the hills. It is to be noted however, that the proportion of language speakers who returned Manipuri or Meitei language as their mother tongue is on a downward slide since its merger with India.

²⁰²India - A-02: Decadal variation in population 1901-2011, Manipur, URL : <https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/43347>

Table 20 - Manipuri mother-tongue speakers: State and All-India share

	1951	1961	1971	1991	2001	2011
Manipuri/Meitei speakers in Manipur	65.3	64.7	63.2	60.4	58.43	53.30
Manipuri/Meitei speakers All-India	--	--	0.14	0.15	0.14	0.15

Source: Population by Mother tongue, Census 2011²⁰³

The declining share of Manipuri language speakers which is more or less analogous to the share of Meitei population in the State, purportedly, feeds into the Meitei anxiety against ‘population influx’. But the paradox is that the Census records since 1971 onwards suggest that the share of Manipuri speakers at the all-India plane has either remained constant, or has not registered significant increase (Table above).

A closer scrutiny of the population data offers a different explanation. In the wake of a declining DGR and district level analysis, it is evident that there is no mass inflow of Kuki-Chin-Zo population from across the State. The fear generated among the valley population appears to be unfounded and pernicious. But how do we then explain the declining ratio of Meitei/Manipuri speakers in the State? In our understanding, there could be a combination of factors contributing to the given scenario, amongst which two reasons stand out. One, the extent of out-migration from the State. The State records outflow to inflow ratio of migration at

²⁰³India - C-16: Population by mother tongue, India – 2011, URL :<https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/10191>

3.32, highest among all the seven States of the North-east²⁰⁴. This suggests that the number of people migrating out of Manipur is three times more than those immigrating into it. Two, the disparity between the TFR (total fertility rate) of the Valley and Hill districts of Manipur. The TFR is inversely proportional to the extent of socio-economic development of a given region. As per the NFHS-5 (National Family Health Survey), the TFR of the State stands at 2.2 which is almost identical with the national average (2.2). However, the fertility rate, owing to the better development indices of the valley districts, is noticeably lower (1.7 to 2) than that of the Hill districts (2.5-3.3). The two factors, greater out-flow of population and lower TFR in the Imphal area vis-vis the hill districts, probably lead to declining ratio of Meitei population in Manipur. Their share in population at the all-India level has either remained constant, or registers increase.

It is evident from a study of the data that the clamour of population influx, mainly raised by Meitei nationalists and Manipur's ruling regime, holds little ground.

6.2. Geo-Political Considerations

During the course of tribunal hearings, a recurring theme came up through narrations of those testifying, especially from the Meitei side. Citing a larger agenda behind the violence, the deponents stated that the central government wanted greater control in the region due to geo-political considerations. The continuance of the violence for so long is also why the larger agenda of the government behind the conflict appears to be arousing strong suspicion.

²⁰⁴ (Computed from Table D-2, Census of India 2011, also see Table 11 in Lusome and Bhagat, Migration in North-east India, Indian Journal of Labour Economics, 2020 Oct 24;63(4):1125–1141), URL : <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7585351/>

A Meitei professor (MeMD2) while talking to the Tribunal, expressed that at the core of the violence that has engulfed Manipur state, are agendas far beyond the ethnic and communal issues that are being spoken about. In his view, ordinary people, whether Kuki or Meitei, want an end to the violence and want to be assured peace and safety. However, if in spite of it the violence is continuing, it is on account of the geo-political agenda of the central government and the role played by the insurgent groups, who have been granted impunity. He said that the narcotic trade and teak trade are also reasons behind the continuation of the conflict. He emphasised that it isn't any particular community, but bureaucrats and officials from all communities that are involved, with the major role being played by the government and politicians.

Two activists from a Meitei group (MeMD3-1 and MeMD3-2) also reiterated that the Central Government has a geopolitical agenda. Indicating that the government is using Kukis for their agenda, they claimed that while the *"Burmese army is fighting with Kuki militants, Bangladesh is fighting with Kuki militants but India is making friends with them."* Blaming the state's ulterior motive behind the violence, they said that before this conflict for the first time in 10 years Manipur was witnessing the advent of peace, with no police everywhere and people joining mainstream instead of the insurgents. However they said that the government has interests in the ongoing war in Burma, where they are aiding Kuki militants even as they diplomatically side with the Myanmar government. A Meitei political scientist (MeMO11) also said that it was a theory floating around that the Indian government has lent support to rebel groups in Burma and radical groups in Manipur, however one cannot ascertain the veracity of these claims. However, he was also of the opinion that if it were not for some oblique motive, the conflict would have been put to an end in the initial stages itself.

A Meitei politician, IGD2, stated in no uncertain terms that the government is exploiting its own agenda in the name of the Kuki-Meitei conflict. He also cited Myanmar as being a core geopolitical agenda, where India is trying to protect its interests in Myanmar through the rebels instead of the military junta / government. According to him, India's interests lie in Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project which passes through Paletwa on Mizoram border, and the Asian highways (India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway project), which are both pending completion. He said that 80,000 troops were brought by the Indian Government to Manipur in the name of the conflict, however the conflict has not stopped since the real purpose was always geopolitical and the conflict is the perfect excuse to increase military presence and control in the region. He also cited the interest of the government at both the centre and state in the drug trade, which could not flourish without governmental support. Pointing to the divisive role played by the State to fuel the conflict, he said that a narrative was allowed to be built against Kukis for over a year before the conflict, which led to the spread of a divisive narrative and fuelled the ethnic divide.

This was also observed by a Meitei professor, IGD1, who said that important players in the state government and ruling party were involved in building a narrative against Kukis, calling them drug peddlers, infiltrators / illegal immigrants, encroachers of forest and land grabbers. This hateful narrative was peddled through mainstream media and social media, pointing to a concerted effort made to create societal tensions and incite hate and violence, according to him with an ulterior motive. However, he said that what is even more striking, is the complete lack of attempt on the part of the state to stop the conflict and restore peace in over a year. He also said that the lack of intent to stop the violence, is clear from the fact that even with the influx and presence of a high number of security forces, they haven't been able to stop the conflict with a population of only 30 lakh people in the state. In particular, he pointed

to the impunity granted to groups to continue the violence, by not taking strict action against them. He said that it was almost as though the government and elites have more to gain from the violence continuing than from stopping it.

While analysing this charge, the professor claimed that there is a strong connection between the historical and current ethnic conflict, and the geopolitical situation created on account of Manipur's geographical location. He claimed that – *“the frequent Military coup in Myanmar since 1962 had a distinct impact on the borderland. The Military coup that unfolded in Myanmar in February 2021 had significant implication for Manipur and other neighbouring areas. There is long history of cultural, economic and strategic exchanges between India and Myanmar. Indian security depends critically on Myanmar which shares border of 1643 kms long (Manipur shares 400 kms border). With a focus of improving connectivity trade and energy cooperation, India has made investment through programs like Kaladan Multi-Model Transit Transport project and others. Myanmar’s Chin State has strong connections with tribes from Mizoram and Manipur.”*

Another Meitei scholar (MeMO11) shared the talks he had heard doing the rounds, with skepticism. “Some security analysts suggest that India’s need to counter China’s strategic moves—what they call the "string of pearls"—has influenced the situation. The Chin state of Myanmar, which borders Manipur, is seen as key to India’s ambitions. The Kuki - Zo people, who live across these borders, are crucial to this strategic calculation. However, it’s unclear how much weight this theory holds.”

The narrative of geo-political considerations behind the continuing conflict has spread among the Meiteis and was also heard from different groups during the course of the tribunal. A group of Meira Paibi women, IGD4, shared their strong views on the subject, that –

“- There is geopolitics involved. Indian government's interest in Manipur is that. Kuki people have got lots of people in Myanmar. India needs to appease people in Burma. Kukis are immigrants who came from there. India's policy favours Kukis. Therefore they have a soft corner for the Kukis. By Geopolitics we mean the relationship between India and foreign countries, and the way those relationships have consequences etc.

- For the success of the Kaladan project, India must have good relationship with Burma. Kaladan passes through the Chin state which has Kukis. So for the sake of this project, India is nice with the Kukis.

- Along the hills, Kuki revolutionary groups are in SoO, they are friends with the Assam Rifles. Only for Kaladan project they try to dominate all the hill areas. Meiteis also have revolutionary groups. But Kukis and Assam rifles have driven out the Meitei revolutionary groups.”

A Meitei journalist, Onl13, claimed that Manipur is the last frontier that needs to be controlled. “In order to control them, they have to keep them separated and fighting. It is always easier to control the people who are divided.” The journalist claimed that the interests lie in trade between India and Burma, to facilitate corporations. According to the journalist, there is an economic, geopolitical agenda and the resources to be exploited are a wide range, including resources of Burma like Bromide which India, China and U.S. are competing to control, also “3 trillion cubic tons of petrol”, natural resources like gold, gas, supari, teakwood, semi-precious gems, which is attracting corporate interests.

Members of a Naga group (NMD5-1 and NMD5-2) who testified before the tribunal also felt that the governments at the centre and state were influenced by geopolitical considerations. They said that there is incentive given to Kukis to flush out Meitei and Naga insurgents. They said that if it wants, the government can bring peace in a week but they have done

nothing to stop the violence. Arambai Tenggol has been used in the violence and militants are allowed to roam freely with weapons. Meanwhile, the Kukis are demanding separate administration – Kukiland Zalemang, infringing upon the rights of Nagas. They also stated that while all communities are suffering on account of the violence, Kukis have suffered more displacement and deaths.

A Kuki journalist (KFO9) pointed out that since Kukis made a demand for separate administration in light of the violence, there is propaganda doing the rounds that Kukis started the violence to make a demand for separate administration or that this is part of a larger aim of Kukis or Chin Mizos to form a greater homeland consisting of areas in Mizoram, adjoining areas of Myanmar, parts of Manipur as well perhaps even parts of Nagaland. However, the hate propaganda against Kukis, calling them infiltrators and drug peddlers played a big role in inciting hate and violence against the community; it was his view that the continuance of the violence and the conflict led to the demand for separate administration in the first place.

Meanwhile a Meitei journalist (MeMD28) claimed that the state's larger agenda in continuing the violence is to separate the communities and lead to trifurcation of the state – “If you want to take out the petroleum in the hills - you have to agree with the Kukis, if you want to mine in the valley - you have to agree with the Meiteis, if you want chromite, limestone, bauxite - you have to agree with the Nagas.” The journalist stated that Manipur was like a small shop where so many resources were available, and also pointed to the geopolitical importance of Manipur as it was a gateway to East-China, Myanmar, Thailand etc. Another Meitei journalist (MeFD25) based in Delhi also spoke of the geopolitical importance of Manipur because the eastern corridor connects from there. He said that the Adani gas pipeline and land interests are also factors. He also pointed to the drug trade being an important reason. According to him, drug trade

has been going on despite the conflict, indicative that the drug business is going on as usual despite the security checkpoints and movement restrictions. It was reported in Hindustan Times in July 2024, that 50 kgs of drugs from Manipur were seized in Delhi on June 25, 2024²⁰⁵.

A Meitei human rights activist also claimed that the drug trade and relations with Myanmar for the purpose of drug trade is also an important reason for ensuring constant instability in the state. He however attributed the state agenda to the growing business interest in natural resources, minerals and palm oil cultivation in Manipur. He said that with the ST Status (to Meiteis) they want to unlock tribal land and push the corporate agenda. He informed that there are also plans underway for a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in the hills. Moreover, the Trans Asian Railway²⁰⁶ plan, the proposed railway network connecting Europe and Asia, with Manipur in India being a key part of the project, will also make it feasible to extract in the region.

A researcher who has worked extensively on Manipur state, Onl12(m2), stressed that one of the main agendas is enabling exploitation of resources and free trade. He shared that until Covid, internal trade, and by that grey area trade, was exploding and the cronies of the ruling party were benefiting - “Started with betel nuts. But also timber, also drugs and gold. Everybody is involved. Question is of the percentage that people get and what parties and individuals get.” However, according to him, the real

²⁰⁵ Hindustan Times, 7 July 2024, URL : <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/delhi-news/4-held-in-delhi-for-smuggling-drugs-worth-50-cr-from-manipur-101720291360172.html#:~:text=On%20June%2025%2C%20their%20search,a%20cavity%20under%20the%20taillight>

²⁰⁶ Trans-Asian railway network provides a coordinated plan for developing a regional rail network to support intra and inter-regional trade and transport. The 128,000-kilometer long rail network passes through 28 countries and was formalized through an Inter-governmental Agreement on Trans-Asian Railway network that entered into force in 2009. Source : <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1914709>

objective is to control land without people, to enable resources for their cronies that are extractive. He said, “They want this border unoccupied. They may do border fencing but this (illegal trade) will not stop. Now it will be official. (They will) gain immense wealth. Gujarat model of 2002 now being tried in Manipur.”

It was reported in September 2024²⁰⁷, that the thrust to expand oil palm plantations under the Oil Palm Mission Manipur and increasing influence of the Golden Triangle's drug trade is threatening the future of the region's forests and the livelihood systems of its indigenous populations. As per the news report, the Oil Palm Mission Manipur aims to bring at least 65,000 hectares of area under oil palm plantations only in Manipur, through contract farming. Big companies such as Godrej Agrovet and Ruchi Soya Industries – part of Patanjali group are reportedly leading the project. Such large-scale farm cultivation would prove highly unsustainable and would destroy not only forests, but also traditional farming, indigenous knowledge systems, water sources and food sovereignty. Moreover, the 2023 amendments to the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, ease deforestation by narrowing the protection to forests, by excluding unclassified forest land from its purview. As much as 76% forest cover in Manipur is unclassified, making it easy to divert the same²⁰⁸.

The head of a Kuki organisation, CCPurGD3, stated that there is a tug of war between the government and the community for access and control over forest resources. The state government is misusing forest laws and the forest survey to evict tribals and is taking unconstitutional measures such as cordoning off forest areas from adjoining tribal villages under the

²⁰⁷Vygr News Bureau, 14 September 2024, URL : <https://vygrnews.com/india-news/fromethnicviolencetoenvironmentaldevastationhowoilpalmexpansioncoulddeepenmanipur'sconflict>

²⁰⁸<https://india.mongabay.com/2023/08/commentary-what-does-the-forest-conservation-amendment-act-mean-for-northeast-india/>

justification of protecting reserved forests from illegal timber felling and poppy plantations by locals. Another leader from a Kuki organisation, CCPurGD1, also expressed similar concerns that under the garb of forest conservation and wetland protection, access to forest areas was being taken away from the indigenous community. He stated that the propaganda has made it easy to target Kukis in this fashion. It is also claimed that the process of declaration of reserved forest, protected forest, wetlands itself has been weaponized against the indigenous community by denying their rights and inheritance²⁰⁹.

In the absence of explanation to justify the State failure and inaction to arrest the violence in a timely manner, in spite of people's aggravated discontent and distress, and the literal division of society in Manipur that has taken place on account of the same, representative members of the communities communicated their strong suspicions of a larger agenda at play on account of which solutions for peace and integrity were not being presented and normalcy was not being restored.

6.3. Patterns of State Failure and Complicity emerging from testimonies

1. The mala fide intention of the state in altering the status of forests leading to serious apprehensions and polarization

There has been seething discontent among the people in Hill areas that many of their established habitations have been notified without following the procedure established by law to be treated as Protected Forests (PF) or Reserved Forests (RF). Among others, Churachandpur-Khoupum Protected Forest notification dated 17.9.1966 was modified later over a

²⁰⁹<https://www.landconflictwatch.org/conflicts/declaration-of-village-land-as-protected-forest-areas-in-the-hill-district-of-manipur-triggers-statewide-protests#>

period of time between 1972 to 1988, upon representations from inhabitants of some of the villages but all those orders have been annulled by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests & HoFF on 7.11.2022 setting aside 38 orders issued by ASOs (Forest)/ FSOs trampling “the existing rights” in 38 villages and has made a facade of fairness by directing fresh enquiries of the nature and extent of the rights of private person/ individual/ community prior to the notifications.

Five hamlet villages in Kungpinosen have been notified as PF, when there are documents from 1892 about the existence of these villages. On the basis of the orders issued on 7.11.2022, several of the villagers have been forcibly evicted from their settled lands. This is only to highlight that people of hill areas are constantly under threat of losing possession of even the lands of what are assured to them and village councils’ powers are seriously curtailed. The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes has expressed shock that the constitutional protections to the STs are being flouted and empowerment of Autonomous District Councils are still a distant dream. The Hill Areas Committees (HACs) are left powerless.

The expert testimony NmMO10 points out how the above orders created distrust regarding the intentions of the government. It did not seem to be a very logical decision, because these forests would eventually become prime real estate, being close to the valley. That's where the hill tribes would want to live in order to have access to the valley facilities like schools, hospitals etc. Recently controversies have erupted over it because the Meiteis claim that Thangjing hill is a sacred hill for them, and hence they would not want the Kukis to live there.

Certain seemingly partisan actions of the government – declaring the land surveys done in 1966 as null and void and ordering new surveys to be done, seem to have exacerbated matters. Expert deponent NmMO10 also mentions the incident that took place about six or seven months before

the violence. Bharatiya Janta Yuva Morcha (of the BJP) sent volunteers to do reforestation tree plantation on the Thangjing hill. This was a provocative act to which the Kukis objected and insisted that no one could come in there without the permission of their chief, because “all this land belongs to our chief²¹⁰”. Then the Meiteis said that “this is our sacred hill; and it doesn't belong to any Kuki chief. We can do what we please”. It is under these circumstances that the matter was referred to the government; which was inclined to treat all forests as ‘reserved forests’.

This had serious implications, since reserved forests did not permit human habitations; and hence it meant that the communities living in almost 38 villages could be evicted. This also jeopardized the future expansion of those villages when each of them got saturated, requiring creation of new villages to accommodate the natural growth of existing population, when required over a period of time.

These concerns were also strongly articulated by a Kuki organisation, CCPurGD5, to the Tribunal:

“In 2015, the Manipur govt introduced a series of Bills and Acts that started undermining the autonomy and sovereignty of tribals in matters regarding the protection and management of forest lands indigenous to them for thousands of years.

This included declaring large tracts of tribal land as Protected Forests, Reserved Forests, Wetland Protection areas, Wildlife Sanctuaries, and Proposed Forest Reserves, all governed by the Forest Act of 1927. However, many of the amendments, clauses and standard procedures, including public notification, public hearing and taking consent of the

²¹⁰Refer Chapter 3 which describes community land ownership through the Chief in Kuki settlements under Kuki tribal / customary laws.

village chief and the Hill Area Committee were vagrantly ignored and bypassed.”

It is abundantly clear that the Government of Manipur has been engaging in legislative and policy level actions that definitely led to disruption of the delicate balance and peace that prevailed. The May 3rd 2023 rally in CCPur was not only to protest the scheduled tribe status demand of the Meiteis, but also about the ongoing/potential evictions and restrictions that would affect the existence, leave alone expansion of Kuki villages.

2. The role of the State in maintaining the rule of law and as a mediator in times of conflict

A significant number of people from both communities, particularly women, expressed their desire for peace, in their depositions to the Tribunal. It is inconceivable that a State that has experienced and contended with insurgency and violence over several decades would not have developed its intelligence and law enforcement machinery in such a way as to anticipate violence from the elements that were intent on creating hatred through misinformation and false propaganda. The warning signs were all there in the public domain, but there did not seem to have been any concerted preventive action taken; no sincere efforts towards peace were undertaken. Deponent MeFD4 repeatedly harked back to the peace efforts by women of all communities during different episodes of conflict – especially the Naga-Kuki conflict.

The testimony of KFO8 went back in history to see the role that the state had played in the recent past:

“...One thing we have to know is that if you go back, the State was never part of all the ethnic conflicts, it always acted as a mediator. In 1993 more than 300 Pangal Muslims were killed but then they were not displaced.....”“.....the State was there acting as a mediator between the

Meiteis and the Pangals and that's how the violence subsided within a week. And then somehow the people started living together again. There was not nothing like this. Even in the case of the Nagas and Kukis which the Meiteis have been telling, I can say that the State was never partisan. It was always acting as a mediator. In this case I feel that it (the violence) could never stop because it is state sponsored. The State doesn't want it to get over. It doesn't want it to stop. In 1997 also we witnessed some form of conflict but people's houses were not burned, I know, like people were killed, but then, it was never like that. So yeah it's very surprising, the way the State has acted. That's what I've been always saying in any forum where the Meiteis are also there. The Meiteis will always bring up this earlier violence so I always tell them exactly this point...”

Deponent MeFD4 also pointed to the refusal on the part of the government to have earnest and intense negotiations with the students when they were agitated, refusal to even meet them, followed by disproportionate use of force by the police. Firing without warning or use of non-fatal force such as water cannon, resulting in death and debilitating injuries have been reported by both sides.

3. The government failed or refused to mediate peace and reconciliation

While many testimonies were clearly pro-Meitei, they did express a yearning for peace and harmonious coexistence, towards which the state did not take adequate efforts. The words of deponent MeFD4 reveal this powerfully:

“...I know that people will see Meitei society has different voices, we are also critical of Meitei. This is something we need to carry forward to go ahead. When I was working in Guwahati for a peace project, we wanted to sit together with the women belonging to the Dimasa and the Hmar group who were the conflicting communities. They were hesitant to do that and

said they wanted to ask their men and student community. To ask women, civil society and the student community is the need of the hour. Women are becoming very vocal against such violence. From common people to common people - we do not see this hatred....”.

Despite all the misinformation and hate propaganda that influenced the Meiteis in the hill districts, the Meitei victims of Kuki violence still expressed a strong desire for peace. The fact that the state government and the CM never tried to leverage this yearning for peace by facilitating dialogue and countering disinformation and hate propaganda makes the intentions of the state government and its functionaries suspect.

“...Meiteis do not feel that Kukis should not return because we think they are part of us. We still want to live together. Imphal is like Delhi. But Kukis wanted to ethnically cleanse the hill areas of the Meiteis, and they did it in front of the Assam Rifles. The security advisor did everything, he was controlled by the Centre. The CM was not involved at all.

In the Sugnu area, people were not involved in the war and Kukis and Meiteis decided to live peacefully. But militants from outside came and attacked. The Kukis released 19 Meiteis without any attacks. Because Meitei were released, the Meitei side also released Kukis. The PM or Home Ministers have to answer why they do not want Meiteis and Kukis to live together...” (MeMD3-1 and MeMD3-2)”

This testimony of a Kuki person (KFD14) also, as that of the Meitei MeFD4 above highlights a total lack of state interventions to ensure peace.

“I was in Churachandpur. On May 5, 2023 in the evening at around 5 PM, people started giving out messages that women should come out and stop

security personnel who were trying to rescue Meiteis. We were afraid that if they took all the Meiteis out of CCPur, then our Kukis will not be sent back from Imphal. Meiteis were taken to a safe place in CCPur, and Kuki women also formed human chains to protect them from the mob....”

A situation where different communities had to resort to hostage taking and hostage exchange could have happened only due to a total failure of governance and the lack of faith of the conflicting communities in the impartiality of the law-and-order mechanism.

Meira Paibis (KgGD2) also clearly stated that they wanted peace. Although they believe that the Kukis are not indigenous as the Meiteis are and were given to the rumours about the conflict being fuelled by illegal immigrants and narco-terrorists, they still felt that ‘geo-political interests of the senior leaders of the Central Government were key to this conflict. There were perceptions that the Kukis were being supplied arms to fight the Meiteis for some ulterior motive.

Kuki Women’s Organizations (CcpurGD9)

Depositions of Kuki women’s organisations were also indicative of their desire for peace; although they were distressed by how they felt the Meiteis now saw them as their ‘sworn enemies’.

“...The Kukis wanted revenge on the Meiteis after the 3rd of May, but the Kuki women (especially from the Maar community) saved the Meiteis from the Kuki mob whenever they could, often in collaboration with the army and the Assam Rifles. The women in CCPur made human chains to save Meitei women. We guided them to the national security forces and even made human chain in front of the gate. I saved three Meitei boys. They came running into my clinic, I shut the door to keep them safe. In the morning, I opened the door and asked them to run to the police station. I was afraid I would be condemned by my own community. On 3,

4, 5 May, the Meiteis in CCPur reached Imphal safely because we need human chains till the securities....”.

The deponent from CCPurGD1, also reconfirmed the fact that it was the National Kuki Women’s Human Rights Organisation that stopped the Kuki men from holding the Meitei youth, and released the Meitei boys who had been caught, in Churachandpur, on 3rd, 4th, and 5th of May, 2023. . This too, despite the serious provocation by the Meiteis who tried to burn the Anglo-Kuki Centenary Gate.

4. Denial of Rehabilitation and pathetic conditions of the camps

Total lack of efforts by the government to rehabilitate the IDPs living in relief camps renders the intention of the government suspect. It appears as if the government has no intention to rehabilitate; rather wants those in the camps to languish.

5. Emergence of divisive politics, and State complicity

Strands of political thinking characterising Kukis as not being native to Manipur had started earlier on. In 2012, a retired army major called R. K. Rajendro proposed that Kukis were not native to Manipur and were all immigrants from Myanmar. Eventually this became the dominant thinking among the Meiteis and the Nagas. For the Meiteis this alleged non-indigeneity of the Kukis became the rallying point that helped strengthen the present conflict (Expert Testimony of NmN010).

“...ArambaiTengol and Meitei Lipun seem to enjoy State patronage. Meitei Lipun is most certainly a Sangh Parivar type of organisation whereas AT is a native Meitei revivalist organization. It's not entirely clear what all they want. At the extreme case they might just want to reinstate the traditional Meitei kingdom there. That's the kind of ideology they

profess. So both AT and ML consider Christians as a threat to Meitei society. They call themselves Hindus and they believe that Hindus are reducing, and Hinduism is in danger in Manipur” (Expert Testimony of NmN010).

“...These different entities federated into the Kokomi Coordinating Committee for Manipur Integrity. in June 2023, one month after the conflict started they declared a Manipuri National war on the Kukis which I suppose, meant that all Meiteis had to sign up to fight this war, and every kind of sacrifice and every kind of offense would be perfectly legitimate...” (Expert Testimony of NmN010).

The utterances of the then CM, especially since his re-election in 2022, appear to have contributed majorly to strengthening the dangerous and divisive narrative. In this report, the messages sent by the former CM have been recounted at length all of which make it clear that the former CM consciously and deliberately stoked the narrative of the Kukis being poppy cultivators, illegal immigrants, and narco-terrorists.

6. The Militias and the seeming government complicity in giving them a free hand

The role of the Arambai Tenggol (AT) in fomenting violence needs to be investigated. There have been instances of the AT personnel riding Manipur police jeeps. The AT ‘summoning’ the MLAs and MPs of Manipur to the Kangla Fort²¹¹ with 37 MLAs & 2 MPs responding to the ‘summons’ and attending the meeting and allegedly signing the demands that the AT had put forward, could be cited as conclusive proof of the nexus that the authorities have with the AT. This reaffirms the belief that

²¹¹<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/manipur-meitei-mlas-mps-kangla-fort-summons-arambai-tenggol-9125520/>

there is a relation between the Meitei political elite and the AT. The fact that the state government neither stopped this meeting nor took action against a meeting organized by an armed militia arouses suspicion of complicity. The Manipur CM saying that “they are doing it for defence, till the other side is disarmed” is nothing but justifying the existence and the armed status of the armed militia (AT). (Expert Testimony of NmMD24)

An expert testimony by a High Court Advocate (NmMD22) also highlights the belief that the Chief Minister himself seemed to have been closely associated with the formation of such militia:

“...The State govt led by Biren, and he is said to be one of the people who has been instrumental in raising the private militia called AT and ML - Meitei extremist groups.

The Chief Minister has been instrumental in arranging the surrender of banned secessionist terror organisations in Myanmar. CM has been instrumental in arranging the surrender of the banned terror group called UNLF (United national liberation front). The surrendered cadres of the UNLF have been assimilated with AT and together have been launching attacks against tribal villages in hills...”

“...Yes it smacks of an agenda for two or three reasons - it is the result of a premeditated agenda. Central govt and local admin failed to seek assistance of army under section 371 CrPC.

I have been told by army officers that there has been no instructions from the state or central govt. I have been told that there are unwritten instructions that they should not act.

These private militias were in the process of being raised for the last 4-5 years and everyone was aware - the state, the centre, etc. - raising of large force is not a matter of months. They were allowed to loot state armories...Army has been regularly issuing statements and carrying out small tasks - apprehended and arrested 6 terror orgs with huge weapons but Meira Paibis forced them to release....”(NmMD22)

The Naga leaders who deposed had concerns regarding the Kuki demand for a separate autonomous administration; but the ongoing conflict was ‘state-sponsored’ according to them. Their neutral status could be instrumental in mediating for peace, but it required that the state and central governments have an intention to bring in peace.

“...The state government has been branded as — May 3 is branded as state sponsored. They are using Arambai Tenggol, and militants freely roaming with weapons. There is no more rule of law. We have also sent a representation to Home Minister to deal with this with an iron hand. But they have done nothing...” (NMD5-2)

The Kuki perception, (On12 Kukis+G) is that the Meitei separatist insurgent groups that are part of the CorCom coordination committee having a free hand in fuelling the violence exposes the partisan nature of both the state and the central governments. This is corroborated by certain media reports too:

“...Military intelligence seems to bear out the claims. An intelligence officer in the Indian Army said they believe around 100-odd cadres of the KYKL and PLA had crossed over through the Taret Lok river corridor that spans the districts of Kamjong and Tegnoupal areas of eastern Manipur.

On June 24, the Army said it had intercepted 12 KYKL cadres with “arms, ammunition and war-like stores” in Imphal’s Itham village, but were forced to release them as a large number of Meitei protesters, most of them women, gathered in the area demanding they be let go...”²¹²

²¹²<https://scroll.in/article/1055257/the-return-of-meitei-insurgents-marks-a-new-turn-in-manipur-conflict>

The state government is in denial as to the involvement of radical insurgents in the violence. The strident Meitei demand for withdrawal of the Assam Rifles, which has historically kept insurgency under check, and the removal of AR from key conflict areas, also seem to fit into a pattern of the State and Central governments in taking steps that do not seem to inspire confidence. The looting of over 4500 guns from the state armouries which are understood to be now with Meitei insurgents and militias and the Manipur police perceived as being hands in gloves with them, the Kukis see the demand for suspension of SoO also as a ploy to facilitate large-scale operations against them which could only exacerbate the situation further. The Kukis maintain that they have only been making a fully constitutional demand for a separate UT with administrative controls over the hill regions they occupy; but the state and central governments seem to be giving in to separatist, insurgent Meitei groups to perpetuate the conflict.

One of the experts, Onl12-m2, who testified talked about a security review meeting called by the Union Home minister where “The Army gave a blunt briefing. If there were 4000 Meitei radicals on May 23, the estimated ones now are 50 to 60K. Plus 6K weapons, 6 lakhs ammunition. Army asked the security command to be under them. And that they be allowed to use AFSPA.”

The depositions of the representatives of a Meitei group (MeMD3-1) also emphasises the failure or complicity of the government in perpetuation of this conflict:

“....But Meitei groups like Arambai Tenggol and others - we did not know Arambai Tenggol before this violence - after this violence we were told that 50-60,000 people are being trained and are a part of the AT. They have also looted armoury. Kukis also have arms but we do not know where their arms come from. German guns etc. We don't know. Meiteis get their weapons by looting armouries....”

The division of the Manipur police along ethnic lines has made the force incapable of non-partisan action in this conflict. When the army and paramilitary forces are deployed, it is the local police that assist the forces in every respect, However with the police getting ethnically divided the paramilitary forces also find it difficult to act in a manner that could effectively counter and defuse the violence.

Be it reality or perceptions, the measures of state and central governments have failed to inspire confidence; rather, they have led to an erosion of the faith in the government to contain the conflict and usher in peace.

7. Uneven imposition of AFSPA

Ever since the SoO agreement, most Kuki militant groups have relinquished their arms, while the Meitei militant groups keep raiding state armouries and equipping themselves with more and more advanced weapons. Meanwhile AFSPA has been removed from the plains, where the Meitei groups dominate, but has been kept intact in the hills. In such a scenario, without protection of the CRPF and the Assam Rifles, the Kukis would not stand a chance against attacks by Meitei groups.

A Kuki deponent, KFO8, also highlighted the danger of selectively and differentially imposing or lifting AFSPA in Manipur.

If AFSPA has been continuously revoked in the valley areas & renewed even after the ArambaiTengol militia has forced the state's legislators to agree to their demands (at Kangla Fort, Imphal on 24th January, 2024) then, why is there a need to impose AFSPA in the hills but not in the valley? That too, after more than 6,000 arms were looted in the Imphal valley and continue to remain in the militias' hands. If at all AFSPA is required to be imposed, the Imphal valley areas are where it is needed the

most, because the Meitei insurgent groups have a history of secessionist demands from the Indian Union.

The 1st thing is that in the Imphal valley AFSPA has to be re-enforced. For the information of the panel AFSPA was withdrawn in 2, 3 police stations before March 2023. But after the violence, in the whole of Imphal Valley, in 93 stations AFSPA was withdrawn, but still imposed in the hill districts. So I think the first point is that AFSPA has to be imposed uniformly in Manipur. We talk of the hills as unsafe but that is so on the front line otherwise I think the hills are relatively very peaceful, But Imphal is totally in chaos and I think people are robbing with their guns and we have seen on the 24th of January, But AFSPA has not been reimposed there again and these are questions that need to be raised. and everything, and I don't know why it's not imposed again – if AFSPA is there in the hills, why not in Imphal. I have been saying that Imphal has to be calmed down first. If Imphal is calm the other parts will also be calm”.

8. Prior identification and marking of Kuki houses in Imphal; and planned attacks – vandalism and burning of those houses

Almost all depositions by Kukis mention mob attacks on Kuki houses in Imphal city beginning the 3rd of May, 2023. There were also many who mention prior identification and marking of their houses through surveys conducted by ‘government officials’.

KMD15, in his testimony stated: “ 6 or 7 months prior, there was a survey conducted by the Imphal Municipal Council, saying that the pattas will be computerised so they came to verify properties. We shared the details. Apparently, that was the basis they identified. For eg. In New Lambolen in Imphal, Meiteis , Kukis, Nagas and Muslims reside together - how would the mob know which is whose house? How were they able to

single out the houses of the kukis? Kuki intellectuals said that the state was complicit.

It was obvious that the entire attack was pre-planned and not spontaneous. The deponent KMD15, the son of one of the earliest tribal IPS officers of the Manipur-Tripura cadre, was categorical in stating:

“....They had come prepared with half litre petrol bombs and started sprinkling petrol all over our furniture. They broke the tv, computer set, destroyed his medals and accolades. The fire was lit, the curtains, ceiling was all on fire. I tried to stop them from damaging further when they were trying to burn the cars and outhouse in the front. They were trying to destroy anything in front of them. The leader of the mob said, ‘I’m sorry, dada. We have to do so.’ Now in retrospect, I realise that they were definitely following orders. It was completely preplanned....”

Even the privileged social position of this Kuki family in Imphal, with several Meitei members married into the family, could not ensure the security of their residential properties.

Another important dimension of the issue is the total lack of action on the part of the state to provide compensation to the victims in spite of orders by the Supreme Court appointed Gita Mittal Committee.

9. The State’s failure in countering hate propaganda and disinformation

It is well known that disinformation campaigns in the media were on since as early as 2014. Internet ban seemed to be the only step that the state had resorted to in order to prevent the spread of disinformation. However, it has been observed that the state as a preventer of the spread of disinformation either failed or was biased. The social media and even the mainstream media carried hate messages that were designed to provoke rage and violence. The law enforcement donot seem to have taken

effective action by promptly tracing, exposing and apprehending those who were engaging in disinformation and hate messages in time to prevent violence from erupting. It could only have been governance failure and in certain circumstances, complicity with the vested interests that provoked such violence. NmMD24 said:

“...There were two main clusters of disinformation. One was sexual violence and sexual aggression, digital violence on women’s bodies, especially on Kuki - Zo women where their bodies were sexualized using online rhetoric. One was the naked parade. But I’ll give you one example beyond that. Certain Meitei accounts used pictures to indicate that kuki women sleep with AR officers. This was distinct. These were used to provoke retaliatory attacks. “They raped our women so we must rape them back.” We saw digital space as a weapon of war leading to rape as a weapon of war.

The second was xenophobia. There was imagery of Kukis being savages and drug peddlers. There was a video where a Kuki is crossing a fragile bamboo bridge, it was used in the context of illegal immigration. Later it was found out that it did not belong to Manipur. Very sophisticated disinformation had moved beyond the borders of Manipur and reached the national platform...”

Disinformation intended to create panic and demonized imaginations of the ‘enemy’ is also dangerous. This leads to offensive and pre-emptive responses which adds to the sense of hate and further aggravates the conflict. It is important for any government to debunk false news and distortion of facts, especially during times of conflict. There has been a narrative created that the Kukis have been using sophisticated weapons like drones and rockets. The media interviews of the ex-DG (P.C. Nair)²¹³ Assam Rifles established that the ‘drones’ were only surveillance drones

²¹³<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=knctf0w5cJc>

and not those that dropped ammunition; and that the ‘rockets’ were actually only primitive local weapons – just metallic barrels filled with TNT. The media had kept on propagating these false stories that created panic, furthering a dangerous false narrative that endangered all possibilities of peace. This certainly is a serious failure of the government that could even be perceived as complicity with the elements that propagate such false stories.

10. ‘Demonizing and othering’ narratives legitimized by the State

Expert testimony by NmMD24 focused on how it could be dangerous for State functionaries to create or lend credence to narratives that ‘demonize and otherize’ certain communities.

“....Drugs and guns are just the outside shell of the conflict. The core is something else. The construction of the ‘other’, the ‘outsider’ with specific political ends - Kuki Zo - is key to this conflict. We often see the narrative of “Kuki-Zo illegal” - like a weed in the garden, dispensable, that should be thrown out. A lot of this is based on alarmism and numerical exaggerations wherein small batches of refugees and undocumented migrants are inflated into a critical mass that supposedly threatens the majority. Wild figures are thrown around to alarm the people. We see the same process happening in Assam. Hyperbolic exaggeration of refugee numbers, or outsider numbers which threaten the demographic profile of the society....”

“...Biren Singh through repeated accusations created a threat perception of external aggression by illegal migrants. I stop short of blaming the Meitei society for this perception. An average Meitei does not have the wherewithal to fact check these claims thus constructing a rationale for the hatred towards Kuki-Zo....”

“...CM himself blamed the conflict on Kuki Zo, the narco-terrorists from Myanmar. Kuki Democratic Front (non-existent) was blamed for the conflict in Manipur by Amit Shah last year. The conflict did not begin on

3rd May, but on 10th March when the protests across the hill district turned violent. CM went on national TV and gave a statement saying he attributed the violence to poppy planters and foreign plot to destabilize the country - no further explanation - remark during Independence Day speech last year - conflict by those engaging in poppy plantation and drug business...”

11. Deployment/Non-deployment of the paramilitary forces with political intentions

Paramilitary forces like the Assam Rifles have been operational in Manipur since years; this gives them the cumulative institutional memory and information that enable them to deal with violence, and control conflicting armed militias or insurgents. It would be a costly mistake to deploy another force, or to send the paramilitary forces to support the usually politically biased state police in their operations. This seriously compromises the neutrality of the paramilitary forces and also leads to the erosion of confidence of communities on either or both sides of an ongoing conflict. For instance in Jiribam the state police and CRPF were deployed on the ground together. Expert NmMD24 in his testimony stated:

“...Now we see a new sort of thing where the CRPF was attached with the Manipuri commandos in Jiribam. State police is often target of Kukis but paramilitary are not. If paramilitary are attached to state police, we will see escalation and aggravation of violence. These small micro patterns should be watched out for. We are seeing a pattern where both the paramilitary and the police are engaged in tactical collaboration and go on the ground together. The paramilitary are providing shield to the state police because police is open to attack by the Kukis. The Jiribam incident indicates there might be a strategy to do this. There have been 3-4 incidents where the paramilitary forces took a hit because of this and we saw how there was a narrative that the Kukis are attacking paramilitary

forces and the kukis came out to say that they were not the target, the target were the police. The CRPF were collateral damage....”

Expert NmMD24 had this to say regarding the reports of disproportionate violence by the Rapid Action Force: “...RAF, in the very first days, did not anticipate what would happen. SOPs were not in place, so we saw this sort of over-reaction. Before the conflict also, RAF was deployed in parts and has had a very bad reputation of extra judicial killings or violence against Meiteis also. Both communities placed blame on RAF, but gradually their role was replaced by other forces. Particularly BSF is not equipped to handle violence on the streets, particularly this level of violence. We saw overreaction, but it is not an innocent overreaction. The training they receive to operate in sensitive areas is very different from their training to operate in other areas like maybe Delhi....”.

12.The dubious role of the State and Central government functionaries

The deposition of On12 dealt with the dubious role of the state and central government functionaries in perpetuating the conflict.

A number of people consider the then CM Biren Singh to be responsible – through his partisan role in the conflict. The leaked tape with his voice in it, videos that are attributed to him, his open defence of the AT, how the Meiteis are under attack and outfits like the AT are forced to defend the Meiteis have eroded the faith in his administration, thus fuelling insecurity and violence. There are apprehensions among certain experts about how the insurgent Meitei groups have been allowed to function freely in the valley. The following excerpt from an expert’s deposition articulates this concern lucidly:

“....Kolcom coordination committee comprises seven insurgent Meitei groups that are fighting for separation from India. This student body has a

connection with them. Any kind of protest the reactionary agenda is taken up by the student body. For them we are a kingly state and so will fight for sovereignty and independence. They have killed many army people. Many have been participating in this. They have pulled down India flags from Dy collector office and put up the SALED flag. These students are being used for a revolutionary agenda. This is not new.

Even the student body is saying that we don't want to be part of India. They are declared as a terrorist group but they are given free hand in Imphal valley and go with police in their vehicles. I cannot understand why this is being allowed and given free hand....”

“...Now the central government is using them for what we do not know. Students are now demanding Assam Rifles and the CRPF also leave. They chased the CRPF and also the unified command...”

The distinction between the Meitei insurgent/separatist groups’ demands for a separate kingdom and that of Kukis for administrative control (which is constitutional) has to be crystal clear. There have been efforts to blur that distinction and misinterpret the Kuki demand as separatist, and misconstruing this as one of the causes of the conflict. The present regime would appear to be blatantly partisan towards the Meitei militias; allowing them a free hand to go on the rampage.

Interview with a senior (serving) officer of a security force:

The State government, especially the CM, is seen as partisan and has lost all credibility with the tribes residing in the hill districts. The officer’s observation that “The chief minister is administering only 45% of the population and 10% of the land mass of Manipur” explains how the State was destined to fail with the most important functionary having shown no political will to end the conflict and usher in peace.

Although there are people on both sides who want peace, the Central Government has not made efforts to facilitate dialogue between the two sides.

The premeditated attack on the Kuki Centenary gate, burning of tyres directly under it, was a serious provocation. Even to this day this has not been investigated and the offenders brought to book. This false propaganda also was not countered by the state firmly in time to prevent sentiments from being hurt and protests becoming violent.

The officer said that in the initial days of the violence weapons were surrendered and kept in the custody of the state. The looting of armouries that happened subsequently led to the spurt of violence, and this was a serious failure of the state and its security establishment. The officer said: “Everyone knows where the weapons are. We can only hope that when ceasefire is called for, the weapons will be returned. But if not the army will have to step in.”

13. Policy and Governance failures: Ownership and control of the Hills and Forests —

The Manipur government has been perceived by the tribal communities as trying to undermine the tribal ownership and control of the forested hill regions, which has hitherto been protected through various constitutional and legislative provisions.

The amendments introduced by the Manipur Government in 2015 led to declaring large tracts of tribal land as Protected Forests, Reserved Forests, Wetland Protection areas, Wildlife Sanctuaries, and Proposed Forest Reserves, that were all governed by the Forest Act of 1927. The government did not seem to have followed due process of duly notified

public hearings, and bypassed the village chiefs and Hill Area Committees while bringing in these amendments, which has caused serious misgivings among the tribes. The recent cordoning off of 135 Sq.Km of forest land from the adjoining tribal villages is one instance which makes the intention of the government suspect; the Kukis see this as an effort to deprive them of their constitutionally granted access and control of the forests.

Expert testimony of NmMO10 describes this pre-existing dimension of the conflict comprehensively.

“....there was a protected forest called the ChurachandpurKhoum Protected Forest ((CCPurKhoum protected Forest). It's at the southwest of the valley that is, around Thangjing hill. It was declared as a protected forest around 1966, when Manipur was still a Union territory, but it had a legislative assembly and the chief minister. We have no information about how that decision was made. It's not a very logical decision, because these are areas that are close to the valley. So this is prime real estate. That's where people would want to live. The hill tribes would want to live in order to have access to the valley facilities like access to schools, hospitals, etc, etc. It does not make sense to make that part of the hills as a protected forest but it was done way back when Manipur was the Union Territory. Recently controversies have erupted over it because the Meiteis have said that Thangjing hill is a sacred hill for us, and we cannot let Kukis live on it essentially. That started a cycle of, you know, governmental actions which resulted in the government declaring that all the surveys that were done in t1966 are invalid and new surveys will be done. This means that some 38 large villages are now at the peril of getting axed. This was one of the largest grievances that the Kukis had on May 3rd. The May 3rd rally in CCPur was not only about the scheduled tribe status demand, it was also about these evictions and deregulations of the protected forest. So they're all forest dwellers and they live in the forest.

But a protected forest in principle means that people who already live in the forest can continue to live, and only new people cannot come...”²¹⁴.

Under Art-371(c), tribal lands are protected from being purchased by non-tribals; but there have been concerted efforts by the state to undermine this protective provision. The amendment to forest legislation mentioned above is also part of the strategy to weaken this provision. The demand to recognize Meiteis as ST is the latest ploy to make tribal land accessible to the Meiteis. It is in this context that the HC order led to widespread protests and disturbances.

The position stated by the UNC is indicative of serious unresolved ethnic issues. The position of the UNC regarding Kukis as ‘immigrants’ brought in by the British and hence having no claim to land, the hills and the forests, have flared up in the past, and could trigger off dangerous conflicts. In normal times this would be a perception simmering in the back-burner; but in times of conflict, they flare up causing irreversible damage to the socio-political fabric. There should have been extensive consultations that should have resulted in a fair allocation of land and access to forest rights among the various tribes, and systems of vigilance and maintenance.

6.4. Poppy Cultivation and drug trade

6.4.1. The suspected political connections

Information obtained on drug trafficking involving Myanmar and Manipur from news reports and experts points to a multi-million-dollar drug production and trafficking industry that is thriving, presumably enjoying patronage at high levels. This has been going on since decades, and some of the drug hauls and investigation in recent years establish the

²¹⁴Testimony of NmMO10

involvement of even defence personnel, an MLA's son and large-scale drug traffickers from outside Manipur. In February 2013, Manipur Police commandos arrested defence spokesman Colonel Ajay Chowdhry, Indigo Airlines staff N Brojendro, Territorial Army sepoy RK Babloo and three tribal youths for carrying pseudoephedrine hydrochloride drugs worth over Rs 20 crore in three jeeps at Pallel in Thoubal district²¹⁵.

It is a fact that Manipur is one among the many conduits for drugs, and that the principal actors in this entire illegal business operate much beyond Manipur. A news report of 2024 indicates the multi-State nature of drug trafficking and trade²¹⁶.

Four major drug trafficking operatives were arrested in June 2024 - Ramawtar Jat (42), Tejpal Beniwal (29), Ramniwas Lega (26) and Kishana Ram (47), (all belonging to Rajasthan's Churu district) - and have allegedly been smuggling drugs from Rajasthan, Manipur, Madhya Pradesh and Punjab since 2019.

“To expand their operations, they worked with residents in Manipur by posing as officials from road construction companies. Few of the associates would stay in Manipur for weeks to get access to fine quality opium which was smuggled from Myanmar by suppliers. The gang has been active for years and have active clients in Mumbai and Delhi where they approach people at clubs in posh areas and sell them the drugs,”²¹⁷

²¹⁵<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/manipur-govt-hands-over-pallel-drug-haul-case-to-cbi/articleshow/18819129.cms>

²¹⁶<https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/delhi-news/4-held-in-delhi-for-smuggling-drugs-worth-50-cr-from-manipur-101720291360172.html#:~:text=On%20June%2025%2C%20their%20search,a%20cavity%20under%20the%20taillight.>

²¹⁷[https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/delhi-news/4-held-in-delhi-for-smuggling-drugs-worth-50-cr-from-manipur-](https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/delhi-news/4-held-in-delhi-for-smuggling-drugs-worth-50-cr-from-manipur-101720291360172.html#:~:text=On%20June%2025%2C%20their%20search,a%20cavity%20under%20the%20taillight.)

6.4.2. *The drivers of poppy cultivation*

The decreasing income from regular agriculture and lack of alternative means of livelihood has exacerbated poverty in the hills. Manipur already had been reeling from recurrent violence over the decades therefore lacking a peaceful environment required for economic development. The failure of the State in rendering effective rural development programmes and adequate social security has perpetuated poverty and created conditions that push local villagers to take up poppy cultivation. The hills and the cover of the forests are favourable for the viability and invisibility of poppy cultivation; and as is the experience in many Asian countries like Afghanistan where poppy cultivation is prevalent, excessive coercive action by the State has pushed the poppy cultivators further and further away to areas that are inaccessible to the State forces. Poppy cultivation, impoverished farmers have seen, could help earn significantly to facilitate social mobility, secure a higher standard of life and provide a good education to their children. The cultivation of poppy acts like a “magic potion” for rural households to pull themselves out of poverty, within a short time span. It proves to be rewarding in providing financial and food security and access to credit/loans²¹⁸.

Studies on poppy cultivation in Asia have shown that providing alternative livelihood measures to the cultivators is the only way out. In Manipur although certain options like lemongrass have been considered, there is no certainty of a market for lemongrass even today. In the absence of a well-planned backward and forward linkage in terms of inputs, assistance, market, and value addition, the policies implemented to wean people from poppy cultivation seem to have only minuscule impact. Lemongrass as a

[101720291360172.html#:~:text=On%20June%2025%2C%20their%20search,a%20cavity%20under%20the%20taillight.](https://www.epw.in/engage/article/quest-end-illicit-poppy-cultivation-manipur)

²¹⁸<https://www.epw.in/engage/article/quest-end-illicit-poppy-cultivation-manipur>

crop is yet to find a market, and values from other crops fall short to meet the demands of the farmers' families and aspiration to lead a better life. The central question is: Who does not want to move out of poverty?²¹⁹

6.4.3. The contending narratives

6.4.3.1. Two contending narratives: The Meitei and State narrative: Illegal infiltration, poppy cultivation – the root cause of the violence

One narrative is that of the Meiteis which also seem to coincide with that of the State. The basic contours of that narrative are very well explained in an FIR filed by a Meitei organization against two reputed Kuki activists, one of whom had given an interview to a national channel. The interview was seen as divisive and potentially capable of exacerbating the situation and hence a complaint was filed against them by a Meitei activist. Some excerpts from the FIR are given below:

“....during the regimes of all previous governments in Manipur there were no process of identification of illegal immigrants, prosecution against large scale destruction of poppy cultivations, large scale seizure of narcotic substances, and eviction of illegal encroachments in forest area in the State of Manipur. But since the month of March 2017, this government started identifying illegal immigrants from Myanmar and other countries who are mainly labourers who have been brought in Manipur as labourers by big investors businessman in narcotic substances....Many leaders of the Kuki militants are the direct beneficiaries of these cartel and poppy is one of the main sources of terror funding of these Kuki terrorists who have mostly come from Myanmar. Therefore large scale destruction of poppy cultivation in the hill range measuring about 8000 acre, seizure of narcotic substances over the past 5 years; crackdown against Myanmarese immigrants, eviction of illegal encroachments in forest areas are some of the reasons why these narco-terrorists are up in arms against the State

²¹⁹<https://www.epw.in/engage/article/quest-end-illicit-poppy-cultivation-manipur>

Government of Manipur and all these narco-terrorists have been instigating the innocent Kuki community to attack against the Meitei villages in foothills across all districts. Moreover strict actions are been taken up by the present BJP led State government against all the illegal encroachments in the reserve and protected forest areas across all communities including the Meiteis/Kukis and also numerous actions have been taken against illegal construction in paddy fields. These are also the main reasons for the violence being instigated as the vested interested people as many illegal immigrants have started settling in the reserve and protected forests, they will forthwith start poppy cultivation as a main source of livelihood under the finance and control of these Kuki militants..”

“...We must also recall the information being made available to the public by the State government officials that the previous State government of Manipur destroyed only 66 acres of illegal poppy cultivation from 2013 to 2016. But the present State government under the leadership of Shri N. Biren Singh destroyed 18,664 acres of illegal poppy cultivation from 2017 to March 2023. And precisely more than 2699 acres of illegal poppy was destroyed in Churachandpur alone and as such armed narco-terrorists and their supporters in Churachandpur have every reason to wage war against the State...”

“...7.3 Thus the opium poppy is the key source for many narcotics including morphine, codeine and heroine. And, since 1972 it has been widely planted in the Hill Areas of Manipur especially in the Kuki dominated areas.

....7.4 That however the allegations are being made as if only the Kuki community has been prosecuted under the law of the land for illegal large scale cultivation of Poppy in the hill areas clearing of large tracts of Reserve/Protected Forest for Poppy cultivation, settlement of immigrants

of foreign countries etc. But the fact is that the Government of Manipur has taken serious actions under the ND&PS act and such related legislations and prosecuted everyone who has infringed the law of the land regardless of community affiliations and without differentiating caste, creed or religion i.e. is against those persons who are part of poppy plantations, forest encroachments and such illegalities. Hence the allegation of targeting the Kuki community by the State government is baseless and wrong. It is also reported in the many newspapers that the destruction of the illegal poppy plantations is carried out all over the State of Manipur and the same is not confined only to a specific area or community. The complainants have tried everything to obtain relevant documents from SP NAB, Forest Department, Police Department etc. as relevant to the present case but they refused to provide the details. Therefore the complainants crave leave of this Hon'ble Court to direct the State authorities to disclose the correct documents and the police may seize the same as part of the case record in the interest of justice.....”

The key ingredients of this narrative are illegal (Kuki) immigrants who have infiltrated into Manipur from Myanmar, engaging in poppy cultivation and drug trafficking under the patronage of Kuki extremist groups that foment terror and insurgency in Manipur. Key to this narrative is the construction of the category: ‘illegal infiltrators linked to narco-terror’. Depending on the position in the ideological spectrum, different actors takes positions vis-à-vis the State government – supporting it as they see the violence as a reaction to the war on drugs that this government has declared since 2017, thus triggering violence by the narco-terrorist Kuki outfit; or criticizing the government for being too soft on narco-terror, instead of exterminating them, necessitating vigilante groups such as Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Lipun.

Statements of leaders

The Statements of the top leadership – then Manipur CM Biren Singh in particular – seem to be in line with this narrative. While announcing the achievements of the ‘war on drugs’ campaign his government had launched, reportedly claiming to have destroyed over 19000 acres of poppy fields and 297 drug traffickers convicted, he said that the on-going crisis in the State is related to drugs and illegal poppy cultivation²²⁰. He had spoken along the same lines on national TV during the Independence Day speech in 2023, attributing the violence to poppy planters being part of a foreign plot to destabilize the country - conflict by those engaging in poppy plantation and drug business.²²¹

The Meitei depositions before the Tribunal reveal the manner in which this narrative finds expression among the common people.

“...Maximum number of poppy cultivation is in Kuki areas. There are a lot of journalists defending poppy cultivation....”²²²

“...I have a friend who is Kuki. Who still goes to office with me in Gurgaon. We know that in my town - they plant poppies in the hills. There is a saying (Kuki song) - saying even if we don’t have money or a government job, we will do poppy plantation so get wooed by me. It is a recent song....”²²³

6.4.3.2. The Kuki-Zo Counter: A conspiracy to criminalize and demonize the Kuki-Zo and take control of the Hills

Some of the Kuki depositions before the Jury more or less concur with the view that people belonging to all communities (Tangkhul, Nagas,

²²⁰Manipur crisis co-related with war on drugs campaign: CM Biren Singh | Latest News India - Hindustan Times

²²¹NmMD24

²²²Deposition of MeMD27-1

²²³Deposition of MeMD27-2

Kukis and Meiteis) are engaged in poppy cultivation; Kuki-Zo alone cannot be singled out as the ones responsible for the same. At the same time, they also point to the large scale drug trafficking that goes on, which has patronage at the highest levels, thus demolishing the argument that the violence is the handiwork of the ‘poppy cultivators’ and narco-terrorists.

The following Statements by the Kuki deponents amply illustrate this:

“Everybody is involved. We are the cultivators because we are living in the hills. Tangkhul, Nagas, Kukis, and Meiteis, who are settled in the hills, are all involved. We are cultivators. We are peddlers. But we are not the ones actually dealing with it.”²²⁴

“...I had a farm. My father, during his off time, goes and cultivates poppy. He gets a per day wage. He is not selling the poppy. Drug cases have always been from the other community. The CM’s second wife has a pending case, ex-CM’s nephew (roughly around 2017-18 - he joined BJP and the case was caput). There are cases, but we are not the ones doing it...”²²⁵

“...Biren Singh was warned in 2022 that this demand for ST status will lead to a communal war but didn't listen. Because we have land, and they are at the top of the poppy trade business. We are poor, and we are given money to cultivate, but they are the financiers. We have very weak education and health etc. They are blaming us for being poppy cultivators. Kukis are not the only cultivators, and we are not the ones who run the trade, it is Biren. If they are against the poppy trade, why do they not target the top of the business....”²²⁶

Thus it appears that the Kuki-Zo narrative is more of a counter-narrative, a defence against the stereo-type of the ‘illegal infiltrators’, ‘poppy

²²⁴Deposition of KMD11

²²⁵Deposition of KMD11

²²⁶Deposition of KMD13

cultivators’ and ‘narco-terrorist’ image that the Meitei-State narrative has been seeking to disseminate. They repeatedly stress that while the poor and marginalized Kuki-Zo farmers may find poppy cultivation a convenient way out of poverty, it has been the powerful drug traffickers who enjoy political patronage who have been creating the demand for poppy, and those at the helm of this illegal narcotics trade were certainly not Kuki-Zos.

An expert deponent also raised questions on the veracity of the purported increase in poppy cultivation. As per the UNODC - Myanmar opium survey of 2022 - among the areas bordering Manipur - no spike in poppy plantation is visible except in one small part in Churachandpur and Chandel districts. There has been no spike in poppy plantations at the scale that it has been made out to be.²²⁷

Moreover, news reports and other evidence points to the fact that the Kuki-Zo farmers were also cooperating with the State government in checking out the alternatives to poppy such as lemongrass and cardamom. On 25 February 2021 representatives from 33 communities in Manipur took a pledge to end poppy cultivation under the banner “All Communities Convention for a Pledge against Illegal Poppy Plantation” as a response to the Chief Minister’s call to support the “War on Drugs” (Morung Express 2021).²²⁸ It is also pertinent to note that in a deposition to the Jury representatives of the United Naga Council stated that even Kuki organisations are against drugs as much as the Nagas are.

The counter-narrative of the Kuki-Zo thus seeks to demolish the constructed image of them being illegal immigrants, poppy cultivators and narco-terrorists; while highlighting the fact that the illegal international

²²⁷NmMD24 Delhi Tribunal 24

²²⁸<https://www.epw.in/engage/article/quest-end-illicit-poppy-cultivation-manipur>

narcotics trade is controlled by powerful politicians and drug traffickers that extend beyond the boundaries of Manipur. The demonization of the Kuki-Zo in this manner was required to evoke hatred in the minds of the Meiteis, thus giving them an emotional justification for the violence that was and still continues to be perpetrated against the Kuki-Zo. The real agenda behind this demonization and targeted violence against the Kuki-Zo is to dispossess them of the Hills and thus enabling the State to take over those resources. The demand for inclusion of the Meiteis in the ST should be seen from this perspective, which is what really triggered the violence more than any other factor. It is this core issue that is being diverted through the demonization of the Kuki-Zo and the violence unleashed against them.

6.5. Disruption of inter-community / inter-religious harmony in Manipur: The narratives fueling conflict

From the testimonies received by the Tribunal, it is evident that the violence in Manipur was waiting to happen, or there was sufficient indication that there was a preparation going on for violence. The history of intercommunity violence shows that it is always preceded by organised hate propaganda leading to suspicion, fear and alienation between communities. The communities involved in the violence are turned into enemies of each other. One's existence is then seen as a threat to the other. The propaganda convinces the target people that the other is conspiring to steal or capture their resources and destroy them physically. All this makes the social ground fertile for violence. Long held prejudices about each other are whipped up and given new life which can then act as justification for violence. You invent a reason to attack the other. 'Historical' accounts which have become part of the common sense are weaponized. When violence starts, we see in some cases both sides get involved. But the nature of the violence changes when the state starts acting on behalf of one community.

This is exactly what happened in Manipur. It becomes starkly clear from the testimonies and other sources that the functionaries of the ruling party in Manipur from the Meitei community took the role of the guardian or friend of the Meitei community, while instigating violence against the Kukis by actively spreading hatred and mistrust against the Kuki people. Apart from them there were organised groups like Meitei Lupun and Arambai Tenggol which indulged in hate propaganda against the Kuki people. With them were the media and hate-mongering people who through different channels continued spreading lies and hate against Kukis.

In addition to the ‘historical’ myth propagated in the Meitei society that Kukis are outsiders allowing their portrayal as illegal immigrants, a systematic campaign was launched to describe Kukis as narco terrorists: criminals engaged in poppy cultivation which work against the national interests. As one of the testimonies of an independent journalist in the online medium, IGD6, states:

“The Meitei-Kuki conflict was not built up in a day, but engineered over months and years.

- Trouble was stirred up from Oct-Nov 2022 near Brinda Thounaojam’s constituency by the BJYM (Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha) president, Barish Sharma.
- Though Barish is just the Youth President, he acts as though he is like the BJP President of Manipur, going around in convoys of cars. Barish does everything under Biren Singh.
- Barish was going to Kuki villages in the hills during that time to plant tree saplings for an environmental drive, but the Kuki chiefs stopped him and a gun-showdown happened.

- That is when the divisive propaganda between Kukis and Meiteis started, with Barish alleging that poppy was being cultivated in those lands so they did not allow us to pass.
- The propaganda was built up in a big way, with Meitei Pangal peasants being touted to peddle drugs, and then slowly shifting entirely to the Kukis growing and peddling drugs.
- A false urgency to act against these miscreants started getting built.”

The name of the BJP functionary Barish Sharma appears frequently on social media platforms and elsewhere but it was not only him who alleged that Kukis were doing poppy cultivation. The then Chief Minister Biren Singh himself, on several occasions made this allegation implying that violence against Kukis was somehow justified as it was part of an anti-terrorist drive. In the initial phase of violence it was reported that Biren Singh himself called Kukis illegal migrants. The Wire reported,

"Since the outbreak of the ethnic violence, the chief minister has tried to push the blame on insurgents, and a narrative of Kuki community harbouring “illegal migrants” from a civil war-affected Myanmar and accusing the Kuki SCO groups of indulging in ‘narco terrorism’. Chief of the Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan on May 31 has contradicted the chief minister’s claims and said that the violence in Manipur was not linked to “insurgency” but “a conflict involving people from two ethnicities.” (Wire²²⁹)

Biren Singh claimed that “The current crisis in Manipur is not a clash between ethnic groups and not a law-and-order issue of the state, but purely a war against the Indian Union by Myanmar and Bangladesh based

²²⁹<https://thewire.in/government/special-days-before-mha-was-to-finalise-kuki-accord-not-supported-by-cm-violence-broke-out-in-manipur>

Kuki militants in collaboration with militant groups operating in Manipur.” (Deccan Herald²³⁰)

This allegation was reinforced by think tanks which are seen as sympathetic to the present government sitting in Delhi also made similar indications:

“Some analysts have also pointed to the role of narcoterrorism in the recent unrest in Manipur, where Kuki militants and a drug mafia have allegedly incited violence against Meitei communities.” (ORF²³¹.)

The role of Biren Singh as the fountain head of the hate campaign and violence is substantiated by an audio tape which has his voice, as strongly suggested by the Truth Lab (which says that there is a 93% match between the voice sample of the tape and Biren Singh.²³²). As claimed, he is heard as saying,

“So, now...how has this issue started from/originated? I saw all of these...When I saw all of these, I started operations [unclear]. We started seeking governmental land over reserved forest land, protected forest land. The incidents that have followed...haven't you seen on the map? Don't you feel like crying? I have been studying all of these for the past 10-15 years now. Something like this was bound to happen...But the number of Naga villages have not increased...check the areas inhabited by the Naga indigenous people and even within Imphal. The areas in Imphal, Nagaram, Tangkhul avenue, there has been no increase in villages and they (Kuki) just spread through Veng...Veng (village or colony).”

²³⁰<https://www.deccanherald.com/india/manipur/its-a-war-against-indian-union-says-manipur-cm-biren-singh-on-the-ongoing-violence-in-state-2708582>

²³¹<https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-narcoterrorism-challenge-to-india-s-national-security>

²³²<https://m.thewire.in/article/law/supreme-court-truth-lap-manipur-tapes-biren-singh-audio>

“At the secretariat, we don’t have our people because of their quota, they have filled up the IPS, IAS. They are all there in the IAS service. Our Naga brethren are not too interested in this side, they are concentrated on their independence. There might be just 5-10 out of a 100 and so, they [Kukis] have a total capture.”

“In the Secretariat, there are 12 secretariat officers and of the 12, there are 11 of them [Kukis].”

What is said in this conversation is an understanding that has become a common sense in the Meitei community: that Kukis are occupying all high posts in the government and they are expanding their territory.

On 9th February, 2025, Chief Minister Biren Singh tendered his resignation after presiding over the violence for more than 900 days. But even in his resignation letter he persists with his propaganda. The Wire reports²³³: "While resigning from his post , Biren Singh asked the Union government to “maintain the territorial integrity of Manipur which has a rich and diverse civilisational history over thousands of years”. He also requested a crackdown “on border infiltration”, for the formulation of a policy to deport “illegal immigrants”, and “to continue the fight against drugs and narco-terrorism.”.

In the testimony given by a Meitei politician, IGD2, the claim of Kukis being outsiders is thus explained:

“- Kukis are unreliable and untrustworthy. During the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857, they joined rebellion. It is said they killed freedom fighters and surrendered their arms to British. As reward they were armed by British.

²³³<https://thewire.in/politics/biren-singh-tenders-resignation>

This happened in Sylhet Area of Northern Bangladesh. Lt. Col. Rajendra has said in video.

- Between 1910 to 1917 a house tax of Rs. 3/- was being levied, which had to be paid to Maharaja. However, the Kuki rebelled against it between 1917 to 1919, the Maharaja and the British suppressed this rebellion. It was not a rebellion against the Crown/King but against Maharaja, it is wrongly represented 1 . Kukis were put in Kohima jail, however pursuant to them writing a mercy petition, they were released without punishment, they were let off by terming them ‘wild tribals’.
- The Sadar hills of Manipur are inhabited by Kukis. Kukis were planted there initially by British to control the King.
- Kukis are immigrants who came from Myanmar in large numbers. Kukis have been conducting highway blockades for 20 years. Kuki militants have been looting trucks, engaging in extortion, beating people. However the Central / State government has not done anything to stop this.
- Kukis have been making their own roads, highways and bridges. They have heavy machinery and fuel. They are very rich and have amassed a lot of wealth. They have grand and beautiful European-looking houses in their villages.”

We can conclude from this testimony that in the popular Meitei mind, Kukis are not only intruders but they are also seen as illegal people who have cornered huge wealth which should have been with the Meiteis. It creates envy against them in Meitei minds. This is what was done with Jews who were portrayed as people who had stolen wealth from the Germans. We also see it being used as a trope against Muslims which are sought to be shown as being favoured as against Hindus by the secular parties.

The Tribunal’s interaction with a group of Meira Paibi women, (IGD4), revealed the influence these narratives have had. The Meira Paibi women shared strong views about Kukis, including—

“- Now they are demanding a separate administration, and autonomous state (Jalengam).

- We are fighting for peace. But Kukis objective is the other way from the beginning - by smuggling drugs, cultivating poppies, having lots of arms.

- It is not a religious conflict. We also have Christians. They are trying to portray that Meiteis are against Christianity. Kukis started to burn down Meiteis' churches and temples. This is very emotional. And here Meiteis burnt down Kuki churches.

- Kuki women are having congenial relations with Assam Rifles. Such is their character.”

Several deponents gave testimonies explaining how this propaganda led to the creation of a mass resentment against Kukis. We often encountered during the tribunal hearings, the narrative of “Kuki – Zo illegal” - like a weed in the garden, dispensable, that should be thrown out.

A Kuki deponent (KFO8) informed that while one after the other, areas were burning they used to sit till 2 in the morning looking at videos that were uploaded accusing Kukis of doing different things on social media and trying to create a whole false narrative. He recalled that when former Chief Minister Biren Singh came out in the media saying that he has waged a war against the Kukis - the narco-terrorists, was the day when the whole night the Sukmo area was burning. He said that since long, Biren Singh had been trying to somehow indoctrinate people that all Kukis are narco-terrorists, they are illegal immigrants, poppy planters.

Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai describes this as, “a dominant majority, believes that the continuing existence of a minority will be a threat to their society”. This is a theoretical framework based on the ‘fear of small numbers’. A lot of this is based on alarmism and numerical exaggerations wherein small batches of refugees and undocumented migrants are

inflated into a critical mass that supposedly threatens the majority. Wild figures are thrown around to alarm the people. We see the same process happening in Assam. Hyperbolic exaggeration of refugee numbers, or outsider numbers which threaten the demographic profile of the society.

At a meeting held with youth activists in Imphal, IGD10, the activists shared their disappointment at the growing hatred. They said that, “the hatred between communities in Manipur has been there for many years. The demand for ST status was just an excuse. Everyone has their own interests. It could have taken one week to stop the violence everywhere. But why is it taking so long? Any person who questions the state is targeted.” They felt that the anti-drug campaign was just an eyewash. “So far no drug kingpin has been arrested. No sincere effort has been put by the government for an anti-drug campaign.”

They conveyed that an impetus to hate was given, “When the Chief Minister himself started spewing hatred against his own people, it provided a boost to an already existing hate narrative.” They said that social media has played a huge role in spreading hate. They lamented that it has been impossible for them to do anything to building peace. “We have lots of Kuki friends, who had completely lost touch with us.”

The propaganda in Manipur was on the familiar lines: demographic anxiety was ignited in the mind of the majority community, which in this case is the Meitei community. All this then got amplified by hundreds of twitter handles and other social media platforms.

NmMD24, a researcher, writer and expert on North East India, Myanmar and armed conflicts, informed the Tribunal of the extent of disinformation in Manipur on and around the conflict. He shared that “There was imagery of Kukis being savages and drug peddlers. There was a video where a Kuki is crossing a fragile bamboo bridge, it was used in

the context of illegal immigration. Later it was found out that it did not belong to Manipur. Very sophisticated disinformation had moved beyond the borders of Manipur and reached the national platform.” He said this disinformation continued during the violence. Rape as a weapon of war was amplified in the digital space with the messaging of “They raped our women so we must rape them back.” He said that the lines between misinformation and disinformation are blurred. Citing as an example, he shared that, “The incident (naked parade) itself was triggered by a WhatsApp message of a supposed rape of a Meitei woman. So disinformation was circulating not just on social media but also on private apps like WhatsApp, which were used to mobilise masses to attack the other community.”

The hate being spread also has a communal colour. A professor (NmMO10) shared about the anti-Christian sentiment amongst the Meitei groups like Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun, which was also displayed during the conflict which saw the burning and destruction of Churches. At a meeting with the Meitei Christian community, IGD14, in Imphal, the members described the extent of attacks on Churches. They shared that they were attacked because of their religion. They also shared that they have been tagged as informers for Kukis and that has also led to the hatred against them. They said that “When a Hindu does something wrong, he is blamed individually. But Meitei Christians are blamed as a community.”

Providing testimony of the growing communalism in the region, a member of the Pangal community, IGD11, also shared that their community was victim of communalism and communal violence. “There is an element of discrimination against our community. Before this ethnic violence, we were also targetted by the ultra-nationalist group of the Meitei majority.” He also recalled the anti-Muslim communal riots that took place in Manipur in 1993, in which within 2 days they lost 300 people and

the violence took place like a pogrom. “There was a claim that Ciengaichin was a holy place of the Meiteis. It was a communal tense time. It started on 3 May 1993. Some underground activists were engaged with the local Muslim community to buy guns. When they refused, the violence erupted and it was definitely pre-planned.” He conveyed that 30 years to that day the conflict has erupted between Meiteis and Kukis, and with the general atmosphere of growing communalism, the insecurity can also be felt within their minority community.

6.6. Emergence of new militias and arming the radical groups and citizen groups

The role played by armed militias in the Manipur conflict is glaring. Two relatively new militant groups which stand in the eye of the tornado – with numerous allegations against them including active participation in the conflict to looting of arms from state armouries – are Arambai Tenggol (AT) and Meitei Leepun (ML). Both these organisations, which are engaged in the Sanamahi revivalist movement, have close connections to Hindu right wing organisations such as the BJP and the RSS. Arambai Tenggol was founded by the titular Meitei king of Manipur, Leishemba Sanajaoba, who is also the Rajya Sabha member from the BJP. Sanajaoba also remains the chairman of Arambai Tenggol till this date and a video posted by Sanajaoba captured the oath taking ceremony of Arambai Tenggol being conducted at his residence.²³⁴

Apart from Sanajaoba, Arambai Tenggol also enjoys the patronage of the former BJP Chief Minister Biren Singh who has photographs with the

²³⁴<https://www.facebook.com/HHSanjaoba.Leishemba/videos/430995689136627/>

members of the organisation which were posted by the organisation on their Facebook page²³⁵.

On the other hand, Pramot Singh who is the leader of Meitei Leepun, was a member of Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, the student's wing of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh which is the parent organisation of BJP. A person who had till recently held a senior position in a statutory body recalled having witnessed a training camp run by RSS cadres in Pangei which she visited in 2022. She told the Tribunal:

“I was surprised to see young boys undergoing training for 3 months, 6 months there. People who ran the camps were from Karnataka.

They were trained on various issues. I didn't exactly discuss what it was but they were radicalised, taught about Hinduism, culture of India. There were training sessions for women as well. Only Meiteis were participating, not the tribals.

They had gaushala there, food was vaishnavian. I asked my friend - what is the purpose of establishing such a camp here? They said Meiteis are also Hindus, they are converted Hindus. They follow the Sanamahi faith and can be assimilated into Hinduism but they wanted them to really become the real hindus.

They have already established the International University of Manipur which was run by the chairman of RSS - it was very close to the airport and was established right before COVID. They bought some land in the hill areas of Manipur.”

²³⁵<https://www.itlfmediacell.com/the-rise-of-arambai-tenggol/> (We can take the relevant pictures from the article since the article is by ITLF)

NmMO10, a professor who has studied the two groups, in his deposition mentions the context in which the AT and ML were formed. The politics of ‘indigeneity’ which has been going on for about 20 years has in a significant manner fostered extreme views that made conditions favourable to the formation of AT and MT. NmMO10 also believes that the rhetoric of Kukis being ‘illegal immigrants’ from Myanmar moved from being a fringe idea into a mainstream idea over a decade from 2012; the Sanamahi revivalism that also instilled a growing perception of Christianity being a threat to the ‘Hindu’ Sanamahi tradition of the Meiteis with its own demographic myth of the depleting population of Hindus (Meiteis); and the strengthening of Meitei nationalism that yearned to revive the traditional Meitei Kingdom (Kangleipak) – all created conditions favourable to the formation of extremist militias such as the AT and the MS.

NmMO10 also opined that it is obvious that the two groups enjoy state patronage, when “.. you see a State policeman standing next to somebody carrying this stolen gun, you wonder how this is allowed to happen? So there's several, you know, hundreds of pictures of that kind on Twitter.”

NmMD24, a researcher and writer whose expertise lies in the topics of North East India, Myanmar and armed conflicts, deposed before the Tribunal regarding the creation and escalation of a militia state in the state of Manipur. He stated as follows:

“When we talk about the creation of a militia state in the form of AT, what do we mean by militia state? Simply the existence of armed groups? No. The NE since many decades has had armed groups. We mean a direct nexus between armed group and a state and incontrovertible evidence to prove that there is a connection between the state govt and the AT. The CM gave a speech on AT about why they are holding onto their arms. He said they are doing it for defence, till the other side is disarmed. This is rationalization of the existence of AT and justification of their armed

status. This reaffirms the belief that there is a relation between the Meitei political elite and the AT. There have also been instances of the AT riding Manipur police jeeps and using their assets. During the Kangla Fort event of 24 January, 2024, they forced politicians to take a certain oath. Security cover was withdrawn. AT has gone from a rag tag militia to a state in waiting.”

NmMD24 made the above observation in the context of several cases of robberies in state armouries allegedly carried out by the Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun. In one suo moto FIR filed by the Porompat Police Station under section 25(1-A) of Arms Act, Barish Sharma, the former President of BJYM, was reported as concealing illegal arms and ammunitions and the following weapons were recovered from his possession at his house:

- i. One Glock 17 gun along with a magazine bearing no. LDK328
- ii. One Glock gun along with a magazine bearing no. SNM885
- iii. One Glock empty magazine
- iv. One Steyr Mannlicher Pistol along with a magazine

However, Sharma was released on bail merely a week after his arrest²³⁶.

Instances of impunity enjoyed by these militias are rampant and the state has deliberately turned a blind eye to the complaints raised against these actors. Human rights activists, lawyers as well as journalists have repeatedly raised alarm against the conduct of these organisations, while many prominent individuals engaged in advocacy for peace between the conflicting communities in Manipur has faced serious threats as well as full-fledged attacks by these militant organisations²³⁷. Despite continuous appeals made to the government, no significant progress has been made

²³⁶<https://imphaleast.dcourts.gov.in/case-status-search-by-petitioner-respondent/>; Cross reference to chapter 10 of this report.

²³⁷Cross refer to chapter 10. (NOTE: WHAT DOES THIS MEAN???)

towards ensuring justice and accountability. Police officials in the valley refuse to cooperate to bring these militant outfits to justice, and it is pertinent to note that the NHRC too, has failed to efficiently and adequately address the grave situation brought about by these groups²³⁸

On 31st May, 2024, members of the Tribunal during a meeting with the Inspector General of Assam Rifles/Major General asked about the future of Manipur. Clearly expressing his concerns regarding the robbed and unrecovered arms and ammunitions he stated:

“One of the worries is de-weaponisation of society since everyone is freely using weapons. Arambai Tenggol, Meitei Leepun, etc hold around 6000-7000 weapons in 600 sq. km. and most of these weapons are automatic weapons which have been looted from the police armoury....Moreover, the perpetrators should be taken to task. Investigation and rule of law must prevail. De-weaponisation is required to remove romanticization of war.”

In a report released in December, 2023 [UK3] by the Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF) titled '*#MANIPURMAYHEM – Key Players and Events*' the rise of Arambai Tenggol and its newfound prominence has been linked to the ethnic violence that broke out in the state on May 3, 2023. The report claims that the Arambai Tenggol conducts recruitment drives among the young and disaffected youths and that before the violence erupted in the state, the group used social media and other online platforms to spread propaganda in an effort to radicalise the Meitei population and recruit young people. The report asserts that Meitei linked outfits like KYKL, PLA and the UNLF which are banned under the UAPA, are supporting Arambai Tenggol as it enjoys patronage from the ruling party. The report, while claiming a significant role for Arambai Tenggol in the violence, reported that 4000 weapons were looted by the

²³⁸Cross refer to chapter 10

group in May 2023 alone from state armouries. As per a recent India Today report²³⁹ Arambai Tenggol surrendered 246 weapons looted from the state armouries to the security forces on the last day of the deadline fixed to return arms and ammunition by Governor Ajay Bhalla. The report goes on to lament that,

“Despite a plethora of evidence of Arambai Tenggol’s leading role in the violence – witness testimonies, social media posts and quotes from security officers deployed in the state – the government and the chief minister has not said a word condemning the group. No action has been taken to arrest their members or curb their activities.”

The Tribunal also witnessed the growing militancy and radicalisation of the general populace in Manipur. On 30.05.2024, the Tribunal visited Kakching district to meet the Convenor and members of a Meitei youth forum called the LangsaiThouna as well as the Meira Paibis. The Tribunal was informed that the Meira Paibis along with Meitei youths have successfully carried out a road blockade at the entrance to the town of Moreh which is Kuki dominated. They ensure that no Kuki can either enter or exit Moreh, and also ensure that no essential items are delivered into Moreh. The women and youth groups keep a close eye on and regulate every person and every vehicle crossing the blockade, including the army and the Assam Rifles. The convenor of the organisation told the Tribunal:

“There is a refugee camp in Moreh for Burmese Kukis – it is called a relief camp and houses around 5000 people. The Kuki MLA in Tengnoupal, managed to open a relief camp. Most protests in Moreh are by these Kukis. Youths are trained in this relief camp to become militants. Meitei population is about 7000-8000 in Moreh. There are two relief camps in Thoubal, 32 relief camps in Kakching with around 6000 population. No

²³⁹<https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/manipur-arm-surrender-deadline-meitei-group-arambai-tenggol-return-firearms-2686623-2025-02-27>

Meitei can travel on road through Moreh, so we also do not let them pass. We are not an armed group, but we are waging a war. We are waging a war against Kukis, we do not let essential commodities and food pass this road to Moreh. No trucks were allowed to pass through here for 6-7 months from both sides. Now, we allow Pangals to pass. We entered into agreement that only items for the Muslims will be carried. Earlier we stopped all transport of items from and to Moreh. The Kukis in Moreh are not in a good position but there are other roads through CCPur, etc. Everyday, more than 400 trucks travel from outside to Imphal through Moreh. For one truck, Kukis are charging 15-20 thousand depending on the item. We caught one truck of Topaz Blades which Kukis use to cut poppy.”

“The women stand vigil here all day, they take turns. From 6 am to 1 pm, first colony’s Meira Paibis stand vigil. From 1 to 9, second colony’s and from 9 to 6, third colony’s. We stopped Assam Rifles for 2.5 months. We only allowed BSF with company of State forces. The IGAR (South) came and negotiated but Meira Paibis do not want them. Assam Rifles never force us to pass through when we block the road. If they try to pass, we block the road by sitting in front of their vehicles. After 2.5 months, we allowed essential items and movement for the army but only with our permission. The Assam Rifles report to us and we coordinate with the police.”

The above account by the convenor of LangsaiThouna reveals the anger of the Meitei youth regarding the danger to the lives of 7000-8000 Meiteis in Moreh and disturbed about the 32 relief camps for Meitei in Kakching and other places where the Kukis are in majority. The expression “we are waging a war against Kukis” shows the seriousness of the situation, and the perceptions of the Meiteis regarding the Kukis. The perception that the violence has been spearheaded by the Burmese Kukis who are trained

in militancy in the refugee camps is strong, and serves as a justification of Meitei violence – retaliatory or in the defence of their people.

In the above accounts, the absence of state control was as striking as the claims of cooperation between the youth organisation and the state forces. The civilian groups showed the Tribunal tickets or passes which they issue to those who they allow to pass to or from Moreh, and these passes are issued against a fixed amount of fee. In short, these civilian groups, often armed, have replaced the state forces in certain parts of Manipur and are running, unabashedly and without hindrance, a parallel administration. The convenor of LangsaïThouna also informed the Tribunal that many youths have taken up arms, like the Arambai Tenggol.

Several survivors' accounts reveal how civilian mobs were accompanied by these radical and extremist organisations. On both sides, radicalised civilian populations also engaged in looting and killing²⁴⁰. The radicalisation of the population was also revealed through testimonies of experts and commentators. The Major General [UK5] relayed an incident wherein the Assam Rifles caught 11 cadres from the Meitei community openly roaming with weapons in Bishnupur:

“As soon as we caught them, they informed the Meira Paibis, who came and tried to manhandle the army men. First, the army tried to reason with them, then on the order of the Commanding Officer, gun was shot in the air. However, the Meira Paibis kept on insisting for the release of the cadres. Finally, we kept the arms and released the cadres. We are negotiating for peace, that does not mean we are weak. Barring two acts of violence, no loss of life has occurred in the last four months. We accept restrictions imposed by the people in order to maintain peace.”

²⁴⁰Cross refer to chapter 5

Even though the Major General stated that the army negotiates with the militants in order to maintain peace, it seems unlikely that it is the only reason. It was clear from the narration of the incident that the Assam Rifles was overpowered by the militants and the Meira Paibis, and had to give in to their illegal demands.

The Tribunal also noted with grave concern that many of the survivors spoke of their relatives being village volunteers who are assigned the duty of protecting their villages from the other community. A report titled ‘Manufacturing Ethnic Segregation and Conflict: A Report on the Violence in Manipur’, published by the CPI(ML), AIPWA and AILAJ, discusses the issue of arming civilian population:

“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 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.²⁴¹”

²⁴¹https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Fg9FM_WmJGM5MgUfjaUCEH8qso8wxwQL/view?usp=drive_link

It is evident that the distrust between the two communities has led them to feel the need to protect themselves and to pick up arms. Manipur is grasped not only by militant organisations who have their own vested interests in continuing the conflict, but it is also witnessing radicalisation of its population which will have long lasting effects that will outlive the conflict. It is not only essential to de-weaponise but also to de-radicalise the population, and to build trust between the different communities to enable them to live harmoniously.

Chapter 7: Popular writings in the print and electronic media

7.1. Overview

Media plays a crucial role during any violence. Often as a mitigating force, spreading awareness and safeguarding bystanders from the violence. But more often than not, as an agent of aggravation and escalation, spreading misinformation and stoking bystanders into participating in the violence. The Manipur ethnic conflict had a deliberate and polarizing nature to it, almost as if it was a civil conflict that was live-streamed as it unfolded. This is a well-known page taken out of the playbook of weaponizing the media to shock and provoke bystanders, triggering fresh violence and intensifying the actual conflict. Numerous reports speak of how digital violence has broken through the screen and contributed to actual violence on the ground. In fact, the Manipur violence is amongst the first episodes of mass violence in India where the entire outbreak of violence can be directly traced to how incidents and events were covered by the media – both by mainstream as also the social media. Depending on the purpose for which the message was sought to be conveyed, participants, survivors, and victims were depicted to either show the actuality of an event as it played out or to spread fake news, mis-information and dis-information. It therefore becomes crucial to examine the role played by the media critical in understanding the nature and extent of the ongoing conflict.

7.2. Politics of Media and Violence: An Explanatory Framework

Before we look at anecdotes and facts that highlight the role that media played in the conflict, it will be useful to construct a framework that will serve as a context to examine these facts. This is important for two

reasons. The first reason is so that one can appreciate the different nuances and types of news that aggravate a conflict, and the second is so that one can account for the direct correlation between the news that is disseminated and the action, or more accurately, the reaction seen on the ground in the aftermath of the news. For this, we build upon and reference some concepts laid out in a paper by VanlalhruiiKhawlhing (2024) titled 'Exploring the Ethical Implications of Fake News with special reference to Manipur, India'.

7.2.1. Definitions

In their work "Defining 'Fake news'," Tandoc, Lim and Ling (2017) offer a thorough analysis of the phrase "fake news." The authors define fake news as information that lacks the journalistic procedures and moral/ethical standards that distinguish real news sources, and offers inaccurate, misleading or sensationalizing material in a style that looks like real news and masquerades similar credibility.

Fake news can be further categorized as propaganda, satire, parody, fabrication, manipulation, and advertising. The degree of factuality, purpose and target audience differs throughout each category. For example, parody and satire frequently aim to indignify or mock rather than to trick, but fabrication and manipulation include purposeful lies meant to mislead and gaslight viewers.

Tandoc et al. not only classify fake news but also point out that it is most prevalent on digital platforms and social media handles since there is no editorial control or gatekeeping, which makes it easy for false information to spread. The authors stress the significance of comprehending the varied definitions and categories of fake news in order to effectively address its consequences on individuals, communities and state governance itself.

7.2.2. Few prominent Media Theories

7.2.2.1. Information Disorder Theory

Claire Wardle (2017) developed the Information Disorder Theory, a thorough framework for comprehending the different kinds of problematic information that are disseminated in media ecosystems. Disinformation, misinformation, and mal-information are the three main categories into which the theory divides misinformation.

Disinformation: False information that is intentionally spread to cause harm to an individual, social group, organization, or nation is referred to as disinformation. This kind of content is purposefully false and is frequently created to trick or influence viewers for financial, ideological, or political motives.

Example- On May 5th, 2023, there was a false report that said the bodies of 37 Meitei women and a Meitei child, aged 7, were being held for post-mortem examinations at Shija Hospital, a private medical college in Imphal, after they had been raped and murdered. The news was untrue though people spread the news in texts and on Twitter. According to Shija Hospital, the incident never happened as they are not allowed to perform post-mortems since they are a private hospital.

Misinformation: False information that is not meant to be harmful but nevertheless has the potential to do a great deal of harm is referred to as misinformation. People who really think the information is true but do not want to mislead or hurt others are frequently the ones disseminating this kind of information.

Example- A video from a national television news show (India Today) had been making the rounds on X (previously Twitter) since July 26th, 2023, amid the political impasse over the Manipur crisis. It purports that the Congress chairman in Manipur has blamed his own party for the violence in the northeastern state. According to the post, the president of the Manipur Congress wrote to Rahul Gandhi, accusing him of being responsible for the problem by pushing for the illegal immigration of

Bangladeshis and Rohingyas into Manipur for political reasons. On closer examination of the video, though, it becomes clear that the letter's author was not a member of the Congress but rather a local party. The author of the social media post mistook the anchor of the video's initial reference to “a Manipur regional party leader” for the Manipur Congress leader.

Malinformation: Genuine information disseminated with malicious intent is referred to as malinformation. This kind of information involves presenting accurate but deceptive information in an inappropriate setting or purposefully disclosing personal information to destroy someone's reputation.

Example- On 20th July, 2023, the arrest of a person from a minority group for his role in the attack was disseminated supposedly by one of the lawmakers for the ruling party. The individual was called the "primary accused of [the] Manipur case" as per the lawmaker's tweet, which received thousands of shares and over twenty thousand retweets. But this was a false statement. That day, a person from a minority group was indeed taken into custody by Manipur police, but for a completely different reason. The arrests, according to the police, happened in various places and had nothing to do with the women's attack. The mistake was addressed by news agency ANI, which had originally linked the arrest to the mob attack. They attributed it to a misinterpretation of police tweets. Thus, we see how the Information Disorder Theory is pertinent to the investigation of fake news in Manipur by helping us categorize and qualitatively distinguish between the different kinds of fake news peddled by both sides. This aids in tracing both the intent and impact of such news, especially when it is further used in conjunction with hate speech.

7.2.2.2 Media Effect Theory

Basing itself in the tradition of social cognitive theory, Albert Bandura (2001) developed the Media Effect Theory, which looks at how exposure to media material affects attitudes, behaviours, and beliefs. According to

the notion, people pick up knowledge by watching other people, and the media can be a very effective tool for this kind of observational learning. The Media Effect Theory is composed of various essential elements, such as:

Observational learning. Through seeing media representations, people pick up new attitudes or behaviour. This may result in people copying what they see or hear in the media or forming new opinions as a result.

Example- In the section titled, '4.2.2. Hate Speech by Political Leaders' in Chapter 4 above, the example of BJYM (Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha) President, Barish Sharma's visit to some Kuki villages in the hills during October-November 2022 is a prime example. "Barish was going to the hills during that time to plant tree saplings for an environmental drive, but the Kuki chiefs stopped him and a gun-showdown happened. That is when the divisive propaganda between Kukis and Meiteis started, with Barish alleging that poppy was being cultivated in those lands so they did not allow us to pass. The propaganda was built up in a big way, with Meitei Pangal peasants being touted to peddle drugs, and then slowly shifting entirely to the Kukis growing and peddling drugs. A false urgency to act against these miscreants started getting built".

Priming. Exposure to the media might affect people's interpretations of information or events that happen later. Priming gives people a context for comprehending linked concerns, which might shape their perceptions.

Example - In the section titled, '4.2.3. Biren Singh stereotyping of Kukis as poppy cultivators and illegal migrants', there are numerous instances where Biren Singh's repeated posts "demonstrate a consistent narrative of associating the Kuki communities with criminal activity, poppy cultivation, drug trafficking and being illegal immigrants. This rhetoric has not only reinforced harmful stereotypes but also deepened communal divisions and fostered an environment of distrust and hatred. Public platforms like Facebook and Twitter have amplified these narratives, further perpetuating prejudice through comments and discourse that scapegoat

the Kuki communities. Biren Singh also openly welcomed the aggravated responses of the Meitei community, whose claims were that the Kukis threatened their status and lives as the ‘indigenous people of Manipur’.

Framing: People's understanding or comprehension and interpretation of information can be influenced by the way it is presented in the media. The focus of framing is on how the media highlights and chooses which parts of reality to emphasize.

Example - In the section titled, ‘4.2.4. Widespread Hate Speech against Kuki communities’, “the series of statements, reports, and social media posts highlighted above reflect a pattern of rhetoric that associates the Kuki community with illegal activities, immigration issues, and land encroachment. This narrative, coupled with public statements and demands for measures such as the implementation of NRC and the inclusion of Meitei in the Scheduled Tribes category, appear to have contributed to growing mistrust and division between ethnic communities in Manipur. The framing of Kukis as "immigrants," "aliens," or "refugees," and the portrayal of their activities as a threat to indigenous identities, suggests a targeted discourse that may have fuelled communal tensions during this period”.

Thus, we see how a counter-narrative is built in a logical, coordinated, planned and systematic process of dissemination of fake news over a long period of time. In the Observational Learning stage, a subconscious link started getting made between poppy cultivators and Kukis. In this stage, associations were largely anecdotal or circumstantial, usually lacking substantive proof or legitimacy. In the Priming stage, the same associations were reinforced through a series of posts that not only generalized these anecdotes to the entire population but clearly legitimized these subconscious associations and articulated them to the entire world. Therefore, the moment one heard Kuki, they were likely to immediately think of them as ‘poppy cultivators’ and ‘illegal immigrants’. The key to

this stage was the constant and consistent contorting of facts to reinforce a certain narrative. In the final stage of Framing, the mistrust, hate and othering that was already established and legitimized is now normalized. Calls for urgent action to safeguard against these ‘aliens’, ‘infiltrators’ and ‘narco-terrorists’ can be safely and effectively made now. This call for action is not merely in defence but in active offense, as if any compassion or mercy might make the Meiteis vulnerable to some evil plot of the Kukis. It is behind this narrative that a renewed push towards granting ST-status to Meiteis emerged and culminated in the highly contentious High Court order of March, 27th, 2023. After this, any escalation promoted by inflammatory posts from either side, only added more fuel to an already towering pile of dynamite stacked over time. This was seen in the run-up of the final few weeks to the violence that erupted on 3rd May, 2023. The kind of hate-speech and dog-whistling that ran rampant on the day of the ATSUM rally finally ignited a full-scale ethnic war with which the Manipur ethnic conflict officially began.

To conclude this section, we can see how the Media Effect Theory provides a useful framework to trace the different stages of escalation and a similar pattern can be traced out in posts that went viral during and after the initial round of violence. People's impressions of the opposing group, for instance, had been continuously shaped by media portrayals of the clashes, which would have heightened fear or hate in both groups. Fake news reports had primed people to see future events in a specific manner, which would have exacerbated the clashes. As disinformation ran rampant in the aftermath of the violence, one can see how the media continued to be weaponized to influence people's attitudes and perceptions, provoking fresh rounds of violence (like Jiribam in June 2024) and continue to fester irreconcilable fissures within communities on geographic, ethnic, economic and political lines.

7. 3. Popularity of Media Channels in Manipur

With a population last recorded of 27 lakh²⁴² Manipur is served by a multitude of media outlets catering to the interests of different communities. Historically speaking, though the development of media was slow in Manipur, there is significant increase in recent years, particularly in digital media and social media. This has been reflected in the growing popularity of YouTube news channels, whose subscription numbers indicate high engagement of Manipuris with the news. It appears that the Imphal Valley is much more developed and there are many more daily newspapers, television channels and digital platforms in Imphal than in the rest of the State²⁴³. The landscape of the media looks as follows:

7.3.1. Print Media

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. HueiyenLanpao (Meitei)
8. NaharolgiThoudang (Meitei)

7.3.2. Youtube Channels

1. Tom TV (9 lakh subscribers)
2. Impact TV (8 lakh subscribers)
3. ISTV Live (5 lakh subscribers)
4. Elite TV (2.8 lakh subscribers)
5. RK Production (2.6 lakh subscribers)
6. MAMI TV Network (2 lakh subscribers)
7. Hornbill Cable Network (1.7 lakh subscribers)

²⁴²<https://mdoner.gov.in/about-north-east/manipur>

²⁴³<https://dipr.mn.gov.in/infoApp.aspx?par=list%20of%20media%20at%20dipr;>

8. TC News Network (1 lakh subscribers)

7.3.3. Social Media

Given the relative lack of interest from national media, particularly after the initial episodes of mass violence appeared to be over, it was on social media that news about Manipur could be accessed. Some of the Twitter handles which generated the most amount of engagement have been listed here.

1. LicpriyaKangujam, @licypriyaK
2. Meitei Heritage Society, @meiteiheritage
3. Christopher Hijam, @ChristopherHij2
4. Adu-Oirasu, @themeiteitweets
5. BinalakshmiNeptram, @BinaNeptram
6. Annie, @annieNgashepam
7. MoirangthemAsnikumar, @asnikumarmoiral
8. KhurajamAthouba, @Paari_Athouba
9. Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty, @sangbarooahpish
10. SS Kim, @KimHaokipINC
11. AbeimaLisham, @AbeimaLisham
12. Sanajaoba, @Sana10Meitei

The list also includes journalists in and outside Manipur, members of parliament and politicians, and activists and others

1. Vijaita Singh, @vijaita
2. Makepeace Sitlhou, @makesyoucakes
3. Greeshma Kuthar, @jeegujja
4. Tamal Saha, @Tamal0401
5. Manish Prasad, @manishindiatv
6. Bhavika Kapoor, @BhavikaKapoor5
7. Ananya Bhardwaj, @BhardwajAnanya
8. Ravinder Kapur, @RavinderKapur2

9. Ankit Mayank, @mr_mayank
10. Pieter Freidrich, @FriedrichPieter
11. Anshuman Sail Nehru, @AnshumanSail
12. Ashok Swain, @ashoswai
13. Hindu Post, @hindupost
14. Samirul Islam, @Samirul65556476

7. 4. Quality of Media Reporting (ref. Editors Guild Report)

The role of the media during episodes of mass violence has been examined in India before.²⁴⁴ A few similar patterns emerge here, including the attribution of part of the problem to the media.

On 12 July 2023, two months after violence broke out in Manipur, the Indian Army wrote a letter to the Editors Guild of India on the subject of the 'Unethical and ex-parte reporting of incidents of Manipur by vernacular media'.²⁴⁵

The letter said media outlets in the Imphal valley have been "indulging in outright misrepresentation of facts that violate all norms of journalistic ethics and in the process may be one of the major contributors to the instigation of further violence." It added that the "bias of the media in favour of one community and against the other community emerges clearly in their reportage."

Three examples of reporting were cited in the letter as examples of the 'large scale' and 'unethical' reporting. Signed by Col Anurag Pandey of 3

²⁴⁴ 'Rights and Wrongs: Ordeal by Fire in the Killing Fields of Gujarat', 3 May 2002, Editors Guild of India

²⁴⁵ 'Report on the fact-finding mission of media's reportage of the ethnic violence in Manipur', 2 September 2023, Editors Guild of India

Corps on behalf of the General Commanding Officer, the letter asked the Editors Guild to examine these reports and "ascertain whether the guidelines for journalists and media houses have been violated".

The examples referred to reports in the Sangai Express, Imphal Free Press and People's Chronicle on 4th June, 9th June and 15th June, 2023. The army refers to them in its letter as 'vernacular media' though all three publish in English so presumably what was meant was local media.

The first of the reports was, according to the army's letter, about a mob in Khamenlok which was blocking troops from preventing arson in villages. This mob was then attacked in what was said to be retaliatory action ("it was a clear case of the attackers being attacked" the army wrote). The army took offence to the manner in which the incident was reported, with such headlines as 'At least 9 civilians killed in Kuki militants' attack'.

The second instance cited was about an attack on a Kuki village of Khoken by "armed miscreants dressed in police uniforms". Three people were killed. The army letter says that reporting of this incident as being "between suspected Kuki militants and armed villagers" "well serve to be another, (sic) black moment in journalism".

The third example, according to the army, was "the nadir of journalism in Imphal". The incident concerned a seven-year old boy with a Kuki father and Meitei mother. The boy and his mother were burnt alive by a mob. The army says the incident was "completely blacked out by Imphal media, because it would project one community in poor light." After being reported by national media, there followed what the army said was a "failed attempt was made to attribute responsibility of the burning to a Kuki mob. Reputed media outlet (sic) which carried an incorrect version was forced to amend the story, only after an angry backlash across social media."

The Editors Guild of India's report said that "Imphal media transformed into Meitei media" after the onset of violence. It concluded that Manipur's journalists "wrote one-sided reports" which under normal circumstances "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." The internet ban exacerbated the problem, having "a deleterious effect on journalism as it directly impacted the ability of journalists to communicate with each other, their editors and their sources."

In its conclusions and recommendations, the Guild report said: "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."

Apparently, the practice originated from the days when insurgent groups were active in the Valley and threatened newspaper editors for any "adverse reporting."

After the report was published, the Manipur government through its police filed an FIR against the Guild²⁴⁶. Two cases were filed, accusing the body of promoting enmity and defamation. The Supreme Court of India heard this matter and referred to the cases as being a "counter-narrative"²⁴⁷ by the State government.

²⁴⁶ 'Press freedom concerns as India editors' body charged over Manipur report', 5 September 2023, Aj Jazeera

²⁴⁷ 'Supreme Court calls complaint against Editors Guild a "counter narrative" of the Manipur Government', 15 September 2023, Supreme Court Observer

The EGI report was met with a furious response from some Manipuri groups, two instances of which it has posted²⁴⁸ on its website²⁴⁹.

7. 5. Summary of media testimonies before the Jury

7.5.1. Testimonies related to role of Media

Some of the journalists who deposed seemed to indicate that the findings of the armed forces as represented in their letter and of the EGI were broadly true. Meaning that there was a certain consensus in the media about being partisan, and about how to report stories where there was an interest involved, whether linked to the government or community.

A Meitei journalist said: “We have a journalists union – All Manipur Working Journalists Union. This union has a decisive role – on how to carry a story, how to kill a story. It operates like Godi media and they are pro-Biren Singh.”

Another spoke of the restrictions under which journalistic work was carried out, indicating that not all journalists accepted working under a consensus: “I have been warned, threatened, a gun has been put on my head. I have no problem with professional hazards. I have faced those things in the past but we have families, children and loved ones. If it is our own lives, we are ready to sacrifice for the truth. I have been arrested twice, (cases were) slapped on our organisation.”

Ownership patterns also influenced the manner in which the journalists operated: “There is lack of independent media, and they do not treat us as members of the association though we are journalists. Private Ltd

²⁴⁸ 'All Manipur Working Journalists Union, AMWJU and Editors Guild Manipur, EGM, strongly deny Editor Guild of India's Motivated Allegation based on Hearsay', 3 September 2023

²⁴⁹ 'Rebuttal on the Report of fact-finding mission on media's reportage of the ethnic violence in Manipur', 6 September 2023

companies (meaning corporations as opposed to, say, unions) alone can run TV channels and digital media.”

Another aspect was the shock and the confusion even in the media as the violence exploded like a thunderclap. One editor was quoted as saying that “the local media in Imphal were left in total confusion. This would be the scenario in Churachandpur as well.”

Most testimonies referred to the price paid by journalists for working in such an ethnically hostile space: “It has been a total mess since last year, and takes a heavy physical, psychological and mental emotional toll on each one of us.”

Some of the deponents from the media felt that the framing of the conflict as being against ‘illegal immigrants’ was done through the use of language promoted and pushed by both Imphal-based Meitei media and the mainstream media outside Manipur.

Refugee vs Illegal Immigrant: Non-recognition of refugee law and its implication in the use of terminology

“In India we do not have a refugee law; hence anyone who enters India automatically becomes an illegal migrant.” This then came to be reflected in the media’s output and “certain headlines from Manipur and mainstream media and the editorials published by Imphal based media completely pinned the blame entirely on the ‘illegal immigrants’ for the conflict.”

The use of this phrasing by the media without context or qualification was problematic both in the present instance in Manipur and the longer term.

“It is incumbent on the media to avoid using this term without an adequate context to qualify it. It is not fair to call the people seeking shelter as illegal immigrants. The legal term may be illegal immigrant, but this term has been used recklessly. At the least this term should be used within quotes or they should say that they are refugees seeking shelter.”

Deponents from the national media spoke of the difficulty in accessing information right up to the middle of May, 2023 when some material began to come out. One spoke of seeing the first FIR only on 17th May, 2023. There was “a general lack of information but also lack of interest to report from Manipur” in newsrooms and with an internet blockade, the “only information was that coming out of the chief minister’s office.”

7.5.2. Testimonies related to role of State

‘A Mad Max situation’²⁵⁰

Even in a State accustomed to violence, individuals in the media felt that the crisis of the present was unprecedented. They also poignantly pointed out that given its experience of tackling armed conflicts over the decades, the State should have been able to control the violence, but chose not to.

“All paramilitary, army forces are there. Even the police have enough experience. Their hands are tied. They are compromised in a way that even if they wanted to help, they couldn't. Some orders were given, maybe.”

²⁵⁰ The reference is to a series of movies set in dystopian Australia where the government no longer has the capacity to effectively protect its citizens, Max Rockatansky is a skilled policeman trying to keep order on the highways

A second said: “This crisis in Manipur is a big failure of the State. In my 25 years as a journalist, I have seen various conflict situations that the government can solve in a timely manner. I know that. I have seen operation of AFSPA, rape and killings - all these can be resolved. This conflict is different. There is no law and order in Manipur. Dogs of war are let loose. It is up to the government to control the situation.”

A third looked at the manner in which the State interacted with the Union government and speculated that “something is going on with the national security advisor, CBI, SIB and the other agencies like the NIA, CBI.”

Yet another said that the conflict “could have been controlled in 24 hours but Biren wanted to teach Kukis a lesson, but it backfired. He lost control of the situation and allowed it to escalate on 4th and 5th May. Arambai Tenggol also became rogue and completely out of hand.” Several of the deponents were despondent about the future given the apparent lack of effort in bringing about a lasting peace.

“I don’t know if a peace process is possible. The solution is to either take illegal arms away or give everyone a weapon, every single child. Today, I will be shot if I go to the streets and talk about peace.”

Far from inching towards a meaningful normalcy, “arms are increasing in both Kuki and Meitei sides. Whoever is supplying arms on one side is supplying on the other side.” A stage had reached where “almost anybody in Manipur can buy an AK-47 for Rs 1.5 lakhs. Many are engaged in war-profiteering by selling guns on both sides. The only way to defuse this situation is to take off arms from everybody or give everyone arms.”

Most of the media professionals the Tribunal spoke to are very senior, experienced professionals with a long history of covering the many conflicts that have characterised Manipur politics over the last several

decades. They requested that their identities not be made public as the threat of retribution and elimination is very real. It is for this reason that their identities are not being revealed. Most of them spoke with sadness at the huge cost of the present ethnic conflict saying that the brutality of the violence on various sides will not be easily forgotten by the younger generation. They also pointed out to the consciously planned and deliberate nature by which the violence was planned, executed and prolonged, the deliberate abdication of responsibilities by the state police and administration controlled by the political executive which did not want the conflict to be resolved quickly and the impunity and protection granted to non-state players like the Arambai'Tengol, Meitei Lipun and Meira Paibis from the Meitei side.

Very interestingly, and in a curious manner, a common phrase heard from most media professionals was: "If the state government wanted, they could have easily controlled the violent outbreak within 3 days or a week at the maximum after 3rd May, 2023 But they didn't. Why? Who stands to gain?". These experienced journalists who have covered and witnessed many conflict situations in the last 30 years and more, were unequivocal about the fact that the entire ethnic conflict that has engulfed Manipur since 3rd May, 2023, was not spontaneous or organic, but reflected the results of deliberate stoking of fear, anger, hostility and sense of revenge or retribution and a planned outbreak of violence. A common refrain from many of them are worth repeating: "The clue to understanding the current conflict lies in asking the hard questions: 'Who gains by allowing the conflict to keep festering? Who benefits by the non-resolution of the conflict? What is the advantage by forcing tens of thousands of Manipuris from various sides, to live in IDP camps? What does the Central Government gain by allowing the present leadership (under Biren Singh) to continue and not seriously do anything to stop the conflict? The answers to these questions will provide the clue to understanding the present conflict'".

Chapter 8: Relief, Rehabilitation and Rebuilding Lives

8.1. Extent of State Aid

8.1.1. Review of standard protocol for rehabilitation under laws

More than 60,000 people, including women, children, orphans, persons with disabilities, and senior citizens have been displaced since violence erupted in Manipur on the 3rd of May, 2023. More than two years have passed since these Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) have been left without a home, without a livelihood and more importantly, without hope. More than 350 relief camps have been in operation since May, 2023. With fresh violence erupting as recently as June 2025, following the arrest of a top leader of Arambai Tenggol²⁵¹, one can only assume that more people are forced into relief camps than are able to leave them. Relief and Rehabilitation are concepts traditionally associated with casualties arising from natural disasters, but in the case of the Manipur conflict, which is not only a man-made disaster, but a State-sponsored war on its people, a much broader, human-rights framework has to be considered.

We begin by reviewing existing laws and institutions that lay down standard protocol for relief and rehabilitation during a crisis. We then examine whether the State machinery had any level of readiness to respond swiftly and effectively to the outbreak of violence, especially in the context of rescue, relief and rehabilitation. Next, we adopt different frameworks of analysis from the National Guidelines for Temporary Shelters, 2019. This will help us map the shifting needs of affected communities as they go through each phase of post-violence recovery and place observations in subsequent sections against objective standards.

²⁵¹ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/meitei-leaders-arrest-protests-continue-in-manipur-defying-prohibitory-orders/article69673628.ece> (last accessed: 11th June, 2025)

Then we examine the type and level of aid declared by the Central and State governments and compare it with the actual aid received by the IDPs. This is supplemented by a detailed account of some of the relief camps in Manipur which a few members of the Tribunal had visited in May, 2024. Subsequent visits were made by one member to several different relief camps in November, 2024. In this context, we also look at the role of civil society and the State in closing the deficit in aid by providing relief to the IDPs, either through mobilizing resources, volunteering directly or helping with rehabilitation.

The next part recounts the observations made by the Gita Mittal Committee appointed by the Supreme Court to investigate the ongoing violence. This is useful in corroborating our findings as well as highlighting points of divergences wherever they arise.

8.1.2. Existing Policies & Institutions: The Disaster Management Act, 2005

In the aftermath of a disaster always lies a story and context of dislocation and misery of a vast section of the local population who are forcibly displaced from their homes made to live in camps that provide basic safety and shelter with access to food, water, sanitation, medicines and daily necessities. In such circumstances, it is not enough to simply provide relief and mitigate losses, given the sheer scale and pace of loss in human lives and property. Proactive steps have to be taken to predict the onset of such crises as well as build institutional capacity to heighten crisis management. The National Disaster Management Act or Disaster Management Act (DMA), 2005²⁵² was passed precisely to lay down a comprehensive framework for disaster management, relief and rehabilitation.

²⁵² Disaster Management Act (DMA), 2005
(https://ndma.gov.in/Reference_Material/DMAAct2005)

The DMA, 2005 constitutes and empowers various bodies at the national, State and district levels to oversee and coordinate disaster management efforts along with relief and rehabilitation. These bodies are the National, State, and District Disaster Management Authorities (NDMA, SDMA, DDMA respectively). The Act also constitutes a National and State Disaster Response Fund (NDRF, SDRF respectively) for efficient and effective resource mobilization for executing various Disaster Management Plans at each level.

This highlights the basic level of disaster-readiness at State and district levels as part of standard policy within Manipur. While far from perfect, such measures do indicate a considerable amount of institutional preparedness, in addition to having clear protocols in place for immediate and sustained multi-stakeholder response in the event of a disaster. Even though an unprecedented disaster might catch the administration off-guard, it is apparent that such an event won't blindside or paralyze the administration from responding swiftly and effectively.

8.1.3. Readiness in providing Relief during Civilian Conflicts

Before examining the State's immediate response to the 3rd May, 2023 violence in Manipur, it is crucial to note a fundamental gap in the Disaster Management Act, 2005 (DMA): its definition of "disaster"—*a catastrophe arising from natural or man-made causes*— does not explicitly encompass armed civilian conflict, mass riots or ethnic clashes. Conflict situations inherently involve political actors and considerations that shape relief, rehabilitation and resolution efforts—factors the DMA does not address.

This raises two questions. First, is there any legislation prescribing national or State-level protocols for readiness, response, relief, recovery and rehabilitation in armed conflict? The answer is no. The absence of such a law represents a serious lacuna, both from disaster-management and

human-rights perspectives, especially given the rise in communal and ethnic violence across India over the past decade.

Second, in the absence of a framework specific to conflict, to what extent could the administration have invoked the DMA to manage armed conflict effectively? Under the DMA, the State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA) is chaired by the Chief Minister (in Manipur's case, formerly Biren Singh), and Section 18 empowers the Chairperson, under emergency conditions, to exercise all SDMA functions, subject to later ratification. Thus, at the outbreak of violence on May 3, 2023, Biren Singh and his Council of Ministers possessed full executive authority to apply the DMA's relief and rehabilitation provisions.

Yet, as earlier chapters show, they failed to contain the violence, alleviate its aftermath or assist those affected. This raises a *prima facie* question of “willful negligence,” if not “political motivation”. Even within the DMA's limited scope, the Act could—and should—have provided a framework to ensure that internally displaced persons in relief camps received dignified, rights-upholding treatment.

8.1.4. Frameworks for Analysis: National Guidelines for Temporary Shelters, 2019

In 2019, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) released the ‘National Guidelines on Temporary Shelters for the Disaster-Affected Families (NGTS)²⁵³, a document that was drafted to assist States in managing post-disaster shelter needs effectively. ‘Shelters’ form a critical part of any relief and rehabilitation effort for they become the refuge of the first resort for people displaced because of any kind of crisis. Most importantly, shelters become the secondary home of affected communities

²⁵³ National Guidelines on Temporary Shelters for the Disaster-Affected Families (NGTS), 2019 (<https://nidm.gov.in/PDF/pubs/NDMA/24.pdf>)

for a considerable amount of time, sometimes extending into months, if not years. Therefore, the design and construction of shelters needs to consider multiple factors like accessibility, functionality, familiarity, etc. in addition to being efficient in resource-use and swift in assembly. Such measures ensure affected communities are not just passively recuperating but are actively regaining their autonomy and agency while having a sense of dignity and ownership while inhabiting these shelters. Only then can communities move from a state of rescue and relief to a state of recovery and rehabilitation. The NGTS, 2019 lays out guidelines and frameworks that take into consideration many of these aspects. We cite these directly in the following subsections and use them as benchmarks for evaluating the state of relief and rehabilitation.

8.1.5. The Disaster Management Cycle

Before one starts planning the construction of shelters, they must be able to identify the phase of recovery the community is in because that phase will determine what needs should be accounted for while designing shelters. In this regard, the Disaster Management Cycle (DMC) offers a simple framework to visualize different stages of response that go beyond relief and rehabilitation to build capacity and increase institutional readiness before the next disaster. The DMC takes the outbreak of disaster as the starting point for looking at different phases of recovery and capacity-building for communities and systems respectively. A visual representation of the DMC from the NGTS, 2019 is shown below. While DMCs in other documents might start from a different phase than ‘Rescue & Relief’, what is important is to remember the sequence of phases, which remains the same across all documents and is a central part of looking at both the emergence and transition of community needs from one phase to another.

For the purposes of this chapter, the first three phases are of particular interest. This is because we see different types of shelter appropriate for each phase of disaster management. We expand on this in the next subsection.

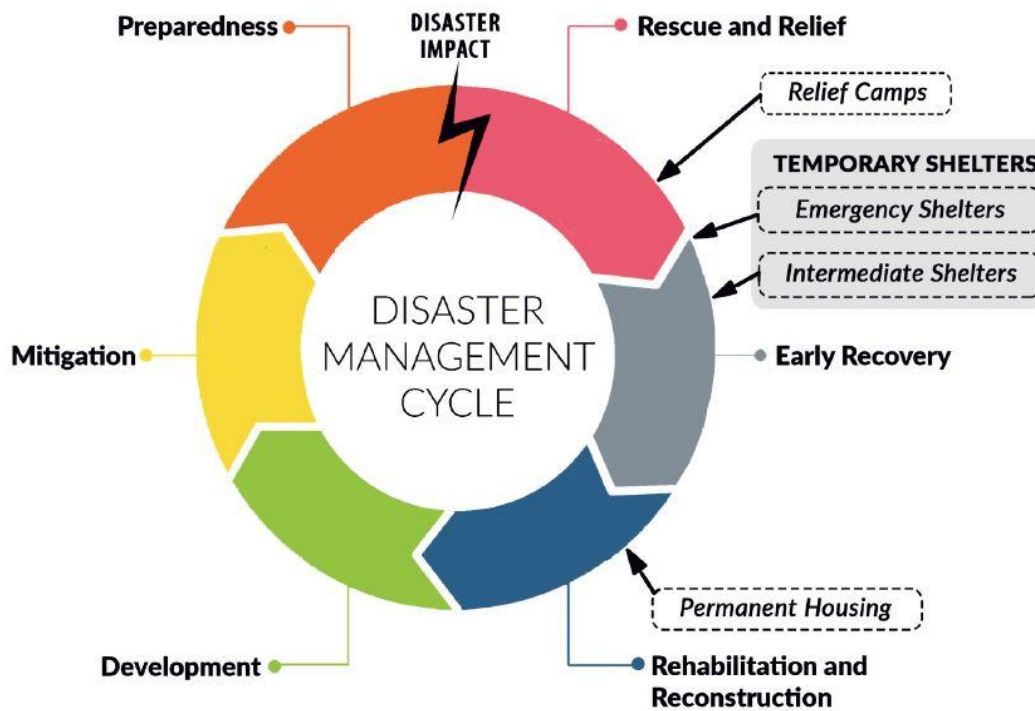


Figure 1: Disaster Management Cycle (ref. NGTS, 2019)

8.1.6. Typologies of Shelter

As a community transitions through different phases of the DMC, different pathways towards rebuilding their homes and lives become available to them depending on their context, needs, capacities and available support. So, while a disaster or crisis might affect a community in the same way, different subgroups (or individuals within the same community) might be able to avail different pathways towards recovery based on their socio-economic, cultural, religious, ethnic contexts. A simple example can be of a displaced family that has the means to travel to a different State and take refuge with their contacts there. Another

example can be of a family that has the means of renting out an apartment or shifting in with relatives at a nearby area. Families like these may have the option of leaving a relief camp or temporary shelter earlier than most or may not even need to relocate to a temporary shelter despite losing their homes to the crisis.

To account for all the different pathways that may be available to people impacted by a disaster or crisis, we outline a simple flowchart below, the contents of which are largely derived and consolidated from the NGTS, 2019 document.

8.1.7 Guiding Principles of Temporary Shelters

Building the optimal shelter for a displaced community is a tailored process that requires identifying and stratifying the affected community using the right criteria, surveying available land, mobilizing resources and allocating them in the most efficient manner such that dignity, agency and ownership of the community is ensured during the process of relocating and settling into such shelters. While the first two can be achieved through guidelines, the later can only be ensured through a set of principles and perspectives that go beyond the technical realm of engineering and economics and tap into a moral and legal framework of rights and entitlements.

The following points summarize the principles laid out in the NGTS, 2019 that dictates the scope, objectives and strategy around providing temporary shelter:

1. Support for recovery from a disaster is an entitlement of the affected people.
2. Affected people should not be treated as hapless passive recipients of relief but as resourceful and with agency.
3. The most vulnerable community members tend to be invisible or at the margins and unable to access support. Therefore, targeted

attention should ensure their inclusion. No one should be left behind.

4. Temporary shelters should be disaster resistant and not cause any further injury or loss of life.
5. Use of materials and technologies that involve self-help should be encouraged. This also includes building materials and components that can be retrieved, salvaged, recycled and reused from rubble or damaged houses.
6. One design doesn't fit all. A bouquet of design and technology options is necessary to ensure that people can have a shelter that's appropriate for their needs.
7. Temporary shelters should be durable at least until a permanent house is reconstructed.
8. Socio-technical facilitation of shelter process is not just a matter of certain tools and techniques but requires a mind-set and perspective of enabling the community
9. If collective community efforts are facilitated well and in a timely manner, the early recovery shelter process can become an active precursor to an effective owner-driven housing reconstruction program later.

While such principles can certainly be expanded and improved upon, it helps to treat this as a baseline for assessing the State of shelters available to the IDPs, since these are standards set by the Central Government themselves. From the aforementioned points, one can arrive at a 5-indicator metric:- a) Targeted attention to most vulnerable groups, b) Need-appropriate shelters, c) Disaster-resistant shelters, d) Self-reliance of communities, e) Entitlement-based approach. Apart from these, one can also create a quantitative measure using the maximum response time ascribed to different types of shelters considered in the previous subsection.

8.2. Early Response, Management & Assessment of the Crisis

8.2.1. Immediate State Response and Declared State Aid

With the escalation of violence since 3rd May 2023, more casualties and displacements were being reported every day. By 25th May, almost 50,000 people were displaced and almost 8,000 people had fled to the neighboring states of Assam and Mizoram. On 17th May, the Supreme Court intervened and pushed the Manipur government to submit status reports of its efforts to contain the violence and step up rescue and relief efforts.

Sphere India, a national coalition of Humanitarian, Development and Resilience actors in India published a set of reports during the first week of the violence, documenting some of the following key steps taken by the government from some of their status reports²⁵⁴:

- The army and the Assam Rifles were deployed to contain the violence and rescued almost 13,000 IDPs in addition to leading them to safety in respective Kuki and Meitei camps, as of 6th May. The central government also sent reserve forces to aid the army.
- As of 9th May, 2023, the army relocated 23,000 people from various districts. About 10,000 of the displaced were Kukis, 9,500 Meiteis and the rest from other communities
- The Chief Minister had announced an ex-gratia of Rs 5 lakh to the next of kin of the deceased, Rs 2 lakh to those seriously injured & Rs 25,000 to those with minor injuries.
- 40 MT rice was issued from Food Storage Department (FSD) Sawombung for Imphal East and West districts and 7.5 MT rice was issued from FSD Tamenglong for Tamenglong district.

²⁵⁴Sphere India Status-Reports – Manipur Conflict (<https://www.sphereindia.org.in/situation-reports?page=10>)

- Several State governments, particularly those of Nagaland, West Bengal, Assam and Tripura started evacuating their residents through special flights amidst army cover.
- By the end of the month, the State government had released a contingency fund of Rs. 3 crores, out of which relief was provided to 47,914 people across 318 relief camps.

While such efforts deserve praise, they have to be measured against the index of preparedness and responsiveness the State machinery should have had in the context of the policies and institutions mentioned in the first section. Similarly, the quantum of aid declared by both the central and State governments have to be measured against the budgetary allocation in other activities undertaken during the same time, often unrelated to relief and rehabilitation. We will revisit this analysis after summarizing below, the major aid packages declared by the government in subsequent months after the violence:

- By June 2023, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) had sanctioned a Rs 101.75 crore relief package²⁵⁵ to IDPs. This came at the heels of Union Home Minister Amit Shah's visit to Manipur and his joint conference with government officials, security forces and civil society.
- An additional amount²⁵⁶ of Rs 10 lakh (Rs 5 lakh each from the Manipur government and Union home ministry) was announced after the same conference. This was to be provided through direct benefit transfer to the next of kin of those who have lost their lives in the violence.

²⁵⁵<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/mha-sanctions-rs-101-75-cr-relief-package-for-people-displaced-due-to-manipur-violence/articleshow/100857002.cms> (last accessed: 21st October, 2024)

²⁵⁶<https://thewire.in/rights/mha-yet-to-disburse-full-compensation-for-manipur-violence-victims-rti> (last accessed: 21st October, 2024)

- As of 27th June, Biren Singh declared that his government would provide a one-time assistance²⁵⁷ of Rs 1000 to all those living in relief camps. This financial assistance would help IDPs buy clothes, rations etc that would replace belongings lost in the violence.
- By then Biren Singh had also declared the construction²⁵⁸ of 4,000 prefabricated temporary homes within two months in line with the NDMA guidelines around temporary shelters. Though constructions had begun by then, no announcements for allotments were declared at the time.
- As of 9th August 2024, the Central Government informed the Lok Sabha that almost Rs 400 crore had been disbursed²⁵⁹ to pregnant women and lactating mothers and children under the age of 8 residing across all relief camps in Manipur. Such funds were specially mobilized under schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, Mission Shakti, Mission Vatsalya, etc. Furthermore, the Nirbhaya Fund was also used to mobilize resources for women who were raped, faced sexual abuse during the conflict etc.

8.2.2 Early Assessments: Joint Rapid Needs Assessment Report (JRNA)

By 31st May 2023, a Joint Rapid Needs Assessments Report (JRNA)²⁶⁰ was released by Sphere India, in collaboration with multiple humanitarian and civil society organizations in Manipur. Its methodology included data

²⁵⁷<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/manipur-violence-victims-staying-in-relief-camps-to-get-1000-assistance-cm-biren-singh/article67015582.ece> (last accessed: 21st October, 2024)

²⁵⁸<https://www.morungexpress.com/manipur-cm-asks-officials-to-expedite-construction-of-prefabricated-houses-for-displaced> (last accessed: 24th October, 2024)

²⁵⁹<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/400-crore-given-to-manipur-under-special-assistance-package-centre-tell-ls-101723208589589.html> (last accessed: 24th October, 2024)

²⁶⁰ Joint Rapid Needs Assessment – Manipur Humanitarian Crisis -- 2023 by Sphere India https://sphereindia.org.in/sites/default/files/2023-09/JRNA%20Version%201_June%2002_11AM.pdf

collection conducted through secondary sources, field visits, personal interviews, key informant interviews, observations, information provided by the local organizations and volunteers. The main objective of the JRNA was to gather information on the impact of the crisis on community members, and understand their recovery needs in addition to collating, analyzing and disseminating the findings to State, National and International agencies. Given the urgent nature of the report, the first inter-agency coordination meeting was held within 5 days of the violence, and both data collection and analysis were completed within 29th May, leading to the release of this report on 31st May itself. Therefore, this serves as a credible benchmark of the needs of affected communities right after the violence and one can expect this data to have been available with the Central & State governments at the time of its publication.

In the following section, we adopt the framework laid out in the JRNA in terms of the different sectors or aspects of living in a relief camp. These include the following:

1. Food Security and Nutrition, Livelihood
2. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)
3. Health
4. Shelter, Settlements and Non-food items
5. Protection
6. Education

These findings have been made in the context of the following camps and their residents:

#	District	No. of camps	No. of residents	Updated on
1	Imphal West	17	2470	24 th May 2023
2	Imphal East	43	6780	23 rd May 2023
3	Thoubal	10	950	28 th May 2023
4	Bishnupur	56	7817	29 th May 2023
5	Churachandpur	77	12838	30 th May 2023
6	Tengnoupal	02	169	30 th May 2023
7	Kangpokpi	47	10305	30 th May 2023
#	Other States	No. of camps	No. of residents	Updated on
1	Mizoram	07	6993	30 th May 2023
2	Guwahati	03	183	30 th May 2023
3	Delhi	01	16	30 th May 2023

Figure 3: Number of Camps and Residents in 7 districts of Manipur (ref. JRNA, 2023)

We directly quote the following findings on these sectors from the Executive Summary of the JRNA, 2023 report. While the first paragraph in each section highlights the current status, the second one in italics talks about the urgent needs of the community.

8.2.2.1. Food Security and Nutrition, Livelihood

‘The crisis has led to low stocks of stored food grains in villages and inadequate food supplies in camps, impacting the affected population's access to essential nutrition. Livestock deaths, road closures, and train service suspensions have further exacerbated the situation.’

‘Assessments reveal that most camps have only one to two weeks' worth of food supplies, with limited meals provided and insufficient support for pregnant and lactating mothers. Challenges include insufficient food stock, imbalanced diets, water scarcity, inadequate storage facilities, and limited market access. Pregnant and lactating mothers, as well as children over six months old, face particular difficulties in accessing nutritious food. Addressing these challenges is crucial to support the well-being of the affected population.’

8.2.2.2. *Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)*

‘The analysis revealed that the provision of hygiene kits in camps varies, with some lacking essential items like dustbins with lids, blankets, bedsheets, and undergarments. Toilet facilities are predominantly for men, and while most camps have proper toilets, some are unsafe for women and children due to location. Waste disposal facilities are available, but running water is lacking in most camp toilets. Access to hygiene and sanitation products varies across camps, with some relying on cloth during menstruation. Challenges in meeting sanitation and hygiene needs include inadequate provisions, limited access to water and hygiene kits, insufficient sanitary pads, and scarcity of resources.’

‘Urgent needs include menstrual hygiene products, clean drinking water, essential supplies, safe toilet facilities, and separate toilets for men and women.’

8.2.2.3. *Health*

‘The crisis has impacted access to holistic healthcare services. The assessment reveals urgent requirements for emergency medications for various health conditions, including diabetes, high blood pressure, and cancer. The crisis has significantly impacted the mental health and psychosocial well-being of the affected population, necessitating immediate psychosocial support. Adequate quantities of menstrual hygiene products are needed in the camps, and health issues related to unhygienic water and mosquito bites require assistance with cleaning supplies. Safe drinking water is a critical need for the community.’

‘Access to healthcare services is challenging in some camps due to distances from health centers and hospitals. Mental health issues, particularly anxiety, panic, and sleeping problems, are prevalent among camp residents. The assistance provided so far includes medicine, financial

support, and access to ambulances, but challenges remain, such as insufficient availability of medicines and lack of immunization facilities. Psychosocial support, improved hygiene practices, immunizations for infants, and access to medical needs and facilities are urgent requirements for the affected population.’

8.2.2.4. Shelter, Settlements and Non-food Items

‘The surveyed camps in Manipur are primarily set up in schools, community centers, halls, colleges, churches, and other buildings. The condition of the camps is generally fine, but challenges exist in housing. Lack of separate rooms for each family affects privacy, and government assistance has been insufficient. Destruction of houses during the violence worsens the housing crisis. In Assam, shelters are provided in government and private schools, but challenges include inadequate essential items and safety concerns. In Mizoram, community halls serve as temporary shelters, but vulnerability to weather conditions is a major issue.’

‘Urgent needs include protected shelters, assistance in rebuilding houses, employment opportunities, and government support to restore lives. Comprehensive efforts are necessary to address housing, employment, and property-related concerns for the affected population.’

8.2.2.5. Protection

‘The respondents reported that the recent unrest in Manipur and neighboring States has led to safety concerns for the displaced population seeking shelter in camps. While some camps provide a sense of security, others face challenges in privacy, especially for pregnant and lactating women. General safety and security are identified as the most critical protection needs, followed by mental health support, access to protection services, and safety for women and children. Lack of protection services and staff, privacy issues, language barriers, and trust issues hinder access to

protection services. Most camps maintain peace and order, but isolated incidents of antisocial behavior and discrimination have been reported.’

‘Urgent needs include a focus on peace, communal harmony, and the desire to return to their own villages, child-friendly spaces, psycho-social support for children, separate toilets for genders, privacy for pregnant and lactating women, and provisions for transgender individuals in camps.’

8.2.2.6. Education

‘The population affected by the Manipur violence faces significant challenges in accessing education for children. While some areas receive assistance, others lack support, resulting in disrupted schooling and limited resources. In Assam and Mizoram, education needs have not been addressed, with children feeling unsafe in camps.’

‘Urgent needs include prioritizing education, skill development training for livelihood, financial support, and provision of recreational materials. Games, sports, and education assistance are crucial for empowering the affected population and promoting their well-being. Efforts should be made to provide educational opportunities and address the pressing needs to foster resilience and empowerment.’

8.3. State of Relief Camps: Observations

8.3.1 Context of Manipur during the Tribunal’s Visit

Members of the People’s Tribunal visited Manipur once inbetween 27th May and 3rd June, 2024, and again in November 2023. More than a year had passed since the initial eruption of violence on 3rd May, when the first visit had taken place. This time period should constantly be kept in mind while examining the findings presented in the following sections for they provide a sharp contrast to both the immediacy and the wholesomeness of relief prescribed by the various acts and frameworks laid out previously.

The Lok Sabha elections of 2024 were still underway during the time of the visit. So while polling in Manipur had been completed almost a month back, the election results had not yet been declared. While it is difficult to determine whether this context contributed to more calm or more unrest in Manipur, it should be kept in mind that pre-election conditions or pending election results do influence the state of affairs in a given geography, and the same applies for Manipur.

During this timeframe, members of the Tribunal visited 2 Kuki and 5 Meitei relief camps. Later in the month of November, 2024 a member of the jury visited a fresh set of 5 Meitei relief camps in and around Imphal. The demographics of these camps as on the date of visit are outlined in the next subsection. A brief summary of the state of facilities in these camps are presented in the subsection after that. This is presented using similar parameters as highlighted in the JRNA report above so that we have a common baseline for comparing the State of amenities and needs in the camps between when the violence first broke out and one year later. Both of these are categorized in terms of Kuki and Meitei camps to help us analyse whether there is qualitative difference in the standard of living in between the two sets of camps. It should be mentioned at the outset that there is no particular rationale for visiting 2 Kuki camps in contrast to 10 Meitei camps. Given their accessibility and proximity to Imphal, it can be said that Meitei camps were easier to visit, however other logistical constraints (including meeting officials in Imphal) prevented the Jury from visiting more Kuki camps.

8.3.2 Demographics of Relief Camps

8.3.2.1. Kuki Camps

Sangai University relief camp in Churachandpur had 102 families and 612 IDPs, 239 of whom were below 18 years of age. The camp is being run in an under-construction building of Sangai University where IDPs from 6 or

7 camps previously being run in government or private schools in Kangpokpi, Chandel, Sugnu, in Kakching and Churachandpur districts were brought in February, 2024 when the schools were to open. This relief camp is being run by KKL (Kuki Khangloi Lompi), a philanthropic organisation.

At Motbung relief camp in Kangpokpi 170 families were staying, with 50 more who were likely to arrive for whom houses are being constructed nearby.

8.3.2.2. Meitei Camps

ApunbaTengbangLup relief camp in Bishnupur was started by camp inchargeMoirangthemBilkee Singh, 69 yrs. old, who volunteered on a call given by the DC and local MLA to take responsibility for this camp. This was started on 9th May, 2023. Initially, in the first 3 months it ran on community support. There are 87 families, 319 IDPs who had arrived from 4 different relief camps. About 100 affected persons are living outside with relatives or on rent.

At Indoor Stadium, Kakching, there were 58 families and 173 IDPs, of whom 102 were females, 50 of them below 18 years of age. The camp was set up on 11th May, 2023 at the Higher Secondary School across from Stadium and on 20 June shifted to Stadium.

Kwakta Sericulture relief camp in Bishnupur was a government-run relief camp where residents hailed from Zou Veng and Khumujamba villages in Churachandpur district. This relief camp had well-built, coloured brick houses and housed 146 families.

Santhong relief camp in Moirang had 413 inmates, 96 of whom were students. They were residents from Torbung, Bangla (border areas of

Churachandpur and Bishnupur), Churachandpur, and Kanpai (bufferzone). The President of this camp was Bimol Singh.

Thongju relief camp in Imphal East, Tilananda, the camp incharge, informed that a total families 226 and 886 people from Moreh and Churachandpur were staying there since 10 May. Local MLA T.H. BSinceiswajit Singh provided the support till September 2023. Then the District Collector of Imphal East had took charge.

8.3.2.3. Meitei Camps (visited in November 2024)

Phayeng High School in Imphal West has been housing 68 families in a portion of the school premises. All of them belong to a village merely 1 km away called KangchupChingkhong also falling in Imphal West. This relief camp was established on 28th May, 2023.

Manipur Trade and Export Centre in Lamboikhongnangkhong had 160 families which comprised of 708 IDPs from Kangpokpi, Churachandpur, Serou in Kakching and Moreh in Tengenoupal.

Samurou Government High School relief camp in Imphal West has been housing 69 IDPs of whom 35 are male and 34 female with 35 IDPs below 18 years of age. IDPs have come from Churachandpur, Moreh in Tengenoupal, Sugnu in Kakching and Torbungbangla in Bishnupur. This camp has been organised by All SamurouNaoremChaprou Club and the Meira Paibi.

Pravabati College relief camp in Mayang, Imphal has 51 families, comprising 174 inmates from Moreh in Tengenoupal district. They first came to a camp run by the 'Universal Friendship Organisation', which has a campus in Mayang Imphal, in mid May 2023 and a month later were moved to the College campus on the advice of local MLA.

At Biramangol College Hostel relief camp in Sawombung there are 136 inmates who belong to 55 families, of whom 56 are male, 80 are female and there are 63 students among them. This relief camp has been organised by Sawombung Students' Club, Sawombung, Semgat Sagat Marup and the Meira Painibi of Sawombung. The inmates have come from Sugnu, Kakching, Moirang-Purel, Thampokpi, Thumukhong in Imphal East. The first batch of inmates came to the camp on 28 May, 2023.

8.3.3 State of Facilities inside Relief Camps

In this subsection, we record the observations of the jury under the aforementioned categories: (1) Food Security and Nutrition, (2) Livelihood, (3) Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), (4) Health, (5) Shelter, Settlements and Non-food items, (6) Protection, and (6) Education. Within each category, we maintain the distinction between Kuki and Meitei camps to draw out the contrast between the two.

Food Security and Nutrition

Main source of food in all camps is the food grains provided as part of the Public Distribution System (PDS). However, there is a discrepancy between the people's and officials' versions.

Kuki Camps

At the Sangai University camp, people informed that they get rice, dal and potato meals two times a day cooked out of a common kitchen. They do not get any milk or tea. They get meat once in two months. The DC's office also provides items of daily needs like soaps, detergents, toothpaste, etc. The camp-in-charge mentioned that they regularly need potatoes and sugar to supplement what they get from the government. The ADC in Churachandpur had claimed that people get clothing, diapers, and nutrients for lactating women. This was at odds with what the IDPs in the camp recounted as well as what was observed during the visit.

There were many pregnant women in the camp and most lacked access to even basic care. A small fraction of them could afford prenatal support. The rest of them were entirely depended on nonprofits for their nutrition. There were more than 10 lactating mothers in the relief camps. Given the long sleepless nights, trauma and lack of nutritious food, almost 8 of them did not have sufficient breast milk to feed their babies. Poor nutrition and lack of vitamins had left many mothers weak and most births occurred in camps with the support of local midwives. There have already been infant deaths from complications like asthma, diarrhea, etc. The Rural Women Upliftment Society would support the women IDPs in all issues related to pregnancy and postnatal care. The administration would provide sanitary napkins but were not sufficient for all the menstruating women in the camp. Many such women used old clothes as pads because they did not have sufficient money to buy sanitary pads from the market.

At Motbung relief camp in Kangpokpi, KFK1, a 23-year-old female said that they don't get rations in relief camps. Meanwhile rice, dal, potato, oil, onion and firewood were being supplied by the DC office.

Meitei Camps

At ApunbaTengbangLup in Bishnupur, the DC's office provides rice, dal, oil, items of day to day need and Rs. 40 for ten days per person to buy onion, etc. out of which Rs. 20 is utilised for collective needs and Rs. 20 is given to the inmates. Meals are provided 3 times a day. There are some families who stay outside in rented houses but come to take their share of supplies. MeFB7, a 29-year old woman shared that rice, dal, potato and eggs (occasionally) are served by the government, but there is irregularity in supplies.

At the Indoor Stadium camp in Kakching, inmates get rice, dal, butter, oil, cerelac. They get egg once a week. However, they do not get milk, meat or

vegetables. For the initial 3-4 months the camp ran on community support before the government aid started arriving. Rs. 100 weekly per person is also provided by the government. 20 packets, each containing 6 sanitary napkins, are made available weekly, which are more or less sufficient for the time being.

At Sanjamai relief camp, MeFII1, a 51-year-old female reported that food in the camp is limited, even though the government provides rations and 2 meals per day. Mostly rice and dal, and sometimes vegetables.

At Thongju, Imphal East, rice, dal, oil, breakfast for babies and other items of daily need are provided. At Motbung kitchen is common, where families take turns to cook, but those who want additional cooking can do it in their homes. The supplies consist of rice, dal, oil, and potatoes. Each person also gets one egg per week.

Meitei Camps (visited in November 2024)

At Phayeng High School relief camp inmates get rice, dal, sugar, potato, oil, soap. They also get egg two or three times a week and milk every day. So far they have also got Rs. 1,000 on five occasions since the camp was set up on 28 May, 2023.

At Manipur Trade and Export Centre in Lamboikhongnangkhong, inmates get rice, dal and oil. In addition, they get Rs. 80 cash per day per head, two times a month to buy other essential items. Here the kitchen was common earlier but now every family cooks their own food. They use induction stoves for cooking. At most other camps common kitchens use wood as fuel.

At Samurou Government High School relief camp inmates get only rice and Rs. 80 per day per head to buy other essential items. In June 2023 they once got plates, blankets and milk for a month.

At Pravabati College relief camp in Mayang Imphal inmates get rice, dal, potato, onion, oil, soap, shampoo, detergent and Rs. 15 per day per head for breakfast twice in a month on behalf of the Deputy Commissioner.

At Biramangol College Hostel relief camp in Sawombung inmates get rice, dal, oil, soap, shampoo, detergent, toothpaste and Rs. 80 per day per head for those whose houses have been burned and Rs. 10 per day per head for those whose houses still stand. They used to get egg and milk earlier but now it has stopped. Inmates use their own money to buy vegetables frequently and meat once in a while.

8.3.3.2. Livelihood

Kuki Camps

At Sangai University relief camp some people go out to work as agricultural and construction workers and earn Rs. 200-300 per day but regular employment is not available. Rural Women Upliftment Society provided Rs. 3,000 to 160 women to strengthen their livelihood in areas such as weaving, modha (bamboo stools) making, sugarcane juice counter, pan shop, fish shop, second hand goods shop, chicken shop and petrol shop. KFC29, aged 34 years was one of the women who received the Rs. 3000 grant and says there was no follow-up or additional reimbursement after that. She was earning her livelihood selling vegetables and clearing weeds in nearby farms. Through this she had to feed 4 children, all below 10 years of age. One woman at the relief camp, KFC32, aged 34 from Nazareth, Sugnu was weaving Khamtangpuon, a Kuki shawl. Earlier she used to weave Phenek, a Meitei shawl which she can't do now as economic relations between Kuki and Meitei have also broken.

At Motbung relief camp in Kangpokpi, KFK1, a 29 year old female commented that she had only received a small amount of money when she entered the camp, and after that there has been no means of livelihood.

KFK3, a 31 year old woman from the same camp remarked that she is forced to learn sowing seeds and weaving in order to earn a livelihood at a nearby agricultural field. She used to run a shop before but now all that is lost, and there has been no response from the government. She claimed that she was entitled to Rs. 8 lakhs worth of compensation from the State under various schemes like Rural Livelihood Mission, Skill Development Loans, Welfare Schemes and Legal Training under the SC-ST Prevention Act, etc, but so far, she has not received anything. Many IDPs had started earning, earning small income through different activities such as selling vegetables, selling petrol in the black market, bamboo work and handicrafts. They also set up tea stalls, sold cooked meat and sugarcane juice beside the streets. Second-hand clothes and essential commodities were also sold for a commission. Many were forced to work as domestic workers, daily wage worker in farms and construction sites. However, such opportunities were seldom available. The same was true for getting reliable and consistent buyers for all the produce. RUS, in collaboration with other local nonprofits had started a small project of rebuilding livelihood for 1000 women IDPs through material support and setting up of IDP Women Market known as KinepNa bazar which means 'Market of Hope' in New Bazaar.

Meitei Camps

At ApunbaTengbangLup in Bishnupur, MeFB2, a 32-year old widow said that she got paid employment from the government for 10 days, but then it was discontinued without any reason. She also said that she had not got any compensation from the state government for the loss of her kin's lives. MeMB3, a 30-year old man from the same camp recalled how government officials had promised skill-development training in the camp, but that never took place. MeMB4, a 48 year old man, who is wheelchair bound said that any kind of livelihood is difficult for him. And in the absence of any scheme from the government, one of his daughters is helping at a local stitching shop, while another goes to school. Two more

women, MeFB6 and MeFB7, aged 49 and 29 respectively also shared how their whole livelihoods are dependent on the MGNREGS since they started living in the camp. They shared that for the first 15 days, they got work as sweepers, but after that there has been no update or development of the situation. They also shared how CM Biren Singh had promised Rs. 1 lakhs ex-gratia amount for those who lost a member of their family, but no such amount has been disbursed yet.

At Indoor Stadium relief camp, Kakching, inmates are making handicraft items which will be sold to the DC who will then organise an exhibition of these items. Some men have gone back to work on agricultural fields which also explains the smaller number of men compared to women in camp.

In Santhong relief camp, Moirang, 70 year old MeFB9 lives with her elderly sister and takes care of her 3 year old grandson since his mother died during childbirth and his father had left for Manipur to fight. They have no means of earning any livelihood and are entirely dependent on the camp supplies. Both of them still have nightmares from the night of the violence.

Meitei Camps (visited in November 2024)

At Phayeng High School relief camp some women make plastic bags and some make candles but the problem is to find a market to sell these items. In the Manipur Trade and Export Centre in Lamboikhongnangkhong, some inmates have taken advantage of the spacious campus to have cultivated their kitchen gardens. Most people go out to work as daily wage workers.

From Samurou Government High School relief camp most people go to cottage industry units to package incense sticks, candles, bakery items, dry

fish to earn their wages. Women are engaged in some handicraft and uncovering Supari work.

At Pravabati College relief camp in Mayang Imphal three handlooms have been provided by the community on which some women inmates work. On a number of occasions government officials have promised them to give sewing machines, etc. or training in some skills but nothing has come out of it. Only one training in mushroom cultivation was imparted but the inmates were not provided the necessary material to take up this work.

At Biramangol College Hostel relief camp in Sawombung, four handlooms have been provided by the government but the women at this camp think that the requirement is much bigger, about 15 more looms. Men find it difficult to get work because of the adverse effect on the economy due to ongoing violence.

8.3.3.3. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

Kuki Camps

In Sangai University relief camp, there is a tank for drinking water, but the water for washing and bathing had to be drawn from a small river nearby. As of 27th May 2024, the IDPs were seen collecting rainwater in their buckets and containers. 12 toilets have been built by MSF (Doctors without Borders) but they are used only during night time lest they might get dirty. IDPs prefer to go out in the open to relieve themselves. There is a ringwell near the toilets where women take bath by wrapping a cloth around them. Camp in-charge T. Solenmang Haokip on behalf of Kuki Khangloi Lompi mentioned that at least 10 more toilets are required for this relief camp. KFC32, who was weaving traditional Kuki shawls, stayed with her 3 children on a makeshift bed covered by a mosquito net. She does not have a room and the space is dark, dingy and prone to water-logging.

In Motbung relief camp in Kangpokpi, families have access to separate, attached toilets to their rooms, which are prefabricated constructions. Water supply was fairly adequate.

Meitei Camps

In ApunbaTengbangLup in Bishnupur as the camp is being run out of a properly constructed government building so people had access to the normal water supply and separate toilets.

At Santhong relief camp in Moirang women had to use dirty water from a nearby to wash their clothes.

In Thongju in Imphal East again the camp is functioning in a government set up so there is regular water supply. In Motbung there was a submersible pump installed. Separate , functional toilets are available for the IDPs.

Meitei Camps (visited in November 2024)

At Phayeng High School, there is proper water supply since the camp is housed inside an institutional building. However, there are only two toilets. The school toilets are also available for use during non-school hours. However, people have to take baths in the open, and women use enclosures set up with pieces of cloth.

At Manipur Trade and Export Centre in Lamboikhongnangkhong, there is adequate water supply. There are five blocks in the camp each with 32-33 families. Each block has ten toilets, five each for men and women.

In Samurou Government High School, there are provisions for adequate water and there are 6 toilets for women and 2 for men. However, people have to take baths in the open.

In Pravabati College in Mayang Imphal, water has to be brought in from outside sometimes despite the camp being in an institutional building. Additionally, there are 8 toilets and 2 bathrooms.

Since the Biramangol College Hostel in Sawombung is a relief camp set up in a hostel building, there is proper water supply, with 8 toilets and 5 bathrooms.

8.3.3.4 Health

Kuki Camps

The nearest hospital to Sangai University relief camp is the District Hospital in Churachandpur and a private Christian hospital about 5 km away. Immunization of children is being done here. Young Vaiphei Association and Rural Women Upliftment Society have arranged for medical camps and ambulances when needed. Medical camps were conducted by Doctors without Borders or Medico Friends Circle. No government doctor came. More than 86 deaths were recorded in the relief camp as per records maintained by KKL youth groups from the Kuki community. Causes of death included chronic illnesses such as cancer, kidney ailments, hearts problem, tuberculosis, diabetes etc. Many IDPs died on the way to Mizoram or Guwahati for medical treatments. Children suffered from measles, smallpox, chickenpox, tape worms, dysentery, common cold and fever. There was a pregnant woman, KFC26, who received some iron and calcium tablets but there was no prenatal or postnatal care available. For any complication people have to be taken to Aizawl which is at least 10 hours by road. In some cases patients have died on the way. One such patient was the mother of an 8-month old infant, KMC27 who died and is now looked after by the infant's 50 year old grandmother, KFC28. KMC30, a 70 year old man said that there is no medical intervention by the government. Apart from the medical camps, no doctors from the district hospitals come for inspection. He mentioned

outbreak of infectious diseases like chickenpox and measles in some camps, due to poor hygiene. Though the outbreak was controlled, all interventions are curative in nature, not preventative.

For Motbung relief camp in Kangpokpi, the nearest government hospital has merely one general medicine doctor. There are no specialist doctors. Motbung, which is halfway between Imphal and Kangpokpi, also has 2 private hospitals. The government hospitals did not get any medicines from Imphal. The IDPs were unable to afford the cost of essential medicines from nearby pharmacies. They would purchase medicines on credit in the name of KKL youth organisation. One day KKL approached the Rural Upliftment Society to help in clearing the outstanding medicine bills of 3 lakhs in the local pharmacy. Thankfully, the Mariwala Health Institute, Mumbai came to aid and cleared the bills. During the crisis Nagaland CM had provided Rs. 10 lakhs for medicines. KFK1, a 23 year old woman mentioned that there was a total breakdown of services along with denial of maternity benefits and institutional delivery. Previously, she and others would go to the government hospital for delivery, but now she cannot. She also mentioned that one cancer patient in the camp died because they could not access the government hospital in Imphal. KMK8, a 48 year old male living in a nearby camp cannot turn to the right, cannot walk, cannot stand for long, and cannot sit for long. His vision has also deteriorated badly. He mentioned some general physicians visit their camp for fever, cough, and cold, but more serious illnesses do not get any attention. KMK 11, a 65 year old male had asthma and diabetes. He mentioned not getting any medicines at relief camp. He said some doctors came a few times but then stopped coming, so he had to arrange his own medicines.

Meitei Camps

At ApunbaTengbangLup in Bishnupur, 4 children were born while their parents were in the camp, all deliveries took place in the government

hospital. At the same camp, MeMB3, a 30-year old man reported that the district hospital was functional and there was a steady supply of medicines. MeMB4, a 48 year old man said that his wife was a heart patient and a transplant was supposed to happen at AIIMS but there has been no response from the doctors for over 5 months.

At Indoor Stadium relief camp in Kakching there are two pregnant women who get monthly supplements and periodic medical checkups. The people in the camps get weekly supply of medicines for headache, blood pressure, diabetes, hepatitis B, etc, but for serious diseases like piles, diarrhea or any other serious illness, only prescriptions are given. Sanitary napkins are provided but it is insufficient. Once a week, only 10 packets are provided for the whole camp.

At Thongju, in Imphal East, CMO is providing medical facilities. Doctors visit thrice in a week, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. They are on call as well.

At the Sanjamai relief camp in Imphal, MeFI1 reported that they get medicines regularly at the camp and those who have eye or heart problems get treated by the doctors from the nearby government hospitals.

Meitei Camps (visited in November 2024)

In Phayeng High School, IDPs have access to the PHC nearby for health care needs. Doctor also visits the camp once in a month. However, no ambulance service is available if any patient has to be taken to a hospital in Imphal.

In the Manipur Trade and Export Centre, Lamboikhongnangkhong relief camp Medical Officer makes weekly visits to. In case of emergency the nearest hospital, RIMS is only 1.5 km away. Two inmates, a 65 years old woman and a 83 years old man have died due to illness at the camp.

Doctor visits the Samurou Government High School relief camp twice a week but doesn't bring medicines. There is a PHC half a km away and in case of emergency they can go to JNIMS, 13 km away. One inmate Ningthoujam Gopal, 57 years, died due to illness in the camp. There is another 14 years old boy who keeps lying on bed because of paralysis. A wheelchair has been provided for him by the social welfare department.

Doctor visits the Pravabati College relief camp in Mayang Imphal once a week. There is a PHC nearby and in case of emergency one has to go to RIMS which is 22 km away. There is 20 years old mental health patient Th. Usharani in this camp who finds it difficult to buy her medicines.

Doctor visits the Biramangol College Hostel relief camp in Sawombung three times a month. In case of emergency, JNIMS is 15-20 km away. Getting an ambulance can be difficult. Very few inmates have Ayushman cards.

8.3.3.5 Shelter, Settlements and Non-food items & Protection

Kuki Camps

At Sangai University, tarpaulin sheets tied to pillars of open verandahs of under-construction University buildings serve as walls. Each family stays in one such space enclosed by tarpaulin sheets. Few families also stay in rooms in common setups. There are no doors. The building is open from all sides. Staircases have no railings and ledges are uncovered making it dangerous for children and elderly. IDPs from 8-9 relief camps are put together in this one camp, making the living conditions unbearable. They have been sleeping on the floor without a mattress for almost two years now. The government had provided a single mattress, blanket and other non food items to every family, though there were about 5-8 members in each family. 30-80 families were sharing just one room, without any privacy. KMC31, a 70 year old man said that his house in Gelzang was

intact but he could not return because it is close to Meitei areas and even though Kuki volunteers patrol the area, it is still unsafe for IDPs to go there.

At Motbung relief camp in Kangkopki, several adjacent houses consisting of prefabricated panels in the form of units with separate toilets have been built as a block. Two rows of blocks constitute this relief camp. KFK1, a 23 year old female mentioned that the government had constructed some prefabricated houses in January 2024, yet she does not feel safe in the camp. KFK7, a 42 year old female mentioned that she had nothing when she came to the camp. She has got only one bedsheet before winter started. The DC gave foldable mattresses which get worn out and torn with only a few uses. Many NGOs came, and activists came, but have not been able to help us, she said.

Meitei Camps

At ApunbaTengbangLup in Bishnupur, MeMB3, a 30-year old man recalled how he had just one picture of his late father, and even that got burnt during the violence. “My mother has been in a state of depression since the incident and there is almost no hope left for the elderly in the camp.” Though he claimed that all his burnt certificates had been replaced by the government, he had still not received any compensation or news of resettlement. ‘Give us resettlement, not merely relief,’ he said.

The Kwakta Sericulture camp has well-built, colored brick-houses where almost 146 families were housed.

In Sanjamai relief camp in Imphal, MeFI1 reported that there was no security at the camp, while MeFI3, a 40 year-old woman said that she had a college-going daughter and with all kinds of people living in the camp, she felt it was safer to stay at a nearby hostel.

Meitei Camps (visited in November 2024)

At Phayeng High School relief camp 8-10 families are staying in each classroom of a portion of the school.

At Manipur Trade and Export Centre in Lamboikhongnangkhong, 32-33 families stay in each of the five blocks of a big campus, four of the blocks being on four corners of a large spacious hall.

At Samurou Government High School, five families stay in one classroom of the portion of school where relief camp is housed.

At Pravabati College relief camp in Mayang Imphal inmates live in an indoor stadium in a dormitory like arrangement with men on one side and women on another. Hence, unlike other relief camps, families don't stay as a unit here.

At Biramangol College Hostel relief camp in Sawombung, families stay in the college hostel rooms.

8.3.3.6 Education

Kuki Camps

In Sangai University, children attend a nearby government school and a private school St. Mary's. Children either use public transport or walk to the school. In December, 2023, 26 schools - 15 in Churachandpur and 11 in Kangpokpi received recognition from CBSE. State government objected to it after a week. Zonal Education Officer who gave NOCs required for obtaining recognition were suspended. Affiliation was withdrawn. State government has asked them to apply again with documents among which they require a fire safety certificate. The Director for Fire Safety sits in Imphal and they cannot go to Imphal. The future of students in these schools hangs in limbo. Kuki students who were studying at medical institutions like RIMS, JNIMS, SAHS (SHIJA Academy of Health Sciences) in Imphal prior to 3 May, 2023 are unable to attend classes. When classes resumed no arrangement was made to attend online. Complaint was made to the National Medical Commission. 120

students of MBBS, Post Graduate and Dental are affected. In spite of government order for online classes and/or in hybrid mode at Churachandpur Medical College, they did not happen regularly nor did examinations take place on time. Manipur University has now been given power to conduct examinations.

In Motbung relief camp in Kangpokpi there were nearby government schools that are functioning properly but there are no institutions for higher learning here. In the beginning of 2024, only about 30% of IDP children were enrolled in schools. 70% of IDP parents were unable to send back their children to schools. Kuki Students Organisation(KSO) started community school in three locations for IDP children under the theme of 'Leave no one behind'. They also started a campaign under the banner of 'no children must stop going to school because of conflict'. As of 2025, almost 99% of IDP children are enrolled in community schools free of cost. This reflects situation where local communities are doing what the government is supposed to do.

Meitei Camps

MeMB1, a 54-year old man from the ApunbaTengbangLup camp in Bishnupur said that his two children go to a school nearby, but are unable to concentrate on studies properly living inside the camp. He said that he is worried about their children's education unless resettlement happens soon.

At the Kwakta Sericulture Government relief camp, MeMB11, a 47 year old man said that there are difficulties in accessing good schools in the nearby area and the students have challenges concentrating inside the camp.

Children from Indoor Stadium relief camp, Kakching, go to the nearest government school.

In Santhong relief camp in Moirang many students were about to complete class XI but with no financial assistance from the government,

their dreams for higher education lay shattered. MeMB9, the President of the relief camp mentioned this is further compounded by lack of good schools near their relief camp, inaccessibility to government institutions, no money for books or transportation, and difficulty in understanding Manipuri language (because of displacement). MeFB10, a single mother has a 9 year old daughter who missed her exams because they had to flee their house and only resumed her education after almost a year later. It is difficult for MeFB10 to tend to her daughter because she has to look after her 70 year old mother at the camp as well.

Meitei Camps (visited in November 2024)

From Phayeng High School relief camp about 50 children of the families staying here all go outside to attend private schools whereas some of them were earlier studying in the school on campus. Parents feel that the quality of teaching in government schools is not good. Two women Juman and Chandralekha said they even sell part of the supplies they get from the government so that they can pay the fees of their children. They became emotional on this issue and said they are willing to go to any length to ensure that their children get a good education because they are their hope for the future.

Children from Manipur Trade and Export Centre in Lamboikhongnangkhong go to both government and private schools nearby.

From Samurou Government High School relief camp 4-5 children go to private schools, remaining study in government schools.

All 30 children from Pravabati College relief camp in Mayang Imphal attend private schools and based on a certificate from the relief committee here the private schools don't charge fees from students who are inmates

of the relief camp. The parents have to only take care of the transportation expenses.

Out of the 63 students at Biramangol College Hostel relief camp in Sawombung some go to government schools and some to private. Konssam Phalguni, a B.Sc. II year student sells ice-cream to pay for his college fees.

8.4. State of Relief Camps: Findings and Analysis

In this section, we use the anecdotes mentioned above to analyse the standard of living in relief camps as against the declared and proclaimed level of aid by the government. We also compare and contrast the State of facilities between Kuki and Meitei camps and try to trace the causes for the same.

8.4.1. Food Security and Nutrition, Livelihood

Compared to the claims made by the Minister of Women and Child Development (WCD) in the Parliament in response to the question put forth by Manipur M.P. BimolAkoijam, the situation in relief camps was woeful. Inmates of two relief camps - one Meitei and one Kuki – were asked about the 14 points relating to Women and Children by the WCD Minister. They said that hardly any of the provisions mentioned had been implemented. Except for the first installment of Rs. 3,000 as part of the PM Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) to some pregnant women, the majority of female inmates were not getting any benefit like supplementary diet or free ambulance services. Orphaned and semi-orphaned children were not getting any nutritional or financial assistance, and neither was there any home for them in Kangpokpi. In none of the camps we visited did we find any Anganwadi centers being run. Therefore, the government's claims are Utopian at best, and exaggerated at worst.

The case of non-operational Anganwadi centers is not merely an institutional failure, but a gross violation of food security, and in turn the Right to Life of one of the most vulnerable sections of the population, viz. infants and children below 8 years of age. During such formative years, even the slightest neglect leads to permanent damage to the child's mental, psychological and physical development, crippling them for life. Healthy, nutritious and age-appropriate diet for both the mother and child are critical needs which cannot wait until infrastructural, ethnic and political roadblocks are resolved. Especially since a large section of children in India suffer from malnutrition while their mothers suffer from anemia due to acute deficiency of nutritious food.

In many of the Meitei camps food was adequate but they neither comprised of a nutritious nor balanced diet. With only rice, dal and potatoes being regular and legumes or eggs being infrequent at best and absent at worst, women, children, inmates with disabilities or infirmities, and the elderly were left in an especially vulnerable state for more than a year. The situation was particularly dire in the Kuki camps with stocks of even basic foodgrains not lasting more than 2-3 days at a stretch. While civil society organizations stepped in fill the gap, they were barely making ends meet with the limited funds they could raise. In such a scenario, there is no option of not having consistent, targeted government interventions towards providing the basic necessities for having a dignified sustenance inside relief camps.

A similar indispensability of targeted government interventions is seen with inmates having disabilities since they cannot go outside in search of other opportunities like their other able-bodied inmates. The number of women was higher than that of men in camps because the men either returned to their villages to work on their farms (if their lands had not been taken over by others) or were on frontline duty defending their villages from attacks by militant groups.

8.4.2. *Livelihood*

In terms of implementing in-house employment opportunities inside relief camps, there was a lot of variation both within and across Kuki and Meitei camps, with there being more opportunities and consistency of work in the latter than the former. This may be attributed to the difference in infrastructure and amenities available to Meitei camps versus Kuki camps, on an average. Implementation of 100-days guaranteed work under the NREGA also saw many irregularities and inconsistencies, with inmates from almost all camps complaining of either not receiving full payment for the work or not being given work for the full 100 days. With intermittent violence rocking the local economy at regular intervals, there was limited scope of starting or resuming any form of business or employment without the active intervention of the state authorities.

Many have been compensated for the loss of life in their families due to violence but they have not been compensated for the loss of businesses or homes to arson despite having been given reassurances by the government. On the surface, the Meiteis seemed to have incurred a greater amount of economic loss owing to their relatively better financial position pre-conflict, with losses amounting to crores for some business-owners in Bishnupur, Morei and Imphal. However, the Kukis were more vulnerable to any kind of loss of property or means of livelihood. So even if the sheer magnitude of economic loss is lesser than the Meiteis, the Kukis were left in a far more deprived and vulnerable state post-violence.

The arbitrariness in the payment of cash per day to inmates in relief camps depending on whether their houses have been burned or not is both irrational and inexplicable. For many inmates, their houses may not have been razed, but amidst widespread looting and restrictions on travel, their houses. Despite this, there is no uniformity in distributing cash or various supplies in different camps.

Those already employed or seeking employment in public sector jobs were denied their Right to earn a Livelihood because they could not travel to an area dominated by the other ethnic group. Many entrance examinations were held in such centrally located intuitions which were in and around Imphal, so Kukis had to seek other alternatives or travel to neighboring states to appear for such examinations. The same applied to people who had qualified for public sector jobs and had received appointment letters, but could not join them because of restrictions of travel. Though both Kukis and Meiteis were affected because of this, the former suffered much more because most of the jobs lay in the developed Meitei dominated urban areas surrounding Imphal.

8.4.3. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

A similar trend of infrastructural disparities between Kuki and Meitei camps exist regarding issues of water, sanitation and hygiene. While such facilities are essential aspects of any settlement, their inadequacy or absence cause much greater harm than what is usually perceived. Lack of separate washrooms for men and women, inadequate provision for water and unhygienic, overcrowded and claustrophobic living spaces not only make day-to-day living unimaginably difficult but also impacts one physically, mentally and psychologically, particularly one's sense of dignity. For survivors of violence who lost their family, friends, homes and their normal way of life, not being able to live in a dignified manner inside relief camps pushes them to edge of sanity. With soaring ethnic tensions, delay in serving justice and the complete breakdown of governance and the rule of law, there is little hope to cling to, and even lesser hope to aspire for in the near future. In such circumstances, stress, trauma and mental health ailments often push inmates towards suicide, as is elaborated on in the next chapter. All of these issues are not only connected, but are deeply influenced by one's notion of dignity and their feeling of belonging with

the other inmates. Both of which are mediated by the living conditions inside camps, especially with regards to water, sanitation and hygiene. Lack of privacy, inadequate water, safe, hygienic and accessible restrooms or bathing facilities not only impair an individual's wellbeing and capacity to cope with stress but also strain relations with other inmates due to the lack of resources.

Therefore, any form of relief and rehabilitation must go beyond checking boxes for providing basic necessities and instead focus on all those amenities which enable and promote individual and collective wellbeing within relief camps, especially in terms of water, sanitation and hygiene.

8.4.4. Health

Access to overall healthcare was an alarming issue across both Kuki and Meitei camps. From shortage of medicines to infrequent health check-ups due unavailability of doctors, the crisis put more strain on the health system than it could handle. Despite additional help from organizations like Medico Friends Circle or Doctors without Borders, a large proportion of inmates had to live through their ailments, ending up with long-term health-risks at best, and premature death at worst.

The Kuki camps were significantly worse off in terms of getting access to quality healthcare. While there were obvious infrastructural differences between the Kuki-dominated hills and the Meitei-dominated plains, these disparities turned into chronic deprivation because the hills were cut-off from receiving any kind of medical assistance from Imphal and the surrounding areas. The unsaid rule of no Kuki being allowed to enter a Meitei area and vice versa greatly impacted the administrative mechanism, leaving many relief schemes unimplemented in Kuki and Meitei relief camps in the hills. Kuki camps being located in more interior parts of the hills suffered even more because of the conflict. The Additional District

Collector (ADC) of Churachandpur had mentioned that the main reason for relief not reaching the more remote camps was because the BDOs and CDPOs in-charge of those areas were Meiteis who had fled from Churachandpur, a Kuki-dominated district during the 3rd May conflict and now could not return because they were Meiteis trying to enter a Kuki area.

Hospitals, PHCs and medical facilities were geographically inaccessible to many relief camps so the inmates of those camps had to incur out-of-pocket expenditures at private healthcare providers. Relief camps would often receive infrequent supplies of generic medicine or health check-ups but there was little scope for getting any kind of specialized support at camps. This meant that for any major treatment or diagnosis, the Kukis had to travel to Nagaland, Assam or Mizoram, almost tripling costs. In Kangpokpi, no government or private hospital had a dialysis machine and patients had to travel outside of the district to avail treatment. Lack of ambulance services often led to many patient deaths or miscarriages and this was exacerbated by the remoteness of certain camps and the restrictions on travel. Some Kuki camps did receive more routine visit than Meitei camps, but that was primarily due to civil society intervention, and not government intervention.

8.4.5. Shelter, Settlements and Non-food items & (6) Protection

Based on the visits, one can broadly conceive of the following types of relief camps:

- a) Makeshift/Informal Camps (Tarpaulin shelters, under-construction buildings, etc),
- b) Prefabricated Block Camps (Government-built units with attached toilets, etc),
- c) Institutional Building Camps (Schools, stadiums, college hostels, etc).

From the descriptions it is clear that the safety and habitability provided by the relief camps to increase as we go down the list. Most Meitei camps, especially ones near Imphal largely fall under the last two categories. Meanwhile Kuki camps majorly fall in the first category. Even if they are housed in school buildings, they are far more overcrowded and under-resourced than their Meitei counterparts. Thus we see a similar pattern of disparity between the Kukis and Meiteis, and this can be attributed to similar economic, social and geographical forces as mentioned in the previous sections. This is also reflected in how Meitei camps received more frequent aid and support from State authorities compared to Kuki camps.

By and large, Kuki camps lacked separate rooms, windows and even partitions. They did not have proper water supply and lacked hygienic, separate washrooms for men and women. In terms of medicine, food or other material possessions like beds, blankets, etc, these camps were on the edge of sustenance, with inmates languishing from hunger, poverty, disease and a sense of hopelessness. Meanwhile Meitei camps had separate rooms and some camps had separate washrooms with a steady supply of water as well. Food was available and was often nutritious as well. Many inmates had shifted out of temporary relief camps into pre-fabricated houses or even rented houses in nearby areas. For those remaining inside camps, the main concerns were around lack of privacy, occasional security breaches and losing out on education or employment opportunities.

This sharp contrast is only brought out to show how a one-size-fit-all approach to rehabilitation will neither be practical or effective for inmates at such different levels of vulnerability across camps. One common theme emerged, that no inmate wanted to spend any more time in the relief camp. Having been stranded in such camps for over a year, they were showing visible impatience and frustration of still not being relocated to a safer location or back to their native villages. Inmates from four relief

camps in Imphal organized a demonstration regarding the issue of languishing in relief camps for over a year.

8.4.6. Education

Education was severely disrupted for both Meiteis and Kukis as almost all educational institutions remained shut for at least the first few months since the violence erupted. But slowly, as such institutions started resuming operations, the Kukis found it increasingly difficult to continue their education compared to their Meitei counterparts. As more time elapsed, the educational gaps between the two groups due to the disruption started widening significantly and continue to widen to this day.

A particular area of concern was the sheer number of out-of-school children in relief camps. In their formative years, even a year's worth of missing school leads to learning gaps that never get addressed throughout school unless the children are offered remedial programmes. With government schools largely shut and no income barring a one-time compensation by the government, parents also found it very difficult to meet the expenses for continuing their children's' education. The government could have ensured the children were admitted in the nearest private schools u/s 12(1)(c) of the RTE Act (which fixes the responsibility of private unaided schools to provide free and compulsory education to children from weaker and disadvantaged sections by admitting at least one-fourth of the total strength of class I or pre-school education). The said private schools could easily have been compensated by the government. This would've been logistically much easier than giving educational aid to individual families and leaving it to them to get their children enrolled in a school. The fact that this was considered shows a clear lack of political will.

Geographically, most of the premier educational institutions, especially colleges and high schools were clustered around Imphal. Both Kukis and Meiteis used to go to these institutions, though Meiteis were much larger in number in such institutions. Post-violence, all this changed. Kukis could no longer go to any Meitei area, making such institutions inaccessible to them. This not only deprived them of the Right to Education, but also denied them public sector employment opportunities, whose entrance examinations were held in such centrally located intuitions. The same fate awaited those who had received appointment letters for posts in educational institutions but could not join because they lay in an area dominated by the other ethnic group. Though this applied to both Kukis and Meiteis, the former suffered much more because most of the jobs lay in the Meitei dominated areas surrounding Imphal. Many Meitei students studying in Kuki areas had gone to Imphal and had been accommodated in educational institutions but the Kuki students returning from Imphal to Kuki areas had not been so lucky. This was because the resource-poor Kuki areas found it much harder to resume education in their institutions than in the plains.

Additionally, many of the colleges adopted unfair and unethical practices towards students, either trying to economically exploit them or ethnically discriminate against them. Many students and parents had testified that they were unfairly charged tuition and lodging fees for the entire duration their colleges were closed. These fees added up to well beyond lakhs over a period of more than a year. Other institutions withheld passing certificates or transfer certificates until extra fees were paid. Many such cases were taken to the High Court as well by different parents' bodies and still await judgment.

Often this economic exploitation was also accompanied by ethnic discrimination, where ethnicities were identified by either name or address and such students were either marked poorly, failed or simply expelled due

to some technical reason (often masking the ethnic discrimination). If Meiteis were expelled from institutions in Kuki areas, they could always find alternatives in Meitei areas. But the converse does not hold true. Again, the consequences were disproportionately grave for Kukis than Meiteis due to the same reasons, as explained above.

This is also reflected in the number of students who have been forced to go outside the state to continue their education and how long they have been able to continue in those places. With no means of livelihood, paying fees for even a year becomes burdensome. More importantly still, having to migrate to an unfamiliar state amidst the fresh trauma of the violence along with leaving the rest of the family in relief camps places an even greater burden on such students who are deprived of education. All this is in addition to the emotional turmoil of students who had lost more than a year and were in camps far away from the comfort, safety and privacy of their homes. This cruel reality is reflected in the story of 7 year Hoineijem Vaiphei aka Je Jem, who had joined the Government Model Lower Primary School at Thycaud in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, thousands of miles away from her family in Manipur²⁶¹.

All this severely impairs innocent students' mental health, emotional wellbeing, educational capabilities, rendering a sense of hopelessness in a competitive market-driven economy, and a violent, polarized society.

8.5. Gita Mittal Committee Report: Findings and Analysis

The Justice Gita Mittal Committee submitted three initial reports (August 2023) highlighting: (1) widespread loss of essential identity documents among displaced survivors, (2) significant inadequacies in the Manipur Victim Compensation Scheme (MVCS) compared with the National Legal

²⁶¹<https://www.deccanherald.com/india/kerala/many-students-from-manipur-coming-down-to-kerala-to-resume-their-studies-2691501> (last accessed: 23th October, 2024)

Services Authority (NALSA) framework, and (3) the urgent need to appoint domain experts to streamline relief operations²⁶². Some observations made by the Gita Mittal Committee on extent of state relief, gaps in implementation and subsequent recommendation are listed below.

8.5.1. Relief and Rehabilitation Measures Delivered by the State

Following outbreaks of communal violence from May 3, 2023, the Manipur government opened numerous relief camps across the valley and hill districts, providing displaced families with basic shelter and security oversight by security forces, including the use of drones and helicopters to monitor volatile areas²⁶³.

In affidavits to the Supreme Court, the Chief Secretary of Manipur reported that there was no shortage of food, medicines, or other essential supplies in relief camps. Any residual grievances were directed to district administrations or the Court appointed Committee for redressal²⁶⁴. Relief camps also received on-site medical arrangements, with critical cases referred to Army Hospitals and regional medical institutions as needed.

To ensure safe movement of stranded persons, the state organized helicopter corridors linking hill districts (e.g., Churachandpur, Kangpokpi) with Imphal, while coordinating with Assam and other neighboring states to facilitate evacuee transport.

²⁶²<https://m.economictimes.com/news/india/manipur-violence-sc-to-pass-orders-on-aug-25-to-facilitate-functioning-of-justice-gita-mittal-panel/articleshow/102897600.cms?> (last accessed: 23st October, 2024)

²⁶³<https://www.scobserver.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Judgement-Oversight-Committee.pdf>

²⁶⁴<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/supreme-court-demands-status-report-on-recovery-of-stolen-arms-in-manipur-ethnic-clashes-101693995008257.html> (last accessed: 23st October, 2024)

By mid-July 2023, the state reported having registered over 6,500 FIRs, documented 150 deaths and 502 injuries, and opened compensation schemes for death and injury cases. Preliminary interim payments (e.g., ₹10 lakhs per death) were directed, pending comprehensive disbursement plans for home, church reconstruction and mesne-profit arrangements for encroached properties.

While primarily focused on humanitarian relief, the Committee also coordinated with SITs headed by retired DIG-rank officers and monitored the transfer of high profile trial cases (such as the sexual assault of two women) to courts in Guwahati for timely & impartial adjudication²⁶⁵.

8.5.2. Gaps in State Aid and Relief Efforts

Thousands of displaced survivors lost Aadhaar cards, voter IDs, land records, and other essential documents during the violence—hindering access to relief, bank accounts, compensation, and social welfare schemes²⁶⁶.

The 2019 MVCS disqualifies victims who have received benefits under any other scheme, unlike NALSA’s pan-India scheme which “tops up” previous benefits when determining additional compensation. This exclusionary clause left many survivors without recourse to adequate financial redress²⁶⁷.

Witnesses faced delays in FIR registration up to 14 days in some sexual assault cases—and protracted investigation timelines. Families residing in

²⁶⁵<https://dainikasam.assamtribune.com/north-east/sc-extends-oversight-on-manipur-violence-cases-confirms-trials-to-be-held-in-guwahati-1571435> (last accessed: 25th October, 2024)

²⁶⁶<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/supreme-court-to-address-plight-of-manipur-ethnic-clash-victims-mulls-compensation-and-relief-measures-101692642382176.html> (last accessed: 25th October, 2024)

²⁶⁷<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/justice-mittal-panel-flags-inadequacies-in-manipur-victim-compensation-scheme/articleshow/102919688.cms> (last accessed: 25th October, 2024)

relief camps encountered administrative hurdles in accessing compensation, medical referrals & school admissions for displaced children.

Despite high levels of trauma among victims—particularly women and children—the absence of structured mental-health and psycho-social services in relief camps compounded survivors’ suffering. Committee reports noted the need for regular counseling and dedicated One-Stop Centres for holistic care.

Relief operations also suffered from inconsistent data collection, lack of a centralized web portal, and insufficient real time monitoring, hampering resource allocation & accountability across districts.

8.5.3. Key Recommendations of the Gita Mittal Committee

8.5.3.1. Reconstruction of Identity Documents

- **Nodal Officer:** Appoint a dedicated nodal officer in each district to oversee reconstructing lost documents.
- **UIDAI Coordination:** Direct UIDAI to re-issue Aadhaar cards following biometric verification of displaced persons.
- **Bank Account Access:** Instruct banks to furnish displaced persons with details of their existing accounts to prevent financial exclusion²⁶⁸.

8.5.3.2. Upgrading the MVCS to Align with NALSA

- **Inclusive Compensation:** Amend MVCS to adopt NALSA’s approach of “additional benefit” rather than complete exclusion for those who received other aid.

²⁶⁸<https://www.scobserver.in/journal/supreme-court-accepts-expert-committees-recommendations-to-improve-conditions-of-displaced-persons-in-manipur/> (last accessed: 25th October, 2024)

- **Broadening Eligibility:** Ensure compensation covers victims of sexual violence, property loss, and psychological trauma, with tiered slabs for death, injury, abduction, mental health support.

8.5.3.3. Appointment of Domain Experts

- **Multidisciplinary Panel:** Recruit at least 12 experts—including rehabilitation specialists, mental-health professionals, legal policy analysts (e.g., Vidhi Centre), data scientists, and child-protection officers—to support field assessments, policy design, and monitoring²⁶⁹.

8.5.3.4. Procedural Directions and Logistical Support

- **Administrative Requisitions & Funding:** Secure dedicated government funding and administrative support to meet the Committee’s operational costs.
- **Office Space & Web Portal:** Establish permanent workspace (courtesy of Delhi HC or Union MHA) and launch a public web portal for real time updates on relief camp locations, compensation status, and survivor services.

8.5.3.5. Holistic Relief Camp Management

- **Dignity in Camps:** Upgrade camp infrastructure—sanitation, privacy for women, child-friendly areas—and expand camp numbers where overcrowding persists.
- **One-Stop Centres& Counseling:** Implement camps to provide bi-monthly counseling in collaboration with local NGOs & integrate mental health support into relief services²⁷⁰.

²⁶⁹<https://theprint.in/judiciary/doctors-ex-civil-servant-among-12-rehabilitation-experts-sc-appointed-panel-has-sought-for-manipur/1725643/> (last accessed: 28th October, 2024)

²⁷⁰https://ijels.com/upload_document/issue_files/16IJELS-103202522-Vulnerability.pdf

8.5.3.6. Livelihood Restoration and Skill Training

- **Youth Skill Programs:** Launch large-scale vocational and sports coach training for youth (e.g., hospitality, table tennis, judo) to rebuild livelihoods and foster community resilience.
- **Health-Center PPPs:** Operationalize primary health centers via PPP (e.g., Apollo Tele-medicine in Imphal) for sustained healthcare access beyond emergency relief²⁷¹.

8.5.3.7. Time Bound Monitoring and Review

- **Fixed Timelines:** Direct state agencies to disburse interim compensation (e.g., ₹10 lakhs per death, ₹4 lakhs per grievous injury) within three months of claims.
- **Periodic Reporting:** Mandate bi-weekly status reports to the Supreme Court detailing relief camp conditions, compensation disbursements, arms recovery updates, and resettlement arrangements.

8.5.3.8. Security and Property Restitution

- **Encroachment & Mesne Profits:** Complete surveys of destroyed or encroached properties, determine mesne profits, and implement restitution schemes for owners.
- **Safe-Return Protocols:** Coordinate law-and-order measures to facilitate displaced persons' safe return, including securing tribal-majority villages and religious sites.

8.6. State of Relief Camps: Under President's Rule

After almost 2 years of protests calling for Biren Singh's resignation by a large section of Kukis and Meiteis alike, President's Rule was abruptly announced by the central government on 13th February, 2025, followed by

²⁷¹<https://hubnetwork.in/manipur-governments-initiatives-to-rebuild-lives-and-communities-affected-by-manipur-violence/> (last accessed: 28th October, 2024)

Biren Singh stepping down as Chief Minister. Even then thousands of IDPs remained stranded in relief camps. Official figures to the Supreme Court put about 57,000 people in 361 camps as of March 2025 out of ~60,000 displaced by the Meitei–Kuki clashes²⁷².

After imposition President’s Rule, authorities have announced large relief allocations. In March 2025, the Manipur government released ₹161 crore for camp relief and ₹25 crore for permanent housing. The Home Ministry provided another ₹217 crore for relief and rehabilitation²⁷³. A five-judge Supreme Court delegation led by Justice BR Gavai, visited camps on 22nd March 2025, distributed essential supplies, and helped enroll eligible IDPs in government welfare schemes²⁷⁴. Civil society and the Education Department have provided support as well: for example, nonprofits like Wide Angle and CRY distributed books and learning kits to over 1,300 children in about 15 camps near Imphal in late April 2025²⁷⁵. Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla highlighted that new training and skill programs (“Hunar Se Rozgar”) for displaced youth and other initiatives under way to improve conditions in relief camps²⁷⁶. Earlier schemes announced by the state (some in late 2024) including cash payouts (₹1,000 one-time aid), linking camp students to schools, nutrition and hygiene kits, document replacement centers and planned prefabricated houses were still incomplete or unoccupied as of early 2025²⁷⁷.

²⁷²<https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/03/27/india-ethnic-clashes-restart-manipur> (last accessed: 25th April, 2025)

²⁷³<https://northeastlivetv.com/topnews/manipur-govt-releases-rs-186-crore-for-idp/> (last accessed: 25th April, 2025)

²⁷⁴<https://www.newsonair.gov.in/supreme-court-judges-visit-manipur-relief-camps-assess-idp-conditions/> (last accessed: 26th April, 2025)

²⁷⁵<https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=17..220425.apr25#:~:text=The%20initiative%2C%20led%20by%20Sucheta,rsiding%20in%20these%20relief%20camps> (last accessed: 26th April, 2025)

²⁷⁶<https://theprint.in/india/significant-efforts-made-to-restore-normalcy-in-manipur-governor/2600407/> (last accessed: 26th April, 2025)

²⁷⁷<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/manipur-relief-camps-face-another-winter-of-struggle-amid-ethnic-violence/articleshow/115538604.cms> (last accessed: 26th April, 2025)

Despite renewed efforts, reports underscore severe gaps in last mile delivery of relief on the ground. Human Rights Watch and news investigations describe *overcrowded, austere conditions*. One hill camp (run by the Church) had no running water, just two latrines, no piped water and minimal rations, so churches and NGOs had to provide most of the food. Inhabitants say government food is “very limited” and “irregular” to the point that they would not survive without the help from the Church²⁷⁸. In valley camps, some state support exists (e.g. holding camps in converted college buildings or sports complexes), but resources are stretched thin because of overcrowding. The report notes a Meitei evacuee sharing an Imphal relief centre with 600 others. Feeding arrangements are still meager – with analysts finding camps relying on only 400g of rice per person per day, leading to hunger complaints. Sanitation, healthcare and education are still inadequate. Local critics point out that very little official relief has actually reached remote hill areas. An Imphal legislator observed in Parliament that “scarcely any government relief is going to the Kuki-inhabited areas of Kangpokpi and Churachandpur,” and that the state budget has failed to address the historic Imphal-valley vs. hill disparity²⁷⁹. Many displaced families (from both communities) continue to live in limbo – fearful to return home without security guarantees, and struggling with lost homes, jobs and documents.

Meitei-majority camps (Imphal/valley) residing in government facilities continue to receive more visible state assistance (security patrols, regular rice distribution, etc.), but are increasingly getting overcrowded with looming uncertainty on shifting into permanent settlements. Meanwhile Kuki camps, though not as overcrowded, suffer from systemic neglect and survive on minimum rations and amenities. However, since both groups

²⁷⁸<https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/03/27/india-ethnic-clashes-restart-manipur>(last accessed: 27th April, 2025)

²⁷⁹<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/in-parliament-manipur-is-let-down-again-9928753/>

are cut-off from each other, a perception that the other group is better off and is receiving more support has steadily built up in both Kukis and Meiteis over the past few months. This creates a simmering distrust among the two groups fosters a polarized and volatile environment that can once again open the doors to ethnic violence in the wake of an event like the rally on 3rd May.

To summarize, some relief efforts have begun under central rule – big fund releases, camp visits by officials and judges, educational support, etc. – but many critical shortfalls remain. Shortfalls that have been plaguing the lives of IDPs since the violence began. Restoring normalcy will not just require restoration of documents and livelihoods, but rebuilding homes alongside confidence-restoring and peace-building measures for both Kuki and Meitei survivors.

The chapter on “Relief, Rehabilitation and Rebuilding Lives” lays bare a grim picture of the state’s response to the ongoing ethnic violence that broke out in May 2023. Initially, the review of state aid and existing disaster management frameworks revealed that while policies like the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and the National Guidelines on Temporary Shelters, 2019 were in place to ensure swift action, these protocols were rendered ineffective in the face of a man-made, state-sponsored crisis. The State apparatus, despite possessing the requisite authority and resources, displayed a marked lack of preparedness and an alarming reluctance to deploy them, raising serious questions about willful neglect and even collusion at various levels of administration.

The chapter then systematically examined the early response and the declared aid packages—from ex-gratia payments and contingency funds to the construction of temporary shelters. However, juxtaposing these declarations with on-ground realities, it becomes evident that the promised support was both insufficient and inconsistently distributed. Detailed

analysis through the Joint Rapid Needs Assessment Report (JRNA) underscored critical deficiencies across essential sectors such as food security, nutrition, water, sanitation, healthcare, shelter, protection, and education. These deficits were exacerbated by the chronic under-delivery of promised services and material aid. Despite such findings being made public in almost a month's time since the first outbreak of violence, it cuts a very sorry figure for the State, when almost a year later, the same deficiencies (further exacerbated in the meantime) were found in the camps visited by the Tribunal almost a year later.

A comparative assessment of relief camps exposed a stark differential treatment between the Meitei and Kuki communities. While Meitei camps, by virtue of their proximity to administrative hubs, managed to secure marginally better facilities and more regular services, the Kuki camps were left grappling with dire shortages, dilapidated shelters, and erratic support. Such disparities are symptomatic of deeper issues—political favoritism, collusion between state agencies, and a systemic neglect that has left the most vulnerable bereft of dignity, essential rights, and guaranteed material entitlements and livelihood opportunities.

Today, the situation in the relief camps still remains precarious. With many families still languishing in temporary setups that barely meet basic human needs, the current framework of aid appears to have been a stopgap measure rather than a genuine pathway to recovery. The camps continue to operate under conditions that reinforce dependency, while the promise of a dignified, long-term rehabilitation remains unfulfilled. Every camp houses a whole range of especially vulnerable people: Women, children, the elderly, those with disabilities, and those suffering from chronic illnesses. Additionally, survivors have different economic needs. While some aspire for regular work or steady supply of rations, others dream of completing their education, retrieving copies of burnt documents or relocating back to their ancestral lands. Any serious attempt

towards recovery has to keep these intersectionalities and diversities in mind while designing targeted interventions, by either civil society or the government.

Rehabilitation and Recovery must be looked at as a necessary first step towards Relief and not as the end point. A notion of 'Relief' from a human rights perspective has to help 'rebuild lives', and not just stop at 'recovery'. To achieve that, our focus has to shift eventually towards Reconciliation and Restoration. The same can be imagined in the form of a three-pronged approach in the short-medium-long run respectively.

In the short run, Recovery of Lost Property and Reclaiming the Dignity of Individuals must be of paramount importance. This can be achieved by establishing transparent and decentralized mechanisms for adequate allocation and distribution of compensation and restoration of property. Additionally, specialized medical practitioners can be deployed to help survivors deal with bereavement, trauma and other mental, physical and emotional impact from not just the violence but also from subsisting in unlivable conditions in relief camps. Ensuring these basic material and psychological needs first is crucial to start a slow but gradual journey towards rebuilding their lives.

In the short-medium run, the priority must shift to Reconstructing permanent homes for survivors and helping them Recover economic security through livelihood guarantees. This can be done through a staggered program that starts with the transition of IDPs from temporary relief camps to permanent settlements and leads to investment in sustainable livelihood programs, skill development, and monetary entitlements. It is essential that these employment schemes are implemented in the form of guarantees so that the survivors do not have to worry about finding their footing in the job market after having lost considerable time and opportunity due to the violence, compared to their

peers from other areas. These kinds of economic guarantees offer a tangible route to self-sufficiency, thereby helping survivors to begin rebuilding their lives without undue stress and hardship.

Finally, in the medium-long run, Reconciliation of Ethnic Hatred and Restoration of Community Resilience has to be focussed on as part of rebuilding lives. Using interventions like community dialogue, reparative justice measures, and trust-building initiatives can help heal the deep-seated mistrust, hatred and divisions between Kukis and Meiteis. This kind of ethnic-reconciliation and peace-building is a crucial, but often overlooked step since inter-community harmony and collective living is the bedrock of individual wellbeing and long-term security for both groups. It is also an invaluable step to make sure community resilience is built over time so that similar violence does not erupt in the future, and even if it does, both communities are better equipped to respond instead of being left to the mercy of the State.

To sum up, while the chapter documents a host of well-intentioned, if mismanaged, relief measures, it also exposes the alarming gaps between policy and practice. The onus now lies on both state institutions and civil society to rectify these disparities and to work together towards a holistic and equitable rehabilitation that not only rebuilds physical structures but also restores trust and communal harmony.

Chapter 9: Navigating Health and Mental Well-Being Amidst Ethnic Conflict in Manipur

This chapter examines the impact of the ethnic conflict in Manipur on health and mental well-being, drawing on survivor testimonies as well as insights from health professionals, civil society actors, and journalists gathered through both offline and online depositions. These accounts are supplemented with government data and academic literature. The chapter begins by outlining the pre-conflict health landscape, underscoring the structural limitations and service deficits that shaped access to care. This context is critical to understanding how the conflict has further deepened the vulnerabilities of individuals and communities, especially those already facing social and economic marginalization.

9.1. The Pre-Conflict Health and Mental Health Landscape

9.1.1. Spatial Disparities in Health and Healthcare Access

While Manipur's aggregate health indicators such as life expectancy and infant mortality often meet or exceed national averages, they obscure stark disparities in access, infrastructure, and, for some indicators, even health outcomes between the valley and hill districts.^{280,281,282} These inequities

²⁸⁰ Veda Yumnam, 'Health Systems Strengthening for Manipur, India: A Critical Examination of Gaps and Contradictions', *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)* Vol. 12, no. No. 4 (2023): 246–50, <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.21275/SR23402205406>.

²⁸¹ Esther Ngaihte and Anushruti, 'SDG 3 in Manipur: A Story of Hill-Valley Divide?', in *Sustainable Development Goals in Northeast India*, ed. Subhash Anand et al., Advances in Geographical and Environmental Sciences (Springer Nature Singapore, 2023), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-6478-7_27.

²⁸² Prem Shankar Mishra et al., 'Geographical Divide Led Inequality in Accessing Maternal Healthcare Services between Hills and Valley Regions of Manipur State, India', *Clinical Epidemiology and Global Health* 11 (July 2021): 100744, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cegh.2021.100744>.

stem not only from longstanding structural disadvantages but have also been exacerbated by decades of political instability.²⁸³ This section draws on key maternal and child health indicators and district-level data on public health infrastructure to highlight the persistent urban–rural and hill–valley divides—gaps that have only deepened amid the ongoing conflict.

Table 21 - Key Maternal and Child Health Indicators

	NFHS 5 (2019-2020)			NFHS 4 (2015-2016)
	Urban	Rural	Total	Total
Neonatal Mortality Rate (NNMR) - per 1000 live births	5.7	22.7	17.2	15.6
Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) - per 1000 live births	12.2	31.1	25.0	21.7
Under Five Mortality Rate (U5MR) - per 1000 live births	17.1yy	36.2	30.0	25.9
Mothers who had atleast 4 antenatal care visits (%)	88.8	74.5	79.4	69.0
Mothers who received post-natal care from a doctor/nurse/LHV/ANM/Midwife	86.2	66.8	73.4	64.6

²⁸³ Veda Yumnam, ‘Manipur’s Journey Towards the Health SDGs: What’s Achieved and What More Is Needed?’, *Indian Journal of Community Medicine: Official Publication of Indian Association of Preventive & Social Medicine* 49, no. 1 (2024): 18–21, https://doi.org/10.4103/ijcm.ijcm_196_23.

/other health personnel within 2 days of delivery (%)				
Institutional Births in Public Facility (%)	64.5	56.9	59.4	45.7
Children who received post-natal care from a doctor/nurse/LHV/ANM/Midwife /other health personnel within 2 days of delivery (%)	82.6	63.9	70.3	NA
Children age 12-23 months fully vaccinated based on information from either vaccination card or mother's recall (%)	75.1	65.9	68.8	65.8
Children under 5 years who are stunted (height-for-age) (%)	20.1	25.1	23.4	28.9
Children under 5 years who are wasted (weight for height) (%)	9.8	10.0	9.9	6.8
Children who are under 5 who are severely wasted (weight for height) (%)	2.6	3.8	3.4	2.2
Children under 5 years who are underweight (weight for age) (%)	12.9	13.5	13.3	13.8

Source: NFHS 5 (2019-2021), Manipur

Maternal and child health indicators serve as crucial measures of the overall performance and equity of health systems. They also reflect the broader socio-economic development in a region and a government's commitment to addressing health inequities. Table 1 highlights the

disparities in maternal and child health outcomes across urban and rural areas in Manipur, as well as the mixed progress the state has made between the two NFHS survey rounds.

Neonatal, Infant, and Under-Five Mortality: The data indicates markedly higher mortality rates in rural regions across all three indicators, with neonatal mortality standing at 22.7 per 1,000 live births in contrast to 5.7 in urban areas and under-five mortality at 36.2 compared to 17.1 in urban counterparts. Moreover, all three indicators show an upward trajectory since NFHS-4, a deeply worrying trend.

Maternal Care: Antenatal care coverage has seen an improvement—from 69.0% in NFHS-4 to 79.4%—but rural areas continue to show lower uptake, reflecting persistent disparities. Postnatal care within two days of delivery has also increased, yet rural coverage (66.8%) still lags behind urban areas (86.2%). Comprehensive and equitable postpartum care is crucial to reducing preventable deaths and promoting long-term well-being of mothers and babies.

Institutional Deliveries: While institutional births in public facilities have increased since NFHS-4, indicating progress, significant disparities between urban and rural areas persist, reflecting inequities in healthcare infrastructure. Disaggregated data by caste and tribal affiliation show that only 41.5% of Scheduled Tribe women access public health facilities for deliveries, as against 67.5% among Scheduled Castes and 70.4% among Other Backward Classes—underscoring persistent gaps in maternal health services in the hill districts.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁴ International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and ICF, *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), India, 2019–21: Manipur* (Mumbai: IIPS, 2021), 98

Child Vaccination: There has been progress in full vaccination coverage (65.8% to 68.8%), though rural areas (65.9%) still lag behind urban areas (75.1%). Vaccination coverage is a significant challenge in remote rural and tribal areas due to limited accessibility and inadequate healthcare infrastructure.

Child Nutrition: While stunting, caused by chronic malnutrition, has modestly declined in NFHS-5, rural children continue to exhibit higher rates compared to their urban counterparts. Wasting rates in Manipur have risen in rural areas—from 6.8% to 10.0%—while remaining stable in urban areas. Severe wasting has also increased in rural areas, from 2.2% to 3.8%, even as it declined slightly in urban settings. This points to a growing rural burden, though acute malnutrition remains a concern across both contexts.

The data shows that maternal and child health outcomes in Manipur—much like elsewhere in India—are closely linked to geographic and social location. Rural areas, especially the hill districts, face persistent barriers to timely and quality care due to entrenched gaps in infrastructure and human resources. These challenges, rooted in systemic neglect and decades of conflict, have been further exacerbated by the recent ethnic violence, threatening to undo past gains and widen existing disparities.

Table 2: District Wise Public Health Infrastructure (number functional as on 31st March 2022)

District	SC	PH C	CH C	SDH	DH	Medical College
Valley Districts						
Bishnupur	33	7	2	0	DH	0

					Bishnupur	
Imphal East	44	14	1	0	0	JNIMS
Imphal West	54	12	2	0	0	RIMS
Jiribam	6	1	1	0	DH Jiribam	0
Kakching	13	6	2	0	0	0
Thoubal	37	10	3	0	DH Thoubal	0
Hill Districts						
Chandel	15	2	1	0	DH Chandel	0
Churachandpur	50	7	0	0	DH Churachandpur	Churachandpur Medical College
Kamjong	21	2	1	0	0	0
Kangpokpi	35	6	1	0	DH Kangpokpi	0
Noney	15	3	1	0	0	0
Pherzawl	19	4	1	0	0	0
Senapati	32	8	1	0	DH Senapati	0
Tamenglong	15	3	0	0	DH Tamenglong	0
Tengnoupal	9	4	0	SDH - Moreh	0	0
Ukhrul	18	6	0	0	DH Ukhrul	0
Total = 16	416	95	17	1	9	3

Source: Rural Health Statistics, 2021-2022

The table highlights the distribution of public health infrastructure across the valley and hill districts of Manipur as of March 31, 2022. Valley districts such as Imphal West and Imphal East benefit from relatively stronger health infrastructure, including three medical colleges—Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences (JNIMS), the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), and Shija Medical College, a private institution. In contrast, the hill districts have only one medical college, located in Churachandpur.

However, despite these relative advantages, significant gaps persist even in the valley districts. The 2021 Performance Audit of Select District Hospitals in Manipur by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) highlighted serious deficiencies in infrastructure and human resources in Bishnupur and Thoubal—two valley districts. At the District Hospital in Thoubal, 53% of doctor posts were vacant, while 17% of nursing positions remained unfilled in Bishnupur. Notably, Bishnupur lacked a functional blood bank, and the blood bank in Thoubal operated without the required license.²⁸⁵ At JNIMS which serves both as a district hospital and a tertiary referral hospital, 36% of doctor posts and 48% of specialist positions were vacant during the audit period.²⁸⁶ These shortfalls raise concerns about the availability and quality of healthcare services, even in the state's higher-level referral facilities located in the valley.

The situation in the hill districts is considerably more precarious,^{287,288,289} prompting court interventions,²⁹⁰ public protests, and, in some cases, the

²⁸⁵ Comptroller and Auditor General of India. *Performance Audit of Select District Hospitals in Manipur for the Year Ended 31 March 2019*. Report No. 1 of 2021. Imphal: Government of Manipur, 2021. Accessed September 27, 2024.

https://cag.gov.in/webroot/uploads/download_audit_report/2021/Manipur-2018-19-Report-No.-1-of-2021-0640eda22d15086.41412230.pdf.

²⁸⁶Ibid., vi.

²⁸⁷ 'Dearth of Staff, Facilities Cripples District Hospital, Chandel : 18th Oct20 ~ E-Pao! Headlines', accessed 24 July 2024, <https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=11..181020.oct20>.

complete shutdown of health facilities as a form of resistance.²⁹¹ The 2021 CAG report highlighted the state government's failure to adopt effective strategies to incentivize healthcare professionals to serve in remote areas, particularly in the hill districts. At the District Hospital in Chandel, 53% of doctor positions and 55% of nursing positions were vacant. Moreover, the availability of essential medical equipment, as per Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS), stood at only 31%.²⁹²

Among the six new hill districts created in 2016, only Kangpokpi has a district hospital, which was upgraded from a Community Health Centre (CHC) in 2018. Yet it remains poorly equipped and understaffed, lacking essential facilities such as an operation theatre and a blood storage unit limiting its capacity to serve as a referral center for specialist and critical care—a gap that became especially apparent during the early phase of the conflict.^{293,294}

Primary and secondary healthcare services in Manipur remain unevenly distributed, with valley districts having a significantly higher number of functional Sub-Centres (SCs), Primary Health Centres (PHCs), and

²⁸⁸ ‘Tamenglong District Hospital in Grave Shortage of Manpowers (Doctors)... : 08th Oct18 ~ E-Pao! Headlines’, accessed 12 December 2024, <https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=2..081018.oct18>.

²⁸⁹ TMNL: *The State Government Must Stop Neglecting the Pathetic Public Healthcare System in Ukhrul*, Headlines, 23 August 2020, <https://ukhrultimes.com/tmnl-the-state-government-must-stop-neglecting-the-pathetic-public-healthcare-system-in-ukhrul/>

²⁹⁰ ‘Fill Vacant Posts or the Purpose of Establishing a District Hospital Rendered Meaningless: Manipur HC - The Frontier Manipur’, accessed 24 July 2024, <https://thefrontiermanipur.com/fill-vacant-posts-or-the-purpose-of-establishing-a-district-hospital-rendered-meaningless-manipur-hc/>.

²⁹¹ Yumnam, ‘Health Systems Strengthening for Manipur, India: A Critical Examination of Gaps and Contradictions’.

²⁹² Comptroller and Auditor General of India, *Performance Audit of Select District Hospitals in Manipur*, vi-vii.

²⁹³ Physician from Kangpokpi, meeting with members of the Independent Citizen’s Tribunal, Manipur, 2 June 2024

²⁹⁴ ‘Team of Doctors Visits Manipur, Raises Concerns over Health Situation in Relief Camps’, accessed 14 November 2024, <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/manipur/team-of-doctors-visits-manipur-raises-concerns-over-health-situation-in-relief-camps-2672613>.

Community Health Centres (CHCs) compared to the hill districts. In the latter, even the officially reported number of functional facilities often masks ground realities—for instance, only four PHCs are operational in Senapati district.²⁹⁵ Moreover, many of these ‘functional’ facilities in tribal areas are severely under-resourced, limiting their ability to provide even basic services.²⁹⁶

In addition to infrastructure gaps, there is a critical shortage of human resources,²⁹⁷ particularly medical specialists. While this reflects broader national trends,²⁹⁸ the shortfall is especially acute in Manipur’s hill districts, where CHCs face a specialist vacancy rate of up to 81%.²⁹⁹ As a result, patients are frequently referred to higher-level public and private facilities, most of which are concentrated in Imphal. This over-reliance on tertiary institutions such as RIMS and JNIMS has historically led to delays in treatment, increased out-of-pocket expenditure, and significant strain on an already overburdened system.³⁰⁰

The central government’s sanction of ₹104.66 crore in November 2024—more than a year and a half into the ongoing conflict—for strengthening critical health infrastructure in underserved districts such as Chandel, Ukhrul, Senapati, and Tamenglong in the hills, as well as Jiribam in the

²⁹⁵ Physician associated with a humanitarian agency from outside the state, email message to tribunal member, January 22, 2024. He was involved in relief and health interventions in affected areas following the outbreak of violence on May 3.

²⁹⁶ Yumnam, ‘Manipur’s Journey Towards the Health SDGs’.

²⁹⁷ ‘Team of Doctors Visits Manipur, Raises Concerns over Health Situation in Relief Camps’.

²⁹⁸ ‘An Alarming Shortage of Specialist Doctors’, accessed 14 November 2024, <https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/editorial/an-alarming-shortage-of-specialist-doctors-3186949>.

²⁹⁹ Rural Health Statistics, 2021-22 (2023), <https://ruralindiaonline.org/en/library/resource/rural-health-statistics-2021-22/>.

³⁰⁰ Yumnam, ‘Health Systems Strengthening for Manipur, India: A Critical Examination of Gaps and Contradictions’.

valley, is a long-overdue step.³⁰¹ While the allocation acknowledges the pressing need to invest in remote and tribal regions, the complex health challenges facing Manipur—particularly in the hill districts—require more than reactive measures. What is urgently needed is a sustained, long-term commitment anchored in region-sensitive governance and an equity-oriented public health framework.

9.1.2 The Mental Health Conundrum

Manipur's mental health crisis is deeply rooted in the state's long-standing socio-political instability—shaped by decades of armed insurgency, militarization under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), and recurring ethnic violence.³⁰² These structural and political stressors have significantly contributed to widespread psychological distress across communities.^{303, 304}

9.1.2.1 Mental Health Burden and Treatment Seeking

According to the *National Mental Health Survey (2016)*, Manipur faces a disproportionately high burden of mental illness. The current prevalence of mental morbidity is 13.9% (national average: 10.5%), while lifetime prevalence stands at 19.9% (national: 13.9%). Neurotic and stress-related disorders account for 6.3%, ranking Manipur third among surveyed states.

³⁰¹ 'Centre Allocates ₹104 Crore to Enhance Healthcare in Manipur's Hill Districts | Guwahati News - Times of India', accessed 24 July 2025, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/centre-allocates-104-crore-to-enhance-healthcare-in-manipurs-hill-districts/articleshow/115537658.cms>.

³⁰² Seema Kazi, 'Conflict in Kashmir and Manipur: History, Ethnicity, Gender', *Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research* 15, no. 1 (2022): 39–50, world, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JACPR-01-2022-0667>.

³⁰³ Prashant Kesharvani and Kalpana Sarathy, "Mental Health Services in Protracted Conflict Area of Manipur, India: Understanding the Challenges for Policy Makers," in *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Public Health*, vol. 2 (Colombo: TIIKM, 2016), 52–59.

³⁰⁴ Prashant Kesharvani and Kalpana Sarathy, "Living in a Protracted Conflict Area: Mental Health Burden of Women in Manipur, India," *Psychological Studies* 65, no. 4 (October–December 2020): 445–454, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12646-020-00581-9>.

Lifetime prevalence includes 2.4% for schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders, and 9.4% for mood disorders (9.1% depressive, 0.4% bipolar). Suicidal risk is reported at 10.3%, significantly higher than the national average of 6.4% and the reported suicide incidence rate in Manipur is 2 per 100,000 population—among the lowest in the country possibly due to underreporting or other contextual factors.³⁰⁵

According to the *Keshav Desiraju India Mental Health Observatory (2023)*, which draws on *ADSI 2022* data, reported suicide cases declined from 49 in 2021 to 26 in 2022—a 47% decrease.³⁰⁶ While this appears to be a positive trend, media reports and testimonies from mental health professionals and civil society actors suggest a likely increase in suicide cases following the outbreak of ethnic violence on May 3, 2023—pointing to a serious and evolving mental health crisis (explored further in Section 2.4).

Illicit drug use is another major concern.³⁰⁷ Manipur's proximity to international drug trafficking routes has facilitated access to heroin and synthetic opioids, particularly among youth.³⁰⁸ Injection drug use continues to be a major driver of the state's high HIV prevalence,

³⁰⁵ Gururaj G, et al., *National Mental Health Survey of India, 2015-16: Prevalence, Patterns, and Outcomes* (Bengaluru: National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences, NIMHANS Publication No. 129, 2016),

³⁰⁶ 'Takeaways from the NCRB Data on Suicide for 2022', CMHLP, accessed 18 October 2024, <https://cmhlp.org/imho/blog/takeaways-from-the-ncrb-data-on-suicide-for-2022/>.

³⁰⁷ 'Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking in Manipur By Ashem Regina', accessed 21 October 2024, [https://e-](https://e-pao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=education.Health_Issue.Drug_Awareness_Education.Drug_abuse_and_illicit_trafficking_in_Manipur_By_Ashem_Regina)

[pao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=education.Health_Issue.Drug_Awareness_Education.Drug_abuse_and_illicit_trafficking_in_Manipur_By_Ashem_Regina](https://e-pao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=education.Health_Issue.Drug_Awareness_Education.Drug_abuse_and_illicit_trafficking_in_Manipur_By_Ashem_Regina).

³⁰⁸ 'From Poppy Fields to Black Markets: Understanding the Drug Trade Across India and Myanmar', Orfonline.Org, accessed 21 October 2024, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/from-poppy-fields-to-black-markets-understanding-the-drug-trade-across-india-and-myanmar>.

compounded by structural vulnerabilities such as poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment.³⁰⁹

The mental health landscape in Manipur is constrained by underdeveloped infrastructure and a critical shortage of trained professionals, despite a high burden of mental illness.³¹⁰ According to the National Mental Health Survey (NMHS) 2016, the state has only 0.31 psychiatric beds per 10,000 population,³¹¹ below the national average of 0.47³¹² and far short of the commonly accepted international benchmark of at least 3.0 beds per 10,000 population.³¹³ Although the NMHS is nearly a decade old, it continues to offer valuable insights into the persistent gap between mental health needs and available services.

A senior Meitei psychiatrist from Imphal, speaking to tribunal members, noted that Manipur currently has about 30 psychiatrists, with most concentrated in the valley. In Churachandpur—one of the districts most affected by the conflict—four psychiatrists are posted, two at the District Hospital and two at Churachandpur Medical College, though the latter were relocated in response to the ongoing conflict.³¹⁴ Kangpokpi, another conflict-affected district, currently has no psychiatrist, as the previous

³⁰⁹ A. L. Sharma et al., 'Understanding of HIV/AIDS in the International Border Area, Manipur: Northeast India', *Epidemiology & Infection* 147 (January 2019): e113, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0950268818003564>.

³¹⁰ Nuzhat Khan and Zoya Hussain, 'Manipur's Mental Health Crisis, a Year after Violence', *BMJ*, 2 August 2024, q1672, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.q1672>.

³¹¹ National Mental Health Survey of India, 2015–16: Manipur, *Mental Health Systems Assessment Fact Sheet*. Bengaluru: National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2016, 123

³¹² Suresh Bada Math et al., 'Cost Estimation for the Implementation of the Mental Healthcare Act 2017', *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 61, no. Suppl 4 (2019): S650–59, https://doi.org/10.4103/psychiatry.IndianJPsychiatry_188_19.

³¹³ Adrian P. Mundt et al., 'Need Estimates of Psychiatric Beds: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis', *Psychological Medicine* 54, no. 14 (n.d.): 3795–808, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291724002307>.

³¹⁴ Medical professional from Churachandpur Medical College, Churachandpur. WhatsApp message to a tribunal member.

appointee was transferred before the violence.³¹⁵ Reliable data on clinical psychologists and psychiatric social workers is unavailable, further obscuring the extent of the human resource gap. The absence of a dedicated mental health hospital³¹⁶ and the need for judicial intervention to implement the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017,³¹⁷ together highlight the systemic neglect of mental health in the state.

Treatment-seeking for mental health concerns in the state as elsewhere is shaped not only by infrastructural and workforce limitations but also by geographic and sociocultural barriers. Inadequate transport infrastructure in hilly and remote areas significantly restricts access to care. These structural constraints are compounded by pervasive stigma, which often frames mental illness as a moral, spiritual, or intellectual failing. As a 35-year-old Kuki-Zo male, co-founder of a youth-led mental health NGO in Churachandpur, explained:

The Psychiatry Department at the district hospital is perceived as a place for mentally retarded individuals. The community prioritizes spending on physical health over mental health—people go into debt for physical ailments but hesitate to pay for counselling and mental health services.

Thus, given the above factors, the treatment gap in Manipur remains high, with only about 20% of those affected receiving care despite a significant mental health burden.³¹⁸

³¹⁵ Physician from Kangpokpi, meeting with members of the Independent Citizen's Tribunal, Kangpokpi, Manipur, 2 June 2024.

³¹⁶ 'What Is Hindering Construction of Mental Health Hospital in Manipur?', Imphal Free Press, accessed 29 September 2024, <https://www.ifp.co.in/ifp-breaking-point/what-is-hindering-construction-of-mental-health-hospital-in-manipur>.

³¹⁷ Sparsh Upadhyay, 'Implement Provisions Of Mental Healthcare Act In Letter And Spirit Within 6 Months : Manipur HC Directs State Government [Read Order]', 13 September 2020, <https://www.livelaw.in/news-updates/implement-provisions-of-mental-healthcare-act-in-letter-and-spirit-within-6-months-manipur-hc-directs-state-government-162862>.

³¹⁸ Khan and Hussain, 'Manipur's Mental Health Crisis, a Year after Violence'.

9.1.2.2 District Mental Health Programme

The *District Mental Health Programme* (DMHP), launched in 1996 to integrate mental health into primary care and expand services to rural and tribal areas, holds particular relevance in Manipur. While the state government reports that the DMHP is operational across all 16 districts, the concentration of mental health professionals and infrastructure in the valley districts raises equity concerns.³¹⁹ The *National Mental Health Survey (2016)* found that only 37.4% of the tribal population in Manipur was covered under the programme,³²⁰ indicating substantial gaps in outreach.

Mental health professionals from both the valley and the hills who engaged with the tribunal identified several factors limiting the programme's effectiveness. These include low budgetary prioritization, high vacancy rates, limited availability of trained personnel, and logistical constraints—all of which mirror broader national trends.³²¹ The following table shows fund allocation and utilization for the DMHP in Manipur. While some improvements are visible in later years, earlier periods reflect significant underutilization pointing to administrative and institutional challenges.

Table 22: Funds Allocated and Utilized for DMHP in Manipur (in ₹ Lakhs)

³¹⁹ Government of India, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, *Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question No. 3132 to Be Answered on 23rd March, 2021: District Mental Health Programme*, answered by Shri Ashwini Kumar Choubey, March 23, 2021, <https://pqars.nic.in>.

³²⁰NIMHANS, *National Mental Health Survey of India, 2015–16: Manipur Fact Sheet*, 122.

³²¹ Vivek Kirpekar et al., 'District Mental Health Program: Then and Now', *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 66, no. 7 (2024): 603–13, https://doi.org/10.4103/indianjpsychiatry.indianjpsychiatry_974_23.

Year	Approved Expenditure	
2015–2016	0.00	0.00
2016–2017	306.01	0.00
2017–2018	179.10	0.00
2018–2019	64.28	150.34
2019–2020	157.15	85.43
2020–2021*	288.96	24.18

*Till 30/12/2020

Source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India (2021)

Strengthening the DMHP will require sustained financial and technical support, improved implementation mechanisms, and greater attention to underserved districts, particularly in the hills.

9.1.2.3 The Role of Private Mental Health Providers

In the absence of adequate public provision, non-state actors—including NGOs and faith-based organizations—have played a limited but important role in responding to mental health needs. Several drug rehabilitation centres, some supported by government funding, operate in response to the region’s high rates of substance use. In the hill districts, faith-based counselling remains the most accessible form of psychosocial support, reflecting both community reliance on religious institutions and the absence of formal mental health services.

A growing number of psychology and social work graduates are entering private practice. However, demand for their services remains limited—

constrained by stigma, affordability concerns, and low levels of mental health awareness. While some community-based mental health initiatives have emerged, they continue to be modest in scale and unevenly distributed.

These intersecting challenges—including infrastructural deficits, workforce shortages, stigma, and regional disparities—underscore the need for a comprehensive and context-sensitive mental health strategy for Manipur. Such a strategy must address the cumulative impact of the ongoing conflict, the historical neglect of tribal and remote populations, and the structural barriers that continue to shape the state’s mental health landscape.

9.2. The Health and Mental Health Impact of the Conflict

This central section examines the multifaceted impact of the conflict on health and mental health, drawing on testimonies from survivors, families, health professionals, civil society actors, and field observations. The findings are organized into four interrelated themes: **Targeted Violence Against Healthcare, A Fragile Health System in Deep Crisis, The Health Fallout of Relief Camps, and Conflict and Mental Health: Human Toll and Resilience**. Together, these themes highlight the complexity and interdependence of the conflict’s effects on health and well-being.

9.2.1 Targeted Violence Against Healthcare.

The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC)—an international network committed to protecting health workers and facilities in conflict

settings³²²—documented at least 24 incidents of violence and obstruction targeting healthcare in Manipur between May and November 2023. Notably, one-third of these incidents occurred in May alone.³²³

Of the recorded cases, 12 were attributed to Meiteis, 5 to Kukis, and 3 to security forces or police, while others involved unidentified assailants. Incidents included the looting of medical supplies, destruction of health infrastructure, obstruction of care due to blockades, the killing of a nurse and an ambulance driver, and physical assaults on Kuki nursing students in Imphal.

Although the SHCC acknowledges that its documentation is neither exhaustive nor fully representative, several incidents have been corroborated by domestic media, which has also reported additional episodes of violence. For instance, on November 6, 2023, armed assailants fired multiple rounds at the residence of Dr. Laishram Deben, Director of JNIMS, in Kakwa Asem Leikai, Imphal.³²⁴

While disruptions to healthcare have occurred in previous periods of unrest in Manipur,³²⁵ the current conflict has escalated both the frequency and severity of these disruptions. Earlier, such delays were typically sporadic and geographically contained. Healthcare providers too occasionally faced violence, extortion, and even abductions or fatalities, often undocumented. Bandhs, boycotts, and shutdowns contributed to

³²² ‘Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition’, Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition, 10 December 2024, <https://safeguarding-health.com/>.

³²³ Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition, *Critical Condition: Violence Against Health Care in Conflict – India (Manipur State)* (Baltimore: Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition, 2023), <https://data.humdata.org/dataset/shcchealthcare-dataset>.

³²⁴ ‘Residences Of MLA K Robindro And JNIMS Director L Deben Attacked | Ukhrul Times’, accessed 19 April 2025, <https://ukhrultimes.com/residences-of-mla-k-robindro-and-jnims-director-l-deben-attacked/>.

³²⁵ Kesharvani and Sarathy, ‘Mental Health Services in Protracted Conflict Area.’

further access barriers.³²⁶ However, the ongoing ethnic conflict marks a qualitative shift, characterised by three intersecting development:-

A) The Role of Social Media

The widespread dissemination of misinformation, doctored videos, and inflammatory rumours on social media intensified violence.^{327,328} These digital provocations have incited physical attacks, including sexual violence, and fuelled cycles of retaliation and brutality. In some instances, healthcare workers, patients (including those with mental illness), accompanying caregivers, and ambulances were directly targeted—leading to serious injuries and fatalities.

B) Women's Active Participation in Violence and Healthcare Blockades

Women have played a visible and active role in instigating violence—including sexual violence—and, in some cases, in attacks on patients, health workers, and caregivers. They have also been involved in obstructing the delivery of essential medical supplies, including vaccines for children,³²⁹ to areas perceived as “enemy territory.” This gendered participation in exclusionary violence marks a significant shift in the dynamics of the conflict.

³²⁶ Yumnam, ‘Health Systems Strengthening for Manipur, India: A Critical Examination of Gaps and Contradictions’.

³²⁷ ‘How Disinformation Sparked The Ethnic Violence In A Remote Area Of India - Media Diversity Institute’, Articles, *Media Diversity Institute - Media Diversity Institute*, 1 September 2023, <https://www.media-diversity.org/how-disinformation-sparked-the-ethnic-violence-in-a-remote-area-of-india/>.

³²⁸ ‘Manipur Violence’, accessed 17 November 2024, <https://www.reporters-collective.in/twitter-threads/manipur-violence>.

³²⁹ ‘Manipur: Supplies Hit by Blockades by Tribals, Meitei Women’, *Deccan Herald*, accessed 20 April 2025, <https://www.deccanherald.com//india/manipur-supplies-hit-by-blockades-by-tribals-meitei-women-1228348.html>.

C) Ethnic Territorial Divisions and Disruption of Referral Pathways

One of the most critical consequences of the conflict has been the hardening of ethnic boundaries, which has fractured healthcare referral networks across the state. Previously, despite ethnic conflicts and intermittent disruptions, residents of the hill districts were able to access tertiary care in Imphal's public and private hospitals —pathways essential given the limited specialist infrastructure in the hills. The present conflict has rendered many of these routes inaccessible, for the Kuki community, who now rely on under-resourced district hospitals (as detailed in Section 1) or are forced to travel outside the state for care. This has resulted in treatment delays, deterioration of otherwise manageable conditions, avoidable morbidity and mortality, and a sharp increase in out-of-pocket health expenditures discussed in detail in subsequent sections.

The following narrative provides a detailed account of the targeted attack on healthcare facilities, providers, and patients, as well as the obstruction of medical supplies

9.2.1.1 Destruction of Health Care Infrastructure

An analysis of zero FIRs registered at Saikul Police Station in Kangpokpi district—shared by civil society activists during the tribunal's visit to Manipur (May 27–June 3)—indicates that at least 10 Anganwadi centres and 4 Sub-Centres or Health and Wellness Centres were destroyed during attacks on villages, disrupting essential community-level health services. It is important to note that this data is limited to FIRs filed at a single police station; similar incidents may have occurred in other parts of Kangpokpi district as well as in other affected areas.

In September 2024, as violence resurfaced in Jiribam, unknown assailants set fire to a Primary Health Centre in the Borobekra area.³³⁰ Although the facility was unoccupied and no injuries were reported—the attack took place early in the morning just 200 meters from a police outpost—it highlights the ongoing vulnerability of healthcare infrastructure in conflict-affected districts. The targeting of this facility more than a year into the conflict reflects a serious violation of the principle of medical neutrality and points to a troubling disregard for essential health services.

Civil society actors noted that, despite the substantial deployment of police and security forces in conflict zones, the state government has been unable to ensure the safety and protection of health facilities.

9.2.1.2 Obstructions to Essential Medical Supplies and Services

Highway blockades—particularly along NH2 and NH37—and disruptions to arterial roads during the early months of the conflict in Manipur severely disrupted the distribution of essential commodities, including medicines (most of which are routed through Imphal),³³¹ vaccines, baby food, and diagnostic reagents critical for laboratory services.

Women from both sides of the ethnic divide were reported to have actively participated in enforcing these blockades. A convenor from the Meitei-majority Kakching district described the organized nature of this enforcement:

Women stand vigil here all day, they take turns. From 6 a.m. to 1 p.m., the first colony's Meira Paibis stand vigil. From 1 p.m. to 9 p.m. the second

³³⁰ 'Primary Health Centre Set On Fire In Manipur's Jiribam', [Www.Ndtv.Com](https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/primary-health-centre-set-on-fire-in-manipurs-jiribam-6549872), accessed 15 December 2024, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/primary-health-centre-set-on-fire-in-manipurs-jiribam-6549872>.

³³¹ Personal communication with the physician from Kangpokpi by a tribunal member, December 15, 2024.

colony's, and from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m., the third colony's. We stopped Assam Rifles for 2.5 months. After that, we allowed essential items and movement for the army, but only with our permission.

In Manipur, highways have long served not only as vital lifelines but also as symbolic battlegrounds.³³² Various ethnic and civil society groups have used highway blockades to articulate political grievances and assert territorial control, making them deeply politicized spaces.

A 35-year-old Kuki public health professional from Churachandpur, working with a youth-led mental health and development NGO, described the early impact:

“The blockades caused major disruptions to medical and essential services. Prices of commodities, including medicines, skyrocketed. Lamka (Churachandpur) was reeling under a health crisis. The district hospital was overwhelmed, with limited supplies and personnel. A massive influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs), most of them destitute, made the situation worse. Private pharmacies were also running low. We prioritized baby food, nutritional supplements for pregnant and lactating women, and essential medicines for relief camps—sourced directly from Aizawl. The internet shutdown made coordination and resource mobilization extremely difficult.”

When the tribunal visited a year later, it found that territorial fragmentation and ongoing blockades continued to impede supply chains and access to care. Many of those who testified expressed frustration over the failure of both state and central authorities to ensure safe passage for life-saving commodities, despite the presence of security forces—raising

³³² Raile Rocky Ziipao, *Infrastructure of Injustice: State and Politics in Manipur and Northeast India* (Routledge, 2020).

serious concerns about political will. According to the NGO's co-founder and director, who maintained close engagement with Churachandpur District Hospital:

Over a year later, essential drugs and vaccines still have to be transported discreetly by neutral actors or security forces. Deliveries remain inconsistent in timing and quantity. The hospital depends heavily on donations from NGOs, churches, medical associations, and private healthcare professionals—particularly from the Kuki community within and outside Manipur. Supplies via Aizawl face delays due to poor road conditions, and vaccines are especially difficult to transport given cold chain requirements. The journey to Lamka takes a minimum of 15 hours. These challenges have significantly increased out-of-pocket expenditures, making healthcare unaffordable for many.

Hospitals in the valley, including JNIMS in Imphal East, also experienced supply disruptions during the initial months of the conflict. In particular, medications for chronic conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, and cancer were in short supply due to interruptions along routes from Guwahati.³³³ Though no fatalities were reported, emergency procurement from nearby institutions highlighted the fragility of the system. In the hill districts, the situation was considerably more severe. Continued shortages of essential medical supplies and limited access to specialist care disproportionately affected local communities and internally displaced persons. These concerns are explored in greater depth in Sections 9.2.2 and 9.2.3.

³³³ Tanushree Pandey, 'Death Toll Mounts As Manipur Conflict Stretches Healthcare To Breaking Point', 2 September 2023, <https://www.indiaspend.com/health/death-toll-mounts-as-manipur-conflict-stretches-healthcare-to-breaking-point-875261>.

9.2.1.3 Violence against Health Personnel, Patients and Care Givers

The following testimonies highlight the brutal violence perpetrated during the conflict—often incited by rumours and misinformation—where even women with mental illness were not spared.

One such account was by a 20-year-old Kuki nursing student who was studying at a private nursing college in Imphal when the conflict erupted. She deposed before the tribunal in Churachandpur. She and a fellow student were brutally attacked and left for dead — a horrifying act of retaliation driven by false rumours that Meitei nurses were sexually assaulted in Churachandpur. Her harrowing testimony lays bare the violence she endured:

On May 4, 2023, around 4:45 PM, we were in the hostel in Porompat, Imphal, at Nightingale Nursing Institute. I was charging my phone when I looked outside the window and saw 5-7 men running towards our hostel. They banged on the electric poles and called everyone together outside. The hostel warden and seniors opened the gate. A lot of people were there. We were all very scared. All of us were girls. They ordered us to wear our ID cards and took us to the grounds. I am Kuki, and I knew they were searching for Kukis. I called my brother and told him that the Meiteis mobs were coming towards our hostel! I started crying and told him that I didn't know what to do. He was speechless. Immediately afterwards, I called my mom and weeping told her that it might be my last call. When I was searching for a place to hide, the mob found me. Two Meitei women held my wrists and asked me if I was Kuki. They went back to the room to search for my friends. They kept saying that in Churachandpur, Meitei, women were being raped, that is why we will face the consequences. Two of us were taken by the mob and made to walk on the street. They beat us and verbally abused us. I fell down because of their beating. I was told by one of the women that if I tried to run away

they would beat me more. They said they would keep us at the house a Meera Paibis. One woman even asked the mob why they were keeping us alive. She told them to chop us up and burn our bodies. The mob held knives and pointed guns at us. Some of them were holding stones. I was sure that I would not survive that day. Suddenly, I was unconscious and woke up only at JNIMS.

Another tragic incident, fuelled by rumours, occurred on June 4, 2023, when a seven-year-old boy, his mother, and her aunt lost their lives. The boy's father is Kuki, and his mother Meitei. The boy, who had sustained a bullet injury on the head, was being transported in an ambulance to RIMS for emergency care. En route, the ambulance was attacked by a mob in Iroisemba, Imphal, and set on fire despite the presence of a police escort. The mother, her sister, and the child were burnt to death. The violence was reportedly incited by rumours that the ambulance was carrying an injured Kuki militant. This incident, which was also reported in the media, deeply shocked the nation's conscience. With tears in his eyes, the father recounted the events to the tribunal at Kangpokpi:

I was informed that the ambulance was stopped at Lamsang, where there was a block, but they were let go. But at the next village, Iroisemba, the ambulance was blocked again, and here they did not let them go and set the ambulance on fire. My child, wife and sister-in-law were all burnt alive. My brother-in-law was following behind the ambulance. However, he could not save them since the mob would have killed him as well. The Manipur police were escorting them with 3 escort vehicles, but when the mob came, they did nothing; they did not stop the mob. I was not in a position to take any action after getting to know all this, as my mental health was badly affected. But people asked me to take action, and so I finally filed an FIR on 14th June 2023. Witnesses informed me that Arambai Tenggol, Meitei Leepun, and Meera Paibis were part of the mob that killed my family.

A young Meitei man in his late thirties, married to a Kuki woman and residing in Churachandpur, recounted during his testimony in Delhi the hostility and threats he encountered while trying to transfer his injured brother from Churachandpur District Hospital to Imphal:

The next day after my brother's operation – he was shot on the chest, I arranged for an army-escorted ambulance to take him to Imphal. As we were preparing to board, a group of Kuki youths tried to attack us, but army personnel intervened. Later, our ambulance was pelted with stones. The roads were blocked with bamboo, and armed individuals were everywhere. I had never expected to face such hostility and violence in my life.

Representatives of the United Naga Council (UNC), who testified before the tribunal in Senapati District on June 1, spoke about the brutal murder of Lucy Maring, a 55-year-old Naga woman with mental illness, which occurred in Imphal East in July 2023. She was shot in the head, and her face disfigured. The representatives stated that she was forcefully apprehended by a women's group in a case of mistaken identity believing her to be Kuki and handed over to a private militia that subsequently killed her. The UNC immediately called for a 12-hour shutdown in all Naga-inhabited areas of Manipur to condemn the incident. Nine individuals, including five women, were subsequently arrested in connection with the case. The killing was reported in both local and national media.³³⁴

³³⁴Takeaways from 'Naga Woman among Two Killed in Manipur Violence', accessed 19 October 2024, <https://scroll.in/latest/1052733/two-killed-in-separate-incidents-of-violence-in-manipur>.

9.2.1.4. Extortion as a Form of Violence

The protracted conflict has led to a sharp rise in extortion by armed groups. Widespread media reports from educational institutions, government employees, and other sectors point to escalating threats linked to extortion. While extortion has long been a challenge in the state³³⁵—including for healthcare professionals³³⁶—the current conflict has markedly intensified its occurrence, contributing to an atmosphere of fear and insecurity.

The senior Meitei psychiatrist from Imphal who spoke to members of the tribunal described how healthcare professionals have increasingly become targets of threats. In a confidential off-the-record conversation with two tribunal members, he stated:

In addition to everything else we are going through; we face extortion threats from armed militia—you know what I mean. It's not that we haven't had extortion threats in the past—we did. However, the frequency is now greater, and the demands are much higher. There is nothing we can do because our lives and those of our families are at stake. This is causing immense mental stress. Yet, we must maintain a calm and normal front and carry on with our lives and work.

Targeted attacks on patients, caregivers, healthcare workers, and facilities—as well as the obstruction of medical supplies, disruption of healthcare delivery, and extortion—constitute serious violations of

³³⁵ Manipur | Extortion “Epidemic” in Manipur amid Ethnic Conflict: At Least 380 People Arrested by Police - ‘Telegraph India’, accessed 19 December 2024, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/north-east/extortion-epidemic-in-manipur-amid-ethnic-conflict-at-least-380-people-arrested-by-police/cid/2055756>.

³³⁶ ‘Extortion Rerun Spurs Sit-in - Agitation to Follow, Warn Manipur Health Employees’, accessed 17 December 2024, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/north-east/extortion-rerun-spurs-sit-in-agitation-to-follow-warn-manipur-health-employees/cid/683892>.

Articles 14, 15, and 21 of the Indian Constitution. They also undermine the principle of medical neutrality and contravene Common Article 3 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, to which India is a signatory, along with other protections under international humanitarian and human rights law.

Comprehensive documentation of these violations is essential to establish their nature and scale, identify those responsible, and critically examine the role of state institutions in either enabling or failing to prevent such abuses. These efforts are crucial not only for ensuring accountability but also for informing legal and policy reforms aimed at safeguarding healthcare systems in conflict settings and upholding the right to health of affected population

9.2.2 A Fragile Health System in Deep Crisis

This section outlines the collapse of Manipur's already fragile health and mental health systems, drawing on field observations and testimonies. It highlights mounting strain on public health facilities, disruptions to medical education, shifts in health system dynamics, ethnic homogenization, rising out-of-pocket costs, limited access to insurance schemes, and instances of profiteering—exacerbated by the absence of effective redress mechanisms.

9.2.2.1 Public Healthcare Facilities Under Pressure

A) Community Health Centre, Saikul:

Kangpokpi, established as a district in 2016,³³⁷ faces persistent challenges in health infrastructure³³⁸—similar to those encountered in other newly

³³⁷ '7 New Districts Formed in Manipur amid Opposition by Nagas', India Today, 9 December 2016, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/manipur-7-new-districts-united-naga-council-okram-ibobi-singar-sadar-hills-nagas-356658-2016-12-09>.

created districts, as noted in Section 1. It has only one Community Health Centre (CHC), located in the Saikul subdivision, approximately two hours from the district headquarters. This CHC serves a large population spread across three sub-divisional blocks, including several Kuki villages in the neighbouring Ukhrul district.

The facility has long struggled with the absence of essential diagnostic equipment, limited laboratory services, and a severe shortage of healthcare staff. During the initial months of the conflict, Saikul—being among the most severely affected areas—witnessed a large influx of injured individuals and internally displaced persons, overwhelming the CHC. It continues to face immense challenges in meeting the healthcare needs of the community.

A Kuki research scholar (male, 35 years) who testified online spoke about the challenges CHC Saikul faced in managing critically injured patients during the peak of the violence:

Even with limited staff and facilities, the doctors—all MBBS as there are no specialists at the CHC—managed critical cases of serious gunshot wounds, pellet injuries, and burns, offering first aid and initial care before referring patients to higher centres for specialized treatment. Nearly half of the seriously injured had to be referred to higher referral centres, such as District Hospital Kangpokpi, which however functions more like a CHC; the Mission Hospital in Kangpokpi, and District Hospital Senapati for advanced care, at a time when every second was critical for their survival.

³³⁸ Bimal Khadka, 'Health of the Internally Displaced Residents in Relief Camps in the Conflict Zones of Manipur State', *Medicine, Conflict and Survival* 40, no. 4 (2024): 359–65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13623699.2024.2412574>.

The Kuki doctor (male 40 years) in a meeting with some members of the tribunal at Kangpokpi described the ongoing challenges faced by the CHC:

People of the area, particularly pregnant women and IDPs, are severely affected by the absence of essential diagnostic equipment like a USG machine at CHC Saikul. They have to travel long distances for more than five hours over difficult terrain to access ultrasound services. The USG machine, even at the District Hospital, was not functioning even before the conflict. Otherwise, too, people from Saikul often travelled to Imphal for USG and other diagnostic services, as the roads are much better and the services more accessible. In addition to this, the lack of basic laboratory tests at the CHCs, have also complicated healthcare delivery. The previous system of sending blood samples to Krishna Diagnostic Laboratory in Imphal, under a public-private partnership model, for testing became impossible due to the conflict. Patients requiring blood transfusions, including IDPs, are forced to travel to Kohima, as blood requisitions cannot be processed in Imphal. There is no blood transfusion facility in Kangpokpi District. These barriers are placing an additional financial burden on the local population, including displaced persons.

He also highlighted how long-standing staffing shortages, worsened by the conflict, are impacting the delivery of both clinical and public health services:

Although Saikul PHC was upgraded to a CHC in 2018, there have been no sanctioned posts allocated to support its full functioning. It does not have specialist positions of a surgeon, obstetrician/gynaecologist, paediatrician, or general physician, which every CHC should have as per IPHS norms. It is operating with even fewer staff than the sanctioned posts for a PHC. We have only three medical officers against the sanctioned posts of five medical officers and only two staff nurses at present who have been

relocated from JNIMS. When the conflict erupted, 28 Meitei staff members who were posted at CHC Saikul and the health and wellness centres under it reported to the valley, but there has been no replacement since then. The CHC is rendering 24/7 services (OPD, emergency, and IPD) with very limited staff. The two staff nurses are managing services round the clock. The four health and wellness centres have no staff at present. There is no auxiliary nurse midwife. Primary health services have been halted since May 2021. Despite these intense challenges, the authorities have yet to come up with an alternative arrangement to prevent the collapse of the health systems. Locally trained staff can be hired on a temporary basis to address the huge human resource gap in the healthcare delivery system by giving the authority of hiring or recruitment to the concerned chief medical officer/district collector. The state government had done so during the COVID-19 pandemic. There are trained nurses locally who can be hired. Moreover, these challenges are not limited to just the Saikul CHC but are experienced by public health facilities across the district.

He further described the severe challenges faced by vulnerable groups in accessing tertiary care, given the lack of tertiary care services within the district:

There are cancer patients in Saikul and various other parts of Kangpokpi District including internally displaced persons (IDPs) in relief camps, who were receiving treatment in Imphal but have been unable to resume it due to the conflict. This creates a significant financial strain on local residents, especially IDPs, who now have to travel to Guwahati for cancer treatment. There are at least three cancer patients in relief camps at Saikul who have discontinued their treatment because of their financial condition. The lack of dialysis facilities in the district also meant that some IDPs with chronic kidney diseases died as they were unable to get even

minimum required dialysis slots at the nearest government dialysis centre which is Senapati District Hospital.

He concluded his testimony by emphasizing the profound and often overlooked human toll of the ongoing health crisis, urging the Central Government to take immediate and decisive action.

Health is a state subject; hence, it is the bounden duty of the state government to ensure that comprehensive healthcare services are accessible and affordable to its people irrespective of caste, creed, and religion. Lack of access to medical care services is resulting in several deaths, which are no lesser than deaths due to bullets fired from the other side. This is undeniably a public health crisis that has remained unnoticed over the last year since the conflict erupted. The state of Manipur appears to deliberately ignore its constitutional obligation towards the health of the Kuki. If this continues, it will result in more severe forms of public health crises. We hope the Central Government and our fellow citizens in other parts of the country will listen and act before it's too late for many of us.

B) District Hospital, Churachandpur

Churachandpur, among the districts worst affected by the ethnic conflict, saw intense violence and the displacement of nearly 20,000 people after May 3, 2023. This surge overwhelmed local infrastructure, particularly the District Hospital—the largest public health facility outside the valley, with 307 sanctioned beds.

At the time of the conflict, only 69 of the 104 sanctioned medical positions were filled. Key specialist roles in oncology, cardiology, nephrology, urology, and gastroenterology remained vacant, weakening its

referral capabilities. The displacement of 15 Meitei doctors, six nurses, and 11 technicians further compounded the hospital's staffing crisis.³³⁹

With private healthcare options limited, the district hospital serves as the primary healthcare provider for much of the local population. Interestingly, despite severe constraints, Manipur's public health system continues to be a key source of care, with 82-84% of rural and 72-83% of urban populations depending on it for outpatient and inpatient services—figures that exceed national averages.³⁴⁰ This reliance stems from multiple factors: in remote rural and tribal areas, public facilities are often the only available source of healthcare, including specialist care, as private options are both scarce and frequently unaffordable for low-income and marginalized populations.

Following the outbreak, the hospital faced critical shortages of medicines and personnel. Essential drugs for dialysis, TB, cancer, HIV, and hypertension were unavailable, as were basic medications for common illnesses such as fever and stomach ailments. The lack of a cardiothoracic surgeon forced the evacuation of patients with bullet injuries to Aizawl or other distant centres. Prior to the conflict, superspecialists from Imphal provided weekly services, and patients could access tertiary care in the capital both of which have since become unviable.^{341,342,343} Now, patients

³³⁹ Data on posts/vacancies was shared by the co-founder and director of the local youth-led NGO focused on mental health and community development, based on inputs from sources familiar with the facility.

³⁴⁰ Government of India. *NSS 75th Round: Key Indicators of Social Consumption in India – Health*. New Delhi: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2019, accessed 18 December 2024. <http://www.mospi.gov.in/unit-level-data-report-nss-75th-round-july-2017-june-2018-schedule-250social-consumption-health>.

³⁴¹ Business Standard, 'Lack of Essential Items, Medicines Leads to Desperation in Manipur Hills', 10 July 2023, https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/lack-of-essential-items-medicines-leads-to-desperation-in-manipur-hills-123071000446_1.html.

must travel to Mizoram or Assam for advanced treatment, often at prohibitive cost.

A high-ranking army official spoke of how the Assam Rifles stepped in to support the District Hospital in the initial months of the violence:

People were dependent on the Army. The district hospital has limited facilities. We stepped in by organizing blood donation camps, helping with army medical supplies and providing ambulances to transport patients to Aizawl. The people in the hills did not have access to Imphal airport as district borders were closed since the conflict erupted. It was our duty to ensure the well-being of civilians, not any particular group. The Assam Rifle regiment posted in Imphal Valley would have done likewise.

A 32-year-old Kuki social worker, consulting with the youth-led mental health and development organization, described how the conflict deepened constraints at the district hospital, severely limiting access to care. She said,

There was a massive surge in population...accessing healthcare became a major issue. The district hospital was no longer receiving supplies as it did before the conflict, and healthcare workers were limited. People were forced to travel to Mizoram and Assam for treatment at considerable expense. Those who couldn't afford it had to hope for the best. The nearest quality healthcare facilities are in Guwahati, which is extremely far and costly. There was no special provision for air transport of patients other than the twice-a-week helicopter service, which is always booked months in advance.

³⁴² “‘I’ve Left It to God’: Imphal out of Reach for Many, Manipur’s Healthcare System Is Faltering’, *The Indian Express*, 12 August 2023, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/imphal-manipur-healthcare-system-8888877/>.

³⁴³ Pandey, ‘Death Toll Mounts As Manipur Conflict Stretches Healthcare To Breaking Point’.

The co-founder and director of the organization, previously cited, outlined the longstanding and deepening systemic challenges at the District Hospital:

Critical specialist positions in Oncology, Cardiology, Nephrology, Urology, and Gastroenterology were vacant even before the conflict, so most cases requiring tertiary care were referred to Imphal—which is now out of bounds. Doctors at the district hospital are doing their best to treat patients locally, managing cases within their capacity to avoid the high costs and accessibility issues associated with referrals. As mentioned by my colleague, critical cases continue to be referred to cities with better facilities, like Aizawl, Guwahati, or Delhi. The only lifeline for Lamka (Churachandpur) District is NH 102B connecting Mizoram, which takes 15–20 hours and is highly vulnerable to landslides and extreme weather. The cost of hiring an ambulance from Lamka to Lengpui Airport in Mizoram is around ₹60,000 per trip for those unable to secure a spot on the helicopter service, which is in high demand and dependent on weather and other factors.

He further described how the conflict severely disrupted medical and nursing services:

Dialysis and OT (operation theatre) services have been among the most affected. Of the 28 sanctioned posts for various medical technicians, 18 were filled when the conflict began. After the outbreak, 11 Meitei technicians were displaced. Elective surgeries had to be postponed. The situation with nursing is also concerning. Out of the 52 sanctioned positions for staff nurses, only 38 were filled when the conflict erupted. Six Meitei nurses were displaced, so now the district hospital is short of around 20 nurses. Human resource shortages are straining the hospital's staff, hindering the delivery of optimal healthcare services. Existing nurses

are stretched between hospital duties and national programme responsibilities, with limited staffing affecting the performance and reach of these programmes.

The testimonies from Saikul and Churachandpur highlight the severe strain on Manipur's fragile public health system—particularly in the hill districts—due to chronic shortages of personnel, equipment, and specialist care. Facilities already struggling before the conflict are now critically overstretched by the displacement of health workers and disruptions in tertiary care access, exacerbating existing health inequities. The broader implications for displaced populations are addressed in Section 2.3, Health Fallout of Relief Camps.

9.2.2.2. Disruption to Medical Education in the Hills

Churachandpur Medical College (CMC), established in 2022, marked a significant milestone in improving access to medical education and tertiary healthcare in Manipur's hill districts. The first medical college in the hill districts, it has an intake capacity of 100 MBBS students³⁴⁴—85 through state nominations and 15 via the all-India quota.³⁴⁵ It operates from the Churachandpur District Hospital, which was approved for upgradation to a medical college under a Central Scheme³⁴⁶ The construction of its

³⁴⁴ cmcmanipur.nic.in/aboutuspage

³⁴⁵Project coordinator, local youth-led NGO working on mental health and community development, based on information from a medical professional at Churachandpur Medical College, October 18, 2024.

³⁴⁶'Rs 325 Cr Marked for CCpur Medical College - The Sangai Express - Largest Circulated NewsPaper in Manipur', accessed 21 April 2025, <https://www.thesangaiexpress.com/Encyc/2021/2/13/Staff-Reporter-DIPRIMPHAL-Feb-12-Chief-Minister-N-Biren-has-stated-that-the-State-Government-has-been-working-to-set-up-a-medical-college-at-Churachandpur-at-the-cost-of-Rs-325-crore-under-a-Centr.html>.

permanent campus, which had begun prior to the conflict, has remained stalled since its onset.³⁴⁷

The outbreak of violence severely disrupted CMC's operations, especially in the initial months. Teaching faculty strength dropped from around 50 to 20 due to the departure of 15 Meitei faculty members and the reassignment of others to the district hospital to manage the influx of displaced persons.³⁴⁸ The first batch of 91 students—comprising Meiteis, Nagas, and out-of-state candidates was relocated to CMC's Imphal campus, attached primarily to JNIMS in Imphal East. Over time, Kuki medical professionals with the State Medical Services serving in Meitei-dominated areas or teaching at JNIMS and RIMS were reassigned to CMC, but faculty shortages persist.³⁴⁹

The conflict had also displaced approximately 120 Kuki medical students, including 75 MBBS students, 19 postgraduate students, and 16 BDS students, who were previously enrolled in valley-based institutions such as RIMS, JNIMS, and Shija Hospital.^{350,351} These students were later attached to CMC in Churachandpur. Some of these students, along with

³⁴⁷ Project Coordinator, local youth-led NGO, information based on certain sources, October 18, 2024.

³⁴⁸ 'Stuck in Strife, PG Medical Students Chip in as Hospital Faculty, Treat Violence-Hit | India News - Times of India', accessed 21 December 2024, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/stuck-in-strife-pg-medical-students-chip-in-as-hospital-faculty-treat-violence-hit/articleshow/102045218.cms>.

³⁴⁹ Project coordinator, local youth-led NGO, citing a medical professional at Churachandpur Medical College, October 18, 2024.

³⁵⁰ "Sometimes I Forget I'm a Student": From Medicine to Engineering, Manipur Violence Takes a Toll on Higher Education', *The Indian Express*, 6 September 2023, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/from-medicine-to-engineering-manipur-violence-takes-toll-on-higher-education-8925766/>.

³⁵¹ The breakup of numbers — 75 MBBS students, 19 postgraduate students, and 16 BDS students was provided by the president and secretary of the Parents' Body for Displaced Medical Students during their testimony before the Independent Citizens' Tribunal in Churachandpur.

representatives of the Parents' Body for Displaced Medical Students, presented their grievances before the tribunal in Churachandpur. They shared concerns about delayed classes and examinations,³⁵² attributing them to discriminatory policies and inaction by the state government. They also pointed to the limited infrastructure and faculty shortages at CMC, a newly established institution, emphasizing how these challenges could undermine the quality of medical education for displaced Kuki students who were earlier studying in premier institutions in the valley.

The Secretary of the Parents' Body stated:

Another big problem is that there is a shortage of faculty. Nothing is being done about it. We demand immediate action. No point giving an order that says classes can be held if there is no faculty. So even if MBBS students can resume their education, PG students also suffer from a lack of faculty and infrastructure.

The Churachandpur campus of CMC is now exclusive to Kuki students, while students from other ethnic communities and those admitted through the all-India quota in subsequent batches continue their education at the Imphal campus. The conflict has in fact effectively barred Kuki medical and nursing aspirants from accessing premier valley-based institutions like RIMS and JNIMS, despite meeting eligibility criteria – a violation of their right to pursue education at an institution of their choice.

Concerns about the future of the medical college at Churachandpur prevail. Expressing disappointment over the halt in construction, the project coordinator of the local mental health and community development organization in an online interaction stated:

³⁵²‘Churachandpur Medical College | Kuki-Zo Medical Students Protest against Manipur University over Bar on MBBS Examination - Telegraph India’, accessed 21 December 2024, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/north-east/kuki-zo-medical-students-protest-against-manipur-university-over-bar-on-mbbs-examination/cid/1981624>.

It was a matter of pride for the local people that the district hospital was being upgraded to a medical college. The halt in construction is now a major concern as it will affect CMC's progress toward becoming a fully operational medical college and a much-needed tertiary care facility for the hill districts of Manipur.

9.2.2.3 The Reshaping of Health System Dynamics

A) Medical Settings: Sites of Mistrust?

Hospitals—typically spaces of care and healing—became sites of tension and mistrust during the conflict. Media reports and survivor testimonies indicate that hostilities between Kukis and Meiteis surfaced within medical settings in the initial days of violence, before large-scale population exchanges began. In Imphal, the admission of injured Kuki patients reportedly caused discomfort among some Meitei healthcare staff, particularly due to the presence of accompanying family members.³⁵³

Testimonies presented before the tribunal also underscore the profound sense of insecurity experienced by individuals receiving care in hospitals where the dominant ethnic community was from the opposing side. For instance, a Kuki nursing student—who had been brutally assaulted and left for dead by Meitei mobs—recounted her fear while undergoing treatment at JNIMS in Imphal:

As soon as I gained consciousness, I began to feel very insecure. All the medical and nursing staff around me were Meitei. There was so much awkwardness. I talked to my parents and begged them to come and get me. After being dragged out and brutally beaten, I feared for my safety.

³⁵³Prajwal Bhat, Raju Maria Teresa, 'Manipur Ground Report: In Hospitals, Doctors Witness the Tragedy of the Violence', The News Minute, 13 August 2023, <https://www.thenewsminute.com/news/manipur-ground-report-hospitals-doctors-witness-tragedy-violence-180986>.

After many tries, my parents got an army official to pick me up from JNIMS and drop me at KCC Hospital. From there, I was taken to Delhi and admitted to AIMS on 7th May. My parents met me in Delhi. I had to go for regular follow-ups at the hospital, so we stayed in Delhi till the 24th of May.

A Meitei man residing in Churachandpur and married to a Kuki woman described the profound helplessness he felt while seeking emergency care for his brother, who had been shot during the violence that had broken out in the district on May 3. Although the District Hospital provided treatment without prejudice, he remained anxious about his brother's safety. Concerned about a potential threat to his brother's life, he made urgent efforts to relocate him to what he perceived as a "more secure location". His account highlights the deep anxiety and fear that influenced healthcare decisions during the conflict:

My brother was admitted to Churachandpur Hospital. Knowing the local language, he managed to communicate... When I learned that his operation was scheduled, I contacted the Chief Medical Officer. I then went to the police station, where an officer advised me not to disclose my location to anyone, even friends. I spent the night there, feeling anxious and tried to contact the SP (Superintendent of Police) and DC (District Collector) to arrange an ambulance, but nothing worked. Early in the morning, around 6am I sought help again to move my brother to a safer location. A police official, a Kuki woman who had been my brother's teacher, was very supportive and offered immense assistance. With her help, I arranged a vehicle to transfer my brother from the hospital to the police station. From there, we approached an army officer for an ambulance. Within two hours, two army vehicles arrived and escorted us to Imphal.

These accounts demonstrate how conflict zones foster mistrust in healthcare environments, even in hospitals designed to be neutral and safe spaces. While there was no evidence in both situations of medical professionals on either side breaching medical neutrality or the fundamental ethical principle of humanity, the polarized and volatile environment had significantly heightened fear and unease among patients and even medical staff.

B) Ethnic Homogeneity Within Health Workforce: Health care in the state like many other aspects of life has become divided along ethnic lines. In the affected hill districts, particularly the Kuki-dominated areas, and the valley (to a lesser extent), the health workforce remains largely homogenous, with limited ethnic diversity. This physical and psychological divide has restricted people's choice of providers and disrupted longstanding relationships of trust and familiarity between clinicians and patients across ethnicities that had developed over time. Reflecting on this, the senior Meitei psychiatrist based in Imphal noted:

I stayed there (Churachandpur) for more than one year. I know many people there. Some of them (patients) I have been treating for years. They used to also come to Imphal to consult with me. Since the conflict, a few of them (Kuki patients) or their family members still call me. They have been consulting with me for a while and don't wish to seek treatment elsewhere. I advise them about their treatment through WhatsApp. They are innocent people. I don't have any grudge against them. They are also victims. How can I not help them? They are also suffering because they don't have a proper home or proper food. They are the local people. But these people (Kuki infiltrators) who are attacking us mercilessly- they are not our local people.

The ethnic alignment within the healthcare workforce has also created significant disparities in the distribution of health professionals. While some areas, particularly the valley districts, report a surplus of healthcare

staff, other regions, such as the hill districts, face critical understaffing. As highlighted by the doctor from Kangpokpi who had testified before the tribunal:

Staff, including nurses and paramedic were relocated from Kangpokpi to valley districts. I learned that one of the urban primary health centres (in the valley) has 12 nurses, while we are left with only few and no plans for assigning additional nurses.

Such disparities are severely limiting access to care in underserved regions, placing additional strain on the remaining staff and increasing the risk of burnout. This imbalance not only compromises the quality and continuity of healthcare services but also deepens existing health inequities.

Additionally, the ethnic divide is limiting healthcare workers' exposure to diverse cultural contexts and health needs—an essential component of culturally competent practice. For instance, the student body, faculty, and patients at Churachandpur Medical College (CMC) are now almost entirely Kuki, while medical colleges in the valley continue to have relatively greater diversity among both healthcare providers and patients. This is partly because valley-based institutions also receive patients from other northeastern states. If this lack of cross-cultural exposure persists, students at CMC may have fewer opportunities to engage with a broader spectrum of medical conditions, treatment approaches, and socio-cultural determinants of health—key elements in developing the cultural competence necessary for delivering inclusive and effective healthcare in a multi-ethnic society.

Recruitment in the health sector—both public and private—may get increasingly shaped by ethnic lines, with Meiteis largely occupying positions in the valley and Kukis staffing health facilities in the Kuki-dominated hill districts. While this may be viewed as inevitable under the

current circumstances it risks entrenching an ethnically divided healthcare system, potentially undermining the willingness and ability of practitioners to work across communities once peace is restored. It may also normalize ethnic segregation in healthcare employment, complicating future efforts to reintegrate the workforce and equitably distribute health resources across the state.

There are also serious concerns that ethnic segregation may severely restrict public employment opportunities for Kukis in healthcare and other sectors. Government recruitment processes often require candidates to travel to Imphal for documentation and interviews—an option that has remained inaccessible to Kukis since 2023. The project coordinator of the youth-led mental health and community development organization in Churachandpur, stated in a follow-up conversation with a tribunal member:

Any advantages of even having an ST certificate has been nullified due to this (ethnic segregation). Since 2023, government positions have largely been filled by Nagas and Meiteis, leaving Kukis excluded from opportunities such as consultant roles at RIMS, LDC (lower division clerk) positions in the High Court, or primary teacher roles through MPSC (Manipur Public Service Commission). There is also growing concern that even recruitment for the newly established Churachandpur Medical College may disproportionately benefit Meiteis and Nagas if positions get allocated to the CMC- Imphal campus, further marginalizing Kukis in public employment.

Finally, with healthcare providers and patients predominantly belonging to the same ethnic group, opportunities for inter-ethnic interaction and trust-building within healthcare settings are limited. In regions marked by ethnic tension, a diverse health workforce could play a pivotal role in bridging

divides by creating neutral and inclusive spaces for care and fostering dialogue.

9.2.2.4 Mental Health: Post-Conflict Challenges and State Response

Mental health professionals who engaged with the tribunal highlighted how the conflict has intensified longstanding weaknesses in Manipur's mental healthcare system—particularly in the hill districts, where infrastructure is either minimal or non-existent. Territorial divides have further restricted mobility and disrupted referral pathways, limiting access to services that remain concentrated in the valley.

They specifically referred to Kangpokpi, one of the worst-affected districts, where the mental health situation is especially dire. The transfer of the district hospital's only psychiatrist shortly before the outbreak of violence left the area without any clinical mental health services. Testimonies from residents described widespread psychological distress—including anxiety, depression, and trauma symptoms—underscoring the urgent need for accessible, culturally sensitive, and trauma-informed care. To address this gap, the state government had arranged for psychiatrists from AIIMS Guwahati to be deputed on a rotational basis. Dr. Ramdas Raising, Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry at AIIMS Guwahati, was posted to the district. In a virtual meeting with the Gita Mittal Committee on 11 September 2023, he reported acute shortages of psychologists, counsellors, and essential psychiatric medications in Kangpokpi.³⁵⁴

The senior Meitei psychiatrist based in Imphal described the situation in the valley:

³⁵⁴ Committee Constituted by the Order Dated 07.08.2023 in SLP (Civil) Diary No. 19206 of 2023 and Connected Matters Passed by the Supreme Court of India, *Minutes of the 10th Meeting*, September 11, 2023, 4:00 p.m., via Video Conferencing.

Services in the valley are comparatively better, primarily due to the presence of institutions such as RIMS, JNIMS, and Shija Hospital. However, the rising outpatient load following the conflict, coupled with staff shortages—particularly in public hospitals—has significantly hindered efforts to extend community mental health services, especially to relief camps in remote areas. The government envisions the DMHP as a mechanism for addressing the mental health consequences of the conflict; however, the programme is already constrained by serious deficits in infrastructure, personnel, and coverage. As a result, it is ill-equipped to respond to the scale and complexity of the current mental health crisis.

A similar concern was raised by the co-founder and director of a local mental health and community development organisation based in Churachandpur:

The DMHP, with its predominantly biomedical approach, lacks the flexibility to address the multifaceted needs arising from trauma, grief, and psychosocial distress stemming from the conflict. Trauma-informed and community-based approaches are urgently needed to respond effectively to these challenges.

In a written reply to Unstarred Question No. 918 in the Rajya Sabha on 30 July 2024, the state government listed several initiatives to address mental health needs since May 2023.³⁵⁵ These included visits by DMHP teams to relief camps, follow-up care by medical officers and OPDs, services via the 24/7 Tele-MANAS helpline, and a range of psychosocial interventions such as outreach camps, awareness programmes, suicide prevention counselling, stress management sessions, and yoga therapy in selected camps. Individuals deemed high risk were reportedly given targeted

³⁵⁵ Government of India, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Department of Health and Family Welfare, *Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question No. 918: Impact of the Conflict on the Mental Health of the Population in Manipur*, answered on 30 July 2024 (New Delhi: Government of India, 2024)

counselling and follow-up care. However, the government did not provide disaggregated data on the locations or population coverage of these interventions.

Survivors, civil society actors, and mental health professionals challenge these claims, pointing to major gaps in access and service delivery, particularly in relief camps and remote hill districts. The Gita Mittal Committee too has highlighted acute shortages of psychiatrists, psychologists, and essential medicines, underscoring the scale of the conflict's mental health burden.^{356,357} These challenges are not surprising given the state's limited mental health workforce and the systemic neglect of mental health within public health planning, as discussed in Section 1. Although the government has announced plans to train grassroots workers and non-specialists in basic counselling and psychosocial support,³⁵⁸ the details remain unclear, leaving a persistent gap between policy commitments and ground realities and hampering the development of an adequate, inclusive mental health response.

9.2.2.5. Economic Barriers to Health Care Post Conflict

A) Rising Out-of-Pocket Expenditure:

³⁵⁶ Committee Constituted by Order Dated August 7, 2023, in SLP (Civil) Diary No. 19206 of 2023 and Connected Matters, passed by the Supreme Court of India, *Minutes of the Fourth Meeting*, held on August 18, 2023, at 1:30 p.m., via video conference.

³⁵⁶In the Supreme Court of India, Extraordinary Appellate/Original Jurisdiction, Special Leave Petition (Civil Diary) No. 19206 of 2023, in the matter of DinganglungGangmei v. Mutum Churamani Meitei & Others. Report No. 10: Re. Issues Relating to Mental Health, September 13, 2023

³⁵⁷

³⁵⁸ Government of Manipur, Updated Status Report on Behalf of the State of Manipur in Compliance of Order Dated 03.07.2023, in DinganglungGangmei v. MutumChuramani Meitei & Others, SLP (Civil) Diary Nos. 19206 and 19210 of 2023 with WP (Civil) No. 540 of 2023, Supreme Court of India, p. 8.

Those who deposed before the tribunal highlighted how the ongoing healthcare crisis—particularly in conflict-affected districts—is driving high out-of-pocket expenditures (OOPE) for families. This burden stems from disruptions in primary and secondary care, territorial divisions forcing patients to seek treatment outside their districts or even outside the state, and injuries requiring long-term management—all unfolding amid acute economic distress. Manipur has historically reported high OOPE for health services, reflecting persistent gaps in public healthcare financing and accessibility. The average expenditure per delivery in public health facilities, for example, rose from ₹10,348 in NFHS-4 (2015–16) to ₹14,518 in NFHS-5 (2019–21), with costs remaining consistently high across both rural and urban areas. The average OOPE for deliveries in private facilities is even higher, at ₹36,906 (NFHS-5).³⁵⁹

The rising cost of healthcare is likely to pose serious barriers to post-conflict recovery, deepening poverty and limiting access to essential services—especially for marginalized groups. While those with financial means travel to urban centres such as Guwahati, Chennai, or Delhi for specialist care,³⁶⁰ others are left to navigate cycles of unmet health needs and worsening economic vulnerability.

A 75-year-old Meitei housewife in a relief camp in Bishnupur shared her anguish with the tribunal:

Immediately after he was found, members of our local club rushed my brother to the nearest hospital. Seeing the severity of his condition, the

³⁵⁹ International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and ICF. *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), India, 2019–21: Manipur*. Mumbai: IIPS, March 2021. <https://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-5Reports/Manipur.pdf>.

³⁶⁰ Anvi Maria Joy Gunnal Megha P. K, Akhil P. M, Gaurav Suresh, 'Less Out-of-Pocket Expenditure for Births in Public Facilities in Rural Areas, NFHS-5 Finds', Down To Earth, 31 December 2020, <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/health/less-out-of-pocket-expenditure-for-births-in-public-facilities-in-rural-areas-nfhs-5-finds-74848>.

doctors administered first aid and referred him to another hospital. My brother's body was severely burned, and even after a year, he is still undergoing treatment. We have already spent so much money on his medical care that we don't know if we can afford to continue his treatment further. The financial burden is too much!

Similarly, a 27-year-old Kuki village volunteer from Kangpokpi recounted his ordeal:

I was shot in five places—once in the leg, twice in the chest, and twice in my hands. I was initially taken to the district hospital in Senapati for first aid and then transferred to a private hospital in Kohima, where I was treated for one month and spent Rs 4 lakh on my treatment. After Kohima, I spent another month at Kangpokpi Mission Hospital, which cost Rs 50,000. Now, I go for periodic check-ups to Dimapur in Nagaland which also costs money. Back home in the village, I am mostly confined to bed rest. I can't walk normally; putting any pressure on my injured leg causes severe pain, even a year later. My leg has been infected three times, requiring three operations, and I need yet another surgery because a bone has improperly healed—it would be my fourth surgery but I don't know if I can afford it.

He also explained the financial strain his injuries placed on his family:

We are a poor family and have already spent so much on my treatment. Half of the medical expenses were covered by us, while the other half came from the COTU medical team and crowdfunding in my area. I even had confrontations with my parents because of the financial burden my injuries have placed on them.

These testimonies shed light on the intertwined economic and mental health toll of Manipur's ongoing healthcare crisis. The gendered

dimensions of financial distress and rising out-of-pocket expenditures (OOPE) also warrant attention. In situations of acute household resource constraints, women's healthcare is often deprioritized in favour of other family members, leading to significant unmet health needs. Similar vulnerabilities may also be observed among persons with disabilities and the elderly, who face compounded barriers to accessing timely and adequate care.

B) Health Insurance Schemes for the Poor – Challenges Post Conflict
Launched in January 2018, the Chief Minister-gi Hakshelgi Tengbang (CMHT) health assurance scheme was introduced to promote universal health coverage in Manipur by providing cashless treatment of up to ₹5 lakh per family annually.³⁶¹ The scheme targets vulnerable groups, including SECC-identified households, persons with disabilities, widows, ASHA and Anganwadi workers, and Ima Market vendors. It covers seven critical ailments—cardiovascular, kidney, neurological, and liver conditions, cancer, neonatal diseases, and burn injuries—across government hospitals, health centres, and select private hospitals in Manipur and Guwahati. Beneficiaries are also entitled to transport and subsistence allowances.³⁶² As of November 2024, 3.53 lakh individuals were enrolled, and 2.32 lakh treatments had been provided, amounting to a total expenditure of ₹287.10 crore.³⁶³

On 23 September 2018, the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) was rolled out in Manipur, offering similar annual coverage for secondary

³⁶¹ Business Standard, 'CM Launches Health Assurance Scheme for Poor & Disabled People', 21 January 2018, https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/cm-launches-health-assurance-scheme-for-poor-disabled-people-118012100778_1.html.

³⁶² CMHT, accessed 20 September 2024, <https://cmhtmanipur.gov.in/cmht/scheme-details.html>.

³⁶³ Government of Manipur, *CMHT Fortnightly and Cumulative Report as on November 2024* (Imphal: Department of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Manipur), accessed December 4, 2024, [https://www.cmhtmanipur.gov.in/cmht/data-notice/CMHT fortnightly and cumulative as on November 2024.pdf](https://www.cmhtmanipur.gov.in/cmht/data-notice/CMHT%20fortnightly%20and%20cumulative%20as%20on%20November%202024.pdf)

and tertiary care. Based on SECC 2011 data, PM-JAY places no restriction on family size, age, or gender. As of August 4, 2024, over 6.15 lakh beneficiaries had been registered under the scheme, with 1.72 lakh hospitalisations and nearly all treated.³⁶⁴

A review of CMHT and State Health Agency data, however, reveals significant spatial disparities in the location of empanelled facilities.³⁶⁵ Most hospitals—including those offering specialist and tertiary care—are concentrated in the valley, particularly in Imphal West. The bar chart below illustrates this disparity:

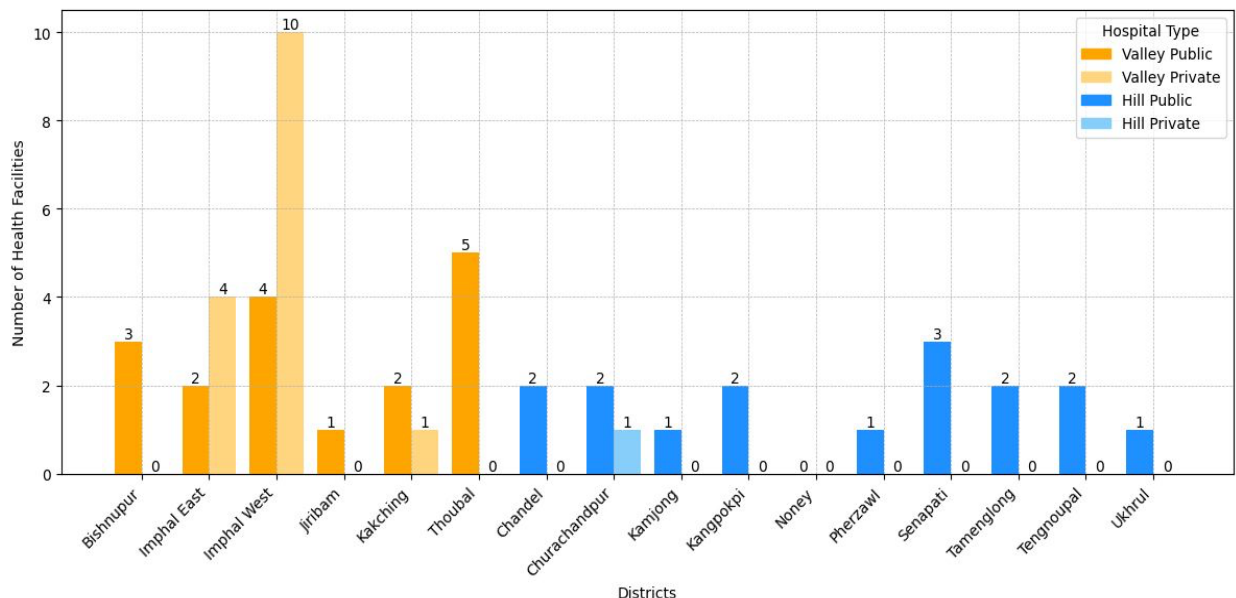


Figure 1: District-wise Distribution of Empanelled Health Facilities under CMHT and PM-JAY in Manipur

Source: CMHT and State Health Agency, Government of Manipur, 2024

³⁶⁴‘PMJAY-Home’, accessed 14 September 2024, <https://www.shamanipur.mn.gov.in/>.

³⁶⁵ ‘PMJAY-STATE EMPANELLED HOSPITALS’, accessed 24 September 2024, <https://www.shamanipur.mn.gov.in/Static/StateEmpanelledHosp>.

With the ongoing conflict and resultant territorial divides, access to facilities under both CMHT and PM-JAY has become severely restricted for members of the Kuki community. The physician from Saikul who spoke to some tribunal members stated:

Several children with congenital anomalies, who were beneficiaries of the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK), have been unable to resume or receive treatment. This is because tertiary centres empanelled by the State Health Society under the National Health Mission are located in Imphal and are now inaccessible to the Kuki community.

While some public facilities in the hill districts are technically empanelled under the insurance schemes, many remain severely under-resourced as detailed in Section 1. The lack of functional referral infrastructure leaves enrolled beneficiaries—especially those from conflict-affected communities—with few viable options, resulting in increased out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE). This underscores a key limitation: **insurance coverage, in the absence of geographically accessible and adequately equipped facilities, does not guarantee meaningful access to care or financial protection.**

Survivors, health professionals, and civil society activists reported that many individuals lost essential documents—including Aadhaar cards and health cards (CMHT and PM-JAY)—either due to the destruction of their homes or the urgency with which they fled. This loss has significantly hindered access to healthcare benefits, particularly for displaced persons living in relief camps, including both Meiteis and Kukis. In the absence of these documents, many have been compelled to pay out of pocket for healthcare services, exacerbating financial distress.

In its updated status report to the Supreme Court, submitted in compliance with the order dated 3 July 2023, the Government of Manipur

stated that efforts had been initiated to reconstruct lost documents such as Aadhaar cards, health cards, and bank passbooks.³⁶⁶ However, during the visit of the Independent Citizens' Tribunal, multiple stakeholders confirmed that more than a year into the conflict, many displaced individuals still did not have access to their health cards. The Gita Mittal Committee, in its reports, repeatedly emphasized the urgent need to reissue essential documents to ensure uninterrupted access to healthcare, irrespective of a person's place of residence.³⁶⁷

The loss of essential documents and limited access to functional healthcare facilities appear to have had a direct impact on the utilisation of the CMHT scheme. Data from the official website show a steady increase in cases treated before the ethnic violence—from 4,502 in May 2022 to 5,997 by April 2023—followed by a sharp spike after the violence began in May 2023, peaking at 6,815 cases in August 2023, likely linked to conflict-related injuries and morbidity. However, from December 2023 onwards, utilisation declined sharply, falling to 3,157 cases in January 2024 and remaining below pre-violence levels through May 2024 (3,670 cases).³⁶⁸ This reversal of the conflict-related surge suggests underutilisation of the scheme despite continuing humanitarian and health needs among displaced and vulnerable population and needs immediate investigation and corrective action.

³⁶⁶ Government of Manipur, *Updated Status Report*, 8.

³⁶⁷ ³⁶⁷www.ETLegalWorld.com, 'Justice Gita Mittal Panel Files Reports on Loss of ID Proofs of Victims in Manipur Violence, Compensation Scheme to SC - ET LegalWorld', ETLegalWorld.Com, accessed 25 April 2025, <https://legal.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/litigation/justice-gita-mittal-panel-files-reports-on-loss-of-id-proofs-of-victims-in-manipur-violence-compensation-scheme-to-sc/102916665>.

³⁶⁸ Government of Manipur. *CMHT Fortnightly and Cumulative as of November 2024*. Imphal: CMHT Manipur, November 2024. Accessed [30 November, 2024]. <https://www.cmhtmanipur.gov.in/cmht/index.html>.

Government of Manipur, *CMHT Fortnightly and Cumulative as of November 2024* (Imphal: CMHT Manipur, November 2024), accessed via CMHT Manipur website. <https://www.cmhtmanipur.gov.in/cmht/index.html>

The reissuing health cards alone however will not be sufficient if structural and financial challenges continue to impede the effective implementation of CMHT and PMJAY. In January 2024, media reports highlighted that a coalition of private hospitals appealed to the Manipur government to clear substantial payment backlogs under both schemes.³⁶⁹ With dues reportedly amounting to several crores of rupees, hospitals were reportedly facing challenges in covering operational costs, including vendor payments and staff salaries.

These delays in reimbursement reflect broader systemic issues within India's social insurance framework,^{370,371} where deferred payments by the state to compromise service delivery and shift the burden onto patients. In conflict-affected areas, where access to healthcare is already limited, such delays deepen existing vulnerabilities. Economically disadvantaged patients often resort to borrowing money or selling assets to afford treatment—pushing them further into financial precarity, impacting their mental well-being, or leading them to forgo care altogether.

The impact of delayed payments also began to be felt at empanelled public health facilities. A senior nursing professional from Churachandpur, a Kuki woman in her early 50s, shared the following in a confidential WhatsApp message to a tribunal member:

³⁶⁹ IT Web Admin, “CMHT Health Scheme Faces Challenges: Fund Crunch, Delayed Reimbursements, and Unprecedented Hurdles Impacting Patients,” *Imphal Times (blog)*, January 29, 2024, <https://www.imphaltimes.com/news/cmht-health-scheme-faces-challenges-fund-crunch-delayed-reimbursements-and-unprecedented-hurdles-impacting-patients/>.

³⁷⁰ Sumi Sukanya Dutta, “‘Inordinate Delay’: Private Hospitals Seek Interest from Govt on Ayushman Bharat Reimbursement,” *ThePrint*, 1 May 2024, <https://theprint.in/health/inordinate-delay-private-hospitals-seek-interest-from-govt-on-ayushman-bharat-reimbursement/2065124/>.

³⁷¹ Priyanka Sharma, ‘Private Hospitals Pull Back on Ayushman Bharat amid Low State Funding’, *Mint*, 8 May 2024, <https://www.livemint.com/industry/private-hospitals-pull-back-on-ayushman-bharat-amid-low-state-funding-11715151502802.html>.

Since June or July, eligible patients have been unable to use their CMHT cards at Churachandpur District Hospital due to substantial pending dues from the state government. This has intensified hardships for patients, forcing many to pay out of pocket for essential medicines and treatments.

In August 2024, the state cabinet decided to delist private hospitals from the CMHT scheme, effective September 30, to encourage greater use of public health services.^{372,373} While the goal of strengthening public health services is commendable, it must be accompanied by efforts to address structural and operational gaps, particularly in the hill districts. Without such improvements, delisting private providers risks reducing access to essential care for low-income families across ethnicities—Meiteis, Nagas, Kukis, and others—who often rely on private facilities for specialized services due to constraints within the public health system.

The above complexities highlight the limitations of insurance-based healthcare models, such as CMHT and PM-JAY, during periods of systemic disruption and prolonged crisis. They underscore the need for a more robust and adaptable public health infrastructure capable of ensuring continuity of care and equitable access to essential services during emergencies.

³⁷² ‘Delisting Private Hospitals from CMHT PC 20240902’, accessed 4 November 2024, https://epao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=news_section.editorial.editorial_2024.Delisting_private_hospitals_from_CMHT_PC_20240902.

³⁷³ ‘CMHT Not to Cover Pvt Hospitals from Sep 30 - The Sangai Express - Largest Circulated NewsPaper in Manipur’, accessed 26 April 2025, <https://www.thesangaiexpress.com/Encyc/2024/8/31/By-Our-Staff-ReporterIMPHAL-Aug-30-From-September-30-and-the-health-insurance-given-under-Chief-Minister-.html>.

9.2.2.5. Profiteering and Weak Accountability – A Case Study³⁷⁴

This case highlights the ordeal of an 18-year-old Kuki nursing student from Kangpokpi district in Manipur, exposing exploitative institutional practices and the inadequacy of grievance redressal mechanisms, despite Supreme Court-mandated processes.

The student, enrolled in a General Nursing and Midwifery (GNM) programme at a private nursing college in Imphal in November 2022, found herself in grave danger when ethnic violence erupted on May 3, 2023. She and other Kuki students were specifically targeted by Meitei mobs when their hostel was attacked and narrowly escaped before being relocated to safety.

Through a Christian network, she secured admission to a nursing college in Bengaluru, where her fees were waived as a humanitarian gesture. However, to complete her admission and register with the Karnataka Nursing Council, she required her original Class X and XII certificates, which were being withheld by her previous institution in Imphal. Despite repeated requests, the college refused to release the documents unless she paid ₹2,20,000—covering the full three-year programme. This demand was both legally and ethically questionable, as she had already paid the first-year fees up to April 2023. Her family was prepared to pay the remaining ₹32,000 for the academic year, but not the amount demanded for the entire course, which she was no longer attending.

³⁷⁴ The NGO working in the field of mental health and community development in Churachandpur shared this case with the written consent of the young woman and her family. The organization had been supporting her in retrieving her Class X and XII certificates after connecting with her through an activist. The relevant documents were shared by the young woman in confidence.

The student sought help from the Karnataka State Legal Services Authority (KSLSA), one of the eighteen State Legal Services Authorities established under the Supreme Court's directives through the Gita Mittal Committee to support conflict-affected students from Manipur.³⁷⁵ KSLSA reached out to the Manipur Legal Services Authority (MALSA), which visited the nursing college but failed to communicate with the student, her family, or KSLSA. The college later proposed a settlement of ₹70,000–₹80,000. Eventually, the student was able to continue her studies after obtaining duplicate certificates from the respective education boards—but only after enduring considerable emotional and logistical hardship.

This case underscores several concerns: the unethical conduct of the private nursing institution in withholding educational documents, the failure of statutory bodies to ensure accountability, and the lack of effective grievance redressal or appeal mechanisms for survivors of the conflict. Courts in India have consistently held that institutions cannot withhold student documents to recover dues and must use lawful means to settle accounts.^{376,377} The episode reveals the urgent need for better enforcement of legal protections and compassionate institutional responses in times of crisis.

³⁷⁵ Government of Manipur, *Public Notice on Contact Persons for Displaced Persons*, Home Department, December 4, 2023. PDF file. Issued by the Home Department, Government of Manipur, this public notice lists designated contact persons across Indian states to assist students displaced

³⁷⁶ ‘A. Bharath vs The Chairman on 1 April 2021’, accessed 24 December 2024, <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/43295835/?type=print>.

³⁷⁷ ‘Educational Institutions Can’t Hold Back Student’s Certificates over Fee Dues: HC | Madurai News - Times of India’, accessed 24 April 2025, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/madurai/colleges-cant-hold-back-students-certificates-over-fee-dues-hc/articleshow/71811928.cms>.

9.3. Health Fallout of Relief Camps

Research on internally displaced persons (IDPs), both in camps and outside³⁷⁸, consistently shows that they experience worse health outcomes than other conflict-affected populations.^{379,380,381} These include higher rates of communicable and vector-borne diseases, reproductive health complications, mental health disorders, malnutrition, and elevated mortality. Such health impacts are often intergenerational, shaped by intersecting factors such as class, gender, age, ethnicity, disability, and religion. The tribunal's visit to three Kuki and four Meitei relief camps between May 27 and June 3, 2024, revealed serious physical and mental health concerns, echoing patterns observed in other contexts of protracted displacement.

9.3.1 Precarious Living Conditions

The tribunal observed that IDPs across multiple relief camps continue to live in severely inadequate conditions marked by overcrowding, poor ventilation, and lack of privacy—factors that significantly compromise physical health and contribute to psychological distress. Basic necessities such as mosquito nets, blankets, and mattresses were either inadequate or altogether unavailable. Residents often sleep on thin foam or cloth laid

³⁷⁸ Many IDPs live outside camps - staying with relatives, renting rooms, or in informal settlements within or outside the state—making them less visible to authorities and aid agencies. This invisibility hampers access to services, documentation, and recognition, and complicates efforts to estimate their numbers

³⁷⁹ Jina Swartz et al., 'Researching Health and Internal Displacement: Introduction to the Special Series', *Journal of Migration and Health*, 20 December 2023, 100208, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmh.2023.100208>.

³⁸⁰ David Cantor et al., 'Understanding the Health Needs of Internally Displaced Persons: A Scoping Review', *Journal of Migration and Health* 4 (January 2021): 100071, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmh.2021.100071>.

³⁸¹ Françoise Girard and Wilhelmina Waldman, 'Ensuring the Reproductive Rights of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons: Legal and Policy Issues', *International Family Planning Perspectives* 26, no. 4 (2000): 167–73, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2648254>.

directly on the ground. The absence of mosquito control measures such as fogging heightened the risk of vector-borne diseases.

Drinking water was primarily supplied through tankers; however, the absence of water quality testing raised concerns about its safety. Camp officials informed the tribunal that the state government had issued advisories to boil water before consumption, but limited access to fuel and cooking facilities made this impractical. Residents in at least three camps reported persistent shortages of water for bathing and washing. Women at the Santhong Relief Camp in Moirang said they were forced to wash clothes with “*dirty water*,” while those at the Sangai University Relief Camp in Churachandpur relied on a nearby river for daily bathing and washing needs.

9.3.2 Inadequate Sanitation and Hygiene

Sanitation and bathing facilities were grossly inadequate, with disproportionate impacts on women and girls. In some camps, women bathed in the open using makeshift cloth enclosures, severely compromising privacy and dignity. The absence of disability-friendly toilets and bathing areas raised concerns about accessibility and inclusivity. At the Sangai University Relief Camp, residents relieved themselves in open spaces during the day and used the 12 toilets built by Médecins Sans Frontières only at night due to limited water availability. The camp in-charge stated that at least 10 additional toilets were needed.

In several camps, women and girls reported irregular and insufficient supplies of sanitary napkins. A young woman in one camp told tribunal members that many women and adolescent girls “we have problems like vaginal itching, lots of white discharge etc.”

9.3.3 Gender-Based Risks and Safety Concerns

The 32-year-old Kuki social worker from Churachandpur, engaged with the youth-led mental health and community development CBO, was also involved in the documentation of gender-based and sexual violence against Kuki women. She shared that “a few cases of sexual harassment in camps have been reported and addressed by the camp-in-charge.” She expressed concern that such incidents may be occurring in camps across the state, given the heightened risk of gender-based violence faced by internally displaced women in conflict situations. She emphasized the importance of creating safe environments for women and girls to report such incidents and called for immediate and decisive action to prevent and address such violations.

9.3.4 Exposure to Environmental Hazards

Relief camps also lacked adequate protection from harsh weather. At the Sangai University Relief Camp, heavy rains made living spaces damp and uninhabitable, with puddles forming where children were seen playing—exposing them to waterborne diseases. Water leaking onto exposed electrical wiring posed electrocution risks, while the lack of guardrails on upper floors created safety hazards for children and older residents.

9.3.5 Health Implications of Camp Conditions

Overcrowding and poor ventilation significantly increase the risk of respiratory infections, including TB - the state has a high prevalence of both drug-sensitive and drug-resistant TB,^{382,383} influenza, and other infectious diseases. Unsafe water and inadequate sanitation heighten the

³⁸² ‘Delivering Specialist Care for HIV, TB, and Hepatitis in Manipur’, Médecins Sans Frontières(MSF), accessed 28 December 2024, <https://msfinindia.in/project/delivering-specialist-care-for-hiv-tb-and-hepatitis-in-manipur/>.

³⁸³ ‘Manipur: Incidence rate of tuberculosis only reduced to 142 per lakh population in 2020’, India Today NE, 18 January 2023, <https://www.indiatodayne.in/manipur/story/manipur-incidence-rate-tuberculosis-only-reduced-142-lakh-population-2020-499552-2023-01-18>.

risk of waterborne diseases such as cholera, typhoid, and diarrhoea. Poor access to water for bathing and washing has led to skin conditions, as reported in Sangai University Relief Camp.

Women and girls face greater risk of UTIs and reproductive health problems due to inadequate WASH facilities. Sleeping on hard surfaces worsens musculoskeletal discomfort, especially for children, pregnant women, elderly individuals, and persons with disabilities. Exposed electrical wiring and poor drainage increase injury risks and disease exposure.

Psychologically, overcrowding, lack of privacy, and persistent insecurity contribute to stress, anxiety, and feelings of helplessness. Incidents of sexual violence create further psychological harm, leaving women feeling unsafe and eroding trust within the camp community.

The Gita Mittal Committee, recognising the precarious conditions in relief camps, has repeatedly directed the government to undertake necessary measures to prevent outbreaks of waterborne diseases such as cholera, typhoid, and amoebiasis, as well as vector-borne diseases like malaria, dengue, and chikungunya.³⁸⁴—risks exacerbated by inadequate sanitation, stagnant water, and overcrowding within the camps. It has also consistently urged the state government to ensure the availability of potable water across all relief camps and to strengthen security measures to protect the well-being and safety of camp residents.

Yet, a little over a year later, when the Independent Citizens' Tribunal visited the state, it observed that conditions in the relief camps were grossly inadequate and failed to meet the minimum living standards

³⁸⁴ Committee Constituted by Order Dated August 7, 2023, in SLP (Civil) Diary No. 19206 of 2023 and Connected Matters, *Minutes of the Seventh Meeting*, September 1, 2023

prescribed under the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) guidelines for disaster relief.^{385,386} These guidelines outline essential requirements such as adequate living space, ventilation, access to safe drinking water, functional sanitation facilities, and protection measures for vulnerable groups, including women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities. This is particularly concerning given that the *Office Memorandum on Guidelines for Setting Up and Operation of Semi-Permanent Relief Camps for the Displaced Persons Due to Large Scale Violence in the State on 3rd May 2023*, issued by the Government of Manipur, had explicitly committed to constructing temporary shelters in accordance with the NDMA's minimum standards.³⁸⁷ The NDMA framework, unfortunately, is geared mainly toward natural disasters and certain human-made emergencies, offering little explicit guidance on conflict-induced displacement. Consequently, state governments often fail to implement these provisions in letter and spirit. This normative gap is significant, as NDMA guidelines and their operational structures at the state and district levels could otherwise play a crucial role in responding to complex humanitarian crises arising from internal conflict. The absence of a dedicated national policy on conflict-induced displacement further compounds this challenge. More broadly, protection frameworks for

³⁸⁵National Disaster Management Authority. *Guidelines on Minimum Standards of Relief*. New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, September 2019. Accessed December 24, 2024. <https://ndma.gov.in/sites/default/files/PDF/Guidelines/guideline-on-minimum-standard-of-relief.pdf>.

³⁸⁶ National Disaster Management Authority. *National Guidelines on Temporary Shelters for Disaster-Affected Families*. New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, September 2019. Accessed December 24, 2024. <https://ndma.gov.in/sites/default/files/PDF/Guidelines/Temporary-Shelters-Disaster-Affected-families.pdf>.

³⁸⁷ Government of Manipur, Home Department. *Office Memorandum No. H-1701/114/2023: Guidelines for Setting Up and Operation of Semi-Permanent Relief Camps for the Displaced Persons Due to Large Scale Violence in the State on 3rd May 2023 and Thereafter*. Imphal: Government of Manipur, June 9, 2023.

internally displaced persons (IDPs) remain underdeveloped at both national and international levels.

9.3.6. Nutrition Insecurity

“We get dal and rice in the morning and rice and dal in the evening,” remarked a woman at the Sangai University Relief Camp, capturing with dry humour the monotony of meals provided to internally displaced persons. This sentiment reflects the broader issue of nutritional inadequacy and the unbalanced, insufficient food access faced in crisis settings.^{388,389 ,390}

In its status report to the Supreme Court on 9th July 2023, the Government of Manipur assured the Court that items such as rice, dal, vegetables, and milk/fruits/food supplements, as available, would be provided in all camps for two meals a day.³⁹¹ However, the report

A list of essential items to be made available in all camps is as detailed below:

Sl. No.	Items	Quantity per Day Per Person for Two Meals	Sl. No.	One time Provision
1	Rice	400 gm	1	Venue Preparation (CGI Sheet/ Plastic/Partition)
2	Dal	100 gm	2	Mattresses + Bedsheet+ Pillow + Blanket+ Mosquito Net
3	Cooking Cost	Spices+ Fuel+ Cooking Oil	4	Bucket+ Mug + Cooking Utensils
4	Vegetables	200 gm	5	Gas Stove/Rice Cookers/Fire Place
5	Drinking Water	3 litres	6	Water Tank (2000 litres + 500ltrs)
6	Milk/Fruit/Supplements	As Available	7	Electricity (40 Bulbo + Wiring+ 20 Fan)/ Extension Cord/ Fan/
7	Items for Cleaning	As Required	8	Plates/Bowls/Cups/ Glass etc.
8	Soap and other Consumables	As Required	9	Toilet
9	Miscellaneous Including Cook, Laundry and Other Related Services as per the Requirement	As Required	10	Miscellaneous: Torch Light/Radio/Diapers/ Sanitary Pads etc.

³⁸⁸Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2023: Internal Displacement and Food Security*. Geneva: IDMC, 2023. Accessed December 24, 2024. <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2023/>.

³⁸⁹Claire Gooding et al., ‘Nutritional Challenges among African Refugee and Internally Displaced Children: A Comprehensive Scoping Review’, *Children* 11, no. 3 (2024): 318, <https://doi.org/10.3390/children11030318>.

³⁹⁰‘An Assessment of the Nutritional Status of Internally Displaced School Children in the West and Littoral Regions of Cameroon - Ejoh - 2024 - Food Science & Nutrition - Wiley Online Library’, accessed 25 April 2025, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/fsn3.4068>.

³⁹¹Government of Manipur, *Updated Status Report*, Annexure A–ii, p. 12.

(see **Figure 4**) does not clarify how the specific dietary needs of infants, children, pregnant and lactating women, patients with special needs, and the elderly would be met. Addressing the nutritional needs of vulnerable groups is a critical component of any relief programme.

Despite these assurances, serious food and nutrition challenges persisted, as reflected in public interest litigations filed regarding poor food quality and other deficiencies in relief camps.³⁹² During the visit of the Independent Citizen's Tribunal to Manipur between May 27 and June 3, 2024, residents in several camps reported that rice and dal were the only consistent staples provided. Vegetables too were generally limited to potatoes, which were irregularly available in some camps, and fruits were entirely absent, highlighting a severe lack of dietary diversity. The type of food items and the number of meals varied significantly across camps. For instance, milk and eggs were not universally provided, even to vulnerable groups such as children, pregnant women, and lactating mothers. In one camp, breakfast was provided to babies; in another, Cerelac was distributed for infants, although the frequency of distribution was unclear. Meanwhile, residents in a third camp reported receiving three meals a day—a rare exception.

In a few camps in the valley, families used the small allowances received from the government at regular intervals to supplement their diet through their own cooking. However, high prices of vegetables and other food items in the open market made this option challenging and unsustainable. The food provided also failed to meet culturally appropriate standards, a

³⁹²*Women in Governance-India v. State of Manipur & Another*, Writ Petition (Criminal) No. _ of 2023, with I.A. No. ____ of 2023, Application for Concealment and Protection of Identity of the Victims of Sexual Offence, filed as Public Interest Litigation, Supreme Court of India (Extraordinary Writ Jurisdiction), 2023.

fundamental principle of humanitarian assistance.³⁹³ Essential local staples such as leafy vegetables, fish, and meat integral to both Meitei and Kuki diets were absent. Residents of the Sangai University Relief Camp shared that meat was provided only once in two months, usually when a local benefactor wished to celebrate a family event. The absence of green leafy vegetables and animal proteins significantly raises the risk of nutrient deficiencies, including Vitamin A deficiency in children and anaemia among women and girls.

In response to Unstarred Question No. 3086 in the Lok Sabha on August 9, 2024, the Minister of Women and Child Development reported that 6,164 children (aged six months to six years), 2,638 adolescent girls, 232 pregnant women, and 753 lactating mothers in relief camps had been linked to 272 nearby Anganwadi centres under the Saksham Anganwadi and Mission Poshan 2.0 initiatives. Supplementary nutrition—including eggs, milk, and other food items—was reportedly being provided weekly. However, given the scale of displacement (57,000 people in 280 camps as of 4 July 2025, according to the Department of Home, Manipur),³⁹⁴ the relatively low numbers raise concerns about the adequacy and reach of these services. The response also lacked clarity on whether these were conflict-specific interventions or part of routine service delivery and did not disaggregate data by district or displacement status, limiting meaningful assessment of coverage, equity, and responsiveness to conflict-related needs.

The nutrition insecurity faced by displaced populations—particularly infants, children, and pregnant and lactating mothers further poses serious

³⁹³ Lorenzo Cotula and Margaret Vidar, *The Right to Adequate Food in Emergencies*, FAO Legislative Study 77 (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2002), <https://www.fao.org/3/y4430e/y4430e.pdf>.

³⁹⁴ 'In Manipur, Extending President's Rule Is Not a Solution | The Indian Express', accessed 27 July 2025, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/in-manipur-extending-presidents-rule-is-not-a-solution-10150229/>.

risks to child health and nutrition in the state. Combined with economic distress and disruptions to health services, it threatens to reverse the progress achieved since NFHS-4 in reducing stunting and may worsen other critical indicators such as wasting and severe wasting among children.

9.4. Pre-Conflict Health and Mental Health Landscape

The situation is particularly alarming in districts like Churachandpur, Imphal East, and Imphal West, which are among the worst affected by the conflict and host large concentrations of displaced populations. Notably, these districts, along with Senapati (from which Kangpokpi, another severely affected district, was carved out in 2016), were already identified in the *State Nutrition Profile: Manipur, 2021*³⁹⁵ as having a high prevalence of stunting, wasting, and anaemia among children and pregnant women.

The intersection of conflict and pre-existing nutritional vulnerabilities underscores the urgent need for targeted and coordinated interventions by both the state government and the Centre to address immediate nutritional needs and longer-term challenges to food security, especially in districts facing a double burden of pre-existing vulnerabilities and conflict-induced displacement.

9.4.1. Challenges in Accessing Healthcare

Visits to relief camps revealed the acute challenges faced by residents in accessing health and mental health care. Forced to flee their homes under life-threatening circumstances, often without essential belongings, many endured immense hardships. Individuals with serious health conditions, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and pregnant women suffered

³⁹⁵‘State Nutrition Profile: Manipur’, accessed 25 November 2024, <https://poshan.ifpri.info/2021/09/30/state-nutrition-profile-manipur/>.

greatly—travelling long and arduous stretches on foot or in overcrowded vehicles, often without food, medications, assistive devices, or the prospect of medical care even in emergencies.

A Kuki woman survivor from Imphal recounted the harrowing ordeal her husband endured. Brutally beaten by a mob allegedly linked to the Arambai Tenggol, he was left gravely injured. The couple sought refuge in the home of a Kuki neighbour. Trapped in a Meitei-dominated locality and fearing for their lives, they were unable to access medical assistance. She recalled, "The next morning, a Nepali pharmacist came to clean my husband's wounds and wipe his blood. My husband was more or less dead."

A 23-year-old Kuki woman, in her ninth month of pregnancy when forced to flee, described giving birth under precarious conditions:

The mob from Arambai Tenggol was too large, and we had to flee further away on May 5, 2023. They burnt down our village. On 7th May, I couldn't walk anymore, and my husband had to carry me. It was a matter of life and death; the pain was unbearable. I felt guilty about my condition amidst such hardship. My brother helped my husband lift me. We found a small hut in the mountains and survived with very little food. There were no midwives, no help—but by God's grace, I gave birth in that hut in the forest. We still had to continue our journey. My mother-in-law carried the baby, and I was carried on a plastic sheet.

A senior feminist activist with an NGO engaged in women's economic empowerment in Churachandpur recounted the ordeal of a pregnant woman who was forced to flee her village during an attack near a Meitei-dominated area. She gave birth on a truck while traversing hilly terrain, with only one litre of drinking water available, which was used to clean the newborn. Upon arriving at a relief camp, both mother and child lacked basic necessities such as baby clothes, towels, soap, and a proper bathing

tub. In the absence of these, the newborn was bathed in a bucket typically used for toilet purposes. It was only after the NGO's intervention that essential supplies were provided and medical check-ups were arranged for the mother and infant.

Several testimonies highlighted that relief camps were largely ill-equipped to meet the specific needs of pregnant women, particularly those nearing childbirth. A 50-year-old Meitei woman from a relief camp in Moirang described how, in the early months, women were forced to give birth in unhygienic conditions without trained birth attendants or healthcare professionals, placing both mothers and newborns at considerable risk.

In contrast, responding to Unstarred Question No. 3086 in the Lok Sabha on 9 August 2024³⁹⁶—over a year into the conflict—the Minister of Women and Child Development stated that *“pregnant women are given free routine health check-ups and free medicines through dedicated medical officers and staff nurses. Any pregnant woman requiring a visit to a health centre or consultation with a gynaecologist, or immunization, is provided ambulance pick-up to and from the relief camps.”*

However, the government's account diverges sharply from the lived experiences shared by displaced persons from both communities and other stakeholders during the Independent Citizen's Tribunal hearings. Moreover, the parliamentary response did not specify the districts where these services were delivered or provide disaggregated data on the ethnic profile or displacement status of service users—details essential for assessing the reach, adequacy, and equity of government interventions in a context marked by ethnic conflict.

³⁹⁶ Ministry of Women and Child Development, *Unstarred Question No. 308*

Geographical remoteness compounded access challenges. Many camps were located more than five kilometres from the nearest Primary or Community Health Centre and over ten kilometres from the nearest government hospital.³⁹⁷ In one tragic case, a nine-month-old infant with diarrhoea died en route to Churachandpur District Hospital, being transported at night from the Muay Thai Village camp, 12 kilometres away, in an ambulance provided by a voluntary organisation. Women in remote camps reported severe difficulties accessing routine antenatal and postnatal care, compounded by irregular supplies of essential medicines and supplements. Ambulances were often unavailable during emergencies, and in the absence of public transport, residents relied on expensive private vehicles or undertook long, hazardous walks—often across treacherous terrain. The lack of all-weather motorable roads worsened access during the monsoon, resulting in delays, catastrophic health expenditure, and treatment discontinuation.

Access to care has been especially challenging for individuals living with non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as asthma, diabetes, and heart conditions, due to treatment interruptions, lack of follow-up care - with in some cases, life-threatening consequences. A 48-year-old man from a relief camp in Bishnupur shared that his wife, a heart patient awaiting a transplant at an AIIMS institution (location unspecified) before the conflict, had not received any communication from doctors in Imphal for over five months regarding the next steps in her treatment. He expressed deep anxiety about her condition and the uncertainty surrounding her care. In the Motbung Relief Camp in Kangpokpi, a female cancer patient tragically passed away after being unable to continue treatment due to

³⁹⁷ Sphere India. *Joint Rapid Needs Assessment (JRNA) Manipur: Sharing Findings – A Rapid Appraisal of the Humanitarian Situation as of 2 June 2023*. New Delhi: Sphere India, 2023. https://sphereindia.org.in/sites/default/files/2023-09/JRNA%20Version%201_June%2002_11AM.pdf.

unaffordable travel costs. Similarly, three cancer patients in Saikul, Kangpokpi, were forced to discontinue treatment altogether because of the financial burden of travel and care.

The disruption of routine immunization services has increased the risk of vaccine-preventable diseases among children in relief camps. Reported cases of measles and chickenpox in Ukhrul and Kangpokpi districts³⁹⁸ point to poor immunization coverage, especially in hard-to-reach camps. Other essential child health services—such as growth monitoring, nutritional support, and disease control programmes—have also been severely impacted due to the lack of accessible primary health facilities and limited public health outreach. The ongoing conflict has exacerbated pre-existing structural deficiencies in the health system particularly in conflict affected districts, significantly compromising child health outcomes among displaced populations.

Healthcare access in relief camps located in the valley districts was relatively better due to the greater concentration of health services. Residents reported periodic visits by health teams and improved access to antenatal care, with most deliveries taking place in hospitals. However, access to medicines remained uneven—some received basic drugs, while others had to purchase essential medications out-of-pocket, exacerbating financial distress. A middle-aged woman in Moirang relief camp noted, *“Medicines are not given to everyone. Sometimes, with the little money we have, we buy medicines for cough and cold, but we can’t afford more important medicines. Many people come and visit us, and we are tired of repeating the same concerns.”* In contrast, displaced persons in remote camps had virtually no access to mental health care.

³⁹⁸ Committee Constituted by Order Dated August 7, 2023, in SLP (Civil) Diary No. 19206 of 2023 and Connected Matters, *Minutes of the Seventh Meeting*, September 1, 2023.

These disparities between the valley and hill districts are likely to worsen existing health inequities, especially in areas such as Churachandpur and Kangpokpi, which have seen a substantial influx of displaced populations. The modest gains recorded in Manipur since NFHS-4—including reductions in stunting, improved maternal and child health services, and expanded immunization coverage—now face serious risk of reversal especially in rural and tribal areas. Particularly concerning is the potential deterioration of neonatal, infant, and under-five mortality rates, which had already shown troubling trends after NFHS-4, as discussed in Section 1.

Civil society organizations—including faith-based and community-based groups, local churches, professional associations, medical institutions, humanitarian agencies, and women’s collectives—have played a vital role in addressing the health needs of displaced communities. Their contributions have ranged from organizing medical camps and mental health support to facilitating immunizations, ambulance services, and the distribution of essential medicines and nutrition supplements for pregnant and lactating women. These efforts have been especially critical in remote areas where public healthcare is limited or absent. However, as donor fatigue sets in and resources dwindle, these interventions—while indispensable—remain supplementary. The responsibility for ensuring sustained, equitable, and accountable access to healthcare and relief ultimately rests with the state as the primary duty-bearer.

Acknowledging Manipur’s deep health crisis, the Gita Mittal Committee called for strengthening primary health care, addressing workforce shortages, and improving accountability,³⁹⁹ alongside targeted measures for internally displaced persons (IDPs). It directed the state to ensure free

³⁹⁹ Supreme Court of India, *Minutes of the Seventh Meeting of the Committee Constituted by Order Dated August 7, 2023, in SLP (Civil) Diary No. 19206 of 2023 and Connected Matters*, meeting held on September 1, 2023, at 5:00 p.m., via video conference.

maternal health services (including access to gynaecologists, pregnancy test kits, sanitary pads, and contraceptives), nutritional support for pregnant and lactating women, essential medicines, trauma counselling for survivors of violence (including sexual violence), and mental health support for children, adolescents, and displaced persons in relief camps. Additional directives included routine immunisation for children under five, potable water provision, preventive measures against waterborne and vector-borne diseases, deployment of medical specialists, daily transport to health facilities, continuity of treatment for cancer, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS (including ART) and dialysis, care for chronic conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, and epilepsy, expedited disability certification, and support for those in de-addiction treatment.^{400,401,402} Yet, even these basic interventions required continuous judicial oversight, revealing deep structural and governance gaps in the state's health response.

Chief Secretary Vineet Joshi's December 5, 2024, directives⁴⁰³—issued more than a year into the conflict—acknowledged the longstanding neglect of the hill districts and proposed staff deployment, ambulance services, blood banks, infrastructure upgrades, new PHSCs, PHCs, and CHCs, and a review of Public–Private Partnership (PPP) institutions. However, as noted in Section 1, meaningful reform will depend on sustained investment and the political will to redress entrenched inequities between the valley and the hills.

⁴⁰⁰ Committee Constituted by Order Dated August 7, 2023, in SLP (Civil) Diary No. 19206 of 2023 and Connected Matters, passed by the Supreme Court of India, *Minutes of the Meeting*, held on August 16, 2023, at 5:00 p.m., via video conference.

⁴⁰¹ Committee Constituted by Order Dated August 7, 2023, in SLP (Civil) Diary No. 19206 of 2023 and Connected Matters, *Minutes of the Fourth Meeting*, August 18, 2023

⁴⁰² Committee Constituted by Order Dated August 7, 2023, in SLP (Civil) Diary No. 19206 of 2023 and Connected Matters, *Minutes of the Seventh Meeting*, September 1, 2023

⁴⁰³ PTI, 'Manipur Chief Secretary Reviews Health Infrastructure in Hill Districts', ThePrint, 4 December 2024, <https://theprint.in/india/manipur-chief-secretary-reviews-health-infrastructure-in-hill-districts/2387592/>.

The Government of Manipur has repeatedly assured the Committee of its commitment to addressing the health, relief, and rehabilitation needs of IDPs. In June 2024, it constituted a cabinet sub-committee to oversee the rehabilitation and relocation of IDPs⁴⁰⁴ following renewed violence in Jiribam district that displaced over 1,000 people. The sub-committee's mandate includes identifying grievances of IDPs in relief camps, assessing their needs, supervising resettlement and rehabilitation efforts, and facilitating land identification for temporary relocation.

Despite these formal steps, there is little evidence of a coherent strategy to address the complex and evolving humanitarian challenges triggered by the conflict. Nearly two years since its onset, thousands remain in relief camps, enduring precarious living conditions and facing persistent barriers to healthcare, mental health support, and nutrition security. Allegations of corruption and political partisanship in relief delivery have further undermined public trust. Status reports submitted to the Committee and responses to parliamentary questions were often perfunctory, citing pre-existing health, mental health, and nutrition schemes^{405,406,407} as evidence of “action taken” without explaining how these were adapted to meet the specific needs of conflict-affected populations. The Committee also highlighted a striking gap in comprehensive and reliable data on the humanitarian impact of the conflict.⁴⁰⁸ It is deeply concerning that district- and displacement-disaggregated data, as well as even basic information on relief camps, remain unavailable in the public domain. This lack of transparency hinders meaningful assessment of the coverage, adequacy,

⁴⁰⁴ The Hindu Bureau, ‘Manipur Cabinet Panel to Oversee Rehabilitation of Internally Displaced Persons’, India, *The Hindu*, 13 June 2024, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/manipur-cabinet-panel-to-oversee-rehabilitation-of-internally-displaced-persons/article68286735.ece>.

⁴⁰⁵ Government of India, Ministry of Women and Child Development, *Conditions of Women and Children in Manipur*, Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question No. 1598, answered on August 2, 2023.

⁴⁰⁶ Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, *Impact of the Conflict on Mental Health*.

⁴⁰⁷ Ministry of Women and Child Development, *Relief Camps for Women and Children*.

⁴⁰⁸ Committee Constituted by Order Dated August 7, 2023, in SLP (Civil) Diary No. 19206 of 2023 and Connected Matters, *Minutes of the Eighth Meeting*, September 4, 2023.

and equity of humanitarian assistance. Without such data, it is difficult to determine whether relief efforts are reaching all affected populations, whether support is commensurate with actual needs, and whether assistance is being provided in an equitable and accountable manner.

A senior government official from Churachandpur, in discussions with tribunal members, attributed the persistent inadequacies in relief, rehabilitation, healthcare, and essential services—particularly in the hill districts—“to the overall breakdown of governance, the ethnicization of public administration, and territorial divisions.”

9.5. Conflict and Mental Health: The Human Toll and Resilience

Armed conflict inflicts deep psychological and social distress through trauma, bereavement, displacement, and loss of livelihoods and support networks.⁴⁰⁹ Populations exposed to violence—especially women,^{410,411} children, and internally displaced persons (IDPs)⁴¹²—face heightened risks of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicide. Prolonged uncertainty, broken social ties, and economic instability compound these stressors, while access to mental health care is severely

⁴⁰⁹ Bernardo Carpinello, “The Mental Health Costs of Armed Conflicts—A Review of Systematic Reviews Conducted on Refugees, Asylum-Seekers and People Living in War Zones”, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 20, no. 4 (2023): 2840, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20042840>.

⁴¹⁰ Prashant Kesharvani and Kalpana Sarathy, “Living in a Protracted Conflict Area: Mental Health Burden of Women in Manipur, India,” *Psychological Studies* 65, no. 4 (October–December 2020): 445–454, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12646-020-00581-9>.

⁴¹¹ Kalpana Sarathy and Prashant Kesharvani, “Caregiving in the Context of Protracted Conflict in Manipur, India: Understanding the Strains, Pains, and Gains,” in *Contextualizing Peace*, ed. Asok Kumar Sarkar and Subhrangshu Dhar (New Delhi: Manak Publications Pvt. Ltd., 2020), 225–239.

⁴¹² Marie Louise D. Østergaard et al., ‘Vulnerability Factors in Conflict-Related Mental Health’, *Medicine, Conflict, and Survival* 39, no. 1 (2023): 63–80, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13623699.2022.2156232>.

constrained. Yet, amid these hardships, survivors also demonstrate remarkable resilience, drawing strength from kinship ties, cultural practices, and collective coping strategies. This section focuses on the lived experiences of survivors in Manipur, highlighting both the enduring psychological toll of conflict and the diverse ways individuals adapt and rebuild their lives.

9.5.1. Rising Mental Health Burden in the State

Survivor testimonies, reports from civil society organisations, and mental health professionals, as well as emerging research, indicate a sharp rise in mental health conditions, including acute stress reactions, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms, substance use disorders, suicidal ideation, and suicide. Preliminary estimates suggest that around one in eight individuals in Manipur may be living with a mental illness.⁴¹³ This is likely an underestimate given the scale of violence, mass displacement, and prolonged humanitarian disruption in the state. While prevalence estimates are important, they capture only part of the reality, masking both the depth of psychological suffering and the systemic barriers that limit access to care. Moreover, according to WHO, one in five people (22%) who have experienced war or conflict in the previous 10 years lives with depression, anxiety, PTSD, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia,⁴¹⁴ highlighting the heightened mental health burden in conflict settings.

The senior psychiatrist from Imphal, in conversation with tribunal members, expressed concern over the rising caseload and the long-term psychological toll of the conflict:

⁴¹³ Bikash Singh, '1 out of 8 Has Mental Health Issues in Manipur: World Mental Health Day', *The Economic Times*, 10 October 2023, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/1-out-of-8-has-mental-health-issues-in-manipur-world-mental-health-day/articleshow/104322238.cms>.

⁴¹⁴ 'Mental Health in Emergencies', accessed 11 January 2025, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-in-emergencies>.

One is definitely seeing an increase in cases of common mental disorders, such as anxiety, depression, and substance use disorders. Trauma-related conditions, including PTSD, are also on the rise. The mental health consequences of this conflict are likely to persist for a long time, which is deeply worrying given the state's pre-existing mental health challenges. The situation in relief camps, where thousands are displaced, is particularly concerning, though one also sees remarkable resilience.

Similar concerns were echoed in Churachandpur, where a psychiatrist at the District Hospital reported a sharp rise in psychiatric consultations:

Before the conflict, the Psychiatry OPD saw few patients, largely due to the stigma surrounding mental illness. However, after the conflict, they are seeing 30–40 patients daily, many presenting with anxiety and depressive symptoms. While some patients are brought in by their families, others—more aware of mental health issues—come on their own. However, not all continue with treatment; some discontinue after one or two visits.

In an interview for *Global Health Now* dated 3 January 2024, Dr. Nelson Loitongbam, a psychiatrist at JNIMS, Imphal East, stated that prior to the conflict, his department encountered only one or two PTSD cases per month. Following the escalation of violence, this number rose to five to seven cases daily.⁴¹⁵ He noted an initial surge in acute stress reactions—typically within the first month of trauma exposure—which, over time, progressed to PTSD, often marked by social withdrawal and disengagement from family and community life.

A 2024 study titled *Psychological Effects of Manipur Violence Among Internally Displaced Persons Residing in Relief Camps Across the Imphal Valley* found that over half of the respondents had been diagnosed with PTSD.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁵'PTSD: A Legacy of Manipur's Enduring Conflict | Global Health NOW', accessed 9 October 2024, <https://globalhealthnow.org/2024-01/ptsd-legacy-manipurs-enduring-conflict>.

⁴¹⁶Bishwalata Rajkumari et al., 'Psychological Effects of Manipur Violence among the Internally Displaced Persons Residing in Relief Camps across Imphal Valley of Manipur – A Cross-Sectional Study', *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care* 13, no. 10 (2024): 4354–62, https://doi.org/10.4103/jfmpe.jfmpe_341_24.

Additionally, 24.8% reported moderate anxiety and 15.2% experienced severe anxiety. PTSD prevalence was significantly associated with gender (female), age (20–59 years), marital status, and post-conflict employment disruption. Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) was notably linked to marital status and the destruction of property. Strikingly, 75.8% of participants had witnessed the destruction or burning of property, and 9.4% had witnessed the death of a family member or friend.

These accounts underscore the rising mental health burden in Manipur, with one of the most alarming manifestations being the reported increase in suicide cases since the onset of the conflict.

Rising Suicide Rates: As noted in Section 1.4, official data from the *Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India* (ADSI) 2022 report recorded a 47% decline in reported suicide cases in Manipur—from 49 cases in 2021 to 26 in 2022.⁴¹⁷ The 2023 report is not yet out⁴¹⁸ however, emerging accounts following the outbreak of ethnic violence suggest that this downward trend may be reversing. Media reports^{419,420} and testimonies presented to the Independent Citizens’ Tribunal point to a rise in suicide cases among both displaced persons residing in relief camps and members of the broader community. Civil society actors have expressed concern that, in

⁴¹⁷ CMHLP, ‘Takeaways from the NCRB Data on Suicide for 2022’.

⁴¹⁸ Dipak K. Dash, “NCRB Report for 2023 Not Out Yet, Coming Soon, Says Centre,” *Times of India*, March 20, 2025, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/ncrb-report-for-2023-not-out-yet-coming-soon-says-centre/articleshow/118038333.cms>. The Union home ministry stated in the Rajya Sabha that the 2023 NCRB reports are delayed because the data validation process—covering submissions from 36 states/UTs and 53 metropolitan cities—is still underway, involving multiple verification and revalidation stages.

⁴¹⁹ The Hindu Bureau, ‘Man Displaced in Conflict Dies by Suicide in Manipur Relief Camp, Say Police’, India, *The Hindu*, 7 July 2024,

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/man-displaced-in-conflict-dies-by-suicide-in-manipur-relief-camp-say-police/article68379296.ece>.

⁴²⁰ NE NOW NEWS, ‘Manipur: Rising Suicide Cases Alarm Churachandpur’, *NorthEast Now*, 18 October 2024, <https://ftp.nenow.in/north-east-news/manipur/manipur-rising-suicide-cases-alarm-churachandpur.html>.

the continued absence of peace—and amid worsening economic distress and limited access to reparative measures—the risk of suicide is likely to escalate, particularly among individuals who are already deeply vulnerable.

A Meitei activist in his late 40s expressing deep concern about the rise in suicide cases said:

There may be at least 12 to 15 suicide cases on the Meitei side alone since the violence began. While we have not systematically monitored, reports from our networks and the media indicate a rising trend. For a small state like ours, this is deeply concerning and if there is no end to the violence, no peace – the numbers will only rise.

Suicide in Churachandpur: Churachandpur has long been perceived by mental health practitioners as having the highest suicide rate in Manipur, although there is no official or published report to confirm this. The youth-led mental health and community development organisation based in the district has been documenting suicide cases over the past decade. Between 2014 and 2024, the organisation recorded 176 suicides—an average of 17.6 cases per year. Between 2014 and 2024, the organization recorded 176 suicides—an average of 17.6 cases per year.⁴²¹

Since the outbreak of ethnic violence in May 2023, the organization has documented 29 suicides as of December 31, 2024, averaging around 1.4 cases per month.⁴²² Although this rate remains broadly consistent with pre-conflict levels, the organization has cautioned that the conflict has significantly intensified underlying risk factors—such as displacement, loss of livelihoods, and disruption of social networks—that may heighten the risk of suicide, particularly among already vulnerable individuals.

⁴²¹Data shared via email by the co-founder and director of the organization on 5 January 2025

⁴²²Ibid

The co-founder and director of the organization highlighted three distressing cases of suicide among displaced males—aged 12, 30, and 70—that occurred within months of the violence, underscoring how conflict-related disruptions have deepened pre-existing vulnerabilities and triggered severe psychosocial distress:

Since the conflict began, three male IDPs, aged 12, 30, and 70 have died by suicide. The 12-year-old had a history of school bullying and multiple previous suicide attempts. Before the conflict, the bullying incidents were informally handled between the school and parents through customary law. However despite such intervention, the bullying persisted, sometimes leaving him with bruises. After the conflict, the distress became unbearable. The 30-year-old had a history of drug abuse and struggled with de-addiction and withdrawal symptoms. His displacement added to his distress, leaving him unable to cope. The 70-year-old, previously well-off, found it difficult to adapt to life in a relief centre after displacement. After three failed suicide attempts, he succeeded on his fourth.

Wider Economic Distress and Suicide Risk

He also highlighted the growing distress among individuals who have not been displaced but continue to bear the economic and social brunt of the conflict. Rising inflation, loss of livelihoods, family breakdown, and, in some cases, substance dependence are driving people into acute psychological distress. He recounted the case of a 27-year-old daily wage earner and father of three who died by suicide:

As the sole provider for his family, he struggled after his father's accident left him unable to work. The conflict worsened his financial situation, making work scarce. Already unable to pay rent and feed his children, he was left alone to care for his infant after his wife left. On October 30, 2023, his father woke to the sound of the baby crying—only to find his son hanging in the kitchen, with a barely legible suicide note expressing his despair.

While the above accounts offer valuable insights, the broader picture of suicide in Manipur remains highly fragmented. Although some documentation is available from Churachandpur, data from the valley and several other conflict-affected hill districts is limited—and in some areas, entirely absent. This invisibility risks obscuring the true scale of the crisis, particularly in contexts where suicide deaths are underreported due to stigma or cultural silence. As the conflict continues, the cumulative effects of displacement, disrupted care systems, and chronic precarity are likely to deepen mental health distress and increase suicide vulnerability.

9.5.2. Disrupted Lives, Enduring Strength

This subsection explores how violence and displacement have fractured lives, ruptured interethnic families, and forced survivors into constrained choices under duress, often leading to long-term psychosocial consequences. Drawing on firsthand accounts, it highlights not only these disruptions and the secondary trauma they generate but also the coping strategies and resilience displayed by survivors as they navigate uncertain futures.

A) Exposure to Traumatic Events and Violence: Survivors described extreme acts of violence, including rape, physical assault, and the anguish of being unable to recover the bodies of loved ones—leaving many without closure. The targeted violence against women has been particularly devastating, with sexual and physical assaults resulting in deep psychological, social, and physical consequences. The testimonies that follow offer insight into these lived experiences and their enduring toll.

A 48-year-old cultivator from a relief camp in Saikul recounted the harrowing experience of witnessing the brutal killing of his two sisters—an event that left both him and his brother deeply traumatized:

The Arambai Tenggol with the Meira Paibis pulled out my two elder sisters- manhandled them beat and tortured them: both of them were also allegedly raped and then butchered in front of our gate. Both of us (myself and brother) experienced even traumatic life mentally. The cries for help of my two sisters before they were killed always ring in my ears.

A Kuki woman, injured by a bullet when security forces opened fire to disperse crowds, shared her testimony about the devastating impact of the incident. On May 5th, Kuki women had blocked security forces who were attempting to evacuate Meiteis, fearing that if all Meiteis were removed from Churachandpur, Kukis stranded in Imphal would not be allowed to return. Reflecting on the incident, she described the profound effect it has had on her physical and mental health:

I was bedridden for almost a year. I can't walk for long, and I have a lot of breathlessness. The doctors are saying that a splinter is still in my lungs I survive on pain relief which is almost Rs. 10,000 per month. Three rib bones had broken. I was taken by the army helicopter to Health City Hospital, Guwahati. Travel expenses were covered through a lot of community funds from ITLF and other such organisations. The pain continued to persist so I was flown to Delhi and admitted to AIIMS trauma centre. I started having hallucinations etc. I can't sleep, I keep hearing sounds, and even panic a lot when I hear fireworks etc. Until last December, I needed help from my family members even for bathing. But from this year, I have been receiving counselling and therefore am able to take care of myself. My father passed away when I was very young. My mother passed away in June 2023 while I was undergoing treatment. She was a heart patient. I was not able to go see my mother or go for her last rites.

The following testimony captures the devastating experience of a Hmar woman who witnessed and survived mob violence in Imphal. Her

narrative reveals the deep psychological and emotional scars left behind by the violence, illustrating the trauma experienced by women and children in the face of ethnic conflict. She said:

The mob started banging on the gate of my Mom's residence. She stays opposite to my house. I had fled to her place with my children once we heard the banging of electoral poles. I was alone with my children and house help. My husband is posted outside the state. My brother thought it's better to go and talk to them(the mob) so he opened the door. Many people came in. We begged them to spare us and told them there were children and sick people. They told us to bring them out. They let us leave so we moved out of the house. When we left, we left everything behind, even our documents. I could see my house was already burning on the other side of the road.

My children and I met a clinical psychologist in GNRC Guwahati – a multi-speciality hospital. I had nightmares and problems sleeping. In sleep, I would see those people in black T- shirts climbing the fence. It was like a horror movie. I would wake up at 3-4am and then would not be able to back to sleep. I was so disturbed – even the children had behavioural changes. I met with a neurologist as due to stress, my blood pressure would keep falling. I still have phobia. I went to Beltola in Guwahati to buy vegetables and heard some Meitei vendors selling veggies and I couldn't breathe. My heart was racing, and I pleaded with my husband to immediately leave from there. He said don't be scared, but when I heard their language, I ran away, I could not bear to face them. My mother just completed her physiotherapy but she is still on medication.

The brutal assault and public humiliation of a 29-year-old Kuki woman, which left her with severe injuries, was recounted by her husband's cousin, who testified online from London on behalf of the family. Her husband and mother-in-law, an Under-Secretary in the Agriculture and Veterinary

Department, were killed by the same mob. The cousin shared the ordeal the woman went through:

During this time the young bride of my cousin (she was married for only 5 months before becoming a widow) was taken to a separate area and (there is a viral video of this) the women were shouting to the men we give you permission to rape this Kuki woman because of what they did to our women in Churachandpur. Some rumour about this was floating around. She was taken to a separate area and from her account, she lost sight of her family. She begged them to take her back to her family, but they kept parading her. They kept asking her to walk faster, beating her at the same time. She got really weak. One woman took a wooden bark of a tree and she went to hit her on the head and the bride moved a bit so it hit her shoulder. Another man hit her on the head and so she fell unconscious. We didn't know where the bride was until later at 1 am we heard that the police had got her and she was admitted to RIMS. The young bride had blood clots in her brain, fractured arms and fingers and was unconscious. She was in ICU for 10 days. After that we flew her out to Delhi and she got treatment in AIIMS for three months before she could go home. She is still very traumatized and grieving for her husband.

The father of 20-year-old Phijam Hemjit, one of the two Meitei students who went missing and were later found murdered, was devastated by his son's brutal death. Their fate remained unknown until September, when photos of their bodies surfaced online—just days after mobile internet was restored—sparking widespread protests in Imphal. Weeping, the father told tribunal members:

My son went missing along with his friend, and for over two and a half months, we waited to understand what had transpired. Their phone and motorbike were never recovered. In September 2023, photos of the bodies of both students surfaced and went viral. The phone's last known location was traced to Laimaton, near the winter flower tourist spot in Churachandpur district, and it was reactivated 15–16 days later. This led to

the NIA arresting six individuals, including two minors. However, their bodies remain unrecovered. We know that they were abducted by the Kukis and killed. My wife is totally devastated and inconsolable. We want the bodies of our son and the girl. We want justice and closure.

A Scheduled Caste Meitei woman from Churachandpur, married with three children, shared her harrowing account of sexual assault with a couple of tribunal members in Imphal. She recounted:

On 3rd May 2023, Kuki miscreants started burning down Meitei houses. My neighbour's house was also set on fire. I carried my niece on my back and held my two sons as I started running from my house along with my sister-in-law. She was carrying her baby on her back and running ahead of me. Then I stumbled and fell on the road. I couldn't get up—I must have run nearly half a kilometre by then. My sister-in-law came to pick me up. I insisted she go ahead with my niece and sons while I stayed behind.

When I finally managed to stand up, some 5–6 Kuki miscreants caught hold of me. They started abusing and assaulting me. They sexually assaulted me. There was no help coming. After some time, more men joined them, and they too sexually assaulted me. Eventually, I lost consciousness. When I regained consciousness, I found myself in a house surrounded by Meitei people. Later, I was able to reunite with my family, and we shifted to a relief camp. I didn't disclose the incident to anyone because I feared being stigmatized. But my health kept deteriorating. I once went to RIMS hospital, but I lacked the courage to meet the doctor and returned. My condition worsened further. On 8th August 2023, I finally went to JNIMS hospital. It was only after that visit that an FIR was filed on 9th August 2023. A year later, I still get nightmares, I tremble and faint on hearing loud noises and scary images flash before me. I don't go out of my house.

The testimonies presented expose the devastating human cost of ethnic conflict, illustrating the depth of trauma endured by survivors and the potential long-lasting impact on their mental and physical well-being. These narratives expose the systemic failure of institutional mechanisms to safeguard vulnerable populations, raising critical questions about accountability, protection, and the role of the state in the conflict.

A) **Uncertain Futures in Relief Camps:** The chaos and uncertainty of displacement have exacted a profound mental and emotional toll on individuals residing in relief camps. Many grapple with feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, and a loss of control over their futures. For women IDPs who have experienced sexual violence, their trauma is compounded by the lack of resolution in many cases, with little to no progress being made toward justice.

A 45-year-old Meitei labourer from a Bishnupur relief camp voiced despair over his children's future:

Both my son and daughter are still students aiming big for their future, but I will not be able to do anything for my children as we are staying in such conditions (relief camp). This is not the dream I had aimed for their future. I feel very hopeless and am unable to sleep as I am deeply anxious about what will be.

A 75-year-old woman in a Moirang relief camp spoke of her family's deep anxiety for the future and economic distress the family is currently experiencing:

Living in the relief camp, we don't know when we will be able to go back home—neither can we sleep nor eat well as we are constantly anxious about what lies in the future. My brother was sustained burn injuries all over and is still undergoing treatment. I don't know how we are going to afford the cost of treatment beyond a point. We have no money left.

For a 30-year-old male resident in a camp in Bishnupur, relief is a temporary measure that meets immediate survival needs but fails to uphold dignity and foster a sense of independence:

We have our basic needs taken care of in this camp, but we want privacy. We want rehabilitation, not relief. Teach us how to catch a fish, not just give us fish. From the government, we need employment. They (government officials who visited the camp) had said that some skilldevelopment training wouldbe given to us, but they never came back. We did not receive any compensation for our house that was destroyed which we had built with so much hope My mother has been in depression ever since. For all the elderly, they have almost no hopes left. I had just one picture of father - that also was also burnt!

A 58-year-old Kuki man, now in a relief camp in Churachandpur, spoke of the conflict's devastating toll on his family. His son-in-law was burned to death when a Meitei mob attacked their village. Reflecting on his loss and ongoing struggles, he said

My son in law had 4 children. He died in the fire when the Meitie mob attacked our village and burnt our houses. We are all living in a relief camp. We received some compensation but this is not justice. The loss of a human being cannot be compensated. I don't have a job. I don't know how to raise the children. We are suffering from a lot of financial problems. Education is difficult to afford. In the relief camps food is free but are no medical facilities.

B) The pervasive uncertainty about the future is deepened by systemic inaction—especially in cases of sexual violence as observed by the female social worker consulting with youth-led mental health and community development organisation:

Many women IDPs report instances of sexual violence, including cases of sexual assault and rape, that remain unaddressed. Many FIRs and forensic reports are still pending action in Imphal. Typically, there is one official

report on paper and another shared with the families. Even when FIRs and forensic reports are available, they have not led to any action from the police. Victims of sexual violence wonder if they will ever see justice, especially when swift action is taken in the case of the other side. They are concerned about what the future holds for them and their families.

While relief efforts provide basic sustenance, they fail to address the deeper wounds of displacement—mental health struggles, economic precarity, lack of justice, and profound uncertainty about the future. Prolonged instability and systemic neglect have not only undermined the sense of security for those in relief camps but also diminished hope for long-term recovery.

C) Inter-ethnic Families Under Strain: Armed conflict profoundly disrupts families, leaving lasting psychological and social consequences. In Manipur, the prolonged violence has forcibly separated Meitei-Kuki families along ethnic lines, creating physical distance, fracturing relationships, and deepening mistrust. For some, this rupture has also led to fears that their children will lose touch with their interethnic identity. The following testimonies illustrate how conflict is reshaping family dynamics in irreversible ways -

The Meitei man, who was displaced and separated from his wife and children, shared his anguish during his deposition in Delhi on 6th July 2024:

My wife is from the Zomi community. She and my children are in Churachandpur. My house there has been destroyed. I have two daughters and a son—aged 13, 10, and 5. I think about them every day. My wife and I speak about twice a week, but our conversations are brief because she may be under surveillance by certain groups there. Sometimes, I feel like ending my life. My children are being asked by their Kuki friends about who they support. My daughter told them that it has nothing to do with her. Even my wife's sister does not want them to attend the same school

because everyone there knows they are the children of a Meitei. Their names have now been changed to my wife's surname. I fear that one day, they may forget their father is a Meitei.

Kuki women married to Meitei men have faced displacement, unable to return to their homes or physically reconnect with their families. One such Kuki woman, who had previously held a senior government position, described the precarious situation:

Kuki women who are married to Meiteis had to flee their homes - they could not stay in Imphal. They ran away. A female IAS officer is living in Delhi even though her husband is a Meitei and is living in Imphal. Another good friend is a DGP. She is in Delhi, because she is not safe in Imphal. The Arambai Tenggol kidnapped her husband and demanded a ransom of Rs 50 lakhs because she is a Kuki. Such separation is not only very painful but also straining family ties in some cases.

She also spoke about how the conflict has fractured relationships with extended family, drawing on her own experience:

Though my mother is a Meitei, she has not gone back to Imphal. She went to Churachandpur instead but longs to return home (Imphal). Her house is gone, and no Meitei relative will house her. If the Arambai Tenggol find out that they have housed my mother, they will cause trouble for the Meitei relatives. And the Meitei relatives will not take care of my mother either.

A 32-year-old Meitei woman, married to a Kuki man, spoke of her husband's brutal killing and how it led to her severing ties with her ethnic community. Weeping she said:

My husband returned to Imphal on May 2 for work. I spoke to him on May 3 morning and in the afternoon when I had called him his voice completely changed. He said that he was surrounded and kept calling out my name. I found out about his death on May 7. His body was brought to

us in December along with the others. I stay in Churchandpur now in a rented house and look after my 5 children. Even though I am Meitie I will never live among them again. My husband was an ordinary man. How could they have killed him so brutally? How can it be moral?

The conflict has profoundly ruptured interethnic families, forcing painful separations that extend beyond physical displacement to lasting emotional and identity fractures. Violence and deepening mistrust have not only severed familial bonds but have also reshaped identities in ways that may be irreparable. As divisions harden and communities retreat into ethnic enclaves, interethnic families find themselves navigating a fragile space, struggling to preserve both their relationships and their sense of belonging in an increasingly polarized society.

D) Burden of Guilt: The psychological toll of surviving conflict extends beyond displacement and material loss, often rooted in the anguish of impossible choices—fleeing while leaving behind vulnerable relatives, being unable to prevent loved ones’ deaths, or taking up arms to defend one’s community. Such experiences leave deep moral and emotional scars, marked by guilt, helplessness, and unresolved grief.

A 55-year-old man from Saikul weeping recounted before the tribunal: Muslims near our locality warned us that the Meitei mob was approaching and urged us to flee immediately to save ourselves. We ran without hesitation, hearing gunshots as we escaped. By the time we learned what had happened the next day, it was too late. My brother, who was suffering from paralysis, had tried to crawl out of the house but was seen by the mob and shot dead.

A 45-year-old female cultivator also from Saikul shared the overwhelming guilt she carries over her son’s tragic fate:

My 18-year-old son, our youngest child, was working in Chirgarel with iron and steel in Imphal. My husband is blind, and I have struggled to care for our four children alone. On May 3, as we followed the worsening news, I called the head of his company, pleading for him to protect my son. Since we could not reach him ourselves, we requested that he arrange for my son to be dropped home. He assured us he would. I called my son and told him to stay hidden in his room and not to show his face anywhere. I did not sleep that night.

On May 4, he called, desperate, “When are you picking me up?” He begged me to do something fast. I can still hear his voice—“Please do something. Please, mummy, please. I will die if you don’t. Why can’t you sacrifice your life for me?” I wanted to go. I would have done anything for him. But I knew I would not survive the journey. I could have been kidnapped, raped, or killed on the way. My other son stopped me. We blame the owner of the place where he was renting—he did nothing to protect my son. One of my son’s friends, who witnessed everything, later told us what happened. The mob came, took my son—tied one leg to one bike, the other to another bike—and tore him apart. Then they chopped him to pieces.

A Kuki youth from Kangpokpi in his mid 30’s who served as a village volunteer recalled the first time he was compelled to take up arms to defend his village—a decision that left him permanently wounded: This was the first time I went as a volunteer—only because we were compelled to defend our village. I had never used a gun before, nor had I practiced. I had no choice. Now, I am paralyzed on my right side where I was injured, and whenever the weather is bad, I experience pain. I can’t afford any more treatment.

The testimonies in this section illustrate how survivor’s guilt, moral injury, and forced inaction are embedded in both personal and collective

memory. These experiences not only intensify psychological distress but also complicate pathways to healing and resilience, underscoring the need for trauma-informed mental health interventions.

E) Coping and Resilience: Amid the protracted conflict and displacement, survivors attempt to navigate psychological distress through diverse coping mechanisms, including substance use, self-healing, faith, and humanitarian engagement. While some turn to alcohol and drugs as immediate but potentially harmful responses to trauma, others find strength in spirituality, community solidarity, or purposeful activity. This subsection examines the complex interplay between distress, resilience, and agency, highlighting both the vulnerabilities and adaptive strategies of those affected by conflict.

A 30-year-old male residing in a relief camp at Moirang described the increasing reliance on substance use as a coping mechanism for deep psychological distress, shedding light on its devastating consequences:

Alcoholism is increasingly becoming the main problem. People are deeply affected mentally. To cope, they are drinking regularly. Men get drunk in the evenings and fight both within and outside the relief camp. This has led to complaints from the locals. Heroin has reached our poor people, even marijuana. People have begun to die from drug overdoses. Young men are mostly the victims of such cases.

Similarly, the project coordinator of a youth-led mental health and community development organisation described the escalating drug crisis in Churachandpur, particularly among the youth:

Cases of drug overdoses have increased among youth have increased since the conflict began. Many young people were already struggling with addiction, but the situation has worsened, and more youth are now succumbing to drug overdose. The quality of drugs is also very poor because of the widespread economic distress.

He went on to speak about the limited awareness of mental health in Churachandpur and the challenges people face in seeking psychological support:

Concept of mental health is new to Churachandpur. Many are unable to express or are even aware that they are going through mental health conditions. There are quite a few who are suffering from PTSD and are uncomfortable with counselling, which is like a new concept to them. Instead, they ask for sleeping pills. People also believe in the power of prayer and spiritual healing through prayers to be able to cope with the chaos around them. Their faith is a source of deep strength.

A Kuki survivor in his late 30s, who testified online, reflected on his struggle with trauma and coping, sharing his experience of navigating distress and seeking ways to heal:

From time to time, I get flashbacks – thinking about my home, how things turned out – after first few months, I started drinking heavily. During my stay in Mumbai, I decided I cannot go on like this so I took a tattoo course in Malad. That helped me to move on. I try to find things to distract myself – if I am idle I start to think about all that happened. During my stay in Mumbai, my aunt who is a doctor was a great support. I try to do self-healing. I had chest pain and visited a doctor and took physiotherapy. Other than my faith and self-healing, I am not taking any professional help regarding my mental state. I don't even know if I want to take therapy because I have mixed feelings – sometimes I feel that I do not want to forget this – there is a lot of anger.

The female social worker, working as a consultant with the mental health and community development organization, shared her experience of secondary trauma while documenting cases of sexual violence in Churachandpur. She spoke about the emotional toll of the work and the need to take a break for self-care as a means of coping.

There were more than 27 cases of violence against women. Documenting them have been traumatic. I had to go to Guwahati, Shillong, Mumbai for this. The documentation of the sexual violence cases especially took a toll on me. I had to take a break. I started getting nightmares while transcribing interviews of victims.

The Director of an NGO at Kangpokpi District, a 45-year-old man (Kuki-Zo) spoke of the profound emotional toll of witnessing violence and displacement. Yet, amid the devastation, he finds strength in his faith and a sense of purpose in serving his community, anchoring resilience in conviction and duty. He shared:

The sight of innocent people brutally assaulted, sparing no one—not even babies, children, women, or the aged—gives me sleepless nights. Life planning fades when you don't know if your house will burnt or your village will turn to ashes. Peace of mind feels distant as I think of children, women, the elderly, and the sick in relief camps. Our only hope is in God. My biggest resilience is in His infallible word—I know He never failed me. I find strength in His comforting words, and my passion to help people keeps the flame in me alive.

The Co-founder and Director of the mental health and community development organization shared how the resilience and solidarity of displaced communities serve as a source of strength and motivation despite the emotional and physical toll of humanitarian work:

As a social worker in such a humanitarian crisis, it is extremely stressful mentally and physically to navigate humanitarian support to so many in distress while resources are uncertain and always limited. The burden of responsibility has been overwhelming, at the same time, most satisfying. Support has been received from all corners physically, technically and the opportunity to be on the ground to execute such support has been a huge privilege and experience. However, there are times we find ourselves drained out and exhausted mentally. To me, it is practically impossible to

imagine living in such situations in the camps, yet, it is also motivating and challenging to see the resilience and solidarity of the displaced people who have left behind the life they once had, and are quietly bearing their losses in makeshift tents, appreciating every little ounce of help we so humbly provide.

The testimonies reflect the complex interplay between vulnerability and resilience in coping with conflict-related distress. Secondary trauma among humanitarian workers further illustrates the wide-ranging psychological toll of the prolonged violence. Although resilience remains a critical resource for navigating the aftermath of conflict, it cannot be valorized in isolation from the political and structural conditions that are currently shaping suffering in the state. Sustained, culturally responsive mental health interventions—alongside meaningful efforts toward peace, justice, and institutional accountability—are essential for long-term recovery, collective healing, and reconciliation.

The ethnic conflict in Manipur has deepened pre-existing structural inequities in health and mental health systems, particularly along spatial and ethnic lines. As this chapter has shown, longstanding disparities between the hill and valley districts rooted in historical neglect, resource asymmetries, and persistent human resource shortages—have been further exacerbated by the violence. The destruction of health facilities, targeted attacks on personnel, patients, and caregivers, and the disruption of medical supply chains have severely weakened service delivery, rendering healthcare both a casualty of the conflict and, at times, an instrument within it. These developments not only violate medical neutrality and undermine the principle of universal healthcare access, but also contravene Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, which explicitly prohibits attacks on medical personnel and facilities and the denial of care in situations of armed conflict and Articles 21, 14 and 15 of the Indian Constitution.

The fragmentation of the health system along ethnic lines has deepened disparities. The displacement of health personnel has disrupted care, while the resulting ethnic consolidation of health services in conflict-affected districts has altered patterns of access posing serious challenges to future reintegration efforts. Limited in-state access to tertiary care has compelled Kuki patients to seek treatment outside the region, often resulting in delays, heightened out-of-pocket expenditures, and, in some cases, a complete lack of care. Nearly two years into the conflict, the continued displacement of thousands of individuals has contributed to growing health vulnerabilities—particularly in relief camps, where access to adequate medical and mental health support remains limited due to persistent service gaps.

The effects of displacement, bereavement, livelihood loss, and ongoing intermittent violence have also had profound consequences on mental health. Rising levels of depression, anxiety, and suicidality reflect a broader psychosocial crisis. Yet, existing mental health services anchored in a narrow biomedical model remain limited in their capacity to respond to the layered nature of trauma, which is deeply embedded in experiences of violence, including sexual violence, economic precarity, othering and systemic bias. Addressing this crisis demands a shift away from individualised clinical approaches toward mental health responses that are structurally informed, culturally relevant, and embedded in community-based care, while ensuring sustained access to trained mental health professionals.

The Gita Mittal Committee, constituted by the Supreme Court to monitor relief and rehabilitation efforts, has underscored a range of urgent health and mental health challenges—including the need for timely psychosocial support and equitable service provision. However, its functioning has been constrained by reliance on official sources, state-generated data, and select expert inputs, in the absence of robust independent mechanisms for

verification or enforcement. While its recommendations are significant, they often fail to contend with the structural constraints of Manipur's health system and the wider context of resource scarcity. Many directives remain only partially implemented, pointing to deeper failures in governance, institutional responsiveness, and public accountability. Crucially, there appears to be no coherent strategy on the part of the state government to address the layered humanitarian, health, and mental health consequences of the conflict. This is evident in the state's status reports to the Committee and in its replies to parliamentary questions, which are perfunctory and fragmented, reflecting limited engagement with the depth of the crisis. In the absence of disaggregated data, it is not possible to assess the adequacy, reach, or equity of official interventions. Such information deficits continue to obscure a comprehensive understanding of the conflict's full impact.

Justice and accountability are central to any meaningful recovery process. The absence of legal redress for loss of life, bodily harm, destruction of property, and attacks on places of worship has contributed to a prevailing climate of impunity. Similarly, the limited response to extrajudicial killings and gender-based violence has denied survivors meaningful avenues for justice, perpetuating cycles of trauma and exclusion. Women, in particular, have borne a disproportionate burden in the conflict—experiencing gender-based violence, including sexual violence, displacement, and loss, while also shouldering the responsibility of rebuilding fractured families and communities with little institutional support. Nearly two years later, legal, institutional, and policy mechanisms remain inadequate in addressing the diverse needs arising from the conflict—whether in ensuring accountability for violations, supporting access to reparations, or enabling recovery and rehabilitation.

A meaningful recovery process must be anchored in a clear political commitment to end violence and the ethnicization of the state, uphold the

rule of law, restore constitutional governance, and work toward an acceptable political resolution. Without such measures, the mental health crisis will deepen, entrenching long-term distress and exclusion that is often intergenerational. Yet, the resilience demonstrated by affected communities, along with emerging instances of cross-ethnic solidarity and rescue efforts, provides a vital foundation for developing sustainable mental health responses and broader peacebuilding initiatives.

Rebuilding the health system in this context, while a challenge, is also an opportunity to reimagine a more equitable and resilient public health infrastructure. Restoring pre-conflict arrangements may temporarily improve access; however, such measures alone will not address the entrenched spatial and structural disparities laid bare by the conflict. A meaningful recalibration of health governance—anchored in sustained public investment (supported by the Central Government), more equitable resource distribution, and renewed trust through engagement with civil society and local communities—is essential. Reintegrating displaced health personnel and depoliticising service delivery are critical steps toward restoring institutional legitimacy and access. Repositioning healthcare as a fundamental right and a public good—rather than a privilege shaped by ethnicity or class—offers a path toward equity, and long-term recovery. These elements provide the foundations for reconstructing a health system that is just, inclusive, and critical to the restoration of peace, recovery and constitutional governance in Manipur.

Hospitals Empanelled Under CMHT & PMJAY

	Districts	Name of Hospital	Public/ Private
	Valley		
1	Bishnupur	Community Health Centre, Moirang Community Health Centre Nambol District Hospital Bishnupur	Public Public Public
2	Imphal East	Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences Advanced Speciality Hospital and Research Institute Cancer Treatment Services Hyderabad Pvt. Limited at Babina Speciality Hospital Community Health Centre Sagolmang Christian Hospital Catholic Medical Centre, Koirengei	Public Private Private Public Private Private
3	Imphal West	Regional Institute of Medical Sciences Shija Hospitals and Research Institute Raj Medicity Sky Hospital and Research Centre Pvt Ltd Iboyaima Hospital and	Public Private Private Private Private Private Private

	Hill Districts		
7	Chandel	District Hospital Chandel Community Health Centre Chakpikarong	Public Public
8	Churachandpur	Churachandpur District Hospital Samaritan Nursing Home Singhat PHC	Public Private Public
9	Kamjong	Community Health Centre, Kamjong	Public
10	Kangpokpi	CHC Kangpokpi (upgraded to District Hospital, Kagpokpi) ⁴²³ CHC Saikul	Public Public
11	Noney		
12	Pherzawl	Community Health Centre Parbung	Public
13	Senapati	Community Health Centre Mao PHC Maram Senapati District Hospital	Public Public Public
14	Tamenglong	District Hospital Tamenglong Community Health Centre Nungba	Public Public
15	Tengnoupal	Moreh Hospital PHC Moreh	Public Public
16	Ukhrul	Ukhrul District Hospital	Public

Source: State Health Agency and CMHT, Government of Manipur

⁴²³District Hospital Kangpokpi does not feature on the website of the State Health Agency, Government of Manipur

Chapter 10: Justice and Accountability

10.1. Breakdown of rule of law

10.1.1. The logic of reckoning Scheduled Tribe status - the role of Judiciary

We have already observed that the outburst of violence in Manipur following the 3rd May, 2023 incidents was not a spontaneous outbreak and was carefully planned and orchestrated by certain groups allied with the State government. The evidence on the ground also points to the fact that the conflict has roots in long-standing ethnic tensions and political disputes over land, forests, natural resources and other issues.

In mainstream media discourse and popular narratives, the specific incident that sparked the recent violence is ascribed to events that occurred on 3rd May, 2023 in Churachandpur district during a tribal solidarity march organised by the All Tribal Students' Union of Manipur (ATSUM) to protest the order of the Manipur HC directing the Manipur government to include the Meiteis in the list of STs. While certainly there were clashes between Kuki and Meitei groups in Churachandpur, two important aspects need to be pointed out:

- (a) firstly, the clashes broke out about one to two hours after the rally participants had dispersed after the protest march ended peacefully in Churachandpur and occurred after rumours spread that Meitei groups had burnt the Anglo-Kuki Centenary Gate at Leisang;
- (b) secondly, the protest rallies were organised by all the different tribal communities – Nagas, Kuki-Zo, Hmar and other smaller tribal communities - across all the tribal districts of Manipur and all of them ended peacefully barring in Churachandpur.

While it is clear that the immediate impetus for the protests of all the tribal communities was the High Court order of 28th March, 2023 directing the

Manipur Government to recommend to the Central Government inclusion of Meiteis in the list of STs, it is equally clear that the State and the majority Meitei groups like the ArambaiTengol and Meitei Leepun used the context arising from the announced protests of tribal communities on 3rd May, 2023 as an occasion to launch concerted violence against the Kukis.

While perhaps the court failed to consider the potential consequences of the March 2023 Order on inter-ethnic relations in the State, there has been criticism of the judiciary's inaction or lack of timely intervention to address the violence which escalated after 3rd May, 2023, across the state. The courts have been accused of failing to provide clear guidance or to hold the executive accountable for its actions or inactions during the crisis.

10.1.2. Courts' failure to make the State accountable for violence

To start with, the High Court at Manipur completely failed to take cognizance of the violence that erupted in the State, despite it being well within its rights to do so. Ordinarily, whenever there is a breakdown of law and order in the country, the people turn to the courts for reassurance and remedy. When the ordinary citizen is not in a position to do so and yet the issue remains of public importance, Courts, especially Constitutional Courts which have a higher degree of accountability to the people of India, have time and again stepped in and stepped up to take suo motu cognizance of State failure. However, the Manipur High Court completely failed in its constitutional duty to hold the State government accountable especially considering the scale of violence and the division of the state into 2 parts: the valley areas inhabited by the majority Meitei community and the hills, in which the Kukis are predominant. Not only the High Court, but also the Supreme Court remained unmoved about the violence in Manipur for over two months till the video of two Kuki women being paraded naked went viral on 20th July 2023, despite news of

violence being circulated widely and despite various fact-finding committees shedding light on the dire situation of the State. The inaction of the courts in reining in the perpetrators led to the worsening of the situation in Manipur as the perpetrators got a free hand.

Even as the conflict intensified, the Courts failed to take note of the complicity of the state government with the armed militia who were brazenly moving about fully armed in state owned security/ police vehicles. A suo motu FIR was filed by the Porompat Police Station against Barish Sharma, the former President of BJYM, under section 25(1-A) of Arms Act on the basis of information received by the police on 27th May, 2023 at 12:30 am that Barish Sharma is concealing illegal arms and ammunitions at his house after which his house was searched and the following weapons were recovered from his possession:

- i. One Glock 17 gun along with a magazine bearing no. LDK328
- ii. One Glock gun along with a magazine bearing no. SNM885
- iii. One Glock empty magazine
- iv. One Steyr Mannlicher Pistol along with a magazine

The recovered arms were seized and Barish Sharma was arrested.⁴²⁴ However, on 01.06.2023, the accused filed a bail application vide BA No. 87/2023 before the Chief Judicial Magistrate, Imphal East and on 03.06.2023, merely a week after his arrest, the court granted him bail.⁴²⁵

After around four months of Sharma's release, another FIR was filed in Imphal Police Station on 15th October, 2023 under sections 188, 307, 326, 364, 506 and 34 of IPC and 25(1-B) of Arms Act. The complainant reported that on 14th October, 2023, around twenty people attempted a kidnapping which was thwarted by the intervention of the police. However, the perpetrators began shooting at the public and injured five

⁴²⁴<https://manipurpolice.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Fir-4495-2023-Prt-Ps.pdf>;

⁴²⁵<https://imphaleast.dcourts.gov.in/case-status-search-by-petitioner-respondent/>;

individuals before fleeing the spot.⁴²⁶ A “joint action committee” consisting of a group of activists said that the attempted kidnapping could be a result of an argument the victim had with Sharma on social media.⁴²⁷ The wife of the victim revealed that Sharma had earlier approached her husband to post a clarification on social media.⁴²⁸ On 22nd October, 2023, Sharma was arrested.⁴²⁹ His bail application was rejected by the Chief Judicial Magistrate, Imphal West on 28th November, 2023. However, on 18th December, 2023, the Sessions Court granted him interim medical bail for one month which was extended for another month and then indefinitely. On 18th March, 2024, the accused was finally granted medical bail.

In FIR No. 684(6) of 2023 registered in Churachandpur Police Station on 19th June, 2023 under sections 153A, 153B, 500, 505 IPC, the complainant Letjapao Kipgen has accused Pramot Singh, the Chief of Meitei Leepun, of hate speech against the Kuki community in an interview with Karan Thapar on *The Wire* dated 06th June, 2023 as well as in a tweet dated 28th April, 2023 where he called for the annihilation of Kukis. After the Churachandpur Police expressed their inability to secure the presence of the accused who is based in Imphal West, and after the Lamphel Police Station failed to respond to their request for assistance, the Chief Judicial Magistrate, Churachandpur issued a non-bailable warrant against Singh.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁶<https://manipurpolice.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/FIR-NO.-814102023-IMPHAL-PS.pdf>

⁴²⁷<https://scroll.in/latest/1057991/manipur-former-bjp-youth-wing-leader-arrested-for-shooting-incident-in-imphal>

⁴²⁸<https://www.thehilljournal.com/manipur-five-including-women-injured-as-mask-men-allegedly-fired-upon-locals-in-imphal/>

⁴²⁹https://x.com/manipur_police/status/1716141248627818671?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1716141248627818671%7Ctwgr%5E6482b580eb7cd80c04383712517f1c028503c8d1%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fscroll.in%2Flatest%2F1057991%2Fmanipur-former-bjp-youth-wing-leader-arrested-for-shooting-incident-in-imphal

⁴³⁰<https://www.thesangaexpress.com/Encyc/2023/10/15/Guwahati-Oct-14-A-local-Court-in-Manipur-s-Churachandpur-district-has-issued-a-non-bailable-warrant-of-arre.html>

However, the Manipur High Court granted Singh interim protection which continues.⁴³¹

10.1.3. HC's failure to protect its own officers

The Manipur High Court has even failed to protect its own officers. Even when advocates of the Manipur High Court were threatened to withdraw their names from particular cases disliked by the majority community and their residences and offices were vandalized by violent mobs, the High Court did not take cognizance of the situation; nor did it provide protection to the advocates, nor condemned the attacks on its officers who are dutybound to represent anyone who approach them for assistance.⁴³² One of the consequences of the blockade of national highways and the confinement of the Meiteis to the Imphal valley and the Kukis to the Hill areas, has been the difficulty of access to the Manipur High Court by the Kuki community. Since the High Court is situated in Imphal, a Meitei majority area, Kukis cannot travel to Imphal to consult lawyers and have to depend on the good will of such lawyers in Imphal who are willing to take up their cases. The difficulty, however, is that the lawyers in Imphal, who are mostly Meiteis, are not willing to represent Kukis either because of bias or because of threats to their own well-being. Despite knowing this the High Court, however, did little to intervene and therefore lost the opportunity to re-kindle the faith of the people in the impartiality of the judiciary and equal access to all citizens to the judiciary.

The courts act as a check to the failures of the executive. It seems from the above incidents, that in Manipur, there has been a two-fold failure of

<https://scroll.in/latest/1057609/manipur-court-issues-non-bailable-warrant-against-meitei-group-chief>

⁴³¹[https://hcservices.ecourts.gov.in/ecourtindiaHC/cases/display_pdf.php?filename=tuqye3PhFs%2BBDn75ghiOpMyDI%2FI%2BjykXGg7jsyLKGZLeZYKpSoCYjivK%2FisbeqK5&caseno=MC\(WP\(C\)\)/319/2023&cCode=1&appFlag=&cino=MNHC010022702023&State_code=25](https://hcservices.ecourts.gov.in/ecourtindiaHC/cases/display_pdf.php?filename=tuqye3PhFs%2BBDn75ghiOpMyDI%2FI%2BjykXGg7jsyLKGZLeZYKpSoCYjivK%2FisbeqK5&caseno=MC(WP(C))/319/2023&cCode=1&appFlag=&cino=MNHC010022702023&State_code=25)

⁴³² Elaborated in 10.2.1

the executive and the judiciary which has led to a complete collapse of the people's faith in the rule of law and also the State.

10.2. Multi pronged Failure

10.2.1. Silencing dissent by State

Accusations that the State machinery in Manipur has been used to silence dissent during the violence in 2023 are serious and have been raised by various groups, activists and observers. These concerns stem from several actions and omissions by the State and Central governments that have been perceived as either suppressive or biased or both! There have been allegations that the State machinery, including the police and local administration, favoured certain communities over others. The Meitei dominated Imphal valley reportedly saw a different level of policing compared to the hill areas dominated by tribal communities like the Kuki and Naga.

The State Government achieved this end through various means, including imposition of internet shutdowns, filing of criminal cases and complaints against dissenting voices and even protecting perpetrators of violence against human rights defenders.

10.2.2. Internet Shutdown

One of the most criticised actions by the State was the imposition of prolonged internet shutdowns in Manipur. The government justified these shutdowns as necessary to prevent the spread of rumours and inflammatory content. However, these measures effectively silenced voices from affected communities, hindered the free flow of information, and prevented the outside world from fully understanding the situation on the ground. There were also allegations that local media was pressured to avoid reporting on certain aspects of the violence or to downplay the severity of the situation. National and international media faced challenges

in accessing and reporting on the conflict due to restrictions and therefore could not verify about the veracity of news, especially fake news⁴³³.

On 29th May, 2023, an advocate and a proprietor of a brand communications company filed a writ petition before the Supreme Court challenging the complete and indefinite shutdown of internet in the State of Manipur for more than 24 days. The matter was dismissed as withdrawn vide order dated 06th July, 2023 in light of similar matters pending before the division bench of the Manipur HC.⁴³⁴ Five PILs and a Writ Petition were already filed before the Manipur High Court by a journalist and lawyers, among others, seeking restoration of internet services in the State. All the matters finally came to be disposed of on 10th January, 2024 after internet services were resumed in Manipur.⁴³⁵

The Editors Guild of India, in its report published on 02nd September, 2023, wrote that the ban on internet in Manipur adversely affected journalism in the State.⁴³⁶ In response to the worsening of the violence, the State government first shut down mobile data followed by broad band cable lines. The report states that the State Government did not follow the

⁴³³For example, on 17th September, 2024, a new item emanated reportedly from the Manipur Chief Minister's Office (CMO) that over 900 Kuki militants had sneaked into Manipur from Myanmar by crossing the border. These Kuki militants were allegedly to have been trained in drone warfare and use of modern weapons. The news item also warned that these Kuki militants were planning to attack Meitei villages on 28th September, 2024. Soon thereafter however, a statement was jointly issued by Security Adviser appointed by the Central Government, Kuldiep Singh and the Director General of Police, Rajiv Singh, refuting this news as false. Subsequently the CMO retracted the story. See <https://thedailyguardian.com/india/manipur-security-officials-refute-cmos-claim-of-900-kuki-militants-retract-statement-amid-backlash/>

⁴³⁴ https://api.sci.gov.in/supremecourt/2023/22941/22941_2023_1_17_44790_Order_06-Jul-2023.pdf

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https://hcservices.ecourts.gov.in/ecourtindiaHC/cases/display_pdf.php?filename=tuqye3PhFs%2BBDn75ghiOpJjd9FxEfmSh3nCqlscl6Ip%2F3WsNEN1a8vCEC%2BqxyJC6&caseno=PIL/25/2023&cCode=1&appFlag=&cino=MNH010013062023&State_code=25

⁴³⁶ <https://editorsguild.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/EGI-report-on-Manipur.pdf>

guideline laid down by the Supreme Court in the Anuradha Bhasin judgment and details how the internet shutdown left the journalists as well as the public incapable of distinguishing between facts and rumours, especially since the valley-based newspapers were unable to reach their correspondents in the hills. The report refers to the rumours that circulated on 4th May, 2023 regarding rapes of Meitei women in Churachandpur:

“On May 4, 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 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."

The report also justifies that the building of a majoritarian narrative took place simply because majority of the newspapers in Manipur are based in Imphal. A majoritarian narrative shaped the news during the entire conflict.

"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.

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.

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.

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.

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

NmMO10, a professor at the University of Birmingham, England who closely followed the events of Manipur and began posting about them on Twitter, appeared before the Tribunal online and stated that the bias referred to in the report of the Editors Guild of India with respect to Imphal media was also prevalent in the national media, albeit with a slight difference. Similar to the report, NmMO10 also attributed the bias to the State. The latter said that the bias was propagated by police officials who formed the source of most of the reported news. However, while Imphal media quoted the narrative as fact, national media would mention their source. The Twitter account of NmMO10 was withheld in India starting 26th June, 2024 because of a legal removal demand from the Central Government. He was advised by the social media platform to contact the Ministry of Electronic and Information Technology at cyberlaw@meity.gov.in.⁴³⁷ Upon mailing the email address, he was informed that the legal removal demand was issued on the basis of a blocking request from a Government nodal agency, according to which the tweets of NmMO10 are:

“Anti-National that challenges the integrity and sovereignty of India. In the midst of the Manipur ethnic violence between communities, the said X account plays a major role in fueling the violence by posting communal, sensitive and objectionable/instigating posts in order to escalate further

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https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HcANiHKyMEpigGpxaB7wJwJZZLwY2zFO/view?usp=drive_link

violence. The handle has been continuously spreading hatred against one community with the intention of keeping the ethnic tensions alive.”⁴³⁸

NmMO10 replied to the mail seeking information regarding which of his posts were problematic but received no response and his account continues to be withheld in India.⁴³⁹

On 11th August, 2023, Internet Freedom Foundation issued a statement on the indefinite extension of internet shutdown in the State of Manipur stating that “it contributes to propagation of misinformation without any means for verification and hinders the accountability process for human rights violations.”⁴⁴⁰ It stated that the “information blackhole” has adversely affected the right to access information and right to freedom of speech and expression of the people of Manipur and has also isolated them from the rest of the world which remains completely unaware of the ground realities in the State. The statement also addresses the impact of internet shutdown on dissenting voices:

“The consequent information disorder and absence of internet access also throttles voices, especially those of marginalised communities, and takes away their ability to document the violations they have faced.

These egregious violations of human rights and the shocking contempt for Supreme Court’s ruling in *Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India* are concerning. It reveals a pattern of paternalistic governance transpiring in the country while attempting to obscure the government’s failures in preventing law and order problems.”⁴⁴¹

In the wake of violence, protests erupted both in support of and against the demands of various communities. Reports emerged of security forces

⁴³⁸ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HcpsejiKzQEZ4SSF5XbvjVUB-9BP9Ddq/view?usp=drive_link

⁴³⁹ <https://x.com/Kautilya33>

⁴⁴⁰ <https://internetfreedom.in/manipur-100-days-internet-shutdown/>

⁴⁴¹ <https://internetfreedom.in/manipur-100-days-internet-shutdown/>

using force to disperse protests, detaining activists, and imposing curfews that disproportionately affected certain groups. There was no attempt to initiate meaningful dialogue with all the affected communities. While the State machinery's actions in Manipur have been framed by authorities as efforts to restore order, the perception among many affected groups is that these measures have done little to quell violence and the conflict.

10.2.3. Targeting of dissenters

Prior to the Supreme Court taking cognizance of the violence in Manipur on 20th July, 2023, civil society groups and activists had already moved to form fact finding teams. One such fact-finding team was organised by National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) consisting of Annie Raja, CPI leader and General Secretary of the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), Nisha Siddhu, National Secretary of NFIW and Deeksha Dwivedi, an independent Delhi-based lawyer. The NFIW team along with Dwivedi visited Manipur between 28th June, 2023 and 01st July, 2023 and interacted with officials and affected women and children residing in 6 makeshift relief camps. On 08th July, 2023, an FIR numbered 585(7) of 2023 was filed by the Imphal Police Station on the complaint of one S. Liben Singh under sections 121A, 124, 153, 153A, 153B, 499, 504, 505(2), and 34 of IPC against all three of the members of the fact-finding report. On 11th July, 2023, the Supreme Court protected Adv. Dwivedi from coercive steps till 14th July, 2023. The interim protection was extended by the Supreme Court on 17th July, 2023, allowing her to approach the Manipur High Court for appropriate remedy. Deeksha Dwivedi thereafter filed a quash petition before the Manipur HC on 28th July, 2023 averring that she was invited to the team in her capacity as a lawyer and participated only to provide legal inputs. However, till date, Adv. Dwivedi's writ petition in the High Court for quashing has not been decided and stands pending.

The Editors Guild of India too published a fact-finding report on 02nd September, 2023 regarding the conflict in Manipur in which it criticized the role that the State government played and held the biased actions of the Chief Minister responsible for the exacerbation of the situation. On 03rd September, 2023 at 4:19 pm, the EGI took to Twitter to inform that one of the burning houses shown in the report as a Kuki house is actually the residence of a forest department official. They stated that the same will be rectified and the corrected report will be uploaded.⁴⁴²

On 03rd September, 2023, two FIRs came to be lodged against the EGI. The first FIR was filed by one Ngangom Sarat Singh on 03rd September, 2023 at 9:30 pm at Imphal Police Station under sections 153A, 200, 295, 298, 500, 505(1)(b), 505(2), 120B IPC against the members of the fact-finding team, Seema Guha, Sanjay Kapoor and Bharat Bhushan, as well as against Seema Mustafa, the President of the EGI. The allegations in the FIR are of promoting enmity between different groups, hurting religious sentiments and intentionally making false declarations among other things. Initially sec. 66A of the Information Technology Act was also invoked, but it was later removed, in view of the fact that the Supreme Court had struck down the provision in an earlier judgment. The police stated that the mistake occurred as the FIR was “hurriedly written”. Despite the EGI acknowledging and correcting their mistake, Singh relied on the same to claim that the report was entirely false and “sponsored by the Kuki militants”. On 04th September, 2023, the Chief Minister of Manipur made a Statement that the State Government has filed FIRs against the EGI because it is “trying to create more clashes in the State of Manipur” through its report.⁴⁴³ The second complaint was made by

⁴⁴² <https://x.com/IndEditorsGuild/status/1698287099265561025?s=20>

⁴⁴³ <https://x.com/ani/status/1698582733273088015?s=46&t=J1VjQNDTFWtXclPML16-LA;>
<https://thewire.in/media/egi-condemns-manipur-police-fir-against-its-members>

Sorokhaibam Thoudam Sangita from Imphal East.⁴⁴⁴ On 06th September, 2023, the Supreme Court granted interim relief to the EGI against any coercive action in connection to the FIRs filed. The matter before the Supreme Court was finally disposed of on 21.02.2025 after the Solicitor General informed the Supreme Court that closure report had been filed in the said case, making the petition infructuous.

Several cases have also been filed against individuals who have attempted to voice their independent opinions, differing from the narrative presented by the State government. One such person is Dr. Kham Khan Suan Hausing, a Kuki professor of Political Science of Hyderabad University, who gave an interview to Karan Thapar on The Wire on 17th June, 2023 regarding the conflict in Manipur. In the interview, Dr. Hausing focused on the actions and inactions of the State Government of Manipur, particularly of the Chief Minister of Manipur, which led to the emergence of the conflict. On 10th July, 2023, a complaint petition was filed under section 190(1)(a) of CrPC against Dr. Hausing before the Court of the Chief Judicial Magistrate, Imphal East under sections 153(A), 200, 295(A), 298, 505(i) and 120(B) of the IPC, alleging that the accused hurt the religious sentiments of the Meitei community with the statements made in the interview. On 6th July, 2023, the CJM took cognizance of the case and directed the accused to appear before the court on 28th July, 2023.⁴⁴⁵ On 02nd August, 2023, another FIR was also filed against Dr. Hausing at the Imphal Police Station on the complaint of Khomdram Manikanta Singh under sections 420, 468, 471 and 120B of the IPC, alleging that the accused is not a citizen of India but of Myanmar and he entered his name in the electoral roll of Churachandpur in 2005 through fraud, forgery and manipulation. Dr. Hausing sought relief before the Supreme Court in both

⁴⁴⁴<https://scroll.in/latest/1055363/fir-in-manipur-against-editors-guild-for-report-on-media-coverage-of-conflict>

⁴⁴⁵<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/meitei-lawyers-residences-vandalised-in-imphal-over-representation-of-kuki-professor-in-court-101693679355389.html>

the cases. On 14th August, 2023, the Supreme Court granted two weeks' interim protection from coercive steps to Dr Hausing, allowing him to approach the Manipur High Court.

In the Manipur High Court, on 29th August, 2023, Dr. Hausing moved a Criminal Petition seeking quashing of the summons issued to him by the Chief Judicial Magistrate in the private complaint. He was being represented by Senior Advocate, Anand Grover. On the latter's request, four local lawyers agreed to represent Dr. Hausing before the High Court. The lawyers, Chongtham Victor Khaba, Soraisham Chittaranjan, Th. Zingo, and Priyokumar Sharma, who happened to be Meiteis, were threatened by their own community for representing someone from the "other" community. As a result, the lawyers were compelled to file an application seeking withdrawal of their representation of Dr. Hausing by citing "personal difficulties" on 31st August, 2023 and their application came to be accepted on the same day. However, despite their withdrawal from the case, the residences and chambers of Chittaranjan and Victor Khaba were attacked and vandalised.⁴⁴⁶ In a news report dated 03rd September, 2023 published in the *Hindustan Times*, S. Chittaranjan was quoted saying⁴⁴⁷:

"On Friday, around 2.15pm, a large mob came to my residence at SingjameiChingamakhaMaibamLeirak locality in Imphal West district and started damaging the house and my chamber. The entire house and its contents were damaged.

...

⁴⁴⁶<https://sabrangindia.in/2-meitei-lawyers-representing-kuki-professor-hausing-targeted-by-mob-houses-and-chambers-vandalised-in-retaliation-attack/>

⁴⁴⁷<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/meitei-lawyers-residences-vandalised-in-imphal-over-representation-of-kuki-professor-in-court-101693679355389.html>

Though my family members were lucky to have escaped without any physical harm, police haven't provided us with any security. At present, we are taking shelter in a CRPF guest house."

A mob of around 300-400 persons destroyed his office which is annexed to his residential building. He said, "under the present circumstances, legal professionals feel hesitation in handling cases involving threat to personal liberty and security. Though an FIR was filed by the Singjamei Police Station under sections 147, 149, 448, 445 and 427 of the IPC, no accused came to be arrested in the matter.

Five hours after the attack on Chittaranjan's house, a mob attacked the residence and office of Victor Khaba, located at Khonghampat Awang Leikai locality in Imphal West. Khaba was in Agartala at the time of the attack. The mob pelted stones and damaged the walls and windows of his house. Khaba was quoted saying:

"The attack took place between 7pm and 10pm on Friday. Most members of the mob were residents of the area. There were some women too. The police had visited my place after the incident, but I am not aware if a case has been lodged."

While the threats made to the lawyers acted as a deterrent for them, the attacks on them acted as a warning and deterrent for other lawyers as well.

An article published on *The Leaflet* reported that after the withdrawal of the advocates, the Manipur High Court directed a legal aid lawyer to represent Dr. Hausing. However, the lawyer's terms were not acceptable to Dr. Hausing and hence he was left without a counsel of his choice. Due to the prevailing atmosphere of political persecution, not only was Dr. Hausing facing criminal charges due to the exercise of his right to freedom of speech and expression, but he was also being denied his fundamental

right to be represented by a lawyer.⁴⁴⁸ The Supreme Court Bar Association and the All India Lawyers' Union (AILU) have condemned the attacks on the lawyers, stating that the same amounts to an infringement of their right to practice their profession freely and fearlessly.⁴⁴⁹ Dr. Hausing's case for quashing before the Manipur High Court remains pending to this day.

An FIR was also filed against Mary Grace Zou, the convenor of the Kuki Women Forum, and Wilson L. Hangshing, the General Secretary of the Kuki People Alliance in the Porompat Police State by Lourembam Cha Somerendro on 30th July, 2023 under sections 153A, 200, 295A, 298, 505(1) and 120B of IPC. The two accused persons had given interviews with Karan Thapar on The Wire regarding the demands of the Kuki community and their distrust in the Chief Minister of Manipur, which were cited by the complainant to allege that the accused are promoting enmity between communities and hurting religious sentiments and beliefs.⁴⁵⁰ The complainant had also filed a criminal complaint case against the accused on the same subject matter before the Chief Judicial Magistrate, Imphal East which came to be dismissed vide order dated 22nd August, 2023 on the ground that an FIR on the same subject matter already subsists.⁴⁵¹ Another FIR numbered 769(9) of 2023 was filed against Makepeace Sitlhou, a Kuki journalist, in Imphal Police Station by Lairenlakpam Sandeep on 14th September, 2023 under sections 120B, 153A, 500, 505(2) of IPC, alleging that she is guilty of defamation and promoting enmity through her posts on Twitter, where she would share news on Manipur and her opinions on the ongoing conflict.

⁴⁴⁸<https://theleaflet.in/criminal-justice/how-bad-are-things-in-manipur-advocates-are-under-attack-for-representing-clients-that-bad>

⁴⁴⁹<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/ailu-condemns-attacks-on-advocates-in-manipur/article67266709.ece>;
https://x.com/TheLeaflet_in/status/1699345631603736930

⁴⁵⁰ <https://manipurpolice.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/FIR-91972023PRT-PS.pdf>

⁴⁵¹https://drive.google.com/file/d/119aJq6_wrg_m5Jmgdw8EBzzJE6X1oGrw/view?usp=drive_link

MeMD26 is a Meitei human rights lawyer who has faced threats and persecution due to his work involving individuals belonging to the Kuki community. He spoke to the Tribunal at Delhi regarding the situation in the State. He stated that the Arambai Tenggol are not only a threat to the Kuki community but also to their own community and that they have threatened displaced persons living in relief camps to not complain regarding their condition in the relief camps. He stated that the judiciary is not taking suo motu cognizance of illegal activities and the Chief Justice has not taken any steps to address the failure of the State and the police. He revealed that properties of Kuki persons were being occupied by militant organisations but nothing has been done regarding the same. He pointed out that if he tries to file such a case, he will be labelled as a pro-tribal lawyer which is dangerous for his safety. He explained that his vakalatnama in one of the cases where he was representing someone from the Kuki community was leaked on social media which put his life under serious threat as the Meitei radical groups attacked and vandalised his house. According to him, there are individuals on both sides who are not against the other community but he emphasised that there is widespread silencing of dissenting voices. He said:

“I suggested to one of the CRPF officials to file the case. They approached and gave aadhar no and became Petitioner in HC or SC but thereafter they got transferred from Imphal and they were silenced. Now their place is converted to a place for the army or for opening hotels etc.”

MeMD1 is a Meitei human rights activist and lawyer from Manipur who worked extensively against AFSPA. He was attacked by Meitei radical groups like Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun because of his advocacy for peace. He was first attacked in June 2022 by around 20 young men from Meitei Leepun because of his support to Myanmar refugees fleeing the violence in their country to India. He tried to reason with the men but to no avail. He testified before the Tribunal at Delhi regarding the same:

“They were not ready to listen to me. They threatened to pick me up if I continued this work and asked me to stop lecturing them. Four of our lawyers went to the police station and talked to them about this threat. An IO was assigned and we cooperated. But the police officials told us later that instructions have come from the top to not pursue this case.”

On 3rd May, 2023 when the conflict broke out, MeMD1 was in Delhi for work. He was warned over call by his wife to not return to Manipur. On 10th May, 2023, he gave an interview with a news portal regarding the violence in Manipur and the role of the Arambai Tenggol and the Meitei Leepun in the conflict. Thereafter, he stated:

“There was a rumour that my house will be burnt down.

My friends in civil society had also tried to control the damage. In May, nothing happened. I got back home after one month and was even awarded a human rights award on the birthday of Hjam Irabot, for respecting both sides and working for peace.

Things were still normal.

In the year 2023, initially, we tried to bring some Naga friends, some Kuki friends and some Meitei friends in Hyderabad - Henry Martin institute. Groups of friends said why don't we just come together and try to dialogue. As soon as this information got out, the IGP of Hyderabad came to visit us in the Henry Martin Institute and stopped us.

Some friends in Nepal finally agreed to host 4 Nagas, Kukis and Meiteis. While we were organising our travel, we got a call saying people from Arambai went to my house. This was in October, first week - 5 months after the interview - to say that I should apologise for what I said.”

The reason behind the sudden outrage was explained by MeMD1 as the murder of a young Meitei couple in the hills presumably by Kuki armed groups. On 4th September, 2023, after the internet ban was lifted, videos of the couple started circulating which outrages the Meitei community and

a protest was called wherein the protesters decided to hand over a memorandum to the Chief Minister. However, he stated:

“Students came out and protested, and wanted to give a memorandum to the CM. They were stopped. The next day they came up in much larger numbers, few of them were allowed to go meet the CM. There was a huge crackdown on them. Jat regiment and Rapid Action Forces were deployed to deal with these students who were young, peaceful, unarmed, uniform wearing. For the first time in Manipur, they used pellet guns. 70-80 pellets pierced into one person. One of them was blinded. We went and met many of the students.

On 28th September, they went to the CM’s house and gheraoed. We have a full report - the protest continued till 2 AM despite tear gas and crackdown.

End of September 2023, I did an interview, where I said the CM should step down. It has been 5 months. Not a single community looks up to him. He should step down honourably.”

He told the Tribunal that after his interview, his house was attacked again when he was not at home. He stated:

“On 5 October, my house was attacked and dismantled. I asked my brother to give the phone to the person from Arambai Tenggol. They had come with sophisticated arms. My entire family was stuck inside the house, while they were roaming around inside with AK47s.

I tried to speak to them and tell them that we are social workers, and working for the good of the society. I might have made a mistake or you might have, why don’t we sit together and find out how to resolve this? They said how dare you say we have made a mistake. We are sacrificing our lives. My daughter was held at gunpoint, and asked where CCTV cameras were. They destroyed the cameras, our car, and broke many

things. They said if I don't apologise, they will burn down my house. My wife who is a civil servant came back and she said she spoke to Kuldeep Singh, the Security Advisor. He had no idea that all this happened. The police came, looked at everything and went back.

Those groups kept calling my brother's phone and said that if I don't post an apology, they will burn down my house. My 90 year old father called and said that please, for our safety, post an apology.

The groups were unhappy with the connection I made between RSS and AT and ML and the factual mistake that no church was standing in Imphal. So, I posted an apology - and put it up on my Facebook. That is how my family could have some level of sanity.

Then, a 17 year old took a photo of the family and said "Don't worry we are with you". I wept that day in Kathmandu, seeing that the younger people are standing up and the elders are crumbling."

He told the Tribunal that he has not returned to his home since the last attack and that the threat is still lingering:

"I have not returned home since my house was attacked.

On 10 Dec we usually do a lot of programs because it is the Human Rights Day. On 9 Dec, three armed men were loitering around my house trying to see if I try to enter my house. At home, my wife and daughter saw and told me. Fortunately I was in Arunachal Pradesh, I had no plan to go back home.

My house was being monitored by the same armed groups openly showing their weapons. These are the same people who invited 40 Meitei MLAs to the Kangla Fort, and asked them to sign that NRC should be conducted and everyone who came after 1960 should be thrown out. The President

of Congress party was beaten black and blue because he had started to ask some questions. I don't think there is an FIR for that either.”

On 10th October, 2023, PUCL had filed a complaint with the National Human Rights Commission with respect to the attack on MeMD1. In their complaint, PUCL also recorded that one of the neighbours of MeMD1 who tried to reason with the group was also beaten up. MeMD1 was told if he does not apologise publicly by 8 pm on 05th October, 2023, his house would be burned down. Because of this, MeMD1 was compelled to issue an apology. But he informed the matter to the Manipur Security Advisor, Mr. Kuldip Singh, through WhatsApp, who in turn is said to have asked the DGP, Manipur, to enquire into the matter. The complaint was filed urging the NHRC to intervene so that a FIR is registered, the perpetrators are arrested and MeMD1 and his family are provided protection among other things. Pursuant to the complaint, an FIR was registered, though no arrests were made. However, on 30th May, 2024, the case was closed by the NHRC on the ground that MeMD1 was called to appear before the Imphal Police but he did not. It is pertinent to note that despite his entire family being in Imphal, MeMD1 has not been able to enter Imphal since 5th October, 2023 due to the threat that looms over him. In such a situation, directing him to appear in person before the Imphal Police is to put his life in serious danger. Instead of considering this dire reality, the NHRC hastily disposed of the complaint filed in his case.

The report of the EGI also refers to a journalist from India Today (NE) named Afrida Hussain whose reportage dated 29th May, 2023 on a gun fight between the security forces and militants belonging to the Arambai Tenggol at Sugnu to her hotel being surrounded by a mob and her receiving threatening phone calls, including from someone claiming to be

a senior official who indirectly warned her of consequences.⁴⁵² She was finally rescued by the Assam Rifles.⁴⁵³ However, she noted that she did not have to face such threats when on 5th May, 2023, she covered the involvement of Kuki militants in the conflict and pointed out, *“but one thing against the majority community got me into trouble.”*

Another Kuki journalist spoke to the Tribunal regarding the hostile atmosphere that journalists in Manipur are subject to, but also how they are overcoming the same in their own ways:

“I think, despite these obstacles of access, I still managed to speak to individuals or people from the valley for my stories. I would also like to mention this for the record that despite this sort of atmosphere of mistrust and distrust, I've really tried to speak to all my regular previous contacts from the valley, some of whom have flaked out while some others have maintained those connections. We maintain these connections on the sly because neither of us are okay to be forced to come out and compromise each other because of the perception in our communities. This issue would have been a great opportunity to show that media from the State are working together despite the differences and the atmosphere since May 3rd last year. It's just something that would be much to our own detriment for us to come out in the open.”

On 24th May, 2023, the Committee to Protect Journalists issued a Statement condemning the treatment meted out to three journalists on 22nd May, 2023. SoramInaoba, Nongthombam Johnson, and Brahmacharimayum Dayananda were reporting about a fire in the New Checkon area of Imphal when the soldiers dragged them out from the

⁴⁵² <https://www.newslaundry.com/2023/06/02/arent-we-supposed-to-bring-out-the-truth-india-today-journo-threatened-over-manipur-reportage>

⁴⁵³ <https://editorsguild.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/EGI-report-on-Manipur.pdf>;
<https://www.newslaundry.com/2023/06/02/arent-we-supposed-to-bring-out-the-truth-india-today-journo-threatened-over-manipur-reportage>

building where they were reporting, tore off their vests emblazoned with the word 'Press' and beat them with batons.⁴⁵⁴ The Committee to Protect Journalists called for a thorough investigation into the incident and called for action to be taken against the perpetrators.⁴⁵⁵

These instances reveal that the free voice is a distant reality in the State of Manipur especially after the conflict erupted on 3rd May, 2023. Individuals, organisations as well as journalists are not spared from the wrath of the State where they express any opinion that is not in line with the official stand of the State government.

10.2.4. Non-governance and mis-governance

There are three aspects to State's style of functioning or non-functioning.

1. Policy paralysis: The executive, both at the State and at the Union, have faced criticism for its (mis)handling of the situation. It did not surely have an understanding of Meitei's demand for ST status that pitched them against the peoples of the hill areas. Its failure to anticipate the backlash and its inadequate response once violence erupted are the singular outcomes of lack of policy in dealing with constitutional governance.
2. Lack of dialogue: The government's inability or unwillingness to engage in meaningful dialogue with all affected communities has exacerbated the situation. The absence of an inclusive process to address the grievances of the hill tribes has led to a deepening sense of alienation among these groups.
3. Delayed and Inadequate Response: The slow and insufficient response to the initial outbreak of violence allowed the situation to spiral out of control. The deployment of security forces and the imposition of curfews were reactive rather than proactive, leading

⁴⁵⁴ <https://cpj.org/2023/05/indian-soldiers-beat-3-journalists-in-manipur/>

⁴⁵⁵ <https://cpj.org/2023/05/indian-soldiers-beat-3-journalists-in-manipur/>

to criticism that the government failed to protect vulnerable populations.

10.3. Security Services role

10.3.1. Accusations of bias

The use of armed services to regulate normal life across the states of the Northeast has been a bane over several decades. The use of force to contain people and viewing the populace with suspicion regarding their allegiance to the Indian Union has caused both resentment as also alienation from the national mainstream. The use of national security laws through arrests and detentions is perceived as a tactic to intimidate and silence those who are vocal in their opposition to the government's policies and actions. The government has generally denied these accusations, stating that the measures taken were necessary to maintain law and order, prevent the escalation of violence, and protect the lives and property of citizens. They have argued that these actions were not about silencing dissent but about ensuring peace and stability in a highly volatile situation.

Security forces have been accused of acting in a biased manner, favouring certain communities over others. For instance, there have been reports of disproportionate use of force in tribal areas and insufficient protection provided to these communities during the violence. Despite being deployed in large numbers, security forces failed to prevent the violence from spreading. There were instances where security forces were accused of standing by while mobs attacked vulnerable communities. The lack of coordination among different security agencies also contributed to the failure to restore order quickly.

At the other end of the spectrum, accusations of bias against the Assam Rifles, one of India's oldest paramilitary forces, in favour of the Kuki

community and against the Meitei community during the violence in Manipur have often been made. Although these claims are contentious, they reflect the deep ethnic divisions within the region. The Meitei community has accused the Assam Rifles of being biased in favour of the Kuki community. This perception is rooted in several incidents where the Assam Rifles' actions, or perceived inactions, were interpreted as preferential treatment towards the Kukis. For instance, the Meitei community has alleged that the Assam Rifles allowed Kuki armed groups more freedom of movement and failed to protect Meitei areas from attacks. Some Meitei groups have gone so far as to accuse the Assam Rifles of colluding with Kuki militants, particularly those from Kuki insurgent groups that are under Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreements with the Indian government. These allegations suggest that the Assam Rifles either turned a blind eye to the activities of these groups or actively supported them in conflicts against the Meitei community.

The Assam Rifles, tasked with maintaining peace in a highly volatile and ethnically divided region, operates under significant challenges. The force has to navigate complex local dynamics and work within the framework of SoO agreements with various insurgent groups, including Kuki groups. These operational constraints can sometimes create perceptions of bias, particularly in a context where ethnic tensions are high. The Assam Rifles and the Indian government have officially denied any bias, emphasising that the force's mandate is to maintain law and order impartially. They have pointed out that Assam Rifles personnel have been involved in protecting civilians from both communities and that their actions are guided by orders from higher authorities aimed at restoring peace. We will mind the fact that the situation in Manipur is complicated by the fact that different security forces, including the Assam Rifles, local police, and other paramilitary units, have overlapping and sometimes conflicting roles. Miscommunication, lack of coordination, and the need to adapt to rapidly

changing ground realities can lead to actions that are perceived as biased by one community or another.

To bear a balanced and objective perspective, the accusations against the Assam Rifles cannot be separated from the broader ethnic conflict in Manipur. Both the Meitei and Kuki communities have deep-seated grievances, and in such a charged environment, any action by security forces is likely to be scrutinised and interpreted through the lens of ethnic affiliation.

A more elaborate analysis of the allegations against security forces by the survivors and witnesses of the conflict has been made in the next section.

10.3.2. Alleged Partisan Role Of The State Police And The Manipur Commandos, Military And Paramilitary

Manipur has seen numerous conflicts in the past. However, what sets them apart from the conflict which began on 3rd May, 2023 is the role of the State and the State machinery. Almost all the survivors and witnesses who testified before the Tribunal revealed that the security forces who were in charge of maintaining law and order failed to do their duty, and in some cases actively assisted one community to attack the other. While recalling the previous conflicts which plagued the State of Manipur in the not-so-distant past, survivors and witnesses pointed out that unlike in the past, this time, the State machinery was used to fuel the conflict instead of curbing it. Apart from the testimonies, the Tribunal also received documentary evidence which support the testimonies of the survivors. The actions and inaction of the security forces, which includes the State Police, the Manipur Commandos, the Military and the Paramilitary in the State of Manipur, have created a deep sense of distrust and a clear divide amongst the people. While survivors from the Meitei community have clearly stated that the State police was unable to and ineffective at

controlling the Kuki mobs, survivors from the Kuki community have shared that the State forces were active participants in the conflict and were aiding and assisting the Meitei mobs in their attacks on the Kuki community. The Kuki survivors also revealed that the military and paramilitary, in many instances, were not only mere spectators but also refused to assist the Kukis who sought help and refuge. Such conduct of the security forces, whose primary and most important duty is to protect the people of the land, is extremely disturbing and add to the concerns that have time and again been raised regarding their allegiance to the people they are supposed to serve.

10.3.3. Powers and duties of security forces examined

In order to efficiently examine whether the security forces failed to perform their duties during the conflict, it is pertinent to first examine what the duties and powers of the security forces are.

A. State Forces

1. Manipur State Police Force

The State police force is tasked with preventing crimes in a State and maintaining law and order and public peace.

2. Manipur Rifles

On 27th April, 1891, after the British took over the administration of Manipur, the British government introduced the State Military Police of Manipur, which was later renamed as Manipur Rifles on 22nd October, 1948. The Superintendent of Police also acts as the Commandant of Manipur Rifles. In 1953, Manipur Rifles came to be merged with the armed branch of the Civil Police and was declared as the armed wing of the Manipur Police.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁶ https://manipurpolice.gov.in/?page_id=4

3. Manipur Commandos

Manipur Commandos are a specialised counter-insurgency unit manned by personnel from the Manipur Rifles, local police and the India Reserve Battalion. It must be noted that in the State law, there is no term such as “Manipur Commandos”. Their origin can be traced back to 1981-82 and they were specially trained in weapons and tactics, unarmed combat, ambush, cordon and search. They can be classified into Police Commandos and Special Commandos. Their main task was to carry out counter-insurgency operations but they are also assigned other important operations as well. However, this is not an official designation, and the Commandos can be chosen for and relieved from their task as a Commando at any point of time without much ceremony. The Commandos also draw their salaries from the units to which they belong.⁴⁵⁷

4. Indian Reserve Battalion

There are 11 battalions of India Reserve Battalion in Manipur spread amongst the districts of Churachandpur, Bishnupur, Thoubal, Imphal East, Pangei, Jiribam and Imphal. IRB personnel work along with the police to maintain law and order and internal security in the State. These battalions act as a reserve force which is deployed whenever and wherever the manpower of the State police force is insufficient for maintaining law and order. They are given arms training and given sophisticated arms for their functioning too. From time to time, in the last 2 years since the conflict burst out, there have been reports of sophisticated arms and ammunition being snatched or stolen from IRB posts.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁷ <https://theprint.in/india/skilled-hit-units-or-militants-in-uniform-why-unofficial-manipur-commandos-are-praised-hated/1753263/>

⁴⁵⁸For example, in February, 2025, it was reported that about 8 sophisticated arms were grabbed from the Kakmayai IRB Outpost in Thoubal district by members of the banned Meitei outfit, Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP) who came fully armed with sophisticated weapons themselves. The police report that subsequently 8 out of the 9 weapons were recovered though not all the ammunition was recovered.

In the State of Manipur, the actions of the State police force are governed by the Police Act, 1861, which was made applicable to the State after its merger with India vide Part C of the States (Laws) Act, 1950. Section 23 deals with the duties of police officers and reads as follows:

“23. Duties of police-officers.—It shall be the duty of every police-officer promptly to obey and execute all orders and warrants lawfully issued to him by any competent authority; to collect and communicate intelligence affecting the public peace; to prevent the commission of offences and public nuisances; to detect and bring offenders to justice and to apprehend all persons whom he is legally authorized to apprehend, and for whose apprehension sufficient ground exists; and it shall be lawful for every police-officer, for any of the purposes mentioned in this section, without a warrant, to enter and inspect any drinking-shop, gaming-house or other place of resort of loose and disorderly characters.”

It is notable that a police officer is duty bound to obey and execute orders and warrants issued to him by any competent authority **when the same are lawful**. It is reasonable to assume that they are not to partake in any unlawful or illegal act. Hence, where an order or warrant is unlawful, the police officers are not bound to obey it. On the contract, the other duties enlisted in the section make it evident that the police officers would be duty bound to ignore and oppose any such order or warrant that is unlawful. The primary duty of the police officers is to maintain public peace, prevent commission of offences and public nuisance and in order

See <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/manipur/arms-ammunition-looted-from-india-reserve-battalion-outpost-in-manipurs-thoubal-3397240>.

Similarly, on 16th February, 2024, media reported that 7 IRB personnel were suspended for ‘dereliction of duty’ in Chingarel in East Imphal district for the looting of modern arms and ammunition by a mob. <https://assamtribune.com/north-east/7-personnel-suspended-in-looting-of-arms-from-irb-camp-in-manipur-1521010>

to do so, they are empowered to make arrests of such persons that they deem fit, albeit based on the existence of sufficient ground.

Section 31 of the Act also casts a duty on the police officers to maintain order in public places. It reads as:

“31. Police to keep order in public roads, etc.—It shall be the duty of the police to keep order on the public roads, and in the public streets, thoroughfares, ghats and landing-places, and at all other places of public resort, and to prevent obstructions on the occasions of assemblies and processions on the public roads and in the public streets, or in the neighbourhood of places of worship, during the time of public worship, and in any case when any road, street, thoroughfare, ghat or landing-place may be thronged or may be liable to be obstructed.”

Therefore, where there is an assembly or procession on the public roads and streets which is likely to create obstruction, the police are duty bound and empowered to take steps to restrain the same. Reasonably, this stands all the more true if the assembly is a violent one, or likely to turn violent, since the police officers are also duty bound to prevent commission of offences, which the actions of the assembly would then constitute.

These duties, which are also powers, of the Manipur police officers are derived directly from the Police Act, which means that the police officers need not wait for orders before acting in a situation which calls for their action, as long as their actions are lawful and in accordance with the Act.

The Act also lays down that where an area is found to be disturbed or dangerous, the State Government is empowered to declare that the area has been found to be in a disturbed or dangerous State or that the conduct of all or some of the inhabitants of the area is such that it is expedient to increase the number of police in the said area. Thereafter, the Inspector

General of Police or any other authorised officer shall employ additional police force to the area with the sanction of the State government.

Section 29 of the Police Act lays down the punishment to be meted out to a police officer who fails to do his duty. Section 29 of the Police Act reads as follows:

“29. Penalties for neglect of duty, etc. —Every police-officer who shall be guilty of any violation of duty or wilful breach or neglect of any rule or regulation or lawful order made by competent authority, or who shall withdraw from the duties of his office without permission, or without having given previous notice for the period of two months, or who, being absent on leave shall fail, without reasonable cause to report himself for duty on the expiration of such leave, or who shall engage without authority in any employment other than his police-duty, or who shall be guilty of cowardice, or who shall offer any unwarrantable personal violence to any person in his custody, shall be liable, on conviction before a Magistrate, to a penalty not exceeding three months’ pay, or to imprisonment with or without hard labour, for a period not exceeding three months, or to both.”

Hence, where the policeman fails to carry out his duties as per the prescribed rules, regulations and lawful orders from competent authority, or where the police fails to act or acts in cowardice or engages in unwarranted personal violence against persons in his custody, in all the above-mentioned cases, section 29 will be invoked and the police officer shall be liable to be punished or penalised or both.

Apart from the Police Act, section 41 the Code of Criminal Procedure (section 35 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita) empower police officers to make arrest without warrant where any person commits a cognizable offence in the presence of a police officer. Moreover, policer

officers are also duty bound under Chapter XI of the CrPC (Chapter XII of the BNSS) to prevent commission of cognizable offences and injury to public property.

B. Central Armed Police Forces

The Central Armed Police Forces include the Assam Rifles (AR), Border Security Force (BSF), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), National Security Guard (NSG) and Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB). They function under the administrative control of Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi. Though the AR functions under the administrative control of the MHA, its operational control rests with the Ministry of Defence. Of the CAPFs, the AR, BSF, ITBP and SSB are Border Guarding Forces. The NSG is a commando trained force Organisation in India and are used for special operations. The CISF provides security and protection to industrial undertakings and vital installations. The CRPF is deployed in aid of civil power in matters relating to maintenance of law and order, internal security and counter-insurgency measures. The CAPF's are headed by DGP rank officers.⁴⁵⁹

The laws that govern them are: Armed Forces (Special Powers Act (AFSPA) 1958, Assam Rifles Act 1941, Army Act 1950 & CRPF Act 1949. These enactments draw up elaborate references to the powers and duties of the security forces. The Act gives powers to use force, including lethal force, if necessary to maintain public order in a 'disturbed area, search and arrest without warrant, power to destroy structures or shelters that are used to harbour armed groups or militants, seize weapons, explosives, stop and search any vehicle or person, among other powers.

⁴⁵⁹ <https://eawas.capf.gov.in/about.aspx>

Assam Rifles Act confers relatively lesser powers than AFSPA in that the powers of officers are limited to internal discipline, with scope of operations focused on border security, counter insurgency and internal security. Officers do not have sweeping powers of search and arrest but are limited to apprehending and detaining them. The Army Act 1950 establishes military law and procedures for maintaining discipline. The operational difference is that it focuses on military personnel and operations under military law. Use of force is not explicitly provided for civilian operations. The Central Reserve Police Force under the CRPF Act, 1949 operates under the supervision of the Ministry of Home Affairs and works in coordination with State police and civil administration as well as the Armed Forces in disturbed areas with officers under AFSPA, 1958. Although Manipur is not part of the Naxal belt, the CRPF's specialized units like Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) are sometimes engaged in operations against armed groups with similar guerrilla tactics. The Sashastra Seema Bal Act, 2007, governs the functioning of the SSB, outlining its duties and operational framework. When deployed in Manipur, the SSB operates under the mandate of the Central Government or the State Government, depending on the situation. The force has limited jurisdiction in terms of civilian law enforcement unless specifically tasked to aid the civil power.

10.4. Actions and inactions of the security forces

The following subsections document the testimonies of the witnesses and survivors regarding the conduct of the security forces during and surrounding the conflict.

10.4.1. Inaction of security forces to prevent or control the violence

Survivors recalled, in shock and disappointment, how the security forces failed to take action against the mobs to curb violence and protect the people.

KFD6, a senior responsible officer is a 59 year old Kuki woman from the Paitei community who was residing in Imphal prior to the conflict. She deposed before the Tribunal, about the attack on her house on 3rd May, 2023 at around 8:30 pm. She stated that her brother's house was completely burnt down by the Meitei mobs but her house was only partially burned because it was adjacent to the car showroom owned by Chief Minister Biren Singh. The mob that attacked them consisted of both men and women who snatched the few belongings they were carrying. The reason the mob spared KFD6 and her family was because her mother and sister-in-law are Meiteis, but many other victims were injured and even killed. Regarding the response of the police, she said:

“There was one police jeep there in front of such a large mob. They were also helpless. They asked us if we can call a relative to come and pick us up. They must have felt bad because we stood there on the road for one or two hours.

Then we went to the police station. Police said they cannot protect us from the mob, and told us to go anywhere else. Then from the police station, we went to a Kuki woman's house. Then arrangements were made. Her colony was safe. Just because she was the wife of the son of ex-CM of Manipur, her locality, the Old Lambulane was not attacked. By 2-3:30 a.m., we were taken to the army camp.”

KFD10 is a 40 year old Kuki woman who was residing in Langol, Imphal West at the time of the conflict. She also told the Tribunal at Delhi how her brother-in-law and younger brother, despite being in the Manipur police service, were unable to help her when her family was attacked on 3rd May, 2023 at around 9 pm. When her locality was attacked by the Meitei mobs, she called her younger brother to seek his help in evacuating the area. However, her brother informed her that the Chief Minister Biren Singh had advised the police personnel to not step out and so he could

not come to help her. When the mob came to burn her house, a local gym instructor told the mob that the house was empty, so the mob moved on. However, her neighbour's house was burned. Her neighbour had tried calling many high-ranking officials but they either did not answer the calls or even if they did, they did not send help. The next morning at around 8 am, when the CRPF were patrolling, KFD10 asked if they can escape. Instead of helping KFD10 and her family escape, the CRPF told them to leave during the patrolling. KFD10 and her family fled and took shelter in the CRPF camp. However, when another of her neighbour attempted to reach the CRPF camp, their vehicle was burned by the mob. Just opposite the camp, a young boy was killed by the Meitei mobs. KFD6 Stated that the sister of one of the MLAs lived in the same locality as hers. When KFD10 asked her whether the situation in Manipur will improve, the sister told her that the Chief Minister has not uttered any word on the conflict and so she thinks the situation will not improve.

KMD21 is a 34 year old Kuki male from Games Village, Imphal. He was in Thailand when the conflict broke out, but his family was in Manipur. KMD21 recalled the night of 3rd May, 2023 before the Tribunal at Delhi, and Stated as follows:

“Everyone made calls. It is a government residential area, so we made calls to ask for security forces to be sent to protect the residents. There were rumours that they are being deployed. In a brief while, we received an update that the police and security forces were posted around that time.

Sadly, even after that, the violence continued, and we don't know where the security forces had disappeared.”

KMD21 informed that people were fleeing and houses were being burnt down. However, the security forces were nowhere to be seen. KMD21's sister-in-law knew someone in the army who made arrangements to evacuate his family and transport was to arrive at 11 am, but they could

not reach the family due to road blockades by the Meira Paibis. One Meitei man tried to plead with the mob and convince them to spare KMD21's family, but he was also threatened. KMD21's family was then abducted. He described the incident as follows:

"The mob took the abducted people through a route where there was even a police chowki falling under the Lamphei Police Station, with 4-5 policemen stationed there. They did not lift a little finger despite the criminal acts of the mob. The abducted people were then taken through the paddy fields, not the main road. Maybe they wanted to avoid central forces who were present along the main road.

They made them walk, maybe 5-6 km, and passed through a particular area - an area where the mob probably had spent the previous night (3rd night). Then they moved on to an area near Manipur Zoo, passing by Agricultural University (in Roizemba). The CRPF camp is very close to that area as well.

After they were being taken, by at least a 1000 people strong mob, they spat on my family, threatened to rape them with many slurs and racial abuses being hurled at them. Then they were taken to a hall/club. They were kept there and interrogated and kept in detention for a few hours. They were telling them to call people up to negotiate. They heard rumours that Meitei people were also being abducted on the other side. They made my mother call people and ask about hostage exchange. Around 6/7 PM they were handed over to the security forces and transferred to Assam Rifles Camp.

All along during this time the abducted people were being taken by one section of the mob to different houses to prevent them being attacked by the other section of the mob who wanted to kill them. This section of the mob wanted only a negotiation with the opposite camp (Kuki) so that the Meitei hostages could be rescued through an exchange. In the other

murderous mob too, there were people who were graduates from our school, secretly trying to help my family.”

When asked about the response of the State, he reiterated:

“The State response was dismal; the State authorities and the police did absolutely nothing. I also filed a case in the SC in Nov last year (i.e. 2023). There is no further development after that.

In this case, after the family talked to the army officials, arrangements were finally made, and the vehicles to transport all people from our campus were expected to arrive at the campus around 11 AM. But they could not reach the campus because the roads were being blocked by the Meira Paibis. So the transportation convoy could not come and pick them up from the school campus.

Similarly, when the mob took the abducted people through a route where there was a police chowki falling under the Lamphel Police Station, with 4-5 policemen stationed there, those policemen did not lift a little finger to save the abducted family nor to stop the criminal acts of the mob.

MeMD27-1 is a 38 year old Meitei man who was born and brought up in KhugaTampak village of Churachandpur. He deposed before the Tribunal at Delhi with his sister and father. He told the Tribunal that on 3rd May, 2023, when the conflict began, the men of his village gathered to guard the village, and the women and children gathered at the centre of the village. The Kuki mobs came with guns and started shooting at the villagers, who started pelting stones. Then, the mob started burning the houses. MeMD27-1’s younger brother got shot in his chest but he survived. About the police, he stated:

“There were 3-4 army vehicles, so I asked for help. They dropped us in the other direction. My elder brother is also a police personnel. One Kuki policeman who knew me well asked me to not go with the Police when

they offered to take my brother to the hospital, He told me not to go in that vehicle unless I wanted to die. He was trying to save me.

My brother got admitted in Churachandpur hospital, he knew the local language very well so he managed. I contacted the Chief Medical Officer when I found out that his operation was going to happen. I then went to the police station and the police person told me to not reveal my location to any friend or anyone. I waited there till morning. I was trying to contact the SP, DC to arrange an ambulance but nothing could be done. In the morning around 6 am I again asked for help to transfer my brother to a safer place. The Police OC is a woman who was an ex-teacher of my brother. She is a Kuki but she helped us a lot.

I finally brought the vehicle and took my brother from the district hospital to the police station. Approached army officer for an ambulance to get my brother urgent medical help. Within one or two hours, two vehicles came and escorted us. When we were waiting to board the vehicle, many Kuki youths tried to attack us. One of the army personnel caught hold of him and warned him to not do anything. Kukis were also transporting their Meitei friends on scooty to the army camp.”

In a newspaper article published in the *Indian Express* on 18th June, 2023, the Archbishop of Imphal who claimed that 249 churches belonging to Meitei Christians had been destroyed within a period of 36 hours, questioned the intent of the State government and the security forces, stating:

“The elected government of the State and the Centre have not been able to restore the Rule of Law in the State and put a stop to the mad violence even after one and a half months. It is fit to state that there is collapse of

the constitutional machinery in the State. One wonders why the President's Rule is still not an option.”⁴⁶⁰

KFO7 is a Kuki woman who deposed before the Tribunal on 21st July, 2024 on a conference call from London. She was speaking on behalf of her cousin who was an eye-witness to the conflict in Imphal, Manipur and who lost her mother and her brother in the violence on 4th May, 2023: Gouzavung, Female, 58 years (KFO7's aunt) and Goulalsang, Male, 28 years (KFO7's cousin).

She was deposing instead of her cousin, the daughter and sister of the deceased, because the latter had spoken about her experience on various platforms and was unable to relive the traumatic experience any longer, in which she lost her mother and brother. KFO7 told the Tribunal how her family was attacked by the mob and two of the family members were beaten to death, while the deceased man's young bride was paraded by the mob and beaten till she was unconscious. The other members of the family were also attacked by the mob but were able to escape with the help of two Meitei men who transported them to the nearest Manipur Rifles camp.

The deceased mother was an undersecretary with the government in Manipur and her husband was in the police department in Imphal but he was in Churachandpur when the incident took place. The family lived in the government quarters in Lamphel, Imphal. KFO7 said that her cousin was trying to call 112 and other emergency numbers which were being shared online but no one was receiving her calls. She said:

⁴⁶⁰ <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/archbishop-imphal-claims-249-churches-burnt-in-manipur-8669677/>

“One police officer picked up her call and said even they can’t come out because the situation is very bad and the CM sent an instruction telling the police not to go out on the streets.

The young bride – I found something really odd - She was saying when they made her walk out to the main street, she could see the DC office, she was made to walk upto the DC office, and she was holding the gate and shouting, asking for help. The security could see her being beaten but they did not do anything.”

The incident narrated to the Tribunal by KFO7 has been widely reported and the survivors have spoken out about their experience on numerous platforms.⁴⁶¹

KMS5 is a 43 year old Kuki man from Nongdam Kuki Village in Ukhrul District. He narrated his experience to the Tribunal at Saikul on 2nd June, 2024 as follows:

“On 30th May, we were in the village. Around 7 am they started burning the nearby Saichang village and reached our village at 1 pm. Arambai and State forces came. That day I was there, and being the Chairman in my church, I stayed till the last minute. Both Arambai and State forces had joined hands. We told the women and children to leave first. And the men stayed back to defend our homes. In the last minute we also fled. They usually hold AK47s and LMG. Around 1 pm we were hiding and seeing our village burn from the forest. After the mob left, we came back to see the village and our homes. Oil was used, but since we had thatched houses, our houses were burnt down. They took our livestock also.... There was a BSF station nearby but they did not do anything.”

⁴⁶¹<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hhXVDAkqkf8;>
<https://www.newslaundry.com/2023/06/01/can-still-feel-the-blowsimphal-murdered-my-family-manipur-violence-survivor-recalls-escape>

The Tribunal received a chart of close to 1000 FIRs filed at the Saikul Police Station alone. One such FIR No. Zero (91)(5) 2023 SKL-PS mentions that when the B. Phainom village in Island sub-division, Kangpokpi was attacked by Meitei mobs, five villagers who had fled towards the forest were rescued by the NonpokSekmai Police team. However, on the way to the police station, they were obstructed and the mob took over custody of the five individuals from the police. SoitinkamVaiphei, a 56 year old Kuki male, was killed on the spot. Three out of the five individuals were women, who were stripped naked by the mob. One of them, a young woman, 21 years of age⁴⁶², was brutally gang raped in front of eye-witnesses. Her brother, NengkholumVaiphei, 19 years old, tried to rescue her but was killed too. The three women were able to escape with the help of some persons who were known to them, and the FIR was filed by the husband of one of the survivors.⁴⁶³

KFK2 is a Kuki woman who testified before the Tribunal at Kangpokpi on 1st June, 2024 on behalf of her husband who was unable to testify due to ill-health. KFK2 and her family were attacked on 3rd May, 2023 at their residence in T. Tuinom village in New Lambulane, Imphal. As their area was being attacked, KFK2 hid with her children in the back corridor while her husband and his tenant tried to reason with the mob. They also approached the Manipur police present on the spot and pleaded with them for help. However, the Manipur Police stood there and did not do anything while the two were beaten till they became unconscious. Seeing the situation, KFK2 approached the mob to plead with them but she was beaten, harassed and disrobed before she was able to escape with her family. They tried calling emergency services, but no help came.

⁴⁶²The name is not being revealed to protect the identity of the victim woman.

⁴⁶³ Sr. no. 91 in the chart

KMK12-1 and KMK12-2, are two Kuki brothers from the Khongsai village which falls under the Chief Minister's constituency Heingang, Imphal East. They told the Tribunal that the Arambai Tenggol were successful at entering their village on 4th May, 2023 at around 2-4 pm and started burning their village, the houses as well as their village church, Khongsai Veng Christian Church. He said that the CRPF was present at the spot but did not do anything. He told the Tribunal as follows:

“We called DGP Khongsai but he said you try to escape, we cannot help. Assam Rifles came at around 11 pm in the night, they came with 3 trucks and brought some people from Nagaram to IGR South. They came again and took another batch of people to CRPF camp Mantri Pokhri. The third time they came and took them to CRPF camp Lamphel. After that they said they would come back to Nagaram to pick up people, but they did not come back. The security forces and CRPF forces came and guarded the rest of them while they set off on foot to 2nd MR camp. We stayed there between 1 - 3 days in different camps and then the army brought them to Kangpokpi and then we went to relief camp.

...

Khongsai Veng is the entire village/colony of Imphal city Manipur State capital. 210 household settled in this colony and also assembly constituency of present chief minister Shri N. Biren Singh. Unfortunately on the 4th May, 2023 incident around 1000 Meitei ArambaiTengol with looted sophisticated weapons attacked the colony in front of 20/30 CRPF personnel. Unfortunately, not a single bullet was shoot out from the CRPF side. On the spot 3 people lost their live and 6 people faced casualty.”

MeMMo2 is a 59-year-old Meitei man from Phougakchao Ikhai which is situated at the border of Churachandpur and Bishnupur. He used to serve in the Assam Rifles Regiment. He stated that on 3rd May, 2023 at around 2:30 pm, his locality was attacked by Kuki mobs who were throwing tear

gas shells and burning homes. They approached the nearby police station but the 3-4 police jeeps which were there fled. He also stated as follows: “There is an Assam Rifles camp nearby our house. They burnt houses right next to that. One of my relatives even suffered burns. Assam Rifled was absolutely useless. They could have done blank firing to back them off but did not do anything. They did not even let us go back to our homes. Army officials are now staying in our village. The government gave us compensation equivalent to one year’s yield.”

MeFMo5 is a 27 year old Meitei woman also from PhougakchaoIkhai. In her written testimony submitted to the Tribunal, she has mentioned that on 3rd May, 2023 at around 2:30 pm, individuals belonging to the Kuki community were marching towards Torbung when they suddenly started burning houses. She States that as the number of kuki individuals increased, she and other from the area fled. She further alleges that the Kuki mob was pelting stones due to which the State Forces fled from the scene and Arambai Tenggol came to help them. She believes that the State forces did not do their duty. MeFMo5 and other from her village had fled to Santhong relief camp. MeFMo23, a 60 year old woman also from PhougakchaoIkhai, in her written testimony, supported the testimony of MeFMo5. She too mentions that on 3rd May, 2023 at around 2:30 pm, individuals from the Kuki community participating in a march suddenly started burning houses but the State forces did not use any weapons against them and instead ran to save themselves. The Arambai Tenggol came and helped the State forces. MeFMo23 was transported to Saiton in the vehicle of MLA Premchandra from where they reached the Santhong relief camp.

MeFMo7, a 35 year old Meitei woman from the same area, in her written testimony Stated that the police personnel were unable to control the Kuki mob. MeFMo12, 30 year old female from PhougakchaoIkhai also Stated in her written testimony that she saw the Kuki mob standing with the police.

Near Trobung, they started shooting tear gas rubber bullets and the State forces fled the scene. The State forces said that they did not have any orders to intervene and therefore were not able to do anything. The written testimony of MeFMo18, a 61 year old Meitei woman, supports the narrative of MeFMo12. She further emphasised that when the Kuki mobs were attacking them, the State forces instructed them to go inside their houses. She opines that the conflict escalated because the State forces did not have orders to act and control the violence and believes that the violence could be stopped by the State government even before it began if they had given proper orders. MeMMo19, a 28 year old Meitei man wrote in his testimony that on 3rd May, 2023 at around 3 pm, he fled his village PhougakchaoIkhai when it was attacked by Kuki mobs. However, he States that the police did nothing to stop the violence and merely stood there and informed that the police did not have any orders.

MeFMo14, 45 year old Meitei woman from PhougakchaoIkhai Stated that at around 3:30 pm on 3rd May, 2023, she heard a loud noise like an explosion and was informed of the conflict by her daughter. She wrote in her testimony that she was informed by her daughter that the police could not control the Kuki mob.

From the written testimonies of the Meitei survivors from PhougakchaoIkhai, it emerges that on 3rd May, 2023, at the time of the conflict, Arambai Tenggol was assisting the State Police in tackling the Kuki mobs while the State Police itself did not have any orders to intercept.

MeMB3 is a 30 year old Meitei man who worked as a teacher in a private school. He testified before the Tribunal at Bishnupur on 29th May, 2024. When violence started in his locality, everybody started fleeing and MeMB3 along with his family hid in a school. He Stated:

“The army, BSF, nobody came to rescue us from there. We had to walk to the Assam Rifles camp ourselves. There was a police station in the North, IRB and AR in the West, and BSF in the South. Nobody came.”

MeFB8 is a 19 year old Meitei woman, and MeFB11 is a 23 year old Meitei woman, who were residents of D. Phailien Meitei Leikai, Churachandpur. They are from the same family and submitted their written testimonies to the Tribunal at Bishnupur regarding the violence that broke out around their locality on 3rd May, 2023 at around 800 - 900 pm and the attack on them by Kuki mobs. MeFB8 wrote:

“A house started burning at around 8 to 9 pm, we thought that we would lose our lives at that very moment. We were actually waiting for our turn to be burned. Unfortunately, at around 2 am at midnight suddenly they started burning using petrol, cocktail, fuel, etc. and round of guns were shot from outside.

We ran away from back door and hid in the neighbour’s house and spent the night there with full of fear and fright. The next day we could see all the houses of the Meiteis were burnt into ashes. Years of struggle, everything was gone at that moment. On the night of this incident, not a single policeman was seen to protect the civilians, not a single army, IRB, BSF, Assam Rifles was seen on duty to protect us.

My home is just 1 km away from BSF, IRB, Assam Rifles and Police Station but there was none to protect, which makes us feel that they are not to be trusted.”

The same incident was also narrated by MeFB11 wherein she repeated that there were no security personnel available to help the civilians even though their residence is extremely close to the stations of the security personnel.

MeFB16 is a 47 year old Meitei female from Khumujamba, Meitei Leikai, Churachandpur. She submitted her written testimony to the Tribunal at Bishnupur which contains complaint regarding the inaction of the security forces on 3rd May, 2023 when violence broke out in her locality. She stated that the Kuki mobs had started to burn the villages and had weapons with them. As a result, the villagers gathered in a building at the centre of the village. She further wrote:

“As they were in large numbers, it was very difficult, as my husband is a disabled person. We called the police station of Churachandpur but there was no response, no security arrangement. Many villagers were injured.”

MeFB18 is 23-year-old Meitei female from KhugaTampakMeiteiLeikai, Churachandpur who submitted her written testimony to the Tribunal at Bishnupur. She wrote that she had to flee after her locality was attacked by Kuki mobs on 3rd May, 2023 and some of her neighbours got shot. They were evacuated on 4th May, 2023 by Central forces at around 2:30 am. She wrote:

“And during evacuation, we saw burning Meitei houses of MandopLeikai village on our way and in the presence of uniformed armed central forces, we were attacked by the miscreants using hard wooden logs.”

However, she wrote in her testimony that the central forces tried to keep them safe.

MeFB19, a 36-year-old Meitei woman also from KhugaTampak, MamangLeikai, Churachandpur wrote in her written testimony submitted to the Tribunal at Bishnupur that the Meiteis in her locality were assured of safety by their Zou and Paitei (Kuki) neighbours who later started burning Meitei houses. She wrote:

“They had told us not to get anxious, and that we will together safeguard the area, but they were the ones who started burning houses. Bread was soaked with petrol/oil, lit fire and were thrown towards Meitei houses.

From this moment we realised we won't be safe anymore. People have been moving to places where everyone were in groups. People were trying to contact army officer, police to come and safeguard our area but it was not happening.

...

A lot later, around at 3:00 a.m. on 4th May, 2023 some soldiers came. They were trying to guard us but things were not under control. The soldier told us it will be difficult for them to control. They suggested they will take us to Mini Secretariat, Tuibong.... On our way to the Mini Secretariat at Tuibong, particularly from Hmarveng to Tuibong Bazar the Kukis were throwing stones, metal rods, glasses, burnt tyres& vehicles, Meitei houses and stores were burnt.”

She wrote that they starved for two days after which the police gave them some food. She wrote that, “Kukis were still firing gun from outside the gate every night, they even tried to break the gate. The police were not able to control so then the paramilitary came.”

MeMI2, a 33 year old Meitei male born and raised in Moreh testified before the Tribunal at Imphal on 29th May, 2024. He stated that on 3rd May, 2023, at around 5:45 pm he heard houses being burned when he and his wife were at a stall they had put up. He said that the Assam Rifles did not come to assist the victims even though they were stationed nearby. He told the Tribunal that he thinks the Assam Rifles are biased.

MeMD28, a Meitei journalist, testified before the Tribunal at Delhi where he categorically stated:

“This crisis in Manipur is a big failure of the State. In my 25 years as a journalist, I have seen various conflict situations that the government can solve in a timely manner. I know that. I have seen operation of AFSPA, rape and killings - all these can be resolved.

This conflict is different. There is no law and order in Manipur. Dogs of war are let loose. It is up to the government to control the situation.

There is no control over the law and order situation. Arson, crimes and whatever happened - everyone is let loose.

The situation which could have been controlled, is deliberately not controlled.

All paramilitary/army/all forces are there. Even the police have enough experience. Their hands are tied. They are compromised in a way that even if they wanted to help, they couldn't."

The testimonies of the survivors have revealed three distinct reasons behind the failure of the security forces in effectively responding to the violence that erupted and controlling it.

(1) On the one hand, in certain instances, there was conscious and deliberate inaction on the part of the State forces who refrained from taking action which could have controlled or stopped the violence despite being present at the spot where the offences were taking place. The Tribunal came across claims by the survivors that prior to the eruption of the violence in Manipur, Meitei government officials had been transferred from Kuki majority areas to Meitei majority areas and vice versa. The situation was the same even when the Tribunal visited Manipur more than a year after the violence broke out. Therefore, in Kuki majority areas where Meities were attacked, the police force must have reasonably consisted of Kuki officers. Similarly, in Meitei majority areas where Kukis were attacked, the police force must have reasonably consisted of Meitei officers. Therefore, the deliberate and conscious inaction of the police may either have been a result of bias against the attacked community or it could be a method of self-preservation. In either scenario, the inaction of

the security forces, particularly the Manipur Police Commandos, in controlling the violent mobs translates into passive support towards the same, giving rise to an image of the security forces playing a partisan role in the conflict in Manipur.

(2) On the other hand, there are instances where the security forces were unable to respond due to being overpowered because of insufficient deployment. Such conduct is found both when the Meitei mobs attacked the Kuki community and when the Kuki mobs attacked the Meitei community. A crucial difference however is to be pointed out: a predominant number of the testimonies show that in the violence that broke out in the Meitei areas, the State forces were accompanied by and aided by armed cadres of the Arambai Tenggol and meiteiLeepun, who worked alongside the police forces.

(3) Thirdly, the Tribunal heard substantial number of testimonies of victims where it was pointed out that the state security forces explicitly stated that they couldn't act against the mob due to specific orders from the higher authorities directing them not to act, and in some instances being instructed to remain in the police stations without going to localities where violence was erupting. A substantial of such testimonies were heard from Kuki victims in Imphal areas, who reported being driven away from their homes and seeing mobs burn their properties, physically attacking their family members causing injuries and, in a number of instances, death. A very disturbing trend was the testimony of some witnesses who reported that they were forcibly abducted and held hostages by Meitei mobs to be used to bargain for release of Meiteis similarly held as hostages by Kuki mobs.

It is pertinent to note that the State police forces are tasked with maintaining law and order in the State. It is their duty, morally and legally, to act whenever and wherever necessary in order to maintain peace and

tranquillity amongst the public. However, from various testimonies, it has emerged that the State police force informed the public that they did not have orders to act to control the violence. It is evident that under the Police Act as well as CrPC, the police forces are not required to wait for orders before taking action where a commission of crime is apparent or anticipated. Therefore, it can be reasonably inferred that the police force had received specific orders from higher authorities to not intervene in the erupting violence. Several survivors have also revealed that they were told by police officials that instructions had come from the Chief Minister not to step out on the streets.

All this therefore leads to the inference, that prior to the incidents of 3rd May, 2023, among the state authorities, there was an expectation or anticipation of violence breaking out, and an attempt by the State authorities to escalate it either by way of active collusion with armed miscreants by allowing them to attack members of the other community even when the security forces were present on the spot or by conscious and deliberate inaction or non-response when complaints were received about the outbreak of violence in different localities or areas.

Was there a failure of intelligence or was 'Intelligence' made to fail?

A moot question that requires to be addressed is about the role of the 'Intelligence Bureau' and the intelligence departments of both the State police. Did the widespread violence that broke out on 3rd May, 2023, indicate a failure of the intelligence wing to gather prior 'intelligence' indicating the possibility of breakout of violence. Or – and this is the more troubling issue – was the intelligence wing of the state police made complicit in the planning of violence by remaining, at best, mute spectators or at worst, by playing a complicit role when violence actually broke out.

It is important to point out also that the testimonies of victims in Imphal valley, the capital of Manipur, highlights a certain pattern of deliberate police inaction by being given orders not to intervene alongwith repeated instances when police remained as spectators not intervening when mobs were attacking Kukis and their properties. The violence occurred not due to a 'failure of intelligence' or lack of preparedness on the part of the police and security forces. Most of the testimonies clearly indicates prior planning and preparation to use the occasion of the rallies and protests announced for 3rd May, 2023, in all the tribal districts of Manipur, as the situation to attack the Kukis as revealed by marking of Kuki houses. The positioning of armed cadres of the ArambaiTengol and Meitei Leepun along with police forces reveals both prior planning and deliberate strategy on the part of the political leadership, led by the then Chief Minister himself. The pattern of instructions from higher police officials to subordinate officers in Imphal not to intervene also clearly indicates that the collusive role of senior police officers who despite having 'prior knowledge of' and also after being informed that violence had broken out, did nothing to instruct their subordinates to impartially play their role and enforce the law. All this indicates that the incidents occurred not due to a failure of the Intelligence Bureau but arising from a plan to ensure and allow violence to break out targeting Kukis in the localities where they lived.

It is pertinent to note here that, even if such orders of inaction had been issued by higher authorities, such orders would not be lawful and hence it would be essential for the police forces to act in accordance with the Police Act. Any deviation, even in accordance with an unlawful order, would amount to violation of the law which would attract punishment under section 29 of the Police Act. Where the police acted or refused to act out of malice and bias and hence violated their duties laid down in the Act, they would also be liable to be punished under section 29. Furthermore, even where the police failed to interfere due to reasons of

self-preservation, such restraint amounts to “cowardice” and is also liable to punishment under this provision.

10.4.2. Inaction in aiding or protecting the victims when they approached the security forces

Not only did the security forces fail to stop the attackers, but they also refused to provide assistance and shelter to the people in need.

KMD13 is a 27-year-old Kuki male who lived in Mantripukhri, Imphal and was displaced to Delhi because of the conflict. He deposed before the Tribunal at Delhi that on 3rd May, 2023 there were rumours circulating that Meitei women had been raped in Churachandpur. A mob began to gather in his locality. The Meitei women tried to prevent the youth and reason with them but the mob had weapons. The jeeps in which the mob came looked like Manipur police vehicles and some of the people were also wearing uniforms. The mob began burning everything and destroying the houses. KMD13 states:

“Our house was near the IGAR office, and we ran out through the backdoor. The children and women were allowed to enter by the army, but men were not allowed. The army said that they had orders to not allow men inside because they could be threats. So we stayed outside the gate for one night. We handed over a Meitei man to the army, even though we wanted to take revenge. But our elders stopped us from harming him. When the mob heard that we caught him, a lot of them came with guns and automatic rifles. After seeing that we were at the army camp they went away. We also let that man go because the elders told us to. We stayed awake the whole night. We heard many sounds of blasts.

On May 4th morning we went back to collect some documents around 8 am. Our house was looted, and our vehicles (one car and one scooty) were burnt down. A neighbour helped in retrieving some more things. On May

4th the army allowed us to enter the camp and gave us some food. They were not even giving us plates, so I found a plastic sheet in the dustbin and used it like a plate. I thought if I check the dustbin, at least I will get some plastic.”

A similar experience was recalled by KMD16, a 38-year-old Kuki man from Lamlonggei, Maantripukhri, Imphal. He was also displaced to Delhi and recalled the attacks on 3rd May, 2023 before the Tribunal at Delhi:

“My house is of two floors. From the terrace, I saw many people coming. The police should have controlled the mob but they did not do so. We were running down for our lives. At the back, there was a door, we went through that to the Assam Rifles camp nearby.

Some of the Meitei neighbours helped me. They told me the road to the Assam Rifles camp. They did not allow us to enter. We were standing. They said we don’t have permission to let you enter. We reached the camp at around 8 pm, we entered at 1 pm. We were all sitting outside the camp. The Meitei mob came but we started to defend ourselves. We caught two Meiteis and we even tried to kill them but the Assam Rifles stopped us. They tried to stop the Meiteis from attacking the Kukis also but there were many people in the mob. There were many personnel inside but they did not come out. Outside, there were only four-five personnel.

I was working for the Manipur Police in Imphal. No one from the police helped me. The police came but they did not do anything. I also contacted my colleagues and friends, they were Meiteis, but they did not do anything. They said we cannot help you. I called some of my officers for help but they had no means to help. The Kuki officers were also running away. The police present did not control the mob. My unit commander is a Meitei, did not pick up my calls. I also tried to call my officer (inspector) but he also did not respond.”

KMO2 is a Kuki man who lived opposite to the IGAR campus in Imphal. He spoke to the Tribunal online over video conference to share his experience of the violence. He said:

“On the night of 3rd May, houses were burning and the army and police were just staring, they did not do anything. On the 4th of May, the violence started between 5-6 pm. Suddenly the locality named Lamphelpat sharing fencing with Indian army was in flames. At first, we thought it was some natural disaster but then we heard an explosion. We saw that there were mobs and neighbours coming to watch us. Our neighbours, among them Tangkhul, Nepali, and mob started coming towards us. We just took a bag and left with my nieces and mom through the back door. the mob was with stones and sickles and there was only disruption. We went to retreat house (the archbishop's house adjacent to the cemetery - it is one of the church institutions nearby where all the retired priests live) and hid in the dormitory and saw our neighbours looting our houses. We lived with them for decades. There were Arambai Tenggol dressed in black in the mob and they were led by our neighbours to our houses.

We contacted the army. Some of them came. The Lieutenant was asking us to run, they were not even willing to put the women and children in their vehicle or to take their custody. I was the one negotiating with them and trying to explain that if something happened to us they will be responsible. Finally, they agreed to put the elderly, women and children in their vehicle but the youth and others were asked to run through the back gate which is 4-5 km away. On our way, we were beaten and there were mobs chasing us. The army picked up the women and children and left them at the front gate. it is the largest army camp in all of IGAR South. When we reached the gate of the army campus, the army stopped us from entering through the gates. I wrote my name, spoke to them in hindi. After 1 hour of the mob chasing us, some of the people started climbing up the gates. Then, though the army opened the gate, they did not allow

anyone to go in. After 3.5 hours, we were allowed to enter the campus after we gave them all our information.

...

The Manipur police were dressed as AT and they shot my friend who was a nurse.

...

If a citizen is butchered, as Indian army you do not need AFSPA to intervene. Army does not need order from Governor to act – army has taken oath to protect citizens of India.

Even when we got in, the army was pushing out the women and children. We stayed in the campus for 7 nights and 8 days, there was scarcity of food, water, etc. They gave us khichdi not even fit for a dog to eat. No milk was given to children. the army and police should be investigated for their conduct in the conflict, they did not even try to save any civilian, even when violence was being committed right in front of them. They take an oath to protect the Indian people but did nothing to protect us. Are we not Indian people? Why did they not do anything?”

Even amidst the general condition of chaos that prevailed throughout the State of Manipur, there was a reasonable expectation amongst the people that the offices of the security forces would make for safe haven. However, it appears from the testimonies that these spaces were not, in fact, welcoming and protective of the people who approached them in dire need and desperation. Therefore, not only did the security forces fail to answer the call of the people at the required time and place but they also turned away the victims and refused to help them, even when they themselves found their way to the security forces and even when it was apparent and obvious that it was the last resort for their survival. The failure of the security forces in providing immediate and effective protection to the victims has given rise to an impression amongst the

people that perhaps the security forces too had malice against them and would not extend even basic help – to protect their safety and lives.

10.4.3. Active participation of the security forces in the violence

The most disturbing accusation that came from survivors was against security personnel participating in the conflict in various ways.

Even prior to the breakout of the conflict, one Kuki youth, 21-year-old Hanglalmuan Vaiphei, an undergraduate from the Churachandpur district, was killed by a Meitei mob in Imphal. KFC10-1, the 20-year-old sister of the deceased, deposed before the Tribunal during the sitting in Churachandpur on 27th – 28th May, 2024 that the deceased had shared a social media post condemning the Chief Minister Biren Singh on 29th April, 2023. He deleted the said post within 24 hours. However, on 30 April 2023, the police came to the deceased's house and took him into custody. Instead of taking him to the local police station, they took him to a Meitei-run police station. Thereafter, they said he will be taken to the SP office. Instead, he was taken to Imphal, while the family kept waiting at the SP office. The next day, the family visited the deceased in Imphal and saw that he was beaten brutally, even on his buttocks. On 1st May, 2023, the family returned to Churachandpur as they were asked to furnish surety for the deceased. On 4th May, 2023, the deceased was being taken from the court to the jail. He was accompanied by the sub-inspector in his private vehicle. However, on their way, in the Porompat area, they were obstructed and attacked by a Meitei mob who looted the arms and killed the youth, and he died on the spot. According to a newspaper report published in *The Hindu* on 23rd July, 2023⁴⁶⁴, the police officials left Vaiphei with the mob and fled the scene with their vehicles. The deceased's father lodged a complaint with the Churachandpur police against the unknown

⁴⁶⁴<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/when-a-kuki-college-student-in-police-custody-was-beaten-to-death-by-mob-in-manipur/article67112812.ece>

mob and the investigating office of the deceased's case. This was one of the first instances where the victim's family alleged involvement of the police in the violence.

KMC6, a Kuki man, aged 42 years was originally from Haokhongching village in Thoubal district. He was displaced during the initial days of the conflict and deposed before the Tribunal at Churachandpur. Thoubal district is majorly populated by the Meitei community. According to KMC6, on 3rd May, 2023, at around 7 pm, Meitei mobs led by Arambai Tenggol started assembling near his village. Anticipating an attack by the mob, the villagers contacted the local police station and the commandos, expecting protection. However, the commandos did not reach the spot before the violence started and houses were being set ablaze. Even after they reached, the commandos engaged in drinking and did not intervene as was expected.⁴⁶⁵

KMC6 also Stated as follows:

“One Meitei man had married a tribal woman in our village. I think he informed the Meiteis. They started coming in large numbers near our paddy fields. By around 8 PM, they attacked the village and burnt the houses. We tried to protect the homes and reached out to the police and Assam Rifles. We also tried calling the Chairman of Vaiphei Association. The police came. So, we trusted they will calm the situation. But they came and just walked over to the Meitei side. They started shooting tear gas shells into the village around 3 times. There were blast sounds the whole night. It could be gas cylinders of the homes or the bombs they were

⁴⁶⁵https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Sdlg1JzE5p7JvAXJDRXWz29-vjvQ1Cv/view?usp=drive_link;

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1uA4bd4e13ufDhotXUh_VuPGZtqExlER7 (supporting docs)

throwing. The police joined the Meiteis in burning our houses. We watched our village burn the entire night.”

On 3rd May, 2023, KMC11, a 20 year old Kuki man and his friends were working at Meitram petrol pump station in Imphal West district when the mob attacked them. He lost consciousness and woke up at the RIMS hospital and discovered injuries all over his body. He was treated till 9th May, 2023 and was discharged the next day at 5 pm in the custody of police.⁴⁶⁶ He told the Tribunal in Churachandpur the following:

“When the Manipur Police took me out of the hospital, they beat me again and threatened me. They said, each bullet in my gun will be eaten by Kukis. The other policeman stopped him. Then they dropped me in a relief camp in Lamphel and I got further treatment at a CRPF camp.”

KFC14 is a 42-year-old Kuki woman who deposed before the Tribunal at Churachandpur on behalf of her sister-in-law (husband’s sister). KFC14’s sister-in-law was a 45-year-old Kuki woman married to a Meitei man. They had one child together and were living in Napet Palli in Imphal East. Thereafter, due to the conflict, she along with her husband and child shifted to the Kumbi Relief Camp on 30th May, 2023. Both of these places were Meitei populated areas. However, being married to a Meitei, she considered herself to be a Meitei and did not anticipate any threat to her. So, she remained with her husband and child, ignoring the pleas of her family asking her to flee to them as well as the advice of well-meaning Meitei neighbours who did not want her to be targeted. On the night of 30th May, 2023, the Manipur police commandos, who are mostly Meiteis, had warned that she should be killed. On 31st May, 2023, at 9.30 pm, the Manipur Police Commandos came to the relief camp and forced her husband to point her out. Scared of the Commandos, the husband did so.

⁴⁶⁶https://drive.google.com/file/d/16opn6haaGMnI_aSX25zCRUJQcg8IsonZ/view?usp=drive_link;

The Commandos pushed the husband and the crying child aside and dragged her inside their Gypsy and drove off with her. Thereafter, the Tribunal was told that the husband found her body lying completely naked in a paddy field. Her body was swollen. KFC14 also informed the Tribunal that an eye witness had heard her call out for her mother and said that she was brutally gang raped by the Commandos and then her throat was slit to ensure she was dead. An FIR was registered by the family detailing the role of the Manipur commandos. However, it neither records that she was gang raped nor that she was found naked in the paddy fields.⁴⁶⁷

KMD9 is a 31-year-old Kuki male who was displaced from a village situated 15 km away from Imphal during the conflict and took refuge in Delhi. He deposed before the Tribunal during the hearing in Delhi and recounted his experience of the violence. He stated that after the rally on 3rd May, 2023, the situation had escalated in Imphal. His village was only 15 km away from Imphal and was populated by both Kukis and Meiteis. On 4th May, 2023, KMD9 and others from his village could see the smoke from burning houses in Imphal and he knew something was amiss. At around 12 noon, a large mob consisting of young Meiteis were led by the Meitei residents of the village and a few houses were burnt down.

Regarding the role of the security forces, he informed the Tribunal as follows:

“On 5th May, 2024, the security forces came. We were happy that they were taking action. The State police were there too but they just passed our village and went to the next village. We called our friends who said

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https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KLpdNpi86xDVEyunjHUQFOqDuyJidxnk/view?usp=drive_link

that the police fired on them. They also burnt down houses in their village. The army did nothing at all. They said they did not receive any orders.

We tried to persuade the army to allow us inside the army camp but they threatened to shoot at us. Finally, they allowed the women to stay inside the camp. After that, they took the forest route and walked to nearby villages. We assisted them for two days and we came back to our village.

On May 20, they burnt down most of the houses in my village. My house was on the outskirts of Imphal. They targeted my house first. Our village is at a strategic location for them because there is water supply and a dam nearby. That day I was shot and the bullet grazed the right side of my skull. Thankfully, it did not have any serious impact. I dropped my wife and aunt to Kangpokpi and returned to the village. On June 2 and 3 they burnt down the neighbouring villages. The mobs were led by State forces.

We think that after 5th May, 2024, the State forces thought it was no longer necessary to conceal their involvement.”

KMC17 is a 38-year-old Kuki male from Langza, Churachandpur deposed before the Tribunal at Churachandpur regarding the death of his friend David Thiek, a 31-year-old Kuki youth. He told the Tribunal that on 2nd July, 2023, at 4:30 am, a Meitei mob surrounded their village from all directions, looted the houses then burnt them. He said:

“Only David and I were the last two people remaining in the village. They started shooting and firing. When we were briefly separated, there was a lot of noise of guns firing. I tried to run and hide, but David got caught. The Meiteis captured him, abused him, beat him. I heard them also say that they do not want to shoot him, but to keep him alive.

After that I only saw the videos that went viral. David was beheaded, and his head was being carried by a Meitei person. That person can also be

identified but is roaming free till date. They put his head on a fence and recorded themselves hurling abuses at his head. They then burnt the body and only the bones were left.”

KMC17 showed the Tribunals pictures of David’s head being carried by a man in a vest and his remains. The man’s face is clearly visible. David’s father filed an FIR at the Churachandpur Police Station on 02.07.2023 at 10 pm. It accuses the Manipur Police Commandos and IRB of leading the Meitei mobs suspected to be members of Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun to the village.⁴⁶⁸



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https://drive.google.com/file/d/1n8tJo7pvv4xIjDXzjudZ5kqm7sKzR9uA/view?usp=drive_link

KMC20, a 44-year-old Kuki male from Khoken, Kangpokpi, deposed before the Tribunal at Churachandpur regarding the murder of his 67 year old mother in his village on 9th June, 2023. On that day, the deceased had gone to the church to pray when the Meitei mobs attacked the village and started shooting. All the villagers fled to the hills and the nearby forest but the deceased was still in the church where the mob found her and shot her to death. An FIR was filed on 10th June, 2023 which also accused the Manipur Commandos and the IRB of accompanying the Meitei mobs to the village.⁴⁶⁹

KFD18, a 54-year-old Kuki woman from Imphal West, moved to Delhi on 10th May, 2023 with her family to escape the conflict. Comparing earlier incidents of internal disturbances in Manipur to the present conflict, she stated to Tribunal at Delhi:

“There have been clashes before, but security forces and police have always been able to calm the situation by the next day. But this time, commandos and police were with the Arambai Tenggol to attack the Kuki Zo people living in Imphal. On 3rd May night, I saw it myself – they were visibly working together.”

The contention that the present conflict differs from the earlier ones due to the role played by the security forces is supported by NmMO10. Given the scale and intensity of the conflict in Manipur, it has been studied by various experts and scholars in India and abroad, and they have also studied the role played by the State security forces in the conflict. NmMO10 is a professor at the University of Birmingham, England who closely followed the events of Manipur and began posting about them on Twitter. NmMO10 appeared before the Tribunal online via video conference and stated as follows:

⁴⁶⁹ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UfrHRil6fAox7N59FVpBre7CD-tJJUJY/view?usp=drive_link

“in reality, this conflict is not like the earlier ones. This is really an ethnic persecution rather than conflict, where the majority community is targeting an ethnic minority....And the second point I would like to make is also that the violence is pretty definitely State sponsored, and it is State driven and State managed. So, it's been going on all this time, I think with the help of the State, and if the State wants to stop it, it can stop it at any given time.... By "State", I mean mostly the Manipur State government, because the role of the central government in it is not at all clear.”

NmMO10 explained that the narratives against the Kuki community, of them being “illegal immigrants” or “poppy cultivators” or “forest encroachers”, were invented by the State. The Chief Minister termed the participants of the rally dated 03.05.2023 as “encroachers, poppy cultivators, drug smugglers, and illegal immigrants”, against which the Kuki Inpi Manipur organisation took an exception.⁴⁷⁰ Explaining the ways in which the State machinery directly steered the conflict, NmMO10 Stated in his written testimony as follows:

“1. It is quite easy to see the hand of the State behind the violence, because the State is equipped with enough forces for law & order, not only the regular police, but police "commandos" who have been raised to fight insurgencies. In addition, there are paramilitary forces like Assam Rifles and Border Security Force, who seem to be permanently stationed in the State.

So the fact that the violence was allowed to escalate on May 3rd, by itself, points to State complicity. There are several eye witness testimonies, as

⁴⁷⁰<https://frontline.thehindu.com/news/what-is-really-behind-the-violence-in-manipur/article66820969.ece>

well as video evidence, available of police standing by and letting the rioters operate freely.⁴⁷¹

After the violence started, most security experts opine that the State has enough capability to bring back normalcy within a maximum of 72 hours. The fact that the State pleads inability to do so points to rather an unwillingness.

2. There is ample evidence of the militias, Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun, enjoying State patronage, and punitive action not being taken against them.⁴⁷² These militias were allowed to loot police armouries and acquire 6,000 guns and lakhs of ammunition, which they use to prosecute their war against Kukis. Once again, the fact that they continue to operate points to the State's unwillingness to rein in these forces of violence.

In his oral testimony before the Tribunal, NmMO10 emphasized on this point by citing pictures of the Meitei radical groups with the Chief Minister and the BJP MP Sanajaoba who is also the titular king of Manipur. He also cited video evidence on social media which shows the militias and State police acting together to steal arms and ammunitions from the State armouries. He Stated that the inaction of police even in the face of illegality also points to collusion.

3. The Manipur Police were also the source of considerable misinformation, in fact practically all the misinformation, regarding the violence. They have briefed the media regularly, absolving the Meitei groups of all responsibility for the violence, and transferring all the blame to the Kuki groups.

⁴⁷¹<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-States/curfew-in-eight-districts-of-manipur-mobile-internet-services-suspended-over-tribal-stir/article66809376.ece>

⁴⁷²<https://frontline.thehindu.com/the-nation/arambai-tenggol-manipur-meitei-organisation-militia-targeting-kuki-zo/article68210312.ece>

This misinformation, which I can document quite thoroughly, because it is all in public domain, fueled tensions between the communities, by making the Meiteis believe that the Kukis are the perpetrators of the violence and that the Meitei groups are merely defending the Meitei populace. The truth is the exact opposite. In short, the Police lied, and they continue to lie, in favour of the Meiteis.

4. Finally, this is the fourth mechanism, is the direct attack by the Manipur police on Kuki populations. This was most apparent in the Moreh incidents. The Kukis of the district complained for months that they are unable to accept the Manipur commandos into the town, because they target them. Finally, the commandos used the helipad of Assam Rifles to air drop the commandos in Moreh, and immediately there were reports of attacks on women and children. The families immediately fled to the forest or sat in front of the Assam Rifles camp asking for protection. There were also instances of the Manipur police burning villages, and the fire could not be controlled, and fire trucks had to be called in from the neighbouring Myanmar.⁴⁷³

Arunabh Saikia of Scroll, who covered the clash on site, wrote:

“On one side are the commandos, who I found on the ground are essentially acting as an ethnic army using State resources for their fight.”⁴⁷⁴

By citing certain incidents and their reporting, NmMO10 elaborated on how the Manipur Police generated misinformation. The first example was

⁴⁷³<https://theprint.in/india/burnt-houses-schools-manipur-commandos-led-arson-spree-in-moreh-myanmar-fire-dept-came-to-rescue/1933137/>; <https://scroll.in/article/1062898/inside-manipurs-new-battleground-the-border-outpost-of-moreh>

⁴⁷⁴<https://scroll.in/article/1062898/inside-manipurs-new-battleground-the-border-outpost-of-moreh>

of the rally held on 3 May 2023. The PTI news report from Imphal mentioned that a senior police officer had informed that the violence had erupted in Torbung area during the rally.⁴⁷⁵ This information was relied upon by all other national media. However, in reality, the rally took place in Churachandpur Town, 10 km to the south of Torbung. The rally started at 11 am and finished at 1 pm. Several news reporters were present in Churachandpur who reported that the rally was peaceful and the participants dispersed at 1 pm.⁴⁷⁶ The clashes began at around 3 pm, two hours after the rally concluded, along the border between Churachandpur and Bishnupur districts. NmMO10 emphasized on the effect of the misinformation:

“The entire country was misled into thinking that the Churachandpur rally caused the violence, in fact, even that the rally itself had turned violent (the wording used by Imphal media), which has no factual basis whatsoever.

The Police certainly knew all this. The entire route of the rally and its schedule was available to the police well in advance. And police were also present at Torbung and knew exactly when the clashes started.

The effect of this misinformation has been to give the public the impression that the Kuki rally was solely responsible for the onset of violence. No other factors were considered.

⁴⁷⁵ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/curfew-in-eight-districts-of-manipur-mobile-internet-services-suspended-over-tribal-stir/article66809376.ece>

⁴⁷⁶ <https://www.ifp.co.in/manipur/thousands-march-against-st-demand-in-manipur-hill-districts>; <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/curfew-in-eight-districts-of-manipur-mobile-internet-services-suspended-over-tribal-stir/article66809376.ece>;

<https://www.thesangaiexpress.com/Encyc/2023/5/4/OSR-CorrespondentsIMPHAL-May-3-Thousands-of-people-took-out-the-Tribal-Solidarity-March-in-t.html>

There were other factors, of course. There was a rally in Moirang, the closest Meitei town to the Churachandpur district border, around the same time as the Churachandpur rally.⁴⁷⁷ There was also a "counter-blockade" at the district border, imposed by Meitei Leepun.⁴⁷⁸ And, according to the Imphal-based Sangai Express, "reports about a clash between people who had imposed a counter-blockade at Torbung and those returning from the rally started doing the rounds at Torbung."⁴⁷⁹ A free-lancer journalist called Lien Chongloi wrote in The Wire that "many Meitei volunteers who were held up at Kakwa [Kwakta] areas started moving towards Torbung and Kangvai areas and began torching Kuki houses".⁴⁸⁰

NmMO10 cited two more such examples to show how the Manipur police spread misinformation and provocation.

KFD17 is a 29 year old Kuki woman from Sugnu in Chandel district who was living in Delhi when the conflict broke out in Manipur. However, her entire family fell victim to the violence of the conflict, which she recounted to the Tribunal at Delhi. She expressed deep surprise and disappointment, stating as follows:

"We lived together with the Meiteis for ages. We went to school together, shopped together.

3 May 2024 changed our lives. My family would flee and return home every night to sleep for 2-3 hours. For the rest of the time they would go to the forests to hide. We heard Arambai was coming to our place.

⁴⁷⁷<https://ukhrultimes.com/manipur-bid-to-block-roads-leading-to-hills-foiled-torch-rally-organised-in-moirang-kendra/>;

⁴⁷⁸<https://www.ifp.co.in/manipur/counter-blockade-unjustified-atsum>;

⁴⁷⁹<https://www.thesangaiexpress.com/Encyc/2023/5/4/OSR-CorrespondentsIMPHAL-May-3-Thousands-of-people-took-out-the-Tribal-Solidarity-March-in-t.html>;

⁴⁸⁰<https://thewire.in/rights/manipur-violence-claims-counterclaims-meitei-kuki>;

So my family took the babies and closed their mouth to stop the noise while in hiding. My mom had to take insulin but they did not get the medicine. Most of the pharmacies were owned by Meiteis.

Sugnu was burnt down on 29 May and till 29 they kept fleeing. The AT wanted to enter our village. I have a 3 year old niece, another is 2 years old. My mother is a diabetic patient. My dad retired from the army in 2007 and my younger brother worked in the army as well. Another brother worked with the youth to guard the village. From the army camp they could all see our place. They watched the homes burn from there.

Around 400 Zo houses were burnt down out of a total 3000 houses. Meiteis first attacked a neighbouring place then came to our place. I was so restless and whenever I could not reach them, I thought they had died. My family wanted to run to a Naga area, because they were welcoming but after sometime they said they will not be able to offer protection if the Meitei mobs come. My family stayed for a few days in the community hall, the Naga people guarded them as well. But then they had to run from there also. They went to another place, and then early in the morning at around 4 am they came to Churachandpur.”

She recounted on behalf of her family and her village, how the security forces had not only failed to protect them but also helped the Meitei mobs in attacking her village:

“There was no State intervention. The villagers put up a bunker and the police said you have to destroy the bunker. All the police were from the Meitei community. The Kuki police had to flee and the Meitei police said if you don’t remove the bunker we will fire at you. The police fired at them, then the AT entered, they were around 800-900 in the mob. They burnt the whole village, the church, everything turned to ashes. Whatever

was left, even the bricks, they took. Now my house is like a forest. We think this is the end of our lives. I was trying to study but I couldn't.

My Family was in a relief camp for two weeks in Lamka. The Assam Rifles camp gave us a hall, gave food; the food was not good but they gave us. Assam Rifles allowed us to stay in their camp. When everything was burnt, there was no hope. They transported us to Lamka in their vehicle. They could not stop the conflict - if they had power to intervene, the place would not burn. They watched the firing and the guns shooting.”

KMS6 is a 45 year old Kuki male from S. Bongjang village in Kangpokpi district. He spoke to the Tribunal at Saikul regarding the attack on his village on 29 May 2023 at around 3:45 pm by Meitei mobs consisting of Arambai Tenggol as well as the Manipur Police Commandos. He said that the mobs were carrying sophisticated weapons and were being led by the local Meitei youths. He said that the mobs and the Commandos fired at the villagers for 15-20 minutes after which they entered the village, looted and started burning the houses one by one. He further said that they phoned the Gorkha Regiment which was posted in a nearby village called Kamu to help them, but the personnel did not do anything to stop the violence and instead fled the scene. The villagers also called the BSF which was stationed at Moirangpurel but they also did not do anything. A complaint was submitted in this regard against the Meitei mob and the Police Commandos.⁴⁸¹

KMS8, a 36 year old Kuki male from C. Zoulen village, Saikul, Kangpokpi told the Tribunal at Saikul that on 3 May 2023, the Meitei radicals such as Arambai Tenggol, Meitei Leepun, KangleipakKanbaLup and Meitei

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https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oH8uhBSjkb6skOFmPB2dY48g_NhuILLd/view?usp=drive_link

militants had attacked C. Chajang village. Seeing the mob approaching their own village, the youth had chased them away with slings, sticks and single barrel guns. The Meiteis in the area also helped the villagers by telling the mob to go back. However, the next day the Manipur Police Commandos, some dressed in their uniform and some dressed in black T-shirts and cargo pants, entered the village and openly fired at the village. Due to the retaliation of the village youth, the commandos had to leave. However, they threatened to return and took refuge in Chanung which is a Meitei village. The villagers asked the Assam Rifles to guard them, so the Gurkha Regiment under Brig. Sandeep Kapoor was deployed at Chanung. On 11th and 29th May, the Meitei mobs along with the Manipur police commandos attacked the village again which was resisted by the village volunteers along with the Gurkha Regiment. However, on 31st May 2023, at around 4 pm, KMS8's village was surrounded by the Meitei mobs, Manipur Police Commandos assisted by the Meira Paibis and Col. Oinam Akash Singh of 18 Assam rifles and supervised by the SP of Imphal East. According to KMS8:

“on the day of the incident, Mr. Oinam Akash, Col.18 AR and one of his Meitei subordinates along with Meitei Militants, equipped with sophisticated weapons, RL etc. were seen ascending through the Khongbal Tangkhul hill range, which shared the boundary with C. Zoulen, Thingjang village, Saikul sub-division, Kangpokpidistridt and the firing begins once they reached the top of the hill range.”

Everyone from the area had fled, except Nekhomang, a 46 year old male resident of S. Phailengkot village, Saikul, Kangpokpi. He was taken as captive, his hands and legs were chopped off, he was beheaded and burnt alive.

Col. Oinam Akash Singh, a Meitei Commanding Officer in the Assam Rifles, received the military gallantry award “Mentioned in Dispatches” for services of controlling the violence in Pukhao-Dolaithabi, Imphal East.

However, similar allegations have been made against the Col. by residents of other Kuki villages. The allegations are that the Col. is biased against the Kukis due to his identity as a Meitei and he is assisting Meitei militants to launch attacks on Kuki areas and engaging in unwarranted hostilities against Kukis. According to the Hills Journal newspaper report dated 27.01.2024, one such village which was allegedly attacked by the UNLF-MPA and Arambai Tenggol with the support of the Colonel is Satang village in Saikul, Kangpokpi. The attack in Satang village has led to the death of a 26 year old Kuki male named TilminlunKhongsai from Ng. Phainom village who was a village volunteer and on duty in Satang village at the time of the incident.⁴⁸² However, the Assam Rifles has denied the allegations made by the Kuki organisations against Col. Oinam Akash Singh.⁴⁸³

KMS9, a 27 year old Kuki male from B. Boljang village, Kangpokpi also told the Tribunal at Saikul that he and his friends were attacked by the Arambai Tenggol together with the Manipur Police when they were volunteering in Phaimol and Tuichin villages on 28 May 2023. However, he Stated that sometimes the Meitei militants would dress up as the police. KMS13, a 53 year old Kuki male from P. Phaimol village, Saikul, Kangpokpi also told the Tribunal at Saikul that Phaimol, Tuichin and Molnom Phai villages were attacked on 28 May 2023 by the Arambai Tenggol, Meitei Leepun, KangleipakKanbaLup along with the Manipur Police. Initially, the villagers resisted the attacks but the mob retreated and looted the Pangei Police Station from arms and returned to capture and burn down the villages and loot the property and the livestock.

⁴⁸² <https://www.thehillsjournal.com/one-kuki-zo-volunteer-killed-in-satang-attack-kukis-top-body-condemns-demands-neutral-officials-in-the-peripheral-areas/#:~:text=Notably%2C%20Col.,for%20the%20replacement%20of%20Col.>

⁴⁸³ <https://www.thesangaexpress.com/Encyc/2024/1/29/IMPHAL-Jan-28The-Assam-Rifles-has-strongly-condemned-and-refuted-allegations-Kuki-Inpi-Manipur-made-yesterd.html>

KMS11, 73 years old Kuki man and the village chief of Govajang Village, Saikul, Kangpokpi also told the Tribunal at Kangpokpi that on 14 June 2023, his village was attacked by the Manipur Police Commandos and the Arambai Tenggol who used sophisticated weapons for the attack, looted from the State armouries. He Stated in his testimony as follows:

“The most interesting thing of the day was the presence of the CM and the MP(LeishembaSanajaoba) in the attack on Kuki villages in Khamenlok area. The CM, the MP and some cabinet ministers came uptoNongshum, Meitei village, stationed there and commanded the whole operations carried out by combined force of Manipur Police, IRBs and Arambai Tenggol in burning houses, killings and driving away all the Kukis from their respective villages. The CM and his team returned to Imphal after the completion of the whole operations against Kuki villagers in the area including Govajang village.”

KMS16, the 66 year old Kuki chairman of the Happy Valley village, Kangpokpi told the Tribunal at Saikul that the village was attacked on 3 May 2023 by a mob of 300-400 people who were donning the logos of Arambai Tenggol and the Manipur Police. The Manipur Police were with the crowd. The Assam Rifles and the Manipur Police told the villagers not to record anything and internet was immediately shut down. KMS19, a 32 year old Kuki man from L. Lhangnom village, Saikul, Kangpokpi recounted to the Tribunal at Saikul how after they were driven out from their village by the Meitei mobs and the State forces on 4th May 2023, Arambai Tenggol and the State forces returned to their village and burnt down their church on 9 May 2024.

KMS21, a 29 year old Kuki male also deposed before the Tribunal at Saikul regarding his own experience of the conflict. He Stated that the residents of his village fled when the neighbouring villages were attacked by the Meitei mobs on 4 May 2023. On 7 May 2023, the youth who had volunteered to defend their village returned. Their village had not been

burned yet. The Gorkha Regiment was in the area and protected them. The Gorkha Regiment called a meeting with the Kukis and Meiteis in the village and told them they will attack whoever starts the violence. A verbal peace agreement was established. However, when the Meitei mobs started burning another village which was not party to the peace agreement, KMS21 Stated that the Gorkha Regiment – instead of stopping the mob – started firing at KMS21’s village. According to KMS21, people from PLA, UNLF, Manipur Police, IRB, among others, were part of the mob, and the Gorkha Regiment did not do anything to stop the mob.

FIR No. Zero (137)(5) 2023 SKL-PS was filed at Saikul Police station by a 20 year old Kuki male from Ekou Mulam village, Saikul, Kangpokpi. It records an attack on Kuki villagers in the Maibung areas of Saikul on 28.05.2023 at around 6:30 am by Meitei mobs along with Manipur Police Commandos who opened fire on the villagers. the villagers retaliated and the BSF personnel of 29 BSF Bn. A-Coy under the command of Shri. P.S. Pundir intervened in the conflict. The complainant and his friend were captured along with their firearm but were allowed to walk free by the BSF commander. However, while they were leaving, the BSF troops shot at them and the complainant’s friend, Lunminshang Haokip of 24 years perished in the shootout.⁴⁸⁴

In another FIR No. Zero (407)(8) 2023 SKL-PS, the complainant, a 33 year old Kuki man from C. Aisan village, Kangpokpi, has reported about the death of his 20 year old nephew Mangminjoy Haokip. The deceased had received bullet injuries allegedly fired by Manipur Police Commando, Imphal East near Leitanpokpi police out post on 04.05.2023 at 3 am.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸⁴Sr no 137

⁴⁸⁵Sr. no 407; sr. no. 218 – diff FIRs, same incident

At least 30 FIRs have been filed in the Saikul Police Station claiming loss of property due to attacks by the Manipur State force, Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun.⁴⁸⁶

KMK13 is a 54 year old Kuki male and the chief of the Kamuching village in Kangpokpi. He deposed before the Tribunal at Kangpokpi about the attack on his village on 4 May 2023. He Stated that the attack was carried out at around 9 am in the morning by Arambai Tenggol armed with sophisticated weapons and the State armed forces. KMK14 is a 64 year old Kuki male. He is a dance teacher who was residing in Haokip Veng in Imphal. He told the Tribunal at Kangpokpi that on 4 May 2023, the Manipur police approached the residents of his village and told them to flee. The police said that they cannot help the villagers. When the Meitei mob attacked the village, the police was accompanying the mob. The former BJYM President, Barish Sharma, was part of the mob and was leading the mob. KMK14 Stated that the Manipur police did not help the villagers. The involvement of Barish Sharma in the violence is also supported by recovery of illegal arms and ammunition from his house under another FIR dated 27 May 2023 under section 25(1-A) of Arms Act

KFK16 is a 40 year old Kuki female who lived in Khongsai Veng, Imphal. She deposed before the Tribunal at Kangpokpi. She Stated that on 3 May 2023, at around 8 pm when she was cooking dinner, she heard the mobs approach their locality. She told the Tribunal:

“Some policemen who were at the locality started to fire tear gas shells. When the police started firing tear gas, the residents started applying toothpaste around the eyes so that they could see.”

All the survivors who testified before the Tribunal and alleged participation of the security forces in perpetuating violence against them

⁴⁸⁶Sr. no. 232-262

belong to the Kuki community. These testimonies are the most damning as they point towards direct State participation in the violence against the Kuki community and reveal, without leaving room for inference, the partisan role of the security forces. Not only is such conduct of the police punishable under the Police Act, but also under the criminal laws of the land. Strict action against such erring police officers must be taken in order to ensure accountability over impunity. The police's participation in violence amounts to a greater breach of trust than an ordinary citizen's participation, given that the police is tasked with preservation of peace and protection of the general public, a section of which they ended up attacking due to their personal biases.

10.4.5. Failure to investigate/prosecute

One common strain that ran through almost all of the testimonies was that none of the victims and survivors could find justice. Due to displacement from their native place, which was also the place where the incidents of violence took place, the survivors were unable to lodge complaints and register FIRs at the police stations with jurisdiction. Hence, almost all of the FIRs filed by the survivors are zero FIRs filed at the place where the displaced persons have sought rehabilitation. However, most of the FIRs remain uninvestigated or unprosecuted. Despite serious complaints made by the survivors against security forces, most of the FIRs do not contain these allegations. Even where the security forces have been implicated, no disciplinary actions have been taken against the officers, nor have efforts been made to identify the perpetrators.

It can also be seen that certain FIRs have not invoked all the relevant provisions, and serious charges are missing. KFC3 is the 55 year old aunt of Letminthang, a 26 year old Kuki male who was working as a Tax Assistant in the Income Tax Department, Ministry of Finance and who

was dragged out of his quarter and beaten to death by Meitei mobs on 4 May 2023 at around 3 pm. As both his parents were deceased, KFC3 filed a complaint at the Churachandpur police station on the basis of which an FIR was registered. However, the FIR does not contain the provision for the offence of murder, instead only records section 307 of IPC which pertains to “attempt to murder”. Similarly, MeFB16, whose house was attacked and burned, had filed a complained regarding the same. However, section 436 of IPC pertaining to “mischief by fire or explosive substance with intent to destroy house, etc” was not invoked in the FIR which was registered on the basis of her complaint.⁴⁸⁷

Most of the FIRs do not contain names of the accused persons and only mention that the attacks were carried out by unknown Meitei/Kuki mobs. However, many of these incidents have been captured on camera either as photographs or as videos, and many of the perpetrators can be identified from them. Despite this, next to no efforts have been made to identify the accused and prosecute them. It is pertinent to note that some FIRs are also concerned with public personalities and leaders of well-known organisations such as Pramot Singh and Barish Sharma. In FIR No. Zero (46)(01) 2024 SKL-PS filed at the Saikul Police Station by one 50 year old Kuki woman of Type II, AyingLeikaiLangol, Uripok, Imphal West, the name of the Landlady of the complainant is given as an accused who colluded with unknown miscreants and vandalized the complainant’s rented house and looted items worth about 22 Lakhs in January 2024. Against the same accused, a similar allegation is made in another FIR No. Zero (47)(01) 2024 SKL-PS by a 26 year old Kuki woman of Khongsai Veng, Laipham Khunou, Imphal East. The complainant had left her rented house due to the violence on around 8 May 2023. The accused, who is her landlady, had assured the complainant of caring for her

⁴⁸⁷https://drive.google.com/file/d/17iU8wPqm6tHjM05wtAOR05v-Pq1DRwRe/view?usp=drive_link

belongings but stopped responding to her calls from 20.07.2023 onwards. The FIR is lodged for a loss of property worth around Rs. 1,50,000.⁴⁸⁸ However, despite names of accused being mentioned in certain FIRs, no steps have been taken by the police authorities either deliberately or due to the circumstances or for both reasons. In the FIR against Pramot Singh, the police in Churachandpur expressed their inability to enter Imphal where the accused is based. However, according to a news report published in *The Sangai Express* dated 15 October 2023, Churachandpur Police had requested the Officer-in-Charge of the Lamphel Police Station to take necessary steps in the matter but received no response. A reminder was sent on 09.09.2023 but again there was no response. On 02.10.2023, a notice was served on Singh to appear at Churachandpur police station but Singh did not appear.⁴⁸⁹ Thereafter, a non-bailable arrest warrant had been issued by the Chief Judicial Magistrate, Churachandpur but Singh was granted protection by the Manipur High Court. Singh's incident shows that there are multiple complications acting together to hinder prosecution of FIRs.

In most cases of violence, the complainants have been displaced from the place where the incident of violence took place and the incidents reported in the FIRs took place under the jurisdiction of a police station which is in an area hostile to the complainant, and the officials of that police station are from the other community who have no interest in investigating against or prosecuting individuals from their own community. Further, due to the strict division of land between Meiteis and Kukis and the creation of buffer zones, individuals from one community cannot enter the areas inhabited by the other community. Hence, the police stations

⁴⁸⁸Sr. no. 47

⁴⁸⁹https://www.thesangaiexpress.com/Encyc/2023/10/15/Guwahati-Oct-14-A-local-Court-in-Manipur-s-Churachandpur-district-has-issued-a-non-bailable-warrant-of-arre.html#/google_vignette; <https://scroll.in/latest/1057609/manipur-court-issues-non-bailable-warrant-against-meitei-group-chief>;

registering the zero FIRs cannot effectively investigate them since they cannot enter into the areas where the incidents of violence took place. As a result, most of the FIRs remain uninvestigated.

As for Meitei Christians, they form a minority even in their own areas. According to a news article dated 27 December 2023 published in *New Lines Magazine*, at least 76 police complaints have been filed alleging attacks on Meitei churches out of which 6 also mention threats to renounce Christianity and convert to Sanamahism. While a senior police official assured that some of the accused have been charged, it remained unclear whether arrests have been made in the cases.⁴⁹⁰

MeMD26, a Meitei human rights lawyer, testified before the Tribunal regarding his experience in the legal field. He has coined the term “quantity FIRs” to express how the police has only been registering FIRs but not taking any further action to provide effective remedy in those FIRs. Evidently, it is frustrating not only for the public at large but also for the professionals who are pursuing the cases with a genuine interest in justice and accountability, both of which seem to be evading the people of Manipur.

The distrust of the people, especially of the Kuki community, in the investigating agency in the State of Manipur, led them to approach to the Supreme Court seeking transfer of the cases to the CBI and SITs, even transfer to a State other than Manipur. KMD21, a 34 year old lawyer who graduated from NJUS also filed a pro-bono case before the SC on behalf of two persons who were beaten to death. One of the deceased persons was a graduate of the school run by KMD21’s family. He told the Tribunal that the prayer in their case was for investigation of the case by an SIT or other neutral agency. The Supreme Court in its judgment dated 07 August

⁴⁹⁰<https://newlinesmag.com/reportage/meitei-christians-in-indias-manipur-face-broad-attacks/>

2023 took note of the “tardy pace of investigation by the investigating machinery in the State of Manipur”. While it transferred FIRs relating to offences against women and children to the CBI, it also appointed “Shri Dattatray Padsalgikar, former Director General of Police, Maharashtra to supervise the investigation by the CBI into the FIRs transferred to it and the investigation by the investigative machinery of the State into the remaining FIRs” as well as to “investigate the allegations that certain police officers colluded with perpetrators of violence (including sexual violence) during the conflict in Manipur.” Further, the Supreme Court formulated SITs in order to ensure proper and timely investigation into the FIRs.⁴⁹¹

The Tribunal heard testimonies of the survivors and witnesses in the months of May-July 2023 when the survivors raised a common grievance of non-prosecution. Almost all of them told the Tribunal that despite having filed complaints and FIRs, they had not heard back from the investigating agency. The Tribunal does not have information about whether and to what extent progress has been made thereafter.

The response of the security forces in the conflict has left a deep sense of distrust amongst the people towards the State government and the State machinery. Both communities came to a common conclusion that the State government had failed to protect the people and preserve peace in the State. The actions of the security forces, particularly the participation of Manipur Police Commandos in the violence against the Kuki community, amplified the feelings of isolation and alienation which were already sprouting in the minds and hearts of the Kuki residents of the State. This feeling of complete isolation from the State government and the State machinery is one of the major reasons behind the Kuki

⁴⁹¹https://api.sci.gov.in/supremecourt/2023/19206/19206_2023_1_7_45953_Judgement_07-Aug-2023.pdf

community's demand for "separate administration". Further, these incidents of injustice experienced by both communities were met with unaccountability on the part of the State as the perpetrators largely went unpunished. The State's failure to ensure justice and accountability to its people has left such a deep impact amongst both the conflicting communities that they repeatedly expressed one common demand before the Tribunal: "resignation of the Chief Minister". The State must acknowledge the experiences of the people, attempt effective and sincere redressal of their grievances and address their isolation in order for there to be a possibility of peace in Manipur.

10.5. Civil Society: Mixed Degree of Culpability

10.5.1. Division and Polarisation:

Civil society in Manipur is deeply divided along ethnic lines, which has hindered efforts to build peace and reconciliation. Rather than acting as a bridge between communities, many civil society organisations have taken sides, exacerbating tensions and deepening mistrust.

10.5.2. Lack of Advocacy for Peace:

While some civil society groups have called for peace, others have been accused of stoking ethnic tensions and justifying violence. The failure of civil society to present a united front for peace and dialogue has been a significant factor in the continuing unrest.

10.5.3. Media: Moderate Degree of Culpability

10.5.3.1. Biased Reporting:

The media's coverage of the Manipur violence has been criticised for being biased and sensationalist. In many cases, local media outlets have been accused of favouring one community over others, which has contributed to the spread of misinformation and further inflamed tensions.

10.5.3.2. Lack of Coverage:

National and international media have been slow to cover the Manipur crisis in depth, which has contributed to a lack of awareness and understanding of the situation outside the region. The limited and sometimes superficial coverage has prevented a broader discourse on the issues at play and has allowed the situation to deteriorate without sufficient external scrutiny.

10.5.3.3. Suppression of Information:

The government's imposition of internet shutdowns and curbs on media coverage during the height of the violence has been criticised as an attempt to control the narrative and prevent the full extent of the violence from being reported. This suppression of information has made it difficult to assess the situation accurately and has hindered efforts to mobilise appropriate responses.

10.6. Reports of the Supreme Court appointed Committee

On 07.08.2023, the Supreme Court appointed a committee consisting of Justice Gita Mittal, Justice Phansalkar and Justice Asha Menon. The objectives behind appointing the committee, as stated by the Supreme Court, are as follows:

“Firstly, there is a need to ensure that the violence ceases, the perpetrators of violence are punished according to the procedure established by law, and that consequently, the faith and confidence of the community in the justice system is restored. Secondly, there is a pressing need to ensure that the rule of law is restored and public confidence in the investigative and prosecutorial process is sustained.”

The mandate of the Committee is as follows:

- “i. Enquire into the nature of violence against women that occurred in the State of Manipur from 4 May 2023 from all available sources including personal meetings with survivors, members of the families of survivors, local/community representatives, authorities in charge of relief camps and the FIRs lodged as well as media reports; and
- ii. Submit a report to this Court on the steps required to meet the needs of the survivors including measures for dealing with rape trauma, providing social, economic, and psychological support, relief and rehabilitation in a time bound manner;
- iii. Ensure that free and comprehensive medical aid and psychological care to victims of survivors is provided;
- iv. Ensure conditions of dignity in relief camps set up for displaced persons including suggestions for additional camps. This would include, illustratively, ensuring that the following requirements are met:
- A. Clean rations which are adequate in quantity;
 - B. Adequate supplies of essential products such as soap, water, toothpaste, other toiletries, and clothes;
 - C. Taking care of the needs of infants and lactating mothers;
 - D. Meeting the requirement of basic medical care;
 - E. Control on the outbreak of communicable diseases;
 - F. Providing information on the accessibility of legal, psychosocial, medical and livelihood services;
 - G. Access to free pregnancy tests, free emergency contraceptives, free sanitary pads and free maternal health services including access to gynaecologists;
 - H. Emergency and specialised medical care for people suffering with critical illness including haemophilia, cancer, and HIV/AIDS;
 - I. Proper sanitation facilities at the relief camps including clean toilets and bathrooms which are adequate in number having due regard to the number of people housed in a particular relief camp and proper disposal of sewage and other waste;

- J. Suicide prevention services and regular visits by psychologists / psychiatrists to treat the impact of violence and trauma;
- K. Regular visits by psychologists, psychiatrists, and counsellors who are specifically trained to treat children and adolescents;
- L. Ensuring that women, children and persons suffering from physical and mental disabilities have equal access to resources to meet their basic needs; and
- M. Ensuring that information regarding the availability of the facilities listed above is disseminated and awareness is created amongst the residents of the relief camps.

v. Ensuring the payment of compensation and restitution to victims of violence; and

vi. Issuing directions for the appointment of nodal officers at relief camps and the provision of toll-free helplines to provide updates on any investigation, missing persons, and the recovery of dead bodies. The nodal officers must also ensure that they maintain a database of all persons who are housed in their respective relief camps. They must use this database to coordinate with one another and ensure that minors and other persons who have been separated from their families are reunited with their families at the earliest.

The mandate of the Committee reveals that its task is mainly of ensuring proper relief and rehabilitation of the victims and survivors. There is no clarity regarding the role of the committee either in ensuring ceasing of violence and punishment of perpetrators or in the restoration of rule of law and the investigative and prosecutorial process.

In any case, the Supreme Court appointed Committee was primarily focused on disbursement of compensation to the victims of the violence. In its fourth report dated 21.08.2023, the committee has annexed the Minutes of the meeting held with the authorities of Manipur State Legal

Services Authority which shows that no compensation had been granted since no applications had been made under the Victim Compensation Scheme, 2019. A direction was issued to the Manipur State Legal Services Authority (MASLSA) to ensure award and payment of compensation to all victims under Section 357 A of the Cr. P.C., NALSA's Compensation Scheme for Women Victims/Survivors of Sexual Assaults/other Crimes, 2018 and the Manipur Victim Compensation Scheme, 2019 and where the victim is deceased, immediate steps were directed to be taken by the Secretaries, District Legal Services Authority (DLSAs) and the Deputy Collectors of the Districts to identify their next of kin. Further, the Committee sought information regarding compensation schemes in the State and a status report of compliance with its directions for disbursement of compensation. It also sought information on the steps taken for witness protection and medical treatment of victims. All this information was directed to be provided within one week.

In its sixth report dated 31.08.2023, the Committee states that none of the information as sought in the fourth report, were provided to it. Therefore, an email id information.manicom@gmail.com was created to allow stakeholders to directly approach the committee. However, for publicising this information, the Committee depended on the Chief Secretary of the Government of Manipur. Report No. 14 documents that the State made ex-gratia payment to the next of kin of deceased persons in 73 out of 169 cases.

The minutes of the meeting attached to Report No. 7 dated 04.09.2023 of the committee reveals that the condition of the relief camps is dire including lack of clean drinking water. (The same was observed by the present People's Tribunal when they visited the relief camps in Manipur in May-June 2024, which revealed that not much had improved in the relief camps even after almost a year).

Report No. 8 dated 06.09.2023 States that the information sought by the Committee previously was not adequately accounted for by the State in its status report. (Note: Relief and Rehabilitation is dealt with in detail in Chapter 8)

In Report 9, the Committee deals with encroachment of properties and directs the government to protect properties of displaced persons and prevent encroachment of such properties. Where there is encroachment, the Committee directed the government to take action to remove the encroachers.

In Report 13, the Committee notes that there are unclaimed dead bodies being preserved by the State, despite the State having made repeated entreaties to the next of kin to claim the bodies. The Committee was also informed that the dead bodies were not being claimed by the next of kin due to the persuasion of certain civil society organisations. The Committee directed the bodies to be claimed by the next of kind and directed the State to prohibit the civil society organisations from interfering with the claiming of the bodies. The Committee failed to notice that due to the division of territory between the two communities, it is not possible for one community to enter into the territory of the other community, making it difficult for them to collect the bodies of the deceased persons.

It is clear from the reports of the Committee that due to the prevailing volatile condition of Manipur, they were highly dependent on the information provided to them by the State authorities. The Committee visited Manipur between 01 October 2023 and 05 October 2023 after which they proposed to visit again between 23.12.2023 to 28.12.2023. However, the State authorities dissuaded the committee from visiting citing security concerns. The Committee's inevitable dependence on the State authorities for ground level information leave an entire section of the population in Manipur at the risk of feeling alienated and isolated.

Most of the survivors who testified before the Tribunal categorically stated that they had never heard of any Committee appointed by the Supreme Court, nor were they contacted by anyone with respect to compensation. Some survivors told the Tribunal that they knew about the Committee and had applied for compensation but did not receive any. KFD6, a Kuki survivor told the Tribunal that though she did not apply for compensation, her family members had applied through the DC of Churachandpur but they did not receive any compensation. Only her sister-in-law who is a Meitei received a call from the office of the DC informing her that she will get Rs. 1 lakh as compensation in her account. KMD13, a 27-year-old Kuki male also told the Tribunal that he knows only one person who received a compensation of Rs. 40,000/- and all the others he knows who had applied for compensation did not receive anything. KMD16, a 38 year old Kuki male stated that he did not know he could apply for compensation. KFD18, a 54-year-old Kuki female also told the Tribunal that she was not aware of any compensation scheme, except one where individuals receive Rs. 1000 each but that too has not reached displaced people who have settled outside Manipur.

MeMD27-1, a 38-year-old Meitei man told the Tribunal that even though he submitted his documents through the relief camp, he did not receive compensation. He also said that none of the people he knows has received any compensation. There were few survivors who clarified that even if they were approached by the State with compensation, they would refuse to take it because monetary compensation alone cannot sufficiently address the losses they have suffered. KFD17 said that even the question of compensation is a political question and that she will apply for and receive compensation if the Kuki leaders take such a decision. She emphasised that compensation is not the real demand, it is a separate administration.

KFD20 also stated that her uncle ran an orphanage for 10 years but that has been illegally occupied despite the Supreme Court order. She said that she spoke to the Gita Mittal Committee about the illegal occupation but the committee told her that they are working on the issue. KMD21, a 34-year-old lawyer who graduated from NUJS, told the Tribunal that his family was resident of Games Village in Imphal and also ran a school there. He said that the school was intact for the first 3-4 months after which he received information from the neighbours that the walls and the football turf of the school were destroyed. Despite there being a SC court order directing no one should encroach, he said:

“There are rumours that they are trying to convert the turf into a community area. The main building is more or less intact, but the roof has been dismantled and stolen. The house and the school are there in the same place. School part is completely gone, nothing remains right now. The roof of the school is stolen and our turf, opposite the school is burnt.”

While compensation is an important relief, it is more important to hold perpetrators accountable. Victims of displacement have testified before the Tribunal that their properties remain occupied by the other community with no action being taken by the State authorities to address the same, despite the Supreme Court orders and the directions of the SC appointed Committee. FIRs are still not properly investigated into and the reality on ground remains as volatile, buffer zones continue to separate Meitei areas from Kuki areas, road blockades continue to be maintained and monitored by private groups and organisation, and displaced persons continue to yearn to return to their homes.

10.7. Judicial Commission set up by the Home Ministry

On 4 June 2023, the Central government appointed a three-member Commission of Inquiry headed by former Chief Justice of the Gauhati

High Court Ajai Lamba, to inquire into the ethnic violence which erupted in Manipur. The other members of the panel are retired IAS officer Himanshu Shekhar Das and retired IPS officer Akola Prabhakar. The Commission is supposed to look into the causes behind the conflict. The Commission was supposed to submit its report to the central government “not later than six months from the date of its first sitting.”⁴⁹² The Ministry of Home Affairs has now granted an extension to the commission by issuing a fresh notification which States: “*The Commission shall submit its report to the central government as soon as possible but not later than the 20th May, 2025.*”⁴⁹³

KFO1-1, a 40 year old Kuki female who lived around 400-500m away from Imphal airport, told the Tribunal that she filed an affidavit before the Lamba commission through post, documenting the attacks faced by her and her family on 4th May, 2023. However, she does not know what happened thereafter. Another Kuki woman, KFO7, who testified on behalf of her cousins who were attacked, said that she never heard of the Lamba commission.

10.8. Operational Challenges

We have already examined the geopolitical sway over the events at Manipur in Chapter 6. In this segment, we revisit the topic for the limited purpose of outlining the operational challenges for the security forces that impede effective action. FIRs in Manipur often refer to geo political tensions as the cause. Infiltration from Myanmar and Bangladesh are said to increase the tensions in the border State. Is there any truth?

⁴⁹²<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1929742>;

http://dipr.mn.gov.in/NewsFiles/CE_21Nov23_1128_Home%20Order.pdf

⁴⁹³<https://www.deccanherald.com/india/manipur/government-gives-another-extension-to-3-member-panel-probing-manipur-violence-3303346>

Such claims, perhaps, are not without merit, though they are part of a broader and more complex set of issues. Here's a breakdown of the factors at play:

10.8.1. Infiltration from Myanmar

Manipur shares a long and porous border with Myanmar, making it susceptible to cross-border movements. Historically, there have been instances of illegal migration, particularly of ethnic Kukis and Nagas, who share close ethnic and cultural ties with groups in Myanmar. This movement has often been driven by conflict, economic hardship, and persecution in Myanmar. The presence of various insurgent groups in both Manipur and Myanmar complicates the situation. Some of these groups have bases in Myanmar and have been known to cross the border for operations or refuge. The Arakan Army and the Kuki National Organization (KNO), among others, have been active along the Indo-Myanmar border, exacerbating tensions in the region. The influx of people from Myanmar, whether refugees or militants, has strained local resources and heightened ethnic tensions in Manipur. The Meitei community, in particular, has expressed concerns about the demographic changes and the influence of these groups on local politics and security.

10.8.2. Infiltration from Bangladesh

While the primary focus in Manipur is on Myanmar, the broader Northeast India has long been concerned about illegal immigration from Bangladesh. States like Assam have been particularly affected, but the ripple effects are felt across the region, including in Manipur. The fear is that illegal immigrants from Bangladesh might join or support insurgent activities, further destabilising the region. While there is less direct evidence of Bangladeshi infiltration into Manipur compared to Myanmar, the broader regional dynamics contribute to the sense of insecurity.

10.8.3. Broader Geopolitical Tensions

There have been concerns about China's involvement in supporting or at least turning a blind eye to insurgent groups operating along the India-Myanmar border. China's strategic interests in Myanmar and the broader region could have implications for security in Manipur. The Indian government has been increasing efforts to secure the border with Myanmar, including fencing projects and enhanced military presence. However, the challenging terrain and the deep ethnic ties across the border make it difficult to completely seal off these areas.

10.8.4. Causality and FIR References

The mention of geopolitical tensions and infiltration in FIRs filed in Manipur reflects the local perception of these issues as contributing factors to the violence. These references are often based on a mix of documented incidents, historical patterns, and ongoing concerns about national security. While infiltration and cross-border dynamics are undoubtedly factors, the conflict in Manipur is also driven by internal issues, including ethnic tensions, economic disparities, and political marginalisation. External influences exacerbate these internal challenges but are not the sole cause.

It would be true to say that infiltration from Myanmar and, to a lesser extent, Bangladesh, contributes to the tensions in Manipur. However, these factors are part of a larger, more complex set of issues that include ethnic divisions, insurgency, and geopolitical dynamics involving multiple neighbouring countries. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including improved border security, diplomatic efforts with neighbouring countries, and addressing the internal grievances of the local populations.

10.9. Land and resource conflicts

Land is a crucial issue in Manipur. The Meiteis are restricted from purchasing land in the hill areas, which are designated for the tribal groups, including the Kukis. Conversely, there are restrictions on the hill tribes owning land in the Imphal Valley. This has created a sense of insecurity and competition, particularly as the population has grown and economic pressures have increased. Control over resources such as forests, water, and agricultural land has been a significant source of conflict. The Kukis and other hill tribes rely heavily on forest resources, and there have been disputes over the management and ownership of these resources.

During the British colonial period, policies such as the introduction of the Inner Line Permit (ILP) system and the demarcation of boundaries created divisions between the hill tribes and the valley-dwelling Meiteis. The British also engaged in "divide and rule" tactics that exacerbated ethnic divisions. After India's independence, the hill tribes, including the Kukis, often felt that they were politically marginalised by the predominantly Meitei-led State government. The creation of Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) for the hill areas provided some measure of self-governance, but many Kukis feel that these councils have not been sufficiently empowered. The Kukis and other hill tribes have therefore looked for different solutions for greater political autonomy and representation. The demand for a separate Kuki State or a more autonomous administrative region within Manipur has been a recurring theme, which the Meiteis often view as a threat to the territorial integrity of the State.

The rise of insurgency and ethnic militias in Manipur has also fueled tensions. Various militant groups, some of which claim to represent Kuki or Meitei interests, have engaged in violent clashes over territory and

political influence. The 1990s saw significant ethnic violence between the Kukis and the Nagas, another major tribal group in Manipur, as well as between the Kukis and the Meiteis. These clashes were rooted in competition for land and political power and have left a legacy of mistrust. The assertion of a distinct Manipuri identity, centred on the Meiteis, has often clashed with the Kukis' desire to preserve their own cultural and political identity. This has led to a sense of alienation among the Kukis. These historical factors have created deep-seated grievances and mutual distrust between the Meiteis and Kukis, which continue to affect their relations today. The demand for ST status by the Meiteis is just one of the more recent flashpoints in a long history of ethnic tensions in Manipur.

Chapter 11: Strategies for Justic and Peace

11.1. Political interventions

11.1.1. Constitutional scheme

The Central Government has a range of constitutional mechanisms at its disposal to intervene in the governance of a State like Manipur. The use of these mechanisms is often a matter of political judgment, balancing the need for intervention with respect for State autonomy. The most direct and significant intervention is through the imposition of President's Rule under Article 356, which is the latest one promulgated on 13th February, 2025, though this is generally considered a measure of last resort. In practice, the Central Government usually prefers to work with State governments, using Article 355 to assist in managing internal disturbances, or issuing directives under Article 256 and Article 257, before considering more drastic measures like President's Rule. The level of intervention is governed by several constitutional provisions, primarily found in Part XI of the Constitution, which deals with the distribution of powers between the Centre and the States. Here's an overview of the relevant constitutional provisions:

11.1.2. Article 355: Duty of the Union to Protect States

Article 355 States that it is the duty of the Union to protect every State against external aggression and internal disturbances and to ensure that the governance of each State is carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. This article provides a broad mandate for the Central Government to intervene in a State to restore order, especially during situations of internal disturbances, such as ethnic violence or civil unrest.

11.1.3. Article 356: President's Rule

Article 356, also known as the "President's Rule," allows the Central Government to intervene in the governance of a State if the President, on receipt of a report from the Governor or otherwise, is satisfied that the

government of the State cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. Under President's Rule, the State legislature is either suspended or dissolved, and the executive authority of the State is assumed by the President, effectively bringing the State under direct Central control. President's Rule can initially be imposed for six months and can be extended with the approval of Parliament, but it cannot continue beyond three years except under extraordinary circumstances.

Manipur has been placed under President's Rule 11 times. The first time it was done was on 12th January, 1967 that lasted up to 20th March, 1967, which was after the formation of Manipur as a Union Territory. Political instability led to the imposition. On the second occasion between 7th October, 1972 and 3rd March, 1974 was a situation after attaining full statehood in 1972, when the first elected government faced instability, prompting central rule. The third instance was on 16th May, 1977 that lasted upto 28th June, 1977 which was to quell short-term political crisis. 14th November, 1979 to 13th January, 1980 was the fourth period when due to resignation of the government and failure to form a new one led to President's Rule. More instability caused central intervention through proclamation the fifth time that prolonged from 28th February, 1981 to 18th June, 1981. The collapse of the Rishang Keishing government amid factionalism gave place to President's rule the sixth time between 7th December, 1993 to 14th December, 1994. The seventh occasion between 7th December, 1997 to 3rd December, 1998 was the result of continued instability and violence in the State. Resignation of the then CM and inability to form a stable government was the eighth intervention between 17th February, 2001 and 14th June, 2001. Continued unrest led to the ninth time proclamation in quick succession from 2nd March, 2001 to 15th May, 2001. 2nd June, 2001 to 6th March, 2002 was the tenth occasion following ethnic tensions and political disarray, especially following the extension of the Naga ceasefire that led to a prolonged spell of President's Rule. On

24th February 2025, the President of India imposed President's Rule in Manipur following the resignation of Chief Minister N. Biren Singh amid escalating ethnic violence between the Meitei and Kuki communities. This marked the eleventh instance of President's Rule in the state. The decision was based on a report from the State governor and other information indicating that the State government could not function in accordance with constitutional provisions.

The imposition of the President's Rule led to mixed reactions. While Kuki-dominated hill districts welcomed the move, seeing it as an opportunity for peace and a step toward their demand for separate administration, Meitei-majority valley areas protested, viewing it as a betrayal of democratic principles. In the aftermath, the state assembly was placed under suspended animation, and the Central government took over administrative functions through the governor. The governor issued a seven-day ultimatum for all communities to surrender illegal weapons, promising no punitive action for compliance but strict measures for non-compliance. Despite these efforts, the State remained divided along ethnic lines, with ongoing displacement and humanitarian challenges affecting tens of thousands of people.

11.1.4. Article 352: National Emergency

Article 352 allows the President to declare a National Emergency if the security of India or any part thereof is threatened by war, external aggression, or armed rebellion. During a National Emergency, the Centre can assume vast powers, including the authority to direct the State governments on any matters, override State laws, and exercise executive powers in areas normally under State jurisdiction. However, this is a very extreme measure and has been used sparingly in India's history.

11.1.5. Article 263: Inter-State Council

Article 263 provides for the establishment of an Inter-State Council to investigate and discuss subjects of common interest between the Union

and the States or among the States themselves. Although not directly an intervention, it provides a constitutional mechanism for the Centre to engage with States, including Manipur, on matters affecting them and to promote cooperative federalism.

11.1.6. Governor's Role (Article 164 and Article 167)

The Governor of a State, appointed by the President, acts as a representative of the Central Government and has certain discretionary powers. The Governor can report to the President if he believes that the situation in the State has deteriorated to the extent that it is no longer possible to govern according to the Constitution, potentially leading to the invocation of Article 356.

11.1.7. Article 256 and Article 257: Control of the Union Over States

Article 256 obligates every State to ensure that its executive power is exercised in compliance with the laws made by Parliament and the Central Government's directions. Article 257 provides that the executive power of every State should not impede or prejudice the exercise of the executive power of the Union, and it allows the Centre to give directions to States as necessary.

11.2. Inadequate response from Central Government

The responses from the Central government have been woefully inadequate. The Prime Minister of the Country has not visited even once during this difficult period to engage directly with the people who have undergone enormous deprivation of property, suffered humongous volume of human rights violations and immense dimension of loss of lives. His first public comment on the situation came in July 2023, nearly two months after the violence began. In that Statement, he expressed pain and concern over the violence and assured the nation that peace would be restored. However, even in this instance, the reference to Manipur was brief, and he did not go into detail about the conflict or the specific steps

the Central Government was taking to address the crisis. Even in some of his speeches, Modi has spoken about the need for peace and harmony in the Northeast region as a whole, but without specifically mentioning Manipur or delving into the specifics of the ongoing ethnic conflict there. During the monsoon session of Parliament in July 2023, the opposition demanded a detailed discussion on Manipur, and while the issue was discussed, Prime Minister Modi did not address the Parliament specifically on the situation in Manipur. His focus was on other national issues.

His reticence could be on account of the fact that BJP's ascension to power in 2017, though in minority with 21 seats against Congress' 28 seats, came through some manipulations with smaller parties and independent MLAs. In 2022, the BJP bettered the tally to 32 in the 60-member assembly, and Congress seemed decimated with a low tally of 5. In the 2024 parliamentary election, his party candidates lost both the seats in the State to the Congress. Modi loves riding on a high crest of popularity with a show of invincibility and Modi's government often focuses on broader national issues like economic development, infrastructure projects, and foreign policy in public addresses. Manipur, being a regional issue, might not be emphasised as much in his national rhetoric. Given that the situation in Manipur has drawn some international attention, particularly regarding human rights concerns, the Prime Minister might be cautious about making Statements that could be scrutinised or criticised on a global stage.

The Home Minister visited the State in May 2023, 3 weeks after the violence erupted. He announced the formation of a Peace Committee composed of representatives from both the Meitei and Kuki communities, as well as civil society members, religious leaders, and retired officials. The purpose of this committee was to facilitate dialogue and build trust between the communities. He increased the deployment of security forces in the State to prevent further violence and maintain law and order but

they are perceived as obstructing peace and increasing human rights violations. He promised expedited relief and rehabilitation measures for those displaced by the violence. This included setting up relief camps, providing essential supplies, and beginning the process of rebuilding homes and infrastructure damaged during the conflict. The quality of reliefs is examined elsewhere in the report and hence not repeated here except to State that it is far from satisfactory. While Amit Shah's visit and the measures announced were seen as important steps towards de-escalation, the situation in Manipur remains complex, and the effectiveness of these strategies in bringing lasting peace is still uncertain. Indeed, the State is still in turmoil.

11.3. Complete distrust of State players

Biren Singh's government is crippled through policy paralysis. It just does not have answers for what has emerged to be an intransigent tangle. The Chief Minister is from the Meitei community and many believe that he was himself personally responsible for the inevitable situation that Manipur is in. He is being accused of partisanship and suspected to be soft on militant groups. It is even believed by some who spoke to us that the State police connived with some militant organisations like Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun. There were reports of selective targeting of Kuki homes and institutions, and discrepancies in the protection provided to different communities during the violence. While some of these perceptions are based on specific incidents and reports, others are tied to broader, more systemic issues in Manipur's political and social landscape.

Two things stand out : (i) The immediate cause for the conflagration was a direction by the Court to consider the plea of the Meitei representatives for restoring their tribal status and including them in ST notification. (ii) The fall out of the agitations have been pleas for autonomy in administration by Kukis. A decisive armistice between the warring

communities are essentially political decisions requiring issues of reservation in education and employment, and re-draft an executive and legislative strategy for the devolution of greater powers to hills councils. They are simply absent now. Peace initiatives must therefore come from another quarter.

11.4. Designing system for conflict resolution

11.4.1. Reconciliation in Manipur

The conflict in Manipur is deeply rooted in ethnic, political, and social issues. A conflict resolution program designed to address the situation needs to be comprehensive, inclusive, and sensitive to the complexities of the region. Cambodia's experience after the Khmer Rouge era offers a lesson to us of what could lie in store if it were to be only a half-hearted reconciliation process that could leave deep societal wounds, as political settlements failed to heal the trauma endured by the people. Manipur must not repeat this mistake. Imposing President's Rule as a mere stopgap measure to stabilize governance before the next elections does not address the root causes of violence and distrust. Without genuine reconciliation efforts at the grassroots level, any temporary political solution will only prolong instability rather than foster real peace.

In Cambodia, after the fall of Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, Cambodia did make some attempts at reconciliation and justice, but these efforts were slow, inconsistent, and often politically motivated. Many former Khmer Rouge leaders were indeed treated with leniency, and some even reintegrated into the government rather than being held accountable. In 1979, the new Vietnamese-backed government, led by Heng Samrin and Hun Sen, held a trial in absentia for Pol Pot and Ieng Sary, sentencing them to death. However, this trial was largely symbolic and did not lead to any real prosecutions, as most Khmer Rouge leaders had fled to remote areas or Thailand. The new government was more focused on

consolidating power and ending the civil war rather than conducting mass trials.

11.4.1.1. Critical appraisal of Cambodia's half-hearted attempt at reconciliation

Suzannah Linton's book, "Reconciliation in Cambodia" offers a multidisciplinary examination of transitional justice in Cambodia, focusing on the nation's efforts to address the atrocities committed during the Khmer Rouge era. The central theme revolves around understanding how Cambodia has navigated the complex process of reconciliation and justice in the aftermath of mass atrocities. Linton places Cambodia's reconciliation efforts within a global framework by comparing them to initiatives in countries like Chile, Argentina, Rwanda, South Africa, and East Timor. This comparative analysis highlights the unique challenges and commonalities in transitional justice processes worldwide. A significant portion of the book analyses data from a 2002 survey conducted by the Documentation Centre of Cambodia's magazine, *Searching for the Truth*. This survey provides insights into Cambodian citizens' attitudes toward accountability, forgiveness, revenge, and their visions for the future. The book delves into the difficulties Cambodia faces in achieving genuine reconciliation, including political influences, the integration of former Khmer Rouge members into society, and the delayed pursuit of justice. Several authors have also critically examined Cambodia's reconciliation efforts post-Khmer Rouge, highlighting inadequate political responses and the enduring impact on survivors.

11.4.1.2. Comparative Lessons from Cambodia & Manipur

Comparisons can be drawn between Cambodia's failure at deep reconciliation and the ongoing ethnic strife in Manipur between the Meiteis and Kukis. A key lesson from Cambodia's post-Khmer Rouge

experience is that without genuine reconciliation at the societal level, mere political changes—whether leadership shifts or central rule—cannot bring lasting peace. In Cambodia, different regimes (the Vietnamese-backed Heng Samrin-Hun Sen government, post-1991 governments) came to power, but deep-seated grievances and distrust remained. Similarly, in Manipur, replacing a chief minister or even imposing President's Rule will not automatically resolve ethnic hostilities. Without grassroots reconciliation, political changes often remain superficial and temporary. Cambodia prioritized political stability over full justice, allowing former Khmer Rouge members into power structures instead of fully prosecuting them. This led to resentment among victims. In Manipur, if the government only focuses on short-term political management (negotiations, military deployment, or even autonomy deals) without addressing past violence and grievances, the conflict may resurface periodically.

Cambodia's top-down peace process (such as the Paris Peace Accords of 1991) focused more on political elite agreements rather than healing local communities, leaving unresolved trauma. In Manipur, any long-term solution must go beyond political elite discussions and involve village-level reconciliation, inter-community dialogues, and truth-telling mechanisms. In Cambodia, many Khmer Rouge defectors were reintegrated but largely kept to themselves, leading to lingering parallel societies rather than true integration. In Manipur, some have suggested geographical segregation (creating separate administrative zones for Meiteis and Kukis). While this may reduce immediate violence, it could also lead to permanent division, making future reconciliation even harder. Like in Cambodia, merely changing political leaders or imposing Central rule (President's Rule) in Manipur will not resolve deep-seated ethnic divisions. Without genuine reconciliation efforts, cycles of violence and distrust will continue, regardless of who is in power.

Below is a framework for such a program, which identifies key stakeholders and provides a multi-layered dialogue process.

11.4.2. Relevance of Stakeholder Identification

There are multiple stakeholders who would all be required to be brought on board for discussion. Identifying stakeholders in a conflict resolution strategy is essential for ensuring that the process is inclusive, legitimate, and effective. It helps in understanding the conflict's root causes, addressing diverse interests, building trust, and creating sustainable peace. By considering the perspectives and needs of all stakeholders, a conflict resolution strategy is more likely to succeed in achieving a lasting and comprehensive resolution. Inclusivity is assured when all affected parties have a voice to articulate. This prevents the exclusion of key groups, which could lead to feelings of marginalisation and the potential for the conflict to reignite. Different stakeholders have different needs, concerns, and goals. Identifying them allows the strategy to address these diverse interests, which is critical for achieving a comprehensive and lasting resolution.

Stakeholders often have unique perspectives and insights into the underlying causes of the conflict. Engaging with them helps to build a more complete understanding of the conflict's origins and dynamics, which is essential for crafting effective solutions. Understanding the specific grievances of different stakeholders allows the conflict resolution strategy to target the issues that need to be addressed to prevent further escalation. When stakeholders are involved in the design and implementation of the conflict resolution process, they are more likely to feel a sense of ownership over the outcome. This increases the legitimacy of the process and the likelihood that stakeholders will commit to and respect the agreements reached. Stakeholders often possess resources—whether material, political, or social—that are critical for implementing the

conflict resolution strategy. Identifying these stakeholders early ensures that their resources can be effectively mobilised. Some stakeholders may have an interest in perpetuating the conflict or may oppose certain aspects of the resolution process. Identifying these potential "spoilers" allows for the development of strategies to address their concerns or mitigate their influence.

Identifying stakeholders helps in establishing communication channels between different groups. This is particularly important in complex conflicts where misunderstandings or lack of communication may exacerbate tensions. By bringing together diverse stakeholders, the conflict resolution process can foster cooperation and collaboration across group lines, helping to break down barriers and build a foundation for peace. Conflicts are often deeply rooted in local contexts, with unique cultural, social, and political dynamics. Engaging stakeholders helps to ensure that the conflict resolution strategy is tailored to the specific context, making it more relevant and effective. Conflicts are dynamic, and stakeholders' positions may change over time. Regularly identifying and engaging stakeholders allows the strategy to adapt to these changes, ensuring continued relevance and effectiveness.

Involving stakeholders from the beginning can foster long-term commitment to the peace process. When stakeholders see that their concerns have been addressed and that they have a role in the outcome, they are more likely to remain engaged in the post-conflict phase, supporting the implementation of peace agreements and contributing to long-term stability. Stakeholder identification often leads to the creation of inclusive governance structures that can manage future conflicts and ensure that peace is maintained over the long term.

11.4.3. Phase 1: Enumerating the Stakeholders in Manipur imbroglio

Most definitely, the main ethnic groups that are engaged in the conflict are the first to be identified. They are: the Meitei community who inhabit predominantly in the Imphal Valley has also strong cultural and political dominance. The Naga community spread across the hill districts, with strong ties to Naga groups in neighbouring Nagaland. They have had in the past in 1992, major conflicts with the Kukis for land ownership and territorial boundaries. Naga insurgent groups, such as the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), and Kuki militant factions have in the past engaged in guerrilla warfare, kidnappings, and targeted assassinations. Kuki-Zomi Communities, mostly occupying the hills, are the persons who are engaged in serious conflict with Meiteis and have also suffered human casualties and prodigious displacement from their homesteads and lands. These groups have their own distinct identity and grievances and their presence is of utmost relevance. There are other indigenous groups, who are sub-groups of Kukis, such as the theZomis, Hmars, Paites, Thadou, and Zou with specific local issues; Koms inhabiting Churachandpur and Senapati districts that have a mix of traditional animist and Christian beliefs; Maring, Anal and Moyon, Lamkang, Monsang and Koibu, who have Naga descent and affinity living mainly in Chandel district with distinct languages and dance forms and unique festivals. The Chiru tribe is found in the Imphal West and Tamenglong districts. They speak the Chiru language, which is related to the Kuki-Chin-Mizo languages. The Chiru have a distinct cultural identity and celebrate their own traditional festivals. Gangte, Aimol and Chothe speak their own distinct languages. Representatives from each of these tribes shall make the tribal representation comprehensive.

The State Government, the ruling establishment in Manipur, the Central Government, local political leaders from different communities, including MLAs, MPs and local bodies are also the most obvious among the

stakeholders. They are shapers of policies and their execution. Their actions make and break the people. The security forces, including the Indian army, Assam Rifles and the State police are perceived by all concerned as personnel tasked with enforcement of law and order and safeguarding internal borders. The responsibility of an all round outbreak of violence is easily placed at the doors of these forces, as their actions as well as omissions have a direct correlation to the condition of serious disquiet in the State.

The civil Society and Non-Governmental Organisations, women's organisations (e.g., Meira Paibi), and student unions, Human Rights Organizations, both local and national groups advocating for human rights and justice, Religious and Cultural Leaders who have significant influence within their communities are all key stakeholders.

By naming the Militant Groups and banning them, the government may signal their strong disapproval of their violent ways of settling scores and their irrational approaches but discarding them totally from discourse will bury chances of peace, which is in peril largely due to their way of attempting to find solutions. If they have demands for autonomy in administration, there is greater sense that must be brought into the dialogue for sustainable peace. Then, they are the adjoining States of Assam, Nagaland, and Mizoram, which have ethnic and cultural links to the communities in Manipur. Their representatives shall also make sense.

International Bodies: Potential involvement of the United Nations or other international organisations for monitoring or mediating the peace process.

11.4.4. Phase 2: Multi-Layered Dialogue Process

The above enumeration sets the tone for the next line of activity. They could not all be brought at the same time at the same negotiating table. We need to find appropriate fixes by pairing one or more among the stakeholders to carry on dialogues. The dialogue process shall be multi-tiered to ensure that all voices are heard and that solutions are crafted collaboratively.

11.4.5. Preliminary Acts

As a preliminary confidence-building measure, the priority actions shall centre around pushing for ‘Ceasefire Agreements or ‘Cessation of Hostilities’ between the main groups of Meiteis and Kukis represented through several of the stakeholders amongst them identified in the above paragraphs, with immediate focus on reducing violence through ceasefire agreements among the insurgent groups. Arms looted from armouries during the violence which began on 3rd May 2023 should be recovered. It is quite reassuring to note that this demand which was raised by Kuki groups initially is now also being articulated by well-meaning Meiteis who want the violence to end and law and order to be restored. Public Outreach Programs by launching initiatives to educate and engage the general public about the peace process and its goals shall serve the important purpose of anchoring responsibility amongst a fairly diffused cross section of the society, inform them about the process undertaken and give them the importance of being heard and allowed to participate. Organising ‘Inclusive Cultural Events’ that celebrate the diverse cultures of Manipur will help foster a sense of unity and shared heritage.

11.4.6. Community-Level Dialogues

a. Village and District Dialogues: Set up dialogues at the village and district levels where local leaders and community members can voice their concerns.

- b. Peace Committees: Establish peace committees comprising representatives from different communities to facilitate discussions and monitor local issues.
- c. Mediation by Civil Society: Engage local NGOs and civil society leaders to mediate between conflicting parties and provide neutral ground for discussions.
- d. Truth Commissions: The South African example⁴⁹⁴ setting up platforms for perpetrators of violence to come on stage, identify the neighbours they harmed and expression of heartfelt regret and seeking apologies enabled the hitherto warring communities to come to terms and amble hand in hand in full trust and camaraderie is worthy of replication.

11. 4.7. State-Level Dialogues

- a. Inter-Community Dialogue: Convene meetings between leaders of different ethnic groups to discuss grievances, security concerns, and mutual interests.***
- b. Involvement of State Government: The State government should act as a facilitator, ensuring that all voices are heard and that any resolutions are implemented effectively.
- c. Security Dialogue: Involve security forces in discussions about reducing violence and improving relations with local communities.

11. 4.8. National-Level Dialogues

- a. Union Government Mediation: The Indian Union government should play a mediating role, ensuring that the State's issues are addressed within the broader national context.
- b. Parliamentary Involvement: Engage members of Parliament from Manipur and neighbouring States in discussions to ensure that any solutions have broad political support.

⁴⁹⁴ See para 6.11 below.

c. Policy Reforms: Explore the possibility of legal or constitutional changes to address long-standing grievances, such as demands for greater autonomy or recognition of indigenous rights. This could consist of greater powers to the Hilly Areas Councils.

11.4.9. Militant Group Negotiations

- a. Peace Talks: Organise structured negotiations with insurgent groups under a neutral mediator, possibly with international observers.
- b. Rehabilitation Programs: Develop programs for the disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) of former militants into society.
- c. Amnesty Programs: Offer amnesty or reduced sentences for insurgents who agree to lay down arms and participate in the peace process.

11.4.10. International Involvement & Presence of interlocutors

- a. Monitoring by International Bodies: Involve international organisations to monitor the peace process, ensuring transparency and fairness.
- b. Human Rights Oversight: Engage international human rights organisations to oversee the protection of human rights throughout the process.
- c. There shall be rapporteurs who keep track of all conversations and document the trajectory in the conversations and the outcomes. Central to the discussions shall be neutrals who are experts in navigating parties through difficult conversations and resourceful enough to generate several alternatives to secure enduring solutions the way the parties deem fit.

11.4.11. Phase 3: Implementation and Monitoring

- a. Peacebuilding Task Force: Establish a task force comprising representatives from all stakeholder groups to oversee the implementation of agreements and recommendations.
- b. Regular Reporting: Create mechanisms for regular reporting on the progress of the peace process, with updates provided to all stakeholders.

c. Evaluation and Adaptation: Periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the dialogue process and make necessary adjustments to address emerging challenges.

4.12. Long-Term Peacebuilding Measures

a. Education and Awareness Programs: Implement educational programs that promote understanding and reconciliation among different communities.

b. Economic Development Initiatives: Focus on economic development in conflict-affected areas, creating jobs and improving infrastructure to reduce poverty and inequality.

c. Cultural Preservation: Support initiatives that preserve and promote the unique cultural heritage of Manipur's diverse communities.

11.5. Global Examples

There are several global examples where internecine conflicts, both within countries and among neighbouring countries, have been addressed through a variety of conflict resolution strategies. These examples can provide valuable lessons for other conflict situations, including the one in Manipur. Here are some notable cases:

11.5.1 Northern Ireland (The Good Friday Agreement, 1998)

Background:

The conflict in Northern Ireland, often referred to as "The Troubles," was a violent sectarian conflict between Unionists (primarily Protestant) who wanted Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom, and Nationalists (primarily Catholic) who sought unification with the Republic of Ireland.

Resolution Strategy:

- a. Multi-Party Negotiations: Inclusive talks involving the British and Irish governments, and representatives from the main political parties in Northern Ireland, including Sinn Féin, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army (IRA).
- b. Good Friday Agreement: The agreement established a devolved government for Northern Ireland, where power would be shared between the two communities. It also included provisions for disarmament, the release of political prisoners, and the creation of new cross-border institutions between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.
- c. Referendum: The agreement was ratified by referendums in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, ensuring broad public support.

Lessons Learned:

- a. Inclusivity: Bringing all relevant parties to the negotiating table, including those with militant backgrounds.
- b. Power-Sharing: Establishing political institutions that ensure all communities have a stake in governance.
- c. International Mediation: The involvement of external actors (the United States played a crucial role) can help mediate and support the peace process.

11.5.2. South Africa (End of Apartheid and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1990s)

Background:

- a. South Africa's apartheid regime enforced racial segregation and discrimination against the majority Black population. The African National Congress (ANC) led the resistance against the apartheid government.

Resolution Strategy:

- a. Negotiated Transition: The apartheid regime and the ANC engaged in prolonged negotiations that led to the dismantling of apartheid and the establishment of a democratic government.
- b. Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC): Chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the TRC was established to address the human rights abuses that occurred during apartheid. It offered a platform for victims to share their stories and perpetrators to confess their crimes in exchange for amnesty.
- c. Constitutional Reform: A new constitution was drafted that enshrined human rights and laid the foundation for a democratic South Africa.

Lessons Learned:

- a. Transitional Justice: Mechanisms like the TRC helped to heal the nation by promoting reconciliation rather than retribution.
- b. Negotiation and Compromise: Both sides made significant compromises to achieve peace.
- c. Institutional Reform: Establishing a new legal and political framework was essential for long-term stability.

11.5.3. Rwanda (Post-Genocide Reconciliation, 1994 onwards)

Background:

- a. The Rwandan genocide in 1994 saw the mass killing of the Tutsi population by extremist Hutu militias. The genocide left deep scars and a fractured society.

Resolution Strategy:

- a. Gacaca Courts: Traditional community courts were revived to try the vast number of cases related to the genocide. These courts focused on restorative justice, involving the community in the reconciliation process.

- b. National Unity and Reconciliation Commission: The government established this commission to promote unity, educate the population on the causes and effects of the genocide, and foster reconciliation.
- c. Social and Economic Development: The government prioritised rebuilding the country, focusing on economic growth, education, and reducing ethnic divisions.

Lessons Learned:

- a. Restorative Justice: Community-based justice mechanisms can play a crucial role in reconciliation.
- b. Strong Leadership: The Rwandan government, under President Paul Kagame, played a central role in guiding the nation through the post-genocide period.
- c. Economic Integration: Efforts to rebuild the economy and improve living standards helped to reduce ethnic tensions.

11.5.4. Colombia (Peace Process with FARC, 2016)

Background:

- a. Colombia faced a decades-long civil conflict involving the government, paramilitary groups, and leftist guerilla groups like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which sought to overthrow the government.

Resolution Strategy:

- a. Negotiated Peace: The Colombian government engaged in several years of peace talks with FARC in Havana, Cuba, facilitated by international actors including Norway and Cuba.
- b. Comprehensive Agreement: The peace agreement included provisions for disarmament, land reform, political participation for former rebels, and the establishment of a transitional justice system to address war crimes.

c. Referendum and Implementation: Although the initial referendum on the peace deal was narrowly rejected, a revised agreement was later ratified by the Colombian Congress.

Lessons Learned:

- a. Persistence: Peace processes can be lengthy and require perseverance even after setbacks like a failed referendum.
- b. Inclusion of Former Combatants: Providing former rebels with a role in the political process can help ensure the sustainability of peace.
- c. International Support: External mediation and support can facilitate peace talks.

11.5.5. Bosnia and Herzegovina (Dayton Agreement, 1995)

Background:

- a. The Bosnian War (1992-1995) was a brutal conflict involving Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), Croats, and Serbs. It was marked by ethnic cleansing and widespread atrocities.

Resolution Strategy:

- a. Dayton Accords: The peace agreement, brokered by the United States in Dayton, Ohio, ended the war by creating a complex political structure that divided Bosnia into two autonomous entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (mainly Bosniak and Croat) and the Republika Srpska (mainly Serb).
- b. Power-Sharing: The agreement established a power-sharing arrangement at the national level, with a rotating presidency and representation for all three ethnic groups.
- c. International Oversight: The agreement included provisions for a significant international presence in Bosnia, including a peacekeeping force and the Office of the High Representative to oversee the implementation of the peace deal.

Lessons Learned:

- a. Power-Sharing in a Divided Society: The creation of autonomous entities within a single State can be an effective solution for deeply divided societies.
- b. International Involvement: International oversight and peacekeeping forces can be crucial in stabilising post-conflict situations.
- c. Challenges of Ethnic Division: While the Dayton Agreement ended the war, Bosnia remains ethnically divided, highlighting the challenges of achieving true reconciliation in such contexts.
- d. These examples demonstrate that while each conflict is unique, common strategies for resolving internecine conflicts include inclusive dialogue, power-sharing arrangements, restorative justice mechanisms, and international mediation. The key is to design a process that is context-specific, addressing the root causes of the conflict and involving all relevant stakeholders in the pursuit of a sustainable peace.

11.6. Court Interventions

11.6.1 The Supreme Court's suo motu action and the aftermath

The video clip showing two women being paraded naked during the Manipur violence surfaced online on July 19, 2023. The clip, which quickly went viral, depicted a horrifying incident that occurred on May 4, 2023. The video's release sparked widespread outrage across India and internationally, drawing significant attention to the ongoing violence and the plight of the victims in the State. The incident highlighted the severe human rights violations occurring in the State and the failure of the State machinery to protect vulnerable groups, particularly women. On July 20, 2023, the day after the video surfaced, the Supreme Court of India took *suo motu* cognizance of the incident. The then Chief Justice of India (CJI), D.Y. Chandrachud, expressed deep concern over the incident and Stated that the Court would not stand by as a "mute spectator" to such atrocities.

The CJI directed both the central and State governments to take immediate steps to address the situation and ensure the protection of the victims. The Supreme Court demanded an explanation from the Manipur government regarding the delayed action against the perpetrators and asked for a status report on the investigation. The Court also made it clear that it expected swift action and accountability, warning that it would step in if the State failed to act. The Supreme Court's *suo motu* action significantly heightened the scrutiny on the handling of the Manipur violence, particularly with respect to the protection of women and other vulnerable groups. The Court's proactive stance also led to intensified pressure on the State and Central governments to address the broader issues of law and order and human rights violations in the region.

The Supreme Court's intervention in the Manipur conflict was primarily driven by a series of writ petitions filed by various organisations, activists, and individuals, rather than *suo motu* (on its own motion) action. These petitions were largely focused on the deteriorating law and order situation, human rights violations, and the failure of the State machinery to protect the lives and property of citizens. The petitions urged the Court to ensure the protection of human rights, proper investigation into incidents of violence, and the safeguarding of displaced persons. They also called for the accountability of the State government and law enforcement agencies. Reports of severe human rights violations, including sexual violence, extrajudicial killings, and the displacement of thousands of people, were brought to the Court's attention through these petitions. The failure of the State to control the violence and the perceived bias in the actions of law enforcement agencies were significant concerns raised by the petitioners. The petitions expressed a lack of confidence in the local police and other State authorities to conduct impartial investigations into the violence. This led to demands for the involvement of central agencies like the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the creation of Special Investigation Teams (SITs) under the supervision of the Court.

In response to these petitions, the Supreme Court took a proactive role in monitoring the situation, directing the State government to take specific actions, and ensuring that investigations were conducted fairly and impartially. The Court also sought regular updates from the State government and constituted special committees to oversee the distribution of relief and rehabilitation efforts. A Committee under the chairmanship of Justice Gita Mittal has been constituted by the Supreme Court of India to oversee the humanitarian and rehabilitation efforts in Manipur amidst the ethnic conflict that began in May 2023. The committee's mandate included monitoring the conditions in relief camps, ensuring the proper distribution of aid, and safeguarding the rights and welfare of those affected by the violence.

A delegation of six Supreme Court judges visited the state on 22nd March, 2025, to assess the situation and bolster legal and humanitarian support for the affected communities. The delegation, led by Justice B.R. Gavai, included Justices Surya Kant, Vikram Nath, M.M. Sundresh, K.V. Viswanathan, and N. Kotiswar Singh. Their visit coincided with the duodecennial (12-year) celebration of the High Court of Manipur.

11.6.2. Key Initiatives and Actions:

- Legal and Medical Aid: Justice Gavai, serving as the Executive Chairman of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), virtually inaugurated legal services camps and medical camps across all districts of Manipur. New legal aid clinics were also opened in Imphal East, Imphal West, and Ukhrul districts. These initiatives aim to connect internally displaced persons (IDPs) with government welfare programs, ensuring access to healthcare,

pensions, employment schemes, and assistance in reconstructing lost identity documents.

- **Medical Support:** A team of 25 specialized doctors from Chennai conducted medical camps across all relief camps, providing sustained medical support, treatment, and essential medicines to displaced families.
- **Distribution of Relief Materials:** The judges distributed essential relief materials to IDPs during their visit, emphasizing the judiciary's commitment to supporting affected communities.
- **Community Engagement:** Justice Gavai addressed the displaced individuals in Churachandpur district, assuring them that “peace will return to the state soon” and encouraging faith in the constitution.

11.6.3. Judicial Oversight and Directions:

- **Property Damage Assessment:** The Supreme Court directed the Manipur government to submit detailed reports on properties that were burnt, looted, or encroached upon during the violence. The court emphasized the need for the state to address the grievances of displaced persons and take steps to restore their properties .
- **Extension of Oversight Committee:** The tenure of the committee overseeing relief and rehabilitation in Manipur, headed by retired Justice Gita Mittal, was extended until July 31, 2025. This committee continues to monitor aspects beyond investigation, such as relief, rehabilitation, and compensation for those affected .

This visit by the Supreme Court judges underscores the judiciary's proactive role in addressing the humanitarian crisis in Manipur, ensuring that affected individuals receive necessary legal and medical assistance, and that steps are taken towards restoring peace and normalcy in the region.

11.6.4. Gita Mittal Committee Reports

The key findings and recommendations of the Committee have been highlighted in Chapter X. In particular, the committee highlighted the deplorable conditions in many relief camps, pointing out overcrowding, lack of basic amenities like clean water, sanitation, and medical facilities. It expressed concern over the spread of diseases due to poor hygiene and insufficient healthcare services. The committee recommended immediate improvements to the infrastructure and living conditions in these camps, emphasising the need for better coordination between the State authorities and humanitarian agencies. The reports stressed the particular vulnerabilities of women, children, and the elderly in the conflict. It noted instances of sexual violence, trafficking, and other forms of exploitation that had occurred during the conflict. The committee has called for the establishment of specialised support systems for these groups, including trauma counselling, legal aid, and secure housing. The committee has emphasised the importance of a structured rehabilitation and resettlement plan for those displaced by the violence. It has criticised the lack of a clear strategy from the State government and urged the development of long-term solutions to reintegrate displaced persons into their communities or new safe areas.

The committee has recommended the provision of compensation, access to livelihood opportunities, and education for children as part of the rehabilitation efforts. The Gita Mittal Committee reports highlighted the need for accountability for the violence and human rights abuses that occurred. It has recommended that ongoing investigations be expedited and that justice be served to the victims through proper legal processes. The committee also underscored the need for transparency in the actions of law enforcement agencies and urged the State to restore faith in the rule of law by taking decisive action against perpetrators. The committee has pointed out significant gaps in the coordination between various government agencies, both at the State and Central levels, which hindered effective response to the crisis. It called for a more unified approach to

managing relief and rehabilitation efforts. It also suggested the involvement of civil society organisations and local communities in the planning and implementation of rehabilitation programs.

The reports have been impactful in the sense that the findings and recommendations of the Gita Mittal Committee have been instrumental in guiding the Supreme Court's directives to the State and Central governments regarding the ongoing situation in Manipur. The committee's work has brought to light the dire humanitarian situation and the urgent need for effective intervention to restore normalcy and protect the rights of those affected by the conflict.

11.7. Financial & Legal Aids

11.7.1. Financial compensation

As per the status report submitted to the Supreme Court, the State has disbursed ₹5 crores specifically to the Women Victims Compensation Fund. This fund is managed by the Manipur State Legal Services Authority (MASLSA) and aims to provide financial relief to women who have been victims of sexual assault or other crimes during the conflict. The government is also providing ₹1,000 monthly to each individual residing in relief camps. This initiative is meant to assist those displaced by the violence with basic needs. In response to the displacement, the government has facilitated the recreation of Aadhaar cards for those in relief camps. So far, 3,928 Aadhaar cards have been issued, ensuring that displaced individuals retain access to essential services.⁴⁹⁵

No one can dispute or contest that there is a need to initiate a comprehensive dialogue process in Manipur by creating a congenial and convivial process and atmosphere to bring the varied ethnic groups

⁴⁹⁵ The Daily Guardian, November 23, 2023

together to begin the long journey for peace and harmony in Manipur. We present in the next section the contours of such a peace building and reconciliation process.

11.8. Promoting Peace and Social Cohesion in Manipur

11.8.1. An alternative, yet Comprehensive Strategy⁴⁹⁶

What is suggested in this portion is alternative but is not mutually exclusive to the design for conflict resolution suggested in the previous section. There may be areas of overlap. They can be assimilated into the dialogue process proposed to be administered in the previous section or tried as an independent exercise. In recent years, Manipur has grappled with significant tensions and violence rooted in ethnic and communal conflicts. These challenges demand robust, multifaceted strategies to foster peace, healing, and unity among the diverse communities inhabiting the region. This part outlines a comprehensive approach that incorporates establishing peace monitoring committees, identifying early warning signs of violence, implementing restorative justice frameworks, utilizing social media for peace promotion, preventing the weaponization of religion, promoting civic engagement, crafting a narrative for positive peace, facilitating social healing and trauma recovery, implementing an active listening framework to encourage inter-community dialogue, creating circles of support for victims and circles of hope, and ensuring equitable resource distribution to endure durable peace.

11.8.2. Establishing Peace Monitoring Committees

One foundational strategy for promoting peace is the establishment peace monitoring committees. Comprised of representatives from various

⁴⁹⁶ This section owes mainly to a note dated 29th November, 2024, prepared by Prof. Gladston Xavier, Department of Social Work, Loyola College, Chennai and an expert in Conflict Resolution and Peace Building.

communities, including Meitei, Kuki, and others, these committees will have a clear mandate focused on monitoring violence, fostering dialogue, and facilitating cooperation. By ensuring diverse representation, these committees can adequately address the varied perspectives and needs within the community.

The role of the committees includes creating a zero-tolerance policy toward violence, emphasizing that violent actions are never acceptable. Establishing rapid response teams with trained mediators can provide immediate intervention in situations flagged by early warning systems. Furthermore, the committees can engage communities through regular assessments, establishing grassroots monitoring groups to identify potential triggers for violence.

11.8.3. Identifying Early Warning Signs of Violence

To effectively prevent violence, it is vital to identify the "smoke signals" that precede violent outbursts. Developing community-based early warning systems allows groups to monitor tensions and instances of hate speech. Regular assessments can help gauge sentiments within communities, while grassroots leaders can facilitate open communication.

Conflict resolution training and community dialogue forums can better equip individuals to address disputes peacefully, reinforcing positive interactions among community members. Such proactive measures are critical in preventing escalation before conflicts erupt.

11.8.4. Implementing Restorative Justice Frameworks

A restorative justice framework is essential for addressing grievances and promoting healing. By prioritizing the needs of victims and holding

offenders accountable through dialogue, communities can begin to mend fractured relationships. Establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) allows for a meaningful truth-telling process where victims and perpetrators can share their experiences, fostering accountability and understanding.

This framework should educate communities about their rights and the importance of justice in the reconciliation process. Supporting community-led restorative actions, such as public apologies and joint projects, can encourage local healing and foster trust. Importantly, legal safeguards must be in place to support these initiatives, ensuring victims can seek redress through established channels.

11.8.5 Facilitating Social Healing and Dealing with Trauma

Addressing trauma is crucial in fostering social healing and moving communities from revenge to reconciliation. Initiatives that focus on trauma-informed care can help individuals process their experiences and emotions related to violence and conflict. These programs should provide psychological support, counselling, and community workshops designed to promote personal and collective healing.

Creating safe spaces for individuals to share their stories fosters empathy and understanding, essential for healing relationships. Engaging local leaders and mental health professionals to conduct workshops on coping strategies can empower citizens to manage trauma constructively.

Building community resilience through collective healing practices—such as rituals, storytelling, and art therapy—can facilitate a shared recovery process. These initiatives not only address individual traumas but also

contribute to rekindling community bonds that may have been damaged by conflict.

11.8.6. Implementing an Active Listening Framework

An active listening framework is critical for creating a platform for inter-community dialogue that redresses the cartography of violence in Manipur. This framework prioritizes listening over speaking, encouraging participants to genuinely hear and understand the experiences and perspectives of others.

Key elements of the active listening framework include:

1. Structured Dialogue Sessions: Organize regular dialogue sessions where community members can openly share their experiences, fears, and hopes in a safe and respectful environment. These sessions should prioritize participation from various community representatives, ensuring that all voices are heard.
2. Trained Facilitators: Employ trained facilitators to guide discussions, ensuring that conversations remain constructive and focused. Facilitators can help manage emotions, encourage participation, and ensure the dialogue remains respectful.
3. Listening Circles: Implement listening circles where participants can share their narratives without interruption. Each person should have the opportunity to share while others listen empathetically, fostering a deeper understanding of differing perspectives.

4. Feedback Mechanisms: After dialogue sessions, incorporate feedback mechanisms to assess how participants felt about the discussions. This allows for continuous improvement of the dialogue process and ensures community members feel valued and heard.
5. Actionable Outcomes: Identify actionable outcomes from the dialogue sessions that can be implemented collaboratively by the communities. This emphasizes the importance of moving from words to action, thereby reinforcing trust and cooperation among communities.

By fostering an environment of empathy and understanding through active listening, communities can collaboratively redraw the cartography of violence, replacing it with a map of coexistence and mutual respect.

11.8.7. Creating Circles of Support for Victims

To address the needs of those directly affected by violence, establishing circles of support for victims is essential. These circles can provide emotional and psychological assistance, allowing victims to share their experiences in a confidential and supportive environment. Such circles can include:

- a. Peer Support Groups: Facilitate peer-led support groups where victims can connect and share their feelings, challenges, and healing journeys. This shared experience can foster solidarity and reduce feelings of isolation.

- b. Counseling Services: Partner with mental health professionals to provide counseling within these circles, ensuring that victims have access to professional support as they navigate their trauma.
- c. Skill-Building Workshops: Organize workshops that focus on resilience-building, coping mechanisms, and empowerment. These workshops can help victims regain a sense of agency and control over their lives.

By actively supporting victims, communities can begin the process of collective healing, helping individuals transform their pain into paths for peace.

11.8.8. Establishing Circles of Hope

In addition to circles of support, creating circles of hope can inspire communities to envision a future rooted in peace and collaboration. Circles of hope focus on forward-looking dialogues that emphasize shared dreams, aspirations, and possibilities. Key components include:

- a. Visioning Workshops: Conduct workshops where community members collaboratively imagine a peaceful future. These sessions can facilitate a sense of ownership over the peace process and motivate individuals to work towards their shared goals.
- b. Future-Oriented Narratives: Encourage storytelling focused on hope and healing rather than despair and division. Highlighting examples of successful reconciliation and community cooperation can inspire others to follow suit.

- c. Creative Expression: Utilize artistic expression, including music, drama, and visual arts, to convey messages of hope. Creative practices can engage diverse community members and spark discussions about building a united future.

By fostering circles of hope, communities can encourage a shift in mindset from surviving conflict to actively building a peaceful and inclusive society.

11.8.9. Using Moral Imagination to Build Peace

Harnessing moral imagination involves encouraging individuals and communities to envision a world different from the current reality marked by conflict. It allows participants to empathize with others' situations and understand the broader implications of their actions. Implementing moral imagination can include:

- a. Empathy Workshops: Organize workshops that challenge participants to step into the shoes of others, especially those from different communities. This practice promotes understanding and compassion, essential for healing and reconciliation.
- b. Inclusive Storytelling: Facilitate storytelling sessions that encourage community members to share their diverse experiences, values, and cultural practices. By acknowledging and respecting different perspectives, communities can cultivate empathy and mutual respect.
- c. Theatre for Transformation: Utilize theatre as a means of fostering dialogue and understanding among diverse communities. Performances can highlight shared human experiences and cultural plurality, emphasizing the common good while encouraging critical

reflection on societal issues. This artistic medium can serve as a potent tool for social change, sparking conversations that transcend boundaries of identity.

- d. Conflict Transformation Education: Provide education on conflict transformation that emphasizes the importance of understanding underlying issues and seeking collaborative solutions rather than perpetuating cycles of violence.

By integrating moral imagination into peace-building efforts, communities can move beyond entrenched narratives and stereotypes, opening pathways toward genuine understanding and coexistence.

11.8.10. Ensuring Equitable Resource Distribution

Ensuring equitable resource distribution is vital for promoting the collective good within communities. Addressing systemic inequalities that exacerbate tensions requires proactive measures to guarantee that all communities have access to basic necessities and opportunities. Key initiatives can include:

1. Access to Education and Employment: Programs must aim to provide equal access to educational resources and job opportunities for all communities, regardless of their ethnic or religious backgrounds. This approach can help reduce feelings of marginalization and resentment.
2. Healthcare Initiatives: Establish equitable healthcare services that can address the specific health needs of different communities, ensuring that healthcare is accessible, affordable, and culturally sensitive.

3. Community Development Projects: Implement community development initiatives focused on improving infrastructure, providing social services, and enhancing overall quality of life across all communities. These projects can foster collaboration and interdependence.

By focusing on equitable resource distribution, communities can build trust and a sense of shared purpose, diminishing competition for resources and promoting a unified approach to collective well-being.

11.8.11. Utilizing Social Media as a Tool for Peace

Social media presents a powerful platform for promoting peace and countering divisiveness. Positive campaigns on these platforms can share stories of coexistence, amplify peaceful messages, and engage a broad audience. Collaborating with local influencers can enhance outreach, while interactive content can stimulate meaningful conversations around conflict resolution.

Social media for peace initiatives specifically target the sharing of constructive narratives. Such initiatives can include:

1. Peace Campaigns: Launch campaigns that highlight positive interactions among different communities, showcasing examples of cooperation and understanding.
2. Fact-Checking Initiatives: Partner with local fact-checking organizations to verify and clarify harmful misinformation before it spreads, possibly through a dedicated platform or utilizing existing resources.
3. Community Engagement: Foster collective participation through online forums, encouraging users to share experiences and perspectives that promote understanding.

To combat misinformation, educational resources should teach community members how to spot unreliable information. Media literacy programs can help individuals critically evaluate sources, thus preventing the spread of divisive messages that may lead to conflict.

11.8.12. Preventing the Weaponization of Religion

Exploitative narratives that use religion to incite hatred and division are significant concerns that must be addressed. Promoting interfaith dialogues on social media fosters mutual respect and understanding among different religious communities. Counter-narratives that highlight the peaceful teachings within religions can serve as a powerful tool against divisive rhetoric.

Creating mechanisms for individuals to report hate speech and divisive content promotes accountability. Additionally, social media campaigns against political leaders and parties that employ divisive tactics for electoral gain can generate social pressure for ethical campaigning.

11.8.13. Promoting Civic Engagement and Secular Values

To counteract divisive political tactics, promoting civic education is essential. Campaigns aimed at empowering citizens to vote based on policy rather than identity or religious affiliation can help create a more informed electorate. Advocating for transparency in political campaigns encourages candidates to remain accountable to their communities, mitigating the appeal of divisive strategies.

Engaging the public in discussions about secular values as enshrined in the Indian Constitution fosters an inclusive environment. By identifying

shared interests and common goals, communities can mobilize toward a narrative rooted in collaboration rather than division.

11.8.14. Crafting a New Narrative for Positive Peace

Creating a new narrative that emphasizes positive peace is crucial for fostering long-term stability. Through storytelling initiatives, individuals can share personal experiences of reconciliation and cooperation, reinforcing a culture of empathy. Media engagement that highlights successful peacebuilding efforts can reshape public perception and challenge prevailing narratives of fear and division.

In addition, campaigns emphasizing the benefits of diversity and coexistence can encourage open communication and trust. Incorporating peace education into school curricula can nurture an understanding of conflict resolution, civic responsibility, and the importance of shared narratives among younger generations.

11.8.15. Continuous Monitoring and Adaptation

Lastly, to ensure the effectiveness of these strategies, continuous monitoring and evaluation are necessary. Regularly assessing engagement with peace initiatives can inform future actions, while community feedback mechanisms enable adaptation to shifting circumstances.

By implementing these comprehensive strategies, communities in Manipur can cultivate an environment conducive to peace, healing, and social cohesion. Through collaborative efforts between local leaders, community members, and political actors, it is possible to build a shared future founded on mutual respect, understanding, and coexistence.

Chapter 12: Summing Up

As of July, 2025, more than 26 months have passed since 3rd May, 2023, when the ethnic violence first erupted. The state of Manipur still remains a disturbed state – far away from normalcy and peace. Though Biren Singh, the former Chief Minister under whose watch the conflict burst and simmered for unconscionably long periods, has resigned, and President's Rule has been imposed, there appears to be little interest, concern or political will to bring back normalcy to the state. More than 60,000 people from the affected communities, including both the Meiteis and Kukis, still live in abysmal conditions in relief camps scattered across the state. They lead precarious lives without any hope of returning to normalcy, to the safety of their homes or the security of their livelihoods. The state continues to be divided into Meitei and Kuki regions with almost no movement for either community across each other's territories. This sharpens an already pervasive rural-urban divide between the hills and the valley which manifests in health, nutritional, educational and income disparities between the hill-based Kukis and the valley-bound Meiteis. During the last 2 years, countless patients have been deprived of critical medical care just as innumerable students have lost valuable years in their education. Uncertainty hangs over their futures, with no respite available in the present. Accountability for crimes committed, as documented in this Report, have become a metaphorical chimera. The prospect of fixing 'responsibility' for the crimes and suffering appears bleak, caught as it is in between an overburdened judiciary, on one hand, and an unwillingness of the political executive to enforce the rule of law in a neutral, independent and fair manner, on the other.

However, this report goes beyond the confines of fact-finding and demanding accountability from the State. More than anything, it has sought to give the people of Manipur, a platform to share their

experiences of the strife and violence they have been subjected to over the last 2 years. Affected people from both Kuki and Meitei communities have recollected their sense of insecurity in being uprooted and displaced, while articulating the indignity, fears and insecurity they faced during their exile in relief camps. More than cries of protest, these testimonies have been pleas to be seen, heard and acknowledged by the rest of India and the world. This was the reason behind constituting an independent Jury as part of a Citizen's Tribunal. First, to objectively record the people's disappointment with the State of Manipur and the sense of betrayal they felt in how state agencies responded to the conflict. Second, to sensitively recount the misery inflicted on both sides in the scourge of violence, as well as the sense of collective despair at the state of ethnic relations, fractured at best, irreparable at worst. Third, to honestly report both communities' cry for justice and yearning for peace as also to spotlight the numerous acts of courage and compassion extended by members of the conflicting communities towards one another during the height of the violence and thereafter.

The various sections of this Report have highlighted at great length, varied dimensions and issues underlying the conflict of the last 2+ years. In this concluding chapter, we don't intend to enumerate all of them; instead we shall summarize the findings presented above into 4 broad themes and end with key raising questions on assigning accountability as well as charting out a possible way forward towards rehabilitation and reconciliation.

12.1. Manufacturing hatred and sowing the seeds of violence

As is amply clear from Chapter-6 (Tracing the Causes), the outbreak of violence on 3rd May, 2023 was not triggered by any one isolated incident or the other; instead it was the culmination of a series of long-festering

conflicts that were systematically and strategically exploited to build up the animosity and brutality that was witnessed once the conflict burst out violently on 3rd May, 2023. This raises a set of troubling questions: If the conflict was orchestrated, who all created the context and were responsible for fomenting and orchestrating events for the conflict to burst out so violently? What were the means they adopted and how did they go unnoticed for so long, or was a blind eye turned to them on purpose?

One of the earliest fissures between the Kukis and Meiteis is that of history and geography. Who settled in Manipur first, who came in later? Who are the original inhabitants, who all came in as refugees from Myanmar under the Free-movement regime (FMR)? As highlighted in Chapter-6, these questions became the basis for building up a narrative of first ‘refugees’, then ‘illegal immigrants’ and finally ‘narco-terrorists’ by the Meitei-dominated government and the media against the Kukis. Under the guise of spreading fear of drug-trade, arms-smuggling and illegal occupation of forest land, the FMR was scrapped by the Manipur government as early as 2021 and since then the propaganda peddling only intensified. By 2023, an air of open hostility had been normalized between the Meiteis and Kukis, with provocative fake news and fierce debates doing regular rounds in both print and digital media (Chapter-7). Though fringe elements on either side would engage and benefit from fomenting social divides, the projection of Kukis as being anti-social, anti-national and responsible for narco-terrorism was at an all-time high. This not only created mistrust between the two communities but also sowed the seeds of hatred, months and years before 2023.

This hatred and polarization was further intensified socio-culturally by ‘Sanamahi’ revivalist groups such as the Arambai Tenggol and the Meitei Leepun. On the face of it, these groups claimed to be working for social service and cultural revival of ‘Sanamahism’, the Meiteis’ original religion,

before their King officially embraced Hinduism in the 18th century. But internally, these organizations were breeding grounds for religious extremists who assumed the status of a radicalized, armed militia under the patronage of the then Chief Minister, Biren Singh. Apart from spreading religious propaganda, fear-mongering and sowing discontent against the Kukis, who primarily followed Christianity, these groups also targeted Meiteis who had converted into Christianity. One pastor had to flee to West Bengal when Meitei mobs threatened to kill him like Jesus while two Christian media personalities were summoned to meet Biren Singh after they publicly discussed their faith (Section 4.6). Before long, these groups openly started threatening the political executive and bypassing the law and order mechanism in Manipur. In the run-up to the violence of 3rd May, 2023, these groups were clashing routinely with the police and the army as they were raiding state armories for weapons and mass-recruiting Meitei youth for so-called ‘self defence against the Kukis’ as described by Biren Singh in interviews (Section 5.4.1). The nexus between these religious-revivalist groups and the Meitei-dominated government under Biren Singh bears unmistakable resemblance to the nexus between the RSS (and Sangh parivar) to the Narendra Modi-led BJP government at the centre. So it is of little surprise that the Arambai Tenggol and the Meitei Leepun were not only formed by BJP MPs and former ABVP members (Section 4.6) but that many of their camps in Manipur were run by RSS members, especially from Karnataka (Section 5.10.1). It is a matter of concern that even as of date, it is the claim of the RSS that it is their pracharaks or volunteers, who are working in every part of Manipur state to bring normalcy and peace whereas the government agencies are conspicuous by their absence in the process of building rapprochement and dialogue.

The final nail in the coffin of ethnic relations between Kukis and Meiteis was rooted in the political-economy of reserve forests and mineral deposits in Manipur. Building up the narrative of Kukis as illegal immigrants was further weaponized by the Manipur government to

illegally displace the indigenous Kukis from their ancestral forest lands. Following the enactment of several key mineral and mining regulation policies in Manipur, the Geological Survey of India conducted expansive surveys to ascertain the location of heavy mineral deposits along hilly areas containing 80% Christian population spread across Kukis and Meiteis, with the former being the majority. Thus, it became clear that these areas would be the hotbed for corporate, industrial interests in the coming years. Undoubtedly, the Meiteis who comprised the economic and political elites of Manipur wanted to pocket all the profits from future mining operations for themselves. To facilitate that, Biren Singh's government turned a new leaf in the playbook of capitalist extraction and eviction using a two-stage method. The initial stage was marked with ad hoc declarations of tribal-occupied lands as reserve forest lands and forcibly evicting the native Kuki dwellers, one village at a time. This operation was legitimized not only by the illegal immigrant narrative but also by the facade of environmental conservation. The later stage would be ushered in by granting the Meiteis ST status, thereby giving them legal access to occupy, extract and trade in many of these newly declared reserved forests as well as other adjoining hilly areas, where both Kukis and Nagas reside. Under the guise of saving a swelling Meitei population from overcrowding Imphal valley, this move sought to give Biren and Singh and his Meitei ministers control over thousands of hectares of untouched mineral and timber-rich land to be given to the Corporate interests of India.

The controversial Manipur High Court order of 27th March, 2023 recommending ST status be given to the Meiteis and the strong state-wide pushback by both Kukis and Nagas against the demand of the Meiteis, offered an opportune moment to both the then Chief Minister as also the groups encouraged, supported and armed by him, the Arambai Tengol and Meitei Leepun to force a physical confrontation on the issue. While multiple flashpoints erupted between the protesting groups, matters had come to a critical boil as the day of the Tribal Solidarity March called by

ATSUM on 3rd May, 2023 arrived. Very clearly, a lot of planning went behind the confrontation that erupted at Churachandpur on that day near the Anglo-Kuki War Memorial gate, where leaders of the AT and ML were gathered in the presence of police. And all hell broke loose thereafter, as a convergence of the multiple fissures and faultlines between Kukis and Meiteis that were deepened and exacerbated over time burst in a long, intense phase of brutal violence across the state.

A poignant question remains: Why did the state not respond firmly, forcefully and without taking sides? Two further queries arise: Who gained from the violence? What was gained?

12.2. Abdication of State responsibility and continuation of violence

From the previous section, it is clear that the long smouldering embers of mistrust and enmity between the Kukis and Meiteis were meticulously fanned into flames. So it appears reasonable that the intensity and scale of violence that unfolded at the ATSUM rally on 3rd May, 2023 was as horrific and graphic as it turned out to be. But what if one was not content with just fanning the flames, but instead wanted to turn it into a firestorm? What if one not only hurled jet-streams of air that made the flames roar fiercer still, but kept on pouring gasoline instead of water, so it would never be extinguished? Such has been the case with the outbreak of violence in Manipur. With carefully orchestrated escalations that ensured flashpoints between the Meiteis and the tribal protestors at the rally went well past the point of no return. And unwritten, unofficial commands that turned state actors in charge of preserving law and order into silent bystanders at best, merciless warmongers at worst, perpetually keeping the conflict alive. One is forced to ask, who all would wield such power to prevent the State from containing the violence? More importantly, how

would they benefit from keeping an ethnic war alive, and can they be held accountable?

An overwhelming body of evidence (Chapter-4) shows how the violence of 3rd May was pre—planned and was not an instantaneous outburst of long-festering hatred and intolerance of one group towards the other. Instances like geo-tagging and marking out houses to be razed in villages (Section 4.3.3) to the pre-emptive deployment of Rapid Action Forces in Imphal before the riots even started (Section 4.2.7) bear testament to the active role played by state and non-state actors in instigating mass hysteria and violence. And if this was not damning enough, the chiefs of Arambai Tenggol and Metei Leepun were caught on live television, admitting to have been in Churachandpur and claiming to having been prepared for an attack days before the 3rd of May (Section 4.4.1). Such brazen display of collusion towards inciting violence leaves one wondering about the glaring intelligence failure on behalf of the State. Either the State agencies were so blindsided that they could not intercept and intervene in time, or they did not want to. A third possibility is that they were not allowed to.

Dozens of survivors of violence testify to the inaction of state actors like the police and the army during the peak of the violence as well as during its aftermath. One deponent shared how she kept calling the police for help and after many tries she got through to an officer who told her that they were given orders by the CM to not go out into the streets. Another deponent mentioned having gotten through to an IPS officer who wanted to help but did not have any guns at his disposal and hence could not intervene. The armed forces were not spared of the subversion either. A High Court advocate testified that both the central government and the local administration did not seek any assistance from the army under Section-371, CrPC. Rather, unwritten instructions were passed down the ranks instructing the army to not act. Such practices constitute a gross violation of procedure established by law and are punishable offences.

Any officer of the State is not bound by such illegal instructions and a question of command responsibility arises additionally. This means, the superior officers are equally liable for their subordinates abdicating their duties on the superior's command. However, despite the absence of official instructions, many army units posted near hotbeds of violence often carried out rescue and relief operations on their own in good faith. Such moves were perceived by either ethnic group as being partial to the other, and vice versa. An example of this comes in the form of claims made by Kuki organizations against a Meitei Commanding Officer of the Assam Rifles, who allegedly helped Arambai Tenggol attack Kuki areas in Saikul and Kanhpokpi, eventually claiming the life of a Kuki man. This claim however, has been denied by the Assam Rifles.⁴⁹⁷

With state forces rendered incapable of controlling the situation, the violence intensified and raged on for months, leading to unprecedented levels of destruction to lives and property. During these months, fake news and misinformation was rife, manufacturing and weaponizing hatred to incite each community to retaliate against the other with more force (Chapter-7). Once such instance was of a false report from 5th May, 2023 claiming that a private hospital was holding bodies of 37 Meitei women and children for post-mortem after they were raped (Section 7.2.2.1). Such rampant propaganda and fear-mongering played a big role in creating a chasm amongst the women from each community. Womenfolk from Naga, Meitei and Kuki communities once stood shoulder to shoulder against the central government in repealing the AFSPA from Manipur, organizing and uniting the respective men folk in the process. Today, they are divided. Hateful and untrusting of each other at best, vengeful and merciless against each other at worst (Chapter-5).

⁴⁹⁷ <https://www.thesangaiexpress.com/Encyc/2024/1/29/IMPHAL-Jan-28The-Assam-Rifles-has-strongly-condemned-and-refuted-allegations-Kuki-Inpi-Manipur-made-yesterd.html>

12.3. Normalizing hopelessness and accountability of state agencies

The first 6 months of the ethnic violence were gruesome, each day's news more spine-chilling than the last. From entire ancestral villages being razed to IDPs being singled out from relief camps and tortured, raped & murdered by extremists in police uniform. From students of ethnic minorities being witch-hunted from hostels to elderly patients undergoing treatment being burnt alongside their family inside an ambulance. From the viral video of the 2 Kuki women being paraded naked, to the 1-month old baby who was butchered alongside his family and given a silent burial on the outskirts of Churachandpur... Violence, vandalism, debauchery and depravity of this scale would capture headlines daily and the entire nation cried in outrage, asking the Prime Minister to visit Manipur and reign in the violence. The Supreme Court took suo moto cognizance of the governance breakdown in Manipur and many civil society groups visited Manipur for providing aid or conducting fact-findings. Things looked bleak, but there was visibility and with it came outrage. This ensured Manipur remained a burning issue and even though there was little hope from speeches in the parliament, one could still force themselves to sleep at night while living on a prayer. But this started changing as the conflict entered into its first year.

The news coverage declined as did the quantum of aid reaching Manipur. Lesser and lesser hearings took place in the Supreme Court as the Manipur government started submitting its status reports, however untrue and unrepresentative they were of the situation in Manipur after one year. Though clashes between Kukis and Meiteis kept happening in Manipur, life in a chilling environment of fear and uncertainty under an informal martial law and police state became normalized for the people there. The rest of the nation which had grown so used to a high degree of shock

value with regards to news in Manipur started finding it too mundane to care as much, either assuming normalcy had returned or turning to other issues of pressing importance, like the Lok Sabha elections of 2024. Though quantitatively, the amount of ethnic violence had reduced in the last 1 year, the lives of survivors were not qualitatively better off. In fact, one could say it became worse as both the visibility and the outrage disappeared from public discourse, leaving the state agencies to their whims in addressing the issues of total breakdown of governance in Manipur. Biren Singh had managed to masterfully keep the conflict at a steady, manageable boil, neither resolving it fully nor vacating his role as CM, which had become the resounding cry of both Kukis and Meiteis by then. The survivors of violence who remained exiled in relief camps living lesser-than-human lives had little respite to look forward to amid dwindling supplies and boundless apathy from the state agencies. Worst of all, they were submerged in a smog of hopelessness and despair with no practical date of resolution ahead of them to look forward to. In a way, the people of Manipur were living worse lives as refugees of violence than prisoners of war. For the latter, there is still the grace of having fought for something and suffering because of it. For the lakhs of innocents in Manipur who were simply engulfed in the scourge of violence, there is neither consent, nor a just cause to die for. Prisoners of war could still find some redemption in dying as a hero in a context when all hope is lost, but for those still languishing in relief camps, what do they cling on to when there is no hope? In that sense, people who were once refugees of violence 6 months back have now become ghosts of the past; fortunate enough to escape the massacre but perhaps more unfortunate still, to be perpetually chained to a half-life while being rendered invisible and forgotten by the world outside.

It is of little surprise then, to find an alarming rise of suicide rates and mental health disorders among the residents of relief camps, particularly among the youth and elderly (Chapter-9). When there are such glaring

inadequacies in providing basic treatment and ensuring steady supply of generic medicine, what expectations can one have of getting routine checkups by mental health professionals and dedicated counselors? Countless survivors have spoken of reliving the trauma from the days of violence every night. Some get anxiety attacks on hearing sharp sounds that remind them of the pipes beating against electricity poles as a sign of warning, moments before the violence was unleashed back then. Meanwhile, others get flashbacks of their kin getting butchered in cold blood in front of their eyes. These are all tell-tale signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that get heightened in an environment of hopelessness and constant uncertainty inside relief camps. What is worse is that there is hardly any government data on these indicators of health, betraying a sense of lawlessness and complete apathy of the State towards the plight of victims of state-sponsored violence (Chapter-9).

The abysmal state of infrastructure and resources available in relief camps has already been elaborated in Chapter-8, including the sheer disparity in terms of care received between Kuki and Meitei camps. Here, we highlight the discrimination in terms of implementing relief schemes that have been officially rolled out by both the central and state governments. The first instance is that of non-replacement of lost or burnt documents, a measure that was recommended by the Gita Mittal committee (Chapter-8). While most Meitei camps have been issued duplicate documents, the Kuki camps remain largely deprived. What makes matters worse is that many of the Kukis did not have documentation for their belongings in the first place. Therefore they had no way of recovering or getting compensated for property that either got destroyed or confiscated in the aftermath of the violence. One such example is that of licensed guns that were given by the British during the time of independence. More than misgovernance, this is a clear act of depriving people of their rightful property, by the State. A second instance is that of Kukis claiming of not receiving any ex-gratia payment for the loss of their kin, while Biren Singh was seen publicly

disbursing ex-gratia payments to the tune of Rs. 10 lakhs to Meiteis. Another instance of arbitrary, discriminatory action within ethnic groups is the payment of the cash per day scheme to survivors depending on whether one's property was burnt down or not. Such vagrant acts of discrimination and deprivation inflicted by the State conveys more than indifference or apathy, it betrays a level of malice and prejudice that has been previously reflected in how the State responded to the plight of either community during the violence.

An additional burden to this pathological bias is the breakdown of the entire governance machinery of Manipur. Polarization within the bureaucracy and their inability to move freely across Kuki and Meitei dominated areas alike has brought the entire system to a standstill. From disbursing foodgrains under the PDS, to approving critical repair work in violence-hit areas, there are perpetual bottlenecks and delays in every step of government functioning. Even orders that were previously passed but needed a mere signature to be implemented lie in limbo just as appointments and visits by various state agencies like the SHRC or the SEC remain infeasible in a Manipur that looks united from outside, but is completely fractured from inside. As one deponent remarked, all DGPs, IGs, IAS/IPSs who were Kukis have been transferred from Meitei-dominated areas. Meanwhile Meitei officials posted in Kuki-dominated areas can neither enter those areas nor travel through them. If this is the plight of important bureaucrats, one can imagine the misery of the common person who cannot access resources or institutions within arm's reach and instead has to spend additional time and money to seek education, health or livelihood opportunities in the Neighboring states of Assam, Mizoram and Nagaland (Chapter-8). A similar structural malaise plagues institutions like the police and the judiciary, which lies paralyzed in a context where the need for justice and accountability is more pressing than ever. Failure on behalf of the judiciary to conduct impartial proceedings in cases of frivolous complaints against dissenters not only

expose an inability to disburse justice but an unwillingness to do so as well. Similar patterns of failure can be observed in the Police's inability to register FIRs against people of influence who had incriminating evidence against them and their unwillingness to act on FIRs where easy remedy was available. There were over thousands of zero-FIRs filed during and after the violence, naming suspects, quantifying losses and seeking protection or relief. A large proportion of such FIRs did not name one important party or another for fear of retaliation, thus making investigation all the more difficult and cumbersome. Thus, we can see how governance failures and institutional breakdowns deprive the people of Manipur their constitutional rights and turn a blind eye to their cries for justice and their yearning for peace and harmony.

12.4. Restoring hope and building bridges towards peace & harmony

It has been more than 2 years since the people of Manipur have been surviving without a home, without livelihoods, and without hope. Biren Singh stepped down as CM on 9th February, 2025 and Manipur entered into President's Rule for the 11th time since 1967, the highest for any state in India. Long-standing calls for Biren Singh's removal and placing Manipur under President's rule have been met, so can we assume the situation will slowly go back to pre-conflict normalcy? The answer is no, for this was no ordinary ethnic clash that Manipur has a long history of witnessing. This was a state-sponsored war that stretched out the mutual dignity and tolerance ethnic groups have had for each other beyond its breaking point. The sense of humiliation, betrayal, violence and dehumanization that each community has faced at the hands of each other is unprecedented. Regardless of which side lit the first match in this conflict, it was the State that not only supplied the matchboxes, but deliberately created a context where a match needed to be lit in a dark

room full of explosives. As things stand in 2025 and based on the horrors recounted throughout the report, there is no going back.

But if going back to the old normal were hypothetically possible, would that be an ideal outcome? As far as we, the members of the ‘Independent People’s Tribunal on Manipur’ are concerned, we believe it would not be ideal. Especially since it was a normal where ethnic tensions were still simmering, corruption was rampant and the marginalized were suffering, regardless of which ethnic group they belonged to. What can be the way forward that would guarantee that there would never be a need for Manipur to be placed under President’s Rule for the 12th time? This is where we believe the relevance of this report lies even today, when it is more than 2 years since the conflict began. Despite unforeseen delays, the timing of this report’s release is fortuitous. This is because it allowed us to see the entire trajectory of a full-blown state sponsored war on its people, catalysed through stoking long standing identity-based differences. In the context of India, where so much diversity and difference inherently exists and is routinely used as a political weapon to divide and conquer, such insights become crucial. Not just for the state of Manipur, but the whole of India. In this regard, we feel that this report needs to go beyond the task of documenting violences, demanding State accountability and exploring pathways for peace. It has to take up the task of memorializing the past, visibilizing the present and sensitizing the future.

12.4.1. Memorializing the Past

Throughout the report there have been numerous instances where the past has been invoked to draw out a sharp contrast between ‘what was’ and ‘what has become’ because of the conflict. Reminiscing perceptions, interactions, associations, relations, and vocations of the past might be reason for lament, but they can also be a source of hope and inspiration. Of a time when diversity and difference did not necessarily lead to division

and desolation. When negotiating and co-existing with each other's differences was possible and contributed to the strength of the collective.

Though such a reality may be impossible to dream of in the aftermath of the recent conflict, knowing such a past existed brings reassurance and reaffirms the power of co-existence and solidarity in our darkest moments. To that end, we hope this report facilitates the emergence and memorialization of more such stories, artefacts and folklore. So that even if the trauma of violence cages the imagination, a shared history of harmony is able to give the imagination new wings to dream the impossible dream.

12.4.2. Visibilizing the Present

Grand acts of connivance and violence might have been a recurring theme of this report, but this report also records innumerable small acts of incredible courage and compassion. Acts which might be subtle to the point of being invisible during a conflict, but acts which are perhaps the most important reminder of the extent of humanness one can exhibit in the face of the worst forms of dehumanization. Many testimonies record members of either community undertaking great personal risk to protect members from the other community and continue to keep them out of harm's way. There are also instances where members have stood against raging mobs from their own community to either talk them out of their bloodlust or minimize the damage done to property and life. There have also been instances where state actors have tried to be as cooperative and empathetic as possible within their institutional bounds, and deponents have often remarked about the kind difference such acts of concern have made. Such small, yet important acts of solidarity keep on recurring throughout the last 2 years, yet we rarely take notice or give them the recognition they deserve.

We hope that the stories of courage, compassion in this report marks a shift in the kind of reportage we are accustomed to seeing in the context of Manipur. We hope there is a renewal of dialogue between the Kukis and the Meiteis and such a herculean feat need not be facilitated by any mediator. In fact, we believe such solidarity is already being extended in subtle, unseen ways between both communities under the current President's rule. Such small but powerful acts often do not come out in the open for fear of judgement and retaliation from one's own community. So, anonymizing, visibilizing and showcasing these everyday acts in a sensitive yet evocative manner can go a long way in rebuilding hope for a possible reconciliation in the future. We hope that the civil society across India will also partake in this effort of not only bringing back Manipur in the collective consciousness of the nation, but also do it in a way that builds bridges instead of burning them down further.

12.4.3. Sensitizing the Future

Every violent clash has laid bare the sheer destructive potential that perception and narrative can have over people, communities, institutions and society. Consistently engineering divisive narratives and using various media to influence and brainwash people into othering and dehumanizing fellow human beings are part of an age-old playbook. In the context of the Manipur conflict, we saw this playbook being applied in one of the most insidious and heinous ways we have seen in our country so far. We see instances of this happen on a daily basis around us, be it on the issue of religion, caste, ethnicity, etc. Can we use this opportunity to sensitize and empower ourselves and each other against such institutionalized propaganda? The report goes into great detail around how, when and why, which state, non-state actors and mechanisms have been used to spread hatred and foster enmity amongst the people. While such efforts were largely successful because of the level of intensity and scale the State was operating at, there have also been creative ways such efforts have been

thwarted by ordinary citizens. This report carries testimonies of many such instances and reinstills faith in the power of the collective to band together against divisive propaganda and centralized power, when needed the most.

We hope this marks the beginning of a longer, more intensive study of formal and informal ways propaganda can be combatted at individual and collective levels. We hope such studies find their way into training manuals and workshops that can help people and communities defend themselves against future polarization and violence. In that regard, this holds relevance in Manipur as well as the rest of India, if the world. We hope that peace-keeping and human rights organizations, both local and global, unite to build this body of work and spread it to every corner of the world so that future generations need not inherit a similar cycle of violence from us.

To conclude this long yet exhaustive report, we extend our sincere condolences to all victims and survivors of violence. We thank all of the members of the Jury, Tribunal and everyone else (named and unnamed) who have contributed in making this report come to fruition. We stand in solidarity with the people of Manipur and all those who have helped in relief and peacekeeping efforts. We join civil society and every conscionable citizen in condemning the state-sponsored ethnic violence in Manipur and demand accountability from all state and non-state actors and institutions who played a part in instigating the violence. We pray justice be delivered with fairness and peace return soon over the people and state of Manipur.

Recommendations by the Tribunal

Regarding Gender-based Violence

1. Government as well as communities' leadership needs to provide space for women from all communities, to interact and find way forward to establish peace.
2. There is an urgent need to establish mechanisms that will provide rehabilitation and livelihood to women specifically, who have been uprooted from their homes.
3. Intercommunity relationships and families which are torn apart need financial assistance, space, counselling process, to be set up, which they can have access, with their confidentiality maintained strictly.
4. The policemen on duty who failed in their duty to protect women, from sexual assault must be held responsible, accountable and prosecuted legally. The principle of command responsibility must be evoked to acknowledge and redress the harm done to the survivors of sexual violence.

Regarding the narrative of hate

1. The state and its leadership should not under any circumstance be fueling the politics of indigeneity that thrives on creating the bogey of illegal immigration and hate propaganda that demonize the 'illegal immigrants'. This was one of the main driving factors that caused and exacerbated the violence.
2. In a situation that has been vitiated by hate propaganda, ethnic conflict and misinformation the state and its leadership have to be non-partisan.

3. There are divergent perceptions and narratives of the history of nativity, indigeneity and immigration. But such perceptions cannot be allowed to influence the state and its politics.
4. India is yet not a signatory to the Refugee Convention. But India needs to have a clear-cut policy regarding the recognition, registration of the refugees coming into India. They could be refugees fleeing war, conflict or persecution; or economic/climate refugees. Having a clear policy and procedure of recognizing and registering refugees and setting up a humanitarian response plan for refugees would go a long way in stalling the bogey of 'illegal migration' and the apprehension of the illegal immigrants.
5. Militant organizations such as AT and ML have been accused of being on the rampage, engaging in violence with impunity. They need to be held accountable for their actions through serious criminal investigation, prosecution and exemplary punishment.
6. The regression of Manipur Police into a communal force, acting in a partisan manner at the behest of the respective communities they belong to is a dangerous state of affairs that led to loss of lives, injuries and destruction of property. Looting of the police armoury by civilian outfits cannot happen without complicity of the police and the administration with those outfits at every level. There should be an impartial investigation by a sitting judge of the High Court into how this deterioration of the police force happened, the socio-political factors responsible, the key actors within and without the force that were instrumental in precipitating this failure of security
7. During ethnic conflict there should be a mandatory SoP for interventions – to halt violence and provide protection of non-combatant persons, while simultaneously engaging leaders of conflicting parties in peace dialogues. These SoPs should be disseminated widely known among citizens so that they can hold security forces and government officials accountable to the SoPs

that they should mandatorily adhere to. Any failure in following SoPs or willful non-adherence should be considered as criminal dereliction of duty and action taken accordingly. Defining command responsibility at the highest levels across the executive is paramount in this regard.

8. The Manipur Government should refrain forthwith from issuing any notifications changing the status of forests, and the access and control of tribal communities over the forests that they dwell in and around.
9. The Manipur Government should also set up an impartial tribunal to settle in a fair and just manner, the disputes arising out of the many past contentious notifications that have deprived the tribal communities of their access and control over forests.
10. There are rumours about the ongoing conflict being orchestrated by vested interests who would want to destabilize the region so that the state-corporate nexus could take control of the hills and the forests to harness (plunder) the natural resources in abundance there. Such clandestine geo-political interventions would be detrimental to the interests of the people of the state. It is important that the state and central governments come out transparently regarding the corporate business interventions that are being planned in Manipur and beyond. Any such interventions should not jeopardize the interests of the people, especially the tribal communities that reside in the hills.
11. It is established that poppy cultivation and drug trafficking is not carried out exclusively by any one community. There are people from all communities who have been part of it. Nevertheless, there have been efforts to malign and demonize the Kukis alone as the kingpins of poppy cultivation and drug trafficking. The government had failed to dispel false information; and it has been fueling internecine hatred since. It is imperative that the government spearheads a new peace initiative wherein it makes all

information transparently available and dispels such hate propaganda and bring the communities in conflict chart out a path of peace and cooperation.

Regarding Relief and Rehabilitation

Having looked at the state of relief and rehabilitation in both Kuki and Meitei camps, it is clear that the situation is as dire as it is complicated. There is great disparity between the quality of life Kukis have compared to Meiteis in their respective camps, even though both groups have been wasting away in temporary shelters that have taken the form of permanent prisons. With the government providing no concrete plan of action to rehabilitate IDPs into new permanent houses or help them relocate back into their original land, a sense of hopelessness and futility hangs heavy in Manipur.

Many important recommendations were made by the Gita Mittal Committee but very little seems to have been achieved on ground, as seen in the observations made post imposition of President's rule. Therefore, it becomes crucial to end this chapter with two sets of recommendations. One common set of recommendations applicable to all relief camps and another set of recommendations targeting specific relief camps depending on their typology, rather than their ethnic composition. A snapshot of the same is provided in a table below. But before we get into targeted recommendations, we focus on general recommendations.

General Recommendations

1. A special committee should be formed on direction of the appropriate judicial authority to oversee all matters pertaining to Relief, Rehabilitation and Restoration of every survivor of violence, particularly those residing in relief camps.
2. The said committee should have experts from the executive and judiciary, alongside subject experts on various fields like education, health, nutrition, livelihood, etc. The committee should also have

members from civil society and representatives from both the Kukis and the Meiteis.

3. The Committee should have sufficient authority to set up a task-force for conducting a comprehensive area-wise, camp-wise survey to ascertain the number of inmates, the loss of property or family that they faced, entitlements awarded or denied under various schemes, etc. and submit a comprehensive report along with recommendations to both the government and the public.
4. Based on the report, a phase-wise action plan for rehabilitation and resettlement should be created by the Committee and resources should be mobilized for the same. Simultaneously, coordination groups should be set up at village, block and district levels to implement the plan. These groups should consist of the local bureaucracy, civil society and community volunteers from the camps.
5. Additional steps should be taken by the Committee to align such efforts with the State and Central government's schemes and national or local-level nonprofits. The Committee should also establish monitoring mechanisms to ensure there is timely redressal of camp-specific or region-specific issues in the short-run, and basis, and a staggered, yet consistent process of relocation and resettlement for IDPs in every camp in the long-run.
6. A third-party evaluation of the entire Rehabilitation and Resettlement process should be undertaken so that implementation gaps can be rectified and additional post-settlement support programs on education, wellbeing, skill-training, etc can be undertaken on a need-basis.

Targeted Recommendations

In this section, we address more urgent and specific recommendations that are a reflection of the felt needs that emerged from the testimonies

and reports above. We differentiate between camps based on their typology because it is a much more accurate and representative marker of vulnerability for a cluster of IDPs than geographical location or ethnic group. The needs of IDPs within a particular type of camp may vary and need an even more tailored support. But while the general recommendations might need more time to implement, these recommendations can be implemented immediately.

Camp Typology	Community	Access to Resources	Felt Needs & Vulnerabilities
1. Makeshift/Informal Camps (Tarpaulin shelters, under-construction buildings)	Primarily Kuki camps such as Sangai University (Churachandpur)	Minimal: irregular PDS rations; no regular milk/eggs; limited WASH; ad hoc medical camps	Severe vulnerabilities: pregnant/lactating women; children; elderly; persons with disabilities; poor sanitation; psychosocial trauma
2. Prefabricated Block Camps (Government-built units with attached toilets)	Mixed Kuki & Meitei camps (e.g. Motbung, some Meitei camps)	Very Low: PDS plus small cash stipends; basic WASH; irregular health outreach	High vulnerabilities: loss of livelihoods; lack of livelihood training follow-up; education interrupted; protection concerns

Camp Typology	Community	Access to Resources	Felt Needs & Vulnerabilities
3. Institutional-Building Camps (Schools, stadiums, college hostels)	Predominantly Meitei camps (e.g. Indoor Stadium Kakching; Biramangol College Hostel)	Low: regular meals; daily milk/eggs; cash allowances; school access; periodic doctor visits	Medium vulnerabilities: Lower resource gap yet uncertain tenure of stay; psychosocial distress; need for skills & durable housing
4. Non-Camp IDPs (Rentals/relatives' homes)	Primarily Meitei families living outside camps	High variability: access to PDS, some cash; private accommodation	Low vulnerability: Vulnerable to loss of community support; hidden hardship; educational disruption

Figure 4: Felt Needs & Vulnerabilities of IDPs based on Camp Typology

Makeshift/Informal Camps

1. Immediate Relief

- **Food:** Provide monthly rations of nutritious food and a clean and hygienic kitchen to cook. Provide health supplements and milk for pregnant, lactating women and their newborns.
- **WASH:** Deploy mobile water tankers and chlorination units. Install gender segregated pre-fabricated toilets with lighting and menstrual hygiene supplies.

- **Health:** Establish rotating government medical teams and have a dedicated on-site ambulance. Pre-requisition emergency medicines for chronic conditions and install temporary birthing units.

2. Short-term Rehabilitation

- **Shelter:** Replace tarpaulins with standardized NDMA emergency shelters. Provide lockable doors and flooring kits. Build child friendly spaces and safe spaces for women, along with legal aid services.
- **Livelihood:** Ensure implementation of NREGA and compensate each inmate according to loss incurred to their family and property. Replace all original documents that got lost or burnt during the conflict.
- **Education: Open in-camp school and Anganwadi centre with full-time volunteer teachers from nearby regions, with the help of other civil society organizations. Distribute textbooks in camps.**

3. Long-term Restoration

- **Transitional Housing:** Fast-track allotment of prefabricated units; link beneficiaries to State SDRF corpus for reconstruction grants.
- **Community Cohesion:** Engage professionals or nonprofits for conducting sessions on mental, psychological and emotional wellbeing that help inmates cope with individual stress and collective trauma.

Prefabricated Block Camps

1. Immediate Relief

- **Food:** Provide monthly rations of nutritious food and a clean and hygienic kitchen to cook. Provide health supplements and milk for pregnant, lactating women and

their newborns. Establish an in-camp shop for purchasing essentials.

- **WASH:** Deploy mobile water tankers and chlorination units. Install more gender segregated pre-fabricated toilets with lighting and menstrual hygiene supplies.
- **Health:** Establish rotating government medical teams and have a dedicated on-site ambulance. Pre-requisition emergency medicines for chronic conditions.

2. Short-term Rehabilitation

- **Shelter:** Repair damaged prefabricated shelters. Build more shelter houses to ensure there is no overcrowding. Provide additional mattresses and toiletries.
- **Livelihood:** Replace all original documents that got lost or burnt during the conflict. Compensate each inmate according to loss incurred to their family and property. Convert one-time livelihood grants into micro-credit schemes with regular monitoring by District Employment Office. Establish links with local markets to sell handicrafts and other camp-based products.
- **Education:** Provide school bus services to nearby schools. Distribute textbooks in camps. Fast-track admissions in private schools under RTE, Section 12(1)(c) with fee waivers. Fast-track process of recovering educational certificates or help settling pending fees.

3. Long-term Restoration

- **Transitional Housing:** Conduct a feasibility study for transitioning into camps housed in Institutional-buildings without overcrowding them. Chart out a timeline for transition.
- **Community Cohesion:** Engage professionals or nonprofits for conducting sessions on mental,

psychological and emotional wellbeing that help inmates cope with individual stress and collective trauma.

Institutional-building Camps

1. Immediate Relief

- **Food:** Issue “camp residence certificates” to enable access to PDS, scholarships, and health schemes (e.g., Ayushman cards). Provide rations of nutritious food and supplements for pregnant, lactating women and their newborns, whenever needed.
- **WASH:** Ensure sufficient inventory of toiletries in the camp. Provide sufficient resources to keep toilets clean and functional, including hiring dedicated staff. Arrange for more temporary washrooms if necessary.
- **Health:** Institute daily tele-medicine support along with in-person check-ups. Conduct health camps periodically and ensure functional ambulance linkages to nearby RIMS/PHCs. Pre-requisition emergency medicines for chronic conditions.

2. Short-term Rehabilitation

- **Shelter:** Convert unused rooms into semi-permanent cluster homes; install community kitchens with LPG connections.. Build child friendly spaces and safe spaces for women, along with legal aid services.
- **Livelihood:** Compensate each inmate according to loss incurred to their family and property. Replace all original documents that got lost or burnt during the conflict. Establish camp-based training centers in carpentry, mobile repairing, food-processing, etc, and certify them via National Skill Development Corps. Disburse seed grants or short-term loans to help inmates restart businesses.

Provide mentorship and market-support by local businesses and nonprofits.

- **Education:** Provide school bus services to nearby schools and colleges. Distribute textbooks in camps. Fast-track admissions in private schools under RTE, Section 12(1)(c) with fee waivers. Provide scholarships and fee-waivers for inmates going to private schools and colleges. Fast-track process of recovering educational certificates or help settling pending fees.

3. Long-term Restoration

- **Resettlement:** Conduct resettlement surveys to ascertain safety and feasibility of resettling back in their original homes. Link eligible beneficiaries to State SDRF corpus for reconstruction grants.
- **Reconciliation Workshops:** Engage professionals or nonprofits for conducting sessions on mental, psychological and emotional wellbeing. Conduct workshops on facilitating inter-camp dialogue, shared cultural events, sports meets, etc.

Non-camp IDPs

1. Short-term Rehabilitation

- **Shelter:** Provide rental-assistance vouchers for six months through a scheme or grant.
- **Livelihood:** Leverage support of local nonprofits to map and register “hidden IDPs” to ensure they receive PDS, MNREGA work-cards, and health entitlements. Make sure all compensations and entitlements owed to IDPs are disbursed.
- **Education:** Partner with local NGOs to run after school tutoring programs. Provide psycho-social support for

trauma-affected children, adolescents and adults who are studying. Provide educational grants and scholarships.

2. Long-term Restoration

- **Resettlement:** Link eligible beneficiaries to State SDRF corpus for reconstruction grants. Provide security and constructional support in helping IDPs resettle in new homes in their respective areas of residence, pre-conflict.
- **Reconciliation Workshops:** Engage experts in Reconciliation, Dialogue and Peace-building to facilitate workshops within the community to help heal at a collective level, and start rebuilding harmony with the other group.

By stratifying needs and designing both general and targeted interventions, Manipur's IDPs can transition from immediate relief to durable housing, livelihood security, educational continuity, and finally resilient, reconciled communities. Continuous monitoring under President's Rule and proactive government support, alongside robust civil society engagement, will be critical to uphold equity, justice, and restorative justice across both Meitei and Kuki populations.

Regarding health

The following programme and policy measures are proposed to address the immediate and long-term health system challenges identified by the Tribunal. These recommendations draw on testimony, field observations, and expert inputs, with the aim of ensuring equitable, conflict-sensitive, and rights-based health responses in Manipur.

Programme Recommendations

1. Continuity of Essential Health Services in Conflict Zones

- Establish secure health corridors with negotiated safe passage for ambulances, medicines, vaccines, and nutritional supplies across territorial divides, coordinated with neutral actors.

- Deploy mobile health teams and temporary field clinics in hard-to-reach areas and relief camps to ensure uninterrupted maternal, child, and chronic disease care.

2. Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)

- Integrate trauma-informed, culturally appropriate interventions into the District Mental Health Programme (DMHP) that can be delivered despite limited specialist availability.
- Train primary health workers, Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), and NGO staff in basic psychosocial support; establish survivor-led peer groups; engage community and faith leaders for outreach; and embed suicide prevention into existing health and community services, with tele-consultation links for specialist care when needed.
- Institutions such as the **Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS)** – Centre for Health and Mental Health, School of Social Work – and the **National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS)** can be approached for capacity building and technical support.

3. Human Resources in Crisis Contexts

- Create fast-track recruitment and deployment mechanisms for local nurses, paramedics, and community health workers during emergencies, drawing on COVID-19 hiring precedents.
- Offer retention packages (security, insurance, hardship allowances) for staff posted in high-risk postings.

4. Urgent Filling of Vacant Health and Allied Positions

- Urgently identify and fill all sanctioned vacancies for doctors, nurses, paramedics, laboratory technicians, pharmacists, community health officers, and mental health professionals, prioritising underserved and conflict-affected areas.

- Expedite recruitment through special drives and temporary procedural relaxations, with transparent, merit-based selection.
- Consider short-term contractual/ad-hoc appointments with pathways to regularisation, and provide adequate security, housing, and hardship allowances

5. Nutrition and Disease Prevention in Displacement Settings

- Fund community-managed kitchens and targeted supplementary feeding for pregnant and lactating women, children under five, TB/HIV patients, older persons, and those undergoing treatment.
- Introduce vector control, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services, and outbreak surveillance in camps to prevent communicable diseases such as malaria and diarrhoea.

6. Women Survivors of Gender and Sexual Violence

- Establish dedicated crisis response units in health facilities to provide immediate medical care, psychosocial counselling, forensic documentation, and legal aid for survivors.
- Train and deploy crisis response teams with the support of women's organisations for community-based outreach and referral.

Policy Recommendations

1. Conflict-Sensitive Health Governance

- Legally safeguard referral pathways across ethnic lines to ensure access to tertiary care regardless of location.
- Enact a State Health in Conflict Protocol mandating service continuity, emergency supply chains, and healthcare neutrality protections during crises.

2. Equitable Resource Allocation

- Adopt a region-sensitive health budgeting framework to address the hill–valley infrastructure and staffing gap, with ring-fenced funds for underserved districts.
- Align capital investment and human resource planning with Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS) norms, prioritising facilities lacking critical diagnostic and surgical capacity.

3. Insurance and Entitlement Access for Displaced Persons

- Amend CMHT and PMJAY guidelines to permit service access without original documents during displacement, using alternative verification methods.
- Fast-track the re-issuance of lost identity and health cards, and ensure empanelment of facilities accessible to displaced populations in both hill and valley districts.
- For communities such as the Kuki population, who face barriers to accessing critical care and specialist services in the valley due to territorial boundaries, ensure that travel and treatment in other districts or states is fully covered.

4. Disaggregated Data on Displacement and Services

- Establish a robust mechanism for collecting and publicly sharing regular, disaggregated data on internally displaced persons by district, gender, age, disability status, and other relevant indicators.
- Include data on the number connected to and accessing services—such as health care, mental health support, nutrition, housing, and legal aid—to ensure transparency, monitor equity, and guide targeted resource allocation.

5. Financial Support from the Centre

- Provide dedicated central financial packages for rebuilding and strengthening health services, recognising that the conflict has severely impacted Manipur’s primarily agrarian economy and reduced its fiscal capacity.
- Funding should prioritise restoration of damaged infrastructure, emergency recruitment, procurement of essential supplies, and

long-term investments in specialist facilities, tertiary care in the hills, and integrated mental health services.

6. Accountability and Oversight

- Establish an independent health rights monitoring body with representation from civil society, medical associations, and human rights institutions to track service delivery, violations of medical neutrality, and equity outcomes.
- Mandate transparent public reporting of CMHT/PMJAY utilisation, disaggregated by district, ethnicity, and gender during conflict periods.

7. Reintegration of a Divided Health Workforce

- Develop a post-conflict workforce integration plan to rebuild mixed-ethnicity teams and re-establish cross-community trust in healthcare settings.
- Incentivise inter-district postings post-conflict to reduce long-term entrenchment of ethnic segregation in healthcare employment.

Regarding justice and accountability

1. A permanent bench of the Manipur High Court should be established in the hill region.
2. The Supreme Court should appoint an SIT consisting of senior independent officers from states other than Manipur to monitor the cases arising out of the conflict. The SIT should be monitored by the Supreme Court and the SIT should report to the Supreme Court every month.
3. The Supreme Court appointed SIT should investigate into the role of the armed forces and other security forces in the conflict. There should be departmental enquiry as well as criminal action against

those found to have violated the law in any way, not only by direct participation but also by omission to act appropriately.

4. The SIT should investigate the incidents of hate speeches which occurred directly prior to and during the conflict and arrest and prosecute the perpetrators including political figures and state functionaries.
5. The State should provide adequate protection to all the witnesses.
6. All the reports of the Gita Mittal Committee should be uploaded to the Supreme Court website.
7. The Supreme Court should monitor implementation of the recommendations of the Gita Mittal Committee.
8. Actions taken report with respect to the recommendations of the Gita Mittal Committee should be filed by the State and made public.
9. There are numerous instances of cases filed against persons and organisations which engaged in fact finding including the editors guild among others. The State should withdraw these proceedings.
10. Progress of the Justice Ajai Lamba commission should be made public by the Centre and followed up by the Supreme Court.

Epilogue: The Way Forward

More than two years have passed since the conflict erupted in Manipur. The situation between the Kuki and Meitei communities remains tense, fractured, and profoundly unresolved. The hope that time would begin to heal has not yet materialized in any meaningful way. Despite some efforts at peace-building—including the first symbolic peace talks held on 5th April, 2025—the process remains painfully slow, deeply fragile, and without the trust or groundwork needed for reconciliation.

The 5th April meeting⁴⁹⁸, hosted under the initiative of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), was the first joint meeting of Meitei and Kuki representatives since the violence began. It lasted five hours and was seen as a cautious but important step. However, it must be noted that the main Meitei umbrella body, COCOMI, chose not to attend, instead sending proxy organizations. The Kuki-Zomi Council (KZC), representing the Kuki community, did attend and expressed a willingness to talk. But refused to sign on the minutes and so-called agreement reached. Yet, without the full participation of the core stakeholders, including COCOMI and the Suspension of Operations (SoO) groups, there remains deep scepticism about the efficacy and sincerity of these efforts.

Here is the 6-point roadmap, as presented by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) during the 5th April peace talks between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo representatives:

1. Cease hostilities: Both communities are urged to refrain from attacking one another and immediately halt violence.
2. Facilitate safe return of IDPs: Support and enable the return of internally displaced persons to their homes under secure conditions.

⁴⁹⁸ https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/meitei-kuki-groups-in-first-joint-peace-talks-101743878298499.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com

3. Consult on long-term issues: Engage both communities in structured dialogue to address core disputes like land rights, tribe status, and political representation.
4. Prioritize regional development: Launch focused infrastructure and welfare initiatives, especially in neglected hill and valley areas, to bridge socio-economic disparities.
5. Ensure free movement on highways: Open and maintain national and state highways (e.g., NH-2 and NH-37) to reconnect hills and valley and resume essential supply chains.
6. Build inter-community cooperation: Promote collaboration—through civil society groups, local administrations, and task forces to normalize daily life and maintain peace.

Civil society acknowledged that while this was just a symbolic meeting, it was the first time that the representatives from the two communities sat together at the table and therefore it was a welcome move. Following this meeting an announcement was made by the Governor of Manipur in the first week of July that all relief camps will soon be closed⁴⁹⁹. This added a new layer of concern and fear, particularly among the displaced Kuki community. From the Kuki perspective, this announcement does not represent a return to normalcy but rather an administrative attempt to erase the reality of their displacement. Thousands remain unable to return to their homes, especially in and around Imphal. These include families who have lived in the city for generations, such as those from the old Lambulane area, now emptied of Kukis since the May 2023 violence. The fear is palpable: there are no security guarantees, no rehabilitation framework in place, and little trust in the state's promises. The reality is that if the camps are closed, many will be left to scatter in unsafe conditions, outside of any formal support.

⁴⁹⁹ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/manipur/manipur-sets-december-target-to-shut-down-relief-camps-resettlement-begins/article69773652.ece>

One of the clearest indicators that normalcy has not returned is the complete lack of safe access for Kukis to essential infrastructure in Imphal. The airport remains out of reach. Hospitals like RIMS and JNIMS, once serving people from across communities, are no longer accessible to Kuki patients. Even transportation routes remain unsafe. The national highway between Churachandpur and Kangpokpi, for instance, is not accessible to Kukis, forcing them to take interior, dangerous village roads.

This breakdown in connectivity has consequences far beyond travel. Medical services in the hill areas are in a dire crisis. In places like Saikul, only two doctors are currently available to serve the entire area—clearly an untenable situation. Emergency healthcare, including childbirth, is dangerously compromised, and in some instances, people have had to go to other states for basic treatments. The health infrastructure has collapsed, and staffing is near-impossible, since Meitei professionals will not work in Kuki-dominated areas, and vice versa.

Similarly, the educational crisis is immense and widely unaddressed. Students pursuing higher and professional education—particularly in medical, engineering, or science disciplines—have been completely derailed. The main institutions are located in Imphal, now inaccessible to Kukis. Many young people have dropped out, especially those without the means or family networks outside the state. Online education has proven to be a hollow alternative: there is no library access, no laboratory, and no stable internet in the remote hills. Entire academic years have been lost, and many students don't know how or where to restart. The damage to their futures is incalculable.

Governance, as a system, has broken down. The administrative divide is now so stark that officers and public servants refuse to serve in areas

dominated by the "other" community. The result is a near-total collapse of state services—from public transportation to ration distribution and health to infrastructure development. People across both communities feel abandoned, but the Kukis, particularly in the hills, feel entirely cut off from the mechanisms of the state.

A particularly painful point of grievance for Kukis is the lingering assumed association with poppy cultivation and the drug trade. During the early phase of the conflict, this narrative was used as a weapon to paint them as criminal and illegitimate. Today, many Kuki intellectuals push back strongly against this characterisation. They argue that the drug crisis affects all communities in Manipur, and the pushers are often protected by powerful political and police networks. They point out that dreams of quick riches lure many youths, whether Meitei or Kuki or other communities in Manipur. However, the real culprits—those at the top of the network—are untouched. There are even rumours, widely believed in the hills, of the son of a Union Minister being involved in the drug trade. Despite government claims of poppy destruction and FIRs, there is little public evidence of follow-through. Where are the big arrests? Where is the crackdown?

The narrative of the outsider and infiltrator also troubles the Kuki community and they are wondering whether these can be overcome without being addressed by authorities, who deny these charges. Indeed, people say that nothing has changed, except that Chief Minister Biren Singh is no longer directly in charge. But even this change has made no tangible difference on the ground. If anything, things have worsened. Roads are deteriorating fast, particularly during this unusually heavy monsoon. Relief distribution has become irregular and inadequate. Development projects have stalled. In Saikul, people recently met with the health department to raise their concerns. Only two doctors run the local centre, which is impossible for a community with urgent needs. Prices are

rising, access to urban markets remains difficult, and the feeling is one of being trapped—geographically, politically, and socially.

The para military presence, once reassuring, has shrunk. The Assam Rifles, trusted by many Kukis, are now largely absent. The CRPF and BSF are seen as ineffective, especially since they operate under the local police leadership, which is widely perceived to be biased.

The law has also not been applied equally. FIRs lodged by Kukis, numbering in the thousands, have gone nowhere. Of the total of 6000 + FIRs, on many UAPA is being applied—sometimes excessively and selectively—to both Meiteis and Kukis. The perception is that the government is criminalising dissent and arresting foot soldiers, while the real planners of violence remain free. This is particularly in the context of AT and ML.

There is bitterness among Kukis that the Governor, who assumed office during this crisis, has never met them or their representatives. He did, however, meet the Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun groups immediately after taking charge. This alone has shattered any remaining belief in his neutrality. From their side, the Meitei community too has voiced disenchantment. Leaders, intellectuals, and even elected MPs have called the peace process a charade. They feel used and misled, their own suffering instrumentalised.

From the Meitei side, there is also despair. There is a sense that nothing is changing, that the youth are being arrested while leaders roam free. There are complaints that rehabilitation packages are inadequate—₹75,000 for a home is a cruel joke in a community that lives in shared housing. There is widespread anger at Union Home Minister Amit Shah for what is seen as a betrayal. Promises made were not kept. Women, in particular, feel they

were used at the peak of the conflict and then excluded from peace efforts. Meira Paibis have withdrawn. Women are absent from both Track 1 and Track 2 dialogues. Even those willing to return to their villages are holding back. Without trust, they say, there can be no return. Buffer zones are now being treated as permanent boundaries. The Nagas are staying out. Certain Tangkhul leaders, are seen to be actively provoking unrest against Kukis, further souring relations. Hate speech, earlier virulent, has died down—not from reconciliation, but from exhaustion. People are tired. The violence has paused, but peace has not begun.

Shared grief surfaced at the tragic deaths of two young Manipuri air hostesses—one Meitei and one Kuki. A senior journalist noted that when the news broke, the state mourned both as Manipuris, not divided by community. There was even a gesture from the Meitei leadership urging that the Kuki family bring their daughter's body back to Imphal. But fear won out. Instead, the family chose to travel from Ahmedabad to Dimapur, and from there to their current shelter in Kangpokpi. Their home in Imphal, once in the heart of Lambulane, remains abandoned.

This, according to the journalist, is the tragedy of Manipur: brief glimpses of unity, followed by reversion to division. Unless both communities can move past victim and perpetrator roles, unless they meet in truth and reconciliation, the status quo will persist. Track 2 meetings—friendly, intellectual gatherings—are happening, but they lack the political teeth to change realities. True dialogue must bring hostile parties face to face, and must include all SoO groups if it is to have legitimacy on the Kuki side. Above all, there must be accountability.

Ultimately, there is a widespread perception that the peace process is not real, that it is a spectacle, staged from time to time, but not rooted in political will or community consent. The budget for peace is shrinking, the

state deficit is growing, and the cost of continued displacement and broken systems is now being borne by the people.

What is absent is what people crave the most: a process of truth, justice, and healing – the will to face the pain honestly, the courage to meet across the lines, the humility to accept that both sides have suffered, and that peace, if it is to last, must be just, inclusive, and real.

What is really needed is a Truth and Reconciliation project to bring both sides together. The victim-perpetrator mindset needs to be put behind. For the ethnic groups to move back to their homes a process must be undertaken which builds confidence through cultural and social integration, through truth and reconciliation and government financed rebuilding of homes.

What is very clearly needed is a process of comprehensive disarmament. Transitional justice, a holistic blend of security, justice, autonomy, and development—together with continued, mediated dialogue—provides the best chance for a stable, united future in Manipur.

As far as political restructuring for autonomy maybe concerned or land and citizenship reforms, these must be put on the back burner.