

Thingkho Le Malcha

A Daily Newsletter by KSO Media & Documentation Cell



CHINGJALUAN (65 YEARS)

W/O PAUZATHANG SAMTE

ADDRESS: ZOUVENG, SUGNU, CHANDEL DISTRICT

DATE OF DEATH: 9TH JUNE, 2023

PLACE OF DEATH: ZOUVENG, SUGNU, CHANDEL DISTRICT

CAUSE OF DEATH: BURNT ALIVE INSIDE HER HOUSE



KUKI VICTIMS' UPDATE

As on 22.07.2024



191
DEATHS



200+
VILLAGES BURNT



7000+
HOUSES BURNT



360+
CHURCHES &
SYNAGOGUES BURNT



41,425+
DISPLACED
PERSONS

Thingkho Le Malcha (charred wood tied with chilli): A war symbol; a pre-arranged secret code agreed upon by the Kukis to inform the people about the commencement of war and on receiving this, one has to remain alert and be ready for the battle.

KUKI INPI CONDEMNS ALLEGED AMBUSH ATTEMPT ON KUKI-ZO CIVILIANS, CALLS FOR CENTRAL GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION

The Kuki Inpi has strongly condemned a calculated ambush attempt on Kuki-Zo civilians along the Kanggui-Lamka road. The incident, which took place around 2:00 P.M. in the Kangchup region of Sadar Hills, involved a heavy exchange of fire between Kuki-Zo volunteers and combined forces of Arambai Tenggol, Valley-Based Insurgent Groups (VBIGs), and Meitei state forces.

The Kuki top body accused the state government of complicity in the ongoing assaults on Kuki-Zo civilians, highlighting that these attacks continue unabated and seemingly with official sanction. The organization pointed to the use of mortar bombs, as evidenced by circulated videos and pictures on social media, as a clear indication of the violence being perpetrated.

The statement further referenced a leaked audio tape of Manipur Chief Minister Shri N. Biren Singh, in which he allegedly endorses the use of bombs against the Kuki-Zo people.

“This attempted ambush is an attack on our right to exist peacefully in our own land,” Kuki Inpi stated. “It exposes the ongoing failure and, more disturbingly, the open conspiracy of the Manipur state government and VBIGs to further the genocide against the Kuki-Zo people.”

Kuki Inpi has called on the central government to take immediate and decisive action against the state government’s complicity in these atrocities, along with the radical Meitei militia groups. The statement emphasized the urgent need for intervention to halt what it describes as an ethnic cleansing campaign against the Kuki-Zo minority.

Despite the continued aggression, Kuki Inpi declared that the Kuki-Zo community remains resolute in



PRESS STATEMENT

Kanggui, the 1st September, 2024

04/KIM/PR./22-71: Kuki Inpi strongly condemns the recent calculated attempt to ambush Kuki-Zo civilians along the Kanggui-Lamka road, which led to a heavy exchange of fire between the combined forces of Arambai Tenggol, Valley-Based Insurgent Groups (VBIGs), Meitei state forces, and our brave Kuki-Zo volunteers at about 2:00 P.M. in Kangchup region, Sadar Hills. This deliberate attempt at continued aggression is a stark reminder of the systemic violence being perpetrated against the Kuki-Zo people.

The complicity of the state government in these assaults on innocent civilians is undeniable, as these aggressions continue unchecked, unabated, and seemingly with official sanction. More disturbingly, the use of mortar bombs, evident in circulated videos and pictures on social media, corroborates the leaked audio tape of Manipur Chief Minister Shri N. Biren Singh, wherein he brazenly exclaims the use of bombs in attacks against the Kuki-Zo people. The attempted ambush along the Kanggui-Lamka is an attack on our right to exist peacefully in our own land. It exposes the ongoing failure—and more disturbingly; the open conspiracy of the Manipur state government and the VBIGs to further the genocide against the Kuki-Zo people.

Kuki Inpi calls on the central government to take immediate and decisive action against the state government’s complicity in these atrocities along with the radical meitei militia groups. The continued assaults on the Kuki-Zo people demands an urgent need for intervention to stop the ethnic cleansing campaign against the minority Kuki-Zo people.

Nonetheless, the Kuki-Zo community will not be intimidated by these continuous acts of aggression. We will stand strong in our resolve to protect our land, our people, and our rights. We will continue to resist, to speak out, and to demand justice until Justice, peace and security are restored for the Kuki-Zo people. We call on all peace-loving citizens to stand with us in condemning these atrocities and to join us in demanding justice for the Kuki-Zo people.


(JANGHAOLUN HAOKIP)
Secretary, Information & Publicity
Kuki Inpi Manipur



protecting their land, people, and rights. The organization reaffirmed its commitment to resisting these attacks and demanding justice, peace, and security for the Kuki-Zo people.

“We will not be intimidated by these acts of aggression. We call on all peace-loving citizens to stand with us in condemning these atrocities and to join us in demanding justice for the Kuki-Zo people,” the statement concluded.

CoTU SLAMS STATE HOME DEPARTMENT FOR BIASED RESPONSE, VOWS TO OPPOSE FURTHER OPERATIONS

The Committee on Tribal Unity has condemned the recent press release by the state Home Department, accusing the government of selective outrage and biased handling of the ongoing conflict. The Committee expressed deep disappointment over the administration's fixation on the Koutruk incident while ignoring the relentless violence perpetrated by Meitei militants and affiliated groups, who have been using drones, bombs, and military-grade mortars against Kuki-Zo civilians.

The Kuki-Zo community has consistently highlighted that Meitei militants, including groups like Arambai Tenggol, have been launching attacks with advanced weaponry, which even Chief Minister N. Biren Singh admitted to in a viral audio recording aired on national news channels. The Committee criticized the state government's narrative as a deliberate attempt to appease the valley community by wrongfully branding the Kuki-Zo as terrorists, despite their efforts to defend



against an ambush by Meitei militants on the Kangpokpi-Churachandpur route on September 1, 2024.

Labeling the state's actions as a "biased and insensitive assessment," the Committee warned that the Kuki-Zo community will fiercely resist any combined operations ordered by the Home Department. The Committee also called out mainstream TV news channels, urging them to verify their sources and ensure impartial reporting to avoid spreading misinformation.

LEAVE KUKI AREAS OR BE OUSTED: KUKI-ZO VOLUNTEERS WARN MEITEI MILITANTS

In a powerful video released late Sunday, Kuki-Zo Village Volunteers warned Meitei militants occupying Kuki areas to leave immediately or face direct action.

The video, featuring a Kuki-Zo Village Volunteer leader, condemned Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh's calls for peace, accusing him of ignoring ongoing violence as Meitei militants launch daily ambushes on the Kangpokpi-Churachandpur road. "We are not fools, and we will not be deceived," the leader asserted.

The Kuki-Zo Village Volunteer leader highlighted that Meitei militants continue to occupy strategic Kuki-Zo areas, including Satang and Sinam Kom in Kangpokpi District, along with parts of Churachandpur and Tengenoupal Districts.



Issuing a stark warning, he declared that if the militants do not vacate these territories within three days, the Kuki-Zo Village Volunteers will act decisively to oust them and reclaim their land.

FRESH ONSLAUGHTS ON KUKI-ZO VILLAGES ERUPTED DAYS AFTER KUKI-ZOS' MASSIVE RALLIES AGAINST N. BIREN SINGH'S AUDIOTAPES

A day after the massive rallies held in all Kuki-inhabited hill areas over the Meitei Chief Minister N. Biren Singh's incriminating audiotapes, the Meiteis began fresh attacks on the Kuki villages situated along the buffer zones and the aggressive onslaughts continue till today.

On September 1 at around 2:00 PM, the Meiteis' calculated ambush attempt on Kuki-Zo civilians along the Kanggui-Lamka road in Kangchup region of Sadar Hills was thwarted by the Kuki Village Volunteers, thus involving a heavy exchange of fire between Kuki-Zo volunteers and combined forces of Arambai Tenggol, Valley-Based Insurgent Groups (VBIGs), and Meitei state forces.

The violent situation escalated as a result of the Meitei armed groups' aggressive onslaught on Kuki villages using powerful bombs towards the Kuki areas; and consequently, the Kuki Village Volunteers retaliated. The indiscriminate firing towards the Kuki Village areas of Bethel from the Meiteis' localities of Koutruk and neighbouring Kadangband lasted till midnight. The Meitei militants also began indiscriminate attacks towards Phaileng areas near the Meiteis' Sekmai.

In the ensuing gunfight, two persons, including a woman, were killed and nine others injured.

Today, intermittent firing attacks on Kuki areas continued along the fringe areas of Kangchup and Sinam under Kukis' dominated Kangpokpi district at 5:30 AM, and the situation continues to be volatile in the periphery areas of the state with firing reported from multiple places.

At around 7:30 PM on Monday, the Kuki areas of South-West Sadar Hills came under heavy attacks again from the combined forces of Meitei militants, Arambai Tenggol, Meitei Leepun and State Police Forces. The attacks on Lambung, Leimakhong, L.Tangnom and Kangchup areas of Kuki-Zo came from different angles and the indiscriminate firing with shelling of bombs continued until the filing of this report.

Meanwhile, the Kuki top body has accused the state government of complicity in the ongoing assaults on Kuki-Zo civilians, highlighting that these attacks continue unabated and seemingly with official sanction. The organization pointed to the use of mortar bombs, as evidenced by circulated videos and pictures on social media, as a clear indication of the violence being perpetrated.

Referring to a leaked audio tape of Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh, wherein he endorsed the use of bombs against the Kuki-Zo people, the Kuki Inpi stated that the Meiteis' attempted ambush was an attack on their rights to exist peacefully in their own land.

The continuous attacks expose the ongoing failure and, more disturbingly, the open conspiracy of the Manipur state government and VBIGs to further the genocide against the Kuki-Zo people, the Kuki body added.



Rudeness is the weak man's imitation of strength.

- Eric Hoffer

TODAY IN HISTORY/EVENTS RECALLED: SEPTEMBER 01, 2023

A RECAP OF THE HORRIFIC INCIDENTS ON SEPTEMBER 01, 2023 AS A RESULT OF PRE-PLANNED STATE-SPONSORED ETHNIC CLEANSING POGROM AGAINST KUKI-ZO

Last night, it was discovered that the Meiteis had deliberately set fire to their own houses. The incident was initially reported as a Kuki-Zo attack on the Meiteis. In response to the escalating tensions and for security reasons, Manipur Police Commandos and IRB (Indian Reserve Battalion) personnel have entered Chingmang and are in the process of devising plans to establish their own post in the area. This action has raised concerns as it could potentially endanger the safety and stability of the entire Leimakhong region.

Intense and sustained firing erupted following an attack by Meitei armed groups on Kuki-Zo villages located in the Khausabung area. In a notable departure from

previous incidents, the Meiteis heavily employed bombs during this attack, intensifying the conflict. Tragically, two village volunteers were injured as a result of the assault, with bombs continuing to be detonated intermittently.

Despite their efforts, the Meitei armed group was unable to breach the frontline defenses and were pursued until they reached Naranshena, which is a Meitei village. Subsequently, the United Tribal Volunteers opted to withdraw from the area, signifying a tactical retreat. The situation remains fluid and challenging as hostilities persist in the region.

THE SOCIAL MEDIA BUZZ

Dr. Lamthang Haokip
@DrLamthangHK

Son of a prominent mainland businessman, Mr. Nikhil Patni of Thangal Bazar, was kidnapped this morning at 10 a.m by unknown militia men from Gold Gym, Singjamei, Imphal, #Manipur.

It is highly suspected that some high ranking politician/s are reportedly involved.

@rashtrapatibhvn @INCIndia @HMOIndia @the_hindu @thewire_in @ThePrintIndia @htTweets @ndtvindia @CNNnews18 @EastMojo @adgpi @official_dgar @PTI_News



10:48 PM · Sep 2, 2024 · 1,109 Views



Sulaiman Ahmed
@ShaykhSulaiman

Subscribe

INDIAN WOMAN ENCOURAGING THEIR MEN TO RAPE CHRISTIAN (KUKI) WOMEN

In India minority Christians and Muslims are treated with extreme oppression.

The Christian Kuki community are treated horribly.



From Sulaiman Ahmed

20:07 · 01 Sept 24 · 75.1K Views

Click to Follow





NEWS ANALYSIS

Meitei-Owned Media Houses' Culpability and Under-Reporting

Under reporting, biases and twisting the fact in such a manner that the Kuki-Zo community are invariably projected in the wrong light by Meitei-owned media houses, both in print and electronic, is an ongoing issue that has been observed and noted by many. This is one way of exacerbating the violence by the Meiteis as all the major print and electronic media houses of Manipur are based in Imphal and owned by the Meiteis.

The Imphal Free Press on their X handle posted “Kuki militants attack #IRB post at #Meikhan hill under #Sagolmang PS in #ImphalEast in the wee-hours of Monday with #dronebombs and incessant #shelling”.

Imphal Unfree Press should stop reporting fake news. A professional journalist would have shown the proof of the so-called drone bombs. So many mobile phones must be there in the hands of the IRB personnel and yet no one captured the drones. And, no bomb shells despite the so-called “incessant shelling”?

It is suspected that the IRB Personnel may have handed over the weapons to the Meitei militants or the AT/Meitei Leepun and in order to cover up they might have invented the story of Kuki attacks as a figment of their imagination.

In yet another cases of Meitei owned media houses twisting news stories and reporting it as per their own whims and fancies, the People’s Chronicle, English edition of Poknapham newspaper, carried a news story

that says the Hill Tribal Council (HTC) has expressed willingness to facilitate the return and resettlement of the displaced people of Meitei community in Moreh, provided similar arrangements are made for the displaced Kuki people in Imphal.

The news report further stated that the statement was stated by HTC Moreh president Khaikhohal Haokip during a meeting with Assam Rifles on the evening of August 30.

The meeting, held at the Assam Rifles Inspection Bungalow (AR IB) in Moreh at around 5 pm, was co-chaired by IGAR (South) Maj Gen Ravroop Singh, and 26 Sector Assam Rifles commander Brig Vedpal Yadav.

It saw participation from leaders of various community organisations, including Hill Tribal Council Moreh, Tamil Sangam Moreh, Gorkha Samaj Samiti Moreh, Manipur Muslim Council Moreh, Border Trade Chamber of Commerce Moreh, Kuki Students’ Organisation (KSO) Moreh, and Kuki Women’s Union & Human Rights, Moreh.

However, the one-sided reporting of Meitei media was exposed once the HTC came out with a clarification statement, rejecting the twisted statement of HTC president carried by the Meitei newspaper.

Contd.

Contd.

It is absolutely normal and conventional on the part of Imphal based Manipuri media houses to report their own manipulated and baseless news but in order to avoid chaos and misunderstanding from the public, the Hill Tribal Council Moreh is obligated to issue a rebuttal against the Chronicle Newspaper report stating that 'HTC President has expressed willingness to facilitate the return and resettlement of Meitei community in Moreh' which is totally unacceptable and malignant.

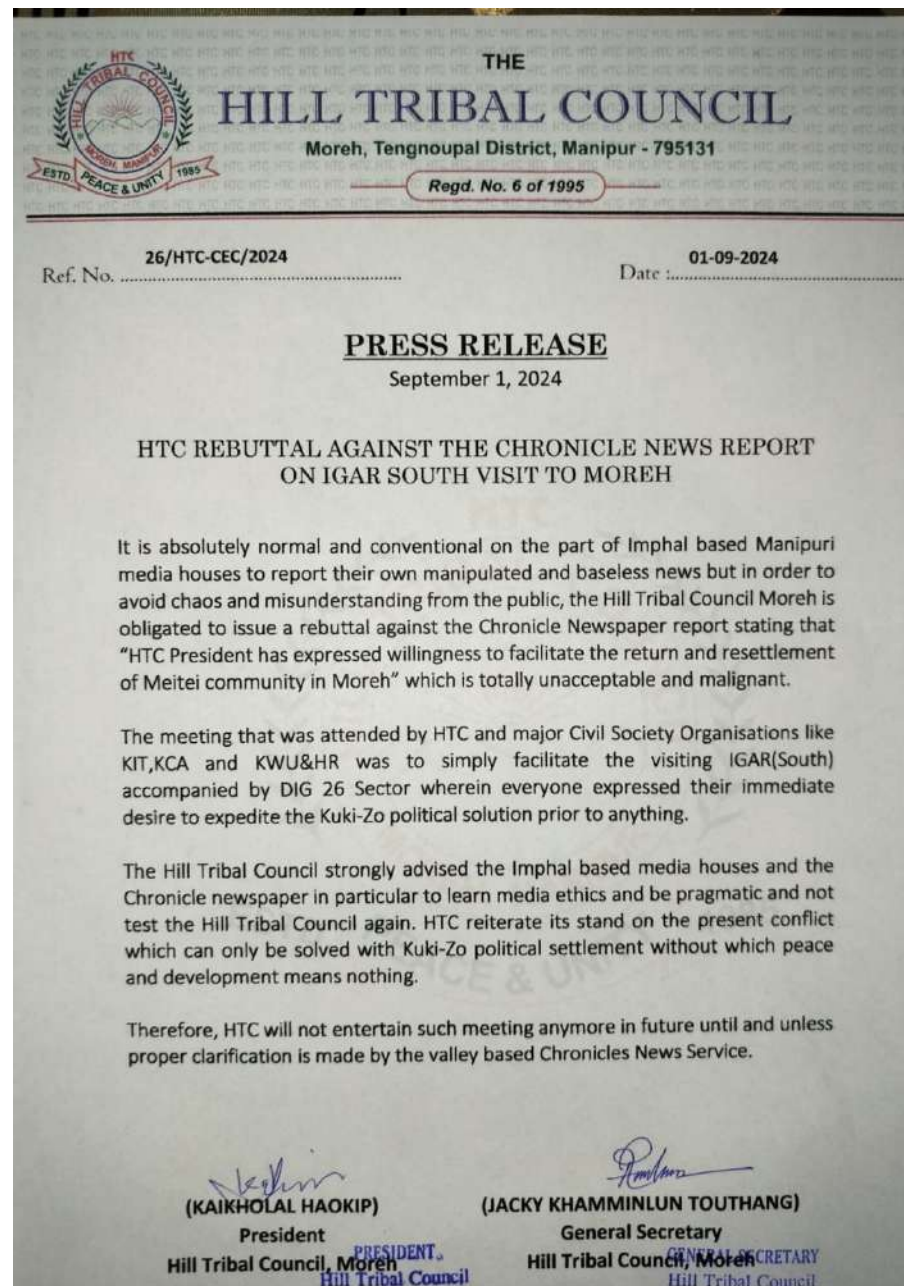
The meeting that was attended by HTC and major Civil Society Organisations like KIT,KCA and KWU&HR was to simply facilitate the visiting IGAR(South) accompanied by DIG 26 Sector wherein everyone expressed their immediate desire to expedite the Kuki-Zo political solution prior to anything.

In response to the misleading news report, the Hill Tribal Council (HTC) has issued a stern rebuttal to a report published by the Chronicle Newspaper, which inaccurately claimed that HTC President had shown willingness to facilitate the return and resettlement of the Meitei community in Moreh. The HTC describes the report as "totally unacceptable and malignant," and asserts that it is a reflection of "manipulated and baseless news" typical of some Imphal-based media outlets.

According to the HTC, the focus of the meeting was solely on expediting the Kuki-Zo political solution, rather than on any resettlement discussions.

The HTC has strongly criticized the Chronicle Newspaper for its lack of adherence to media ethics and for publishing misleading information. The Council emphasized that the ongoing conflict in the region can only be resolved through a Kuki-Zo political settlement, and that peace and development are unattainable without such an agreement.

In its statement, the HTC advised media outlets, particularly the Chronicle, to improve their journalistic practices and avoid creating unnecessary chaos and misunderstanding. The Council also indicated that it will not participate in future meetings or engagements with the Chronicle News Service unless a proper clarification is issued regarding the misleading report.



It is a known fact that valley-based Meitei media houses on many occasions concealed the horrendous crimes of the Meitei militias, militants and bowdlerized it as "unknown miscreants" but the use of misleading and provocative terms like "Kuki militants" and "narco-terrorists" was very frequent. Significant events such as the looting of thousands of guns, the burning to death of an injured kid, his mother and aunt, the killing of innocent people in broad daylight, the massive destruction of homes, churches and vehicles found no mention in majority of the Meitei media houses. Even to this day, the Meitei media's houses have never done any factual reporting regarding the violence in Manipur. All this itself is evident from EGI's fact finding report on Manipur violence.

**FEATURED ARTICLE**

In the Lacerated Land of Manipur, Borders of Hate And a Failed State

Harsh Mander

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi rose to address the newly elected 18th Lok Sabha on June 24, the hall of Parliament resounded with calls from opposition MPs demanding justice for Manipur. Yet, nothing changes. The state remains intractably divided, the communities profoundly estranged and some 60,000 forced to live for the past 17 months in austere relief camps with little prospect of returning to their homelands.

This conflict that broke out in Manipur on May 3, 2023, and grew into a civil war is the subject of a scholarly, sensitive account by Irfan Engineer and Neha Dabhade of the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism. Their report – with careful attention to history and contemporary challenges – casts light on an immensely tangled situation in this border state and explains why there is little hope for an early return to peace.

In so doing, they carry forward the proud traditions of the founder of Centre for Study of Society and Secularism, the iconic Asghar Ali Engineer. Asghar Ali was one of India's foremost peace activists. Deeply anguished by the suffering of survivors of hate violence, he would travel tirelessly to any corner of the country where communal conflict broke out. While striving to heal wounds and advance justice, he would meticulously document each conflict. It is this societal responsibility that Asghar Ali's son Irfan Engineer and his associate Neha Dabhade carry forward with sterling dedication.

The unique history of Manipur is little-known to other Indians. This history, the writers observe, is “chequered and intriguing” with “many layers”. The Tibeto-Burman Meitei community is the dominant group in Manipur, both in population share (53%) as well as politically and economically. They mainly inhabit the verdant Imphal valley which comprises just 10% of the state's geography.

The Meitei people trace their ancestry in the Imphal valley at least back 2,000 years. Royal chronicles, Cheitharol Kumbaba, document the history of Manipuri kings of Ningthouja dynasty to 33 Common Era. The Ningthouja is one of the longest unbroken dynasties of the world. The name Manipur came later. The kingdom was Kangleipak. It was renamed in 1724 by king Meidingu Pamheiba after he converted to Hinduism. He chose the Sanskrit name Manipur, meaning “abode of jewels”, for the kingdom.

The boundaries of the kingdom varied over the centuries; it sometimes included the surrounding hills, and sometimes went as far as the Irrawady River in Myanmar. But for the greater part of its history of two millennia before the arrival of the British, it was confined to the Imphal valley.

Contd.

Click to Follow



Contd.

The rulers and people of the Imphal valley followed for many centuries the indigenous, animistic faith of Sanahism until the 18th century. The king in 1704 converted to the Hindu faith, and large sections of the people over time also adopted the Vaishnavite faith. The report underlines that this conversion was sometimes coercive. King Pamheiba, for instance, took drastic measures against those who defied Hindu taboos and enforced vegetarianism.

Independent for many centuries, Manipur became a British protectorate state from around 1824 to 1891 after it was invaded by the Burmese in 1819. Manipur then became a princely state under the British Indian Empire from 1891 to August 1947. Following India's independence, Manipur on September 21, 1949, signed an annexation treaty with India in 1947. With this, it merged with the Indian union in 1949, one of 500 princely states.

An interesting fact of this history is that before its annexation, the briefly independent princely state of Manipur became, on the initiative of the king, a democratic constitutional monarchy, the first of its kind in Asia. Its legislature passed a progressive State Constitution Act in 1947 that gave representation in the legislature in the ratio of 30, 18 and 3 respectively to three categories that it termed General, Hill and Mohamaden (Muslim).

The General category was of the Meitei people in the valley; the Hill communities were Naga and Kuki-Zomi (listed as 34 Scheduled Tribes in the Indian Constitution); Mohamaden or Muslim Meitei (called Pangal) are believed to have migrated in the 17th century from Sylhet and now are 8% of the state's population.

The merger with the Indian union in 1949, the writers observe, "generated contestations, bitterness and discontent eventually giving rise to long drawn separatist movement in Manipur". Another significant nugget of history is that the legislature of Manipur passed a resolution opposing the merger of Manipur with the union of India, and the Speaker at this time was a Kuki, TC Tainkhan.

Many Manipuri people, across ethnic communities, resented the 1949 accession instrument which integrated the princely state into the newly independent India signed by King Bodhchandra. They believed it "violated their right to self-determination", especially because the merger decision was taken without consulting the newly formed legislature. This "stirred dissent and laid the groundwork for future insurgency".

Fuelled by grievances over marginalisation and injustice, many militant groups formed, waging "armed resistance against Indian rule, intensifying the cycle of violence and repression". The writers describe in careful detail the rise of many militant groups in Manipur.

Not long after statehood was granted to Manipur in 1972, the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act was imposed on the state in 1980, highlighting "the Indian government's heavy-handed approach to quelling dissent in Manipur", further eroding civil liberties and exacerbating tensions. This led to widespread unrest and resistance. "Armed with AFSPA, the armed forces indulged in raids, encounters, combing operations and rapes of women. The state of Manipur was blanketed with fear, violence and restrictions". But the "resistance to AFSPA was multi-ethnic".

Separate Kuki militancy grew much later, mainly in the 1990s, in the wake of the violent clash of Kukis and Nagas which saw much bloodshed and killings. The Kukis, the writers note, "felt betrayed particularly by the excessive atrocities inflicted upon innocent Kuki people by the Nagas" and in response "some Kuki leaders formed the Kuki National Front to carve out a Kuki homeland or Kuki state within the framework of the Indian Constitution in India".

They raised the Kuki National Army to fight for the creation of Kuki states, one in India and another in Burma/Myanmar. The Nagas bitterly opposed

Contd.

Contd.

the creation of a Kuki homeland. The Meiteis, on their part, opposed the creation of both a Kuki homeland or a Greater Nagaland.

To bring peace in the region and to check militant insurgency, the Indian state signed a Suspension of Operations agreement with various militant Kuki groups, first with only the Indian army and then with the government of India and the Manipur state government. The Manipur state government abruptly withdrew from the Suspension of Operations on March 10, 2023, claiming that the ex-insurgents had joined the Kuki protests. This became one of the major sources of Kuki resentment fuelling the conflict.

The relationship between the two communities was also not always hostile. Historical records suggest many instances through the centuries of Kuki chiefs coming to the aid of Meitei kinds in defending and consolidating their kingdoms and boundaries. The most recent examples were supporting the Meitei kings in their wars against the Burmese, and also the resistance to the merger of Manipur into the Indian union.

The estrangement between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo people is more recent. The writers delineate the many conflicting claims and anxieties of the two communities divided by the conflict. Both the unity and the ruptures can be found in the “social and political landscape of Manipur (which) is profoundly intricate, stemming from its rich history and the diverse narratives and most importantly, the claims to its territory”, ethnicity and different ethnic groups’ competing claims over resources.

One paramount Meitei claim that helped stoke the bitter conflict is that the Kuki-Zo are not indigenous to Manipur, and are instead mainly illegal immigrants from Myanmar. However, historical records do not bear out this claim. The writers quote, for instance, Buddhist literature written by Lama Taranatha during the 15th century with accounts of Kukis (Ko-ki) in their present habitat. British records from the 19th century also confirm the presence of Kukis in this region.

The writers point also to the strong Meitei resentment

over the legal bar on their acquiring land in the hills. It is this that drove their demand for Scheduled Tribe status, which became the spark that lit the conflagration of May 3. This also fuelled allegations labelling Kukis as illegal immigrants from Myanmar, with alarmist claims that the number of Kuki villages are increasing rapidly, populated by these “infiltrators”.

The Meitei demand implementing the National Register of Citizens, similar to that implemented in neighbouring Assam to identify and expel these alleged foreigners. But the Kukis explain that new villages are the result of Kuki tribal chiefs setting up new villages for extending to new areas their predominantly shifting agriculture; or for their own children; and deny any large-scale illegal immigration from Myanmar.

“This trope seeks to exclude the Kukis completely and stigmatise them. This deliberate attempt at otherising the Kukis has also led to animosity and distrust.” say Engineer and Dhabade. Chief Minister N Biren Singh himself has long stigmatised the Kuki people as “illegal immigrants” and “foreigners”. He is not restrained by the fact that the decennial censuses from 1901 to 2011 did not reveal any unusual rise in the non-Naga tribal population, and therefore the claim of Kukis being aliens to Manipur an evident falsehood.

The report also points to provocation of the discriminatory eviction drive in Kuki villages, from February 2023. State authorities alleged that Kukis have encroached on reserved forest land and are illegal immigrants. The Kuki residents and Kuki organisations protested in vain that these eviction drives are threatening their existence because they are essentially forest dwellers; and that the Kukis in these villages are not immigrants but settled for many years. They see this as a ploy to grab Kuki tribal lands.

A second smouldering trope against the Kukis is

Contd.

Contd.

that they are destroying Meitei youth by growing and peddling drugs. Again Singh repeatedly disgraces Kukis as “poppy cultivators” – or worse, narco-terrorists. The writers note how “the state government’s crackdown on Kukis in the hills under the pretext of combating drug cultivation” intensified tensions. The state announced the eradication of 15,000 acres of poppy fields, predominantly situated in Kuki-dominated hill areas.

But, as the writers observe, the Kukis “are merely poor cultivators while (the state turns) a blind eye to the influential elements that acquire the poppy, manufacture, and market it. Those who control the movements of the drugs, enjoy political support”.

They quote sensational claims of former Assistant Superintendent of Police in Manipur, Brinda Thounaojam, that “the Chief Minister himself is the biggest investor in the poppy cultivation”. She said to the writers that he “is a drug lord with vested interests in the poppy industry”. She alleged that “not only the CM but the son of Union Minister Amit Shah is also involved in the poppy industry...The CM’s second wife who is a Naga and MLA from Tandel is also active in poppy industry...”

The team clarifies its inability to independently verify these allegations. But I am convinced that it is unfair to lay the blame for Manipur’s drug epidemic primarily at the door of the Kuki people. This illegal cultivation could not have continued without the tacit consent of successive governments in Manipur. There is no evidence the Kukis are key actors in the cross-border drug industry centred in Myanmar, making them culpable for the massive cancer of drug addiction across the valley. The giant transnational drug industry indeed could only flourish with the patronage of people of immense wealth and political clout in Imphal, Delhi and Myanmar.

An important contribution of the report is to document unflinchingly the culpability of the Bharatiya Janata Party governments in Delhi and Imphal, and militant groups with open patronage of the chief minister in

igniting and fuelling the conflict.

It lists the many provocations by the chief minister – stigmatising Kukis as illegal immigrants and foreigners, with eviction drives targeting Kuki lands and villages, and with the abrupt withdrawal from the Suspension of Operations with Kuki militant groups. “By portraying the Kukis in a poor light and dehumanising them by calling them ‘illegal immigrants’, ‘poppy cultivators’ and ‘encroachers’, the BJP is firmly on its way to disenfranchise the Kukis,” the report says.

The Kukis, the writers observe worryingly, have been rendered electorally dispensable similar to the ways in which Muslims have been rendered inconsequential electorally “by consolidating the ‘Hindu’ vote and creating one strong ‘Hindu’ identity including all the caste groups”. Besides, the report describes systematic ways in which the autonomous hill councils were weakened and development funds to the hills squeezed.

The writers also touch on the close alliance of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh with the Meitei militant group Arambai Tenggol which is openly patronised by Singh and the former BJP MP Leishemba Sanajoaba, who is also the titular “king” of Manipur. Each have strengthened the other in the valley. The writers explain that the Arambai Tenggol plank of reviving Sanamahism works as a pretext for Hindutva agenda.

“The Arambai Tenggol’s claim of reviving Sanamahism is pushing the Meiteis towards an agenda of supremacism akin to Hindutva movement in the rest of India,” the report says. The close ties with the state government of the Arambai Tenggol, with the signature black t-shirts of its militia, assures it impunity in “not only using its force and violence against the Kukis but also against Meitei Christians and Meitei liberals who oppose its actions”.

Contd.

Contd.

The Arambai Tenggol led the vandalising of the Meitei Christians and Kuki churches. Its members were allegedly part of the mobs which sexually assaulted Kuki women during the conflict, vandalised and attacked Kuki villages and homes and murdered them brutally. Its members had been seen marking the houses of the Kukis in Imphal months before the May violence broke out.

The gravest outcome of the close partnership of the Arambai Tenggol with the state government was that the state stood by as its members looted around 4,000 modern weapons from the state armoury. It is this that decisively transformed the ethnic conflict into a civil war.

The writers speak compassionately about the situation a year after the conflict started, with no sign of any end in the horizon. At least 70,000 people were displaced by the attacks on their homes and villages, 45,000 of them Kuki. The majority of these still are forced to live in relief camps. They inhabit common halls with partitions of clothes and tarpaulin, sleeping on thin mattresses even in the freezing cold of the winter months. The conditions of sanitation, food, child care, medical attention in the camps are all abysmal.

Hundreds of places of worship remain vandalised and desecrated. Both the valley and the hills have been ethnically cleansed of the estranged community. The boundaries between the valley and the hills are “as hard borders as those between two hostile countries”, protected by different security forces – Assam Rifles guarding the Kukis and Manipur police guarding the Meities – with no less than seven check posts.

The writers make clear why immediate prospects for peace in Manipur are dim. “There are compelling narratives that are hardening community identity amongst individuals, blurring reason and sense of right and solidarity,” they say.

They describe how the claims and demands of each of the warring communities are irreconcilable with the other. The Meitei combatants want an undivided

Manipur but with Scheduled Tribe status to enable them to own land in the hill areas. They also demand an Assam-style National Register of Citizens to identify and expel Kuki “infiltrators”, and the fencing of the mostly open border between Myanmar and Manipur.

They seek further a withdrawal of the Suspension of Operations agreement between Kuki militant groups, the central government and the state government. They demand the withdrawal of the Assam Rifles which they claim protect the Kukis alone, and the handing of all security responsibilities to the Manipur police. And finally, they insist that the displaced Meiteis are returned to their villages and homes in the hills.

The Kukis, on their part, are united in their unyielding opposition to every one of these demands, and require a guarantee that their rights to land and forests in the hills are robustly defended from the Meitei people of the valley. For this, they seek a separate administration for the hill areas in Manipur. The Nagas, although not part of this conflict, oppose a separate administration to the Kukis. They contend that since the areas claimed for separate governance by the Kukis also contain Naga-inhabited territories, any such concession would undermine the Naga pursuit of Nagalim.

On the other hand, many among them oppose, like the Kukis, the grant of Scheduled Tribe status to the Meitei people, as this would endanger Naga-held lands in the hills as well. They seek power-sharing between all the ethnic communities that inhabit Manipur with no room for Meitei chauvinism.

The writers end their report with describing some building blocks that would be essential to a process, however distant, of restoring peace to Manipur. Both communities have lost faith in the chief minister, and are dismayed by the continuing silence of the prime minister regarding their continuing tragedy. Even before Chief Minister

Contd.

Contd.

Singh steps down, his hate speeches must end, and the state administration must punish any further hate speech.

The writers call for a process of truth and reconciliation, built on a shared acknowledgment of loss and suffering on both sides. A peace committee should be established to initiate a peace process involving dialogue between the communities. With this the wheels of justice must be set in motion, punishing those responsible for the killings, mass rape, arson, destruction of habitats and desecration of shrines.

But perhaps the most urgent need is to disarm all militant groups and end the regime of state patronage and impunity that they enjoy. The armed militants of both communities, but particularly the Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun, have let loose a climate of fear. People who call for peace or criticise the state

government are attacked with violence and intimidation unleashed by these armed groups.

It is imperative, the writers rightly conclude, “for all ethnic groups to acknowledge Manipur as a shared homeland, wherein each group respects the others as equals and co-inhabitants. Embracing this collective understanding of a composite homeland holds the key to a sustainable resolution for Manipur”.

Published by: [Scroll](#)

Harsh Mander, justice and peace worker and writer, leads Karwan e Mohabbat, a people's campaign to counter hate violence with love and solidarity. He teaches at FAU University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, and Heidelberg University, Germany; Vrije University, Amsterdam; and IIM, Ahmedabad.



THE CLAIMED PEACE TALK





THE PARADE

You undress them
March them, consume them
With your lust and hatred
It is flesh to flesh
But you have not won the battle
Their souls you cannot touch
The souls you are after
Dignity, God clothed them with-
Is not in their bodies.

It cannot be stripped by the mob
Nor by the pack of those mighty women
who stripped themselves in front
of the Kangla fort.
Women to women!

Yes, the violence is flesh to flesh brothers
Today it is yours to cheer
Today it is ours to weep
Tomorrow belongs to the Lord!

*In grief,
Ningreichong
19/07/2023*

Courtesy: EastMojo.com

