

# Thingkho Le Malcha

A Daily Newsletter by KSO Media & Documentation Cell

## THANK YOU

FOR VISITING KUKI-ZO AREAS THRICE

PU RAHUL GANDHI, MP

HON'BLE LEADER OF OPPOSITION, LOK SABHA





## KUKI VICTIMS' UPDATE

As on 01.06.2024



**186**  
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.

# CONGRESS MP AND LEADER OF OPPOSITION RAHUL GANDHI VISITS LAMKA

Congress MP and Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, on Monday arrived in Manipur's Jiribam district via Silchar amid tight security.

Jiribam district borders Assam's Cachar district and thousands of displaced persons are taking refuge in the neighbouring state after fresh tensions sparked in June.

The Congress leader Gandhi visited a relief camp set up at Jiribam Higher Secondary School and interacted with inmates. He marked his first visit to the northeast region after being elected as the Leader of the Opposition to the Lower House.

"LoP Shri @RahulGandhi visits Jiribam Higher Secondary School relief camps, meets victims of violence & offers support in their darkest hour. His third visit to Manipur post-violence shows his unwavering commitment to the people's cause," posted Congress on X. The Congress MP was warmly welcomed by Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) president K Meghachandra, CWC member Gaikhangam and other part workers upon his arrival at Jiribam.

After his arrival at Imphal airport, Gandhi travelled to Lamka (Churachandpur) via Tiddim road. Upon his arrival at Lamka, the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha was warmly welcomed by students lining up along the Tiddim road, cheering with ecstasy for the visiting Congress leader.

At Lamka, Rahul Gandhi visited Relief Camp at Savdhana Mandap in Tuibong. During his visit, Rahul interacted with inmates of the camp. Various Kuki Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) such as the Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF), Kuki Students' Organization Churachandpur and Kuki Women Organization for Human Rights submitted a representation to the visiting Congress leader.

Through a letter, Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF) chairman Pagin Haokip and general secretary Muan Tombing expressed their gratitude to Rahul Gandhi for



his renewed efforts to put an end to the violence in Manipur and bring about peace in the region.

They conveyed deep appreciation for the Congress Party's longstanding commitment to the welfare of all Indians, particularly marginalised tribal groups. They also praised the election of Alfred Kanngam Arthur as the MP from Outer Manipur, to represent our grievances during the "tragic and difficult period".

They also apprised Gandhi of their concerns. "We do not have a state government; the one that exists is hostile to us and only supports a certain community. We are facing numerous challenges from the state BJP government, which is utilizing both its official machinery and non-state players inside the Meitei community. Our existence as a political entity is at stake," the ITLF wrote.

They pointed out that there has been no improvement in the security situation even after a year of killings and displacements, with citizens having to face danger of death on a daily basis.

"A year after the violence began; Kuki-Zo homes and properties are still being set on fire and destroyed. To date, almost 7,000 homes have been demolished, nearly 200 Kuki-Zo have lost their lives, over 360 places of worship were destroyed and about 20,000 have been homeless," they claimed.

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As a minority community with fewer numbers and even fewer resources to protect themselves, the ITLF said that the community is under constant threat of being attacked by militant groups like Arambai Tenggol and the proscribed UNLF, who allegedly have access to a large arsenal of weapons bought from across the border or looted from state armories.

“They have openly stated that their aim is to either kill all of us or drive us out of our lands,” ITLF said.

The Kuki-Zo body said that all commodities, including essentials, were prohibited from entering the Kuki-Zo areas for over a year. They cited how simple medical supplies like cotton swabs remain unavailable.

“This has negatively impacted the quality of life of the Kuki-Zo people. The condition of our internally displaced people is not up to par, with frequent lack of relief materials and amenities,” ITLF said.

Further, the ITLF highlighted that all development activities, including maintenance and repair of public infrastructure, have been halted in Kuki-Zo areas over the past year. They alleged disparity, claiming that Meitei-controlled valley areas receive preferential state patronage.

The ITLF also pointed out severe connectivity challenges faced by tribal communities, noting that they must travel over 350 kilometers to reach the nearest airport in Lengpui, Mizoram. This lack of connectivity adversely affects access to central competitive examinations and emergency medical care. They also highlighted the unreliability of helicopter services due to limited seating and frequent cancellations, stressing the urgent need for immediate solutions to address these connectivity issues.

“With the Kuki-Zo unable to travel to the state capital, the Meitei-controlled state government is using this opportunity to conduct mass job recruitments. As a result, many job opportunities have been lost for the Kuki-Zo, showing that the state government is openly partisan,” they wrote in their letter to Gandhi.

Students have also been adversely affected, especially those in technical lines, as all major centres of learning and all head offices are located in the capital.

The ITLF stressed the urgent need for an immediate political solution to break the cycle of violence and atrocities in Manipur. They emphasised that the Kuki-Zo minority faces an unsustainable situation, unable to lead dignified and secure lives “given the extent of bloodshed and the radicalization by the majority society”.

To achieve their socio-economic and political aspirations, the ITLF called for the fulfilment of the political settlement outlined in the Congress party’s manifesto, emphasising justice as its cornerstone. They expressed confidence in Rahul Gandhi’s leadership and urged swift action to alleviate their suffering and secure justice without delay.

Meanwhile, the KSO Churachandpur, through a representation extended heartiest congratulations to the Congress party and Rahul Gandhi on remarkable feat achieved in the recent concluded 18th Lok Sabha elections and becoming the Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha, a position which is vital for thriving democracy.

“We are also extremely happy to note you have genuine concerns for the people of Manipur, raising the Manipur issue in the Parliament and other forums and visiting the State twice despite your hectic schedules. We hope these concerns and visits by you pay rich dividends and bring lasting and durable peace to the region. Our best wishes are with you and a warm Chibai, Rahulji!,” KSO wrote.

On his second visit here, the KSO Churachandpur raised some pressing issues pertaining to Kuki students’ community for his kind intervention.

“As you are aware, since day one of the ethnic cleansing campaign against the Kukis by N Biren Singh led Meitei radicals over the last more than one year, we have endured untold hardships and sufferings which one can but only imagine. The pogrom has a direct bearing on the future of many

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students, some on the verge of losing their careers. Contrary to the claims that normalcy is returning, many students are in peril and unable to continue their studies for certain obvious reasons”, the KSO said.

Pending a Political Solution to the ongoing conflict, the Kuki Students’ Organisation (KSO) placed the following grievances pertaining to the academic welfare of its members for prompt redressal:

1. To enable our members who cannot afford to go outside to sit for various all-India competitive exams, exam centre at Lamka (Churachandpur) may be arranged on a priority basis. It is pertinent to mention here that the District Administration has already recommended for making Churachandpur as a UPSC exam centre. However, the State authority has not endorsed the recommendation to the concerned authority;

2. Many students are incapacitated either to pursue higher studies or apply for competitive exams due to the loss of documents in the course of the violence. As such, a mechanism by way of setting up a common portal for recovery of lost or burnt documents be put in place in the best interests of the students’ community;

3. Upgradation of National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology (NIELIT) Churachandpur Extension Centre, under Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology to a full-fledged (Autonomous) Centre is the pressing need for thousands of Kuki students who are now barred from going to Imphal, the State Capital. This will address the need of the students to get training in IT and electronics at different levels.

4. Thousands of displaced students are languishing in relief camps. In its bid to ensure the continuity of their studies, the KSO has started a few community schools exclusively for them from the current academic year. The Community Schools are run at Tuibong (Churachandpur), Sangaikot (Churachandpur) and Phaikoh (Ukhrul district) where underprivileged students are provided free education. However, paucity of resources is coming our way. Nevertheless, addressing this issue will certainly save the careers of many deprived students. Taking cognizance of the predicaments, we urge you to intervene to upgrade the

KSO Community Schools into Residential Schools and provide adequate and updated infrastructures.

5. We would also like to take this opportunity to highlight the fact that schools in Churachandpur and Kangpokpi Districts who were seeking affiliations with the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) were denied by the Manipur State government. As communication with Imphal becoming a big issue in the wake of the violence, as many as 25 schools’ authorities have sought affiliations of their schools with CBSE last year. However, the State government authority intervened to disrupt the process which led to the cancellation of affiliation given by CBSE last December. This issue needs serious contemplation in the interest of the students.

6. Lack of Medical Facilities is taking a heavy toll on the Kuki people. Providing state-of-the-art facilities including specialist and super-specialist doctors to the existing Churachandpur District Hospital would save many lives and improve the health and overall wellbeing of the people.

7. It is also to highlight that Power Supply to the district is coming from Imphal Valley. At the drop of a hat, miscreants from Valley areas disrupt power supply to the district. This issue needs prompt redressal by way of arranging an alternative source of power supply to the district.

8. Helicopter Service from Lamka (Ccp) to Aizawl, Lamka to Kangpokpi, Lamka to Moreh will ease difficulties in travel, particularly during monsoon when road connectivity gets cut due to calamities such as landslides etc. We urge you to ensure stable and reliable chopper service to the aforementioned destinations. Helicopter Service from Lamka-Aizawl (Mizoram) which was started last year has been stopped now for reasons best known to the authority concerned.”

The visiting Congress leader was accompanied by Alfred K. Arthur, MP, Outer Manipur, KC Venugopal, General Secretary AICC and Girish Chodankar, AICC Manipur State In-charge.

# MEITEIS RENEW ATTACK ON KUKI VILLAGES, TWO VILLAGE VOLUNTEERS ARRESTED BY SF

On the day of Rahul Gandhi's visit to Jiribam, Meitei armed groups attacked Phaitol Kuki village; three houses were torched in presence of security forces, and two volunteers arrested.

Hours ahead of Rahul Gandhi's arrival to the strife-torn district of Jiribam, the Meitei armed militants played a spoilsport by attacking a Kuki Village of Phaitol, near Jiribam, under Tousem Sub-division, Tamenglong District, today, prompting the Kuki Village guards to defend their ancestral land.

The Meitei militants including the Arambai Tenggol in cohort with the Meitei State Police began indiscriminate firing towards the Kuki Village at around 5:00 AM on Monday using sophisticated weapons. The Kuki Village Volunteers retaliated and the ensuing gunfight lasted for about two hours.

It is surprising to see that amid the presence of security forces both from the state police and central paramilitary forces, the Meitei armed groups could manage to burn down at least three Kuki houses of Phaitol village. The Central Security forces also arrested two Kuki village volunteers, which is highly condemnable. The two civilians i.e (Village volunteers) from Phaitol were arrested by 39th Assam Rifles.

Three houses belonging to Kukis were burnt down in the presence of CAPF near NH-37, including the residence of Late Letkhokap Singson, residence of Tongjalen Singson and Thenmang's Residence.



Later in the day, a disturbing incident unfolded on social media platforms, wherein the Meira Paibis blocked Central Armed Forces while Meitei militants roamed freely with sophisticated weapons. This blatant double standard has raised serious concerns about the Indian authorities' ability to ensure the safety of minority communities like the Kukis.

The repeated attacks on Kuki-Zo homes, with no adequate response from the authorities, have created a sense of vulnerability and fear among the community. While the Kuki village Volunteers were arrested, the Meitei militants brandishing sophisticated weapons were seen roaming freely amongst the Central Security forces.

The Central security forces' biased attitude in such a conflict zone is uncalled for and is highly condemnable.



**Man cannot be freed by the same  
injustice that enslaved it.**

*– Pierce Brown*

# INDEPENDENT PEOPLE'S TRIBUNAL CONVENES IN DELHI TO HEAR TESTIMONIES OF ETHNIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS

The Independent People's Tribunal on Manipur, convened by the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), gathered in Delhi on July 6 and 7 to hear harrowing personal testimonies from survivors and victims of the prolonged ethnic violence that has gripped Manipur since May 3, 2023.

Prior to the Delhi hearings, a delegation of Jury Members and Secretariat members visited Manipur in late May and June 2024. They traversed through affected districts such as Bishnupur, Churachandpur, Imphal, Kangpokpi, Kakching, Senapati, and others to document firsthand accounts from survivors across diverse communities. The team also visited several Relief Camps to interact with displaced individuals, including schoolchildren, women, and elderly residents, in addition to holding discussions with government officials and security personnel.

The Tribunal gathered testimonies from internally displaced persons and representatives of various ethnic groups including Kukis, Meiteis, Nagas, Pangals, and others. Advocates, journalists, healthcare professionals, scholars, activists, and community leaders also shared their insights and perspectives on the ongoing crisis in Manipur.

Established on March 15, 2024, in response to the escalating violence and governance challenges in Manipur, the Tribunal aims to address issues of constitutional governance, distrust towards governmental roles, controversies surrounding security force responses, and concerns over militant group activities and vigilante actions.



The Tribunal's objectives include documenting human rights violations, especially concerning loss of life, sexual violence, and violence against vulnerable groups. It seeks to analyze the performance of constitutional authorities in preventing violence, ensuring access to justice, investigating crimes, and upholding the rule of law. Additionally, the role of security agencies, government functionaries, and independent institutions in protecting human rights will be scrutinized.

In light of the deep polarization and precarious environment prevailing in Manipur, the Tribunal aspires to restore confidence and trust in constitutional principles and institutions. It aims to compile its findings into a comprehensive "Report to the Nation" in the coming months, outlining recommendations for accountability, justice, and reconciliation in Manipur.

# RAHUL GANDHI MEETS GOVERNOR, SECURITY ADVISOR KULDEIP SINGH AMID ETHNIC VIOLENCE

Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, made his third visit to Manipur on July 8, where he met with the Governor in the presence of Chief Secretary Vineet Joshi and Security Adviser Kuldeip Singh. The meeting also included leaders of the Congress party in Manipur, including Okram Ibobi Singh, Keisham Meghachandra, and Gaikhangam.

During his visit, Gandhi visited relief camps in Manipur's Jiribam and Churachandpur districts, where he interacted with the residents affected by ethnic violence. He also interacted with the displaced people staying in Bishnupur district. The unrest in the northeastern

state has tragically claimed over 200 lives since May last year, with many displaced individuals seeking refuge in these camps

Accompanied by senior Congress leaders, Gandhi's visit to Manipur marks his first since the Congress secured victories in both Lok Sabha seats in the state. His presence underscores the party's ongoing engagement and concern for the welfare of those affected by the recent turmoil in Manipur.

(IndiaTodayNE)



SS Kim  
@KimHaokipINC

Compassionate Politics!!



LoP Shri @RahulGandhi visits a relief camp in Tuibong village of Manipur and interacts with displaced families affected by the violence.

Churachandpur, Manipur



18:00 · 08 Jul 24 · 1,181 Views



Assam Congress  
@INCAssam

Follow

Devastating floods have created havoc in Assam & Manipur & thousands of families have taken shelter in emergency camps.

While PM @narendramodi is on a foreign tour confirming his indifference towards the NorthEast, JanaNayak Shri @RahulGandhi is with the people in distress.

@INCIndia  
@Jairam\_Ramesh  
@SupriyaShrinata  
@JitendraSAlwar  
@BhupenKBorah



12:21 · 08 Jul 24 · 1,088 Views







**FEATURED ARTICLE**

**How Manipur's Tribal Women Are Resisting Patriarchy and The Pressure to Play Peacemakers**

**Makepeace Sitlhou**

Last July, when Rekha Sharma, the chairperson of National Commission for Women (NCW), visited the tribal hill district of Churachandpur in Manipur, she made an unusual suggestion. She was in town to meet the three women who were gang raped and assaulted, and had sought refuge in the district after fleeing their village in a neighbouring Kuki Zo-dominated district in the state. A video of two of these women being paraded naked and fondled by a mob of men was leaked online, sparking widespread outrage and finally, a response from Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

After the video went viral, the Indian mainland, along with the rest of the world, had finally awoken to the depravity of Manipur's ethnic conflict between the Kuki Zo tribe and the Meitei community, which has killed over 220 persons and displaced at least 70,000 in the last 14 months.

Chiching (not her real name), an activist belonging to the Hmar tribe, was among the group of civil society women members who had received Sharma in great hopes of getting justice for the women. Chiching, however, told The Wire that Sharma asked them to sit down with the Meitei women to have peace talks and offered neutral grounds to hold these talks.

Making peace with whom? The Meira Paibis!" Chiching shrieked in response, "I asked where were the good people when Olivia and Florence [two Kuki Zo women who were killed in Imphal] were raped?"

Sharma just rolled her eyes, she said.

The suggestion, Chiching said, was ludicrous considering a peace process was not tenable so long as N. Biren Singh remained the chief minister, who has consistently made divisive remarks particularly aimed at the Kuki Zo tribe. Though the central National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government has continued to entrust him with all law and order affairs, his failure in handling the crisis was evidently reflected in the 2024 general election results. Congress candidates were elected to the parliament in both the hill (tribal) and valley (Meitei) seats from Manipur.

"Not even once in these 12-13 months has he uttered about the suffering of the tribal people and the attacks on us. Or genuinely appealed to the Meitei or tribal community for peace. Even when he does, it is heavily biased against the tribal people," added Chiching.

Sharma's visit was soon followed by a four-women-member team of activists from Meghalaya, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Delhi that met women across sections of the Kuki Zo and Meitei societies in August 2023. In their report, the team commended the 'spirit and resistance' of women from both the communities, but was also left with "troubling as

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well as complex questions about their 'agency' in a strong patriarchal society like theirs".

While the report said that there was "enough evidence" to show "extremely negative roles played by sections of Meira Paibis in the present conflict" apart from "manipulation," and that there can be no justification for these roles, "but neither can there be sweeping generalisations and condemnation for all".

After facing a shocking defeat in the general elections in Manipur, home minister Amit Shah chaired a high level meeting on June 17 to take stock of the security situation in the state. The government has, for the first time, declared its intention to take action against Meira Paibis. Besides building amity between the Kuki Zo and Meitei communities and recovering the weapons stolen from the armouries, the government noted that Meira Paibis have blocked the movement of security forces, helped in the release of armed insurgents and enabled vigilante groups to steal weapons.

Roshmi Goswami, a social activist specialising in women and conflict in the Northeast, who was part of the four member team, said that while certain women from the Meitei community needed to be held to account for their actions, Meira Paibis are getting scapegoated in this conflict. "That Meira Paibis have been used as political agents has not been explored at all here and I'm afraid that many women will en masse become targets of the State"

Although Chiching had no reservations with the Meira Paibis or the Meitei community, at large, and expressed her willingness to engage in peaceful negotiations with them, she clarified that her opposition lies with the systemic injustices and the harmful position that the Kuki Zo tribes have been placed in, rather than with the communities themselves.

"Till today, whenever they give speeches or address the public, they make it very clear that illegal immigration and narco terrorists will be addressed and the NRC [National Register of Citizens] will be implemented immediately," she said.

"Now is not the time to talk about peace, but justice,"

Chiching added.

Kuki Zo tribal women see themselves differently from Meira Paibis.

The latter are accused of participating in the conflict by handing over tribal women to mobs who sexually assaulted them and preventing central security forces from reaching tribal villages under attack by the Arambai Tenggol. The tribal women, on the other hand, have played a "supportive role" whether it is in aiding relief work, leading prayers and protests on the ground, or sitting at barricade points checking for illicit drugs and alcohol. Occasionally, as and when required, Kuki Zo women have formed human chains to protect their community from police action as they did in Moreh, the town bordering Myanmar, and recently, to prevent police from halting construction of a bridge in Serou.

This reporter, however, observed during her field visits that not only Kuki Zo women in the hills have borne the brunt of militancy in their homeland, they have also faced immense backlash on social media. Among many anonymous troll accounts on X, a woman journalist and an award-winning social activist from the Meitei community slut-shamed Kuki Zo women, accusing them of "serving" officers from the Assam Rifles.

Besides dealing with a hostile government and Meitei civil society organisations, Kuki Zo women activists working on the ground have also had to struggle with interferences and diktats from male-led tribal bodies, which continue to be patriarchal at its outset. Moreover, the ethnic fault lines within the Kuki Zo community, primarily over tribal nomenclature of identifying as 'Kuki' or 'Zomi', has also spilled over to the women's groups.

Women at work

The last time Mary Beth Sanate was on the road to Sugnu, she was heading to the frontline where a

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gun battle was on between village volunteers belonging to communities who have been in conflict since May 2023. They took food and rations for the volunteers from the Kuki Zo tribes.

The local tribal groups have always called this place 'Lamka', in the Kuki Zo dialect, and since the conflict, have rejected the official name, Churachandpur, after the Meitei King Churachand. With the hills covered with thicketed forests on one side and paddy farms spread on the other side where the hills melt into the valley, it's hard to fathom that communities on either side of the Manipur river who were neighbours for centuries had now become sworn enemies.

Until the conflict, Sugnu — a town on the bank of Manipur river in Kaching district — had a mixed population of Meiteis, Kuki Zo tribes and Nagas with Churachandpur (Kuki Zo) to its east, Bishnupur (Meitei) on the northern side and Chandel (Naga) district on its west. By the end of May, minority Kuki Zo (among the 1% tribal population in the town) crossed the river into Churachandpur district after they were attacked and their houses were burnt down by Meitei mobs.

Since then, the Manipur river has become a buffer zone in the civil war-like conflict between the Kuki Zo dominated hill district and the Meitei dominated valley.

Sanate, who had been mainly coordinating relief for the displaced tribals in relief camps until then, said Kuki Zo women in the area tagged along with mostly male-led civil society groups to get a glimpse of the action in the frontline, considerably far away from their homes in the district headquarter. For more than a year, the sensitive areas along buffer zones dividing the Meitei and Kuki Zo turfs across the state have witnessed protracted clashes between armed volunteers and respective ethnic armed groups.

In Churachandpur, a district that is home to several sub-tribes and clans of Chin, Kuki, Zo and Hmar tribes, even relief work often gets divided along ethnic lines. "But not when there's firing in the frontline," said Sanate. "Then everyone supports the volunteers as defenders, not as per the tribe they belong to."

There has been little rest for Sanate since the conflict broke out last year after Kuki Zo and Naga tribes from all over the state mobilised rallies in their respective districts to protest a Manipur high court order that recommended 'tribal' status to the Meiteis. Besides providing essential needs to relief camp residents, the 52-year old women's rights activist has been pursuing legal action for victims and survivors of gender-based violence.

In April, as the Northeast region experienced its first spring showers, this reporter travelled along the same road to Sugnu, bound for a village en route to the river, where she intended to visit a former army man, just before reaching the buffer zone. By this time, Sanate had compiled a list of 26 cases of gender-based violence against Kuki Zo women, including incidents of sexual assault. At least 14 cases of gang rape have been registered during the conflict out of which only one where a Meitei woman alleged that she was sexually assaulted in Churachandpur town. Despite the horrific accounts and number of cases she had already come across, Sanate had still been receiving cases of unreported sexual violence.

On June 8 last year, Lamtinsei Kipgen had filed a complaint in Sangaikot sub-division police station in Churachandpur district accusing Manipur police commandos of kidnapping and murdering his sister who was married to a Meitei man. This incident allegedly took place in Kumbi relief camp in Bishnupur about a week earlier on May 31 when Manipur police commandos allegedly forced his brother in law, Ningthoujam Kennedy Singh, to point out his wife and dragged her away from the camp where the family had taken refuge after their house was burned down in Sugnu bazaar. "Then the Manipur police commando took my younger sister to an undisclosed location and killed her without any mercy," Kipgen had said in the First Information Report (FIR) to the police.

Notably, the FIR failed to mention that Kipgen's sister was allegedly gang raped by the same police

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commandos before she was killed. “My brother in law narrated the whole thing to me over the phone but the police refused to add the rape allegations since there were no eye witnesses,” said the former soldier, who served in the Assam regiment for 20 years. He hadn’t informed anyone else in the army, either.

Kipgen’s wife, Vavah, was on the phone with his sister when the police commandos had come to the camp on that fateful day. “I could hear their voices storming inside the camp, communicating through their walkie talkies,” she recalled. “Even before that day, my sister-in-law would always tell us over the phone that she felt very unsafe in the camp, where all the displaced Meiteis were living.”

When this reporter visited Kipgen’s residence, he did not have a copy of the FIR nor had he been contacted by the police since then. Sanate was distraught at his helplessness in the matter and decided to go to the station, a few kilometres away from Kipgen’s house.

Sanate mentioned that the family was not even sure if the accused were Manipur police commandos, or members of the Arambai Tenggol dressed in their fatigues. In several instances during the war, Arambai Tenggol members have donned military or commando fatigues in planned operations against Kuki Zo villages in the hills. Though there are other Kuki Zo women (also married to Meitei men) in some of the relief camps near Kumbi who are eyewitnesses, they refuse to speak out of fear of retaliation.

“Word is that the Arambai men came looking for his sister on a tip off from the Meitei man’s first wife, (who is also Meitei),” Sanate said.

Given that the road to justice in the courts will be long, Sanate is also ensuring the global feminist movement and women organisations in India continue highlighting these stories in the media, solidarity statements, reports, conferences and international platforms like the United Nations.

“I’m in touch with Vrinda Grover as well,” she says, “who

has agreed to fight this in courts to ensure justice for the victims and survivors.” Grover is a prominent human rights lawyer known for high-profile cases of sexual violence during sectarian riots.

Meanwhile, justice continues to elude the fallen Kuki Zo, as well as those who survived heinous crimes like sexual assault. In April, this reporter exclusively reported on the police chargesheet of the viral video gang rape. Despite evidence, there has been no action taken against certain culprits complicit in the crime, namely the Manipur police and extremist groups like Arambai Tenggol, who were named in the complaint.

*Torn between tribal male egos*

On June 7, dozens of Kuki Zo women descended outside home minister Shah’s residence in New Delhi, a week after he had made his first visit to Manipur after the conflict broke out. On his four-day visit, he met leaders and representatives from both the communities including the Meira Paibis in Imphal and even addressed a press conference there. However, he didn’t meet women’s groups like Kuki Women Union or the Zomi Mothers Association in Churachandpur and Kangpokpi districts that he’d visited.

Until then, the gender-based violence victims were yet to come forward although rumours of such incidents, especially in Imphal, were slowly spreading in the relief camps.

Distraught by the mounting number of the dead in their community, and lack of action against the chief minister (an outcome that the Kuki Zo had hoped would happen after Shah’s visit), Delhi-based Dr. Mary Grace Zou felt she could no longer remain a mute spectator. An Anthropology professor who taught in Delhi University for several years, Zou quickly convened the Kuki Women’s Forum, a national collective of Kuki Zo women living outside the Northeast. Although her late husband was

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an avid tribal rights activist, Zou herself was quite uninitiated in any social or political movements. But the action that day outside Shah's residence took everyone, including the media, by surprise.

What propelled the action was the death of a 7-year-old boy and his Meitei mother on June 6 when they were burnt alive by miscreants with the help of Meira Paibis. Though Zou reasonably didn't expect Shah to entertain them, she was enraged to see the spokespersons of the Kuki militant groups on the other side of the gate. "They came out to tell us to calm down and disperse, saying the Home Minister is looking into the matter," Zou said. "It was embarrassing to see them acting like lap dogs and messengers of a government under whose watch our people were massacred."

Barely a month into their existence, the Kuki Women's Forum ran into hot water with some of the members who did not feel represented by the nomenclature, 'Kuki'. Even in the midst of the worst crisis confronting the community, the old squabbles over nomenclature and territorial dominance had resurfaced. "I got a call from a Paitei (a Zomi tribe) man in Churachandpur asking me to change the name of our forum," said Zou, frustrated by such interference by male chauvinistic bodies back home.

Some of the members split from the Kuki Women's Forum and made an Unau Women's Forum which, according to Zou, was under the instructions of the Zomi tribal leaders. In Churachandpur, too, the nomenclature differences erupted over posters that were plastered in the town to observe the international 16 days of activism — a UN Women observation to protest gender-based violence — in December. By then, the nomenclature to identify the community as 'Kuki Zo' had become commonplace even in the media despite the early references being singular to Kuki, even as Thadou, Paitei, Mizo, Vaiphei and Hmar tribals in the valley were targeted as just Kukis.

"Initially, all the tribal women organisations had joined the activism to protest the gender based violence our women had suffered through the conflict," Sanate told

me. "But somehow the wrong posters carrying 'Kuki women' got printed and circulated. The Zomi Mothers' Association [ZMA] backed out."

Chingngaihdon, the president of Zomi Mothers' Association, told The Wire that ZMA had backed out of the 16-day event in Churachandpur because they were in disagreement with using the 'Kuki Zo' nomenclature because it was not 'inclusive'.

"After the conflict, certain forums adopted Kuki Zo as nomenclature as common to all," she said. "But when we talk about Kuki Zo, the Zomi and Hmar brothers could not accept it as they regard the term to only mean the Kuki brothers from the Zo descendants."

It is important to use Hmar, Kuki, Mizo and Zomi because it's only through mutual respect of each community's feelings, identity and existence that we can unite as brothers, added Chingngaihdon. She asked this reporter to hold publishing her quotes until they were approved by the male head of the Zomi Council.

"I don't believe in this fanaticism," a member of the Kuki Women's Union, the oldest women's representative body from the community, told this reporter at their dilapidated office run from a children's shelter in Churachandpur, when asked about the rifts in the resistance. The member asked not to be named for fear of reprisal from the government.

In December, disagreement over nomenclature led to clashes between the Kuki and Zomi groups a day before the burial of 76 dead bodies that had been rotting in the valley hospitals for over eight months. Besides the nomenclature war, she was referring to scores of Zomi flags that were hoisted all around major marketplaces in Tiddim road (which connects to neighbouring Myanmar) in Lamka town, as well as the districts while entering Manipur from Mizoram on bumpy roads.

*Contd.*

*Contd.*

“The public might be ignorant but at least, the leaders should be broadminded,” she said, adding that the women’s union faced criticism for working with Zomi groups on relief work especially since the latter is not part of the Indigenous Tribal Leaders’ Forum (ITLF).

“We have been doing all this relief work with [the] Zomi Mothers’ Association,” she told them. “We simply cannot avoid them.”

Like Chiching, many Kuki Zo women activists agree that women were still under the control of men in their society. The ITLF, which includes a few women representatives like her, was formed post the crisis as a way to bring together the leaders of all the tribal apex bodies under one umbrella. But decisions are still left to the menfolk, who refuse to defer to women.

“For instance, the women have been collecting all the rice for the frontline as donations from the locals twice a month,” she said. “In June, we said it would be sufficient to collect it once but the relief team still insisted we do it twice.”

For all the liberties that women from the Northeast tribes seemingly enjoy compared to the Indian mainland society, mostly in the absence of female foeticide and greater visibility in public spaces, women’s freedoms are hard coded in tribal customary laws subject to male interpretation.

Thongkholal Haokip, a Political Science professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University who has extensively written on the Kuki tribes in Northeast India, said that women have also become chiefs in the absence of their husbands, like it happened with the wives of the rebel leaders who were jailed during the Anglo-Kuki war in 1917-1919. The rebellion by the Kukis in Manipur was in response to the forced conscription of Naga and Kuki tribal men as porters during the First World War by the British colonial administration.

“In all tribal societies, the main reason why women are not given customary rights, particularly over land, is to avoid land alienation and traditional lands going to others outside the clan/tribe,” said Haokip. However, he

added, tribal bodies like the Kuki Inpi have wings like the Kuki Women Union (KWU) which are part of key decision making.

However, almost all the women The Wire spoke to said that the men in tribal bodies were yet to fully grasp women’s power. Zou, the convenor of the forum that has since been renamed Kuki Zo Women’s Forum, says the larger issue lies with men in the tribal community who are patriarchal and threatened that women would take over the movement.

“Our men don’t like women coming out,” she said. “They just want us to come in the frontline to protest but when it comes to decision making, they don’t want us to do anything without their permission”

The cliché of women as peacemakers

In 1995, when the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was signed as a roadmap towards gender equality and women’s rights worldwide, including in the area of peace and security, there was great hope for women’s participation to increase in conflict resolutions. An International Peace Institute study of 182 peace agreements signed between 1989 and 2011 found that when women are included in peace processes, there is a 35% increase in the probability that a peace agreement will last 15 years or more.

However, peace agreements from countries like Syria, South Sudan, or Afghanistan show there’s a long road ahead in bringing women to the table and having their voices heard. Between 1992 and 2018, women were only 13% of negotiators, 3% of mediators and only 4% of signatories in major peace processes.

Even in the Northeast, which has seen several peace agreements with ethnic armed groups and civil society groups, women have historically never

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been part of any political negotiation with the Union government. Despite the 2016 framework agreement with the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak Muivah), considered to be the mother of all insurgent groups, women's groups like the Naga Mothers' Association were sidelined.

Yet hope endures on all sides that women will broker peace between the two warring communities, despite no signs or initiatives from women's groups in this direction.

Conflict specialist Goswami feels that there's been a preoccupation to push women into building peace between two conflicting communities, which is both positive and negative in some sense. The four member team, which she was a part of last year, felt that it was "very early yet and too fraught to talk about peace".

Whether in Manipur or elsewhere in the Northeast, she said that the political issues and the underlying economic pressures must be addressed in any conflict resolution. "The government has made such a mess, having done nothing at all for communities on both

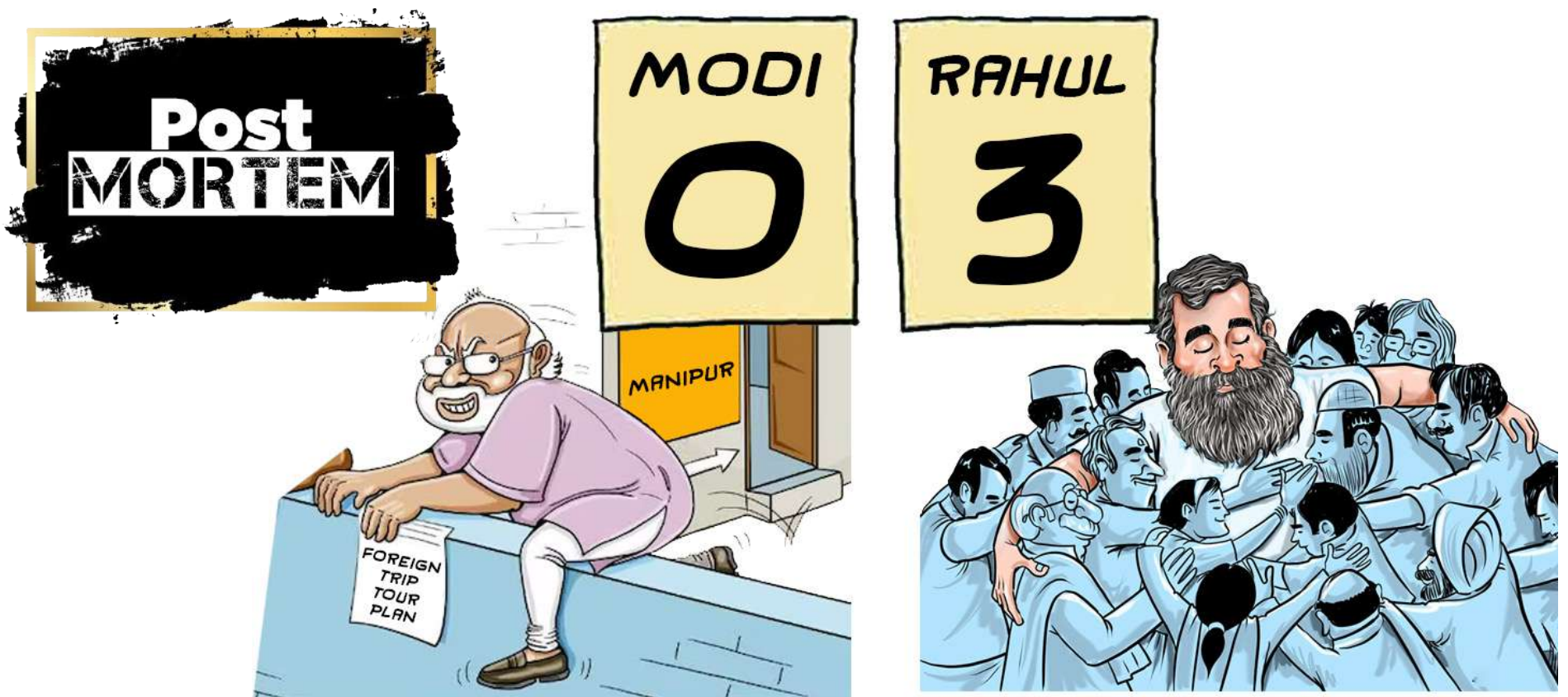
sides; let them first clear the mess before pushing women into a situation where they are set to fail," Goswami said.

She added: "Only after the political mess is resolved, which people on both sides resolutely believed would start after Biren Singh is removed from the chief minister's post, can the women choose to come into the process of peace building at their own pace and determine the terms of the process."

But the hope for peace and renewing lost relations isn't entirely dead. Sanate says that women from both the communities can still come together when the situation has subsided a little. "Despite many women and their leaders taking sides in the current situation, things will change in due course," she said.

"Conflict has its own process and characters."

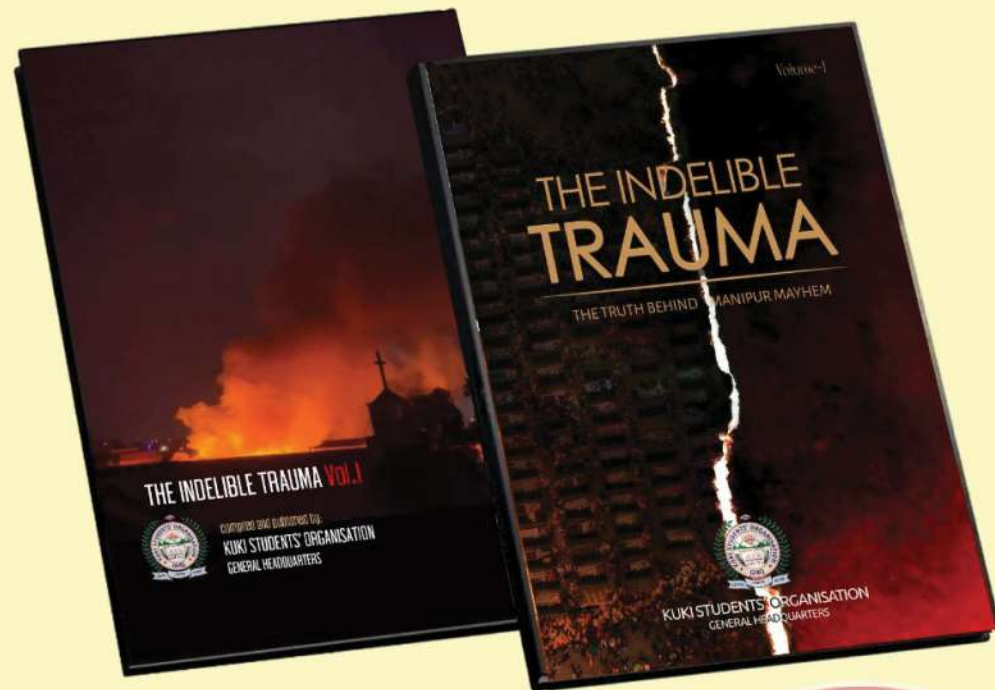
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## THE MANIPUR SCOREBOARD



A BOOK ON  
THE TRUTH BEHIND  
**MANIPUR  
MAYHEM**



# THE INDELIBLE TRAUMA VOL. I

COMPILED AND PUBLISHED BY  
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# OH MANIPUR – A WHISPERS OF A WOUNDED LAND

~ Thongminthang Lhungdim

Oh, Manipur, a land of strife and woe,  
Where ancient hills and valleys flow,  
The fields that once knew harvest gold,  
The laughter of our children's play,  
Now shadows fall, the silence broken,  
By cries and weeps that never cease.

While justice turned a blindfolded eye,  
As innocence deprived.  
The Tahchapas were beheaded, cruelly chopped,  
And a Tahchanu's wails, with a haunting sound,  
Paraded naked, shamed, in daylight's glare,  
Their dreams extinguished, lost in air.

Once the sacred church, where prayers and  
worshipped were heard,  
Now ashes in the air, all things blurred,  
The songs of hope, the hymns of peace,  
Have fallen silent, sorrow's lease.  
Our homes in valleys, reduced to cinders,  
grey,  
Where dreams were built with care.

Oh, Manipur, where once love and unity,  
Is but a ghostly trace,  
How long before your valleys weep,  
For those you can't replace?  
In silent nights, the whispers tell,  
Of horror's grip, a living hell.

May the Almighty God bring solace, and jus-  
tice find its way,

To heal the wounds of Manipur, and bring a  
brighter day.