

Thingkho Le Malecha

A Daily Newsletter by KSO Media & Documentation Cell



AWAITING JUSTICE



L. Jangnomphai Village,
Sadar Hills



KUKI VICTIMS' UPDATE

As on 10.01.2024



158
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'S TOP BODY CENSURES THE FORMATION OF ALL TRIBE COMMITTEE

The Kuki Inpi Manipur, the apex body of the Kuki tribes strongly slammed the recent statement of Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on the formation of an all-tribe committee to decide on whether the Chin-Kuki community would be deleted from the Scheduled Tribes list of the State.

KIM Information & Publicity Secretary, Janghaolun Haokip said that the Chief Minister's statement amidst the state reeling under a communal crisis is an outright indication of the communal dispensation and antagonism of the Meitei led Manipur State Government against the Kuki-Zo people.

He said that the interminable attempt to distort the glorious history and identity of the Kuki-Zo people by the Manipur state government is most regrettable and demands an apposite redressal.

He maintained that the continued aggression and hostility of the Radical Meiteis is similarly a continued effort to further suppress the Kuki-Zo people against their rights and privileges.

"In fact, the conspiracy of the Manipur State Government and the radical Meiteis for the removal of Kuki-Chin Tribe from ST list is just one in a series of ridiculous agendas to demean, distort, and discredit the Kuki-Zo people for further political alienation; social discrimination, and economic exploitation of our people", Haokip asserted.

It is on record that this unscrupulous agenda has led to the barbaric torture, rape and killing of the Kuki-Zo people with the ruthless destruction of their homes and families, he added.

He also said that while the Kuki-Zo people have shown true commitment to the constitutional values and principles, and thereby duly abide with the constitutional leadership, the Kuki-Zo people



PRESS COMMUNIQUE
Kanggui, the 12th January, 2024

04/KIM/PR./22-39: The interminable attempt to distort the glorious history and identity of the Kuki-Zo people by the Manipur state government is most regrettable and demands an apposite redressal.

The recent statement by Manipur Chief Minister Shri N Biren Singh on the formation of an all-tribe committee; amidst the state reeling under a communal crisis is an outright indication of the communal dispensation and antagonism of the Meitei led Manipur State Government against the Kuki-Zo people. The continued aggression and hostility of the Radical Meiteis is similarly a continued effort to further suppress the Kuki-Zo people against their rights and privileges.

In fact, the conspiracy of the Manipur State Government and the radical meiteis for the removal of Kuki-Chin Tribe from ST list is just one in a series of ridiculous agendas to demean, distort, and discredit the Kuki-Zo people for further political alienation; social discrimination, and economic exploitation of our people. It is on record that this unscrupulous agenda has led to the barbaric torture, rape and killing of the Kuki-Zo people with the ruthless destruction of their homes and families.

While the Kuki-Zo people has shown true commitment to the constitutional values and principles; and thereby duly abides with the constitutional leadership, the Kuki-Zo people will not tolerate any attempt to compromise the dignity and sanctity of our history and identity.

Therefore, the Kuki Inpi Manipur would like to appeal the Central Government for due consultation and contemplation on the issue to put an end to the ruthless oppression of the majority meiteis against the minority Kuki-Zo community and therefore also an end to the ongoing ethnic conflict in the region that has crippled the lives of thousands of good citizens of our country.

Issued by:
Department of Information & Publicity
Kuki Inpi Manipur



will not tolerate any attempt to compromise the dignity and sanctity of our history and identity.

The Kuki Inpi Manipur appealed to the Central Government for due consultation and contemplation on the issue to put an end to the ruthless oppression of the minority Kuki-Zo community by the majority Meiteis and therefore also an end to the ongoing ethnic conflict in the region that has crippled the lives of thousands of good citizens of the country.

KSO SADAR HILLS SLAMS SUSPENSION OF KANGPOKPI ZEO, SERVES 48 HOURS ULTIMATUM FOR REVOCATION

The top Kuki students' body of Kangpokpi district, the Kuki Students' Organization Sadar Hills slammed the suspension of the Zonal Education Officer, Kangpokpi along with the ZEO Churachandpur District and Deputy Inspector of Schools, Samulamlan Block of ZEO, Churachandpur today.

"The Governor of Manipur, in exercise of powers conferred by Rule 10) (1) (A) of the Central Civil Services (Classification, Control, and Appeal) Rules 1965, and 10(1)(a) of the Central Civil Services (Classification, Control and Appeal) Rules 1965, hereby placed Jangkhohao Haokip, ZEO Churachandpur, Lhingtinneng, ZEO, Kangpokpi and L. Taithul, D.I of Schools, Samulamlan Block of ZEO, Churachandpur under suspension today with immediate effect." the order reads.

The order stated that the two Zonal Education Officers of Kangpokpi and Churachandpur district and the Deputy Inspector of Schools shall not leave the headquarters without obtaining permission from the Government.

Expressing deep concern and unhappiness over the suspension of Lhingtinneng Singsit, Zonal Education Officer, Kangpokpi, the KSO Sadar Hills stated that the decision has raised questions, and sought clarification on the suspension of the ZEO Kangpokpi.

The KSO Sadar Hills stated that it stands in solidarity with the Zonal Education Officer, Kangpokpi who has been suspended.

It further stated that the suspension reportedly stems from the signatory involvement of the ZEO in the matter related to the CBSE affiliation.

"While the student body understands the importance of adherence to rules and regulations in the matter of education, we, however, believe in providing individuals with a fair chance to present their side of the story and a thorough investigation before reaching the end result." stated KSO Sadar Hills.

The student body also appealed for a swift and impartial investigation into the allegation against Lhingtinneng Singsit while earnestly appealing to revoke the suspension order within 48 hours.



Office of the
KUKI STUDENTS' ORGANISATION SADAR HILLS

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Regd. No. 2991 of 1979

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Ref.....

Date.....

PRESS RELEASE
12th January 2024

Approse the notification Order by the Governor, Manipur from the Secretariat: Education's Department dated 12th January 2024 by Under Secretary, Education(s), Government of Manipur, the KSO Sadar Hills expresses deep concern and unhappiness regarding the suspension of Mrs. Lhingtinneng Singsit, Zonal Education Officer, Kangpokpi. This decision has raised questions, and the KSO-SH seeks clarification on the suspension of the ZEO Kangpokpi.

The KSO Sadar Hills stands in solidarity with the Zonal Education Officer (ZEO) Kangpokpi who has been suspended. The suspension reportedly stems from the signatory involvement of the ZEO in the matter related to the CBSE affiliation.

The KSO understands the importance of adherence to rules and regulations in the matter of education. However, we believe in providing individuals with a fair chance to present their side of the story and a thorough investigation before reaching the end result.

The KSO appeals for the swift and impartial investigation into the allegation against Mrs. Lhingtinneng Singsit. In the light of the urgency surrounding, the KSO-SH earnestly appeals to revoke the suspension order within 48 hours. And also, the KSO declares that the newly appointed official to replace Mrs. Lhingtinneng Singsit will not be allow to occupy the office.

The KSO-SH remains committed to upholding the rights and interest of students and community at large. While we acknowledge the need for disciplinary measures when warranted, we urge the Government of Manipur to thoroughly investigate the allegations against the suspended ZEO Kangpokpi and ensure a fair and unbiased inquiry.

The KSO-SH would also like to highlight that CBSE affiliation was in part, as a result of the ongoing conflict in the state of Manipur.

The KSO-SH recommends to establish the offices for the Board of Secondary Education Manipur (BOSEM) and Council of Higher Secondary Education Manipur (COHSEM) in Hill Districts to prevent any unavoidable circumstances arising from the centralised administrative.

Sd/-
Department of Information and Publicity
KSO Sadar Hills

The KSO Sadar Hills also declared that the newly appointed official to replace Lhingtinneng Singsit will not be allowed to occupy the office.

The student body stated that it remained committed to upholding the rights and interests of students and the community at large.

While acknowledging the need for disciplinary measures when warranted, the student body urged the Government of Manipur to thoroughly investigate the allegations against the suspended ZEO Kangpokpi and ensure a fair and unbiased inquiry.

KSO LAMKA CONDEMNS SUSPENSION OF KUKI OFFICIALS; URGES GOV TO REVOKE ORDER WITHIN 48 HOURS

The Kuki Students' Organization Churachandpur, with great concern and dismay, strongly condemned the suspension of three Kuki government officials working with the Manipur Education Department.

The state government on Friday placed Jangkhohao Haokip, ZEO, Churachandpur; Lhingtinneng, ZEO, Kangpokpi and L. Taithul, D.I of Schools, Samulamlan Block of ZEO, Churachandpur, under suspension with immediate effect.

In a statement of condemnation on Friday, the student body alleged that the three officials have been suspended for performing their duty as they committed no mistakes worthy of suspension. They are performing their assigned duty as concerned Educational officials, it said.

"The state government's suspension of Pu Jangkhohao Haokip (ZEO, Churachandpur), Pi Lhingtinneng (ZEO, Kangpokpi) and Pu L. Taithul (D.I of Schools, Samulamlan Block) is nothing but an attempt to make the Kukis as scapegoats for the rampant inefficiencies and corruption prevalent in all the departments of the Manipur Govt. dominated by the Meiteis," KSO said, adding that such latest act of the Meitei government was only a natural extension of the long history of discrimination against the Kukis, and will definitely be not the last.

"This continuing discrimination against the Kukis is clearly seen in one of the recent speeches of the Meitei CM N. Biren Singh wherein he has plans to suggest the removal of the Kukis from list of STs."

The state government in its order said the responsibilities previously managed by Lhingtinneng, the ZEO of Kangpokpi, will now be overseen by Joshi Lamkhohat Haokip, D.I., who is in charge of Saitu. Similarly, the duties formerly handled by Jangkhohao Haokip, the ZEO of Churachandpur, will be taken care of by Esther Chingneikim, D.I. in charge of Churachandpur.

Vehemently opposing those alterations by the state government, the KSO Churachandpur said it would resist the implementation of the government's order.



KUKI STUDENTS' ORGANISATION
CHURACHANDPUR DISTRICT
Motto: Learn, Unite & Serve
Regd. No. 2991 of 1979

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HENGLEP BLOCK SANGAIKOT BLOCK SINGAT BLOCK THANLON BLOCK SAMULAMLAN BLOCK LEIMATA BLOCK SONGPI BLOCK

Ref. No. KSO/CCP/PR/2023-: 60 Date.....

PRESS STATEMENT

The 12th January, 2024

The Kuki Students' Organization Churachandpur, with great concern and dismay, strongly condemns the suspension of three Kuki government officials working with the Manipur Education Department.

The state government on Friday placed Shri Jangkhohao Haokip, ZEO, Churachandpur; Smt. Lhingtinneng, ZEO, Kangpokpi and Shri L. Taithul, D.I of Schools, Samulamlan Block of ZEO, Churachandpur under suspension with immediate effect. The three officials have been suspended for performing their duty, which really is unfortunate as they have committed no mistakes worthy of suspension. They are performing their assigned duty as concerned Educational officials.

The state government's suspension of three officials is nothing but an attempt to make the Kukis as scapegoats for the rampant inefficiencies and corruption prevalent in all the departments of the Manipur Govt. dominated by the Meiteis. This latest act of the Meitei government is only a natural extension of the long history of discrimination against the Kukis, and will definitely be not the last. This continuing discrimination against the Kukis is clearly seen in one of the recent speeches of the Meitei CM N Biren Singh wherein he has plans to suggest the removal of the Kukis from list of STs.

The partisan action of Manipur government not only disrupts the efficient functioning of public services but also raise questions about due process and fair treatment. The importance of transparent investigations, adherence to legal procedures, and the protection of individuals' rights should be emphasized. Suspension should be a measure taken judiciously, based on credible evidence and in accordance with the principles of justice and fairness. Any deviation from these principles undermines the integrity of public administration and erodes public trust.

Further, the state government in their order said the responsibilities previously managed by Shri Lhingtinneng, the ZEO of Kangpokpi, will now be overseen by Smt. Joshi Lamkhohat Haokip, D.I., who is in charge of Saitu. Similarly, the duties formerly handled by Shri Jangkhohao Haokip, the ZEO of Churachandpur, will be taken care of by Smt Esther Chingneikim, D.I. in charge of Churachandpur. The KSO Churachandpur vehemently opposes these alterations and will resist the implementation.

While urging for a prompt and unbiased inquiry into the accusations against Jangkhohao Haokip, the KSO Churachandpur vehemently criticizes the suspension of the mentioned government officials. The organization also appeals to the Hon'ble Governor to annul the suspension and reinstate the affected officials within 48 hours, emphasizing the cause of justice.

Issued by:
Department of Information & Publicity
KSO Churachandpur

Strongly condemning the suspension of said government officials, the student body requested the Governor of Manipur, Anusuiya Uiquey, a fellow tribal, to revoke the suspension in the interest of justice, and exhorted her to fight for the rights of her fellow tribal communities in Manipur.

While urging for a prompt and unbiased inquiry into the accusations against Jangkhohao Haokip, the KSO Churachandpur also appealed the Governor to annul the suspension and reinstate the affected officials within 48 hours, emphasizing the cause of justice.

IN 2023, BJP'S POLICIES SPARKED VIOLENCE AND RIGHTS ABUSES IN INDIA, SAYS HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

In 2023, the Bharatiya Janata Party government's discriminatory and divisive policies led to increased violence against minorities, creating a pervasive environment of fear and a chilling effect on government critics, Human Rights Watch said on January 11 (Thursday) in its World Report 2024.

The Modi government, through persistent discriminatory practices, undermined its global leadership aspirations as a rights-respecting democracy, it added.

"Instead of holding those responsible for abuses to account, the authorities chose to punish the victims, and persecuted anyone who questioned these actions," said Meenakshi Ganguly, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch.

In the 740-page World Report 2024, its 34th edition, Human Rights Watch reviews human rights practices in more than 100 countries.

Indian authorities harassed journalists, activists, and critics through raids, allegations of financial irregularities, and use of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, which regulates foreign funding of nongovernmental organisations.

In February, Indian tax officials raided BBC's offices in New Delhi and Mumbai in an apparent reprisal for a two-part documentary that highlighted Prime Minister Narendra Modi's failure to provide security for Muslims. The government blocked the BBC documentary in India in January, using emergency powers under the country's Information Technology Rules.

The report listed several events, highlighting discriminatory practices against religious and other minorities.

"On July 31, communal violence broke out in Nuh district in Haryana state during a Hindu procession and swiftly spread to several adjoining districts. Following the violence, as part of a growing pattern, the authorities retaliated against Muslim residents by



illegally demolishing hundreds of Muslim properties and detaining scores of Muslim boys and men. The demolitions led the Punjab and Haryana high court to ask the BJP-led state government whether it was conducting "ethnic cleansing," the report said.

"Over 200 people were killed, tens of thousands displaced, hundreds of homes and churches destroyed, and the internet shut down for months, after violence erupted in May in Manipur state, in northeastern India, between the majority Meitei and the minority Kuki Zo communities. BJP's state chief minister, N. Biren Singh, fuelled divisiveness by stigmatising the Kuki, alleging their involvement in drug trafficking, and providing sanctuary to refugees from Myanmar," it said.

"In August, the Supreme Court said the state police had 'lost control over the situation', and ordered special teams to investigate the violence, including sexual violence. In September, over a dozen United Nations experts raised concerns over the ongoing violence and abuses in Manipur, saying the government's response had been slow and inadequate," it added.

The report further pointed out that Indian authorities persistently limited freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and other rights in Jammu and Kashmir. Incidents of extrajudicial killings by security forces persisted throughout the year.

LHTC CONDEMNS OIL LEAKAGE, SEEKS FAIR INVESTIGATION

The Leimakhong Hill Town Committee, or the LHTC vehemently condemned the leakage of oil from the Leimakhong Heavy Fuel Power Station and demanded a fair investigation and action against those accountable for endangering the environment and the Kuki-Zo community.

According to the statement signed by the Leimakhong Hill Town Committee, the committee came to know about the leakage of oil through social media platforms on January 10 evening.

The LHTC Secretary, Helkhojang Gangte stated that the spillover of oil from the Leimakhong Heavy Fuel Power Station has already affected more than fourteen Kuki-Zo houses in the surrounding area while contaminating the nearby streams affecting the environment and causing health hazards to both animals and human beings.

He also said that the foul smell of the oil is unbearable for human beings further causing health hazards.

While strongly condemning the incident, the Leimakhong Hill Town Committee also slammed the failure of the concerned department in not taking enough precautions to safeguard the station and prevent such an incident.

The Leimakhong Hill Town Committee urged the concerned department and the District Administration as well as the District SP to hold accountable those responsible for endangering the environment and the Kuki-Zo communities by means of fair and transparent investigation and to take immediate action to avoid further damage from the heavy fuel leakage.

MINISTERS DELHI-BOUND AFTER AMIT SHAH'S SUMMON

Three ministers on Thursday rushed to Delhi after Union Home Minister Amit Shah supposedly called them for an immediate meeting.

However, there is no confirmed report about the trio's summoning by the Union minister.

According to sources, RD&PR Minister Yumnam Khemchand, Health Minister Dr Sapam Ranjan and Education Minister Th Basanta Kumar left for New Delhi around 1:40 pm.

The ministers were accompanied by Moirang MLA Thongam Shanti, sources revealed.

Though the exact reason for their Delhi visit remains sketchy, the sources speculated that it might be to

ascertain BJP state government's view regarding the eight month long conflict in Manipur.

The sources have divulged that the ministers will have a meeting with Amit Shah on Thursday itself as soon as they reach Delhi.

Meanwhile, BJP Manipur Pradesh president A Sharda and BJP MLAs recently went to meet BJP national president JP Nadda in the national capital in connection with the ongoing crisis in the state but returned without meeting him.

Prior to the Delhi trip the BJP MLAs and party office bearers had also held a meeting at the party's office.



Appear weak when you are strong, and strong when you are weak.

— Sun Tzu

INDIGENOUS TRIBAL LEADERS' FORUM PUBLISHES ITS ANNUAL REPORT 2023

The Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum today released its Annual Report 2023, published by its Media and Publicity Cell for the period of May 2023 to December 2023.

The book contains ITLF's press releases, memorandums, public notices and activities issued and performed by the tribal body from May 2023 till December 2023.

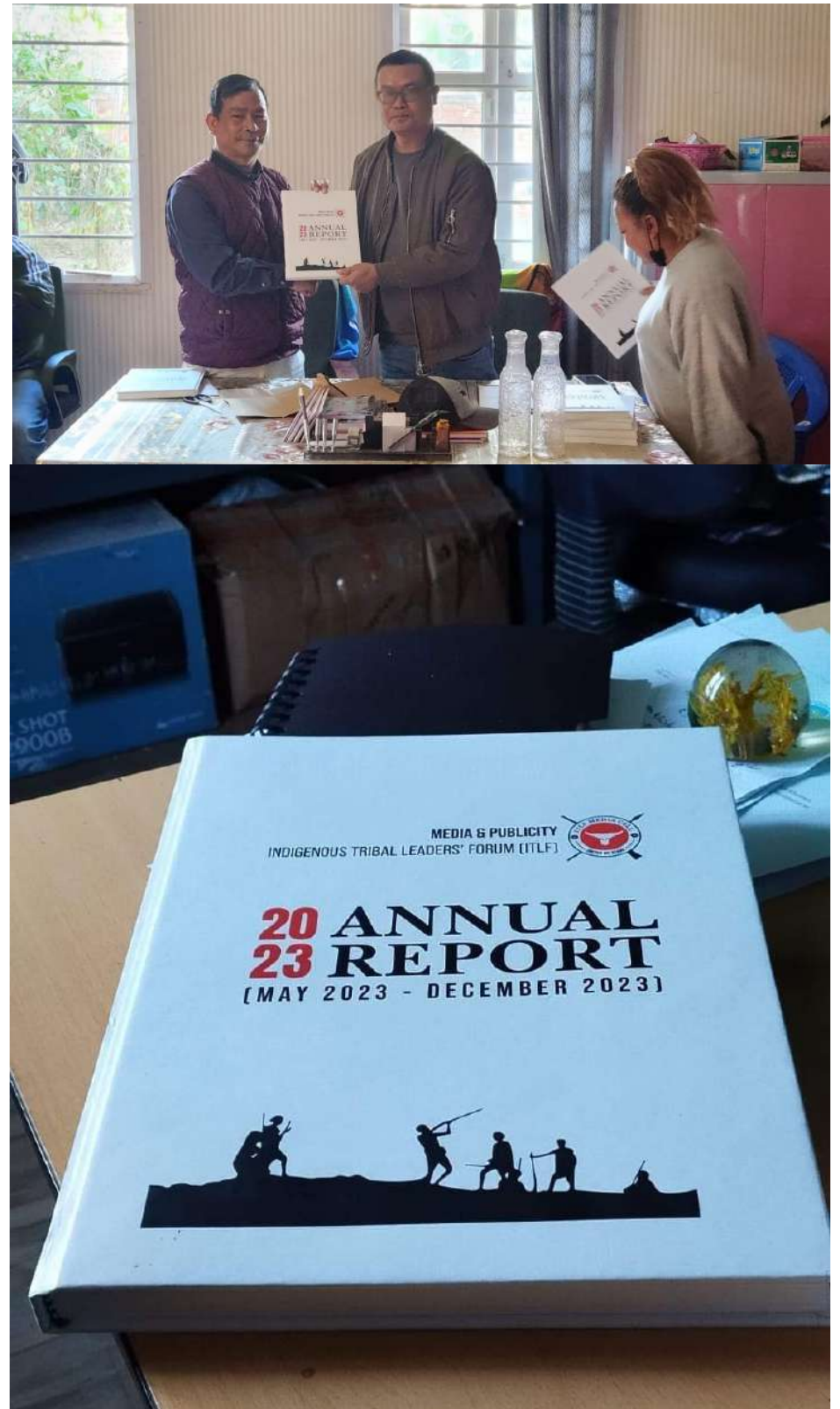
The Annual Report book was released by the President of Simte Tribe Council, B. D Simte, in a function held at its office. The Report was presented to each Tribe president under ITLF and to the Departmental Convenors.

Earlier in the month of October 2023, the Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum had also published a book called "Manipur Mayhem - Key Players & Events" which is a compilation of articles, documents and photographs that bear witness to a sombre period in the chronicles of the Kuki-Zo people in the wake of state-sponsored ethnic cleansing pogrom unleashed by the majority Meiteis.

Going through the pages of "Manipur Mayhem", one will find narratives that are both heart-wrenching and heart-warming. The book speaks of loss and sorrow, but it also speaks of courage and hope. It tells of lives upended by conflict, but also tells of lives rebuilt with resilience and solidarity.

As one delves into the stories of the book, one will become intimately acquainted with the experiences of the Kuki-Zo people - their struggles and their dreams for a better future.

"Manipur Mayhem- Key Players & Events" was more than just a book; it's a call to conscience. It implores the Kuki-Zo to confront the painful past with an eye toward a more equitable future. It reminds them that their shared history, no matter how difficult,



must be remembered, studied and learned from.

The book was dedicated to all the martyrs whose lives have been lost in the hands of the Meiteis.

RAHUL-LED 'BHARAT JODO NYAY YATRA' TO LAUNCH FROM THOUBAL INSTEAD OF MANIPUR'S CAPITAL

After the BJP Government gave limited permission to use the Hapta Kangjeibung Palace ground in Imphal for launching the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' led by former party President Rahul Gandhi on January 14, the Congress on Friday announced that the yatra would be flagged off from Manipur's Thoubal district instead.

The Congress' Manipur President Keisham Meghachandra Singh said that permission was sought on January 2 to start the yatra from the Hapta Kangjeibung ground in the state Capital but the Manipur Government gave consent with certain conditions, forcing the party to move the venue to Thoubal district's Khongjom War Memorial.

The Imphal East district administration in an order earlier said. ".....considering the prevailing law and order situation and circumstances, only flagging off of the yatra with a limited number of participants, is hereby allowed on January, 14, 2024 to prevent any untoward incident and disturbance in law and order. The number and names of the participants shall be provided in advance to this office to enable this office to take all necessary precautionary measures."

"We met Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Wednesday but he, referring to the prevailing law and order situation, told us that the permission would not be given to use the Hapta Kangjeibung ground. Later in the night (on January 10), the district administration issued an order giving permission for the ground but with a limited number of participants," the Congress leader told the media.

Singh said that a team of the state Congress again met Chief Secretary Vineet Joshi in presence of Director General of Police Rajiv Singh, and the Deputy Commissioner (DC) and Superintendent of Police in Imphal East district. "But the officials told us that not more than 1,000 people would be allowed at the Imphal venue and this is a very, very small number of participants for this mega event. On Thursday night, Thoubal Deputy Commissioner gave permission for



flagging off the yatra from a private place in Khongjom area of the district. Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge will flag off the yatra from the Khongjom area," he said.

Terming the Manipur Government's decision as murder of democracy and violation of peoples' right, the Congress leader said that the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' will be launched as scheduled by the AICC.

He said that on January 14 several leaders of the party, including Chief Ministers and MPs from across the country will gather in Manipur for a peaceful rally.

AICC General Secretary KC Venugopal (Organisation) earlier said that from Manipur, the yatra will go to Nagaland, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya and will culminate in Mumbai on March 20 after covering 6,713 km through 110 districts in 15 states in 66 days.

Venugopal had said that the yatra would demand justice for the women, youth, farmers and poor and it would be historic as well.

ZU, ZCC CALL FOR LOW-KEY GAAN-NGAI FESTIVAL

Ahead of the Gaan-Ngai, the grandest festival of the Zeliangrong community on January 23, Zeliangrong Union (Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland) and Zeliangrong Cultural Council (ZCC) have issued a joint appeal to people of Zeliangrong community residing in the state to celebrate the festival in a restrained manner, considering the current volatile situation and imposition of night curfew in the valley districts.

The organisations called for a sombre celebration, taking into account of the challenges faced and as a mark of solidarity with those affected by the ethnic conflict.

Zeliangrong Union and ZCC specifically requested village authorities to refrain from organising lively events such as folk dances, festival song competitions, traditional drum performances, cracking jokes,

and any other entertainment activities in connection with celebration of the festival.

This decision is made to express empathy and sorrow for the families who have lost their loved ones in the recent ethnic conflicts, they said.

While advocating for a low-key celebration, the two organisations emphasised the importance of performing the ritual and customary activities associated with the Gaan-Ngai festival.

These activities are dedicated to traditional almighty god Haipou Tingkao Ragwang and other lower realm gods, seeking their blessings for the well-being and prosperity of the village community.

THE SOCIAL MEDIA BUZZ



PM मोदी की प्राथमिकता
Translated from Hindi by Google
PM Modi's priority



1:18 PM · Jan 12, 2024 · 89K Views



We should not dishonour those segments like Kukis who were in Netaji's stream in his great freedom struggle. - Vappala Balachandran, @IndianExpress, 17 August 2023.



The much-tormented Kukis of Manipur were the ones who helped Netaji enter India. Today, they are tortured, killed and women raped. Their houses, and churches are burnt. What a reward!



indianexpress.com
In a time of strife in Manipur, recalling how Kuki community played an essential part with Netaji...

6:29 PM · Aug 27, 2023 · 4,592 Views

**OPINION**

Will suspending the Free Movement Regime With Myanmar Hurt Northeast?

Ninglun Hanghal

At the onset of 2024, the Central government said it would suspend the Free Movement Regime (FMR) and fence the entire India-Myanmar international border.

This was not out of the blue, however. The demand to cancel the FMR came in the aftermath of the violence that broke out in Manipur in May 2023. The conflict that erupted between the Meiteis and the Kuki-Zo communities saw over 100 people killed, thousands displaced, and hundreds of houses and villages razed to ashes.

The mayhem has been attributed to “illegal immigrants” from Myanmar by the government and various CSOs in the Imphal valley, including the educated and intellectuals. Moreover, cross-border trafficking (arms and narcotics) has also been considered one of the main causes of the ongoing unrest in the state.

The Chief Minister told media persons that border fencing is a way to deal with the influx of “illegal immigrants” along the India-Myanmar border.

Taking to X, formerly known as Twitter, Manipur state CM wrote, “Held a meeting with the officials of BRO and deliberated the plan to begin construction of an additional 70 km of border fencing along the Indo-Myanmar border. I was joined by the Chief Secretary, DGP, and officials from the Home Department. In view of the rise in illegal immigration and drug smuggling

from neighboring countries, safeguarding our porous borders has become an urgent necessity.”

Biren Singh’s claims were backed by Union home minister Amit Shah in August 2023. During a discussion in a no-confidence motion in Parliament, Shah said the violence in Manipur had been triggered by an influx of Kukis from Myanmar into Manipur (India), which he said “created insecurities among the Meiteis.”

Shah had told Parliament that problems started with the Kuki refugees from neighbouring Myanmar after the military rulers there started a crackdown against militants in early 2021.

According to media reports, as of December 2023, around 6,000 Myanmar nationals are taking shelter in Manipur.

On the border fencing and suspension of the FMR, Khriezo Yhome, senior fellow at the Asian Confluence, Shillong, emphasised the need to understand the original idea, concept and the aim of the FMR. “We must re-visit the original FMR, the Act-East policy, and ask whether it is still relevant,” said Yhome. According to the senior researcher, both the state and the centre must ensure policies

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such as FMR are implemented without lapses.

Mentioning India's "neighbourhood first policy," where Myanmar is one of the priority countries, Yhome said, "Without a stable neighbour, our security or economy cannot be secure."

India shares a 1,643 km-long border across four states, namely, Arunachal Pradesh (520 km), Nagaland (215 km), Manipur (398 km), and Mizoram (510 km), with Myanmar's Kachin, Sagaing Region, and Chin State. It runs from the tripoint with China in the north to the tripoint with Bangladesh in the south.

The Assam Rifles of the Indian Army stand guard on the Indian side, while the Border Guard Force of the Tatmadaw guards the Myanmar side. The Indo-Myanmar border is an open border where communities living alongside the two countries cross each other.

According to Angshuman Choudhury, Associate Fellow at the Centre for Policy Research, the "unfenced border is an asset rather than a liability," which he said "is what makes the India-Myanmar border unique."

Under the Free Movement Regime (FMR), agreed upon and implemented by both the Indian and Myanmar governments, it allows people living in villages along the border to go 16 km into each other's territory without any documents or IDs. Scrapping FMR would mean visas would now be required for border movement.

The FMR was implemented in 2018 as part of the Central Government's Act East policy. Among others, the objective was mainly to facilitate trans-border trade and social connections. To enable the inhabitants of the border villages to continue their cultural and social engagements and interactions.

It may be mentioned that communities living along the India-Myanmar border have family ties and are largely of the same ethnic stock, such as the Kuki-Zos and the Nagas.

In 2014, the Indian government re-christened the Look East Policy launched in 1992 to "Act East Policy" in an attempt to further push forward its regional influence in the Southeast Asian region.

With an aim to promote economic cooperation and strategic relationships with countries in the Indo-Pacific region, Act East Policy includes, among others, connectivity, trade, culture, defence, and people-to-people contact at bilateral, regional, and multilateral levels.

Significantly, the northeast India region as the gateway to the SEA region figures as a crucial and key component of the Act East Policy. Myanmar is the only ASEAN nation with which India shares both land and maritime borders and therefore is a "gateway" to Southeast Asia via the north-east Indian states. The policy also envisaged the development of NE states.

More than three decades into the policy, India's northeast states have not experienced much of its impact. The region continues to fall behind in terms of economic development.

According to Amar Yumnam, Fellow at the Centre for Economic and Social Studies Hyderabad, the much-hyped "border trade" cannot be called a "trade" per-se. He stated that the "trade" that is happening along the Indo-Myanmar border is all "illegal activity." He underlined that for a policy to be formulated, there is a need for a thorough understanding of ground reality.

In terms of trade, for instance, Moreh in Manipur, the key trading point, witnessed a lot of human activity. Myanmar traders come to Moreh in the early morning and go back in the evening. Many often stay back for a few days depending on their trade or social acquaintances, as many have relatives and acquaintances on either side. The same goes for Indian traders who go to Myanmar. Trade items include food and non-food commodities.

It is also visibly obvious that there are more incoming goods from Myanmar than outgoing from India. These can be witnessed in the markets across Manipur.

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A brief by the Ministry of External Affairs stated that India-Myanmar trade stood at US\$ 1.03 billion in 2021-22. India's imports from Myanmar increased by 55%, and India's exports to Myanmar witnessed an increase of 45% during 2021-22.

Moreh is the third busiest cross-border trade in the Northeast, with a volume of Rs134.37 crore during 1996-2001, as per a study by NEDFi.

Angshuman Choudhury agrees that the inflow of drugs and arms through the open border is a reality. Nevertheless, "that has little to do with the root causes of the current conflict," noted Choudhury. "Fencing the border is nothing more than a narrow security solution that will do nothing to repair Manipur's social consensus and ethnic fabric," observed Choudhury. "It will only give the illusion of a resolution without any long-term outcome."

In fact, human contact and trade along the India-Myanmar border have been happening since time immemorial. The people-people contact continued even after the colonial period.

India's Act East Policy aims to increase influence in the Southeast Asian region. The policy aims to develop northeastern states while establishing deep cultural and social ties with the Southeast Asian region. Only the future will show if removing the FMR and border fencing fulfils the Act East Policy goals or defeats the purpose of getting Southeast Asia and Northeast India closer.

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THE BIREN'S GENIE





Thank You, Manipur!

Oh Manipur, land of vibrancy,
Innocent blood cries out, seeking aid.
Once tranquil, now hills and valleys
Are divided by the crimson flow.
Yet in loss, brothers and sisters unite.
Thank you, Manipur.

Oh Manipur, a tapestry of diversity,
What transpired among my kin?
Communities once intertwined, now estranged,
But division compels us to stand as one family.
Thank you, Manipur.

Oh Manipur, under Biren's rule,
What prompted this malevolent unrest?
Evil policies displace thousands,
Claiming the breath of hundreds.
Yet, within the divide, family finds unison.
Thank you, Manipur.

- Thanggoufen Khongsai