

Thingkho *Le* Maleha

A Daily Newsletter by KSO Media & Documentation Cell



AWAITING JUSTICE



LUNKHOLAL HAOKIP (66 YEARS)

F/O SEITINMANG HAOKIP

ADDRESS: SAITON KHULLEN, LAMKA

DATE OF DEATH: 9TH MAY, 2023

PLACE OF DEATH: LAMKA

CAUSE OF DEATH: MURDERED BY MEITEI MILITANTS



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.

PROTEST RALLY AGAINST EXTRA-JUDICIAL KILLINGS ON JULY 24

The Hmar Women Association and the Kuki Women Organisation for Human Rights are urgently calling upon all individuals and organizations to join them in a peaceful protest rally on July 24, 2024. This rally is being organized in response to the tragic and unjust extra-judicial killings of three Hmar youths in Cachar District on July 16, 2024, by the Assam Police.

The untimely and brutal deaths of these young men in police custody have left their families and communities devastated and in grief, said a statement issued by the two organizations. The rally aims to demand justice for the victims and accountability for those responsible for this gross violation of human rights.

Objectives of the Peaceful Protest Rally:

Justice for the Victims: Seek justice for the three Hmar youths who lost their lives in police custody.
Demand for Inquiry: Demand a transparent and independent judicial inquiry into the circumstances leading to their deaths.
Raise Awareness: Raise awareness about the prevalence of extra-judicial killings and the urgent need for systemic reforms to prevent such tragedies in the future.

The Hmar Women Association and the Kuki Women Organisation for Human Rights invite all community members, human rights organizations, civil society groups, and concerned citizens to join this peaceful demonstration. The support of the broader community is crucial in showing solidarity with the victims' families and reinforcing the collective demand for justice and human dignity.

Event Details:

Date: July 24, 2024

Time: 10:00 AM

Starting Point: Muolvalphei Playground

Ending Point: Wall of Remembrance, Tuibuong

The organizations urge everyone to come together



in unity and strength to ensure that the voices of the oppressed are heard and that justice is served.

Meanwhile, the Kuki Inpi Churachandpur, Kuki Students' Organisation Churachandpur and Hmar Students' Association Tuithaphai Joint Headquarters have extended their endorsements to the proposed rally on July 24.

In a statement, the KSO Churachandpur said they consider the action of Assam Police in killing 3 innocent Hmar youths as a heinous violation of justice and human rights.

“Fake encounters erode the very foundations of justice and fairness. By endorsing this rally, we stand united against extrajudicial actions and advocate for transparency and due process.”

The KSO Churachandpur also request all schools along the rally route—from Muolvaiphei to Peace Ground—to suspend classes during the rally.

Similarly, they also urged all shops and establishments to close during the rally, allowing rally-goers to participate without hindrance.

“In our pursuit of separate administration and justice, let us join hands to ensure that no innocent lives are lost due to fake encounters,” KSO appealed.

ZORO DEMANDS APOLOGY FROM TRIPURA GOVT FOR DEROGATORY REFERENCE

The Zo Re-Unification Organisation (ZoRO) has issued a strong condemnation of the Tripura government for including an alleged derogatory reference to the Zo people in a recent examination question.

According to ZoRO, the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) Sub Zonal Development Officer (SZDO) exam, held on July 21, 2024, contained question no. 75, which asked, "Who are referred to as Sikam?" The provided answer was "Halam-Kuki," a term that the Zo community finds deeply offensive.

A ZoRO official expressed the organization's dismay, stating, "Sikam is a derogatory term in Tripura, suggesting a foolish tribe who are killers and cannibals. We are deeply hurt and upset by this misrepresentation."

They accused the Tripura government of perpetuating harmful stereotypes and looking down on the Zo people through this competitive exam. "We strongly condemn the Tripura government for referring to Zo people in



such a derogatory manner and demand a formal apology," the official added.

In addition to this issue, ZoRO also condemned the recent killing of three Hmar youths on July 16, 2024, in Cachar District, Assam. The organization urged the Assam government to address the demands made by their association in the wake of this tragedy. "We hope that the Assam government will take immediate action to fulfill the demands and ensure justice for the affected families," the ZoRO official stated. (East Mojo)

TODAY IN HISTORY/EVENTS RECALLED: JULY 23, 2023

A RECAP OF THE HORRIFIC INCIDENTS ON JULY 23, 2023 AS A RESULT OF PRE-PLANNED STATE-SPONSORED ETHNIC CLEANSING POGROM AGAINST KUKI-ZO

23rd July, 2023:

A combined team comprising Arambai Tenggol, Meitei Leepun, Meitei militants, and Manipur Police Commandoes have continued their relentless assault on Molngat. This ongoing attack, which began last night, has unleashed a barrage of gunfire that has endured through the night and into the early hours of the morning, with firing reported until the time of this report at 8.00 AM. A combined team comprising

Arambai Tenggol, Meitei Leepun, Meitei militants, and Manipur Police Commandos launched an attack on Langza in Lamka district. It is deeply concerning that Langza has been subjected to such frequent attacks, with incidents occurring nearly every day since the tragic beheading of David Thiek.

ARAMBAI TENGGOL SUCCUMBS TO NSCN-IM'S THREAT

In a surprising turn of events, the Meitei radical group – the Arambai Tenggol, who boast of their powerful artillery and vow to annihilate the Kukis from this surface, has succumbed to recent threat of NSCN-IM.

The NSCN-IM had issued a stern warning to the Meitei radical group, Arambai Tenggol, in response to their aggressive actions and threats towards the Christian minorities in the state.

Arambai Tenggol has exhibited strong animosity towards Christians. This animosity has been particularly directed towards the Naga Christian communities, who have faced significant violence and persecution from Arambai Tenggol. Despite maintaining a neutral stance in the ongoing conflict, the Naga Christians have been subjected to maiming, torture, kidnappings, and killings by the group. The recent statement by the NSCN-IM signifies a potential shift in the conflict dynamics, as they have declared their intention to protect the interests and safety of Christians in Manipur.

The Arambai Tenggol (AT), a radical group often involved in these conflicts, has responded with a strong assertion that their formation as a voluntary organization was a collective response to threats against the socio-cultural and religious heritage of the indigenous people of Manipur, particularly the Meitei community. The AT contends that their mission is to protect and preserve this heritage against external threats, including those posed by armed aggression from the Kukis.

The AT has expressed disappointment with the NSCN-IM's description of them as a "militant group." They emphasize that their efforts are rooted in a socio-cultural context, aiming to safeguard their community's cultural identity and heritage. The AT claims that their actions are driven by the need to defend the Meitei community, which has led to sacrifices by many of their members.

The situation in Manipur and the role of the Arambai Tenggol (AT) are indeed complex and multi-faceted. While the AT presents itself as a socio-cultural and religious heritage group, their involvement in violence,



extortion, monetary demands, kidnapping, and other criminal activities raises significant questions about their true nature and objectives.

The involvement of the AT in violent activities, including threats, extortion, and kidnappings, significantly undermines their claim of being solely a socio-cultural organization. Such actions are characteristic of militant or criminal groups, not heritage organizations focused on preserving cultural and religious traditions.

Acting as moral police and reprimanding or physically attacking members of their own community further belittles their claim of being a socio-cultural organization. This kind of behavior is often associated with authoritarian or extremist groups that seek to impose their own set of values and norms on others, rather than fostering cultural preservation and respect.

The looting of government armories and the use of sophisticated weapons in attacks against the Kukis indicate a level of militarization that is incompatible with the activities of a typical socio-cultural organization. The public display of such weapons reinforces the perception of the AT as a militant group rather than a cultural one.

The public flaunting of weapons and involvement in violent activities erode the credibility of the AT's claim to be a socio-cultural organization. These actions suggest that the group may have broader

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political or militant objectives that extend beyond the preservation of cultural heritage.

The AT's stated mission of protecting the socio-cultural and religious heritage of the indigenous people of Manipur contrasts sharply with their actions, creating a significant contradiction. This discrepancy leads to questions about their true motivations and the legitimacy of their claims.

In short, while the AT portrays itself as a socio-cultural organization dedicated to preserving the heritage of the Meitei community, their involvement in various forms of violence and criminal activities casts serious doubts on this portrayal. The group's actions align more closely with those of a militant organization, suggesting that their stated mission is but a façade for more aggressive and potentially harmful objectives.

In addressing allegations of animosity towards Christians, the AT states that they respect all religions and the right to religious practice.

The actions of the Arambai Tenggol (AT) towards Christian churches in the Imphal Valley starkly contradict their claims of respecting all religions. These actions, including the desecration and demolition of churches, hoisting their flag atop Christian places of worship, and repurposing these churches as offices for their group, highlight a severe lack of regard for religious diversity and freedom.

The deliberate targeting of Christian churches in Kuki localities is a direct attack on the religious freedom and

cultural identity of the Christian community. The destruction of these places of worship indicates not only a lack of respect but also an active hostility towards Christianity in these regions.

The act of hoisting the Salai-Taret flag on Christian churches is a symbolic assertion of dominance and a clear message of disregard for the sanctity of these religious spaces. It demonstrates an attempt to impose their own cultural and religious symbols over those of the Christian community.

Turning desecrated churches into offices for the AT further emphasizes their contempt for the Christian faith. This act is not just about repurposing buildings but is a profound violation of the community's religious sentiments and heritage.

The AT's actions towards Christian churches starkly contradict their public statements of respecting all religions. Such behavior undermines their credibility and raises serious concerns about their true intentions and respect for religious pluralism.

In conclusion, the actions of the Arambai Tenggol against Christian churches in the Imphal Valley highlight a severe inconsistency between their stated respect for all religions and their actual behavior. These actions are indicative of a broader agenda that undermines religious freedom and contributes to the ongoing conflict and instability in the region.



Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel.

- Samuel Johnson

N. BIREN SINGH'S DOUBLE-STANDARD: ONCE A POPULAR ILLEGAL TIMBER-TRADE DEALER, HE NOW CAMPAIGNS FOR TREE PLANTATION

Although widely known as an illegal “Timber Businessman” for years by clearing virgin forests in the hills of Manipur, the Meitei Chief Minister N. Biren Singh has now ridiculously participated in the “Ek Ped: Maa Ke Naam” (One Tree: In Mother’s Name) campaign, an ambitious tree-planting initiative organised by the state’s Forest Department.

The programme aims to plant 50 lakh saplings across Manipur, with a target of 30 lakh to be planted by the end of September 2024. This large-scale environmental effort seeks to create a greener and more sustainable future for the state.

N. Biren Singh’s campaign for afforestation smacks of his hypocrisy towards forest conservation in the state. His deep involvement in massive deforestation before he became the Chief Minister of Manipur, but campaigning for “mother earth” now is contemptuous and dismissive behaviour he possesses. Till today, his brother Rajendra @Aboi is still engaging in illegal timber business by clearing forests cover in the hill areas.

Once a forest destroyer, N. Biren Singh expressed his enthusiasm for the project on social media, highlighting the symbolic significance of planting trees in honour of mothers. He drew parallels between the nurturing and protective nature of mothers and the environmental benefits provided by trees.

The “Ek Ped: Maa Ke Naam” campaign not only promotes reforestation but also strengthens community bonds by connecting environmental conservation with familial respect. It encourages citizens to take an active role in improving their local environment while paying tribute to maternal figures.

On his X account, N. Biren Singh said, “Every tree symbolizes the nurturing and life-giving spirit of mothers. Let’s make a significant impact on our environment



and honor our mothers in a meaningful way.”

Interestingly, the incompetent Chief Minister closed his account’s comment section. Whenever this Meitei CM closes his comment section, it is obvious that he fears a backlash knowing his weak points. Clever but not an intelligent move. It’s unbecoming of a leader.

Instead of misnaming and dehumanizing the Kukis as forest destroyers, narcissist N. Biren Singh must first stop timber trade largely carried out by the Meiteis.

The illegal timber trade has been long cherished in Manipur by many Meiteis including the family members of the Chief Minister N Biren Singh himself. Tongbram Lukhoi Singh, one of the brothers of N. Biren Singh has been long accused of being one amongst the high-profile tycoons of timber trading in the State.

Deforestation in Manipur was highly affected by the major timber business carried out by the Meiteis. The climate has been affected with the cutting down of lakhs of trees in the hills. Notably, there is near zero percentage of forest cover in the Meiteis’ ancestral land of Imphal Valley.

IGNORED PLIGHT OF MANIPUR AMIDST FLOOD, VIOLENCE IN UNION BUDGET: CONGRESS

The opposition Congress in Manipur on Tuesday criticised the BJP-led government at the Centre, alleging that it ignored the plight of the state, which not only suffered a major flood but also bore the brunt of ethnic violence, in the Union Budget.

State Congress president K Meghachandra alleged that there was a partisan approach in the Budget.

“There was a partiality in the budget. The entire Northeast was not taken care of. Manipur was once again neglected. While flood-hit Assam was mentioned, Manipur that witnessed a catastrophic hailstorm and two of the worst floods in more than 20 years was not,” he said.

“Not providing any aid to more than 60,000 displaced people is also a setback. We are very much disappointed,” he said.

Meanwhile, the ruling BJP in the state hailed the Budget, asserting that it was dedicated to the holistic and inclusive development of all citizens.

In a statement, state BJP spokesperson M Asnikumar said, “To achieve comprehensive social justice, we will employ a saturation approach to ensure all eligible individuals are covered by various programs, including those for education and health.”

“I am delighted to know that the budget proposes to allocate Rs 2 trn for job creation over five years and a new employment skilling scheme,” he said.

Asnikumar said the budget seeks to ensure that all Indians, irrespective of their religion, caste, gender and age, make substantial progress in realising their life goals and aspirations. (Business Standard)



Sushma Sharma
@SushmaSh22

Follow Back

Do u see the condition of #kuki_Zo house, #Channganggei, Near Airport Road, #Imphal #Manipur.

Despite Supreme Court order to protect houses, Manipur #Meitei people can do whatever they want, roaming freely with weapons beating anyone they want because no authority dare to stop them. The challenge to our security and contempt of court is getting worse #BINI #Suriya44 #loveisland



14:19 · 23 Jul 24 · 506 Views



Amnesty India
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Prime Minister Narendra Modi must show the people of Manipur that their rights matter.

The Prime Minister must show the people of #Manipur that their lives matter.

He must hold state and non-state actors accountable for the human rights violations committed since May 2023.



15:54 · 23 Jul 24 · 1,613 Views

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**OPINION**

Myanmar Refugees in Manipur: Caught Between War and Lies

Greeshma Kuthar

“No freedom. Fear. Complete fear!” shouted Kan Linn, repeating the word “fear” over and over again. The 42-year-old teacher from the Sagaing region of Myanmar had been relatively quiet for an hour when his colleagues spoke about the situation in Myanmar, only occasionally nodding or shaking his head. His sudden outburst was a sign of helplessness, a common emotion that seems to have set into most refugees who fled Myanmar in the years following the onset of civil war in 2021.

The National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi, swept the 2020 election in Myanmar and was poised to form the government for the second time.

Hours before the newly elected government was to meet, the country’s military council (the junta) cited election irregularities and announced that it was taking over. It appointed a State Administration Council and overthrew the democratically elected government. Similar to the coup of 1962, many pro-democracy leaders, including Suu Kyi, were arrested almost immediately.

Taking on the junta

Since then, there have been widespread protests against the military regime, ranging from mass strikes to boycotts, with those opposed to the junta leading a civil disobedience movement amidst a violent crackdown, arrests, and Internet shutdowns. Within months, elected parliamentarians formed the National Unity Government (NUG), a government in exile, declaring

their intention to take on the military regime. Local resistance groups emerged to support them, arming and organising themselves into battalions; they are often collectively referred to as People’s Defence Forces or Local Defence Forces.

These came up in addition to the already existing ethnic armed organisations, which are region-specific; some of them have extended support to the NUG. Many of these groups have now seized control of military outposts across Myanmar, especially those close to the borders. The junta and its militias have been vindictive in their response, routinely attacking villages they suspect are against them.

There have been reports of brutal violence and mass killings during such incursions. According to statistics compiled by Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma), 26,936 people have been arrested since the coup started in 2021. More than 5,000 have been killed. In February this year, the junta reintroduced a dormant law that made it compulsory for men aged 18 to 35 and women aged 18 to 27 to serve in the army for at least two years. This led to further panic, resulting in many people fleeing the country and a number of armed attacks by anti-junta forces.

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During one such standoff in early November in 2023, the Sagaing region came under attack. Almost everyone from the township and its neighbouring villages, with a mixed population of Myanmarese citizens of Bamar, Shan, and Kuki-Zo communities, fled towards the Indian border. Within hours, most of the villages were hit by air strikes.

In the weeks that followed, close to 10 villages on the India-Myanmar border were razed to the ground. During a visit to the border area of Tengnoupal in Manipur in late January, this reporter met refugees who had fled the Sagaing region to the town of Tamu on the Myanmar side of the border, facing Moreh on the Manipur side. Robinson Kamodang (66), a trader from Kheronram, a village in Manipur's Kamjong district, told Frontline that he saw a flood of panic-stricken people from Myanmar entering his village in groups, many hysterical and in shock.

Helping the refugees

He said: "Even before the attacks, a few had begun entering my village out of fear. But when the attacks started, all of them fled their villages."

Robinson said that he and others arranged food and water and offered reassurance to the refugees that the junta's forces could not reach them on the Indian side. People on both sides of the border are familiar with each other since the villages are located on an important trade route. That is why the fleeing refugees did not face any hostility on the Indian side.

As their numbers swelled, however, the district authorities got involved. "We started to collect the biometrics of all refugees above the age of 5," Rangnamei Rang Peter, the Deputy Commissioner and District Magistrate of Kamjong, told Frontline, reiterating how maintaining records of the refugees was paramount, especially since Manipur was itself in the middle of a civil war.

In the case of Kamjong, those involved in helping the refugees did not initially face any issues. The Raizen Traders Association (RTA), for instance, continues to assist the administration in providing essentials for the refugees. "We were aware of the fighting in the border

villages. The refugees were in bad shape, and we helped them on humanitarian grounds in whatever way we could," said Phareipam Shithungdang, president of the RTA.

The organisation helped the administration procure essential items and distribute them among the displaced people. It organised medical camps, and volunteers escorted those needing serious medical care to the primary health centre in Kamjong.

Careless statements

All the refugees initially flocked to three locations in Manipur, but to avoid overcrowding they were relocated to eight camps, namely Phaikoh, Skipe, Aloyo, Pilong, Kheronram, Ka Ka, Wanglee, and Namlee. The camps are mixed, with an equal population of Myanmar Buddhist and Kuki-Zo. Everything was going smoothly until people started making careless statements about "illegal immigrants", which disturbed the already fragile communal fabric in Manipur.

This term is often used derogatorily against people of Kuki-Zo origin. This form of labelling has been happening for a while, with Chief Minister N. Biren Singh not distancing himself from it. In fact, during the peak of the ethnic violence in Manipur, the term became almost a slur, with all Kuki-Zo being referred to as "illegal immigrants from Myanmar".

Against this backdrop, Biren Singh, who has been accused of stoking communal sentiments and pitting the Meitei against the Kuki-Zo, posted another careless statement on the social media platform X on May 8.

He said: "The government has detected a total of 5,457 illegal immigrants in Kamjong District, Manipur as on May 7. Out of the total, the biometric data of 5,173 such illegal immigrants have been collected so far. Deportation process is under way. We have been giving humanitarian aid to all the illegal immigrants who were detected so far.

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Despite being an alarming situation, we have been handling it with utmost sensitivity.”

The post led to a flood of misinformation about the identity of the refugees in Kamjong. Messages were shared on social media sites that all of them were Kuki-Zo. In reality, only half of them are Kuki-Zo while the rest are Myanmar Buddhist. Many people in Imphal demanded to know why “Kuki-Chin illegal immigrants” were being housed and fed in Manipur when the valley was in direct conflict with the Kuki-Zo in the hills.

Muddying the waters

As a member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) group of nations, India has from time to time subscribed to the group’s broader resolutions on Myanmar, supporting “unhindered humanitarian access, resolution of the crisis through constructive dialogue, and the transition of Myanmar towards an inclusive democracy”. Biren Singh’s post, made when the Sagaing region was still under attack, went against this declaration.

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met Myanmar’s Foreign Minister Than Swe on July 11, further complicating India’s position in the context of the civil war in that country. Even as India unofficially provides sanctuary to Myanmar refugees, there are reports that it has supported the junta militarily since the 2021 coup. Simultaneously, the junta has been accused of sheltering insurgent groups banned by India such as the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and the United National Liberation Front.

In May 2023, Tom Andrews, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, said in a report that India had supplied \$51 million worth of arms and related materials to the Myanmar military since February 2021. In July 2024, Andrews warned that the junta was “trying to destroy a country it cannot control”, noting a substantial spike in military attacks on civilians and public spaces such as schools, hospitals, and monasteries.

In November 2021, The Hindu said that according to an intelligence report, there were about 300 members of the PLA and other insurgent groups across the border

and that rubbing shoulders with the Myanmar army had emboldened the extremists to strike in Manipur.

Since the government has been speaking in multiple voices, there is a lack of clarity about its stance that can lead to further complications along this sensitive border.

BJP deepens divide

Meanwhile, the BJP government in Manipur appears to be using the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar to fuel disinformation in the State and further deepen the Meitei-Kuki-Zo divide. Many Naga leaders are worried that such attempts might lead to the Nagas getting dragged into the conflict, which they have avoided until now.

The presence of refugees in a Naga district is being used to create divisions within, said a leader, speaking on condition of anonymity, suggesting political pressure from Imphal. Organisations in Kamjong maintain that people outside do not understand the reality in the district and are trying to politicise humanitarian efforts.

“Our insecurities cannot be used against us; we are aware of our responsibilities towards those who have sought refuge here, and we will continue to help those in need,” said Souvenir Duidang, a local entrepreneur and member of the RTA.

The disinformation, though, has reached the refugee camps as well. Mi Neing (51), a Bamar, and Lhingneing (30), a Kuki-Zo, had fled Myanmar’s Aungzaya and Zedy villages, respectively, to Pulong, and then together to Phiakoh, where they now stay in a camp. When they received messages that they would be deported by Indian authorities within a day, they were panic-stricken until the Deputy Commissioner visited the camp and reassured everyone that the messages were a hoax, and they could stay in their camps until the situation was safe for them to return. Close to 600 refugees have

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already returned to their villages in Myanmar.

“The rest of us also want to go, but we are scared of aerial strikes. Worse, we are scared of stepping on mines,” Lhingneineng said. There have been incidents where refugees went back to their villages to cultivate their fields, fearing a famine in the coming year, and stepped on landmines. At least two were killed in such incidents. In June, the junta attacked a wedding ceremony in Mataw village of Sagaing region with aerial strikes, killing at least 29. Such incidents have only increased over the past six months, as per a statement of Andrews. The refugees, however, still hope to return by the end of 2024.

Humanitarian crisis

Beyond the threat of landmines, the fear of starvation looms large. Mi Neing said that the supplies they had been getting regularly have slowed down. She fears that it is because of the disinformation being spread about them. Her only request is that she and her family be provided some basic food and medical care to survive. “We won’t be any trouble; this is all we need,” said Mi Neing, pointing to her father who was injured while escaping their township and is now paralysed. Mi Neing’s family survived the previous month by borrowing food from the residents of Phaikoh, and she hopes the government supplies will resume soon.

Lhingneineng’s bigger worry is her daughter, Nengnaitheng. Aged 16, Nengnaitheng left the camp in March along with two of her friends to join the rebel groups in Myanmar. Lhingneineng has not spoken to her daughter since.

The refugees in the camp said that most young men and increasingly even young women are volunteering to join the rebel groups. “All young people in Myanmar have hardened since 2021. They all want to fight the junta,” said Otkhomang K., a retired teacher from Zedy, a village that was burnt down. Many of his students joined the rebel forces after their villages were burnt down, he added.

A walk around the camps revealed that the people there are mostly the elderly, middle-aged men and

women, mothers, and young children. There are hardly any young adults.

Within a few months of moving into their designated camp, seeing how restless the children were, Kan Linn and nine other teachers set up a makeshift school. Now, it has 140 students. Seated across each other in an area earmarked as the staff room, all the teachers at the school fell silent when asked where they see themselves in the months to come.

At the centre of the open-air staff room, alongside shelves of textbooks, was a portrait of the late Myanmar leader Bogyoke Aung San. All the teachers said that they were supporters of Aung San’s politics. The textbooks scattered around the staff room were in Burmese script, books the refugees had managed to salvage from their homes while escaping.

First-person accounts

Initially frightened, a few refugees finally mustered the courage to go back across the border, only to find their villages completely destroyed.

“There was nothing left, the monastery, church, school.... everything in my village was gone,” said Kyawt Kyawtwin (21), a teacher at the school. She said that until October, there was fear in her village of being attacked, but the villagers managed to stay calm. Most of them had heard horror stories of killings and massacres. In one such incident, a schoolteacher named Saw Tun Moe was beheaded and his severed head impaled on the school gate. He had participated in anti-junta protests and volunteered to keep the high school running, despite the war.

Many teachers opened up such schools with the support of the NUG, and the junta attacked and destroyed them. The hand sign that civil disobedience movement protesters use is a three-finger salute. Saw Tun Moe’s three fingers were chopped off and placed on his body. “Such

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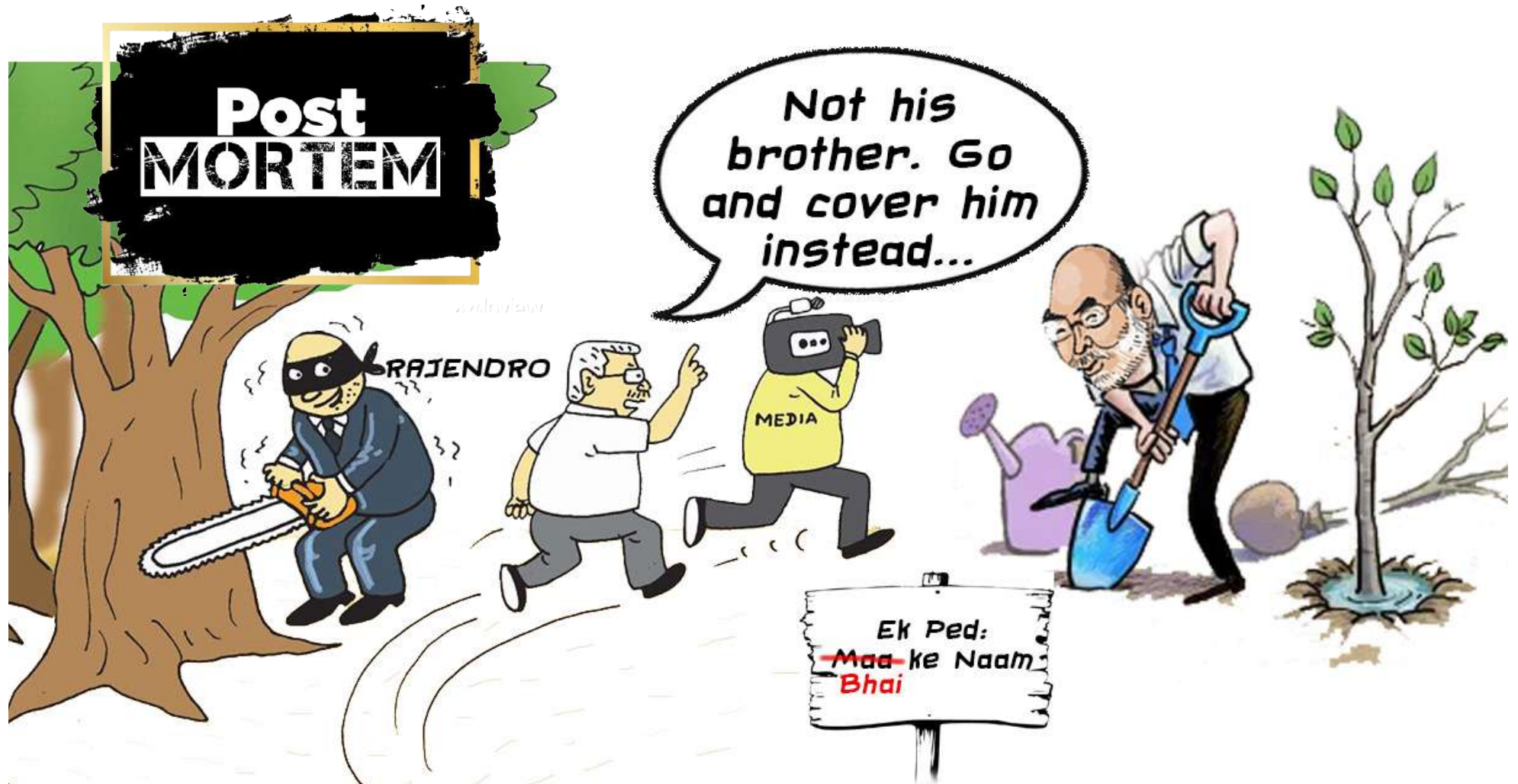
incidents are meant to scare us into submission,” said Kyawtin. Now, a defiant Kyawtinn and her associates are ensuring the smooth functioning of the school in the camp, despite the logistical shortcomings.

The camp at Kheronram has more than 1,200 residents. Families have been allotted small shacks, and the shacks are clubbed together under separate numbers. The settlement has been created in a designated area earmarked by the district administration. Because of the number of families, the camps in Kheronram or adjoining areas are very cramped. While half the camps are accessible through motorable roads, three become inaccessible during the rains, making it even more difficult to reach essentials or medical care to the inhabitants.

With the onset of the monsoon, there has been a surge in communicable diseases in the camps, ranging from dysentery to all kinds of fevers. While the refugees are thankful for their safe haven in India, their living conditions and hopelessness paint a grim picture, one that requires compassion and not suspicion.

Published by [The Hindu Frontline](#)

Greeshma Kuthar is an independent lawyer and journalist from Tamil Nadu. Her primary focus is investigating the evolving methods of the far right, their use of cultural nationalism regionally, and their attempts to assimilate caste identities into the RSS fold.



DEFORESTATION NEXUS VERSUS AFFORESTATION PHOTO-OP

Black Flag

~Anggu

The black flag on the gate of some houses still stands firm
A reminder of the struggle
A reminder of the fight for justice
A reminder of the deaths.

These flags lie motionless every so often
Like most of us who thought would bring some change
Yet sometimes they come alive
Surrendering to the wind's direction
I guess we are a lot like these flags
Swaying to the will of the higher power

I look at the black flag standing tall on top of
my neighbour's house
Last November it was black and proud of its being
Now it's a little less darker and probably ashamed
of its existence
I wonder if people's dream and commitment
has faded like these flags too

These flags of different sizes on different poles
A tribute to the departed souls
Hoisted to remind us of the struggle
To remind us of the fight for justice
These flags, they are now nothing
But a reminder of the job undone
The incomplete task at hand
Will we change the old flag for a new one?