

Thingkho Le Malcha

A Daily Newsletter by KSO Media & Documentation Cell



ITI RELIEF CENTRE

Kangpokpi, Sadar Hills
(Camp Code: KPI-1-01)

Managed by
District Administration &
Kuki CSOs Sadar Hills

Total Inmates Registered: 550*

■ Male: 200

■ Female: 250



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.

REPUBLIC DAY CONTRASTS IN MANIPUR: KUKI-DOMINATED DISTRICTS CELEBRATE WITH FERVOR, WHILE VALLEY AREAS HEED BAN AND STUDENT BODIES BOYCOTT

Despite the ban on national holidays in the valley areas of Manipur, the 75th Republic Day was celebrated with enthusiasm and a genuine sense of Indian nationalism in various Kuki-dominated districts. The celebrations took place in districts like Churachandpur and Kangpokpi, with the district administration playing a central role in organizing the events.

In Churachandpur, the District Administration marked the 75th Republic Day at Peace Ground, Tuibong. Deputy Commissioner Dharun Kumar S unfurled the National Flag and took the Rashtriya Salute as the Chief Guest, overseeing march-past contingents comprising BSF, civil police, NCC cadets, school students, and individuals from several relief camps.

Addressing the gathering, the Deputy Commissioner praised the achievements and contributions of various departments and offices in the district. He highlighted that the district shelters the highest number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in 114 relief camps. The compassionate management of these camps has played a crucial role in instilling hope and resilience among the affected individuals and families. He announced the establishment of a computer center in the district to cater to the educational needs of children.

The Deputy Commissioner emphasized that the spirit of nationalism is not merely an emotion but a responsibility and duty owed to those who sacrificed and fought for the well-being of others. He called on civil society organizations and the people of Churachandpur to continue supporting the District Administration in the journey towards a compassionate and inclusive district.

Other highlights of the program included the distribution of commendations to 113 government officials and staff, 71 police/security forces for their outstanding public service, and recognition of 4 NGOs/organizations for their contributions. Awards and trophies were also presented to winners and runners-up of the Republic Day Relief Camps (IDP) Sports Meet held from January 22 to 25, 2024.



The event featured cultural performances by students from JNV and Kendriya Vidyalaya, soulful renditions of patriotic songs by Muan Hangzo, and a Bamboo Dance by the Hmar Youth Association (HYA).

In contrast, aligning with the CorCom's declaration to boycott the Republic Day celebration in Manipur, the Manipur University Students' Union decided to boycott the participation and observation of Republic Day celebrations inside the university campus due to the prevailing situation in the state.

On January 22, the Manipur University Students Union announced its decision, emphasizing that the union would not participate in the celebration considering the state's current circumstances. Additionally, six student bodies of Manipur, including MSF, DESAM, KSA, SUK, and AIMS, along with another student organization, urged the student community and the public to refrain from participating in Republic Day celebrations and instead hoist black flags.

Moreover, it was emphasized that no Indian flag would be hoisted on Republic Day inside the campus, with the student bodies advocating for a symbolic protest against the prevailing situation in Manipur.

IDPs STRONGLY MOTIVATED DURING THE AUSPICIOUS REPUBLIC DAY CELEBRATION IN KANGPOKPI

Taking pride in being an Indian, hundreds of people across Kangpokpi district headquarters participated in the momentously celebrated 75th Republic Day at Deputy Commissioner Kangpokpi office complex on Friday morning.

The enthusiastic attitude of the public, the sleepless efforts of the district administration to carry forward the people's enthusiasm, the appreciable alertness of the security forces, and the huge contribution of the various civil bodies overcame all hurdles in successfully celebrating one of the grandest ever Republic Day in the district.

People across the district headquarters and adjoining areas, young and old, boys and girls, men and women, started gearing up and gathered at the DC Kangpokpi office complex with joy and enthusiasm to enthuse for the momentous celebration when black flags are hoisted to mark the auspicious occasion in some parts of the state, especially in the valley as some insurgents and student bodies boycotted the significant India's Republic Day.

The meaningful celebration began while Mahesh Chaudhari, IAS, Deputy Commissioner Kangpokpi, accompanied by his cheerful better half, who graced the sparking occasion as Chief Guest had the Guard of Honour and inspected the parade, setting the mood by hoisting the Tricolor amidst cheer and applauds from the crowd accompanied by the National Anthem by the March Past contingents.

Installation of Exhibition Stalls for inmates sheltering at various Relief Camps set up across the district to showcase their hand looms and handcraft products was the main eye-catcher of the event as it demonstrated that they were equally given importance and opportunities, and are never forgotten by the government.

Chief Guest of the event, Mahesh Chaudhari, and his better half along with the District Superintendent of Police, IPS Manoj Prabhakar, all District Level Officers, and other dignitaries visited the stalls



after the celebration program and bought one product each of the inmates exhibited in their stalls to encourage them in their work.

Earlier, while addressing the gathering, Mahesh Chaudhari had thanked and appreciated all departments from officials to the lowest rank for their commitment to the welfare of the public and their meritorious service, particularly during these challenging times.

The Deputy Commissioner strongly advocated cleanliness in the district and urged the public to maintain cleanliness particularly in the district headquarters and in all the sub-divisions/blocks in the district.

Presentation of Certificates of Appreciation to various government employees for their outstanding performance in their respective fields marked the occasion.

As part of the celebration, Nepali cultural dance from the Gorkha youth of Kalapahar, and cultural dance from displaced children of ITI Relief Camp, Kangpokpi were also performed on the occasion.

The program was also attended by students, police officials, staff of various departments, and CSO leaders of the district including CoTU, Kuki Inpi Sadar Hills, tribe leaders, student bodies, village chiefs, local bodies, and church leaders.

MANIPUR CM REMAINS SILENT ON REPORTS OF ARTICLE 355 IMPOSITION IN STATE

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Friday maintained silence on reports of imposition of Article 355 in the strife-torn state.

However, a senior official, who refused to be named, said the Article, which grants the Centre the authority to assume control of the state's law and order without dismissing the government, had not been imposed.

Interacting with reporters after the Republic Day function here, the chief minister did not comment on the issue when asked about it.

This comes days after Manipur Congress president Keisham Meghachandra claimed that Singh had told him during a meeting that Article 355 had been imposed in the state.

Article 355 mandates the Union government to safeguard states against external aggression and

internal disturbance.

This provision grants the Union the authority to assume control of a state's law and order without dismissing the state government.

The confusion over imposition of Article 355 has been in place since violence broke out in the state in May last year.

It had even led a Manipur High Court lawyer and a student to file two separate RTIs in October and November last.

In response, deputy secretary to the government of India, Narendra Gautam, had informed "Article 355 is not imposed, and accordingly the state government of Manipur only is responsible for the maintenance of law and order."

STATE, CENTRAL FORCES WORKING IN COORDINATION TO BRING PEACE IN MANIPUR: DGP

Manipur DGP Rajiv Singh on Friday said the state and central forces are working in coordination to bring tranquillity and peace in the northeastern state.

He also said the state and central forces have coordination committees at the state and district levels to normalise the situation in the violence-hit state.

"We (State and central forces) are always in constant touch. We have coordination committees at the state headquarters and district levels and have several video conferences," the DGP said on the sidelines of a Republic Day programme.



"For me, all forces are equal. We are working together with state and central forces in coordination and trying to bring a normal situation as soon as possible" Singh said.

NAGA STUDENTS FEDERATION CONDEMNS CENTRE'S DECISION TO FENCE INDO-MYANMAR BORDER

The Naga Students' Federation (NSF) has strongly condemned the recent announcement by Union Home Minister Amit Shah on January 20, 2024, regarding the decision to fence the India-Myanmar border, mirroring the approach taken on the Indo-Bangladesh border.

While appreciating the Nagaland government for its seriousness in addressing the matter, the NSF urged the same to proactively engage with the Centre to ensure that the Free Movement Regime is not abolished.

In a release, the NSF calls for a united effort from the state and central governments to address the issue through dialogue and understanding, respecting the historical context and the rights of the indigenous Naga community.

The revelation that the existing Free Movement Regime (FMR) between India and Myanmar is set to be abolished has raised grave concerns among the Naga people, who have historically endured the consequences of external forces imposing arbitrary divisions, it added.

NSF stated that abolition of FMR which serves as a vital bridge fostering connections, relations, and cooperation between the Naga people on both sides of the Saramati mountain range would disrupt the historical ties and cooperation that have existed for generations.

The NSF cautions against any individuals or political entities taking advantage of the issue solely for political mileage in Delhi. "The Naga aspiration for autonomy and respect for our rights should not be compromised for short-term political gains. We urge all stakeholders to prioritize the welfare and aspirations of the Naga people over political opportunism" stated the release.

NSF stated that the Naga people have long suffered the consequences of arbitrary divisions imposed by external forces, and any attempt to further divide and fence the Nagas is as an affront to rights and autonomy of the Nagas.

The recent decision to abolish the Free Movement Regime is deeply troubling, especially considering India's status as a global power and signatory to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2007 (UNDRIP) it added.

Whereas, it may be cited that, Article 36 of the UNDRIP explicitly recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples divided by international borders to maintain and develop connections, relations, and cooperation across borders for various purposes, NSF added.

The release further stated that the 1,643-km-long India Myanmar border, traversing through Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh, is a complex landscape with diverse communities and histories.

The NSF calls upon the Indian government to reconsider its decision and engage in a meaningful dialogue with the Naga community.

"It is imperative to find a solution that not only respects our historical rights but also aligns with the international commitments made by the Indian government to uphold the rights of indigenous peoples.

"The Naga Students Federation will not allow any divisive powers to further segregate the Naga people based on their political whims and imperialistic conveniences by any manmade boundaries or imaginary lines in the Naga homeland.

"The Naga people cannot be denied the right to maintain and develop connections amongst its ethnic selves that have been integral to their cultural, social, and economic fabric." stated the release.

INDO-MYANMAR FENCING NEEDS THOROUGH DISCUSSIONS AND CONSULTATION BEFORE IMPLEMENTATION, SAYS NAGALAND CHIEF MINISTER NEIPHIU RIO

Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio on Friday said the decision of the Centre to fence the India-Myanmar border needs thorough discussion before being implemented.

Asked by reporters about the state's stand on the issue, Rio said the government has to consult the people.

"If the need be then we have to work out a formula on how to solve the issue for the people and prevent infiltration as well, because Nagaland is bordered by Myanmar, and on both sides there are Nagas," he said.

Rio said that while many people live on the Indian side, their farms are on the other side. "Therefore there has to be a workable formula," he added.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah last week said the government will end the free movement of people at the India-Myanmar border, and fence it completely so that it can be protected like the country's boundary with Bangladesh.



Deputy CM Y Patton had on Monday said that the Nagaland government will hold meetings with other northeastern states that share a border with Myanmar, and then approach the Centre on the issue.

Various Naga civil society organisations and also the NSCN-IM have opposed the Centre's decision, saying that it would "divide" the Nagas living on two sides of the border.



**In times of war,
the law falls silent.**

– Cicero

UNTANGLING THE IMBROGLIO SURROUNDING BORDER FENCING AND FMR

ANALYSIS

Why Do the Meiteis Supported Border Fencing and Scrapping of FMR All of a Sudden?

The Meitei community has been strongly against border fencing during the last decade, from 2013 to early 2023. But in the last few months, the same community has suddenly changed its position in favour of fencing the border and scrapping of Free Movement Regime (FMR) when the Nagas, Mizos, Kukis, and even the NSCN-IM, are opposed to it. The question is why this change of position all of a sudden?

BACKGROUND

The Indo-Myanmar borderland is inhabited by various tribal communities including the Nagas, Mizos, and Kukis, among others. These trans-border communities have been living in this part of the world for centuries. Though they were later divided by artificial boundaries drawn passing through their hills, they continue to have socio-cultural ties without much problem even after India's independence.

Knowing this reality, the Government of India (GOI) formally introduced the Free Movement Regime, or the FMR, for these tribal groups. However, the recent decision of the GOI to withdraw the FMR has invited strong opposition from some Northeastern states, notably Mizoram and Nagaland.

In Manipur, the tribal communities, Kukis and Nagas, are opposed to it but the state government as well as the dominant Meitei community has been vocal in supporting the decision. In fact,

they are now advocating even border fencing which they have been opposing for years.

MEITEI'S OPPOSITION TO BORDER FENCING

The Meitei community has been strongly against border fencing especially in the last one decade, i.e., from 2013-2023. The movement against border fencing was spearheaded mainly by a prominent Meitei civil society organisation called the United Committee Manipur (UCM).

The UCM often visited the border pillars along the Indo-Myanmar borderline from time to time as part of their campaign. On August 10, 2013, the UCM visited border areas near Moreh in which they found that at least 16 tribal villages of Manipur were left to be on the Myanmar side. On the next day, the UCM held a press conference in which Y. Nabachandra, the then president, said: "The fence has divided many villages, with houses left out on the other side." This was followed by a series of agitations. Even political parties, other than the ruling Congress, had protested against it. A team of the CPI also visited the border areas to ascertain the ground reality.

The last time a team of the UCM visited the borders was on February 15-16, 2024. And till

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this time, the Meiteis were opposed to border fencing, and the issue of FMR did not arise.

DECODING MEITEI'S DOUBLE STANDARD

However, since the outbreak of the ongoing state-sponsored ethnic cleansing pogrom on May 3, 2023, the erstwhile influential UCM disappeared. There was neither a press conference nor visit to border areas as they did in the past.

On the other hand, various Meitei organisations including COCOMI have begun demanding border fencing, and this was gradually followed by the demand to scrapped FMR. The same was echoed by the Chief Minister, N. Biren Singh, on various occasions. For instance, in an interaction with reporters in early January 2024, Biren Singh blamed the previous government for neglecting the northeastern region, and called for scrapping of the FMR. This was reiterated by the Union Minister of state, RK Ranjan Singh, a Meitei himself, saying fencing the border was a “must”.

CONCLUDING REMARK

The question now is, why did the Meiteis suddenly change their position—from opposing to demanding border fencing? We don't know what exactly transpired in the minds of the intellectuals and think-tanks within the 700 sq.m. Sanaleibak but we can only surmise from the information available to us: first, it could be that their masters somewhere instructed them to do (you already know who they are!); or, the cadres of VBIGs camping in Myanmar have crossed over to the Indian side, and therefore they no longer need the FMR, or the unfenced border.

Whatever may be the reason, the Meiteis have no stake in the Indo-Myanmar borderlands. So no wonder they are the odd one out supporting border fencing and scraping of FMR when the trans-border communities such as the Mizos, the Nagas, and the Kukis, are united in opposing them.



Vishwajeet Singh @VishuAdv

Arambai Tengol militia of Meitei radicals in #Manipur_under_Seige has its own military police now. It staged a Coup de tat in Imphal yesterday wherein the elected civilian government surrendered to its dictat while Union government and it's agencies watched helplessly.

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1:55 PM · Jan 25, 2024 · 243.5K Views

Manipur Tribals' Forum Delhi @mtfdelhi

Despite the boycott call given by Meitei terror groups and separatists, Kuki-Zomi-Hmar Mizo tribes today celebrated #RepublicDay2024 with patriotic fervour and cultural dances at Lamka Public Ground in Outer Manipur areas. Seen here is the famous Bamboo Dance performed by the Hmar Mizo tribe. #HappyRepublicDayIndia

0:41

12:13 PM · Jan 26, 2024 · 6,172 Views



FEATURED ARTICLE

In Imphal, the State's Surrender to an Armed Meitei Militia With 'Taliban-Like' Grip

Arunabh Saikia

As day broke in Imphal on January 24, tension hung as heavy as the piercing morning chill. The previous evening, heavy weaponry had been stationed outside the gates to Kangla, the fort on the banks of the Imphal river that was once the seat of power of the ancient Meitei kingdom.

In a move rife with symbolism, all the Meitei legislators from Manipur – 37 MLAs and two Members of Parliament, across party lines – had been “summoned” there by the Arambai Tenggol, an armed militia alleged to be at the forefront of the violence against the Kuki-Zo community in the ethnic conflict in the state.

Twenty five MLAs were from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, five from the Congress, four from the National People's Party, two from the Janata Dal (United), while one was an independent.

Attempts by the state police and central officials to talk the group out of the seemingly audacious exercise had failed – and everyone seemed to fear a bloody confrontation, given the hulking security deployment all over the city.

As the morning progressed, WhatsApp groups were flush with pictures of members of the group – which claims to have a strength of 60,000 – taking over Imphal's streets as they headed to Kangla. Dressed in

military fatigues, many brandished arms as they rode into the city in open-top white Gypsies.

Soon, though, it became clear that a compromise had been reached. No attempt was made to breach the peripheral security cordon the police had put in place on the roads leading to Kangla. Only the Arambai Tenggol's leadership would go to the fort – and without any heavy weapons.

Abject surrender

The designated entry to the fort that morning was through its western gates – strikingly manned not by the Manipur police, but by three boyish-looking members of the outfit.

The overall conduct rules for the day, it seemed, had also been set by the Arambai Tenggol. The MLAs, not allowed escort vehicles, bundled into vehicles in groups of three to four. At the gates, they rolled down the car windows for the outfit's sentry to peep in and check.

Outside, the white Gypsies of the Manipur Police and the Arambai Tenggol were parked next to each other. The only way to distinguish the two were the initials of the outfit written with red ink on their vehicles. So also for the people there – with many

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of Arambai Tenggol's cadre dressed in camouflage they could be easily mistaken for security personnel if not for the group's red initials on their shoulders.

By the time the meeting began around 10 am, the jumpiness of the morning had given way to a sense of bewilderment. Journalists and police officials outside the gate could barely hide their amusement at what was transpiring: an abject surrender of the state to a group whose members have been accused of murder, rape, arson and more.

"Welcome to Manipur," a senior Manipur police official remarked wryly.

The oath, the assault

Inside, though, the atmosphere was decidedly terse.

The 36 Meitei MLAs – Chief Minister N Biren Singh did not show up – and two MPs sat cross-legged on the grounds of the ancient fort, facing the 58 unit commanders representing Arambai Tenggol.

One of the MLAs who attended the meeting said the business part of it was over in a brisk 15 minutes. An Arambai Tenggol representative spelled out the six demands that the outfit expected the lawmakers to endorse: an update of the National Register of Citizens with 1951 as the base year, abrogation of the Suspension of Operation agreement with Kuki armed groups, relocation of Myanmarese refugees to Mizoram, border fencing along the Indo-Myanmar border, withdrawal of the Assam Rifles and delisting of "illegal migrants" from the Scheduled Tribes list.

The lawmakers invoked the name of Sanamahi, the revered Meitei deity, to swear that they would work towards fulfilling the demands.

As they began to sign their official endorsements, things turned awry, said a legislator.

Upset by the Congress MLA K Meghachandra Singh's suggestion that the responsibility for all recent trouble lay with the BJP-run state government, some members of the Arambai Tenggol rushed across, pinning him

down and raining several blows.

Some of the other MLAs, including the two women legislators, had to physically intervene to rescue Meghachandra.

"He was very badly assaulted," said an MLA who witnessed the assault. Another MLA confirmed this account.

Meghachandra, Scroll has learnt, had to be hospitalised briefly.

Representatives of the vigilante outfit also roughed up two other MLAs: Paonam Brojen Singh and Khwairakpam Raghmani Singh.

An MLA at the scene said there had not been any apparent provocation on the part of the two legislators.

In the first phase of the violence in May, property owned by the family of Paonam Brojen Singh, a Christian by faith, had been targeted by mobs allegedly led by the Arambai Tenggol.

Cheering crowds

After the meeting ended, the Arambai Tenggol's chief, Korounganba Khuman, about whom little is known, addressed a large crowd in the famed women's market in the heart of the city, the local media reported. He is reported to have told the gathering that all the elected lawmakers, including Chief Minister N Biren Singh, had put their signatures to the charter of demands.

As the Arambai Tenggol's cadres moved homewards, large crowds of Meitei women cheered them all over the city. The cadres waved back spiritedly from their vehicles, sometimes even getting down to greet the jubilant crowds.

All of this marked a dramatic shift from the beginning of the conflict in May when the outfit

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was a shadowy group of young armed fundamentalists from which most Meitei people seemed to want to distance themselves.

Today, Arambai Tenggol's legitimacy far outweighs that of the more traditional civil society groups representing the community. This is borne out by fact that a team of the Union ministry of home affairs flew down to meet them ahead of the January 24 meeting.

A senior police official said the state had no choice but to submit to the group considering their strength and access to arms, most of them "looted" from police armouries.

"We held multiple meetings to convince them to not carry arms at least," said the official.

Several people in Imphal described the Arambai Tenggol's near-takeover of public life in the Meitei-dominated valley, thanks to these looted arms, as "Taliban-like".

A veteran Meitei civil society leader said "a people's law" had taken over since the law of the land had "failed" to "protect Meitei lives." "We also cannot stop them because there is no real reason to," he said. "The lawmakers have failed to play their role."

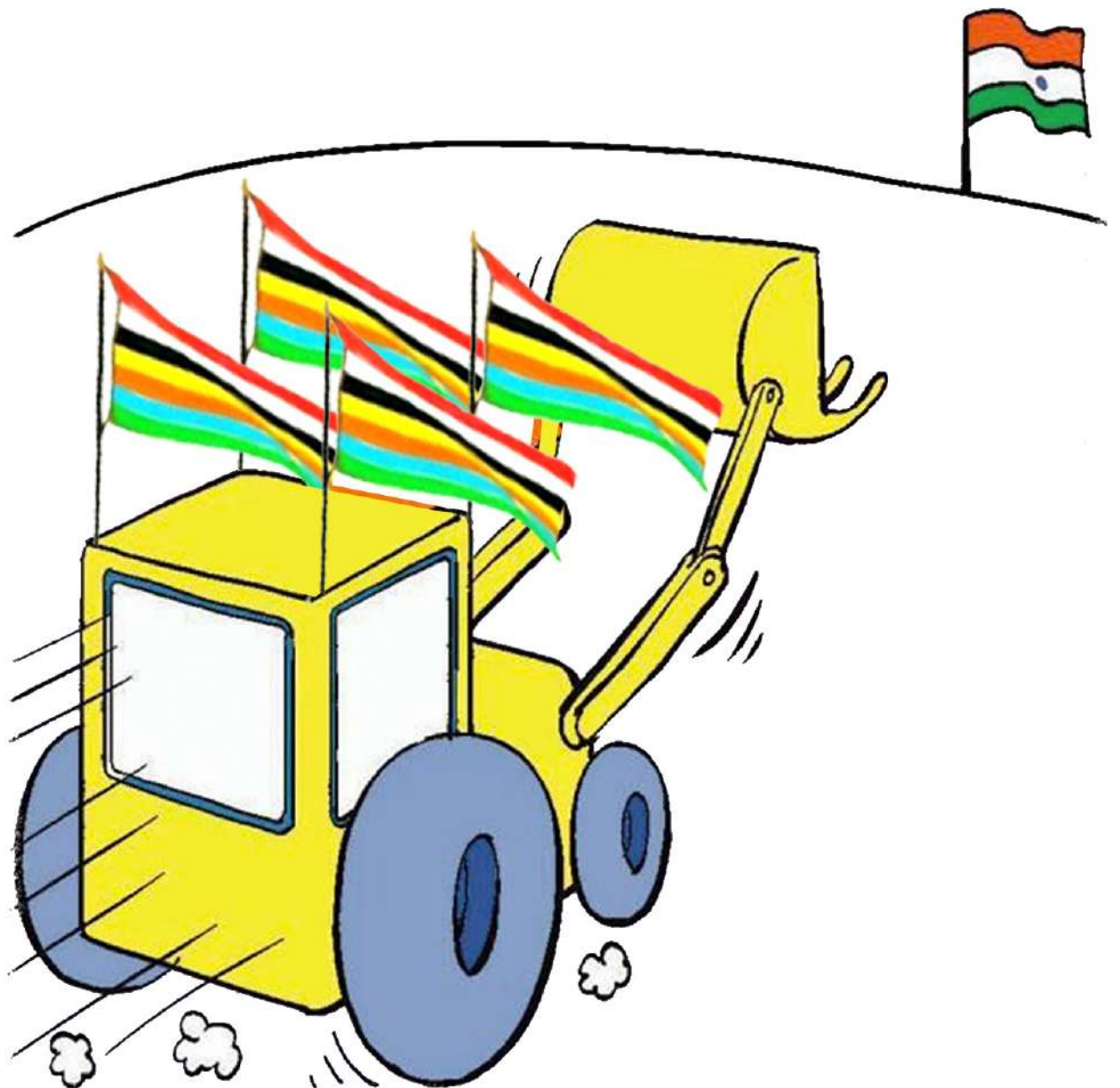
"Every Meitei family is committing one volunteer to the Arambai Tenggol," he added.

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zultvibir

MEITEIS ON INDIA'S REPUBLIC DAY





All we mourn

Brother's pain lingers, wounds that won't seal,
Sister's torment etched, memories never concealed.
Homes ablaze, churches lost, all razed to the ground,
Cities burning with hues of yellow and red.
Have we fallen so far, respect for one's faith unsound?

Gunshots pierce the air, chaos unfurls, panic shakes,
Families run, innocents scatter, their hearts break,
No refuge left but for prayers to ascend;
Humanity lost, darkness creeping its deadly hand
A heart mourns, no place remains, no home can it be.

In this season of cheer and delight,
Our souls bleed, consumed by the night.
Charred house and church, forever changed,
Lost daughter, father, mother, and a life estranged.
Gatherings missed, church echoes with despair,
Loneliness seeping through, no solace to bear.

Brothers undaunted, standing on the Frontline,
Protecting us, unmoved by the cold weather.
Fearless, their lives they lay, bullets they defy,
In bravery, they face every daunting trail.
God's holy weapon, stronger than any fray,
We shan't squander, for our God is unfailing.

Through faith 's resilience, a brighten future we decree.

- Jeena Vaiphei