

Thingkho Le Malcha

A Daily Newsletter by KSO Media & Documentation Cell



BYE BYE

2023

WELCOME

2024

HAPPY NEW YEAR



KUKI VICTIMS' UPDATE

As on 16.12.2023



158
DEATHS



200+
VILLAGES BURNT



7000+
HOUSES BURNT



360+
CHURCHES &
SYNAGOGUES BURNT



41,425+
DISPLACED
PERSONS

The Village Volunteers, Tengenoupal District (Eastern Zone), has clarified to the public and all concerned authorities that the unwanted incident that took place yesterday, the 30th of December

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.

TENGNOUNPAL KUKI APEX BODY, VILLAGE VOLUNTEERS HOLD BIREN SINGH'S GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBLE FOR MOREH INCIDENT; REITERATE DEMAND FOR REMOVAL OF STATE FORCES FROM MOREH TOWN

The ruinous behavior of Manipur state police commandos who are stationed at Moreh caused tension in the border town on Saturday.

Initial reports have stated that the ruinous behavior of the state commando led to a heavy gun battle between village volunteers and state police commandos at around 3.30 pm in which one commando personnel was reportedly injured in the firing.

The injured personnel is reported to be from the Special Commando Unit of the Manipur Home Department who sustained bullet injury in a heavy exchange of fire near the key point of an Assam Rifles on the National Highway -102 Imphal to Moreh on Saturday.

As per locals, the state police commandos had been harsh against the innocent Kuki-Zo civilians including women and children. They slaughtered pigs, tortured civilians and opened blank fire on women and children who were playing in an open space. The locals believed that they could be goons of Arambai Tenggol masquerading as Manipur police commandos.

Meanwhile, the Kuki Inpi Tengnoupal District, Kuki Chief's Association, Hill Tribal Council, Kuki Students' Organisation Moreh, Kuki Women Union for Human Rights and Moreh Youth Club vehemently condemned the torching of houses by police commandos and its militia group in Lhangnom Veng, Moreh following the gunfight between police commandos and unidentified gunmen.

The Joint Press statement stated that gunfight broke out between police commandos and unknown gunmen around 3:20pm following which the police commandos and its militias intruded Lhangnom Veng and burnt down three houses in the said locality.

In an apparent attempt to attack the Kuki-Zo people in Moreh and its surroundings, the police commandos along with its militia - Arambai Tenggol (dressed as police commandos) were seen moving together from Moreh bazar. Following which, they engaged in a



gunfight with unknown gunmen around 3:20pm. While the panic stricken general public were taking shelter for their safety, the police commandos and Arambai Tenggols took advantage and burnt down three houses in Lhangnom Veng, Moreh ward No.9, it alleged.

The Civil Society Organisations would like to question why the so-called state police commandos burnt down houses which are not related to the gunfight incident. Can the burning down of innocent civilian houses be the work of government security forces, asked Moreh based Kuki CSOs.

It clearly shows the communal motives and evil intention of the so-called police commandos against the Kuki-Zo community. This dastardly act shows the presence of communal elements among the police commandos in Moreh town.

The joint CSOs vehemently condemned the arson and indiscriminate random firing towards Kuki-Zo localities and urge the authority concern to immediately withdraw communal commandos from Moreh town.

The people of Moreh and surrounding villages would be compelled to take their own course of action

INDIGENOUS TRIBAL LEADERS' FORUM CONDEMNS ARSONING OF HOUSES BY STATE FORCES; ALLEGES MANIPUR'S RAJYA SABHA MP OF FULLY SUPPORTING ARAMBAI TENGGOL

The Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF) has condemned the burning of houses by trained military personnel, who are supposedly posted in the area to maintain peace and security in Moreh, a border town between India and Myanmar.

In a condemnation statement on Sunday, ITLF said, "The latest incident again highlights the fact that tension and violence will continue as long as armed Meitei forces are posted in tribal areas during an ethnic conflict involving the two sides." It is also no secret that many Arambai Tenggol militants are embedded among the Meitei state forces with the blessing of authorities, it alleged.

Firing broke out between unidentified gunmen and Meitei commandos around 3:30 pm yesterday as the communal state forces were advancing towards Lhangkichoi Veng, a Kuki-Zo tribal settlement in the border town of Moreh.

Some commandos reportedly suffered injuries before the state forces retreated and ran inside an Assam Rifles camp. The commandos fired indiscriminately at the village and burned three civilian houses at Lhangkichoi Veng out of spite, thereby showcasing a blatant disregard for civilians and their wellbeing.

Spokesperson of ITLF, Ginza Vualzong said the incident in Moreh came after a gunfight near the tribal village of Nakhojang in Kangpokpi district earlier yesterday. Nakhojang and nearby Singda Kuki village were burned down by Meitei mobs on May 5, and all the villagers fled to relief camps.

After hearing reports that Arambai Tenggol cadres were preparing to attack tribal settlements and were camping at Nakhojang, tribal volunteers launched a search operation and were confronted by the militants around 3:00 am. In the ensuing gunfight, Jamesbond Ningomba, a member of Arambai Tenggol, was killed, while the others fled towards Kadangban, the nearest Meitei village



Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF)
Conglomerate of Recognised Tribes in Lamka, Outer Manipur

File No: ITLF-PR-202371

Sunday, 31 December 2023

CONDEMNATION

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Jamesbond Ningomba also works as a journalist for the Meitei vernacular Naharolgi Thoudang and is a key contributor to the anti-tribal propaganda of the Meitei media. Naharolgi Thoudang was edited by CM Biren Singh before he became a politician.

After news of the death, Rajya Sabha MP Sanajaoba Leishemba, who openly endorses Arambai Tenggol, expressed his condolences on Facebook, stating: "Oh...RIP... my beloved child."



Ginza Vualzong,
Media & Publicity,
Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF)
Website: <https://www.itlfmediacell.com/>



To authenticate ITLF's press releases, please refer to our website <https://itlfmediacell.com>

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ITLF alleged that after news of the death of Jamesbond, Rajya Sabha MP Sanajaoba Leishemba had openly endorsed the Arambai Tenggol and expressed his condolences on Facebook, stating, "Oh...RIP... my beloved child," and that "I shall not remain idle."

BURNING OF KUKI-ZO CIVILIAN'S HOUSES IN MOREH TOWN: KUKI INPI SADAR HILLS CALLS FOR URGENT INVESTIGATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Deeply troubled by reports of the Manipur Police Commandos' involvement in the burning down of houses belonging to Kuki-Zo civilians in Moreh town, the Kuki Inpi, Sdar Hills (KISH) has said, "Such acts of violence against innocent civilians are reprehensible and must be thoroughly investigated to ensure accountability and justice."

In a statement issued on Sunday, Thanglenhao Chongloi, Secretary Information and Publicity, said the Kuki apex body of Sadar Hills strongly condemned any form of violence targeting civilians, regardless of their background. He called upon the relevant authorities to launch an immediate and impartial investigation into such serious allegations. "If proven true, those responsible must be held accountable for their actions," he said.

Stressing that the safety and well-being of affected individuals and families are of utmost importance, the Kuki body urged the authorities to take swift action to provide support and protection to those affected by those distressing incidents.

"In times of crisis, it is essential for the community and law enforcement agencies to come together to address the root causes of such events," said the Kuki body, and reiterated time and again the alleged involvement of Manipur Police personnel on atrocities against Kuki-Zo community.

The Kuki Inpi, Sadar Hills, has asserted that the state and central government would be held accountable for all the consequences.



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No. KI(SH)/PR-03/2023

PRESS RELEASE
31st December, 2023

Alleged Burning of Houses of Kuki-Zo Civilians in Moreh Town: A Call for Urgent Investigation and Accountability.

We are deeply troubled by reports alleging the involvement of Manipur Police Commando personnel in the burning down of houses belonging to Kuki-Zo civilians in Moreh town. Such acts of violence against innocent civilians are reprehensible and must be thoroughly investigated to ensure accountability and justice.

Our organization strongly condemns any form of violence targeting civilians, regardless of their background. We call upon the relevant authorities to launch an immediate and impartial investigation into these serious allegations. If proven true, those responsible must be held accountable for their actions.

The safety and well-being of affected individuals and families are of utmost importance. We urge the authorities to take swift action to provide support and protection to those affected by these distressing incidents.

In times of crisis, it is essential for the community and law enforcement agencies to come together to address the root causes of such events. It has been reiterated time and again on the involvement of Manipur Police personnel on their alleged involvement on their atrocities against Kuki-Zo community. The state and central government will be held accountable for all the consequences.

Our organization remains committed to monitoring the situation closely and advocating for the protection of human rights. We call on all parties involved to prioritize the principles of justice, fairness, and the rule of law.

Secretary
Information & Publicity
Kuki Inpi Sadar Hills
Thanglenhao Chongloi
Thanglenhao Chongloi
Secretary,
Information & Publicity
Kuki Inpi, Sadar Hills (KISH)



Stating to remain committed to monitoring the situation closely and advocating for the protection of human rights, the Kuki Inpi called on all parties involved to prioritize the principles of justice, fairness, and the rule of law.



In the eyes of the people, the general who wins a battle has made no mistakes.

— Niccolo Machiavelli

EXTERNAL MEDIA HOUSE FALLS FOR MEITEI MEDIA LIES; PUBLISHES A FALSE REPORT

A fabricated news has been doing the rounds on social media via an online news portal nenow. in wherein the report states that two suspected cadres of the KNA have been killed and several others injured in a gunfight with security forces in the border town of Moreh that stretched from Saturday afternoon to the early hours of Sunday.

The report further goes on to state that the gunfight began at around 3.30pm on Saturday as a result of Manipur police commandos coming under attack from militants.

The report seems to have been sourced from Imphal valley based media sources who make it a point to turn every narrative against the Kukis. The facts are that the police commandos had been using excessive force against the civilian population in Moreh, resorting to wanton violence against civilians including firing live rounds at some civilians. They have also been reported to exercise a heavy hand on livestock belonging to the townspeople. The exchange of gunfire began as some unidentified men took offence at their excessive behaviour.

In this regard, the Kuki National Army (KNA), whom the online news portal has alleged of being involved in the gunfight resulting in loss of life of its cadres and injury to others, have issued a clarification on the matter.

The KNA through its Dept. Of Information & Publicity has thus clarified the matter stating, "This Fabricated News from some News channel is a blatant lie and unfounded News published without facts & findings from the ground. No Kuki National Army (KNA) cadres were involved in the firing and no dead whatsoever as claimed by the News from different channels. The gunfight was between the Manipur State Commandos and The Kuki-Zo Village Volunteers of Moreh who were protecting their God given Ancestral Land."

Manipur

Manipur: Two militants killed, 9 injured in firefight

by Bit from December 31, 2023 4:42 pm

Twitter Facebook Google News WhatsApp Telegram LinkedIn



Manipur beefs up security along Myanmar border

Media houses outside of Manipur must always take whatever news comes out of the Imphal valley with a pinch of salt and verify each item of news that the lie factories based in Imphal valley produce. Their history of fabricating news and turning the narrative against the Kukis has been well documented time and time again. It is a wonder how nenow.in deemed it fit to publish the news without any verification. It raises doubts on their credibility and integrity. And unlike the Meiteis who hide their number of casualties for fear of public panic and/or public outrage by under-reporting their figures, the Kuki-Zo community has always been transparent about the status of its deaths and every death has always been declared a martyr and publicised with high regard. Although heavy firing has been reported till time of filing, no death has been reported. And the KNA has issued a clarification about its lack of involvement in the current firefight.

MEMBERS OF ARAMBAI TENGGOL HIJACK VEHICLE BELONGING TO LAMKANG TRIBESMAN AT KAKCHING

Members of Arambai Tenggol hijacked and forcefully took away a Creta car belonging to a Lamkang tribesman on Sunday afternoon.

The incident occurred at Kakching Lamkhai opposite to the Petrol Pump near Vishal mart. The care belongs to the president of Lamkang Kurchuk Naokunpun (Lamkang Students Union, Bepol Sankhil).

As per sources, it is learnt that the members of Arambai Tenggol hijacked the vehicle forcefully at gunpoint and took away the car.

Recently the self-styled leader of Arambai Tenggol, Korounganba Khuman in an interview has said that Arambai Tenggol did not support violence and it was formed to preserve and protect the culture and tradition of the Meitei.

Contrary to the claims made by the self-styled Arambai leaders, many incidents happening in the valley areas is an indication that there is no law and order in the valley and that the Arambai Tenggol are given a free hand to do whatever they wish.

In connection with the incident, the Naga Students' Union Chandel issued a press release stating that the union condemns the action of a few miscreants claiming themselves to be Arambai Tenggol and snatching away the vehicle (Bearing No. MN02C 5495 Creta Sx Black) of President, Lamkang Kurchuknao Kunpun (Lamkang Naga Students' Union) at gun point at Kakching Lamkhai.

The union, while claiming that they have been extending its peaceful flag right from the beginning of this current conflict added that taking due advantage of the peace gesture of the union shall not be considered a weakness.

The union also questions the credibility of those organizations or civilians, who check vehicles at Kakching Lamkhai and elsewhere day & night.

The union warned that the unwanted situation should not happen in future and if the vehicle is not returned within 48hrs, the aftermath shall not be peaceful.

KUKI-ZO VILLAGE VOLUNTEERS INFORM HELICOPTER SERVICES PROVIDER TO STOP SERVICES TO MOREH WITH IMMEDIATE EFFECT

In view of the serious nature of the prevailing situation in Moreh, the Kuki-Zo village volunteers of Moreh has notified to all transport operators including Helicopter service providers in Manipur to desist from transporting Meitei police commandos to Moreh town with immediate effect.

In a statement on Sunday, the Village Volunteers said, "The state-sponsored terrorists are mixed with Meitei Militants and Arambai Tenggol and involved in burning down civilian houses, killing innocent public, and looting public properties especially the Kuki-Zo people in Moreh and surrounding areas. Last night too, they burnt down three civilian houses in Lhangnom Veng, Moreh, and mercilessly thrashed an innocent civilian who is a teacher in private school in Moreh."

"The Pawan Hans Ltd., or whosoever provided helicopter services between Imphal-Tengnoupal district for state sponsored terrorist police Commandos and Meitei radicals embedded with State commandos are informed to halt immediately," the Kuki Volunteers informed.

The Volunteers warned that failing to heed the appeal to stop helicopter services would be interpreted as collusion with the "genocidal efforts on the Kuku-Zo community, and any damage to vehicles/Helicopters would be at their own risk.

Earlier in the day, the Village Volunteers, Tengnoupal District (Eastern Zone), had clarified to the public and all concerned authorities that the unwanted incident that took place yesterday, the 30th of December 2023 at M. Chahnou and Lhangkicho Veng areas of Moreh was a direct consequence of the communal Manipur government's atrocities and hatred upon the indigenous Kuki-Zo people in Tengnoupal District in particular and the current state of Manipur as a whole.

The Village Volunteers warned that they will not remain silent as long as rogue Manipur state forces are not withdrawn completely from the land of Kuki-Zo tribals including Moreh border town.

**FEATURED ARTICLE****While the Conflict Has Been Ethnic in Nature, There Has Been an Underlying Communal Element to the Violence****Makepeace Sitlhou & Greeshma Kuthar**

Today is the first day I am coming out with this,” said a missionary, pointing to his sling bag with a Bible, when New Lines met him in August. He feared that if he were frisked, his life could be in danger. One among the four Meitei Christian families in a Hindu-dominated neighborhood of Imphal, the capital of the northeast Indian state of Manipur, the missionary had hardly ventured out since the ethnic conflict erupted in early May and a mob forcefully entered his home and burned all Christian texts, including the Bible, in front of him and his family. Hence, he was reluctant but agreed to meet us at a church 12 miles away, in a predominantly Naga tribe neighborhood. Visibly shaken and scared, he was accompanied by a friend who led the conversation, gauging whether it would be safe for them to speak to us.

On May 3, fighting broke out across Manipur after news spread that a rally held by the All Tribal Students Union of Manipur — which opposed the Manipur High Court’s recommendation to grant Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to Meiteis, the state’s dominant ethnic group — had become violent. The Meiteis, most of whom are Hindu though there are some Muslims and Christians, make up 51% of the population and historically have held more political, cultural and social capital, whereas the minority Kuki-Zo tribes, who make up 14% of the population, are predominantly Christians and have been protected under the ST status, through which the Indian government recognizes historically marginalized tribal communities.

A special provision in the Indian Constitution reserves land in Manipur’s hill districts for these protected tribes. The Meiteis mostly live in the valley and are not allowed

to purchase land in the hills. Hence, recently the state government and valley-based civil society organizations have attempted to portray Kuki-Zo tribes as “illegal immigrants” or “not Indigenous” so that their claim to the land could be scrutinized and Meiteis could be granted ST status. These fault lines have led to the recent conflict.

More than 200 people have died in Manipur since the conflict began, with over 65,000 displaced within and outside the state. There have been at least 15 recorded cases of sexual assault. Buffer zones, separating the hills from the valley, are controlled by armed groups that have been revived after first forming during the decadeslong insurgency in Manipur in the 1960s. Even though over 40,000 Indian armed forces personnel are present in the state, firing continues on the edge of the valley and the hills. Mobs have looted more than 4,300 weapons from police armories, mostly in Imphal Valley.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was forced to break his silence on Manipur in July, when a graphic video showing two tribal women being stripped naked and groped went viral and sparked outrage across India. Several international organizations and diplomats, such as the European Parliament, U.S. Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti and the United Nations’ Special Rapporteurs, had been raising concerns over the conflict but were dismissed by the Indian government,

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which asked them to not interfere in its internal matters.

While the conflict primarily has been ethnic in nature, between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo tribal residents, there has been a communal element to the violence, especially against Meitei Christians. This aspect of the conflict has been underreported by the media and downplayed by Imphal-based journalists; experts; the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its ideological parent organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS); and Oswald Gracias, a cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church. "It has been given a religious twist but it is not a religious conflict. It is between two tribes," said Gracias, in an undated video statement shared by the BJP in July.

With a population of 300,000, Meitei Christians often call themselves a "minority within a minority." (Despite being the majority ethnic group in Manipur, Meiteis are an ethnic minority in India.) While there have been tensions in the past between Meitei Hindus and Meitei Muslims, Nagas and Meiteis, as well as Kuki-Zo and Naga tribes, Meitei Christians have avoided conflicts. But during the early days of this unrest, Meitei Christians suffered attacks on their churches and residences, as well as threats and intimidation from village committees and right-wing extremist groups Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun, which are mostly made up of Meitei Hindus and have been organizing themselves militarily over the past two years in an effort to revive Sanamahism, the Indigenous faith followed by the Meiteis before they converted to Hinduism, Christianity and Islam.

In the past five years, the number of Christian converts in the Meitei community has soared. There are over 17 churches in Imphal belonging to the Evangelical Baptist Convention (the largest denomination in Manipur), which exclusively serve a Meitei congregation, said Lalthanglun Guite, a church elder in Lamphelpat, a neighborhood of Imphal. The census reports from 2001 and 2011 show a 62% increase in Christians in the state, with a 15% jump in Hindu-dominated districts in the valley. However, this data is more indicative than conclusive since the migration of Christian tribal people from the hills may have also contributed to this growth. But the increase in the latter's influence in the state is seen as a threat by the Meitei Hindus and the Sanamahis, who want Meitei Christians to convert to their "original" faith.

New Lines met several Meitei Christian pastors in Imphal and the surrounding Meitei-dominated districts whose churches had been attacked, but they were extremely scared to share their stories. One pastor from the Imphal West district requested that we not speak until we were inside his house. "Many of those who attacked my church live in the neighborhood. We cannot be loud," he warned. Everything inside his church had been piled up and burned.

A pastor in the town of Thoubal who had agreed to meet us backed out the moment we arrived in his neighborhood. His church was burned down by a mob of more than 2,000, none of whom belonged to his locality, he said. In June, the archbishop of Imphal, Dominic Lumon, said that 249 churches belonging to Meitei Christians had been destroyed in the first 36 hours of the violence.

In fact, on Dec. 21 in Awang Leikinhabhi village of Imphal West, Premkumar Chingsubam, a pastor, found his house, which he had decorated for Christmas with a tree and artificial snowman, vandalized, when he returned from dinner at his relative's place. "I felt very unsettled when I saw the way they had destroyed the Christmas decorations," Chingsubam told New Lines.

The village committee called a meeting the next day where members of the mob, who, the pastor's nephew alleged, belonged to Arambai Tenggol, also showed up. They acknowledged their role in the attack but did not give a reason for it, the pastor said. Instead, they opened fire, disbursing the meeting before they attacked the pastor, leaving him hospitalized with a bruised forehead, and fractured ribs and hip bone. Photos of him later circulated on social media.

Meitei pastors have also alleged that they were forced to convert to Sanamahism and that an unaccounted number of Meitei Christian families have had to renounce their faith by signing conversion affidavits and burning their Bibles under duress from these extremist groups. New Lines has seen 76 police complaints alleging attacks on Meitei churches, of which six complainants spoke of threats to renounce Christianity and convert to Sanamahism. A senior police officer told New Lines that some of the accused have been charged, although it's not clear if any arrests were made.

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The missionary we met in the Naga-majority neighborhood alleged that he was assaulted, threatened at gunpoint to give up Christianity and told he would be killed if he continued to preach or practice his faith. “They [the mob] told me that by the time they return, I should demarcate a space within my house for Sanamahi deity, failing which they would kill me,” he said. He had filed a police complaint on May 16, stating that “some unknown people numbering about 60” had damaged and burned his property. The Manipur police contacted him recently to say that his case had been sent to the High Court, which would look into the matter.

A Meitei Christian leader told New Lines that he was beaten up by a mob that had pressured him to sign the conversion affidavit. He reasoned with local leaders, promising them that he would stop conducting prayer meetings and would keep his faith to himself. But when he left Manipur for medical treatment, his house was vandalized and locals threatened to shoot him dead after a photo of his battered body was circulated on Kuki-Zo social media groups to highlight anti-Christian atrocities committed by the Meiteis.

Even though he was assured safety by neighborhood elders and members of the district council, when he returned and sought refuge at his relative’s house, a mob surrounded it, then dragged him out and beat him up. “A friend tried to intervene and said if I just signed the conversion document, the issue would die down. I refused.” Eventually, he managed to escape with his wife and children. After walking for miles and hiding in different neighborhoods, they made their way to the state of West Bengal. “I will not return to Manipur,” he said.

A Meitei pastor from Imphal Valley told New Lines that initially the community felt secure thinking that their Christian brethren from the Naga and Kuki-Zo tribes would support them should there be any threats. However, he said that on May 3 they were left in disbelief after churches across the valley were targeted in clashes. “We are like a pendulum right now where the Kukis attack us in the hills and the Sanamahis in the valley.” He, too, fled the state.

Despite alleged attacks by members of the Kuki-Zo community, there have been attempts to downplay and deny the role of extremist Sanamahi groups in the attacks against Meitei Christians and blame them on the Kuki-Zos. During a press conference led by the Meitei Christian Churches Council (MCCC) in Delhi in July, Meitei organizations alleged that all properties and churches of Meitei Christians were only destroyed by Kuki-Zo tribal people. However, Lumon

said that there was no evidence or reports that Meitei churches were destroyed by Kuki-Zos in the hills.

Philem Rohan Singh, a popular Meitei Christian travel vlogger who has become the face of the community, told New Lines that “people from these groups [Meitei Leepun and Arambai Tenggol] may have been involved but largely this has come from the Leikai [village neighborhood] committees exacting personal revenge from the Christian families.” Though Meitei Christian pastors did accuse village chiefs and district council leaders of attacks, they also alleged that they belonged to Hindu and Sanamahi-dominated committees working in cahoots with the extremist groups.

Rohan Singh further stated that neither Arambai Tenggol nor the “titular king” had given any personal instructions to burn down churches. By “titular king” he was referring to Maharaja Leishemba Sanajaoba, the grandson of Maharaja Bodhchandra Singh, who ruled over the state and was coerced to sign the merger agreement with the Union of India in 1949. Even though the royal family does not rule over Manipur, Sanajaoba continues to lead the family and has played an instrumental role in reviving Sanamahism and supporting groups like Arambai Tenggol in the past two years with combat training and encouraging the practice of their rituals.

Until 2020, Sanajaoba’s influence was limited to his royal lineage, and he was the “symbolic and spiritual head of many ritualistic traditions of the old Manipur kingdom,” wrote veteran journalist Pradip Phanjoubam in *The Telegraph India*. But he had no real power, as acknowledged by the king himself, till he was nominated as a member of the Rajya Sabha (the upper house of Parliament) in 2020 by the BJP, which hoped to harness this new surge of energy in the Indigenous people’s movement.

Rohan Singh also contested the “communal” narrative — that there were fault lines within the Meiteis — alleging instead that the churches were destroyed by the Kuki-Zos. He shared a list of 13 such churches, of which New Lines verified that 10 were still standing, unharmed.

Over the past seven decades, Hindu nationalist organizations have pushed for the revival of Indigenous

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faiths that tribal communities in India's northeast region followed before the majority converted to Christianity. Even though Hindus make up 54% of the population in this region, they are a minority in four of the seven states that make up the northeast. Hence, the region is of special interest to the Hindu nationalist organizations that want to bring the converted Christian tribal people into the Hindu fold by promoting Indigenous faiths. Recently, the RSS has also started demanding that the ST status of tribal people should be revoked unless they return to their Indigenous religion or Hinduism.

Moreover, Hindu right-wing organizations have also used mythology to link the northeast region with Hinduism. For instance, in a 2018 speech at the annual Madhavpur fair in Gujarat where the union of Lord Krishna and his goddess wife Rukmini is celebrated, Manipur Chief Minister Biren Singh said that Lord Krishna had abducted "our girl" (when she was being forcefully married by her brother) and made a connection between Rukmini's origins and the Idu Mishmi tribe in Arunachal Pradesh. Similarly, claims have been made that princess Chitrangada, whom Pandava Prince Arjuna had married in the Hindu mythological epic Mahabharata, was from Manipur.

In Manipur, before converting to different religions, Meiteis followed Sanamahism and regarded Lainingthou Sanamahi as the creator and controller of the universe. But when King Pamheiba of the Kangleipak kingdom, which ruled over the valley in the 18th century, was inspired by the teachings of a Bengali Brahmin preacher from Sylhet (in present-day Bangladesh), he forced his subjects to convert to Hinduism and adopt the Bengali script. During that period, several Sanamahi deities and scriptures were destroyed, Hindu preachers banned the practice of the old Indigenous faith, and the seven clans of the Meitei dynasty were included in the Hindu caste system.

In the past decade, however, some Meiteis have sought to revive their Indigenous roots. According to Vidyapati Senjam, a senior ideologue of the Sanamahi religion and vice president of the Lainingthou Sanamahi Temple Board, Meiteis Hindus have increasingly readopted Sanamahism, with younger generations embracing it more willingly than the older ones. In 2021, the Manipur government also reverted to the Meitei Mayak script, which was replaced around the advent of Hinduism, stoking controversies while trying to claim tribal areas

in the hills as sacred protected sites for Sanamahi Meiteis.

While the adoption of Samanahism by Hindus has been seamless, Meitei Christians have firmly opposed this wave, particularly because of the way that ethno-nationalist groups have been propagating it. There are several videos on Facebook of Arambai Tenggol demonstrations in which young Meitei men dressed in black sport a red insignia of three horsemen charging into battle, reminiscent of the image of the cavalry of the erstwhile Kangleipak kingdom wielding a poisonous dart. They march down highways or market areas distributing pamphlets and chanting slogans on restoring the glory of the old kingdom.

Moreover, Meitei pastors have alleged that the terms of conversion and its enforcement have been different for Hindus and Christians. Hindus don't have to sign an affidavit; they just need to keep the southwest corner of their home empty, dedicating it to Lainingthou Sanamahi, alongside Hindu deities. But for Meitei Christians, the conversion entails personally burning the Bible, removing all signs of Christianity from their homes, joining meetings and signing a legal affidavit declaring that they have converted to Sanamahism, said the pastor from Imphal Valley. Senjam told New Lines the reason for the difference was because most Meitei Hindus practice certain rituals of Sanamahism, unlike the Abrahamic faiths.

Several leaders in Manipur have told New Lines that the BJP leadership has applied pressure on Meitei Christian leaders to convert to Sanamahism. At least two public personalities said they were summoned to meet the chief minister in 2022 after videos of them speaking about their faith went viral. One of them alleged that in a meeting where Meitei Leepun chief Pramot Singh was present, they were indirectly pressured to abandon their Christian faith.

A member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) who belongs to BJP and did not want to be identified told New Lines that the chief minister had pressured Paonam Brojen Singh, a Meitei Christian politician and BJP MLA, to convert to Sanamahism through his aides. "Both Sanajaoba and Leishantheim Susindro Meitei [another BJP MLA] were also present," they said. Another pastor alleged that MLA Mayanglambam Rameshwar Singh, who belongs to the National People's Party, offered him money to convert in 2022.

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Responding to these allegations, both Susindro Meitei and Rameshwar Singh told New Lines that they were “not true” and one shouldn’t believe in these “false rumors.” Biren Singh and Sanajaoba had not responded to our emails at the time of publication.

Meanwhile, the names of Biren Singh, Sanajaoba and Yasobanta Sharma, the acting president of the Manipur chapter of Vishwa Hindu Parishad, a prominent Hindu right-wing organization, on the plaque of a new building within the Sanamahi Temples complex in Imphal further showed a close working relationship between Meitei leaders and Hindu nationalist organizations.

As for the conflict with Meitei Christians, Senjam said that the problem isn’t with any particular faith but with how community members speak about Sanamahism. “Tribal Christians don’t talk down about our religion, but Meitei Christians do,” he said. He was referring to comments made in April by the Meitei Rev. Takhellambam Ramananda during a gospel outreach program in Imphal, when he spoke ill of certain tenets of Sanamahism. The preacher received a lot of criticism and was briefly arrested, but his comments sparked widespread protests led by the Arambai Tenggol. Even Sanajaoba posted on social media, threatening to “skin him alive if he doesn’t apologize.”

Similarly, statements made by Brojen Singh, the lone Meitei Christian representative in the state assembly, had also irked Meitei Hindus and Sanamahis. The BJP politician had organized a “peace rally” in March, involving the Meitei Christian community, to support the government’s “war on drugs” campaign, aimed at stopping poppy cultivation in the hills, which mostly involved Kuki-Zo tribal people.

But he devoted most of his speech to commending how far tribal people had come by adopting Christianity. “Earlier, we thought the tribals to be fools. But look at them now,” he said. “Because of Christianity, they have advanced much ahead of us in all important fields, controlling 92% of the state resources today. Now we [Meiteis] are the tribal fools.” He further blamed the “old religion” for holding back the Meitei community, which did not go down well with the Sanamahi groups and Meitei Hindu leaders.

“Such statements are bound to cause anger among the youth,” said Senjam, attributing the statements

for provoking mobs to go after Meitei Christians and their churches.

The Rev. L. Manga, the joint secretary of the All Manipur Christian Organization, told New Lines that Christian leaders had told Brojen Singh not to hold this rally, since it could cause more trouble. “But he insisted that this wasn’t about tribals but to show their strength as Meitei Christians,” said Manga.

The rally was an important political ploy for Brojen Singh to display the huge turnout of the Meitei Christian community, which ran into the thousands (although some claim that as many as 60,000 Meitei Christians were present). “It was a response to the pressure he was put under to give up Christianity,” said one BJP MLA, who didn’t want to be named. New Lines made several attempts to reach Brojen Singh for an interview, but he didn’t respond. Christian leaders from the tribal and Meitei communities said that he has gone into hiding since the conflict began. On May 28, a mob of between 3,000 and 4,000 people attacked his house in the Wangjing Wangkhei neighborhood of Thoubal and the Wangjing Baptist Church that he had built.

A Meitei Christian leader from Bishnupur town in Manipur told New Lines that Meitei Christians should not be making such provocative statements about the majority community and blamed Ramananda and Brojen Singh for the current predicament of Meitei Christians. He said that when Meitei churches were being burned, he told his friends not to write or publicize about it because antagonizing the majority would only work against them.

“This is the time to be silent and pray,” he said, while adding that an Arambai Tenggol cadre told him to remove the verses of the Bible that had been painted inside his compound.

Meanwhile, Senjam said efforts are ongoing to ensure that attacks against Meitei Christians don’t happen again.

Since the onset of the violence, all programs at the churches of the pastors New Lines spoke with had stopped, but prayer fellowships have continued and are taking place over conference calls.

Meanwhile, Rohan Singh told New Lines that a resolution had been reached with the right-wing Sanamahi groups

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to allow Meitei Christians to resume services in the valley. "Meitei Leepun and Arambai Tenggol are ready to do a press release. Now that we have their assurance, many Meitei pastors have already started their church service," he said. However, no such release was made at the time of this writing.

The displaced pastors didn't buy into the claims of compromises, even if statements were coming from those in their own community. Rohan Singh "might be under threat to say that," said a pastor of an independent church in a rural district in the valley who had to flee Manipur with his family to an undisclosed location in the Northeast region after his church was looted and burned down and his house was vandalized on May 4. "If we go back to Manipur, something bad may happen to us. [Also] if a resolution was reached, they would have announced it in the news, but both central and state governments are quiet."

The pastor who fled to West Bengal said that he had stopped all worship activities for a while and had started worshipping Pakhangba (one the most powerful Sanamahi gods). But he has stopped short of signing the conversion affidavit. "I could not remove Jesus from my heart. When the mob dragged me out of the house, they shouted that I would be killed like Jesus," he said.

A member of the district council where this displaced pastor came from told New Lines that attacks on Meitei

Christians were unfortunate and "everybody was charged up those days," but it is "safe" for displaced church leaders to return.

Organizations like the MCCC have been making efforts to rebuild trust with Meitei civil society groups by distancing themselves from Kuki-Zos. For instance, when a petition was filed against Meitei Leepun and Arambai Tenggol at the Supreme Court and a list of 121 churches burned or destroyed across ethnic communities was provided, the MCCC strongly opposed the inclusion of 70 Meitei churches in it and disassociated itself from the tribes.

The Bishnupur pastor said that when the churches are rebuilt, they should reflect Meitei culture and not have any Kuki-Zo influence, by which he meant that they should not be taking the "eager" monetary assistance often offered by Kuki-Zos and Nagas to Meitei Christians to build churches.

A pastor in Assam told New Lines that several Meitei Christian leaders like him have been part of several meetings where they have been reassuring Meitei groups that they have no association with the Kuki-Zos.

"Lord Jesus does not only belong to the Kukis. He belongs to all of us," he said. "If he was only for Kukis, we would not have worshiped him."

Source: [News Line Magazine](#)

THE BUZZ SOCIAL MEDIA

 **Arijit nobody**
@phoenixpaul2023

Peter Mate is a teacher in Bethel English School, Moreh. and Youth secretary of St. George Catholic Church. He was caught by police commandos on 30th December, and beaten black and blue. Just because he belongs to the Minority, it's acceptable?

[@rashtrapatibhvn](#)
[#Manipur](#)
[#SaveMoreh](#)

6:26 PM · Dec 31, 2023 · 1,389 Views

 **BhaiPal**
@RayiCis

We need clarification from [@manipur_police](#) on this matter.

[#Manipur](#)

This will create more agitation and unwanted consequences for the state forces if they do not make statement on such matter. [@adgpi](#)
[@AmitShah](#) [@narendramodi](#) should really look into this matter. [#India](#)



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New Year's Hope

Oh, New Year! Pristine and untainted.

New year! With hope you are welcome
New year! Anticipating to be awesome.

New sunrise! For you very much we long
That Sunrise of Freedom which is ever-long
A desperate wait to sing a triumphant song.

New day! Redeem us from the foe's serfdom
Like a newborn yearns for her mother's bosom
Much we crave deliverance for us to blossom.
Been a long spell hoping to have our kingdom.

Almighty! Ceaselessly we pray for redemption
Of our pasts forgive the sins and this generation
Measure not our heinousness and transgression
But thy Royal blessings for this oblivious nation
For us to sing the Song of Freedom in jubilation.

- *Henminthang Haokip*



December 31

The year's ending but our hearts are still bending
The news man and the weather man are never wrong when you want them to be
But we've moved past such dependency, haven't we?
We've moved past bullets and bombs and have come to a place we thought we'd never be,
We carry the weight of the world on our shoulders but faith and hope still hold us together.
Our journey through the shadows shall weave a tale of how we swerve and spin,
A tale where truth sometimes takes its leave, a tale of how we stand and still believe.
We're haunted by yesterday, tomorrow's a blurry gaze
And today?
We're still holding onto a little thread, trying not to lose it.
We recognize ourselves in our shared resilience and strength.
The mothers are sharing their recipes of love and healing, the fathers are discussing freedom,
The brothers are taking turns at the outposts, the sisters are weaving shawls of glory,
The children are playing while the babies can be heard cooing in their crib.
There's a rose growing from a crack in the ruins of the concrete church across the street.
God must be thinking that we're strong to give us what we're going through.
To reach the point of giving up must be the point all along
Because when we're finally at rock bottom,
That's when we start looking up and reaching out.
Within this storm, may we see God's glory
Because through this darkness, God writes our story.

- Jacquelyn Laltanpuii Suantak



The Last Goodbye

The last light of Year of the Rabbit has gone.
Gone with three sixty and five rises of dawn.
The beauty of the world it withered by.
For ten and two lunar nights skittered I
In helter-skelter aimlessly grooved by.
Wandering around as a wind sporadically,
'Tis time to finally say the last goodbye.
Adieu to loved ones the Rabbit has taken.
Adieu to the Rabbit that's come to an end.
May the sufferings and sorrows of man be gone.
And haunting memories of the things bygone.

The first light of Year of the Dragon comes soon.
Pray, all you hills that the Dragon brings fortune.
Over the hills yonder the sun will soon rise.
From darkness to light a ray of hope will arise.
For the ones broken, a new heart likewise.
For the downtrodden and also the despised,
'Tis time to finally say the last goodbye.
Adieu to misery the Rabbit had brought forth.
Adieu to loss that'd torment us at our comfort.
May no calamity ever come in the life of man.
May sorrow depart and every heart amend.

- Henry Manggon