

# The Ongoing Violence in Manipur: State Apathy, Hatred and Eluding Peace

## A Fact-Finding Report on Manipur Violence

### **Introduction:**

Manipur violence, as reported in the media and various civil society organisations' investigative reports, is among the most unprecedented conflicts in India. According to some reports, the ongoing violence has already displaced over 70,000 persons and claimed more than 180 lives. Videos of Kuki women being sexually assaulted publicly and paraded naked in Manipur have shocked the collective consciousness of the country and shed light on the scale and tenor of this conflict. With no end in sight, the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism (CSSS) organised a fact-finding visit to Manipur from 28<sup>th</sup> November to 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2023. A team comprising Irfan Engineer, Director, CSSS and Neha Dabhade, Executive Director, CSSS, visited the districts of Imphal and Churachandpur in Manipur.

### **Methodology:**

The immediate trigger for the current conflict in Manipur appears to be the directive by the Manipur High Court, directing the State government to recommend to the Union government that the status of Scheduled Tribe be granted to the dominant Meitei community. In protest, the All Tribals Students' Union Manipur (ATSUM) organised a rally on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023, which allegedly turned aggressive and triggered violence throughout the state, which continues to date and has led to "human transfer" from the valley and surrounding hills. Owing to the internet shutdown, the scale of violence was not fully comprehended by the outside world. However, it is estimated that more than 180 persons are dead, scores of women have been raped and sexually assaulted, and many persons are missing. What is more disturbing is the news that the entire valley, predominantly inhabited by the Meiteis, has been 'cleansed' of Kukis and the hills, predominantly

inhabited by the Kukis, are 'cleansed' of Meiteis. The forced displacement has rendered more than 70000 people from both communities homeless. They are now living in relief camps.

The CS fact-finding team visited Imphal and Churachandpur from 28<sup>th</sup> November to 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2023. The objective of the visit was to understand the different visions of peace held by the various stakeholders in this conflict. While much has been written about the violence and is available in the public domain, CSSS tried to understand the causative factors that led to the violence to trace the roots of this ongoing conflict. The team visited community leaders and social workers from the Meitei, Kuki and Naga communities, representatives of civil society organisations, students, youth, women, journalists, teachers and political representatives. The team tried to coax out the idea or terms for peace behind the current conflict held by these different parties. Due to the prevailing atmosphere of fear, insecurity and intimidation, the sources preferred anonymity and, thus, have not been named in the report.

### ***Background of Manipur:***

The history of Manipur, with its multiple layers, is chequered and intriguing. *The Cheitharol Kumbaba*, a royal chronicle, documents the history of Manipuri kings of the Ningthouja dynasty since 33 AD. Though there are archaeological records of human civilisation in the Imphal valley earlier than 33AD, it is difficult to attribute them to the Meitei people. Linguistically and ethnically, the Meitei are considered Tibeto-Burmans. The people in the valley were ruled by the dominant Ningthouja dynasty, one of the longest-ruling dynasties of India. Until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the kings and the people of Manipur followed an indigenous faith known as Sanamahism (Schoetz & Das, 2023).

Sanamahism, though still practised among the Meiteis in Manipur, has seen a significant decline over the centuries as many Meiteis have embraced Hinduism. The introduction of Hinduism to Manipur dates back many centuries. It was introduced to the people by ruling kings who used coercive methods to promote Vaishnavism, often violently suppressing Sanamahism. One notable instance was during the reign of King Charairongba (1697-1709). In 1704, he and his family were initiated into the Nimbarka/Nimandi School of Vaishnavism by a Brahman named

Krishnacharya alias Rai Vanamali from Orissa. He imposed strict tenets and practices of food and worship on the Manipuri people.

After Charairongba's death, King Pamheiba alias Gharib Niwaz (1709-1748) ascended the throne and consolidated Hinduism as the official religion of Manipur. Pamheiba took drastic measures against those who defied Hindu taboos and enforced vegetarianism. Despite this, his stance towards traditional Lais (gods and goddesses) fluctuated, resulting in their eventual banishment and destruction.

During Pamheiba's reign, Santidas Gosai, a Hindu Ramandi Brahmin preacher, arrived from Sylhet and became the king's guru. Gosai advocated for the worship of 'Shri Rama' as the supreme form. He persuaded the king to abandon the Nimandi School of Vaishnavism in favour of the Ramandi or Ramananda School, which he believed would be more accessible to the masses.

Under Santidas Gosai's influence, Pamheiba initiated a revolution in Manipur's sectarian ideology and systematically suppressed Sanamahism and other Hindu sects. He ordered the burning of about 120 sacred puyas (religious texts) of the Meiteis, and the destruction of temples dedicated to nine Sylvan deities (Umang Lais), and the abodes of Lainingthou Sanamahi, Lairemma Panthoiibi, Lainingthou Soraren, and Lai Wahaiba, the central gods of Sanamahism. These actions aimed to eradicate the old Meitei religion and establish Hinduism in Manipur (Devi, 2017).

Meidingu Pamheiba (named Gharib Niwaz by Muslims) is known for conquering the Burmese capital. In 1724, Pamheiba renamed Ningthoujas' kingdom, Kangleipak, Manipur, which means 'abode of jewels/ in Sanskrit. After the consolidation of power by the Ningthoujas in the 15th century, the political and geographical boundary of the Meitei kingdom expanded or shrank depending on the power of the existing ruler. At one point, the boundaries of the Manipur kingdom extended from Barak (now in Assam) to Chindwin (now in Myanmar) and from Maram hills to Tipaimukh (bordering present-day Mizoram). At another time, it extended to the Irrawaddy River (present-day Myanmar) in the east to Cachar and Tripura in the west.

In 1819, the Burmese invaded Manipur, and the Manipuri kings sought help from the British. Manipur was granted the status of a British protectorate state from 1824 to 1891. Under the British Indian Empire, Manipur was a princely state from 1891 to August 1947. After India's

independence, it was one of the 500 princely states that merged with India on 21st September 1949. This merger generated contestations, bitterness, and discontent, eventually leading to the long-drawn separatist movement in Manipur, as discussed below.

Regarding the migration of Kukis and whether they are the 'original inhabitants' of Manipur, it should be noted that Kukis have been mentioned for many centuries in Manipur's history, as written by Kuki and Meitei scholars. This is despite the dichotomy of 'old Kukis' and 'new Kukis', which is the oft-repeated narrative to signify that Kukis are recent immigrants and thus not a legitimate section of Manipur society. Modern India, founded on principles of equality, included Kukis as part of India. Kuki academician Thongkhohal Haokip points out that Buddhist literature written by Lama Taranatha during the 15th century also has accounts of Kukis (Ko-ki) in their present habitat. The 1886 *Gazetteer of Manipur*, based on this census data, recorded approximately 8,000 'old Kukis' in Manipur who traditionally lived in the state and about 17,000 'new Kukis' who had migrated from Lushai Hills in the south during the early 19th century.

Given the current conflict, it is interesting to reflect that historically, the relationship between Kukis and Meiteis was not always marked by animosity. Kukis aided Meitei kings to protect and consolidate their kingdoms and boundaries. Incidentally, Pooyas – traditional records maintained by Meitei Kings mention how *“two Kuki chiefs named Kuki Ahongba and Kuki Achouba were allies to Nongba Lairen Pakhangba, the first historically recorded king of the Meithis [Meiteis], in the latter's mobilisation for the throne in 33 AD,”* says Thongkhohal Haokip. He adds, *“Kukis and Meiteis have more or less followed the principle of peaceful coexistence. This can be necessitated from the assistance extended to the Meitei maharajah by the Kuki chiefs in the erstwhile period”*. An example of this amity was noted in 1810 when the then Meitei King Chourajit sought help from Kukis to fight the Burmese army. Historians also state that Kuki chiefs supplied irregulars to guard the Meitei Maharajah and his kingdom, which was resisting the merger agreement on the eve of Manipur's annexation to the Indian Union in 1949 (Bose, 2023).

The Kukis have a rich history of contributing to the Indian independence movement against British rule. During World War I (1914-18), the Kuki chiefs refused to send their men to fight for the British. In 1917, the Kukis revolted against the British state. The entrance to Churachandpur

boasts a memorial erected in memory of the two-year-long revolt. The Kuki resistance has been mentioned in several colonial records and accounts. However, the Meiteis, who believe that the Kukis did not fight the British, contest this Anglo-Kuki war memorial. The participation of the Kukis in Subhash Chandra Bose's Indian National Army, too, is well-documented. In contrast, the King of Manipur was supporting the British. The British supported feudal kings and allowed them their 'kingdoms' in exchange for their loyalty. Thus, the King of Manipur did not participate in the freedom struggle against the British.

The merger of Manipur with the Indian Union was a watershed moment for North-East India, marking the start of insurgency in the region, particularly in Manipur. This unrest shaped inter-community relationships between Manipur's ethnic groups—Nagas, Meiteis, Kukis, and Pangals. In turn, these equations shaped Manipur.

### **Fault Lines in Manipur:**

Manipur's social and political landscape is profoundly intricate, stemming from its rich history, diverse narratives, and, most importantly, claims to its territory. The current conflicts can be traced back to deep-rooted fault lines within Manipuri society, chiefly along ethnicity and the competing claims of different ethnic groups over its resources.

After independence, the Kukis and the Meiteis united for greater autonomy. However, a persistent contest for natural resources and political power has endured. While the Meiteis comprise roughly 54% of Manipur's population, they predominantly inhabit the valley, constituting only 10% of the state's total land. Conversely, the Kuki Chin and the Nagas, designated as Scheduled Tribes under the Indian Constitution, account for 14% and 26% of the population, predominantly occupying 90% of Manipur's landmass, primarily the hill areas. Out of the 60 seats, the valley accounts for 40 assembly seats and the hills only 20. The hills constitute 90% of Manipur and are not entirely cultivatable. This translates into only 33% of seats for the tribes. However, their share in the population is 40%, hinting at the disproportionate share of power enjoyed by the Meiteis.

The Meiteis assert themselves as the original inhabitants of Manipur, wielding significant cultural and political dominance. The valley, home to the capital Imphal, serves as the nexus of power and resources in terms of infrastructure and political influence. The valley is home to all administrative offices, substantial educational institutions, prime healthcare institutions, courts, and other essential industries that are attractive livelihood options. This development can be attributed to the vast budgetary allocations to the valley.

As opposed to the valley, it is alleged that the hills receive only a fraction of the allocated budget, especially after the BJP came to power in 2017. The Kukis allege that more than 80% of the State's budget is spent in the valley. In addition, autonomous Hill District Councils were rendered non-functional after the BJP came into power. This discriminatory approach has led to the economic backwardness of the hills, which are heavily dependent on agriculture – mostly shifting cultivation. The life and livelihood of the tribes depend on the forest produce. Therefore, they want to safeguard their lands and forests. The Kuki Chin and Nagas harbour a deep-seated sense of insecurity, perceived from neglect by the dominant Meitei political elite, particularly towards the hills. They fear further marginalisation if the Meiteis are granted Scheduled Tribe status, enabling them to purchase land in the hills—a privilege currently denied to the Meiteis.

Conversations with Meitei communities reveal their strong resentment stemming from their inability to acquire land in the hills. This drives their fervent demand for Scheduled Tribe status. This dynamic is further complicated by allegations that label Kukis as illegal immigrants from Myanmar. This fuels Meitei demands for implementing the National Register of Citizens. It is alleged that the number of Kuki villages is increasing, given the large-scale illegal immigration of Kukis from Myanmar to Manipur through porous borders. A publication called 'Save Integrity of Manipur and Resolve Crisis' by AMUCO alleges that in addition to the existing 2803 Kuki villages, another 970 villages are seeking fresh recognition. They attribute the emergence of the new villages to the large-scale migration of Kukis from Myanmar to Manipur. However, it should be noted that new villages do not necessarily mean an increased number of immigrants. It can also be attributed to the Kuki tribal chiefs setting up new villages for more agriculture or their children.

The narrative that the Meiteis vehemently repeated was that they were the original inhabitants of Manipur, while the Kukis were immigrants. They also have a classification of Kukis –old Kukis and new Kukis. Old Kukis, according to this narrative, are loyal to Manipur and living in harmony with Meiteis, while the ‘new’ Kukis are illegal immigrants and are creating discord. A more worrisome narrative was that Kukis are illegal immigrants from Myanmar and thus should be evicted through the process of NRC. This trope seeks to exclude the Kukis completely and stigmatise them. This deliberate attempt at otherising the Kukis has also led to animosity and distrust. The Meiteis allege that there are at least over 30% of Kukis who are illegal immigrants, and some of them hold higher positions in the bureaucracy and are also elected representatives. Meiteis also resent that, according to them, 70% of personnel in the bureaucracy are Kukis.

Manipur's intricate social and political dynamics reflect a complex interplay of historical grievances, ethnic tensions, and competing claims over resources and identity.

### **Contested Land and Separatist Movements:**

Manipur, a region steeped in rich history and cultural diversity, saw significant transformations during the colonial era. Once an independent kingdom, Manipur was defeated by the British in 1891, and it became a princely state under British suzerainty until the end of colonial rule. However, the colonial legacy left deep imprints on Manipur's socio-political landscape and set the stage for subsequent conflicts and struggles for autonomy.

India gained independence from British rule in 1947, but Manipur was merged into India only in 1949. Until then, Manipur was independent and autonomous without interference from the Indian state. In 1948, Manipur held its free elections and had a newly elected legislature. It also had its Constitution. It was a sovereign democratic nation with the king as its titular head. This assembly ruled Manipur, and India controlled foreign affairs, defence, and communications. In 1949, Manipur faced a pivotal moment when the accession instrument was signed, which integrated the princely state into the newly independent India. This agreement, signed by King Bodhchandra, was met with contention by many Manipuris who believed it violated their right to self-determination. They believed that the king was called treacherously to Shillong by Indian

leaders and made to sign the merger agreement under duress after confining him. The decision to merge without the consultation of the legislature formed in 1948 stirred dissent and became the basis for the future insurgency.

The merger's aftermath saw separatist sentiments emerge, exacerbated by socio-political and economic disparities within Manipur. The Nagas' demand for autonomy and insurgency for "Nagalim" spilt over into Manipur in the 1950s, prompting the Indian government to enact the Armed Forces (Assam and Manipur) Special Powers Act in 1958, even in parts of Manipur. This legislation granted sweeping powers to the military during counter-insurgency operations, leading to heightened tensions and further alienation among Manipur's diverse ethnic communities.

There was a strong resentment in Manipur about the merger with India, and a demand for greater autonomy emerged. Thus, a movement for greater autonomy or a separatist movement in Manipur began. Isam Erabot, one of the prominent figures from this movement, went underground to organise armed resistance. The Indian state heavily crushed this movement. In the mid-1960s, Manipur experienced another upsurge in violent anti-government activities. On 24th November 1964, the first resistance group was formed with the emergence of the United National Liberation Front (UNLF). The UNLF's aim was an independent, socialist republic in Manipur. However, it also claimed a 'historic mission' to liberate Manipur *'from colonial occupation in the larger context of liberating the entire Indo-Burma region, for a common future'*. The formation of armed opposition groups, such as the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), in 1964 marked a turning point in Manipur's struggle for autonomy. These groups, fuelled by grievances over marginalisation and injustice, waged an armed resistance against Indian rule and intensified the cycle of violence and repression.

Manipur was granted statehood in 1972. However, the imposition of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in 1980 highlighted the Indian government's heavy-handed approach to quelling dissent in Manipur. The designation of the entire state as 'disturbed' further eroded civil liberties and exacerbated tensions, leading to widespread unrest and resistance. Armed with AFSPA, the armed forces indulged in raids, encounters, combing operations and rape of women. The state



was blanketed with fear, violence and restrictions. This spiralled violence and resistance and led to the birth of other significant groups like the People's Liberation Army (PLA), People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP) and offshoots of these groups due to ideological differences and leadership issues("These Fellows Must be Eliminated" Relentless Violence and Impunity in Manipur, 2008). Initially, the insurgents were secular and came from all tribes. The UNLF chief in the past came from the Kuki and Naga tribes, too. The resistance to AFSPA was multi-ethnic.

At this juncture, it is vital to underline the role of the state and its divisive strategy to weaken the insurgency in Manipur. Brinda Thounaojam, former Additional Superintendent of Police in the Manipur police department, explained to the team that in 1984-85, drugs like heroin were introduced in Manipur to de-motivate the youth from joining the insurgency. The infusion of drugs in Manipur society can be understood in different phases. In the first phase, the drugs came from the Golden Triangle. SP tablets were promoted in the second phase, and tramadol was pumped into the market. In the third phase, heroin and '*World is Yours*' (WY) was brought from Myanmar. Gradually, Manipur started growing these drugs. In 1988, Burmese Kukis were brought in by the Indian state to counter insurgency.

The Kuki National Organization (KNO) was formed to demand a separate state for Kukis. KNO also participated in the Naga-Kuki conflict. The area vacated by the Naga insurgents was handed over to the Kukis, who were given domicile and voting rights. The increased aggression against the local Kuki populations during the 1990s led to a renewal of insurgency movements among Kukis, who felt betrayed particularly by the excessive atrocities inflicted upon innocent Kukis by the Nagas. In response, some Kuki leaders formed the Kuki National Front (KNF) to carve out a Kuki homeland or a Kuki state within the framework of the Indian Constitution in India. They raised the Kuki National Army (KNA) to fight to create Kuki states, one in India and another in Burma/Myanmar.

The demand for 'Kukiland' (land for the Kukis) directly challenges the demand for Greater or Southern Nagaland by the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM). 'Greater Nagaland', as the NSCN (IM) projected, would involve all Naga-inhabited areas being integrated with the

neighbouring Nagaland State. Significant chunks, if not the entire districts of Chandel, Senapati, Tamenglong and Ukhrul, would have to be forked out. The intention to drive out Kukis from these four hill districts led to an intense and prolonged 'ethnic cleansing' by the NSCN-IM in the '90s. While Meiteis oppose the creation of either a Kuki homeland or a greater Nagaland, the Kukis and Nagas cannot establish any kind of coordination or cooperation.

To bring peace to the region and to check militant insurgency, the Indian state signed Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreements with different militant Kuki groups. The first SoO with Kuki groups was signed in 2005 with only the Indian army. In 2008, the existing tripartite agreement was signed between the government of India and the Manipur state government on one side and various Kuki underground groups on the other. The Kuki groups in a tripartite SoO with the Central government and the Manipur state government are further splintered into two umbrella groups: the Kuki National Organisation (KNO) and the United Peoples Front (UPF). One of the reasons for the current conflict in Manipur was the move by the Manipur state government to withdraw from the SoO on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2023. This move was based on the claim that the involvement of ex-insurgents in rallies in Lamba, Kangpokpi and Tengnoupal districts was illegal and unconstitutional. One of the most vital demands from the Meitei side for a peaceful resolution is the abrogation of the SoO with the Kuki organisations.

The Nagas are intricately involved in the political landscape of Manipur and are an essential factor in establishing any political solution. However, given their aspirations and the history of animosity, the Nagas are in a dilemma and thus have avoided overtly siding with any party. The Nagas were present in the protest against the High Court directive to recommend granting ST status to the Meiteis. However, after the violence broke out in May, they have not openly taken sides. On speaking to some Nagas, it appeared that they, too, alleged that Kukis are illegal immigrants and do not support their demand for separate administration. The Kukis and Nagas have a long history of conflict and violence, especially in the 1990s, which led to a spiral of violence in Manipur. Thus, intrinsically, Nagas find it hard to support the Kukis. More importantly, supporting the Kuki demand for a separate administration, which is vague, could mean conceding land occupied by the Nagas to the Kukis. At the same time, the dream for Nagalim is still alive. At the same time, siding with the Meiteis would also not be feasible for Nagas if the Meiteis insist

on the ST status and ownership of land in the hills. The Nagas also want the hills to be protected, and granting ST status could lead to the Meiteis owning land in the hills.

Amidst these challenges, Manipur continues to grapple with the legacy of its colonial past and the ongoing struggle for self-determination. The scars of conflict run deep, shaping the region's identity and collective memory. Efforts towards reconciliation and peace remain elusive amidst enduring grievances and unresolved tensions. These scars and conflicts from the past also have a bearing on the current conflict.

### ***Rise of BJP in Manipur and Construction of Victimhood:***

The rise of the BJP in Manipur is instrumental in cementing the narrative of victimhood of the Meiteis and furthering polarisation in a society with deep ethnic cleavages. The state was ruled for 15 years or three consecutive terms by the Congress party led by Okram Ibobi Singh as Chief Minister. After the 2017 elections, the BJP formed a government in Manipur. Though the BJP did not have a clear majority in the 60-seat assembly, it managed to stitch together a coalition of parties. In the 2017 elections, Congress won 28 seats, BJP 21, NPF (Naga People's Front) 4, NPP (National People's Party) 4 and LJP and independent candidate one each. With the support of the NPF, NPP and the other smaller parties, the BJP came to power in Manipur.

Apart from the incumbency factor, what went against the Congress after three terms in 2017 were the ethnic strifes and subsequent blockades. The Congress government, during its tenure, tried to appease all the ethnic groups in a landmine of conflicts. However, it also introduced some controversial legislations, which created discontent. In August 2015, the Congress regime in Manipur sought to pass three bills: Protection of Manipur People Bill, Manipur Land Revenue & Land Reform (Seventh Amendment) Bill and Manipur Shops & Establishments (Second Amendment) Bill. These bills were proposed to bring the state under the regime of the Inner Line Permit to regulate the influx of outsiders. However, owing to the protest, the central government returned the bills that could not be passed to the State government. This created unrest in Manipur.

At the same time, the Congress government had decided to carve out seven districts from the hills in Manipur, which were predominantly Naga-dominated hills. This created social instability. The United Naga Council decided to protest against this move. It declared an indefinite blockade on NH 2 and NH 37, disrupting the flow of essential supplies to Manipur. The blockade started on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2016 and lasted for 139 days. It led to a phenomenal rise in prices of all essentials including petrol and food. The BJP made this blockade one of its strong election planks, promising to lift and end it. This promise also helped the BJP garner support and votes. After the BJP came to power, it managed to have dialogue with the UNC and lift the blockade. This brought some relief to Manipur and helped the BJP win support across ethnic lines.

It is crucial to bear in mind at this juncture that Congress was trying to balance out the interests of the different sections of Manipur society, that is, the Meiteis, Kukis and Nagas. This is evident from the policies of the Congress. However, it is equally evident that this was not always possible. The BJP capitalised on Congress's failure to bring peace to Manipur and came to power in 2017. It also had some support from the Nagas. Congress emerged as the single largest party, but BJP formed the government through a coalition. Thus, it was insecure and had to consolidate its position over the next five years.

One of the ways the BJP sought to consolidate power in Manipur was to polarise the Manipuri society to the extent that the interests of the groups seemed irreconcilable. The BJP built on the discontent in the Manipuri society, which historically viewed itself as autonomous with its Constitution and an elected assembly post-independence. What was crucial was the prevailing sense amongst the Meiteis that they were the original inhabitants of Manipur and their belief that other groups were migrants. BJP fed and further fuelled this sense of superiority amongst the Meiteis to the exclusion of the Kukis. With the help of organisations like Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun, the BJP deepened the narrative that it was the natural representative of the Meiteis.

BJP pushed the narrative that Meiteis were victims at the hands of the Congress and its policies, which had allowed other ethnic communities to take what was legitimately theirs. BJP also boosted claims by the Meiteis that they were land-starved and needed to occupy land in the hills,

too. Some of it was also drawn from history. For example, the team heard the claim that the Nehru administration had 'gifted' the Kobo Valley to Myanmar. The Meiteis believe that Kobo Valley belonged to Manipur. The claims that Kukis are infiltrators and should be detected and detained through NRC is akin to the strategy BJP adopted in Assam vis-a-vis Bengali Muslims. The BJP carefully constructs the victimhood of Meiteis. This plank helped the party to consolidate its power in 2022 and win 32 seats in the Manipur Assembly. Apart from the small state syndrome where the smaller states, including those in Northeast India, support the party in power at the Centre for getting the necessary development support from the Central government, this polarisation helped the BJP immensely to garner majority seats. The lack of action on the part of the Manipur government and its complicity in the conflict at multiple levels is attributed to this need to polarise and feed into the victimhood trope.

The Arambai Tenggol's claim of reviving Sanamahism is pushing the Meiteis towards an agenda of supremacism akin to the Hindutva movement in the rest of India. During the interaction with the fact-finding team, some Meitei sources confirmed that Arambai Tenggol has strengthened the RSS in Manipur. By portraying the Kukis in a poor light and dehumanising them by calling them 'illegal immigrants', 'poppy cultivators' and 'encroachers', the BJP is firmly on its way to disenfranchise the Kukis. Like Muslims are rendered inconsequential electorally by consolidating the 'Hindu' vote and creating one strong 'Hindu' identity, including all the caste groups, the Kukis, too, are rendered indispensable electorally. The Arambai Tenggol, with the impunity and patronage given by the state, is using its force and violence against the Kukis and against Meitei Christians and Meitei liberals who oppose its actions.

The BJP government systematically dismantled democratic institutions in Manipur in its two-term rule. For instance, it weakened the Autonomous Hill Councils. A Kuki MLA explained to the team that no elections have been held for the councils since 2017. He also shed light on how the hills were starved of necessary funds for development. In a shocking revelation, he divulged how Kuki MLAs were rounded up and coerced into supporting Biren Singh before announcing him as Chief Minister in 2022. Thus, the BJP has used all possible ways to suppress the Kukis to stay in power and has further marginalised them politically and economically.

### **The Build-up to the May 3<sup>rd</sup> Violence:**

The violence that broke out on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023 over the issue of granting ST status to the Meiteis is only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. As pointed out below, the current conflict has its roots in the multi-layered claims and contestations around land and political movements for autonomy. Over the last few years, these conflicts have become more complex, with the majoritarian policies of the BJP government being perceived as favouring the Meitei community, infringing on the rights of the Kukis and promoting objectionable narratives. The state's ruling regime built a three-pronged narrative to systematically divide the society, draw a wedge between the Kukis and Meiteis and marginalise the Kukis. This narrative was along the falsehoods of Kukis being narco-terrorists, illegal immigrants and encroachers into the reserved forest. There were definitive signs of the impending violence. This has been a conflict in the making for the past few years.

After the BJP came into power in Manipur in 2017, it started pursuing seemingly anti-Kuki and anti-Naga policies, which marginalised them. The allocation of funds was concentrated mainly in the valley, which has better infrastructure, livelihood options, healthcare, and educational institutions. The fact-finding team was told that the allocation of funds to the hill district councils was dwindling. Some alleged that only 10% of the allocated budget reached the hills. In 2021, the Hill Area Committee Members of the Manipur Legislative Assembly proposed the Manipur (Hill Areas) Autonomous District Councils Bill to counter the massive gap in development. However, it did not get support from the Biren Singh government. Kangpokpi, Churachandpur, Tamenglong, Chandel, Ukhrul and Senapati districts are notified as 'hill districts' in Manipur.

#### *Kukis as poppy cultivators and narco-terrorists:*

The state government's crackdown on the Kukis in the hills, under the pretext of combating drug cultivation, has intensified these tensions. The administration, led by Biren Singh, has announced the eradication of 15,000 acres of poppy fields, predominantly situated in Kuki-dominated hill

areas, and has made over 2,500 arrests in connection with drug-related offences since 2017 (Bhat, 2023). However, insights gathered from discussions with stakeholders in Manipur, including Meiteis and Kukis, suggest that poppy cultivation involves members of both communities and the Nagas. While some Kuki farmers are indeed engaged in poppy cultivation, it appears that a powerful cartel controls the operations and reaps the profits. The crackdown, critics argue, disproportionately targets the Kukis, who are merely poor cultivators, while turning a blind eye to the influential elements that acquire the poppy, manufacture, and market it. Those who control the movements of the drugs enjoy political support.

The massive profits of the poppy industry are reaped by a powerful cartel that is controlled and owned by powerful political elites. Former Assistant Superintendent of Police in Manipur, Brinda Thounaojam, told the fact-finding team that poppy cultivation enjoys political patronage from the authorities in the higher echelons of the ruling regime in Manipur. She stated that the Chief Minister himself is the biggest investor in poppy cultivation and a drug lord with vested interests in the poppy industry. She alleged that not only the CM but the son of Union Minister Amit Shah is also involved in the poppy industry. This reflects the massive scale of the industry. She told the team that over INR 2000 crores of poppy was grown in 2023. The poppy cartel pays the CM INR 250 crores per annum for protection, according to Brinda. The CM's second wife, who is a Naga and an MLA from Tandel, is also active in the poppy industry, Brinda alleged. While these allegations come from a high-placed police officer who should know, we cannot verify these allegations independently.

#### *Forced Eviction:*

A discriminatory policy of Manipur that became a bone of contention between the state and Kukis is the state's eviction drive in Kuki villages. The state alleged that the Kukis had encroached on reserved forest land and were illegal immigrants. In February 2023, the Manipur government launched an eviction drive in K Sonjang, a Kuki tribal village, citing alleged encroachment on Khoupum Protected Forest Land. Sixteen Kuki families were displaced and rendered homeless, according to some reports. The Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF) called for a peaceful rally

in the hill districts on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2023. However, the rally in Kangpokpi turned violent, with the police using tear gas shells and protestors resorting to stone pelting. The police allegedly beat up some rally participants. Following this incident, the forest department issued a clarification to a section of the media, stating that K Songjang is “*a new village established only in the year 2021 by encroaching inside the Churachandpur-Khoupum Protected Forest in violation of Forest Acts, Rules, Supreme Court Order and State Government’s Standing Order.*” (Hasnat & Meitei, 2023)

The forced eviction, along with the reserved and protected forest acts announced vis-à-vis tribal land, is perceived by the Kukis as an attempt by the government to infringe on tribal land. On 10<sup>th</sup> August 2022, a show cause notice was served to Kungpinaosen village and adjoining areas in the same district, directing the villagers to vacate for the same reason — encroachment. The Kuki residents and Kuki bodies have time and again protested these eviction drives by highlighting that since they are essentially forest dwellers, the Kuki tribe is dependent on the forest for their homes and livelihood. They have also clarified that the Kukis in these villages are not immigrants but have been settled for many years (Hasnat, Ground Reports, 2023).

The Kukis view the state government’s move to mark some of the spaces in the hills as 'heritage areas' as a ploy to grab the Kuki tribal lands. For instance, Mount Koubru, which lies between Kangpokpi and Thangjing and is a sacred hill for the Meiteis, was claimed by the Kukis in 2021 as part of the tribal land. Kukis stopped the Meiteis from accessing this holy hill and erected a cross on Thangjing. The Kukis consider these lands as tribal lands. Thus, when the state government started the process of declaring parts of Mount Koubru as a protected site, the Kukis viewed this as an attempt by the Meitei-dominated government to grab their tribal land under the garb of religion.

#### *The narrative of Kukis being illegal immigrants:*

The state of Manipur promotes a three-pronged narrative or propaganda that Kukis are poppy cultivators, forest encroachers and illegal immigrants from Myanmar. By terming the Kukis illegal immigrants and calling for NRC to detect illegal migrants, the state has set in motion systematic stigmatisation and discrimination against the Kukis. They face the risks of disenfranchisement.



According to the Memorandum of AMUCO, the Cabinet sub-committee constituted by the Manipur government on 16th February 2023 to look into the issue of illegal immigration in Manipur identified 2187 'illegal' immigrants in 41 locations. The report further claimed that these immigrants established their villages. If these figures are believed to be accurate, then 2187 is a minuscule number in a place with a porous border. It would be unfair to term all Kukis as immigrants from Myanmar.

#### *Manipur withdrawing from SoO:*

Chief Minister N Biren Singh's decision to unilaterally withdraw the state government from the tripartite (Centre, state and militant outfits' representatives) agreement on the Suspension of Operations (SoO) has complicated the political situation in Manipur. The SoO has been in force since 2008, and at the end of February, it was extended for a year, effective on 1st March 2023. However, the Manipur government decided to withdraw from it on 10th March 2023. There is an overwhelming demand that the Kuki militants are not restricted to their camps and are actively training Kuki Zo youth. Thus, the Suspension of Operations with the Kuki militants should be scrapped entirely.

#### *Patronage to Arambai Tengol and Meitei Leepun and acting as a Militia:*

From the testimonies that the team has heard, it has emerged that the role of Arambai Tengol and Meitei Leepun has been instrumental in mobilising Meiteis against the Kukis. Arambai Tengol is a militia—armed and structured organisation. It seems to have the support and patronage of CM Biren Singh and BJP MP Leishemba Sanajoaba, the titular king of Manipur. There are several pictures on social media where members can be seen with the CM. A video dated 25<sup>th</sup> September 2022 on Leishemba Sanajoaba's Facebook page shows the group holding its oath-taking ceremony at the residence of Sanajoaba. The plank of the group is the revivalism of Sanamahism, which works as a pretext for the Hindutva agenda.

It also emerged from the testimonies that the Arambai Tenggol led attacks to vandalise the churches of the Meitei Christians and the Kuki churches. The organisation was allegedly involved in mobs which sexually assaulted Kuki women during the conflict. They vandalised and attacked Kuki villages and homes and brutally murdered the villagers. It is alleged in the publication *'#Manipur Mayhem: Key Players and Events'* that the members of the Arambai Tenggol marked the houses of the Kukis in Imphal months before the May violence broke out, and videos show its members leading the mobs on 3<sup>rd</sup> May to these marked houses (Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum, 2023).

As per some media reports, members of Arambai Tenggol looted 4000 weapons from the state armoury, which were used during the conflict. Some sources also believe that out of the 500 Meitei militants who surrendered to the government in 2022, a significant number joined the Arambai Tenggol. The organisation also conducts massive recruitment drives amongst unemployed and dissatisfied youth. It carries out regular activities, and its members can be seen in its signature black t-shirts. The members are active on social media in spreading propaganda material to mobilise the Meiteis.

#### *Burning of the gym:*

The resentment of the Kukis was bubbling due to the perceived attempts by the state to grab lands of the Kukis. On 11<sup>th</sup> April, student leaders representing the Kuki Students Organisation and Zomi Students Federation and members of the Research and Preservation of Zo Identities (RPZI) successfully thwarted a government team's attempt to survey the Churachandpur-Khoum Protected Forest without the consent from the village chiefs and local authorities. The government made another such attempt on 13<sup>th</sup> April to survey Lamka district. This time, too, the villagers put up vehement resistance.

This resistance and brewing tensions took a violent turn when, on 27<sup>th</sup> April, the mob of angry Kukis pelted stones on the open gym to be inaugurated by CM Biren Singh in New Lamka in Lamka district. The inauguration was attended by government employees. Due to the heavy stone pelting, the inauguration program was cancelled. The police opened fire to disperse the mob,

which injured some protestors. The ITLA, on 28<sup>th</sup> April, expressed its non-cooperation campaign and called for an eight-hour shutdown in the district.

Against the backdrop of rising tensions after the shutdown, the Meitei Leepun organised a counterblockade on roads and national highways leading to the hill districts. This move opposed the rally scheduled for 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023 and organised by the All-Tribal Students Union Manipur.

### **How did the violence begin on 3<sup>rd</sup> May?**

There are conflicting versions of how the violence started and unfolded on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023. The High Court of Manipur directed the state government to recommend that the Union government grant Scheduled Tribe Status to the Meiteis. Against this direction of the HC and to pressure the State government against this move, the All Tribals Student Association of Manipur (ATSUM) organised a rally in Churachandpur at 10 am on 3<sup>rd</sup> May.

The Meiteis allege that on 3<sup>rd</sup> May, the Kukis started the violence by staging the assault on the Anglo Kuki Memorial in Churachandpur and targeted the Meiteis in Churachandpur during the rally. According to the Meiteis, the participants of the rally were armed with guns to unleash violence, and once the violence broke out at Churachandpur, they were brutally targeted all over the hills. In retaliation, the Meiteis targeted the Kukis in the valley.

The Meitei inmates in relief camps in Imphal that the team met narrated how Meitei houses were targeted in Serou by Kuki militants on 28<sup>th</sup> May when 400 Meitei houses were burnt down. While some of them lived in localities in Serou, which also had other communities – like Nagas or Punjabis, the militants targeted only Meitei houses. Similarly, the displaced Meiteis from Moreh narrated that the Kuki militants targeted the Meitei houses. Four thousand five hundred to five thousand Meiteis were displaced from Moreh.

However, the Kukis allege that the Meities had preplanned the attack and initiated the violence. They told the team that on the night of 2<sup>nd</sup> May, the Meiteis were stopping Kukis vehicles on the

Imphal-Churachandpur border coming from the valley and frisking the passengers. Thus, an atmosphere of aggression and tension was already prevailing. The Kukis narrated that the rally had concluded peacefully, and the participants had returned home in the afternoon. According to them, the Meiteis attacked the Anglo-Kuki war memorial in the afternoon after the rally had peacefully concluded, and after the attack, both groups clashed with each other in Churachandpur. When this news from Churachandpur reached Imphal, the Meiteis mounted an attack on the Kukis in the valley. The Meiteis claim that the Kukis burnt the Anglo-Kuki memorial and blamed the Kukis for triggering violence.

A Meitei source from Imphal narrated that by the afternoon and evening of 3<sup>rd</sup> May, when violence broke out in Churachandpur, there were anti-Kuki announcements and slogans over loudspeakers in Imphal. Announcements were made in clubs in West Imphal: "*Show no mercy to Kukis*". In Imphal, violence broke out between 7 pm and 8 pm when the Meities started attacking the Kukis. The source added that on 4<sup>th</sup> May, Arambai Tengol members came in vans to mobilise Meiteis to attack the Kukis. Rumours of mass rape of Meitei women were circulating to instigate the Meiteis. These inflammatory rumours fuelled the violence against the Kukis. The fact-finding team was told that the Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun played a significant role in mobilising the Meiteis. This source said that these radical groups were instigating violence. The Meiteis claimed that the violence in Imphal against Kukis spontaneously erupted as mobs got emotional when they watched videos of Meiteis being attacked in the hills by the Kukis. However, they claim that attacks by the Kukis were planned and pre-meditated and that they kidnapped Meiteis and murdered them in cold blood.

## **Aftermath of Violence**

### *Losses during the Conflict:*

The conflict raging for almost a year now has witnessed massive losses. There is a substantial loss of life and property. Houses of both Kukis and Meiteis have been attacked, vandalised and

torched. The Meiteis alleged that properties owned by Meiteis in Churachandpur were razed to the ground by the Kukis, such that it was difficult to trace where the house or property once stood. They also claimed that the properties belonging to the Kukis in the valley have been left untouched. Seventy thousand persons have been displaced, of which forty-five thousand are Kukis.

A large number of places of worship in the valley and hills were also vandalised and desecrated. More than 300 churches have been allegedly burnt down. These include churches of the Meities and Kukis in Imphal. Some temples/ shrines of the Meiteis in the hills were destroyed. The Kukis and some of the Meiteis have confirmed that in Meitei-dominated areas, while the churches belonging to the Kukis were vandalised and attacked, the churches of the Nagas/Thanguls next to them were left untouched.

#### *An Impassable Border:*

The Manipur conflict has resulted in an unprecedented phenomenon of ethnic cleansing in an Indian state. Heavily guarded boundaries within the state between territories inhabited by different communities, Meities and Kukis, have been drawn up. But this redrawing of boundaries is not official because no separate state has been carved out. However, the boundaries are as rigid as borders between two hostile countries. They are protected by different security forces, such as Assam Rifles guarding the Kukis and Manipur police guarding the Meities. The violence that started on 3<sup>rd</sup> May resulted in assaults on the life and properties of Kukis in Meitei areas and Meiteis in Kuki areas. The Kuki population in the valley districts was systematically handed over to the army and evacuated to the hills inhabited by the Kukis. Similarly, after the riots, the Meiteis from the hills were evacuated by the security forces and sent to Meitei-dominated areas in the valley districts. In a span of a few days, the Kukis and Meiteis were systematically sent to the hills and the valley, respectively, resulting in complete ethnic cleansing and segregation. This segregation of ethnic zones with the involvement of security forces is not legal, and it is unprecedented! However, it is done on the pretext of securing both ethnic groups. No one has challenged this unprecedented action.

A border between the hills and the valley has been established to maintain this segregation. This so-called border has seven checkpoints set up by the Indian Army, Assam Rifles, Border Security Force, Manipur state police, the Meira Paibis and others. There is also a buffer zone. The Kukis and the Meiteis, including the Kuki elected representatives, are not allowed to cross these boundaries and go to the 'other' side. Any Kukis trying to cross into the valley and, conversely, any Meiteis going into the hills are stopped. There have been incidents of shooting unwanted intruders. Over the last ten months, there have been several instances of gunfire and shootings of persons who strayed into the buffer zone, including a Kuki marriage party. The killings continue in the so-called 'border' areas if the members of the 'other' community are found in those areas. The team was told about how guests from a wedding party were lost and entered the wrong side of the border. They were chased and killed.

Non-Kukis and non-Meiteis can travel across the border after clearing the checkpoints, where they are interrogated about the identity and purpose of travel. Only Pangal drivers – as a Meitei Muslim is called – viewed as an acceptable group to both Kukis and Meiteis are allowed to drive non-Kuki and non-Meitei visitors who want to cross. The border is so stringent that the Kuki-elected MLAs could not attend the state assembly session. A crippling fear of being killed prevails. Such a border is truly unprecedented and a distressing reflection on the scale of the conflict. The relief to the hill areas has been routed through Mizoram, bypassing the Imphal valley. The nearest airport in the valley is about an hour's travel from the hills. However, the route is inaccessible because of the 'border'. Thus, to travel out of Manipur and access an airport, the Kukis must undertake an eight-hour-long arduous road journey to Aizawl in Mizoram. The CSSS team travelling from Imphal to Churachandpur took more than 3 hours on their journey, even though the distance is only about 60 kilometres and, in a regular scenario, should have taken one hour. The two additional hours were spent getting frisked. The vehicle and luggage were thoroughly checked at the seven checkpoints manned by the different heavily armed security forces, all placed within a distance of half a kilometre. The team members had to produce valid permits and identity cards and answer a barrage of questions about where and why they were travelling. The checking at each checkpoint was stricter than any of us have ever experienced in our international travels, including to and from Pakistan.

While we were doing our work in the valley, a Meitei friend asked us to inform the Manipur police about our intention for the next day's travel to Churachandpur. First, we ignored his advice as while undertaking fact-finding work in other areas, we have experienced that police, more often than not, obstruct our work. However, our friend insisted and volunteered to take our written request to the police headquarters and deliver it to them. We finally heeded his advice and wrote an information letter later that evening. The reply from the police was prompt. It advised us not to travel early in the morning but instead begin our journey in the afternoon. There was a rally in Churachandpur in the morning, which, according to the police, could be a risk for us. We decided to heed the police advice as we were also given a police escort vehicle after crossing the 'border'. We would not have been able to negotiate the checkpoints without the help of the police officer in charge of the escort vehicle, who talked over the telephone to the security personnel at the checkpoints and requested them to allow us to cross the borders. The driver of our vehicle, Meitei Pangal, had to pay a 'toll' of INR 100 at the checkpoint, which was put up by Kuki women to let his vehicle pass after thoroughly checking the passengers. The Pangal driver charged the team at least five times more than the usual fare, given these extraordinary times and the risk involved to his life.

The scale of the violence that has unfolded in the state can be gauged by the large number of deaths reported in the media. The reported deaths have crossed 200. Hundreds have been injured. The most appalling is the sexual assaults and rapes during this conflict. Rape is used in conflicts as a political weapon to humiliate the entire community. After the videos of Kuki women being sexually assaulted and paraded naked went viral, the scale and horrendous nature of this conflict dawned upon the country and the world. While it is still unclear how many rapes were reported on either side, one of the women's organisations in Churachandpur has documented over thirty-six cases of sexual assaults on Kuki women in Imphal. Some survived the attacks and sexual assaults, while others died. In the cases compiled by this women's organisation, there are allegations of Arambai Tenggol's involvement in these attacks on women. These documented cases also describe how members of the Meira Paibis aided some of the sexual assaults on the Kuki women.

### *Role of political dispensation and state-supported narratives:*

Despite entrenched fault lines and starkly divergent opinions on the root causes of the ongoing violence, both the Meiteis and the Kukis unite in laying blame on the BJP-led government in Manipur, helmed by Biren Singh, for the current deadlock in the state. According to both communities, neither the state nor the Union government, under the BJP, took sufficient measures to quell the violence and bring the perpetrators to justice. Accusations have been levelled against the state government for allowing the violence to escalate.

However, it is crucial to recognise that while both sides harbour deep mistrust and resentment towards the Biren Singh administration, their grievances stem from entirely different and sometimes contradictory reasons. The Kukis express distrust and frustration towards the state government for allegedly propagating two negative narratives against them. One portrays them as poppy cultivators, and the other accuses them of being illegal immigrants from Myanmar. The Meiteis blame the government for being soft on the Kukis and not doing enough to protect the Meiteis.

### *Relief camps and displacement*

According to different sources, over 70,000 persons have been displaced in Manipur from both the communities. The number of relief camps is pegged at 120, some in very far-flung areas which are relatively neglected. As mentioned above, the Meiteis claim that all their houses in the Kuki areas have been razed down. And the Kukis vehemently state that they cannot or will not return to their homes in the valley. In effect, what it means is that about 70,000 people are homeless. They have lost their homes and livelihoods. They have lost their social relations – friends, neighbours and a way of life. These are members from all communities – Nagas, Meiteis and Kukis. The displaced persons have been uprooted from their homes against their will in the face of violence and threats to their lives and property. The trauma of this forceful displacement was etched across the desperate and helpless faces that the team encountered during their visit. The fact-finding team visited four relief camps – two each in Imphal and Churachandpur. The relief camps were set up in schools, colleges, and churches in the valleys and hills.



In the Shyamasakhi relief camp in Moirangkhom in Imphal, the elderly, women and some children have been provided shelter. When the fact-finding team visited this camp, it had 43 adult inmates – 31 of which were women and 12 were men. There were 16 children. When the camp was set up, it had 95 inmates. All the children go to school. The elderly stay at the camp while the women do odd jobs and sell small products. Most inmates of this camp come from Serou. Some of them came to the camp in the first week of June. Sumati Laishram, one of the inmates from Sugnu, recalled that the Kuki militants attacked her house in Serou along with 400 other houses on 20<sup>th</sup> May. Their house was burnt down, and the gold, cash and furniture in the house were looted. The person in charge of this relief camp told the team that the government gives INR 100 per day per person to the camp. Of this, INR 20 is spent on rice, and the remaining INR 80 is spent on the rest of the relief material. However, people from the Meitei community have donated to medical facilities.

The fact-finding team also visited the Thongju Kendra Relief camp at the Ideal Girls College at Akampat in Imphal. Thongam Biswajit Singh, a minister in the Manipur government, has sponsored it. The state was providing rations for the inmates. When we visited the camp, it had a total of 923 inmates. Some of the inmates that the team interacted with were from Moreh and Churachandpur. This relief camp was set up on 9<sup>th</sup> May. The inmates of this camp, too, had stories of displacement to share. Achou Singh from Moreh, an inmate at the camp, narrated that his house was vandalised and looted on 3<sup>rd</sup> May. He lived in an area with Punjabis, Bengalis and residents from other communities. However, only the houses of the Meiteis were targeted. He suffered a loss of 20 lakhs in terms of valuable assets. On 4<sup>th</sup> May, Singh and other Meiteis went to the army camp. On 5<sup>th</sup> May, the army dropped them to the relief camp. They came to the camp with nothing. Like him, 4500 Meiteis were displaced from Moreh, he claimed. No compensation has been announced for the displaced.

This relief camp had only nine toilets for the nearly 1000 inmates it housed. The inadequate toilets most inconvenienced women as they had to 'plan' their nature's call and food and water intake accordingly. Bathing was a luxury, given the limited water supply and toilets. The women in the camp spoke about wanting to return to their homes and lead normal lives. Their utmost concern was food and medicines for their children. Some were making incense sticks inside the

camp to earn a small income. Eight to ten people were living in roughly 8"X 8" compartments formed by hanging bed sheets. There were several such compartments in a large hall. Sometimes, two or more families shared one compartment.

In Churachandpur, the team visited a relief camp run by the Young Vaiphei Association in an abandoned property belonging to the Vaiphei community. It housed approximately 1200 Kuki inmates. The displaced came from the valley. The relief camp was not getting any aid from the state. The plight of the inmates in this camp was the same, if not worse, than the Meitie relief camp described earlier.

The plight of the inmates of all the relief camps was appalling. Irrespective of the communities they belonged to, all the faces bore the same despondent and helpless look. They had been staying there for over seven months with no end in sight to their suffering. All their belongings and their shattered world were contained in small areas of approximately 50 to 100 square feet in the common area of the relief camps. Their belongings were limited utensils to cook in some camps, a pair of clothes, and if they were lucky, adequate warm clothes for winter and bedding. They lived in common halls with make-do partitions fashioned out of clothes and tarpaulin. They slept on thin mattresses in the freezing cold. In the winter, it was particularly very cold. Like all relief camps, the sanitation conditions were grossly inadequate. In all the relief camps the team visited, there was one toilet for almost 80 inmates on average. While these are inadequate arrangements for all inmates, it is worse for women since it affords them no privacy and necessary time and space during menstruation.

Two concerns were raised very strongly by the women in the camps. Firstly, inadequate food and medicines for the children and secondly, no means of income for day-to-day living. The most pitiful sight in the relief camps were mothers carrying their newborn babies or toddlers. Some were saving food for them. Their babies were playing near them. The women said that food was cooked in the camp twice daily - lunch and dinner. The government gave some rice and lentils as part of the relief. However, the rice and lentils for two meals lacked the nutrition. The children, especially, need milk, medicines and vegetables.

The inmates of the relief camps had been staying in the camps for almost nine months and are still there while this report is being written. Though they had shelter over their heads, this was not their home. They were homeless, living with other homeless in small, cramped spaces without any of their belongings. They were uncertain about their future but were certain that they would not be able to return to their former homes. There was no talk of rehabilitating them or providing them with alternative housing. While they had food two times a day, they needed more food apart from the rice and lentils provided by the state. They needed medicines, clothes, etc. They needed a source of livelihood. While the men in the relief camps took up odd jobs, the women sold fruits, vegetables and other such products. Some made products like incense sticks in the camps.

The trauma of being homeless was the common thread that united the inmates from both communities in their misery. However, they had divergent views of the way ahead. The Meiteis displaced from the hills wanted to return to their homes in the hills. On the other hand, the Kukis displaced from the valley did not want to return to their homes out of fear for their lives. They felt that the valley was not safe for them anymore, and after the brutality they had faced, there was no longer any scope to stay with the Meiteis.

#### *The plight of women and students:*

As in every conflict, women in Manipur have been the worst affected. Women face violence owing to their identities on the axis of ethnicity and gender. The women in Manipur across ethnicities were united in the separatist movement and in the face of atrocities allegedly perpetrated by the army. The Meira Paibis in Manipur, though decentralised and loose in its structure, was a strong collective of women who had a strong voice for greater autonomy and atrocities against women. Historically, the Meira Paibis had fought unjust colonial policies. Post-independence, they put up a strong movement against the Indian army's human rights violations while fighting the militants, including atrocities on women. They had also raised a voice against the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), which gave impunity to the armed forces personnel committing atrocities. One cannot forget the iconic image of naked Manipuri women

with the banners stating, '*Indian Army come rape us*'. In the 1970s and 80s, they also strongly protested alcoholism and drug abuse.

However, in the aftermath of the current conflict, the women's movement stands fragmented. While Meiteis and Kukis women are displaced and bearing the brunt of sexual violence, impoverishment and struggling to take care of their babies and toddlers in the relief camps, they are unable to show solidarity towards each other as women. They are deeply polarised along the lines of ethnicities. There are disturbing narratives of how some of the members of the Meira Paibis have been involved in sexually assaulting the Kuki women and encouraging Meitei men to violate them. The Meira Paibis members have also obstructed the arrest of militants from their community. One of the poignant images was of Meira Paibis erecting a checkpoint between Imphal and Churachandpur and checking the movement of people across the borders. The Meira Paibis have been instrumental in barricading and stopping relief aid from going to the hills.

A well-known women's activist in Churachandpur spoke to the fact-finding team about how women had been the backbone of civil society and had been united in their demands for women's rights. But now, they cannot connect and objectively see the violence for what it is. They have lost touch with their Meitei women friends and cannot see eye to eye with them. There is a bitter feeling towards the role of Meira Paibis for its role in perpetrating sexual violence against Kuki women. However, a woman activist who met with the fact-finding team in Imphal clarified that the Meira Paibis does not represent all Meitei women. The Meira Paibis are a loose body of women and do not represent all women's concerns or peacebuilders. She added that given the political pressure and intimidating atmosphere in Manipur, it is difficult for well-meaning feminists from both communities to express solidarity or engage in meaningful peace work.

Another group that is among the worst affected by the ongoing conflict is the students. The students pursuing educational courses in universities have been hung out to dry. Owing to the so-called border, Meitei students cannot go to the hills where they were enrolled, and Kuki students cannot go for exams and classes in the valley. They stand to lose out on their academic year, if not education itself, and suffer a massive setback in their careers. In November last year,

252 students from the Imphal Valley sought transfer to colleges in the hill districts because of the unrest in Manipur, while 64 others sought transfer from the hill districts to valley colleges.

### **Positive Stories:**

Amidst the pervasive narratives of animosity, suspicion, and violence, the team encountered some rays of hope. Instances of solidarity and compassion emerged from both the Meitei and Kuki communities. In Churachandpur, a Kuki student extended a helping hand to a Meitei woman by retrieving her valuables and ensuring her safe passage to the police.

Similarly, at the Shyamasakhi relief camp in Imphal, caretakers provided shelter and protection to a Kuki individual who expressed the desire to continue supporting them. However, considering the volatile environment, they facilitated the Kuki's safe transfer to security forces. These acts of kindness amidst the turmoil indicate the potential for reconciliation and cooperation between the communities.

### **Demands across the spectrum and preconditions for peace:**

The prospects for peace in Manipur seem complex amidst this ongoing conflict, which has been raging for over a year. While the state and central government are primarily responsible for not taking adequate measures for peacebuilding, the irreconcilable positions taken by the Meiteis and the Kukis have also made the peace process highly difficult.

### ***The Meitei perspective:***

The Meiteis want an undivided Manipur but want them to be granted ST status to own land in the hill areas. This will significantly increase the dominance and power of the already dominant

community. Also, the unsubstantiated allegation that Kukis are illegal immigrants from Myanmar and setting up new villages in Manipur, giving rise to the demand of NRC, is a bone of contention. These exclusive narratives have created significant distrust and resentment, hampering the coexistence of both communities.

The feeling of Kukis being 'outsiders' prevailed amongst most Meiteis to whom the team spoke. There is a strong demand for fencing the border between Myanmar and Manipur to prevent immigrants from entering Manipur. However, India and Myanmar have a Free Movement Regime wherein citizens of both countries along the border can freely cross it and reside for no more than 15 days. Fencing will hurt the livelihoods of the Manipur people. The Meiteis, though unhappy with the Biren Singh government, demanded that this government bring the Kukis and the Meiteis to the table for dialogue. The Meiteis want the displaced Meiteis to return to their houses in the hills.

Thus, their demands can be summed up as the following:

1. An integrated Manipur and an amendment to Article 3 of the Indian Constitution:

The Meiteis are vehemently opposed to the Kuki demand for a separate administration consisting of hill lands where the Kukis live. They want a unified Manipur. They also want an amendment to Article 3 of the Indian Constitution by inserting a clause to safeguard the territorial integrity of Manipur.

2. Detection of 'illegal Kuki immigrants' and NRC:

The Meiteis allege that there is a large number of Kukis in Manipur who are illegal immigrants from Myanmar who come through the porous border. They allege that these illegal immigrants enjoy posts in bureaucracy and other critical positions. Their demand in this context is to implement the National Register of Citizens to detect illegal immigrants. But, the cut-off line will be a controversial matter.

3. Scheduled Tribe status for the Meiteis:

The Meiteis demand Scheduled Tribe status, which will allow them all the privileges of STs, including buying land in hill areas and jobs reserved for STs in the state and central

government. The limited affirmative action protecting the Kukis and the Nagas would be nullified as almost the entire state would come under the same cover.

4. Withdrawal from the SoO signed with the Kuki militants:

There is a Suspension of Operations (SoO) in force between the Kuki militants, the central government and the State government. According to the SoO terms, the former Kuki militants have surrendered their arms to the state, and they must live in camps prepared for them. They can move out of the camp with permission. The SoO was first signed in 2008. The State government withdrew from this tri-partite arrangement on 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2023. The Meiteis now want to scrap the SoO with all the groups of the Kuki militants. If the SoO is scrapped entirely, there is a danger that the former militants might return to militancy.

5. Withdrawal of Assam Rifles:

The Meiteis view the Assam Rifles as being favourable to the Kukis and acting against the interests of the Meiteis. They feel that the Assam Rifles are protecting the Kukis alone. Thus, the Assam Rifles should be withdrawn from the state, and the area's security should be under the Manipur police. While shootings and violence continue in the buffer zone, the Meiteis allege that the Assam Rifles are allowing this violence to take place against the Meiteis.

6. Rehabilitation of the displaced Meitei persons to their original places of residence:

The Meiteis demand that the Meiteis displaced from the hills be rehabilitated and returned to their original houses so that they can reclaim those spaces.

7. Fencing of the Myanmar and Manipur border:

One of the demands of the Meiteis is that the porous border that Manipur shares with Myanmar be fenced. They believe that fencing the border will stop the immigration of "illegal" Kukis from Myanmar to Manipur.

***Demands of the Kukis:***

The Kukis are disgruntled with the hegemony of the Meiteis in the valley. Most of the budget for development is allocated to the valley, leaving the hills largely starved of development and funds.

The ST status for the Meiteis would further marginalise the Kukis and deprive them of land ownership. The claim of the Meiteis that they are the original inhabitants of Manipur while the Kukis were immigrants and are still migrating from Myanmar is deemed an attempt by the Kukis to falsify history and exclude them. These grievances have given way to a hardened position of a separate administration for the Kukis instead of coexistence with the Meiteis. The Kukis have no faith in the Biren Singh-led government and thus have shunned any dialogue with it. They want the Central government's intervention by granting separate administration to the hill areas in Manipur.

This demand for separate administration is vague. No specific borders were conveyed to the fact-finding team. The ITLF mentioned that separate administration can be on the model of the Union territories. However, the demand for “separate administration” may be deliberately kept vague to leave space for negotiation. At the moment, there is no clarity about the nature of this administration or its boundaries.

The Centre is unlikely to fulfil the demand of the Kukis for a separate administration. At the same time, the state has not adopted confidence-building measures or undertaken credible initiatives to bring the two parties together to have a dialogue. The sense of distrust has further deepened with no solution in sight for the internally displaced persons, justice for those who died during the conflict or sexual assaults against women. This further diminishes any prospects of peace. Most of the stakeholders the team spoke to on the Kuki and Meitei sides held extreme and irreconcilable positions. There were some moderate voices of sanity and humanity amidst the violence, which could lead the way to lasting and genuine peace.

### ***Naga Demands:***

While the Nagas are not openly aligning with either side in the Meitei and Kuki conflict, they play a crucial role in fostering peace and striving for a lasting resolution. Their vested interests in the conflict, particularly concerning land and the aspiration for ‘Nagalim’, underscore their stakes in the peace process. The Nagas that the team spoke to did not have one united voice, and there



were nuances in their suggestions for the way forward. Here are their key perspectives and proposals:

1. **Opposition to Separate Administration for Kukis:** The Nagas reject the idea of granting separate administration to the Kukis, contending that the areas they seek for separate governance predominantly consist of Naga-inhabited territories. Any such concession would undermine the Naga pursuit of Nagalim.
2. **Resistance to ST Status for Meitei Community:** Concurrently, the Nagas oppose the grant of Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to the Meitei community, emphasising the necessity to safeguard the hill regions. They expressed concern over the lack of local elections for hill councils since 2017, advocating for reinforced hill administration.
3. **Advocacy for Decentralisation and Dedicated Budgets:** The Nagas advocate for increased decentralisation of funds aimed at hill development. They perceive the current budgetary allocation for hills as insufficient and want a dedicated budget to address developmental needs, challenging the prevailing valley-centric development approach. They also want to implement consultation mechanisms to enable discussion amongst all tribes.
4. **Critique of Biren Singh Government:** Aligning with Kukis and Meiteis's sentiments, the Nagas hold the Biren Singh government accountable for the violence in Manipur, accusing it of being inadequate in addressing the crisis. They assert that the Chief Minister's efforts to resolve the conflict have fallen short of expectations.
5. **Political Solution from the Union Government:** A member of the Naga civil society said the Nagas believe that the Indian state and intelligence pumped in crores of rupees to train Kukis to suppress the Naga movement. Thus, this problem is the creation of the Indian state. They have created ethnic clashes in the past by supporting the KNO and KNA. This time, too, the Home Ministry and Amit Shah failed to maintain law and order in the hills. Therefore, the Union government should take responsibility for their failure and initiate a political dialogue and solution.

6. Support to ST status to Meiteis: One section of Nagas supports granting Scheduled Tribes status to Meiteis. This section of the Nagas believes that Meiteis have been wronged due to the influx of the 'Kuki immigrants'.
7. NRC for Kuki immigrants: One section of Nagas is demanding that NRC should be implemented in Manipur to detect illegal Kuki immigrants coming from Myanmar, and action should be taken to deport them. They believe that the increase in the number of Kuki villages hints at growing immigration. Indo-Myanmar border fencing should be one of the solutions. The Nagas allege that the MNREGA scheme attracts illegal immigrants.
8. Ceasefire: The Nagas demanded a ceasefire from both communities.
9. Disarmament: The Nagas demand immediate disarmament and recovery of all 'looted' arms from both Kukis and Meiteis.
10. Power sharing based on equality: The Nagas believe that a lasting solution for the ethnic divide is power sharing - economic and political, between all ethnic groups based on equal opportunities. They conceded that there is no room for Meitei chauvinism.

#### *Congress Solution to Peace:*

##### Congress perspective on peace:

The Congress holds the Biren Singh government responsible for the violence in Manipur and envisions a more prominent role for the central government. It alleges that the signs of violence were evident and could have been prevented. After the conflict, the government has not initiated the peace-making process for the last seven months. The Prime Minister's silence has been the most shocking.

1. The Congress has rejected the demand for NRC in Manipur. The Congress explained that the Inner Line Permit (ILP) is based on 1961. The demand to set 1951 as the cut-off year is untenable.
2. The Congress has demanded a special assembly session to discuss peace proposals. The Special Assembly Session should include legislators from the valley and hills. There

appears to have been a complete breakdown of law and order, as the normal assembly session was also not held.

3. The Prime Minister should intervene to bring a political solution to the current crisis. He should use the central paramilitary forces to restore peace. The firing and violence continue, and peace and security are eluding Manipur. The Congress lamented that peace committees headed by the Chief Minister have not held a single meeting.
4. A campaign on unemployment and high inflation should be launched. Provisions should be made for the availability of fertilisers and the development of horticulture. There has to be overall development for all.
5. The Congress is rooting for a united Manipur where all communities live together and in harmony. Thus, it is not in the favour of the separate administration demanded by the Kukis.

### **Common demands emerging from the civil society across the ethnic identities:**

#### *Process of Truth and Reconciliation:*

One reasonable suggestion for peace was establishing the process of truth and reconciliation. While one side is blaming the other for starting the violence on 3<sup>rd</sup> May and subsequent deaths, injuries, sexual assaults on women and missing persons, members of neither community want to acknowledge that there have been losses on both sides in this ongoing conflict. There can be no meaningful conversation between the two sides unless there is a shared realisation of loss and acknowledgement that violence took place from both sides. A peace committee should be set up to ensure a peace process involving both communities.

Justice is equally vital with truth as both will help in healing. With so many victims dead and other survivors living in fear, there has to be accountability. The state has to bring to justice those who

committed these crimes, which have claimed life and property on such a massive scale. The survivors should have the satisfaction of knowing that justice has been done.

#### *Change of political regime:*

The Kukis and Meiteis have been unanimous about their disapproval of the Biren Singh government, though for different reasons. Both the communities view the Biren Singh government as merely a proxy for the Central government. Both also demanded that the Biren Singh government is not doing anything for peace and that this should change. The Central government should take more of an initiative to ensure peace.

The most telling sign of the central government's deliberate inaction is the Prime Minister's silence. The Prime Minister has not visited Manipur so far. He has not spoken about the conflict, expressed concern, or offered any concrete political solution to this conflict. He was only compelled to speak up about Manipur when the opposition moved a no-confidence motion in the Parliament. He merely expressed 'anger' at the incident that was captured on a video of women being sexually assaulted. He said, "*The violence in Manipur is saddening. Crimes against women are unacceptable, and the Central and State governments are working together to ensure the guilty are punished. We want to assure our mothers and daughters in Manipur that this country is with you, this House is with you.*" In the same breath, he drew a parallel by stating that similar sexual assaults take place in Congress-ruled states (Hebbar, 2023). He did not discuss the Manipur conflict in the two hours set aside for the purpose but instead spent them blaming the Congress. This reflected the Prime Minister's lack of sincere concern and attempt at resolving the conflict.

#### *Hate Speeches:*

To foster a positive environment for dialogue and reconciliation, the state and elected representatives must make all the communities feel included. Some of the statements of the Chief Minister can be construed as hate speeches against Kukis as they hint at the exclusion of

Kukis from Manipur. The Kukis that the team interacted with demanded that the CM cease to make hate speeches and that he not promote the narrative that Kukis are poppy cultivators and illegal immigrants. Some of the CM's statements have gone to the extent of condoning the violence against Kukis and seem to side with the Meiteis. As the CM, Biren Singh has to be neutral and reach out to all communities for peace. This will be a crucial step towards trust building.

#### *Demilitarisation and Right-Wing Groups:*

There has to be a genuine effort by the state towards demilitarisation in the state. The 4500-odd arms 'robbed' from the state police armoury should be accounted for and recovered. Law and order should be strictly enforced. There should be an immediate cessation of violence in terms of shooting in the buffer zone, and steps need to be taken to foster more trust and end violence. Until ordinary citizens and militia like Arambai Tenggol are armed, genuine peace and security conducive to rebuilding the fragmented Manipuri society cannot exist.

#### *Promote an atmosphere of solidarity and safety:*

The armed militants amidst both the communities and the domination of Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun have created an atmosphere of fear. Any individual who is critical of the state of affairs or asks uncomfortable questions to the state government is faced with violence and intimidation from these armed groups. This has given rise to a palpable fear and an eerie silence in civil society. Individuals are too scared to come and appeal for peace and reason. Well-meaning individuals, some of whom have been strong voices for human rights and peace in the past, are also scared to come out and raise their voices. There are compelling narratives that harden community identity amongst individuals, blurring reason and a sense of right and solidarity. There is an urgent need to disarm militants and rein in the radical groups. They should stop receiving state patronage and impunity.

### *Recommendation of the Fact-Finding Team:*

Upon absorbing various perspectives during the visit, the team came to a resolute realisation: the ongoing conflict in Manipur, historically and presently, primarily stems from competing claims of different ethnic groups over the land, with each asserting it as their exclusive 'homeland'. These assertions have deepened existing divides, as every group invokes intricate historical narratives to bolster their claim. However, in the context of modern India, founded on principles of equality, fraternity, and liberty, such exclusive territorial claims have no place. All ethnic groups must acknowledge Manipur as a shared homeland, wherein each group respects the others as equals and co-inhabitants. Embracing this collective understanding of a composite homeland holds the key to a sustainable resolution for Manipur.

### **Conclusion:**

The conflict in Manipur is multi-faceted and is attributed mainly to the deliberate divisive policies of the ruling regime, which has vested interests in the conflict. The stone-cold silence of the Prime Minister in the face of this conflict, which has led to ethnic cleansing and segregation of the two communities with a rigid border, is a telling sign that no political solution is in sight. It also implies that this humanitarian crisis has no end in sight. This spells unspeakable hardships for the 70,000 displaced Kukis and Meiteis who have lost their houses and livelihoods and are living in relief camps. Their fates hang in suspension.

While there are few prospects of justice in a society so thoroughly brutalised, with women being raped and innocent citizens being beheaded, the militant groups of Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun are freely spreading violence in society. The fact-finding team has tried to understand the future of peace in Manipur and the way forward in these circumstances. The sane voices from civil society hold immense wisdom. They are potent to usher dialogue and healing and should be taken seriously. These suggestions and perspectives provide a tiny opening for light to enter the darkness of violence and hatred.

## **Epilogue:**

When writing this epilogue, it will have been one year since the violence started in Manipur on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023. A year has passed, but the painful reality persists – nothing has changed. In the past year, there has been no attempt to start a political dialogue for a solution. Both the communities – Meiteis and Kukis are divided by the physical ‘border’ guarded by armed officers and militants at different checkpoints. Crossing this border to the ‘other’ side is impossible. It is simply impassable! This includes the bureaucrats stationed across the border, doctors who were forced to abandon their duties at hospitals, and students who have lost out on their education at universities. Blockades are stopping any aid going from the valley to the hills. The only way out from the valley is through the Imphal airport. At the same time, the only way out of Manipur for the Kukis is through Aizwal airport, a 12 to 14-hour road journey.

The physical boundary is rigidly drawn, but worse is the hatred and distrust that continue to divide the two communities to the extent that members cannot talk to each other publicly, come on the same platform to discuss peace or express solidarity towards the losses on both sides.

Responsibility for the continuing stalemate in the conflict and ongoing violence can be attributed to the deliberate inaction of the state. While the informal understanding when the violence erupted was that Union Home Minister Amit Shah would ensure law and order in the hills and Chief Minister Biren Singh would ensure the same in the valley, shooting in the so-called buffer zone continues, regularly claiming innocent lives. This continuous firing can be partly attributed to the 4500 ‘looted’ weapons in the hands of the militia with no attempt by the state to recover them. This has fostered an atmosphere of fear and helplessness.

What is perhaps most shocking and disappointing is that the Prime Minister of India has not yet spoken about Manipur except to pay lip service to the women of Manipur who were sexually assaulted on video. This, too, only happened after the opposition moved a no-confidence motion

in Parliament. The Prime Minister has not visited or acted on the most severe and unprecedented conflict facing India. Ironically, while maintaining that things are under control in Manipur, he has visited other countries but refrained from speaking about the Manipur crisis, which has grabbed international attention. Chief Minister Biren Singh, on the other hand, has spoken the language of hatred and division by not reaching out to the Kukis and favouring the Meiteis. The CM continues to make hate speeches against the Kukis and promotes hatred through the narratives of Kukis being narco-terrorists and illegal immigrants. Adding to the conundrum, Home Minister Amit Shah publicly stated that Kuki's demand for a separate administration would not be granted.

Another concern which needs to be flagged prominently is that no action has been taken against Arambai Tenggol, whose role is well documented in media and other reports in perpetrating violence and targeting the Kukis. This militia, supported by the ruling regime, has been instrumental in fomenting violence and, as per reports in the public domain, has looted the arms from the state armoury. They are emboldened by the impunity given by the state to carry on their majoritarian agenda, which is distinctly communal, too. In the most incredulous move, 37 of Manipur's Meitei MLAs and two of its Meitei MPs publicly took an oath, with the chief minister and deputy chief minister signing on, to promote and pursue Arambai Tenggol's objectives with the Centre. This ceremony took place at the historic Kangla Fort with the Arambai Tenggol chief Korounganba Khuman coming to the venue in a police vehicle with an illegal weapon. The six demands of the organisation include removing 'illegal' Kuki tribes from the scheduled tribe list, replacing the Assam Rifles with another force and scrapping the Suspension of Operations agreement (Thapar, 2024).

Finally, the biggest concern facing Manipur is the fate of 70,000 displaced persons who continue to live in relief camps one year after the start of the conflict. Their fates are suspended in uncertainty and helplessness as they are hurdled together in relief camps with inadequate food, medicines, toilets and livelihoods. These people have lost everything, including, for some of them, their loved ones. Their plight seemed to have evaded the conscience of the state entirely since no solution has been offered or discussions initiated around their rehabilitation.



The only steps taken so far by the state are the ones aimed at targeting the Kukis and pacifying the Meiteis. These include scrapping the free movement regime along the Myanmar border for "*the internal security of the country and maintaining the demographic structure of India's North-Eastern States*". This gives currency to the narrative that Kukis are illegal immigrants from Myanmar. The Union Home Ministry has also announced the fencing of the 1643-kilometre Myanmar border with India. The Zo community has a significant presence in Manipur and Mizoram, parts of Assam and Nagaland, and adjoining areas of Bangladesh and Myanmar. Similarly, Nagas live in Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and neighbouring Myanmar. This move of fencing will pose challenges for these communities to maintain relationships with their families across the fence. These steps will further alienate the Kukis and their resolve for a separate administration.

The onus of bringing a political solution to Manipur and initiating the healing process is on the central and state governments. Until the state does not initiate the process, peace will elude Manipur. Hatred and distrust are tearing down Manipur's social fabric and have blown to smithereens any resemblance of humanity and solidarity. A completely decimated Manipur needs healing state action and consultation with the civil society, which will help rebuild an atmosphere of peace, justice and truth. Otherwise, Manipur will continue groping in the dark.

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