

Manipur Crisis: Human Rights Violations of the Kuki-Zo People

Dear Fellow Citizens:

We, the concerned citizens for the Kuki-Zo community in Manipur, are taking this opportunity to bring to your attention the state of affairs in Manipur and the plight of the persecuted Kuki-Zo minorities.

As you would well know, a conflict erupted on 3rd May between the majority Meitei community of Manipur, who are predominantly Hindu, and the Kuki-Zo minority Christians inhabiting the hill districts. The Meiteis constitute 53% of the population of Manipur and control 40 out of 60 legislators in the Legislative Assembly, while the Kuki-Zo constitute 16% of the population, and control 10 legislators. No matter which party runs the government in Imphal, the lion's share of power has always rested with the Meitei community, while the Kukis, who hold Scheduled Tribe status in Manipur, are protected from undue exploitation only by the feeble constitutional provisions of Article 371C.[1]

The asymmetry of the nature of the conflict is not always visible in the daily news reports, where it is rather made to appear as if it is a "two-sided" conflict between two communities. Reuters has published an analytical report pointing out that two-thirds of the deaths in the communal violence belong to the Kukis. More shockingly, during the first week of the violence, 77 Kukis were killed in the violence compared to 10 Meiteis.[2] These facts have not been highlighted in the Indian national media.

Scholar Angshuman Choudhary (from Centre for Policy Research) has pointed out that the targeting of the Kuki community long predates the onset of violence on 3rd May. Kukis were vilified by the Manipur state government and majoritarian Meitei organisations citing such issues as "illegal immigration" from Myanmar, poppy cultivation in the hills, and encroachment into reserved forests. "The N. Biren Singh government dismissed Kuki grievances for years," says Choudhary, and used the influx of Chin-Kuki asylum seekers from Myanmar to "reanimate Meitei nationalism".[3]

Going back even further, Meitei nationalistic organisations such as the International Meiteis Forum, Federation of Haomee, and more recently Coordinating Committee of Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), have branded the Kuki community as "non-indigenous", made up of "foreigners", who needed to be "pushed back" from Manipur.[4] The recent talk in terms of "illegal immigrants" from Myanmar (who are really refugees trying to escape the civil war that erupted in 2021), is a dogwhistle to apply the alleged "foreigner" label to all Kukis. These vicious narratives, labelled "free-flowing hate speech" by a scholar commentator already in 2022, have poisoned the minds of the Meitei community members, normalised the hatred towards the Kukis and their victimisation.[5]

The dehumanising violence directed at the Kukis during the first week of the conflict, illustrated graphically by the viral video of early August, was the result of such hate campaigns carried out

over a decade. The Kuki persons living in the Imphal valley were attacked in their homes and in the streets, and shot at, beaten to death, or burnt alive, by mobs numbering thousands. The victims were innocent civilians, not bearing arms or resisting in any manner. The ones that escaped from the mayhem ran to the nearest safe places with nothing more than the clothes on their bodies, be it to the houses of sympathetic neighbours or to the closest army camps. An estimated 30,000 to 40,000 civilians were thus driven off their homes from Imphal Valley, while more than a hundred persons fell victim to the attacks. In contrast, the Meitei community members living in the Kuki-Zo areas were not harmed and mostly left of their own accord, and were given safe passage by the Kuki-Zo.[5a]

After the first week, the scene shifted to the foothills surrounding the Valley, where Kuki villages were attacked and largely burnt down by Meitei mobs. The central armed forces then established buffer zones between the valley and hill districts. But repeated attempts have been made—and continue to be made—by armed Meitei groups to breach the buffer zones, or to go around them in order to storm the hill regions. The Khamenlok attack was one of the best known such attacks, but it is only one such. Others include the attacks on Pallel, the Kwakta–Kangvai–Torbung area in the Moirang subdivision, and the entire western and eastern stretches of the Imphal Valley bordering the Kangpokpi district. Most recently, two people engaged in road repair work "well inside the Kuki territory" (in Kangpokpi district) were ambushed and killed by Meitei armed gangs.[6] Social media posts indicate that the Meitei groups and their sympathisers celebrate every such attack by cooking sumptuous meals and patting themselves on the back for having killed Kuki civilians.[7]

There seems to be no end to these attacks, as the large caches of arms looted from the police armouries, numbering 6,000 advanced weapons and 6 lakh rounds of ammunition, continue to be in the hands of miscreants. The state government shows no urgency in recovering these arms, paid for by taxpayers for their own security. After making public statements claiming that a thousand weapons had been recovered, the state government meekly admitted to the Supreme Court in August that only 121 guns were recovered.[8] Its next report in September was "confidential", because it was said that making it public would be a "source of panic".[9] Evidently, there was no progress.

The role of the state in the entire conflict has been thoroughly partisan. The state police were often missing or, in some instances, seen abetting the marauders targeting Kukis. Security officials spoke of a lack of a "clear direction" from the political leadership. The chief minister was engaged in combative rhetoric against the Kukis since March, as was the Imphal-based media.[10] He was noted by many observers including the human rights activist Harsh Mander as being "prejudiced" and "anti-Kuki".[11] The state's partisanship was stark in dispensing justice: any prominent acts of violence against Meiteis were swiftly dealt with, calling in the CBI and the NIA, while violence against Kukis went unheeded and unmentioned.

The humanitarian crisis is compounded by the fact that over 40,000 displaced Kukis, housed in make-shift relief camps in Churachandpur, Kangpokpi and Chandel districts, receive very little by way of relief from the state. The education of children has been disrupted because the

schools had to be turned into camps. The displaced children have no schools in any case, the women have no privacy, food and medicines are in short supply, and the medical facilities are overburdened, with a shortage of staff.[12] Several deaths have occurred from minor ailments due to the inadequacy of medical care.

Hatred towards Kukis is all pervasive in the Meitei society, genocidal songs are composed and sung, and even little children are taught to hate. In this situation, the members of the Kuki-Zo community have come to the conclusion that it is not possible to live alongside the Meiteis under the same state government, and started a demand to have an administration separate from the government in Imphal.[13] The clearest expression of this aspiration is the formation of a new Union Territory to guarantee the fundamental rights of the Kuki-Zo people in India. Indian history provides several precedents in the creation of such entities that this process can be modeled after. This is the only way forward to bring the present crisis to a permanent end.

We are appealing to you for help, to raise your voice in our support, to highlight the trauma we are going through, to expose the unbearable incompetence of the state and central governments in handling the crisis, and to campaign for a speedy solution.

Mary Grace Zou
Lien Gangte
Lenn Chongloi
Vishwajeet Singh
Shaikh Abid Hasan

On behalf of: **Global Citizens for Kuki-Zo**

Notes:

- [1] Article 371C provides a rudimentary protection to the hill tribes of Manipur by establishing a Hill Areas Committee in the state legislature.
- [2] [Bunkers, sniper rifles: Deepening sectarian war in India dents Modi's image](#), Reuters, 28 July 2023.
- [3] Angshuman Choudhury, [Targeting of Kukis the main reason behind Manipur violence](#), *Frontline*, 27 June 2023.
- [4] [Now, Meitei body comes out against proposed Kuki map](#), *The Sangai Express*, 8 December 2012.
- [5] Haoginlen Chongloi, [Free-Flowing Hate Speech, Rampant Racial Profiling: How Manipur Grew Intolerant](#), *The Wire*, 18 June 2022
- [5a] [Explained: The many triggers behind the violence that erupted in parts of Manipur](#), *The News Minute*, 6 May 2023.
- [6] [Manipur: Two Kukis killed in fresh violence along boundary of Kangpokpi and Imphal districts](#), Scroll.in, 20 November 2023.
- [7] @SkTouhang, [tweet](#), 12 November 2023.
- [8] [Manipur government statement in court on recovery of stolen weapons does not add up](#), *The Hindu*, 5 August 2023.

- [9] [Manipur gives report on stolen, missing arms, ammunition](#), *The Hindu*, 22 September 2023.
- [10] [In Manipur, the Kukis are up in arms against the 'majoritarian' BJP government](#), *Scroll.in*, 14 March 2023.
- [11] Harsh Mander, [Manipur: A Land of Settled Grief](#), *The Wire*, 1 November 2023.
- [12] [Manipur Violence Ground Report: Women's Ordeal in Manipur's Relief Camps, Newborn Lives in Jeopardy](#), *The Mooknayak*, 29 August 2023.
- [13] ['Separate administration' only solution to end Manipur conflict, Kuki-Zo protesters to Amit Shah](#), *Deccan Herald*, 29 November 2023.