

Thingkho *Le* Malcha

A Weekly Newsletter by KSO Media & Documentation Cell

FEATURED ARTICLE

SIX REASONS Why Modi is Still Silent on Manipur

**Study: Mainstream
Media's Coverage
of Manipur
Violence Biased,
Superficial**



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KUKI VICTIMS' UPDATE



224
DEATHS



200+
VILLAGES BURNT



7000+
HOUSES BURNT



360+
CHURCHES &
SYNAGOGUES BURNT



41,425+
DISPLACED
PERSONS

Thingkho Le Malcha (charred wood tied with chilli): A war symbol; a pre-arranged secret code agreed upon by the Kukis to inform the people about the commencement of war and on receiving this, one has to remain alert and be ready for the battle.

KUKI-ZO COUNCIL LEADERS MEET MHA OFFICIALS IN DELHI; PUSH FOR SA & POLITICAL TALKS



New Delhi, January 17: In a crucial meeting with officials from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in New Delhi on Friday, leaders of the Kuki-Zo Council (KZC) reiterated their demand for the creation of a separate administration for the Kuki-Zo community to ensure lasting peace in the region.

The Kuki Zo Council, representing various tribes under the Kuki-Zo umbrella, was led by Chairman Henlianthang Thanglet, along with other key members, including Coordinator Ch Ajang Khongsai, Spokesperson Ginza Vualzong, and Finance Secretary Richard Hmar. “This is the first time that Kuki-Zo Council met the home ministry representatives. It was like an icebreaker. We have told the government that we wanted a quick solution in Manipur, for which a quick political dialogue should be initiated,” said Ginza Vualzong, a spokesperson of the council, the highest body representing the Kuki-Zo communities.

During the meeting, the KZC leadership emphasized the urgency of materializing their political demand for a separate administration as the best path forward for resolving the ongoing conflicts and establishing long-term peace in Manipur. They urged the MHA to prioritize and expedite the realization of this demand.

Responding to the KZC’s plea, MHA officials, including Advisor AK Mishra and Joint Director (Northeast) of the Intelligence Bureau Rajesh Kamble, called for a focus on maintaining peace before seeking a permanent solution. However, the KZC leaders countered that only the creation of a separate administration would ensure lasting peace, arguing that such a move would be the most effective way to address the political and security challenges faced by the Kuki-Zo community.

The meeting, which lasted for over an hour and a half, saw discussions on various aspects of the ongoing situation in Manipur. The KZC delegates stressed the importance of swift political dialogue, urging the government to initiate talks as soon as possible to find a resolution. They also pointed out that their demand aligns with the Kuki National Organization (KNO) and United People’s Front (UPF)’s call for a Union Territory under Article 239A of the Indian Constitution.

Notably, the Kuki-Zo Council met the state’s newly-appointed Governor, Ajay Kumar Bhalla, in

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Churachandpur last week and demanded a political solution – a Union territory with a legislature under article 239 (A) of the constitution -- that will take into account the needs of Kuki-Zo in Manipur.

They also asked for a neutral security force and the need for respect of buffer zones.

Ginza Vualzong said they told the MHA officials on Friday that they have the same demands, as given

to the Governor last week. “In order for Manipur to have peace, there must be a dialogue. The government has asked us to not fire at each other until they consider the demands,” he added. Earlier, the Centre had summoned the MLAs belonging to both Kuki and Meitei communities to New Delhi for a joint meeting but Kuki-Zo MLAs refused to share the dais with their Meitei counterparts.

MANIPUR GOVERNOR MEETS AMIT SHAH, REVIEWS STATE'S SECURITY AMID ONGOING CONFLICT

New Delhi, January 19: For the first time after being appointed as the Governor of Manipur, Ajay Kumar Bhalla had a meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday.

Shah was briefed about the the situation in Manipur by Governor Bhalla during the meeting.

Manipur's Governor Bhalla has been having a series of discussions with people from all sectors to access the situation and also to receive feedback to return Manipur to a state of normalcy.

According to reports, to discuss the law-and-order situation of Manipur, Bhalla has chaired at least two meetings in which he has given necessary instructions to security forces.

Bhalla was recommended for the role of the Governor of Manipur by Amit Shah himself, having worked closely with him for five years as a former Union Home Secretary.

Earlier this month, Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla visited Moreh in Tengnoupal district, inspecting the Integrated Check Post and meeting Civil Society Organizations, business leaders, and community representatives to discuss challenges, including suspended cross-border trade.



He also reviewed border fencing progress and praised the efforts of Border Roads Organization officials and local workers.

Additionally, recently, Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla and CRPF Special DG Raja Srivastava discussed restoring peace and protecting lives amid ongoing conflict during a meeting at Raj Bhavan.

They reviewed collaborative efforts between the CRPF, Army, Assam Rifles, BSF, and Police, addressing challenges like ethnic violence since May 2023. Srivastava briefed the Governor on CRPF deployment and initiatives, while Bhalla suggested measures and emphasized regular Joint Command Post Meetings for continued coordination. (Sentinel Assam)

MEITEI ACCUSES KUKIS OF USING DRONE BOMBS, CoTU SETS THE RECORD STRAIGHT

Kangpokpi, January 15: The Meitei populace and their media houses have once again accused the Kukis of using drone bombs in the peripheral areas of Kangpokpi district and the Imphal Valley. In a previous incident, too, the Meitei media houses were quick to conclude that the Kukis were using drone bombs to attack Meitei settlements. However, these claims were debunked by forensic reports, and the Army found no evidence of drones dropping bombs in Manipur, a top defense official said.

When asked about the Manipur Police's claim that minority Kuki groups were using drones to launch rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), the defense official replied: "I don't want to get into who has said what. As far as the situation on the ground is concerned, the Army has found no evidence of drones being used by any side."

The source also stated that what was in use were crude weapons, debunking the alleged use of modern hand-held rockets in the violence.

On January 15, many media outlets reported that suspected Kuki militants dropped a bomb via drone near the 5th MR Camp, though it did not cause any casualties or injuries.

Even Chief Minister Singh expressed concern over the attack, stating, "In recent months, violence in the region had subsided significantly. However, this drone bombing incident is deeply regrettable. The police are actively investigating to initiate appropriate legal action against those responsible."

The attack occurred at approximately 9:30 PM on January 14, targeting a temporary Manipur Rifles camp located in Kangchup Foothill, a strategic area



near Kangpokpi district. Two bombs, reportedly dropped by drones suspected to be operated by Kuki militants, detonated near a bunker within the camp. Fortunately, no injuries were reported.

In response to this reports alleging a bombing at the 5th Manipur Rifles in Kangchup Foothill on January 14th at 9:30 PM, the Committee on Tribal Unity (CoTU) has issued a strong rebuttal, categorically denying any involvement by Kuki militants. The statement challenges what it calls "baseless and orchestrated narratives" perpetuated by valley-based radical media outlets and alleged complicity from the state's Directorate for Information and Publicity.

CoTU asserts that it is "foolhardy" to suggest the Kuki-Zo community could procure high-grade weaponry or advanced drones, given the community's dire humanitarian crisis. Thousands of displaced people remain in relief camps, struggling with critical shortages of food, medical supplies, quality healthcare and not to mention strangulation of educational institutions from the state.

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The committee accuses the media of demonizing the Kuki-Zo community through unverified and one-sided reporting. They urge journalists to ensure balanced coverage, emphasizing the importance of consulting both sides before publishing divisive news.

CoTU reiterates that Kangpokpi District's jurisdiction lies under the authority of the Superintendent of Police, Kangpokpi. It has requested the Imphal

West Police to refrain from encroaching on Kangchup and other areas under their control.

The Kuki-Zo community has endured almost two years of political and social turmoil, marked by displacement and the disruption of basic services. CoTU alleges that this ongoing crisis is compounded by an orchestrated effort to malign their image.

HTC ORDERS SCHOOLS IN MOREH TO DROP MEITEI MAYEK FROM SCHOOL SYLLABUS

New Delhi, January 19: The Hill Tribal Council has notified all government and private schools in Moreh town, under Tengnoupal district, to remove the Manipuri/Meitei Mayek subject from their respective school syllabi starting this academic year (2025-2026).

The Hill Tribal Council issued a notification on Thursday, stating that the purpose of the notification is to ensure that students are taught only useful and productive subjects and to respect the sentiments and culture of the indigenous Kuki-Zo people, considering the current political conflict.

The council instructed that students opted for important subjects like Hindi, English, Mizo, Thadou,



Hmar, Zou, Maring, Anal, Vaiphei, Paite, Gangte, or any other MIL subjects instead.

The council also warned that non-compliance with the notice may result in penalties.



A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves.

— Lao Tzu

MANIPUR GOVT APPROVES 5 BORDER FENCING AND ROAD PROJECTS AMID TRIBAL OPPOSITION



Lamka, January 16: The Government of Manipur has sanctioned five strategic projects along the Indo-Myanmar border, encompassing both fencing and road construction, to be executed by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) and the 25 Border Roads Task Force (BRTF).

In a communication dated January 13, 2025, addressed to the Commander of the 25 BRTF, Joint Secretary (Home) Peter Salam confirmed the approval of the following projects:

- 1. Border Fence Package V:** Extending from Border Pillar (BP) 43 to the west of the Manipur River.
- 2. Border Fence Package VI:** Spanning from BP 58 to BP 61.
- 3. Border Fence Package VII:** Covering the area from BP 85 to the Tarel River.
- 4. Border Road Package I:** Development of the Kuirei-Huishi-Poi road.

5. Border Road Package II: Construction of the road from Kovang to Tuitong.

The approval aims to expedite these projects due to their strategic significance concerning national security. It is stipulated that the BRO/25 BRTF will bear the costs related to land acquisition and compensatory levies for forest clearance, disbursing funds to the relevant organizations once compensation amounts are determined and communicated by the State Government.

Despite the government's intentions, several indigenous tribal groups have expressed strong opposition to the proposed border fencing. Both Kuki-Zo and Naga civil organizations have criticized the discontinuation of the Free Movement Regime (FMR), which previously allowed residents to cross the border within a 16 km range without visas.

The Kuki-Zo Council, representing the Kuki-Zo community, has condemned the initiative, pledging

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to resist it in collaboration with like-minded groups. They describe the termination of the FMR and the border fencing as blatant violations of international law and the rights of the region's indigenous populations.

Similarly, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM), currently engaged in talks with the Central Government, has criticized the cessation of the FMR and the construction of border fences. They argue that these actions, justified by the government under the guise of national security and preventing illegal activities, infringe upon the Naga people's shared identity and breach international law. The NSCN-IM cautions that any adverse outcomes resulting from these measures will be the responsibility of the Indian state.

Additionally, the Naga People's Front (NPF), part of the coalition government, opposes the abolition of the FMR and the proposed border fencing, stating that it exacerbates existing tensions among the Nagas. They contend that the fencing along the "artificial and imaginary" Indo-Myanmar border would sever all cultural, economic, religious, and social connections with their kin across the border. The NPF warns of vigorous opposition to these plans in concert with other ethnic groups in the region.

Given the substantial resistance from the Kuki-Zo and Naga tribal communities, the government's approach to advancing these projects remains to be seen.

ZORO TO PROTEST AGAINST SCRAPPING OF FMR, INTRODUCTION OF BORDER PASS SYSTEM ON JANUARY 29

Aizawl, January 19: The Zo Re-Unification Organization (ZORO) has announced plans to stage demonstrations across Mizoram on January 29.

The protests are against the alleged scrapping of the Free Movement Regime (FMR) and the introduction of a new border pass system along the Indo-Myanmar border.

The organisation, which represents all ethnic Zo or Mizo tribes in India, Bangladesh and Myanmar, held a meeting under the chairmanship of its president R Sangkawia and discussed a wide range of issues, including the scrapping of the FMR, fencing of the Indo-Myanmar border and deportation of Bangladeshi refugees from Mizoram, the organisation general secretary L. Ramdinliana Renthlei said.

The meeting decided to stage demonstrations in



Aizawl and other parts of Mizoram during which copies of both the Centre and state government's notifications scrapping the FMR and introducing a border pass system along the Mizoram-Myanmar border will be burned, he said.

The ZORO also urged the Centre to revoke the notification, which stopped the FMR with

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Myanmar, the organisation also said in a statement.

Earlier, the organisation had urged the Centre to reinstate the FMR, which facilitates a visa-free movement across the India-Myanmar border and revoke the order mandating a border pass for people living within 10 km on either side to cross the international border.

Sangkawia alleged that the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has recently replaced the FMR with a new system to regulate movement across the India-Myanmar border.

As per the new system, which came into effect on January 1, people living within 10 km on either side of the border require a border pass to visit each other, he said.

He said that in its letter communicated to the Mizoram chief secretary about the new system on December 24 last year, the MHA said that entry would be regulated from 18 entry/exit points along the Mizoram-Myanmar border.

While Zokhawthar and Hnahlan cross points in east Mizoram's Champhai district will be implemented as pilot sites, 3 crossing points in Lawngtlai district will be set up under phase-I and another 13 points in all the six districts, which share a border with Myanmar, will be set up under phase-II, the MHA said in the letter, according to Sangkawia.

According to the new guidelines, an individual will now require a "border pass" to travel to and from Myanmar, which will be issued by the Assam rifles for only people living within 10 km on either side of the border for a stay up to 7 days, he said.

An individual seeking for the border pass must produce a document or certificate to prove that he or she lives

within a 10-km radius of the borders, he said.

The identity proof document can be issued by the local police station officer-in-charge or village chief or village authority (administrator).

The MHA letter also said that movement of border residents from Myanmar and India would be allowed for "specific reasons such as visiting relatives, tourism, business, medical treatment and cultural exchange programmes," Sangkawia said.

State's apex student body, Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) also said that it would write to the Centre over the alleged scrapping of the FMR.

Although Union Home Minister Amit Shah had announced in February last year that the FMR would be scrapped, no official notification in this regard has been issued so far, officials said.

The ZORO also blamed both the state government and Assam Rifles, which guards the 510-km long Mizoram-Myanmar border, for allegedly pushing back 28 refugees from Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

The organisation said that the refugees entered south Mizoram's Lawngtlai district on January 5 seeking shelter and were allegedly detained by security forces for a few days.

They were allegedly sent back to their country on January 11 following an arrangement made by the state government and Assam Rifles, it said. (NE Now)

**NEWS ANALYSIS****Neutral Community – Questionable ‘Neutral’ Stance**

The Naga community, which has proclaimed itself as a ‘neutral’ party in the ongoing Manipur conflict, has consistently taken a stance against a particular community, raising doubts about its neutrality. Since May 3, 2023, when the two tribal communities of Manipur jointly organized a solidarity march under a tribal banner, the Naga community has proclaimed itself ‘neutral’ following the outbreak of violence in the aftermath of the tribal solidarity rally.

However, there have been several instances where their ‘neutral’ stance has been called into question. The community has often been accused of intimidating their tribal brethren whenever it suits their agenda. Furthermore, they have been accused of exploiting the hardships faced by the Kukis during this communal conflict for political gain.

Recently, in a shocking incident on the morning of January 17, six unarmed Kuki-Zo volunteers were ambushed by alleged proscribed Tangkhul militants in the Tangkhul Hundung area. The volunteers, who were on a duty-roster exchange tasked with

safeguarding Phailengmol areas in Kangpokpi district, have been protecting the region from sustained aggression by the majoritarian Meitei community over the past two years.

According to the Committee on Tribal Unity (COTU), the militants physically assaulted the volunteers, confiscated their vehicles, and seized personal belongings before releasing them under the mediation of a Tangkhul Hundung Civil Society Organization leader.

This act of hostility has drawn sharp condemnation from COTU, which has accused the Tangkhul militants of undermining the neutrality claimed by the Naga community in the ongoing communal conflict. “The Nagas of Manipur, known for their good Samaritan nature, must uphold their neutral stance and hold accountable those within their fraternity, such as the Tangkhuls in Hundung and Singkap areas, who are determined to destabilize peace,” the statement urged.



Six Reasons Why Modi Is Still Silent on Manipur

Partha S. Ghosh

The latest news from Manipur is that Ajay Kumar Bhalla, the former home secretary of the Union government, is the new governor of the state. But the two other bits of news that Manipur watchers must be more eagerly waiting to hear are, one, when will our prime minister, Narendra Modi, visit the state which he has been mysteriously dodging, and two, when will the Manipur chief minister, N. Biren Singh, who has failed to quell the ethnic violence, be asked to quit.

Of the two questions, one need not attach much importance to the second – Singh's rule rests on the mercy of the Modi government. One also cannot be sure whether he ever really ruled the state with full command.

In less than a month after the stripping incident of May 3, 2023, the then governor of Manipur, Anusuiya Uikey, on May 31, had unceremoniously disqualified him from the customary chairmanship of the unified command of the state's security outfits. On June 17, he was excluded from the high-level security meeting on Manipur which was held in Delhi. Even in the first security conference that governor Bhalla convened after his takeover, Singh was conspicuously missing.

It is evident, therefore, that the buck stops at the desk of Prime Minister Modi and hence the question is what

he is up to, or, what is behind his obstinacy not to visit Manipur at all. Is keeping Singh merely as a titular chief minister suits Modi's politics the best?

Whatever may be said in criticism of Modi as a human being, or his style of governance, one thing that will have to be conceded is that he is a master craftsman of realpolitik. If so, his decision not to visit Manipur cannot be unintended. But how to read Modi's mind is not easy. Since unlike former Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru or Manmohan Singh, both of whom had long tenures, Modi seldom gives an opportunity to anyone, even his party members, to read his mind. The only way to know it, therefore, is by making some intelligent guesses which one can attempt to do.

A recap of the crisis

But before that, a recap of the present crisis is in order. It triggered after the Manipur high court judgment of March 27, 2023 which ruled that like the Nagas and Kukis, the Meitei community should also be granted the Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. Although the judgment was soon revoked, the Kuki community had already revolted. Soon the Meiteis

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retaliated in greater numbers. On May 3, some rowdy elements from among them most unabashedly paraded naked some Kuki women with the obvious purpose of sending the message that Manipur belonged to the Meiteis and the Kukis were a subservient minority.

The Meitei-Kuki civil war that ensued soon resulted in about 250 deaths and 60,000 people being displaced. Militants belonging to both communities became so ferocious that even the security forces started fearing them. In February 2024, when about 200 Meitei militants stormed the residence of the additional superintendent of police and demanded the release of one of their men in custody the police had to oblige. The police conceded that if they did not, they themselves could have been 'lynched or shot dead.'

The Myanmar connection of the conflict is also relevant. The India-Myanmar border is porous and many communities have cross-border ethnic connections, and since there is the massive issue of drug and gun running, the Manipur question is a complex one. A Hindu report dated January 25, 2024 noted: "In September 2022, authorities in Manipur pushed back 4,300... Myanmar nationals from the Moreh area.... The civil war in the neighbouring country [Myanmar] also forced some 40,000 people into Mizoram, who unlike Manipur, made them feel at home primarily due to their ethnic affiliation."

The Indian government has toyed with the idea of fencing the India-Myanmar border which I would say is yet another flight to fantasy. India's former Chief of the Army Staff, General M.M. Naravane, did not mince his words when he warned that besides its prohibitive cost, such a fence could serve "a useful purpose if it is kept under observation and patrolled throughout its length. Without the ability to react to any breach, a fence is of little value."

The Congress-BJP divide

The Congress-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) political divide complicates the Manipur problem. To the extent that Manipur has a chequered political history in which even left adventurism had once mattered, both Congress and the BJP would have to share the blame for the mess we see today. It has been argued that while the Congress rule was known for its 'fake encounters', BJP has mastered the art of rampant 'detentions'. But exonerating oneself by referring to the past mistakes of others, as Modi routinely does, for example, by referring to Nehru, is neither good politics, nor a good reading of history.

In the recently held parliamentary election in May 2024, Modi's no-show in the state was a campaign theme. Congress did embarrass the BJP on this score and advertised, in contrast, Rahul Gandhi's two visits to the state. After the election, in which Congress won both the Manipur seat, the party's newly elected MP, and also a JNU professor, Angomcha Bimol Akoijam, thunderously told parliament that "I would keep quiet the moment the Prime Minister opens his mouth."

Why is Modi dodging the Manipur question?

Returning to our central question, why is Modi not visiting Manipur or talking about it, here are my six speculative takes.

One, BJP is in power in Manipur and in normal circumstances the next assembly election is due in early 2027, two long years from now. Having known Modi's penchant for electioneering, he has no reason to warm himself up now. He would take the call in all earnest at the right time.

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Two, Manipur sends only two members to our 543-strong parliament. It makes little difference to his party in power even if these two seats go to the opposition and has already happened.

Three, the majority Hindu Meitei community is well entrenched in power which cannot be dislodged by other communities, whether the minority Naga or the Kuki communities, the latter even less. They are just 16% of the population compared to 53% Meiteis and 20% Nagas. Moreover, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has been extremely active in the entire Northeast, right from the time of India's independence. (It may be interesting to note that the first chief minister of Manipur after it became a state in the Indian Union in 1972 was a Muslim, Mohammed Alimuddin.)

Four, there is a huge illicit drug and narcotic economy in the region which is endemic to the entire broader region of India, much more so in the areas abutting Myanmar and by extension, Thailand. It is common knowledge that any ruling party in these critical northeastern states takes advantage of this illegal trade for their party funding. Since the BJP is ruling Manipur, that may have something to do with it.

Five, more tension in the area means more demand in the rest of the country for border fencing between India and Myanmar. Fencing is the easiest option ordinary people understand to tackle international migrations and the drug trade. There is a huge mechanism of contract allotment and doling out of political favours associated with these deals which an unsuspecting common man seldom understands.

Six, it is surmised that behind the dogged determination of the Modi government not to grant autonomy to the Kukis is corporate India's greedy eyes on the forest and other natural resources of the areas which form their habitat. The nexus between Modi and some of India's leading corporate giants is common knowledge.

To conclude, given the geography of Manipur and the security dynamics of the region, the Modi government must politically respond to contain the strife before it goes beyond control. It must be underlined that the annual report 2023-24 of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has noted that Manipur accounts for 77% of the violent cases attributed to the entire Northeast.

To drive home the point in a better way, a comparative analysis may help. Of the Northeast's total population of 45,709,443, Manipur's population is 2,855,794, just 6.24%. Of Northeast's total area of 264,331 sq km, Manipur accounts for 22,327 sq km, just 8.44%. Of the 26 MPs from Northeast, Manipur sends merely 2, which is just 7.7%.

About six months ago, on July 3, 2024, Modi explained to the Rajya Sabha the historical roots of the situation of Manipur. But by typically battering the Congress for all that had gone wrong in the state he cut a sorry figure. The Hindu editorial three days later was spot on: "Bluster and mere acknowledgment of the crisis will not solve the problems in Manipur and Mr. Modi has to become proactive in leading changes."

It is sad to note that the same explanation is now being parroted by chief minister Singh. In response to the alarming figures supplied in the MHA report, he said "sorry to the people of the state for what happened since May 3 last year [2023] ... and [that he] would like to apologise to all natives." But just within a couple of days he was back on the game with conventional gusto. He held the Congress responsible for the conflict.

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Excessive Reliance on Government Sources, Coverage Skewed Toward Majority Community Perspectives

FEATURED ARTICLE

Study: Mainstream Media's Coverage of Manipur Violence Biased, Superficial

A study featured in the recently published book, "Inclusiveness in Indian Media Coverage," examined Hindustan Times' reporting on the Manipur violence in 2023 and found glaring lapses in its coverage. Considering that the Times is regarded as one of the better mainstream newspapers, the study could be alluding to widespread issues in the journalism practiced by traditional Indian media.

Edited by journalist Vinod K. Jose, former executive editor of The Caravan magazine from 2009 to 2023, the study points out that Hindustan Times' coverage of the Manipur violence shows lack of on-the-ground reporting – the first of at least four major shortcomings in the newspaper's reportage.

The ongoing violence in Manipur, which started on May 3, 2023, has resulted in extensive destruction of property and places of worship, as well as the loss of over 250 lives. The escalation was sparked by a controversial state high court order proposing to extend special economic benefits and quotas to the majority Meitei population, akin to those afforded to the minority, tribal Kuki-Zo people. The proposal would have permitted Meiteis to purchase land in historically Kuki-Zo territories.

The study, conducted by Elsa Ashish Thomas, head of School of Humanities and Social Sciences At Manipal Academy Higher Education, Dubai Campus, scrutinised 42 news reports, two editorials and three opinion pieces on the Manipur conflict published in Hindustan Times

from May 4, 2023, through to June 2, 2023.

Despite being one of Delhi's most circulated English-language newspapers, Hindustan Times' reportage on the conflict was predominantly conducted from outside Manipur, with 89 percent of the coverage generated from locations such as New Delhi, Guwahati and Kolkata.

Only a negligible portion, about 1 percent, of the reports came from the state's border areas, according to the study, which noted that the absence of reporters and photojournalists in conflict zones led to limited local voices and perspectives, with a majority of the photographs used being sourced from agencies rather than the publication's own team.

The second shortcoming observed was over-reliance of news stories on official narratives.

The reporting heavily depended on statements from government officials, the police and the army, often sidelining the experiences of those directly affected by the conflict, the study said. Of the 42 news reports published, only six included voices from the Kuki-Zo and Meitei communities, with a total of 19 references to individuals from these groups.

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“The largest source of information is from other entities (33), which includes ‘officials’ who sought anonymity, ‘people familiar with the matter’ and other experts,” the study noted.

The third shortcoming concerned the perspectives presented in the coverage.

More than half of the stories about Manipur reflected the viewpoint of the state government, which includes the chief minister, the state security advisory and other state representatives. Slightly fewer than half of the stories conveyed the perspective of the state police, with some representing the viewpoint of the Indian Army deployed there.

Further, the stories seldom featured firsthand accounts from Kuki-Zo districts or areas, where much of the violence took place. Moreover, the coverage significantly favoured the representation of Meitei civilians over that of the Kuki-Zos by 71.42 percent, according to the study.

Furthermore, the narrative approach of Hindustan Times frequently depicted state officials’ perspectives in a sympathetic light.

For instance, an article on June 1, 2023 quoted Home Minister Amit Shah’s promises to ensure the return of refugees but failed to examine whether these commitments were being fulfilled. The absence of Kuki-Zo families in Imphal after the violence, despite these assurances, was left unaddressed, the study noted.

The fourth shortcoming was the absence of sociopolitical context in the stories.

The newspaper did not delve into the escalating tensions between the dominant Meitei and marginalised Kuki-Zo communities, or the partisan actions of the state government that allegedly fuelled the conflict, the study pointed out. This superficial reporting ignored critical issues like land and economic interests and disputes, Scheduled Tribe status debates and narratives around poppy cultivation or drugs, leaving readers with an incomplete understanding of the situation, it said.

For example, the first editorial on May 5, 2023, titled “Quota tweaks must be done with caution,” reduced the complex ethnic conflict to a reservation issue, displaying a dispassionate tone towards the loss of lives and property.

The second editorial, published on May 26, 2023, focused on Home Minister Shah’s awaited visit but failed to critique the Union government’s silence and inaction over the preceding weeks, the study said.

Notably, the editorials lacked any substantial engagement with the deeper causes of the violence or the conditions in relief camps, where people were reportedly living in dire circumstances.

“When hundreds of people were killed and religious places destroyed, the editorial pages were not proportionate to the crisis faced by the people on the ground,” remarked the study. “The coverage overall underscores a missed opportunity for conducting a critical and ethical journalistic inquiry.”

A turning point in national coverage occurred only after a graphic video surfaced on social media on July 19, 2023, showing Kuki-Zo women being stripped, molested and paraded by a mob. The incident drew widespread attention and compelled the media, including Hindustan Times, to amplify its coverage of the violence. However, the study found, this focus was short-lived, and the publication’s initial failure to report extensively on such atrocities during the critical early weeks of the conflict remains a glaring lapse.

Among other studies featured in the book is one examining Dainik Jagran’s coverage of the February 2020 communal violence in Delhi, which exposes an “inversion of the truth” by this Hindi language newspaper.

Published by [Newsreel Asia](#)

SOCIAL MEDIA
THE BUZZ

DIGVIJAY SINGH RAWAT
@Diggi00007

Best thing you will see about foreign interference in Manipur -
This is a Meitei Militant in Myanmar wearing a Manipur police uniform
and working for Myanmar army against Indian army. 😊
@LevinaNeythiri @majorgauravarya @NortheastToday @ravishndtv
@vijaita @BDUTT #manipur



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Ravi Kapur
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Manipur: Two devastations, different causes, same result—catastrophe.
Kuki homes in Imphal & surrounding valleys were reduced to ashes by
Meiteis at the start of the conflict. Almost 2 years later, California
wildfires caused similar destruction—one man-made, the other natural.



10:08 AM · Jan 19, 2025 · 702 Views

Post MORTEM

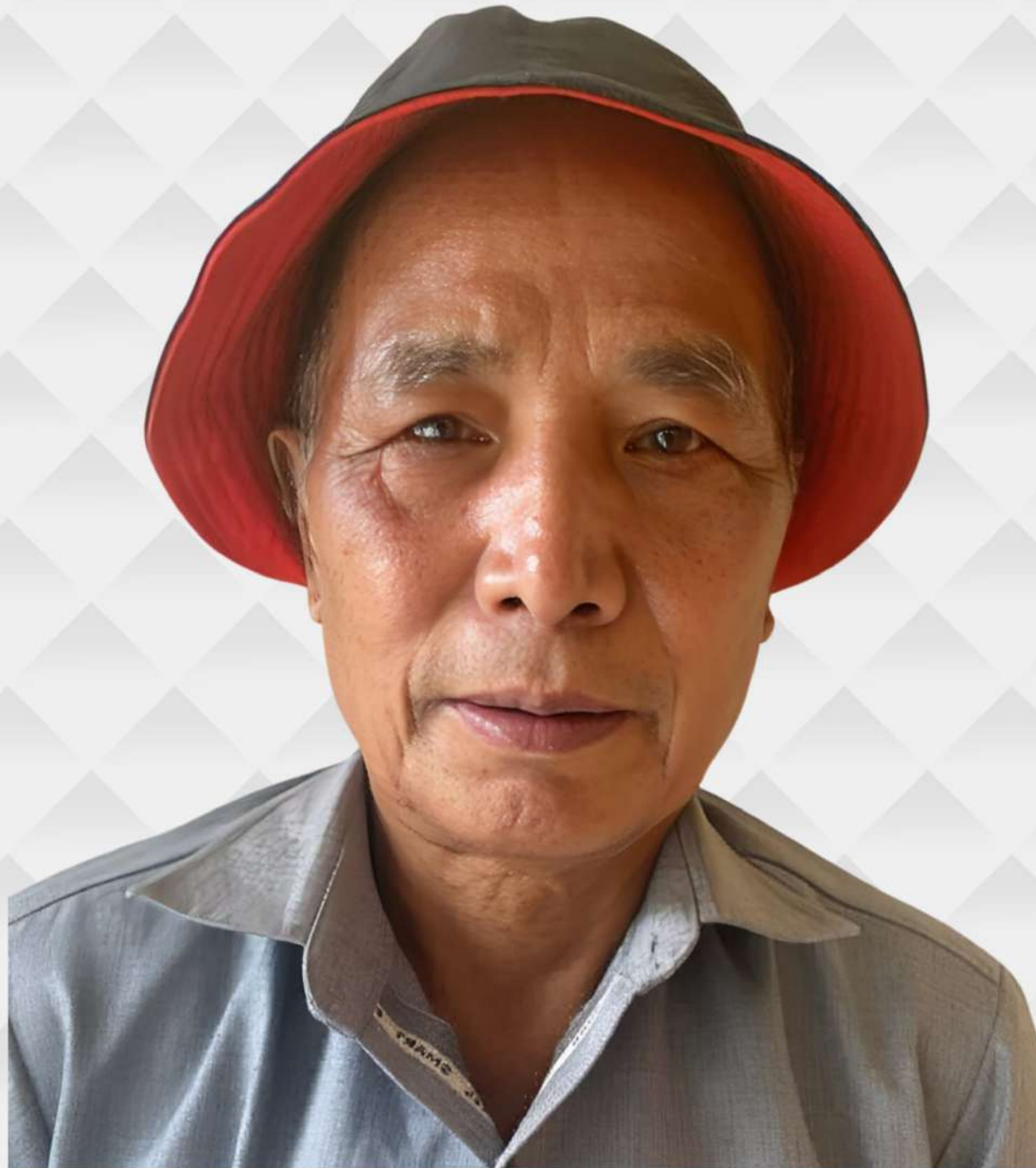
THE REALITY
OF BIREN'S
POLITICS





OUR FALLEN HEROES

IN DEFENCE OF OUR ANCESTRAL LAND & FREEDOM



ZOLAWMSANG

s/o Pu Tlangthanglirn Inbuon

Seimanveng, Muolvaiphei
Lamka District, Manipur

