



# ‘National’ Media and Manipur Mayhem

*The Fourth Estate as a Site of Information War*

**A study on media coverage of the crisis in Manipur**

MEDIA AND POLICY ANALYSIS AND ADVOCACY LOISANG, IMPHAL

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**MAPAAL (Media and Policy Analysis and Advocacy Loisang),**

**Imphal**

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Kwakeithel Moirangpurel

Imphal

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# **‘National’ Media and Manipur Mayhem**

## *The Fourth Estate as a Site of Information War*

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# Foreword

## A Note from the Principal Investigator



*“The media's the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that's power. Because they control the minds of the masses.”*

- Malcolm X

With these powerful words, Malcolm X hints at the immense power wielded by the media to shape public perception with the stroke of a pen or the click of a camera. The fact that our sense of reality is mediated has been well documented in media studies. Our knowledge about the world is acquired largely through human interaction, and in contemporary times, through the media. It not only provides information and educates us but also offers perspectives and interpretations of events around us. Therefore, insofar as people's responses to these events are related to what and how they come to know of these events, the media also shapes the nature and trajectory of those events.

Indeed, the media is a part of the ‘public sphere’, and it wields substantial power in shaping political discourse and societal norms. Of course, the media in itself may not wield power, as Manuel Castells says, but they “... constitute by and large the space where power is decided” (Castells, 2007, p. 242). In this light, an analysis of the role of the media becomes crucial.

Recent times have witnessed a significant expansion and complexity in the media landscape with the emergence of social media, often referred to as the ‘fifth estate’. Despite its emergence and enormous presence, I still believe — for this, you may call me a conservative or a romantic — that most people still rely on the information

gathered through traditional media, such as newspapers, as more authentic than the 'news' we received through social media.

For the past year, Manipur has been haunted by an unprecedented spectre of violence. Hundreds have died and thousands have been rendered homeless. In light of the unfortunate events that have unfolded in the beautiful land of Manipur, also referred to as 'little paradise', the role of the media is crucial in informing, and shaping people's perceptions of the events in the state. It is with this view that we have carried out the present study on the nature of the ways in which some of the leading 'national' media houses have dealt with the crisis in Manipur.

This study aims to serve as a resource for those seeking truth and looking for peaceful and dignified solutions to the Manipur crisis. Additionally, with this study, we seek to contribute to the vast body of knowledge in the field of media studies and journalism.

Last but not the least, we also welcome constructive criticism and suggestions that can help us to correct shortcomings, if there are any, in the present study.

Thanking you,

Best wishes,



Angomcha Bimol Akoijam

Principal Investigator

# Glossary

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
EGI	Editors Guild of India
EBC	Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation
HC	High Court
HAC	Hill Areas Committee
HT	Hindustan Times
MLR&LR Act	Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act
MAPAAL	Media and Policy Analysis and Advocacy Loisang
PCI	Press Council of India
PF	Protected Forest
RTLTM	Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines
RF	Reserved Forest
SC	Scheduled Caste
ST	Scheduled Tribe
TH	The Hindu
IE	The Indian Express
ITLF	The Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum
T	The Telegraph
TOI	The Times of India
UR	Un-reserved
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WS	Wildlife Sanctuary

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# Chapter I

## Introduction: An Overview of the Study

*“The fundamental objective of journalism is to serve the people with news, views, comments and information on matters of public interests in a fair, accurate, unbiased, sober and decent manner.”*

- Norms of Journalistic Conduct  
(Press Council of India, 2022)

Manipur, a hilly state in India’s Northeast, has been caught in an unprecedented spell of violence since May 2023. The violence erupted in Churachandpur District and its adjoining area in Bishnupur District, and consequently spilled over to other areas, in the state on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023, and continues to date. So far, more than 200 people have been reportedly killed, and thousands have also been uprooted from their homes and taken refuge in ‘relief camps’. It is a mayhem that threatens the very existence of this erstwhile kingdom, fondly referred to as the ‘little paradise’ and the ‘maid of the mountains’ (Constantine, 1981), which acceded to the newly established postcolonial Indian state at the time of independence in 1947 (Menon, 1985; Akoijam, 2005). The state has witnessed layered conflicts and violence since the time its administration was ‘taken over’ by the Government of India in 1949. But never has it seen such a spectre of violence that not only threatens its territorial integrity but also tears apart its polity and social fabric.

Even though colossal and violent inter-community clashes have occurred in this country, the post-colonial Indian State has arguably not seen such a spectre of violence in its 75 years of existence. It is not merely violence between two communities; as per press reports and information on social media, heavily armed non-state entities,

including foreign elements, are involved in this unprecedented violence. Besides the horrific murders and cases of sexual assaults, villages have also been completely wiped out and reduced to dust. Thus, in this crisis, which is akin to a civil war, the very foundation of democracy and peaceful coexistence have been challenged.

It is a humanitarian crisis that smacks of ‘ethnic cleansing’ wherein certain sections of the population are being ‘cleansed’ from specific areas, including proclaiming a given area as an ‘ethnically homogeneous territory’ to constitute a politico-administrative entity as an end purpose of the ‘ethnic cleansing’. Having cleansed a given community, some have even openly protested any attempt to return and resettle people to their homes (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*‘Kukis’ protesting the resettlement of displaced Meiteis in Moreh*



*Note: Sourced from Kanglei Solutions [YouTube video]<sup>1</sup>*

Ironically, giving credence to such nefarious acts and attempts to create community-specific areas or ghettos, the state has shifted members of one community from areas majorly inhabited by the members of another community! Not only that, but the state

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VpKPb\\_BF-AM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VpKPb_BF-AM)

also allegedly remains a silent spectator when the residential colonies, belonging to those who have either been driven or shifted out, have been looted and/or pulverised, reportedly even using bulldozers (Figure 2 and Figure 3). Indeed, with the unprecedented violence and calls to break up Manipur on communal lines, the state of affairs in this picturesque state stands as an uncanny reminder of the ‘Partition’ of 1947 which had torn the socio-cultural fabric that marked South Asian society and created community-specific territories that accompanied the formation of the Dominions of India and Pakistan.

## Figure 2

*Thengra Leirak, Meitei colony that has been reduced to rubble in Churachandpur*



*Note: Sourced from Tanushree Pandey, *The Quint*<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thequint.com/news/india/houses-demolished-meiteis-kukis-manipur-churachandpur#read-more>

### Figure 3

*A burnt house in Imphal East, Haokip Veng*



*Note: Sourced from Tanushree Pandey, [The Quint](#)*

That the secular and multicultural state conducts itself in such ways that amount to encouraging exclusivist and communal ghettoisation is not the only issue; many of its institutions/agencies, particularly the state police and the armed forces under the Union Government, the Assam Rifles in particular, have also been accused by sections of the population in the state of playing partisan roles in the violence. This is over and above the obvious inability, or perhaps even refusal, of the mighty Indian state to effectively rein in the violence and restore normalcy in Manipur to date.

Compounding the anarchic violence, which has more or less turned Manipur into a ‘Hobbesian world’ is the disinformation campaign that accompanied this violence. In this context, many have accused the traditional media, both ‘national’ and ‘local’, of

unprofessional and unethical practices, including taking partisan roles that aggravate the situation.

Incidentally, the Editors Guild of India (hereafter EGI), which had earlier appealed to media houses not to become part of the ‘information war’, has published a report on the role of the ‘local’ media houses, those published from Imphal, Manipur, accusing them of biases. However, the report did not look at the role of the ‘national’ media. As it turns out, unfortunately, that report has been accused of being ‘selective’, ‘lopsided’, biased, and lacking rigour by many, including the All Manipur Working Journalists’ Union (AMWJU), and the Editors Guild, Manipur<sup>3</sup>.

On the other hand, many in Manipur have accused these ‘national’ media houses, through their reportage, of not only being selective and biased but also of fuelling the violence by disseminating and sustaining misinformation and disinformation on/about the ongoing crisis and generating mistrust and hatred amongst the communities in Manipur. **Media and Policy Analysis and Advocacy Loisang (MAPAAL)** has investigated these allegations on the media by conducting a systematic study on the manner in which some of the select media with the highest readership have covered, commented, and reported the issues on/about the ongoing crisis in Manipur. The present study is based on the said study.

This study is divided into eight chapters. The introductory chapter is followed by Chapter II which briefly reviews the relevant studies on the role of media in both national and international conflicts. This chapter highlights the significant role played by the media in aggravating or alleviating crisis situations. Owing to this, media houses and professional organisations have established norms of journalistic conduct, which are to be followed by reporters when reporting or writing opinion pieces on crisis situations around the world, as elaborated in Chapter III. The present study uses the norms, particularly the ones laid down by the Press Council of India (hereafter, PCI), as the framework to examine how the national media have dealt with the crisis in Manipur. Following this framework, Chapter IV delves into the theoretical perspectives

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<sup>3</sup> We shall look at this report later (see Appendix A)

used in media studies/analysis and the methodological premise of the present study, as discussed in Chapter V.

Chapters VI and VII report and discuss the findings of the study, wherein Chapter VI focuses on the 'news' and Chapter VII focuses on 'point of view' or opinion pieces. In Chapter VI, basic data of the *content analysis* being carried out on the news items related to the present crisis in Manipur is presented and discussed. This is followed by an analysis of specific news items in Chapter VII, where interpretations and explanations are thoroughly examined and discussed. Chapter VIII encapsulates a general discussion and conclusion on the findings of the present study.

# Chapter II

## Media and Conflict: A Brief Review

Media, in the modern age, has tremendous potential to reach the masses in the blink of an eye. In times of crisis, this potential of the media becomes invaluable as they have the power to not only disseminate key information but also attempt to bring peace in tense situations. However, the information that gets shared among the masses need not always be factual or complete; and when news channels, radio stations, or newspapers publish incomplete and distorted truths, they can aggravate the crisis and cause more harm than good. History bears witness to the multiple instances when media was used to shape perceptions, steer narratives, and add fuel to an already burning region.

### 1. Media as a Catalyst for Conflict

#### 1.1 Cases of Rwanda, Ethiopia, and South Sudan

The potential of the media to reach large sections of the population efficiently in a short period often acts as a double-edged sword. In times of crisis, while it can disseminate crucial information to masses around the world and save lives, it can also be used by individuals and groups to distort the truth and present specific narratives while marginalising others or dehumanising and demonising particular communities and intensifying tensions, as was evident in the Rwandan genocide of 1994.

Rwanda's ethnic composition is made up of three ethnic groups. The Hutus (85%) are traditionally farmers, Tutsis (14%) are predominantly herdsmen, and Twa (1%) are believed to be the remnants of the earlier settlers of the region (U.S. Department of State, Fact Sheet, 2016).

In 1916, Belgium took control of Rwanda from Germany. As a result of colonisation, the distinction between the different ethnic groups, which had previously been only an occupational difference and were open categories, was racialized, rigidified, and closed, thus sowing discord among the communities. Following Rwanda's independence in 1962, the Hutus were left in power, leading to widespread discrimination against the Tutsis, which set the stage for the genocide in 1994. Rwanda witnessed the mass slaughter of an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and a moderate number of Hutus, which was fuelled by ethnic tensions and struggles for political power. During this period, which lasted for approximately 100 days (April to July 1994), media outlets such as 'Radio Rwanda' and 'Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines' (hereafter RTLM), alongside newspapers such as 'Kangura', played pivotal roles in disseminating hate speech, spreading propaganda, and dehumanising the Tutsi population (Lower and Hauschildt, 2014).

These media platforms became instruments of manipulation, exploiting ethnic divisions and demonising the Tutsis as 'enemies', using derogatory terms such as 'cockroaches' to dehumanise them. They disseminated extremist ideologies, such as the 'Hutu Ten Commandments', inciting violence, and instilling fear among the Hutu population, which ultimately fuelled the genocide. The media also spread misinformation and portrayed the Tutsis as a threat to the Hutus, which created a sense of fear among the latter.

Media channels and radio stations fuelled the violence to the point that they have been described as the 'facilitators of genocide' (Lower and Hauschildt, 2014, p. 4). Radio stations such as RTLM broadcasted the names of targets and locations of hiding victims which contributed to the mass killings. Such contributions of the media channels in aggravating the crisis made them active participants in the genocide.

Not just at the local level, but the Hutu propaganda even misled the international community's perception by misrepresenting the events at the global level. As a result, international media framed the event as a 'two-way genocide', thereby distorting the reality of the situation and taking the focus away from the actual perpetrators of the

genocide. This false representation delayed timely humanitarian interventions and permitted the genocide to continue unchecked (Lower and Hauschildt, 2014).

Coupled with this, the social location of the reporters and their lack of familiarity with the history of the region played a role in their ability to cover the incidents effectively and accurately. Studies found that during the crisis, many journalists were deployed from outside the region to report on the events, who lacked adequate training and an in-depth understanding of the history of the country, leading to inaccurate reporting (Estes, 2010). This, combined with strict deadlines and the drive to be the first media outlet to break the news, often resulted in flawed, incomplete, or distorted news coverage.

Similar instances could be seen in the ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia. The diverse ethnic composition of Ethiopia, coupled with the political tug of war and long history of ethnic tensions have resulted in civil wars and the loss of millions of civilian lives. Here too the media—both mass and social media—acted as a catalyst in escalating tensions and fuelling violence within the ethnic conflict.

The controlled narrative disseminated by government-affiliated mass media outlets, such as the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC), perpetuated a biased representation of the conflict. The state's tight grip on these channels limited diverse perspectives, shaping public perception, and validating official messages, thereby concealing the full scope of the crisis (The Interaction of Mass Media, 2022).

Social media, though offering alternative narratives, becomes a battleground for divisive ideologies and incendiary rhetoric. Rumours, misinformation, and hate speech spread rapidly, amplifying ethnic tensions, and demonising specific groups. For instance, following strategic city captures, social media propagated rumours of 'sleeper cells' aiding opposition forces. These narratives vilified Tigrayans and other ethnic groups, fostering a climate of fear and animosity. Government officials' endorsements of these narratives through mass media legitimised such harmful messages, further aggravating social fissures. Moreover, the digital platforms also disseminated the state-sponsored propaganda thereby creating more confusion and panic among the masses.

Hate speeches and open calls for violence openly circulated through social media platforms, which further contributed to the violence.

One can also find similar trends in the crisis in South Sudan. After decades of civil war and violence, South Sudan gained independence from Sudan in 2011. Leaders from the two largest ethnic groups in Sudan, the Dinka and Nuer tribes, assumed control of the country. However, within 2 years, tension broke out between the ethnic communities and various factions in South Sudan, largely due to the political mobilisation by respective leaders of the two ethnic groups who began competing for power shortly after independence. The unity among ethnic groups that had been fostered during the struggle for independence soon deteriorated as old rivalries and tensions re-emerged. What began as a political battle soon translated into a full-fledged ethnic conflict (Vox, 2016). Here too, the media played a dual role by not only disseminating information about the crisis but also exacerbating the country's volatile situation and contributing to the violence (Jok, 2015). The media in South Sudan lacked independence and was highly polarised due to the rift between groups supporting the government and those supporting the opposition groups. As a result, the media often acted as a propaganda tool rather than communicating objective pieces of information to the public. In some instances, government-affiliated media outlets such as South Sudan TV used their resources to present biased narratives in order to undermine the legitimacy of the armed opposition, thereby sowing disharmony and distrust among the masses and intensifying the existing divides.

Moreover, much of the reportage during the crisis was found to lack credibility and failure to abide by the standards of ethical reporting. Due to the limited access to accurate and verified news, much of the information spread through word of mouth or social media was prone to distortion, fabrication, and exaggeration. This created a fertile ground for the escalation of conflict and animosity between different groups.

In one instance, in December 2013, the soldiers loyal to the Dinka leader clashed against the soldiers loyal to the Nuer leader. The violence escalated and led to the targeted killing of Nuer civilians and attacks on Nuer neighbourhoods, resulting in the death of thousands of individuals belonging to the community. This incident was portrayed by

the opposition media as a targeted massacre aimed at ethnic cleansing of the Nuer community. These exaggerated narratives were employed to recruit Nuer youth into the armed opposition, resulting in the deepening of ethnic fault lines and escalation of the conflict (Jok, 2015).

Added to this, the government imposed several means to limit the influence of independent media outlets by threatening their journalists and alleging closures, which led to an atmosphere of fear and censorship. These actions suppressed the freedom of speech, restricted the flow of objective and accurate information among the masses, and built an environment of distrust between the media and the government. Instead of fostering peace in the war-torn region, the media became a tool for those in power to silence opposition forces and control narratives.

Such instances of using the media to shape perceptions about conflict and marginalize certain narratives could also be seen in the various cases of violence in India.

### **1.2 Cases of Anti-Sikh, Gujarat, and Muzaffarnagar Riots**

This section will look at three different cases of violence in Indian history and the role of the media during each of the crises. The crises under review are the Anti-Sikh riots of 1984, the Gujarat riots of 2002, and the Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013. Studies have found that during each of these periods, the media engaged in biased narratives, selective reportage, and dissemination of inaccurate information, which stands as a poignant reminder of the incendiary potential of the media.

Take, for example, the Anti-Sikh riots of 1984. On the morning of 31<sup>st</sup> October 1984, then-Prime Minister of India, Smt. Indira Gandhi, was assassinated by two of her Sikh bodyguards in the aftermath of Operation Blue Star, conducted by the Indian Army. Later that evening, India witnessed the beginning of a series of violent attacks on members of the Sikh community and their property nationwide, which lasted for over four days.

During this period, national newspapers and media channels mostly served as the mouthpiece of the government. They engaged in a one-sided narrative that held the

entire Sikh community responsible for the assassination of Indira Gandhi. Their reportage lacked empathy for the Sikh victims and failed to highlight the atrocities faced by the members of the community. National newspapers such as *The Times of India* and *Hindustan Times* were accused of aggravating the already tense situation and inciting hostility between the Hindus and Sikhs (Ahmed, 2016). Furthermore, the government controlled the dissemination of objective information by imposing media censorship and suppressing any news linked to Operation Blue Star. Unrestricted press coverage about the operation was only permitted a week after the incident, by then the government was successful in shaping the narrative and manipulating the flow of information in their favour. This distortion of facts misrepresented the gravity of the situation, thereby sowing further discord between the Hindus and Sikhs and misleading national and international consumers of news.

In one instance, a national newspaper reported that huge quantities of heroin and drugs were recovered from the Golden Temple complex, which was being used by the militants to illegally fund their operation. The foreign media, which were restricted from entering Punjab, relied on this information from local media and spread this false news internationally. Although the government later retracted this report, the damage this information caused could not be undone (Ahmed, 2016).

Moreover, the media in their reports, wittingly or unwittingly, did not distinguish between political parties, militants, and the entire Sikh community, thereby further exacerbating the communal divide and sowing mistrust and suspicion about the Sikh community, both domestically and globally.

In another case, the Gujarat riots of 2002 also stand as a poignant reminder of the blatant misuse of media by those with vested political interests to sow discord and enmity between religious communities. On the fateful morning of 27<sup>th</sup> February 2002, the S-6 coach of Sabarmati Express, which was en route to Ahmedabad, burned down just outside of Godhra station, killing 58 people on board. Among the victims were Kar Sevaks returning from Ayodhya and it was claimed that Muslims were behind this

barbaric act<sup>4</sup>. The following day many Muslims were butchered and their properties were razed to the ground. Over 2,000 Muslims were killed and close to 200 mosques and monuments significant to the Muslim community were destroyed. One may ask - how did the media contribute to this carnage? Local newspapers such as *Sandesh* and *Gujarat Samachar* played a significant role in steering public perception and inciting violence during the riots. Soon after the train incident, local newspapers shared unverified accounts and published unsubstantiated reports of a ‘foreign hand’ behind the tragedy which caused communal tensions (Citizens for Justice and Peace, 2019). False reports of girls being abducted and brutally killed were shared through these newspapers, which exacerbated the conflict. Newspapers labelled Muslim neighbourhoods as ‘mini-Pakistan’, depicted them as anti-national and pro-Pakistan, and published fabricated claims that the entire Sabarmati Express would have been burned down if not for the delay (Citizens for Justice and Peace, 2019; Ahmed, 2016). *Sandesh* presented the entire Muslim community in a negative light by publishing provocative headlines, photos, and stories that fuelled the existing discord, while suppressing the accounts of various forms of atrocities against the Muslims during the riots (Ahmed, 2016). This selective reporting and biased portrayal of facts misguided the public and shaped a pro-Hindu and anti-Muslim narrative.

Not only that the media failed to abide by the ethical norms of journalistic conduct, which advise media organisations to refrain from disclosing the identity of victims and perpetrators, but a study conducted by the People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) in 2002 found that *Sandesh* mentioned the identity of Muslim perpetrators, but when Muslims were the victims, the identities of the assailants were not revealed. Furthermore, the usage of sensational and provocative headlines, directly lifted from the speeches of Vishwa Hindu Parishad, were not cited. Such unethical journalistic

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<sup>4</sup> *Banerjee Commission and Forensic experts from Gujarat investigated the claim that Muslim miscreants smashed the windows and threw in kerosene-soaked rags to burn the coach. This allegation was refuted by the commission and the expert committee’s reports. These reports claimed that the fire started from inside the train and not from outside. Later theories claimed that the Muslim miscreants boarded the train and set fire to it from inside (Jha, 2022).*

practice of using sensational material without acknowledging its source misled the public and contributed to increased tensions (Ahmed, 2016).

While print media and news channels publish a lot of misinformation during crises, they cannot come close to the degree of fake news, doctored images, and videos that circulate on social media which has the potential to cause more harm than any other form of media. By the mid-2000s, social media became an important part of the daily life of many Indian citizens, and its acceptance has only increased exponentially over the years with the advent of various social networking sites such as Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), and WhatsApp. As Bepari (2020, p. 1181) states, “... *social media is slowly trying to establish a psychological hegemony over the individual on communal line... [and] it has turned into a strong tool of political propaganda.*”

The Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013 bear witness to the catastrophic turn events took following the murders of two Hindu boys and one Muslim boy, intensified by the spread of misinformation and fabricated videos on social media platforms. The conflict, which erupted over disputed causes, soon took on religious overtones. Fabricated videos, images, and false news stories flooded social media, thereby intensifying the Hindu-Muslim tension. In one instance, a doctored video falsely claimed that two Hindu boys were murdered by a Muslim mob in Muzaffarnagar. It was later fact-checked and found to be an old incident from Sialkot, Pakistan (Bepari, 2020). However, the video had already been shared by more than 500 people, and even circulated by a BJP MLA (Ahuja, 2013). This misleading information intensified the religious animosity between the Hindus and Muslims and fuelled the violence which claimed the lives of at least 60 people and displaced 60,000 people.

The cases of violence discussed so far highlight the crucial role played by the media in shaping perspectives, steering narratives, and if used maliciously, how it can exacerbate tension and incite violence. On the contrary, if used ethically and responsibly, then journalism also has the potential to promote inclusivity and foster peace in conflict-ridden regions, as has been seen in various instances across history.

## **2. Media and Its Peace-Building Efforts**

While media has been used as a tool for propaganda time and again, one cannot refute the contributions of the media in promoting peace within conflict-ridden regions around the world. The media serves as a platform for the expression of diverse opinions and perspectives, nuances, and critiques, that are necessary in democratic societies. Responsible and ethical journalism has the ability to counter hate speech and mitigate tension within communities by promoting balanced and objective narratives. By focusing on uncovering the root causes, humanising victims, and proposing solutions, the media can truly utilize its power and resources to bring change for the better.

Local media, such as the radio, plays a crucial role in fostering peace within volatile areas by engaging communities, disseminating peace messages, and offering platforms for dialogue. For instance, independent media outlets in South Sudan, such as the United Nations Mission in South Sudan's Radio Miraya, provide varied perspectives, promoting debate and understanding between two conflicting parties and acting as a bridge between officials and citizens so that the latter can receive information and the former can get feedback from those that they represent (UN News, 2022). Radio stations such as 'Radio La Benevolencija' in Rwanda employed soap operas to promote reconciliation between the conflicting groups after the genocide, fostering empathy and understanding between the communities (Paluck, 2009). Social media platforms in the Arab Spring, while not without criticism, were instrumental in mobilising citizens, shedding light on injustices, and advocating for democratic reforms (Brown et al, 2012).

According to Hassan (2019), the talk show 'TerYat' on a community-based radio station in Gulu, northern Uganda, aimed to promote dialogue and better understanding among the masses, and to alleviate tensions in the region. The show executed this by featuring discussions involving ministers, members of parliament, religious leaders, politicians, and rebels, wherein the participants engage in conversations, either in-studio or via phone calls, and address inquiries from listeners through interactive phone-ins (Momanyi, 2015).

Similar instances can be found in India. During the Gujarat riots, a regional newspaper stood out, compared to the other regional newspapers that promoted Hindutva ideology. *Gujarat Today*, started by liberal Muslims in the state, distinguished itself by emphasising positive stories that underscored the interdependence between communities. For example, the newspaper highlighted instances where Hindu doctors protected Muslim properties from attacks and provided medical assistance to the injured. The newspaper also covered stories of Hindus offering relief aid to Muslim victims in Jhagadia, and of both Hindu and Muslim families working together to safeguard lives and properties across religious lines (PUCL, 2002).

These instances highlight the significant role that media can play in promoting peace and resolving conflicts in regions affected by war. Such contributions are contingent upon the media providing platforms for dialogue between different communities and ensuring the dissemination of only verified and accurate information while upholding ethical standards. If left unregulated, media houses have the potential to exacerbate crises, as illustrated in both global and domestic scenarios. This recognition of the potential of the media, for both escalation and resolution, has spurred collective action among journalist guilds and media organisations. Collaborative efforts have emerged to establish ethical frameworks and codes of conduct that aim to transform the media's role from being troublemakers to trouble-shooters during conflict situations. These initiatives emphasise responsible reporting, impartiality, verification of facts, and the humanisation of victims. The subsequent section delves into the exploration of these codes of conduct. These norms of journalistic conduct will be the framework against which the news reportage and opinion pieces during the Manipur crisis will be assessed in the later sections.

# Chapter III

## Media and Its Ethics: The Framework of Assessment

Like most professions, journalism also has its share of ethical codes to guide the conduct of media professionals while discharging their journalistic duties and responsibilities. In India, professional bodies such as the PCI and the EGI do provide us with such codes of conduct. These sets of norms are fundamentally rooted in the belief that journalism “is to serve the people with news, views, comments and information on matters of public interest in a fair, accurate, unbiased, sober and decent manner”, and that “a more onerous responsibility devolves on the Press towards society” precisely because “[g]ossip reaches a localised few” while “a newspaper report reaches lakhs”<sup>5</sup> of people (PCI, 2022, p. 2).

Such codes of conduct become crucial when journalists are reporting on a conflict situation, especially involving different communities in a multicultural society and polity such as India. Considering these, the PCI has been issuing various dos and don'ts from time to time. Similarly, the EGI has also issued similar codes to be observed while reporting conflict.

In accordance with the 2022 edition of the “Norms of Journalistic Conduct”, as published by the PCI, journalists are entrusted with specific responsibilities when reporting news. A thematic presentation of some of these pivotal considerations is delineated below.

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<sup>5</sup> *The exponential reach and prevalence of social media as a primary news source in contemporary times surpass the audience outreach of traditional newspapers, significantly impacting the spread and susceptibility to misinformation in today's information ecosystem.*

## **1. Covering Communal Disputes/Clashes**

- “Giving community-wise figures of the victims of communal riot or writing about the incident in a style which is likely to inflame passions, aggravate the tension, or accentuate the strained relations between the communities/religious groups concerned, or which has a potential to exacerbate the trouble, shall be avoided” (PCI, 2022, p. 20).

## **2. Headline**

- News, views, or comments: on sensitive topics like “communal or religious disputes” should avoid “sensational, provocative and alarming headlines” (PCI, 2022, p. 19-20).
- Headlines must not accentuate tension between communities or religious groups (PCI, 2022, p. 19).
- Sensitivity and restraint are crucial in crafting headlines related to incidents causing communal disharmony (PCI, 2022, p. 19).
- Headings containing allegations made in statements should either identify the body or the source making it or at least carry quotation marks (PCI, 2022, p. 25).

## **3. Language Usage**

- Maintain a tone that is fair, accurate, and balanced in investigative reporting, refraining from one-sided inferences or unfair comments (PCI, 2022, p. 32).
- Use language that is “sober, decent, and dignified” (PCI, 2022, p. 33).
- Avoid words that are “offensive, barbed, derisive or castigatory”, particularly when reporting on individuals under investigation (PCI, 2022, p. 33).

## **4. Factual Reporting after Thorough Verification of Information**

- “The newspaper must adopt strict standards of fairness and accuracy of facts” (PCI, 2022, p. 32).

- Present findings objectively without exaggeration or distortion, ensuring the information is credible and could withstand legal scrutiny if necessary (PCI, 2022, p. 32).
- Unadorned and accurately stated facts during crises are acceptable, while opinion articles demand verified, factual bases without personal biases (PCI, 2022, p. 21).

## **5. Complete Information**

- Ensure all relevant facts, both for and against the core issues, are distinct and separately stated in investigative reports (PCI, 2022, p. 57).
- Provide complete and accurate facts in rejoinders or replies to stories, allowing readers to judge for themselves without editorial bias (PCI, 2022, p. 57).

## **6. Sources**

- Data must be obtained from “authorised sources” as “inaccurate reports have adverse impact on morale and increase stigma” (PCI, 2022, p. 26).
- The investigative reporter must rely solely on personally verified facts rather than “hearsay” or information collected by others, ensuring information originates from “direct, authentic sources” (PCI, 2022, p. 31).

## **7. Opinion Pieces**

- Opinion articles must be free from personal preferences, prejudices, or notions (PCI, 2022, p. 21).
- Authors must base their analysis on verified, accurate, and established facts, avoiding content that could incite disharmony between communities (PCI, 2022, p. 21).

## **8. Caution Against Identification of Victims of Sexual Assault**

- Refrain from publishing names, photographs, or any details leading to the identification of victims in cases involving sexual assault, rape, abduction, or similar crimes (PCI, 2022, p. 58-59).
- Uphold the privacy and dignity of victims by avoiding content that raises doubts or questions regarding their personal character or chastity (PCI, 2022, p. 58-59).

The prescribed codes from the PCI underscore the vital role of conscientious reporting in sensitive topics, emphasising restrained headlines, fair language usage, and stringent verification of facts. These guidelines advocate for unbiased, factual presentation while ensuring complete information in reports and opinion pieces. Moreover, they stress the utmost respect for victims' privacy, especially in cases of sexual assault, fostering ethical journalism and responsible dissemination of information.

Based on these ethical codes of conduct to be followed by journalists, the present study has adopted the following parameters as the 'Framework of Assessment' to evaluate the way the 'national' media has reported the crisis in Manipur. The study seeks to answer the following questions.

### **1. Does the media exhibit 'fair', 'unbiased', 'accurate', and 'objective' reporting on the ongoing crisis in Manipur?**

In a conflict situation, 'fair(ness)' is fundamentally about giving equal treatment to parties involved in the conflict and hearing and reporting the experiences and views of all parties involved in the conflict. 'Unbiased' is not to display an orientation that favours or goes against one group of people or one side in an argument. 'Accurate' means that the events being reported are in line with what exactly happened. 'Objective' is not to allow one's own personal feeling and/or ideological orientation to colour the facts being reported.

The four criteria mentioned above are crucial while reporting or covering conflict involving fellow citizens and groups in society. If and when, any of these codes are not

followed, media becomes, wittingly or unwittingly, a party to the conflict. They lose their neutrality and legitimacy as an objective source of information. It is to avoid this danger of unethical conduct that the PCI has emphasised these criteria. Similarly, the EGI has also laid out basic dos and don'ts while appealing to the media houses not to become a part of the 'information war' that marks the ongoing crisis in Manipur.

**2. Has the language of the media remained 'sober', 'dignified', and 'non-derisive', especially in coverage involving individuals under investigation?**

In the context of journalistic integrity, the use of language assumes paramount importance, particularly when individuals under investigation are being covered. 'Sober', 'dignified', and 'non-derisive' language usage stands as a testament to ethical reporting. 'Sober' language implies a restrained and serious tone, 'dignified' indicates a respectful representation, while 'non-derisive' underscores the necessity to avoid language that mocks, ridicules, or disparages individuals. Upholding these linguistic standards ensures the maintenance of professional decorum and fairness in reporting investigative matters.

**3. Has the media utilised 'authorised sources' and 'verified facts' in reporting and crediting, or used quotation marks for attributed allegations, as per journalistic guidelines?**

According to the ethical guidelines of journalism, it is expected that media outlets would use 'authorised sources' for information and only rely on 'verified facts' rather than hearsay or information gathered from secondary sources. Moreover, if they present allegations, then it is essential to mention the source and use quotation marks for the same, to maintain transparency and credibility while reporting.

**4. Has the media ensured 'complete' and 'impartial' information in investigative reports, presenting all relevant facts and opinions without editorial bias in the ongoing crisis in Manipur?**

Media is expected to present a holistic and ‘impartial’ picture while reporting on any event, especially while covering news during an ongoing crisis. Here, ‘complete(ness)’ implies the inclusion of all relevant facts and opinions to ensure an overall portrayal of the situation. Additionally, ‘impartiality’ underscores the need to present these facts and opinions without any editorial biases while maintaining objectivity and fairness in the reporting process.

The codes of conduct set by journalistic bodies serve as a robust framework for evaluating newspaper reports on the crisis in Manipur. Through a series of probing questions aligned with these ethical standards, this analysis aims to gauge the extent to which the media coverage adheres to these established norms.

The next chapter discusses the theoretical framework employed in this study, such as Framing theory and Critical Discourse Analysis (hereafter CDA). These theoretical premises are frequently used in media studies, for they offer deeper insights into the mechanisms that underlie media narratives. These frameworks also help us dissect the nuances of media representation, uncover hidden agendas, and shed light on the intricate power dynamics at play, within the journalistic discourse. Incorporating these perspectives will enrich our understanding of how media constructs and mediates public perception during critical moments, such as in the case of Manipur.

# Chapter IV

## Media Studies and Its Perspectives: The Theoretical Framework

### 1. Media Studies

Acquiring knowledge is a multifaceted process, occurring either through direct sensory experiences or symbolically through various channels such as interpersonal interactions, educational materials, and media platforms. The latter method consists of various sources, such as parents or teachers, textbooks, newspapers, radio, museums, the internet, and films, and this becomes the predominant avenue through which we accumulate knowledge (Ott and Mack, 2014, p. 1). The advent of globalisation and the digital revolution has facilitated the dissemination of information to large audiences that are remotely located with utmost efficiency. As Ott and Mack (2014, p. 13) also highlight in their work, “mass media have replaced” several institutions such as “family as caretakers, church as arbiters of cultural values, schools as sites of education and the state as public agenda-setters”. Media plays a socialising role in contemporary society, and this is possible with the use of language, which can be used in specific ways to communicate certain narratives, privileging some and marginalising others, contingent upon the orientation of the storyteller. Recognising this potential of the media, in not just informing the masses about what to think but also how to think about an issue, requires a thorough examination of the production, dissemination, and consumption processes of the discourse. Media studies seek to examine these aspects and analyse their effects on society. This field of study draws upon theories and methods of various disciplines such as Sociology, Psychology, Communication Studies, and Political Sciences. It seeks to understand how media influences society and how, in turn, society influences media.

In media studies, scholars utilise an array of tools and concepts to dissect texts and analyse them. The two primary theories that this study employs are Framing theory and

CDA. Framing theory has been used to analyse how news and media structure and present information (Marais and Linstrom, 2012) whereas CDA is used to examine how ‘texts’ (such as notices, speeches, press releases, news, films, interviews, etc.) are constructed, how they draw from existing discourses to communicate certain meanings, and how the reception of these texts is co-shaped by their discursive context (Lindekilde, 2014).

Building upon this foundation, we explore these media theories in length to analyse the conduct of the national media amidst the crisis in Manipur.

## **2. Framing Theory**

The concept of Framing theory was coined by Erving Goffman in his 1974 book titled *Frame Analysis*. It is a social interactionist perspective that suggests that individuals interpret and make sense of their experiences using ‘frames’. Frames are abstract structures that individuals employ to organise their knowledge and understanding of the world. They provide a set of guidelines for how to interpret information and make decisions. Framing is an integral research tool in ethnography that helps social scientists understand social behaviours by studying the frames that people use to comprehend and organise their reality.

Goffman (1974) claimed that people interpret what is going on around their world through their “primary frameworks”, which are fundamental and often taken for granted, to interpret their experiences. He identifies two types of primary frameworks: natural and social. Both frameworks help individuals make sense of their experiences, but they differ in their functionality. Natural frameworks are used to understand physical phenomena that take place naturally and do not have a causal factor which is social, thus they are “undirected, unoriented, unanimated and unguided” (Goffman, 1974, p. 22). Inversely, social frameworks are used to understand the world and individual experiences, based on our understanding of social norms, expectations, and behaviour of others. These incorporate the “will, aim and controlling effort of a live agency” (Goffman, 1974, p. 22) and involve the motive and intent of the individual.

These conceptual frames structure an individual's perception of society. The frameworks we employ, along with the perspectives they instil in our interactions, significantly impact how we interpret, process, and disseminate information. Goffman's fundamental assumption is that individuals, consciously or subconsciously, effectively utilise these frameworks in their daily lives.

The study of framing has had a tremendous impact across social science disciplines. For example, in Social Psychology, framing theory has been used to study how people's perceptions of events are influenced by the way they are framed. In Political Science, framing theory is used to study how political elites frame issues and talk about them in public platforms, to influence mass opinion. The concept is also used in Marketing to study how companies attract customers by framing products in specific ways.

Framing theory is also employed in media reporting and communication studies, as it helps in analysing news discourse and examining how public discourse about issues is constructed. It studies how news items are framed and presented to the consumers, and how this presentation influences their perception and interpretation of the event. This is achieved by emphasising or highlighting specific events or presenting the news items within a pre-defined and narrow context, which guides the audience's perception and understanding of the information. This has also been referred to as 'second-level agenda setting', as they go beyond simply informing the audience about *what to think about* (agenda setting) to influencing *how they think about* the issue.

Pan and Kosicki (1993) classify four categories of framing devices used in news discourse: syntactical, script, thematic, and rhetorical structures.

- **Syntactical structure** refers to the sequential organisation of structural elements in a news piece such as the headline, lead, episodes, background, and closure. This could be visualised as an inverted pyramid arrangement where the importance of each element varies in descending order, with the headline having the highest potential to activate certain semantically related concepts in the reader's mind as it is the most prominent element of news articles and is likely

to be the first thing that readers see. This makes the headline one of the most powerful framing devices (van Dijk, 1988).

- **Script structures** refer to the story-like character in news writing which contains the 5 Ws and one H (who, what, when, where, why and how), that has the complete information of an event with all the drama, action, characters, and human emotions, much like a story recited by a novelist.
- **Thematic structures** are most evident in news pieces that centre on a specific issue or narrative, gathering and reporting on multiple events, actions, and statements connected to the topic. In these instances, a theme is subtly presented, with support provided through the journalist's observations, actions, or quotes from individuals involved.
- **Rhetorical structures** of news discourses describe the deliberate stylistic choices employed by journalists to achieve their intended communicative goals. These stylistic choices can manifest in various forms, including metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, vivid depictions, and visually compelling images. These rhetorical devices serve to enhance the effectiveness of news narratives and play a pivotal role in shaping and influencing the perceptions of the audience.

Framing theory has emerged as a valuable tool in media studies and news discourse, providing a critical lens through which to examine how information is presented and interpreted. By deconstructing the framing devices employed by media outlets, framing theory sheds light on the underlying assumptions, biases, and power dynamics that shape our understanding of current events and social issues.

### **3. Critical Discourse Analysis**

CDA involves a wide range of approaches used in the study of language, ideology, and power, and highlights the emancipatory potential of discourse analysis. It delves into how discourses are produced and maintained within specific social, political, and

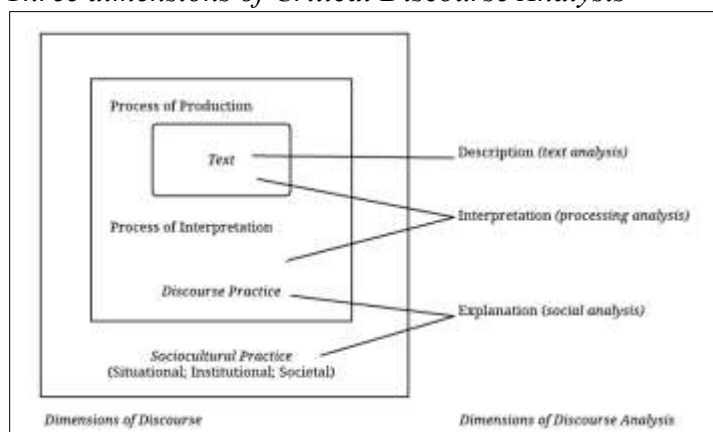
historical contexts and uncovers the subtle yet profound ways in which language can reinforce power structures and marginalise certain groups.

Three scholars and their research contributed significantly to the theory of CDA – Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, and Teun van Dijk. As stated by van Dijk, CDA is “... discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (2015, p. 466).

Fairclough in his seminal work *Language and Power* (1989) propounded a three-dimensional model that has been recognised as the most complete and central method of CDA. It states that the text cannot be isolated from the discursive practices (production, distribution, and consumption) and the social context where it is produced (Tian, 2018). This model can be visualised as three boxes, each within the other. The innermost box contains the text, surrounded by discourse practice, and ultimately enveloped by socio-cultural practice (Figure 4). He identifies three stages of doing CDA, wherein the first stage is the description of the text, followed by an interpretation of the text embedded in the discursive practices, and finally an explanation of the relationship between the discursive practices and the sociocultural context.

#### Figure 4

*Three dimensions of Critical Discourse Analysis*



Note: Sourced from Fairclough, 1992 as mentioned in Tian, 2018, p. 435

**Textual Analysis:** This dimension focuses on analysing the linguistic features of texts, including words, phrases, grammar, and rhetorical structures. It involves identifying linguistic elements such as vocabulary choice, metaphors, modality, and presuppositions. Textual analysis aims to uncover how language is used to construct meanings, represent social actors, and convey ideologies. For instance, identifying how specific words or phrases may subtly reinforce power dynamics or cultural norms.

**Discourse Practices:** The second dimension examines the production and consumption of texts in specific contexts. It studies how texts are *produced* (who produces the texts/why did they do it, etc.), *circulated* (how are they being circulated/who accesses them), and *consumed* (how are they understood or interpreted/how do they respond to them). It analyses the role of institutions, social actors, and power relations in shaping discourses.

**Socio-Cultural Practices:** This third dimension focuses on the broader social, political, and historical contexts in which texts and discourse practices are embedded. It analyses how language use reflects and reproduces social structures, ideologies, and power relations in society.

These three dimensions are interconnected and mutually constitutive in CDA. Textual characteristics are influenced by discourse practices, which are shaped by broader socio-cultural processes. Incorporating CDA to analyse texts examines how lexical choices are influenced by power structures, social contexts, and ideologies. For this reason, CDA has been widely adopted across disciplines to study a vast array of societal issues, such as in media representation, political discourse, legal discourse, advertising practices, and news reporting.

Newspapers have the potential to inform and influence the way people think about an issue. Although news articles attempt to maintain an appearance of objectivity and fairness, they wittingly or unwittingly incorporate ideological elements, that subtly influence the way audiences perceive and interpret information. This is dependent on

the lexical choices employed in the news report, the usage of direct or indirect speech as the source, and the social functions of the news discourse.

Thus, language is not merely a neutral tool for communication; rather, it is a powerful tool that can be used to maintain or challenge power relations and CDA assists in uncovering these power relations and unveiling hidden biases. By employing CDA in newspaper analysis, we can gain a deeper understanding of how language is used to shape our perceptions of the world and to promote a more informed and critical public discourse.

# Chapter V

## Analytical Premise: A Methodological Note

This study undertakes a detailed examination of the newspaper reports and editorials published during the first four months of the crisis in Manipur. It exclusively studies traditional media, particularly newspapers, and does not include new forms of media, such as digital spaces and social media, into its scope for two reasons. Firstly, the ethical guidelines established by journalist guilds and regulatory bodies such as the PCI provides a robust framework for assessing the conduct of newspapers. In contrast, the relative lack of any restrictions or standards for publishing posts, images and videos on social media complicates any meaningful comparative analysis between traditional media and new forms of media. Secondly, newspapers have gained trust and credibility among their readers over decades because of which the readers take information presented in the newspapers at face value, whereas information received from social media is often viewed with a lot of scepticism and social media users are encouraged to fact-check the credibility of the information before sharing it with others. Hence, if newspapers publish biased and inaccurate information, it will be perceived as a significant breach of public trust and journalistic integrity. For these reasons, the study will exclusively focus on five national newspapers and employ the method of content analysis to scrutinise the coverage of the ongoing crisis in Manipur. The five leading national newspapers, which form the subject matter of this study, are *The Hindu*, *The Times of India*, *The Indian Express*, *The Telegraph*, and *Hindustan Times*.

### 1. Sampling and Samples

The study began with a comprehensive review of newspapers having a national readership and printed outside the state of Manipur, focusing on their coverage of the crisis. Initially, the data was gathered from nine newspapers. Subsequent preliminary analysis prompted a deliberate narrowing of focus to five newspapers due to their

notably extensive coverage of the issue in comparison to others. These five newspapers are published from multiple centres across various major cities nationwide and have wide circulation. They are *The Hindu*, *The Indian Express*, *The Times of India*, *The Telegraph*, and *Hindustan Times*. A total of 588 newspaper reports were systematically collected from these newspapers for May and June of 2023, documented in Tables 1, 2, and 3. The analysis revealed that 281 reports in May and 307 reports in June were printed, contributing to a cumulative count of 588 news reports for both months across the front page and inside pages of the newspapers. Notably, *The Hindu* covered the highest number of reports about the Manipur crisis (159), followed by *The Indian Express* (136). In comparison, *The Telegraph* published the fewest reports (75) among the five newspapers. Additionally, *Hindustan Times* featured the most front-page articles about the crisis in both months.

**Table 1**

*News Reports on the Manipur Crisis in May*

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Front Page</b>	<b>Inside News</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
The Hindu	16	58	74
The Indian Express	19	46	65
The Times of India	24	30	54
The Telegraph	14	25	39
Hindustan Times	24	25	49
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>281</b>

**Table 2***News Reports on the Manipur Crisis in June*

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Front Page</b>	<b>Inside News</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
The Hindu	18	67	85
The Indian Express	25	46	71
The Times of India	18	53	71
The Telegraph	17	19	36
Hindustan Times	26	18	44
<b>TOTAL</b>	104	203	307

**Table 3***Cumulative News Reports of Two Months of the Manipur Crisis (May and June)*

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Front Page</b>	<b>Inside News</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
The Hindu	34	125	159
The Indian Express	44	92	136
The Times of India	42	83	125
The Telegraph	31	44	75
Hindustan Times	50	43	93
<b>TOTAL</b>	201	387	588

The study also looked at the opinion pieces and articles written about the crisis in these two months across five newspapers (see Table 4). Overall, there were 26 Editorials, 23 Editorial Articles, and 6 Op-Eds published in these newspapers during this time. Among these, *The Indian Express* stood out by printing the highest number of Editorials (9) and Op-eds (3).

To extend the study’s scope, newspaper reports in 2023 from July (596 reports) and August (415 reports) were also collected, along with the reports from May and June (588 cumulatively), resulting in a total number of 1,599 news reports (see Table 5). Of these, 588 reports appeared on the front page of the newspaper while 1,011 appeared on other pages. *The Hindu* published the highest number of reports at 383 in total, both on the front page (159 reports) and on other pages (224 reports), followed by *The Times of India*, which published 377 reports in total, including 125 on the front page and 252 on other pages. *The Telegraph* published the least number of news reports for the first four months, a total of 238 news reports of which 75 appeared on the front page and the rest 163 appeared on other pages.

From this dataset, two independent random samples were drawn and analysed to discern the emergent patterns in news reporting of the clashes. Comparative analyses were then conducted between these samples to identify discrepancies or similarities in reporting patterns. Furthermore, comparisons were made between the sampled data and the entirety of unsampled news reports of May and June to enhance objectivity and validate the study’s findings.

**Table 4**

*Number of Editorials, Editorial Articles, OP-ED (May and June)*

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Editorial (May - June)</b>	<b>Editorial Articles (May - June)</b>	<b>Op-Ed (May - June)</b>
The Hindu	5	6	3
The Indian Express	9	4	3
The Times of India	3	5	-
The Telegraph	3	2	-
Hindustan Times	6	6	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	26	23	6

**Table 5**

*Cumulative News Reports of Four Months of the Manipur Crisis (May, June, July, and August)*

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Front Page</b>	<b>Inside News</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
The Hindu	159	224	383
The Indian Express	136	197	333
The Times of India	125	252	377
The Telegraph	75	163	238
Hindustan Times	93	175	268
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>588</b>	<b>1,011</b>	<b>1,599</b>

## **2. Content Analysis**

Content analysis of news reports involves systematic and rigorous examination of journalistic content to discern prevalent themes, language use, and adherence to ethical codes set by bodies such as the PCI and the EGI. Berelson (1952) defines content analysis as "... a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (p. 18). By stating that content analysis is objective and systematic, it emphasises the replicability and the validity of the method. While content analysis is a quantitative method, it is not solely limited to counting frequency, it rather delves into deeper meanings, uncovering latent constructs and patterns in messages (Neuendorf, 2004). While Berelson emphasises the limits of content analysis as analysing only the quantitative and manifest aspects of a text, Krippendorff (2019) takes it a step further to include the qualitative as well as the latent aspects of a text acknowledging the variability in individual perceptions of what constitutes as manifest.

Closely associated with content analysis is discourse analysis. While content analysis focuses on objective and fixed reality, discourse analysis focuses on the intersubjective construction of reality. It looks at the discursive structures, practices, and their connections to power dynamics. Discourse analysis and content analysis are seen as compatible methods that could benefit from each other. While discourse analysis provides rich contextual clues for content analysis and contributes to understanding the broader picture, content analysis offers reliability and patterns for further investigation in discourse analysis (Neuendorf, 2004).

However, this study adopts CDA, which delves deeper into language's entrenchment of power dynamics, ideologies, and societal injustices. Where traditional discourse analysis broadly studies language structures, power relations, and cultural norms, CDA goes deeper, probing power dynamics, ideologies, and societal inequalities within language. It aims to uncover and contest these structures, situated within the critical school of thought, advocating for societal change by revealing concealed power dynamics and challenging dominant narratives. The study also analyses the framing devices employed in newspaper reports. These are the devices used to shape the way information is presented and interpreted.

# Chapter VI

## News: Selective and Bias Reportage

The primary task of the present study is to see whether the coverage of the crisis in Manipur by the ‘national’ media is, to quote from the *Norms of Journalistic Conduct* issued by the PCI (2022), “fair, accurate, unbiased, sober and decent”. In order to achieve this, an examination of the recurring patterns and emerging themes of the news items has been carried out by deploying methods informed by content analysis and CDA. This chapter presents the salient findings of the study based on the above methods. In the next few pages, the results of the *Content Analysis*, which is an “objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (see Chapter V), will be presented, followed by those insights provided by the CDA.

### 1. Truth Truncated: News as Views

One key aspect of the news reports is the ways in which the events get reported. This modality affects the issues of accuracy and fairness of the news reportage. These features may manifest in the acts of commission and omissions, that is, events and facts that get reported and those that are left out. Secondly, the nature of the events may be construed differently depending on the lexical choices employed in the news items. The study finds some discernible patterns in this regard that indicate shortcomings and perceptible biases in the ways in which the crisis in Manipur has been covered by the ‘national’ newspapers.

**1.1 The Numbers Speak: Examining Frequency of Sources Quoted in Newspaper Content**

One of the key patterns that has been noted in the news reportage is the extent of the ‘sources’ being quoted in the news items. It has been found that the ‘Kuki’<sup>6</sup> sources are quoted far more than the Meitei sources in the news reports. This is true in the non-sample study (covering all the news published in May and June of 2023), Sample 1 and Sample 2 (covering randomly selected news published in four months, i.e., May to August of 2023), and news reports of major events during the crisis.

**Table 6**

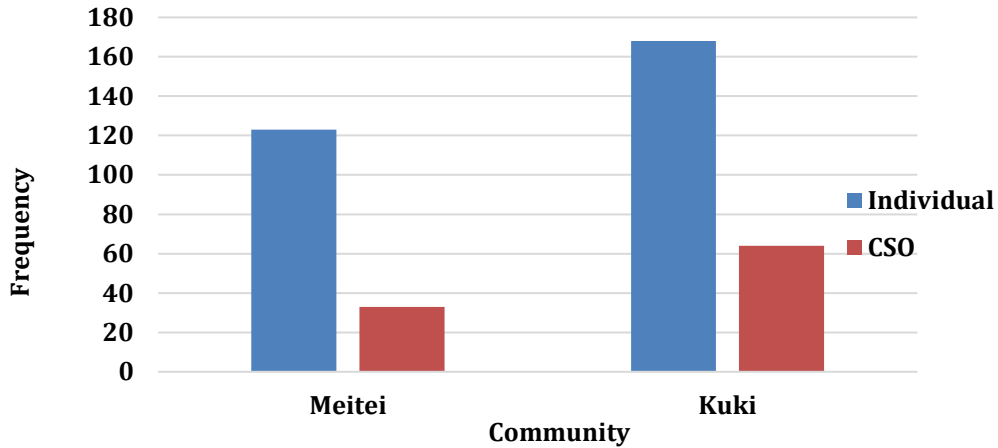
*Number of Sources Quoted (Non-sample)*

Newspaper	Meitei			Kuki		
	Individual	CSO	Total Sources & %	Individual	CSO	Total Sources & %
The Hindu	15	4	19	34	8	42
The Indian Express	39	3	42	90	19	109
The Times of India	15	2	17	2	-	2
The Telegraph	41	15	56	18	17	35
Hindustan Times	13	9	22	24	20	44
<b>Total</b>	123	33	156	168	64	232
<b>Statements</b>			(40.2%)			(59.8%)
<b>Grand Total</b>				<b>388</b>		

<sup>6</sup>‘Kuki’ is being deployed in this study rather than using various hyphenated expressions such as Kuki-Hmar-Zomi tribes.

**Figure 5**

*Number of sources quoted (Non-sample)*



As can be seen from Table 6, a total of 388 statements made by individual citizens or civil society organisations (hereafter CSO) have been quoted as sources in the news published in May and June. Out of these, 156 statements were made by the individual citizens (123 statements) and the CSOs (33 statements) belonging to the Meitei community while the majority of the statements, i.e., 232 were made by individuals (168 statements) and the CSOs (64 statements) belonging to the ‘Kuki’ community. This differential pattern in the way ‘Kuki’ and Meitei sources are being cited in the news items is found to be statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 14.887$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

A similar pattern has also been noted in news samples that were randomly selected out of the 1,599 news reports covering the Manipur mayhem from May to August of 2023. In Sample 1, a total of 157 statements made by individual citizens or CSOs have been quoted as sources in the news (Table 7). Out of these statements, 52 statements are those made by the Meitei community (31 statements by individual citizens and 21 statements by the CSOs) and 105 statements were made by individual citizens (53 statements) and the CSOs (52 statements) belong to the ‘Kuki’ community. This differential pattern is also found to be statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 17.892$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Similarly, in the second sample, which was also selected randomly from the 1,599 news across the four months (May to August), a total of 131 statements made by individual

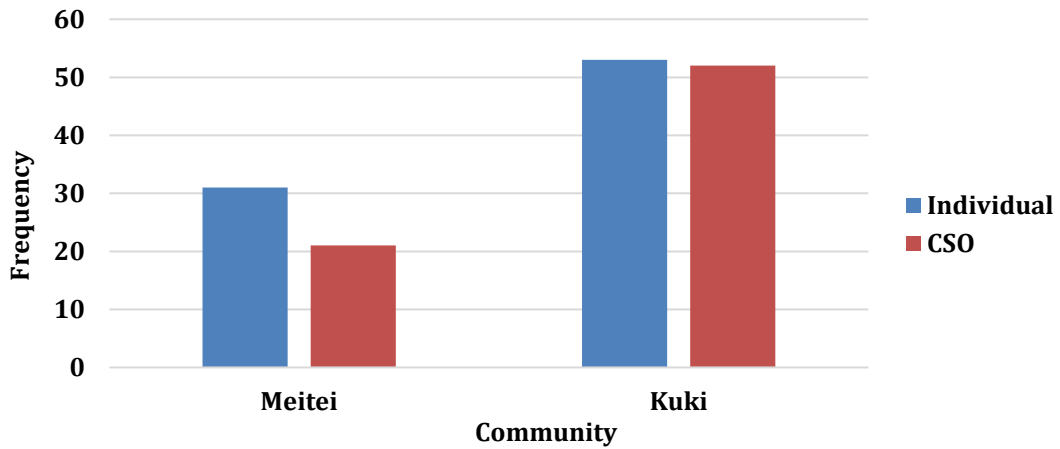
citizens or CSOs have been quoted as sources in the news (Table 8). Out of these statements, 42 statements are those made by the Meitei community (22 statements by individual citizens and 20 statements by the CSOs), and 89 statements are made by the ‘Kuki’ community (54 statements by individual citizens and 35 statements by the CSOs). This differential pattern is also found to be statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 16.863$ ,  $p < 0.05$ )

**Table 7**  
*Number of Sources Quoted (Sample 1)*

Newspaper	Meitei			Kuki		
	Individual	CSO	Total Sources & %	Individual	CSO	Total Sources & %
The Hindu	0	5	5	2	12	14
The Indian Express	9	3	12	18	8	26
The Times of India	8	2	10	4	4	8
The Telegraph	13	3	16	23	15	38
Hindustan Times	1	8	9	6	13	19
<b>Total Statements</b>	31	21	52 (33.1%)	53	52	105 (66.9%)
<b>Grand Total</b>				<b>157</b>		

**Figure 6**

*Number of sources quoted (Sample 1)*



This differential citation of sources differs from one newspaper to another. In the non-sample study, three out of the five newspapers have higher citations of Kuki sources while the remaining two have more Meitei citations. *The Indian Express* has the highest citation of ‘Kuki’ sources while *The Telegraph* has the highest citation of Meitei sources. *The Times of India* has the lowest citation of both Meitei and ‘Kuki’ sources.

However, in Sample 1 and Sample 2, four out of the five newspapers have more ‘Kuki’ sources quoted than Meiteis. *The Telegraph*, which has the highest citation of Meitei sources in the non-sample study, emerges as the newspaper that has the highest citation of ‘Kuki’ sources in Sample 1 and Sample 2, just above *The Indian Express* which has the second highest citation of ‘Kuki’ sources. *The Times of India* has the lowest citation of ‘Kuki’ sources in non-sample, Sample 1, and Sample 2. *The Hindu* has the lowest citation of Meitei sources in both Sample 1 and Sample 2.

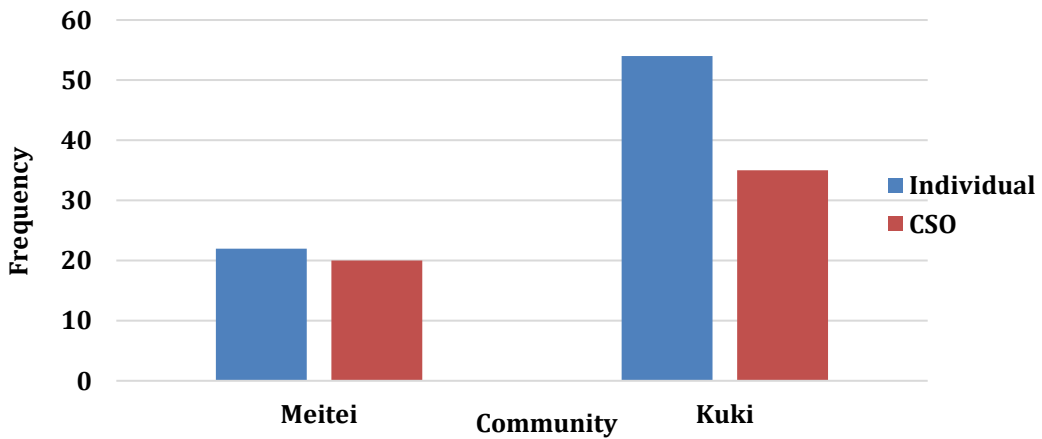
**Table 8**

*Number of Sources Quoted (Sample 2)*

Newspaper	Meitei			Kuki		
	Individual	CSO	Total Sources & %	Individual	CSO	Total Sources & %
The Hindu	1	0	1	6	4	10
The Indian Express	7	8	15	21	0	21
The Times of India	5	3	8	2	4	6
The Telegraph	0	3	3	10	21	31
Hindustan Times	9	6	15	15	6	21
<b>Total Statements</b>	22	20	42 (32.1%)	54	35	89 (67.9%)
<b>Grand Total</b>				<b>131</b>		

**Figure 7**

*Number of sources quoted (Sample 2)*



An additional set of samples of the major incidents during the four months, along with the cited sources within these reports was analysed as part of this study (Table 9). Six such incidents were selected based on the intensity of the crimes committed and the shockwave that these incidents sent through the state and beyond. These include: (i) The attack on the Kuki MLA (ii) The incident in Iroishemba involving a mob attack on an ambulance (iii) The attack inside the church in Khamenlok resulting in the death of nine Meiteis (iv) The attack in Khoijumantabi resulting in the deaths of three Meiteis and the beheading of a Kuki individual (v) The incident of two Kuki women paraded naked (vi) The incident in Kwakta resulting in the death of at least five Meiteis.

In this sample of news reports about 6 major incidents, a total of 30 statements made by individual citizens or CSOs have been quoted as sources in the news (Table 9). Out of these, 5 statements are those made by the Meitei community (2 statements by individual citizens and 3 statements by the CSOs), and 25 statements are those made by the 'Kuki' community (20 statements by individual citizens and 5 statements by the CSOs). This differential pattern is also found to be statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 13.333$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

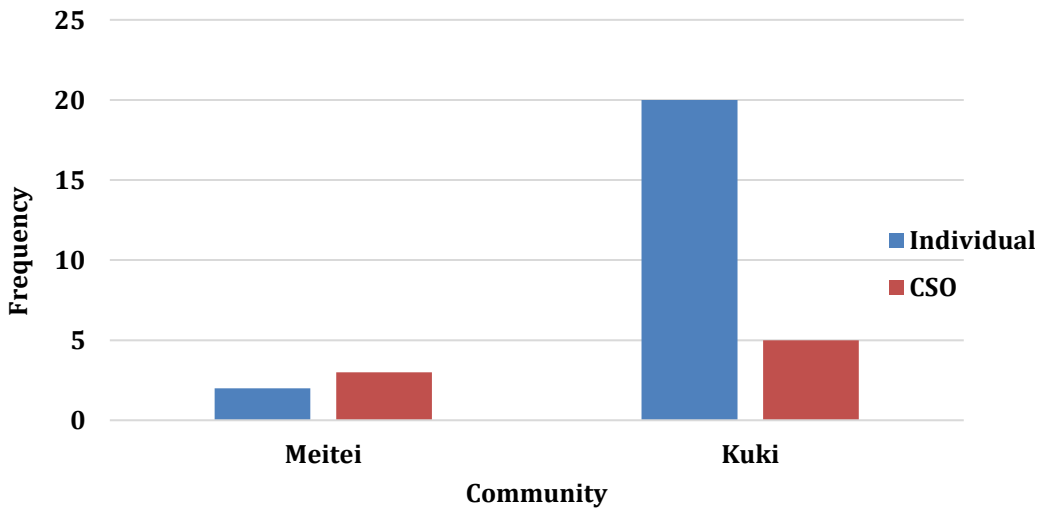
**Table 9**

*Number of Sources Quoted (Major Incidents)*

Newspaper	Meitei			Kuki		Total Sources & %
	Individual	CSO	Total Sources & %	Individual	CSO	
The Hindu	0	0	0	4	0	4
The Indian Express	1	0	1	10	0	10
The Times of India	0	0	0	5	2	7
The Telegraph	0	3	3	1	3	4
Hindustan Times	1	0	1	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	2	3	5	20	5	25
<b>Statements</b>			(16.67%)			(83.33%)
<b>Grand Total</b>				<b>30</b>		

**Figure 8**

*Number of sources quoted (Major incidents)*



## **1.2 Reading Between the Lines: Qualitative Analysis of Sources Quoted in Newspaper Narratives**

This pattern of citation of sources in the news indicates the presence of a particular vantage point in the reportage. In other words, the higher the citation of statements by a particular community in the news items, the more likely that the events have been reported from the vantage point of that community. In short, the reportage on the Manipur crisis by the ‘national’ media is not fair insofar as it privileges the experiences of the ‘Kukis’ over that of the Meiteis.

In fact, a closer look at the news items reveals this aspect. In line with the above pattern of citation of sources, news is structured in ways that privilege the experience of one community at the expense of another. Similarly, linguistic strategies are also employed to present reality in certain ways to hide reality or distort facts. The reportage on the infamous violence of 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2023 in which three Meitei and one Hmar villagers were killed stands as one representative example of such distortions (Figure 9).

*The Indian Express*, which has the highest number of citations of ‘Kuki’ sources amongst the five newspapers, reported this incident in a news item titled, “4 more killed as Manipur violence continues, Kukis lift NH blockade”, a report filed by its correspondent from Guwahati (*The Indian Express*, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2023, p. 7). This news item has 10 paragraphs and three are dedicated to the violent incident. Out of the three paragraphs, two are devoted to narrating the experience of the violence suffered by the ‘tribal’ community, including the horrendous act of beheading of a Hmar man.

## Figure 9

*Khoijumantabi incident,*

*The Indian Express, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2023, p. 7*

# 4 more killed as Manipur violence continues, Kukis lift NH blockade

KUKI REBEL groups announced on Sunday that they would lift the two-month-long blockade of the national highway in Manipur's Kangpokpi district, paving the way for the reopening of a critical lifeline of the state. However, incidents of violence continued in Manipur, with at least four people having been killed on Sunday, including one case where police said the victim had been beheaded.

National Highway-2, connecting Imphal with Dimapur in Nagaland, has been blockaded since violence broke out in Manipur on May 3, impacting the flow of essential supplies. The blockade had been temporarily lifted in early June after Union Home Minister Amit Shah made an appeal during his visit to the state. It was, however, reimposed a few days later when three people from the Kuki-Zomi community were killed in Kangpokpi district on June 9.

In a statement issued on Sunday, the United People's Front and the Kuki National Organisation – both of which come under the 2008 Suspension of Operations agreement with the Centre and the state – said the blockade would be lifted with immediate effect “to ensure uninterrupted supply of essential commodities in the state”. The statement said the decision was taken in view of Shah’s “deep concern to restore peace and harmony in the state and [to] alleviate the plight of people in general”.

In the statement, the groups also said they “appreciate” that central forces have been deployed in most areas at the border of the hills and the valley, and that they would ensure that their volunteers are withdrawn from all such places once the “deploy-

ment of central forces is completed in all vulnerable areas”.

The statement also made an appeal to all “peace-loving organisations and citizens in the state of Manipur” to “reciprocate” their gesture and “take steps towards peace and communal harmony in the state”.

The previous evening, Chief Minister Biren Singh had said that he had spoken to members of the Kuki community that day in an effort to work towards peace and reconciliation.

“I spoke to some brothers and sisters from the Kuki community on the telephone, and said that what has happened has happened. Now is the time to forgive and forget, reconcile and live together,” he had said on Saturday evening, speaking to ANI.

However, the situation continued to remain volatile in the state. A man, identified as David Thiek, was killed and beheaded in Langza – a Hmar-Kuki village – in Churachandpur district on Sunday. According to local residents, the village came under attack in the early hours of Sunday, and while most of the village residents fled, a few village volunteers stayed back. Thiek, one of the volunteers, was killed during the attack.

“They started burning the villages at 3–4 am. We consist of around 23–24 villages, and we were told by our Hmar chief to vacate the villages and take our important documents. However, to prevent our houses from getting looted, we had kept three to four young men to guard the villages,” a resident said. Police confirmed that the man had been beheaded.

In Khoijumantabi in Bishnupur district in the valley, at the border with the hill district of Churachandpur, three people from the Meitei community died in an incident of firing. The deceased were identified as Ningombam Ibomcha (34), Naorem Rajkumar (26) and Haobam Ibocha (44).

The first of the two paragraphs talks about the violence at “Langza”, identified as a “Hmar-Kuki village” in “Churachandpur district”, which was “under attack” and how one “village volunteer” named David Thiek was “killed” and “beheaded”. The second paragraph, consisting of four sentences, has a citation of a source (quoted in the form of direct speech consisting of three sentences) by one of the (tribal) villagers, narrating how their villages were “under attack” and the attackers (“they” meaning Meiteis) “started burning” the villages in the wee hours of 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2023.

In contrast to the above two paragraphs (134 words), the last one consists of two sentences (41 words). The first sentence speaks about “three people from the Meitei community died in an incident of firing” in a place identified as “Khoijumantabi in Bishnupur district in the valley, at the border with the hill district of Churachandpur.” The last sentence identified those who “died” in the

“incident of firing.” A critical look at this news item through the lens of framing theory and CDA (see Chapter IV) reveals the deep-seated bias. First, the news is framed in the

**‘inverse pyramid’** style in which information is presented in descending order of importance.

The sequence and number of paragraphs (the initial two) which consist of two-thirds of the paragraphs dealing with the news on the violence mentioned in the headline, along with the number of sentences (8 out of 10 sentences) and the number of words (134 out of 175 words) — all deal with the experiences of the ‘Hmar-Kuki’ (tribal) in the reported violence. In contrast to this, only the last paragraph, consisting of two sentences in 41 words, speaks of the experience of violence on the Meiteis.

These are elements that structure the ‘news’ in an **‘inverse pyramid’** that presents ‘reality’ by giving importance to the experiences of one community (‘Kuki’) at the expense of the other community (Meitei). The above framing of the news is not the only way such biased reporting is adopted. It is also simultaneously pursued by deploying linguistic strategies. For instance, the loss of life of the ‘Kuki’ (or tribal) is described as ‘killed’ and that of the Meitei is ‘died’. The former implies the end of life which is a product of an intentional act of some people who have deliberately put an end to life, and hence the loss of life is presumably not only untimely but also unnatural and unjust. Given the context of the ongoing crisis, the identity of those people who have brought about such a loss of life is tangibly hinted at in the news, namely the Meiteis.

In contrast, the loss of life of the Meiteis in this news is “died”, a word that does not necessarily implicate someone’s act that has brought about that loss of life, and even when some acts of some people are alluded to (“firing incident”), it does not carry the meaning of an intentional act that deliberately seeks to put an end to life. To say “died in an incident of firing” is a generic expression; it fails to clarify what the firing incident involved, who fired, and other pertinent details. It deflects the gaze away from the ‘Kukis’, thereby saving them from implicating in the death of the three Meiteis, who, in reality, were killed by the ‘Kukis’.

This use of the linguistic strategy and the manner in which the news is framed is complemented by the invocation of spaces (“*in Churachandpur district*” vs. “*in Bishnupur district*”/“*border*”) to give the impression of these two instances as

unrelated. The fact is the attack on the ‘Hmar-Kuki’ villages and the killing of David Theik were a result of a ‘retaliatory’ violence that followed the killing of the three Meiteis by the ‘Kukis’ earlier in the night.

Incidentally, other newspapers that reported on the same incident acknowledged the connection between the two incidents (“Three killed; beheading in revenge attack”, *The Telegraph*, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2023, p.1). Even while connecting the two instances of violence, most of these reports did not cite any Meitei source but all these other reports do quote ‘Kuki’ sources. For instance, in the above report, *The Telegraph* cited a newly founded ‘Kuki’ CSO called ITLF (The Indigenous Tribal Leaders’ Forum).

On 3<sup>rd</sup> July, *The Hindu* also covered this incident, where a similar kind of biased reporting was observed. The news titled “Four killed in fresh violence in Manipur”, runs on the front page and is continued on the 10<sup>th</sup> page and consists of 10 paragraphs and 521 words (Figure 10).

The news begins by stating “... *three villagers in Bishnupur, adjoining Churachandpur, were killed in an unprovoked attack, and a village volunteer was killed when the Kuki-Zo tribal villages of Langza and Chinglangmei were attacked in retaliation.*” One can observe that while the identities of the three villagers were not mentioned, it is stated that the village volunteer belonged to the ‘Kuki-Zo’ villages, thereby implying that the victim himself was ‘Kuki’. Although the three villagers from Bishnupur were Meiteis, there is no mention of their community, while only the victim from the ‘Kuki’ community was identified. This is clear evidence of the under-reporting of Meitei victims, as has also been detailed in Tables 13, 14, and 15 below. Although, unlike *The Indian Express* article which presents the two incidents as disjointed separate incidents, the article of *The Hindu* mentions the attack on the Kuki volunteer was “*in retaliation.*”

Figure 10

*Khoijumantabi incident, The Hindu, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2023, p. 1, contd p. 10*

## Four killed in fresh violence in Manipur

At least four men were killed in a fresh round of violence in Manipur on Sunday. The police said that three villagers in Bishnupur, adjoining Churachandpur, were killed in an unprovoked attack, and a village volunteer was killed when the Kuki-Zo tribal villages of Langza and

Chinglangmei were attacked in retaliation.

Superintendent of Police, Bishnupur, Heisnam Balram Singh said that around five minutes past midnight, bunkers set up by villagers near Khujuma Tabi, a Meitei village, were attacked by armed miscreants.

**CONTINUED ON**  
» PAGE 10

## Four killed in fresh riots in Manipur districts

"Three village guards were killed by the miscreants who are suspected to have come from the hill areas. By the time the police reached the spot, they had left but took vantage positions and an exchange of fire took place," Mr. Singh told *The Hindu*. The village runs along the State Highway. Following the incident, a large number of agitated people came out and stormed the nearby Kuki villages of Langza and Chinglangmei in Churachandpur. A village volunteer was killed then.

The Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF) said that a church was razed to the ground in the attack that happened around midnight.

"The police teams of Bishnupur and Churachandpur are coordinating to assess the scale of violence," Mr. Singh said. He added that locals took the three bodies to Kumbi legislator Sanasam Premchandra Singh's residence. Chief Minister N. Biren Singh visited the area. Churachandpur SP Karthik Malladi could not be reached for comments. A villager from the area told *The Hindu* over the phone that the bunkers put up by the Meitei and the Kuki-Zo villages are barely a few hundred metres apart.

"The Meitei checkpost (bunker) is at a height, they first fired upon the Kuki bunker near Langza village on the opposite side. The Kuki parties from the two bunkers of Langza and Ganaphai pushed back the attackers and in the ensuing fire, three men were killed," Nehngam, a villager said.

He said the Langza village was burnt down and a youth identified as David Thiek was set ablaze. "His head was severed, put up for display and body burnt to ashes. All we could retrieve were his bones," he said.

As many as 138 people have been killed and over 60,000 displaced since May 3, when the ethnic violence between the Kuki and Meitei communities erupted. Since the violence, the areas in the foothills, with adjacent Kuki and Meitei settlements, have been turned into buffer zones where Central forces have been deployed.

Meanwhile, the United People's Front (UPF) and Kuki National Organisation (KNO), the umbrella organisation of the 24 Kuki insurgent groups in a Suspension of Operations (SoO) pact with the government, said on Sunday that they have decided to lift the blockade at Kangpokpi with immediate effect to ensure uninterrupted supply of essential commodities in the State.

It said the decision was taken "notwithstanding the anger and anguish of the Kuki Zo people" and keeping in view Union Home Minister Amit Shah's deep concern to restore peace and harmony in the State. The decision was taken after wide-ranging consultations with Civil Society Organisations, village chiefs, youth and women leaders on several occasions, it said.

The first source quoted in this news is the Superintendent of Police, Bishnupur, and he also mentioned that the bunkers set up by villagers near Khoijumantabi, was “*attacked by armed miscreants.*” In the third paragraph, the police officer states, “... *three village guards were killed by the miscreants who are suspected to have come from the hill areas.*” Here, although the attack was on Meitei villagers and it is implicit that the perpetrators belonged to the Kuki community, the identities of the attackers have not been disclosed. The report then mentions the retaliatory attack on the Kuki villages in Churachandpur where the village volunteer was killed.

In the next paragraph, tribal civil society organisation such as the ITLF has been quoted in the news. It stated, “*a church was razed to the ground*” during the attacks. In the same and following paragraphs, two villagers (possibly Kukis) are also quoted who claimed that “*the bunkers put up by the Meitei and the Kuki-Zo villages are barely few hundred metres apart*” and that the Meitei check post, which is at a height, “*first fired upon the Kuki bunker near Langza village on the opposite side. The Kuki parties from the two bunkers...pushed back the attackers and in the ensuing fire, three men were killed.*”

There are two issues with these claims. Firstly, it is in direct contrast to the statement made in the first paragraph, which claims that the three villagers were killed in an “*unprovoked attack.*” Secondly, while there have been possibly three ‘Kuki’ sources and one police source quoted so far, there has been no Meitei source in the report. In the following paragraphs, more ‘Kuki’ sources have been mentioned. This is further proof of the general tendency to quote more ‘Kuki’ sources during the coverage of the crisis, which has also been detailed above in Table 6 to Table 9.

In the seventh paragraph of the news, a ‘Kuki’ source details the brutality of the murder of the ‘Kuki’ villager named David Theik. He states, “... *his head was severed, put up for display and body burnt to ashes. All we could retrieve were his bones.*” This statement evokes strong emotions among the readers and caters to the overall victimology of the ‘Kukis’.

The ninth and tenth paragraphs of the news detail the Suspension of Operations pact between the government and the United People's Front (UPF) and Kuki National Organisation (KNO). The insurgent groups state "... *they have decided to lift the blockade at Kangpokpi with immediate effect to ensure uninterrupted supply of essential commodities in the State*" and that this decision was taken "... *not withstanding the anger and anguish of the Kuki Zo people.*" This presents the 'Kukis' as people having only good intentions for the welfare of Manipur, even though they have every right to be angry at the state for the horrors they have experienced. This one-sided portrayal not only underscores the good-will of the 'Kukis' amidst adversity but also implicitly suggests that they are the only community with legitimate reasons to be angry.

It goes without saying that such reportage on the ongoing violence in Manipur, wittingly or unwittingly, serves the interests of the narrative of one community ('Kuki') and undermines the experience of violence of another community (Meitei). Such journalistic practice is unethical, unprofessional, and clearly against the standards set up by the PCI (see Chapter III).

## **2. Tales of Victims and Perpetrators**

One of the biggest tragedies in this violence is the uprooting of people from their homesteads. Between 60,000 and 75,000 people have been reportedly rendered homeless due to this mayhem. Both the communities have suffered. A report, citing a government official, suggests that a total of 3,413 houses and 274 villages have been destroyed<sup>7</sup>. Out of these houses, 1,988 belonged to the Meiteis and 1,425 belonged to the 'Kukis'. Similarly, out of 274 villages, 158 belong to the Meiteis and 83 are dominated by the Kukis. The remaining 33 villages have been reported to be villages of mixed population. Even if the accuracy of the numbers cited in the *India Today NE* may not be exact figures, it nonetheless gives us a hint to the fact that both communities have suffered (Figure 11 and Figure 12).

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<sup>7</sup>Manipur Files: 1,988 Meitei homes, 1,425 'Kuki' homes, 17 temples and 221 churches destroyed. <https://www.indiatodayne.in/manipur/story/manipur-files-1988-meitei-homes-1425-kuki-homes-17-temples-and-221-churches-destroyed-569676-2023-06-02>

**Figure 11**

*View of damaged houses in Sugnu, Kakching District*



*Note: Sourced from *The Indian Express*, 14<sup>th</sup> June, p. 6*

However, the reports on the crisis in Manipur in the ‘national’ media seem to give us a different picture. There is a perceptible narrative to present one community as the sole and uncontaminated victim while demonising another community as the sole perpetrator. It is the negation of truth applicable to any communal or ethnic clashes, namely, it takes two hands to clap. As it has been noted in the preceding segment, reportage on the crisis in Manipur in the ‘national’ media, at least amongst a significant section, has wittingly or unwittingly perpetuated this myth.

## Figure 12

*A razed home at Langol Game Village in Imphal*



*Note: Sourced from *The Print*, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2023*

Incidentally, while reporting communal clashes, journalists by and large follow a standard way of not naming the community involved in the violence. This is irrespective of the fact that some do argue that this standard must not be applied while reporting violent clashes wherein one community is clearly the victim. In the present case, naming and identifying the community involved in the current crisis as either victims or perpetrators of the violence is not only noticeable but also portrays one community as the victim and another as the perpetrator (Figure 13).

**Figure 13**

*Selective identification of victims during the crisis*



Vehicles were set on fire during the violence in Imphal on Wednesday. Police resorted to tear gas shelling in most parts of the city to disperse the agitators. *By Praveen Das*

## Curfew in Manipur after rally against ST status turns violent

Mobile internet services suspended in state for five days

THE MANIPUR government imposed a curfew in most of the districts and suspended mobile internet services in the entire state for five days with immediate effect from Wednesday after a mass rally organized by the All Tribal Students' Union Manipur (AT-SUM) turned violent in an area bordering Bishnupur and Charaardpur districts.

The 'solidarity march' was held in protest against the demand for inclusion of the Meitei community in the Scheduled Tribe (ST) category, following an April 19 Manipur High Court directive.

On Wednesday afternoon, the rally organized in Charaardpur district turned violent when the demonstrators clashed with a group of people in an area bordering Bishnupur district. As per re-

ports, following the clashes, unidentified miscreants set fire to houses belonging to a particular group. The Indian Express reached out to the SP of Bishnupur district, but he did not respond.

Following the clash, sporadic incidents of violence were reported in several parts of the state, including capital Imphal. Subsequently, the government imposed a curfew in the majority of the 16 districts until further orders and suspended mobile internet services for five days. In Imphal city there were several reports of alleged attacks on homes belonging to tribal residents. The Kuki Baptist Convention Centre Church was vandalised and parts of it set on fire. The police resorted to tear gas shelling in most parts of Imphal, all late night.

Protest marches were carried out in all the hill districts.

Following the HC's directive on April 19 – to recommend inclusion of the Meitei/Meiteis com-

munity in the Scheduled Tribe list – the state's tribal groups had expressed their strong opposition.

Earlier in the day, Chief Minister N Biren Singh appealed for a dialogue to solve the issue. 'Things can be resolved through dialogue, instead of resorting to handbills and blockades,' Singh wrote on his Facebook page.

While the Meiteis have long demanded to be included in the ST list, the state's tribes – Nagas and Kukis – have strongly opposed it, arguing that it would further marginalise them. This rift is rooted in a deep faultline running between the valley (where Meiteis live) and the hills (inhabited by Nagas and Kukis). While the hills account for nine-tenths of the state's geographical area, they are sparsely populated, with most of the state's population concentrated in the valley. There has been a perception among the hill tribes that Meiteis wield more economic and political power.

A perusal of the news items on the typology of violence and the manner in which the victims and the perpetrators have been identified alludes to this practice. In the non-sample study, the destruction of houses is mentioned 108 times (Table 10). Out of this total number, the 'Kukis' have been identified as victims 31 times and the Meiteis have been identified as victims 18 times. In the case of 54 instances, the community of the victims was not identified while 5 instances were identified with people belonging to other communities, other than the Meitei and the 'Kuki'. A similar trend of reporting follows in the sample studies. In the first sample (Table 11), the 'Kukis' were identified as victims in 13 instances while the Meiteis were identified as victims in only one case.

*Note:* Sourced from *The Indian Express*, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2023, p. 9

In the case of 33 instances, the community of the victims was not identified while in one case, the victim was identified as one person belonging to other community other than the Meitei and the 'Kuki'.

Similarly, in the second sample (Table 12), the 'Kukis' were identified as victims in 12 instances while the Meiteis were identified in 7 cases. In the case of 29 instances, the community of the victims was not identified.

Thus, while reporting the destruction of houses, the community is not identified in a large number of cases. On the face of it, there seems a restraint as per the standard of journalistic practice. However, a closer look shows that when it comes to specific instances of violence, the victims and the perpetrators are identified. Figures 14, 15, 16, and 17 show the percentage breakdown of different communities being reported as victims and perpetrators of the destruction of houses and villages. Amongst those identified victims, there are more ‘Kukis’ than Meiteis. This tendency of identifying the ‘Kukis’ as victims is complemented by a corresponding trend of identifying more Meiteis than ‘Kukis’ as the perpetrators of the destruction of houses. This is contrary to the reported numbers of destroyed Meitei houses being more than those of the ‘Kukis’.

### **Typologies of violence**

**Table 10**

*Destruction of Houses and Villages (as Victim and Perpetrator) (Non-Sample)*

(\*Destruction includes burnt, vandalised, attacked)

Community	Destruction of Houses		Destruction of Villages	
	Victim	Perpetrator	Victim	Perpetrator
<b>Kuki</b>	31	04	14	01
<b>Meitei</b>	18	08	03	03
<b>Others</b>	05	13	-	01
<b>Unnamed</b>	54	83	04	16
<b>Total</b>	108	108	21	21

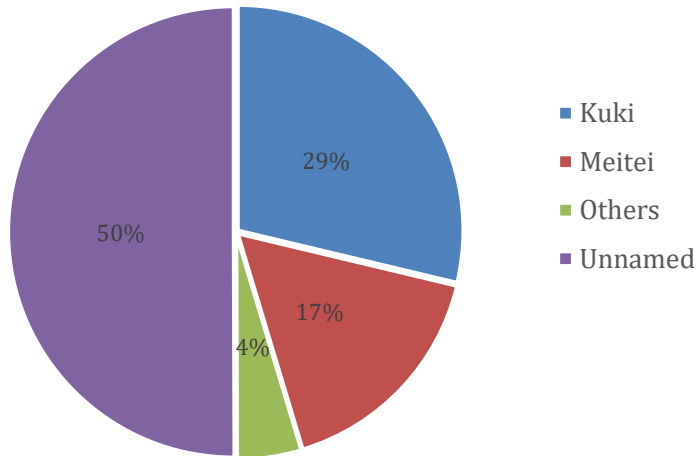
**Table 11***Destruction of Houses and Villages (as Victim and Perpetrator) (Sample 1)***(\*Destruction includes burnt, vandalised, and attacked)**

Community	Destruction of Houses		Destruction of Villages	
	Victim	Perpetrator	Victim	Perpetrator
<b>Kuki</b>	13	06	03	0
<b>Meitei</b>	1	04	0	02
<b>Others</b>	1	0	0	0
<b>Unnamed</b>	33	38	1	02
<b>Total</b>	48	48	4	4

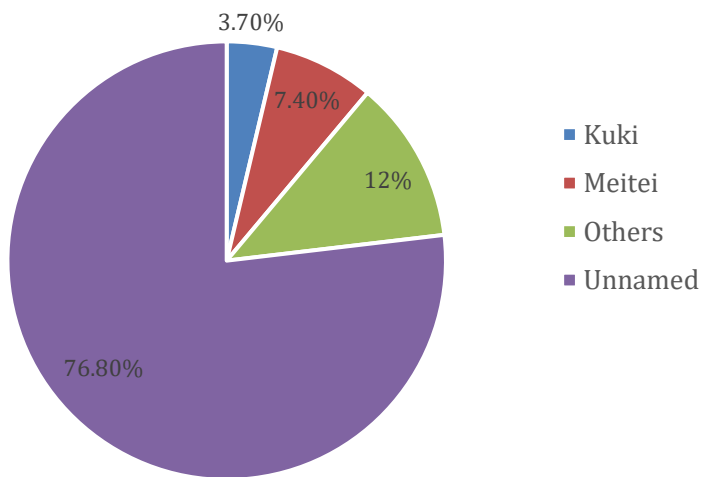
**Table 12***Destruction of Houses and Villages (as Victim and Perpetrator) (Sample 2)***(\*Destruction includes burnt, vandalised, and attacked)**

Community	Destruction of Houses		Destruction of Villages	
	Victim	Perpetrator	Victim	Perpetrator
<b>Kuki</b>	12	03	01	-
<b>Meitei</b>	07	03	-	-
<b>Others</b>	-	-	-	-
<b>Unnamed</b>	29	42	01	02
<b>Total</b>	48	48	2	2

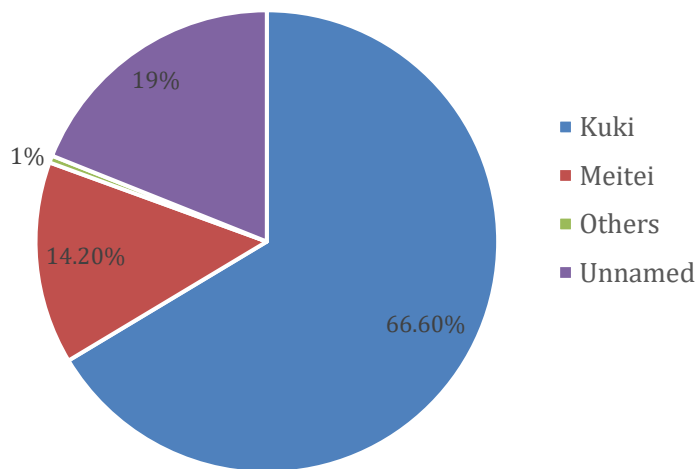
**Figure 14:** *Communities reported as victims of violence (Household)*



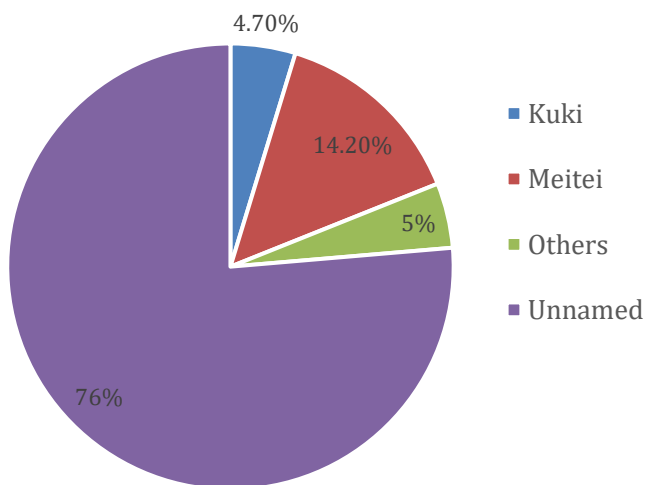
**Figure 15:** *Communities reported as perpetrators of violence (Household)*



**Figure 16:** *Communities reported as victims of violence (Villages)*



**Figure 17 :** *Communities reported as perpetrators of violence (Villages)*



Violence against individuals in both communities was a daily occurrence during the initial months of the crisis. The types of violence included not just physical assault and some cases of sexual violence but also murder and disposal of bodies in ditches, forests, and roads<sup>8</sup>. Table 13 highlights the instances of murder, physical assault, and sexual assault reported during the initial 2-month period (May and June). Out of the total 184 reports mentioning the murder of individuals, the majority of the reports do not mention the community of the victims (104) or perpetrators (150). However, among those reports in which identities are disclosed (80), ‘Kukis’ emerge as the most frequently identified victims in 44 reports, followed by Meiteis in 21 reports. Additionally, security personnel representing the state and the union were identified as victims in 2 and 7 reports, respectively.

Among those reports identifying the perpetrators of murder (34), others were mentioned in 20 reports, followed by Meiteis in 6 instances and ‘Kukis’ in 5 instances. Security personnel from the union were mentioned as perpetrators in 3 reports.

In cases of physical assault, 36 reports do not mention the identity of the victims. Out of 32 reports that disclosed the identity of the victims of physical assault, 13 reports identified others as victims. ‘Kukis’ were mentioned 13 times as victims, while Meiteis were mentioned 5 times.

Out of 68 reports related to physical violence, 56 reports do not name any specific community as perpetrators. Out of the 12 reports that identify the community of the perpetrators, 4 reports implicated Meiteis and 2 reports mentioned ‘Kukis’ as the perpetrators of physical assault. Notably, there were no reported incidents of sexual assault during this period.

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<sup>8</sup> Security advisor Kuldeep Singh while addressing the media on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2023 stated that 3 dead bodies were found buried in a 3-metre-deep ditch along with a vehicle at Churachandpur. All were said to be labourers of PWD. <https://www.aninews.in/news/national/general-news/death-toll-in-violence-hit-manipur-rises-to-71-says-security-advisor-kuldeep-singh20230513112544/>

Mutilated bodies of 3 youths found after heavy gunfire at Kuki Thowai village in Ukhru district on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2023. Police found the bodies while carrying out a thorough search in the surrounding villages and forest areas. <https://www.freepressjournal.in/india/manipur-violence-3-mutilated-dead-bodies-found-after-heavy-gunfire-in-ukhrul>

Figures 18, 19, 20, and 21 depict the percentage-wise breakdown of the communities reported as victims and perpetrators in cases of murders and physical assault. Due to the lack of mentions of sexual assault during this period, the study does not mention a percentage-wise breakdown of those figures.

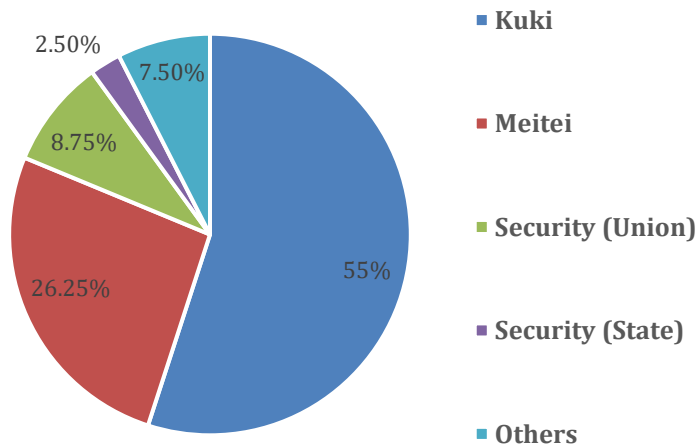
Out of the total reports that disclose the identity of victims and perpetrators, it is noted that ‘Kukis’ are identified as victims of murder (55%) and physical assault (40.62%) significantly more than Meiteis (26.25% and 15.62%, respectively). Contrarily, Meiteis are identified as perpetrators of murder (17.64%) and physical assault (33.33%) significantly more than ‘Kukis’ (14.7% and 16.66%, respectively).

**Table 13**

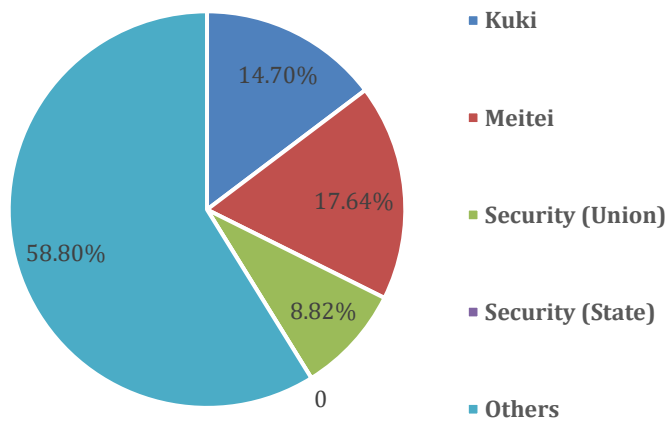
*Murder, Physical Assault, Sexual Assault (as Victim and Perpetrator) (Non-Sample)*

Types of Violence	Murder		Physical Assault		Sexual Assault	
	Victim	Perpetrator	Victim	Perpetrator	Victim	Perpetrator
<b>Kuki</b>	44	5	13	2	0	0
<b>Meitei</b>	21	6	5	4	0	0
<b>Security (Union)</b>	7	3	1	0	0	0
<b>Security (State)</b>	2	0	-	0	0	0
<b>Others</b>	6	20	13	6	0	0
<b>Unnamed</b>	104	150	36	56	0	0
<b>Total</b>	184	184	68	68	0	0

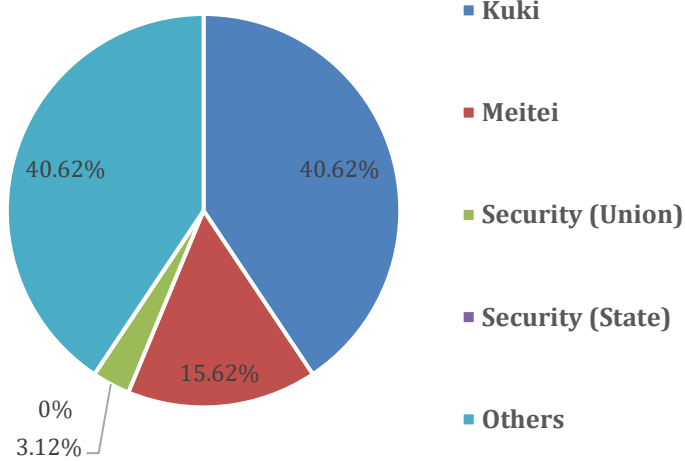
**Figure 18:** *Communities reported as victims of murder (Non-sample)*



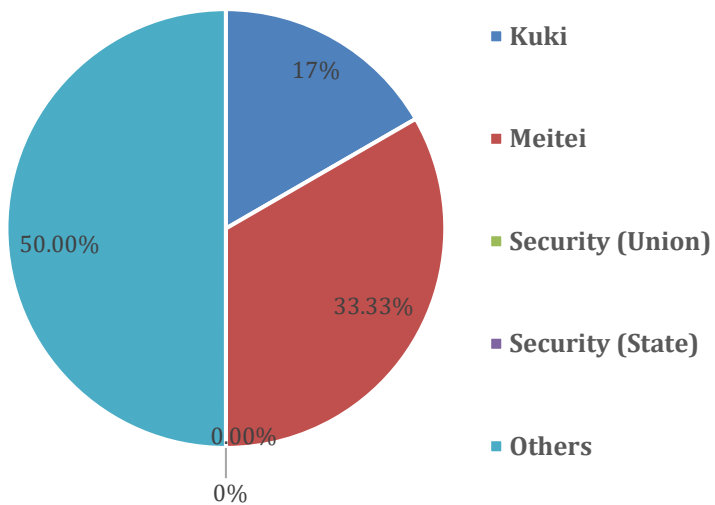
**Figure 19:** *Communities reported as perpetrators of murder (Non-sample)*



**Figure 20:** *Communities reported as victims of physical assault (Non-sample)*



**Figure 21:** *Communities reported as perpetrators of physical assault (Non-sample)*



A similar pattern emerges in Sample 1 (Table 14). Out of 73 reported instances of murder, most reports refrain from specifying the communities to which the victims (58 instances) and perpetrators (62 instances) belong. However, in 12 reports, 'Kukis' are identified as the victims and never as perpetrators, while in 3 reports, Meiteis are mentioned as victims and implicated as perpetrators in 9 reports.

With regard to physical assault, among the 51 reports, a majority do not specify the communities involved (44 victims and 46 perpetrators). However, in cases where identities are mentioned, 'Kukis' are cited as victims in 3 reports but never as perpetrators, whereas Meiteis are mentioned as victims in 2 reports and implicated as perpetrators in 3 reports.

In incidents of sexual assault, out of the total 57 cases, 'Kukis' are cited as victims in 22 instances and never as perpetrators. Conversely, Meiteis are never identified as victims but are mentioned as perpetrators of sexual assault in 16 reports.

Analysis of Sample 2 (Table 15) further underscores the limited mention of 'Kukis' as perpetrators or Meiteis as victims of crimes. Out of 90 reports of murder, 'Kukis' were mentioned as victims in 19 reports and as perpetrators in 3 reports, while Meiteis were cited as victims in 7 reports and as perpetrators in 12 reports. Instances of physical assault also capture this skewed perspective wherein out of 28 reports, 'Kukis' were mentioned as victims in 4 reports and once as perpetrators, whereas Meiteis were mentioned as perpetrators in 2 reports and never as victims.

During the crisis, women from both communities endured instances of sexual assault (Figures 22 and 23). Out of 30 reports on sexual assault, 'Kukis' were identified as victims in 15 instances and once as perpetrators, while Meiteis were mentioned as victims in 1 report and implicated as perpetrators in 6 reports. In the majority of the cases, the identities of the victims and perpetrators were not disclosed.

**Table 14***Murder, Physical Assault, Sexual Assault (as Victim and Perpetrator) (Sample 1)*

<b>Types of Violence</b>	<b>Murder</b>		<b>Physical Assault</b>		<b>Sexual Assault</b>	
	<b>Victim</b>	<b>Perpetrator</b>	<b>Victim</b>	<b>Perpetrator</b>	<b>Victim</b>	<b>Perpetrator</b>
<b>Community</b>						
<b>Kuki</b>	12	0	3	0	22	0
<b>Meitei</b>	3	9	2	3	0	16
<b>Security (Union)</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Security (State)</b>	0	2	2	2	0	1
<b>Unnamed</b>	58	62	44	46	35	40
<b>Others</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	73	73	51	51	57	57

**Table 15***Murder, Physical Assault, Sexual Assault (as Victim and Perpetrator) (Sample 2)*

<b>Types of Violence</b>	<b>Murder</b>		<b>Physical Assault</b>		<b>Sexual Assault</b>	
	<b>Victim</b>	<b>Perpetrator</b>	<b>Victim</b>	<b>Perpetrator</b>	<b>Victim</b>	<b>Perpetrator</b>
<b>Community</b>						
<b>Kuki</b>	19	3	4	1	15	1
<b>Meitei</b>	7	12	0	2	1	6
<b>Security (Union)</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Security (State)</b>	4	0	1	0	0	0
<b>Unnamed</b>	59	75	23	25	14	23
<b>Others</b>	1	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	90	90	28	28	30	30

Figure 22

Meitei woman alleges she was gang raped



Note: Sourced from *The Hindu*, 11<sup>th</sup> August 2023, p. 14

The newspaper reportage of various forms of violence in Manipur among different communities seems to show a skewed perspective, wherein 'Kukis' are predominantly reported as the 'victims' and Meiteis as the 'perpetrators', thereby underreporting the violence in the Meitei community in the first four months.

Table 16 highlights the destruction of places of worship in May and June of 2023. Among 41 reports of such destruction, the 'Kuki' community is identified as the victims in 27 cases involving churches, while Meiteis are reported as the victims in 2 reports. There are 12 instances of destruction of churches where the victims remained unnamed. Meiteis are cited as perpetrators in 3 cases involving the destruction of churches and 38 perpetrators were not named. Notably, there is no mention of the destruction of Hindu or Sanamahi temples.

Figure 23

Kuki women paraded naked and later allegedly gangraped



Note: Sourced from Social Media

**Table 16***Destruction of Places of Worship (as Victim and Perpetrator) (Non-sample)*

Community	Church		Hindu Temple		Sanamahi Temple	
	Victim	Perpetrator	Victim	Perpetrator	Victim	Perpetrator
<b>Kuki</b>	27	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Meitei</b>	2	3	0	0	0	0
<b>Others</b>	-	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Unnamed</b>	12	38	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	41	41	0	0	0	0

Table 17 and Table 18 present data from Sample 1 and Sample 2, respectively. They reveal a consistent pattern: a significant number of reports on the destruction of churches, with 7 reports in Sample 1 and 12 reports in Sample 2. However, there is notably limited mention of destruction concerning Hindu temples, with only 3 instances in Sample 1 and 1 instance in Sample 2. Furthermore, there is no mention of destruction involving Sanamahi temples in either sample.

This is contrary to the ground reality, wherein various Hindu and Sanamahi temples (Figures 24 and 25), along with the churches and Jewish synagogues were vandalized (Figures 26 and 27) during the Manipur crisis.

**Table 17***Destruction of Place of Worship (as Victim and Perpetrator) (Sample 1)*

Community	Place of Worship		Church		Hindu Temple		Sanamahi Temple	
	V	P	V	P	V	P	V	P
<b>Kuki</b>	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Meitei</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Others</b>	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Unnamed</b>	6	7	7	6	3	3	0	0
<b>Total</b>	7	7	7	7	3	3	0	0

*Note: V = Victim; P = Perpetrator***Table 18***Destruction of Place of Worship (as Victim and Perpetrator) (Sample 2)*

Community	Place of Worship		Church		Hindu Temple		Sanamahi Temple	
	V	P	V	P	V	P	V	P
<b>Kuki</b>	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Meitei</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Others</b>	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Unnamed</b>	7	7	9	12	1	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	8	8	12	12	1	1	0	0

*Note: V = Victim; P = Perpetrator*

**Figure 24**

*Destroyed Shiva Temple in Kangpokpi District, 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023*



*Note: Sourced from Open Magazine<sup>9</sup>*

**Figure 25**

*Destroyed Ima Kondong Lairembi Sanglen (A Sanamahi Temple) in Moreh*



*Note: Sourced from Social Media*

<sup>9</sup> <https://openthemagazine.com/feature/the-fraying-of-manipur/>

## Figure 26

### *Destruction of Church, Sangaiprou, Imphal*



Footage from a video clip shows a person attacking the statue of Resurrected Jesus Christ in the niche of St Paul's Church in Sangaiprou, Imphal West district, on May 4 afternoon



Flames engulf the church on May 4 afternoon

Note: Sourced from *The Telegraph*, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2023, p. 1

## Figure 27

### *Jewish synagogues were set on fire and Torah scrolls were torched in Imphal*



Note: Sourced from *The Times of Israel*, 19<sup>th</sup> June 2023

### 3. Whispers of Turmoil: Reporting Origins Unveiled

This section delves into a detailed examination of the frequency of reports documenting incidents of violence across various regions in Manipur. It aims to identify the regions receiving the most coverage and to identify the locations from which the reporters are filing their reports. This analysis is significant as it sheds light on which perspectives of the crisis are receiving attention and which narratives are being marginalised. Additionally, the study investigates the location of correspondents, categorised as locals and non-locals. This distinction is crucial as it reflects the reporters' understanding of local issues and dynamics, as well as the amount of time they have spent studying the crisis before reporting it.

Table 19 details the frequency of reports mentioning the places of violence by national newspapers in May and June (non-sample). Imphal city emerges as the focal point of reports, with 147 instances of violence documented, followed by Churachandpur and Kangpokpi with 120 reports. *Hindustan Times* and *The Indian Express*, followed by *The Telegraph* reported the most from these areas. Periphery areas of Imphal also garnered considerable attention, accounting for 49 reports. Conversely, regions such as Moreh and Tengnoupal received minimal coverage, with only 9 reports.

Sample 1, as represented in Table 20, indicates extensive reporting from Churachandpur (50 reports) followed by Imphal City (28 reports) and periphery areas of Imphal (14 reports). Regions such as Moreh and Tengnoupal (3 reports) and places identified with Meitei/Non-Tribal received 4 mentions. Table 21 (Sample 2) also indicates a similar trend where most of the reports came from Churachandpur and Imphal City (27 and 25 reports, respectively).

**Table 19***Place of Violence (Non-sample)*

<b>Place of Violence</b>	<b>The Hindu</b>	<b>The Indian Express</b>	<b>The Times of India</b>	<b>The Telegraph</b>	<b>Hindustan Times</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Churachandpur and Kangpokpi</b>	15	24	22	27	32	120
<b>Periphery Areas of Imphal</b>	23	16	06	0	04	49
<b>Imphal City</b>	7	41	18	34	47	147
<b>Moreh and Tengnoupal</b>	0	02	01	03	03	9
<b>Others Un-named</b>	0	05	01	0	0	6
<b>Specific Place Identified with Kuki/Tribal</b>	08	15	05	0	15	43
<b>Specific Place Identified with Meitei/Non-Tribal</b>	05	19	03	05	06	38
<b>Grand Total</b>						<b>412</b>

**Table 20***Place of Violence (Sample 1)*

<b>Place of Violence</b>	<b>The Hindu</b>	<b>The Indian Express</b>	<b>The Times of India</b>	<b>The Telegraph</b>	<b>Hindustan Times</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Churachandpur and Kangpokpi</b>	03	07	18	05	17	50
<b>Periphery Areas of Imphal</b>	01	03	06	0	04	14
<b>Imphal City</b>	03	06	09	03	07	28
<b>Moreh and Tengnoupal</b>	01	0	0	0	02	3
<b>Others Un-named</b>	03	16	03	0	0	22
<b>Specific Place Identified with Kuki/Tribal</b>	01	01	0	01	04	07
<b>Specific Place Identified with Meitei/Non-Tribal</b>	0	0	01	0	03	04
<b>Grand Total</b>						<b>128</b>

**Table 21***Place of Violence (Sample 2)*

<b>Place of Violence</b>	<b>The Hindu</b>	<b>The Indian Express</b>	<b>The Times of India</b>	<b>The Telegraph</b>	<b>Hindustan Times</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Churachandpur and Kangpokpi</b>	4	4	4	2	13	27
<b>Periphery Areas of Imphal</b>	4	5	3	3	0	15
<b>Imphal City</b>	1	8	5	2	9	25
<b>Moreh and Tengnoupal</b>	0	0	0	1	1	2
<b>Others Un-named</b>	7	12	3	0		22
<b>Specific Place Identified with Kuki/Tribal</b>	1	1	0	1	4	7
<b>Specific Place Identified with Meitei/Non-Tribal</b>	0	0	1	0	3	4
<b>Grand Total</b>						<b>102</b>

Figure 29 indicates the percentage breakdown of violence reports across regions. It can be observed that 35.68% of the reports came from Imphal City. On the other hand, 29.13% came from Churachandpur and Kangpokpi and only 2.18% came from Moreh and Tengnoupal. Similar trends can be noted in Sample 1 (Figure 30) and Sample 2 (Figure 31).

Considering this, it is observed that in the first four months since the violence broke out, areas such as Imphal City, Churachandpur, and Kangpokpi received significant attention in media coverage but lesser-known regions such as Moreh and Tengnoupal appear conspicuously underreported, with minimal mentions, despite these regions experiencing series of violent attacks.<sup>10</sup>

This discrepancy points towards a concerning trend that journalists predominantly converge in convenient regions such as Imphal, possibly due to logistical ease, resulting in a skewed portrayal of violence dynamics. As a result, violence on ‘Kukis’ in Imphal received more extensive coverage while violence against Meiteis in regions such as Moreh remained underreported, possibly due to the comparative inaccessibility and logistical issues in reaching these areas.

## Figure 28

*Water tanker set on fire during protests in Churachandpur*

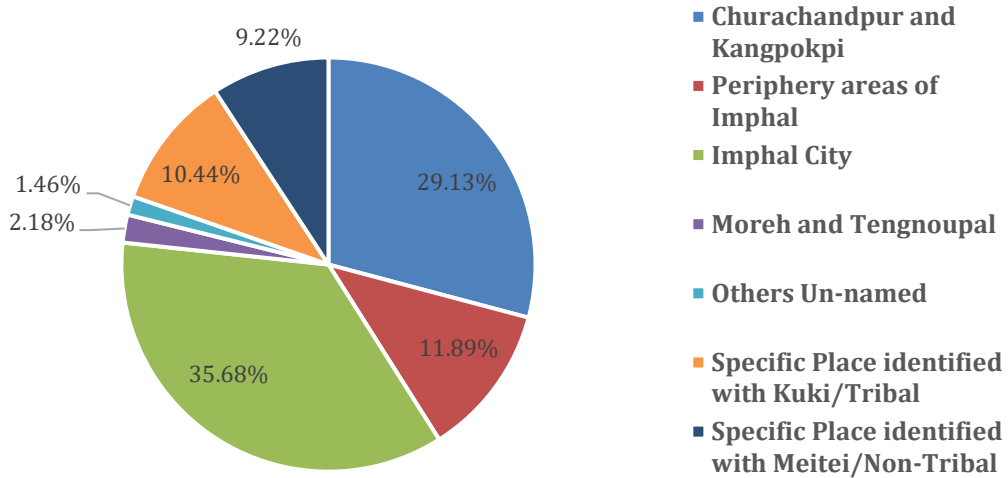


*Note: Sourced from *The Indian Express*, 5<sup>th</sup> May 2023, p. 1*

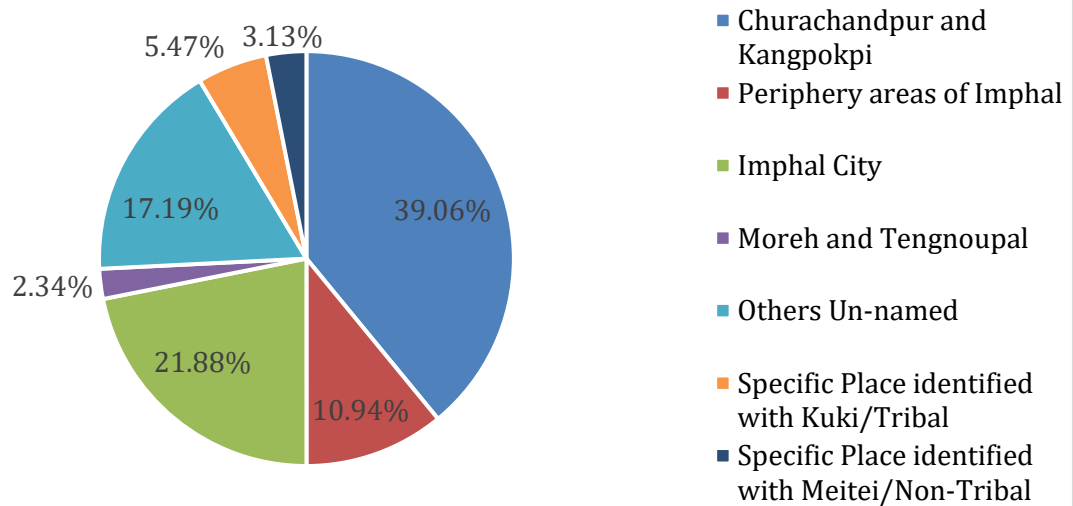
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<sup>10</sup> Unidentified attackers burnt at least 30 abandoned houses and shops in Moreh on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023  
<https://clarionindia.net/attackers-burn-30-abandoned-houses-shops-in-manipurs-bordn-moreh-town/>  
<https://www.newsintervention.com/violence-erupts-in-moreh-town-of-manipur/>

**Figure 29:** *Distribution of violence reports across regions in Manipur (Non-sample)*



**Figure 30:** *Distribution of violence reports across regions in Manipur (Sample 1)*



**Figure 31: Distribution of violence reports across regions in Manipur (Sample 2)**

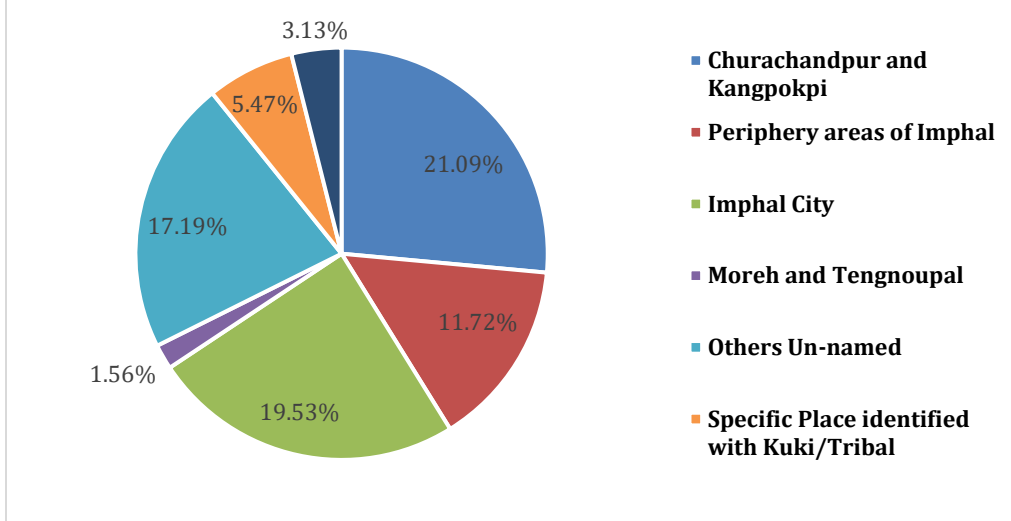


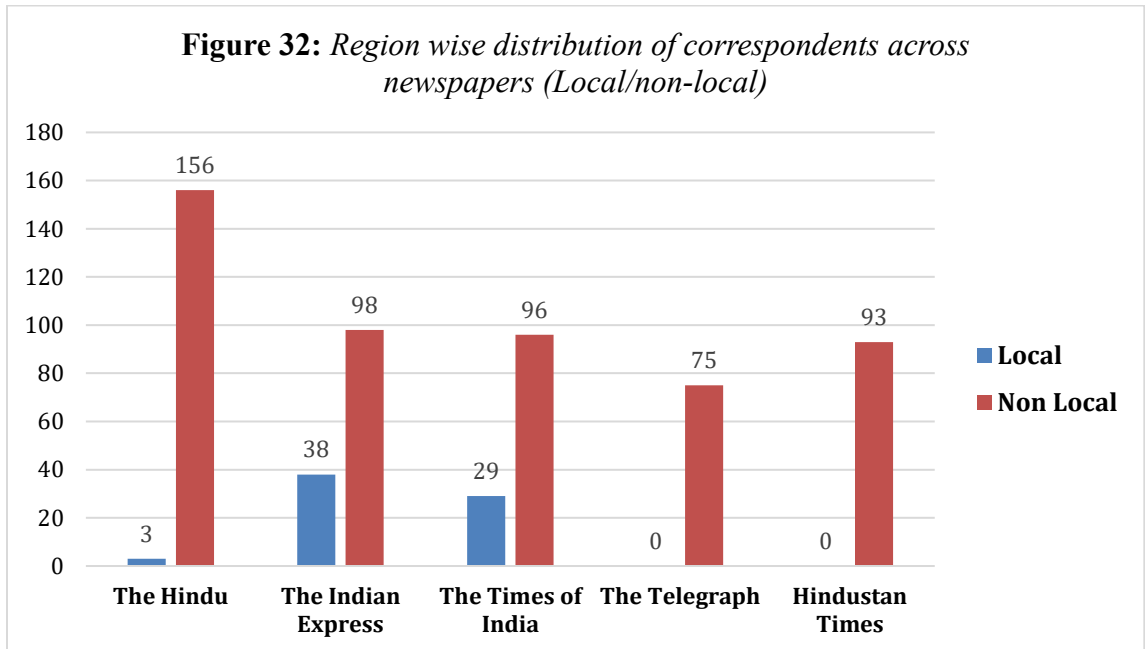
Table 22 indicates the breakdown of news reports categorised by local and non-local correspondents covering the Manipur crisis. The data reveals that out of 588 total reports, the majority of them (518), were provided by non-local reporters, constituting 88% of the total reports during the two-month period of May and June. Conversely, only 70 reports were attributed to local reporters.

Among the newspapers, it is observed that *The Telegraph* and *Hindustan Times* had no local reporters covering the crisis, while *The Hindu* had only 3 local reporters compared to 156 non-local reporters. Notably, *The Indian Express* and *The Times of India* had a significant presence of local reporters in their coverage. The degree of discrepancy in the reportage can be seen clearly in Figure 32.

**Table 22**

*Number of News Reports by Local and Non-Local Correspondents*

<b>News Paper</b>	<b>Local</b>	<b>Non-Local</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>The Hindu</b>	3	156	159
<b>The Indian Express</b>	38	98	136
<b>The Times of India</b>	29	96	125
<b>The Telegraph</b>	0	75	75
<b>Hindustan Times</b>	0	93	93
<b>TOTAL</b>	70	518	588



The prevalence of non-local reporters dominating news coverage of the Manipur crisis shows a broader trend of neglect towards the northeast region. Situated in the periphery of India, the northeast often finds itself overlooked in national discourse and policymaking. This marginalisation is reflected in the media landscape, especially in the context of the Manipur crisis, where the practice of parachute journalism has prevailed. Rather than investing in cultivating a network of local correspondents who possess a nuanced understanding of the region's dynamics, many media outlets opt to deploy non-local reporters, who may lack the contextual understanding and sensitivity required to accurately portray local issues. This practice could compromise the quality and accuracy of reporting, as has been seen in various instances in Manipur and Rwanda.

Added to this, the time constraints, and the pressure to be the first media channel to break the news, limit the journalists' opportunities to familiarise themselves with the region. Consequently, their reporting yielded biased narratives and incomplete depictions, attributable to their limited understanding of the region.

#### **4. Insights and Implications of News Reports**

This chapter set out to find whether the national newspapers' reportage of the Manipur crisis was "fair, accurate, unbiased, sober and decent" and whether they provided "complete" and "impartial facts" while covering the news, as per the codes of conduct established by the PCI (2022).

When analysing the sources used in these reports, it is seen that 'Kuki' sources are predominantly cited, be it in the form of individual accounts or that of CSOs, thereby marginalising and erasing the Meitei side of experiences and their narratives. Such tendencies have the potential to vilify a particular community and aggravate the crisis by making them vulnerable to more attacks.

Secondly, presenting facts correctly, without exaggeration or distortion is a core norm that is to be followed by the newspapers when reporting; however, as could be seen in the Khoijumantabi incident, the reportage of the facts was not reported in a

chronologically accurate manner, rather presented the killing of the Kuki volunteer and the shooting of the three Meiteis as disconnected events. In reality, the former was done in retaliation to the latter; and although both acts were against humanity, the reportage of the incident was not accurate and complete. News always follows an ‘**inverse pyramid**’ structure of reporting, where the reports are mentioned in descending order of importance. By mentioning the firing of the Meiteis in the very end, which instigated the killing of the Kuki volunteer, one can see the national media failing to follow the very standards they have set.

Moreover, as an ethical practice, correspondents are expected to refrain from mentioning the identity of the victim and perpetrator in communal violence, so as to not escalate the communal tensions. However, as noted in the *Indian Express* report of 4<sup>th</sup> May 2023 (Figure 13), these standards are not followed uniformly even within the same news piece. While the article refrains from mentioning ‘Meitei victims’, rather stating that “unidentified miscreants set fire to the houses belonging to a particular group”, a few paragraphs below mention ‘tribal’ (thereby alluding to the ‘Kukis’) as victims in another instance. This sort of selective amnesia when it comes to following one’s norms is adding fuel to the fire. Similarly, when reporting about communities that were victims of physical and sexual assault, although not mentioning the names of the communities they belong to is the general pattern, in the cases where the identity is disclosed it is seen that ‘Kukis’ are predominantly mentioned as the victims while Meiteis are cited as the perpetrators.

Not only is there a lack of mentions of the attacks on Meitei individuals but there is also a gross underreporting and erasure of reports of attacks on Hindu temples and Sanamahi temples.

Finally, when analysing the distribution of reports on the places of violence, it is seen that most of the reports were from Imphal city, where the violence on ‘Kukis’ is a known fact. However, the violence in other communities in the periphery areas has been underreported and almost portrayed as practically non-existent. This creates an impression of one community as predominantly the victims and the other as the perpetrators, not understanding the nuances of the social context and geographical

location. Moreover, the study finds that most of the reporters were non-locals, and some newspapers did not have any local correspondents reporting on the incidents. This form of parachute journalism, coupled with the time pressures to report immediately and be the first media house to break the news, does not give the correspondents sufficient time in the field to acquaint with the situation and report fairly and accurately.

In other words, the media reportage has not been “fair, accurate, and unbiased”, according to the norms set by the PCI (2022).

# Chapter VII

## Views: Opinion Articles as Propagandist Disinformation

The media does not merely provide information or news of events; it is also a site wherein public opinion gets shaped. It is an extension of what German philosopher and social theorist Jürgen Habermas calls the ‘public sphere’, a social space where people can discuss and learn about the issues that the society faces, and voice their opinions freely. It is a sphere that mediates between state and society<sup>11</sup>. The communication taking place in the public sphere is often transmitted to the wider public using different media<sup>12</sup> so as to influence those who receive it. It is this aspect that makes editorials and opinion pieces published in newspapers crucial for those who seek to influence people’s opinions. Thus, in relation to the ongoing crisis in Manipur, opinion pieces (articles) have also appeared in these ‘national’ dailies seeking to inform, influence, and form public opinions.

Given this place of opinion pieces in newspapers, these writings run the risk of being used as a propaganda platform and vitiate public order. To monitor and avoid such a possibility, the PCI has laid out norms to be followed for opinion pieces in the newspapers (PCI, 2022; Chapter III of this study). One of the crucial norms that it lays out stipulates that the authors “**must base their analysis on verified, accurate, and established facts, avoiding content that could incite disharmony between communities**” (PCI, 2022, p. 21). Unfortunately, articles have come up in these media

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<sup>11</sup> It is this nature of the media, as an extension of the ‘public sphere’ that mediates between society and state, that it is referred to as the *fourth* estate, a crucial domain besides the legislature, the judiciary, and the executive.

<sup>12</sup>The different media that Habermas (1974) points to is the radio, television, magazines, and newspapers. However, he also takes a strong stand against the public media calling it a “*pseudo-public sphere*” and asserting how the public has changed from the one debating culture to consuming it (Habermas, 1989).

spaces, which have gone against such professional norms. In this segment, we shall briefly look at this aspect of the media *vis-à-vis* the ongoing crisis in Manipur.

## **1. Template of Propagandist Disinformation**

One of the first articles that appeared on the issue in the ‘national’ media is a piece titled “Fault lines in Imphal” in *The Indian Express* (see Figure 33). First, it appeared online on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2023 and in print on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2023. As an article that hit the ‘national’ media less than 48 hours after the tragic events unfolded in Manipur, it ‘explains’ the what, why, and wherefore of the crisis and provides a prescription for the way forward to end the same. Written by Prof K.K. Suan, a well-known ‘Kuki’ academic and regular columnist of the said newspaper, who teaches at the University of Hyderabad, the article sets the tone of the information war that has come to accompany the crisis from day one in more ways than one. In fact, as it shall be illustrated below, it sets up a template for many other opinion pieces to follow. Hence, a critical assessment of the article shall reveal many of the familiar narratives in the ‘national’ media which have dominated the ‘opinions’ on the crisis in Manipur.

The template in question here has two parts: First, it exhibits a particular way of *framing*, i.e., it sets up a specific perspective on the crisis, which, unfortunately, produces a biased and provocative narrative. Second, it presents misleading and/or false information in service of that standpoint.

## Figure 33

Prof. K.K. Suan's article addressing the violence in Manipur

# Fault lines in Imphal



Ground for Manipur riots was laid by dilution of provisions to protect tribal interests

KHAM KHAN SUAN HAUSING

THE LARGE-SCALE COMMUNAL riots that have spread like wildfire in Manipur since May 3 are deeply disturbing and have exposed the collapse of law and order in the state. The immediate spark for the violence was provided by the retaliatory destruction of the Anglo-Kuki War Memorial Gate in Leisang and razing of Vaiphei houses in Kangvai village by Meitei mobs following the beating up of a Meitei driver whose tripper truck hit a bike and ran over a stock of water bottles kept for use by peaceful tribal protestors in Lamka on the same day. However, these riots seem to follow an established pattern witnessed in other parts of India. This pattern follows what Paul Brass calls an "institutionalised riot system" (IRS), wherein riots are prepared, activated and sustained with explanatory justifications.

Brass argued that far from being unpredictable, unpreventable and spontaneous, Hindu-Muslim riots are manufactured and sustained by an institutional ecosystem. If early reports about the riots in Manipur are any indication, it could fit as a textbook case of Brass's IRS.

To put matters into perspective, the preparatory ground for these riots was set by increasing, seemingly concerted attempts both by the state government and valley-based civil society organisations (CSOs) to dilute the intra-state constitutional asymmetry under Article 371C and undermine the historical protection for tribal land rights. After several attempts to extend the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1961 (MLR&L Act) to the hill areas, a controversial Bill (along with two others) was introduced by the state in 2015 to amend this law. These Bills precipitated an unprecedented tribal uprising. The death of nine tribal protestors — including seven killed in police firing — was seen as the reason to protest for over 632 days to negotiate more secure tribal land rights, without much success. However, tribal dead bodies were used as "symbolic martyrs" and became a powerful rallying force around which tribal unity and solidarity were weaved.

This was transient and exploited by the state government to divide and rule over tribal factions, some of whom were co-opted

by the state to perpetuate a series of developmental and land-related policies which have a direct bearing on existing tribal land rights. The declaration of large swathes of land in Kuki-Zomi-Hmar inhabited areas in Southern Manipur as Reserved Forest (RF), Protected Forest (PF), Wildlife Sanctuary (WS), and Wetlands without following established procedures and the aggressive drive by the state to evict the tribals as illegal encroachers had antagonised them to no end. A series of evictions took place in the past couple of months and several villages in the hills and churches in Imphal were razed to the ground. The manner in which three churches were razed to the ground before sunrise, allegedly without following established law and procedure after the Manipur High Court (HC) dismissed the appeal against the state's refusal to regularise their *dak chitha* (land document), was seen as "lawless law enforcement".

In all of this, it became apparent that existing asymmetrical institutions like the District Councils and the Hill Areas Committee (HAC), mandated under Article 371C of the Indian Constitution to protect tribal rights and interests, were rendered toothless. In fact, the recent resolutions by the HAC which tried to negate any action of the state to declare areas as RF, PF, and WS, without its input, and its displeasure over the HC order asking the state cabinet to clarify its position on the Meitei demand for Scheduled Tribe status within four weeks to the Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs invited condemnation from various Meitei CSOs.

As civil society groups, both in the hills and valley, became more vocal and aggressive to push their radicalised communal agenda, they opened up new sites of conflict. Social media is a powerful platform where hardened positions from both sides were relayed live, with communal overtones. The live display of protests on platforms, ill-informed media reports where tribals are branded as "illegal immigrants" and "encroachers", regular media debates organised around contentious issues like the demand for tribal land protection and the Meitei ST demand, and coercive handling by the police of tribal protests have aroused commu-

nal passions and provided ammunition to both sides. These have, over time, sowed the seed of hatred. The institutional ecosystem of hate that activates and sustains riots could not be starker if one were to make a longitudinal comparison of the tweets of influential leaders with those of valley-based social media warriors. Their positions seem indistinguishable.

There are no visible signs of immediate closure. The seeming leeway given to ragtag mobs in the valley to violently target and indulge in extensive arson of tribal houses and churches in various localities is galling. That no Kuki-Zomi is longer safe becomes evident as the houses of high-ranking tribal leaders — including Letpao Haokip, Tribal Affairs Minister and V Hangchambian, a former minister — have been torched. The unprecedented targeting and vandalisation of tribals' properties in Manipur University where ragtag mobs reportedly entered women's hostels and the inability of the university administration to protect tribals demonstrate the precarity of tribal lives and properties. Unleashing the same mobs in tribal areas to target and raze Meitei settlements to the ground is bound to be used conveniently by what Brass calls riot "conversion specialists".

For now, there are indications that the methods in this madness remain confined to what is called in civil war literature as "ethnic cleansing" — creating fear, and sanitisation of mixed populated areas to establish ethnic homogeneity.

Given that the state police is already deeply communalised, the law and order machinery cannot be invested in them. The imposition of President's Rule and sufficient deployment of the army seems to be the only plausible way to restore law and order for now. While the restoration of law and order may be the immediate need of the hour to foreclose impending human tragedy, the hardened positions taken by both the hill tribals and valley communities will need a shifting of constitutional gears to accommodate their distinctive aspirations.

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Note: Sourced from *The Indian Express*, 6<sup>th</sup> May 2023, p. 12

First, the title of the article runs as follows: “Fault lines in Imphal<sup>13</sup>, Ground for Manipur riots was laid by dilution of provisions to protect tribal interests” (emphasis added). What it tells the readers is that the ‘fault line’, of which ‘riots’ are manifestations, is something to do with the factors that work against the ‘interests’ of the ‘tribal’. ‘Dilution of provision’ is provided as an example of that which works against the ‘tribal interests’. In other words, the title defines the phenomenon as something to do with not only the ‘tribal’ but also an allusion to some forms of ‘injustices’ that are being perpetrated on them. Who are the perpetrators of these ‘injustices’? The article points to the state and the Meiteis as the ‘non-tribal’ (alluded to by the expressions such as ‘Meitei mobs’, the ‘state government’, ‘valley-based civil society organisations’, ‘ragtag mobs in the valley’, ‘Meitei ST demand’, etc.) as the perpetrators. Thus, the article presents the crisis as a conflict between the ‘tribals’ and the ‘non-tribals’ who are demanding ST status.

Much of the opinion pieces follow this *framing*. For instance, see the editorial article titled “Manipur: a rude reminder of northeast tensions” published in *The Hindu* on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2023. In addition, other editorials, such as “Ethnic quagmire” published in *The Hindu* on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2023, and editorial article “Manipur Peace: Give Kuki-Zomis A Separate Homeland” published in *The Times of India* on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2023, including other articles by the same author, we see a trope of the ‘tribal’ being often conflated with ‘minority’ and the Meitei as ‘non-tribal’ with ‘majority’ as well. Some have also attempted to give this ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ a religious colour (e.g., ‘minority Christian tribals’)<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, the juxtaposition of the “state” and the “valley-based civil society organisations” in the same sentence with a common *definite article* ‘the’ — e.g., “concerted attempts both by the state and valley-based civil society

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<sup>13</sup> Here, in term of its syntactical structure, “Imphal” is used as a synecdoche for Manipur and in some sense, it also stands in for ‘the valley’. Hence, the reader is subtly encouraged to direct her/his gaze towards the violence that has occurred in ‘Imphal’ (or ‘the valley’) rather than those in Churachandpur District or Moreh.

<sup>14</sup> Rajdeep Sardesai points out the danger of this framing as he writes: “when the ideological battle lines are posed by some in stark religious terms - as majority Hindu Meiteis minority Christian tribals, there's a great danger of sharpened identity politics”. (Manipur Requires an Urgent Healing Touch, *Hindustan Times*, 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023.)

organisations to dilute...” — in the article provides a template to present an oft-repeated and lopsided<sup>15</sup> narrative of the present violence as a ‘state sponsored’ one. Thus, this *framing* sets up or weaves the information in specific ways to produce certain kinds of interpretations as suggested by the *Framing theory* (see Chapter IV).

But what is wrong with that?

The trouble with this article, and those which follow its template<sup>16</sup>, is that it is based on *factually incorrect framing*. Not only that, but it also presents a biased narrative, which is likely to encourage conflict and create *disharmony* in society by emboldening disinformation and demonisation of one community or putting the blame for the violence squarely at the door of *one community* without an iota of ‘verified or established facts’. This, to say the least, goes against the norm set up by the PCI, that is, the authors of opinion pieces “*must base their analysis on verified, accurate, and established facts, avoiding content that could incite disharmony between communities*” (*ibid.*).

## **2. The Misleading Frame: ‘Tribal – Non-Tribal’ as ‘Minority-Majority’**

On the face of it, the *framing* of the crisis as a conflict between the ‘tribal’ and the ‘non-tribal’ seems unproblematic and represents a taken-for-granted ‘truth’ about the catastrophe that has befallen the people of Manipur. However, a closer look tells us that the invocation of the ‘tribal’ and the ‘non-tribal’ categories to *frame* the present crisis is misleading. In fact, it distorts the reality on the ground.

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<sup>15</sup> Lopsided insofar as this expression ‘state sponsored’ is used to associate the state with one community in conflict, namely the Meiteis (alluded by the expression “valley-based civil society organisation” in the above sentence). However, it must be noted that many Meiteis have openly voiced that the Indian state and the central security forces are “helping” or “colluding” with the ‘Kukis’ in this ongoing violence or as some of them alleged that the police in Churachandpur were firing at the Meiteis as they move along with the (‘Kuki’) mobs in Torbung areas on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023.

<sup>16</sup> See article *In Manipur, None is an Outsider, Everyone’s a Migrant* published in *The Times of India* on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2023.

The ongoing conflict in Manipur implicates only two broad conglomerates, the Meiteis and the 'Kukis'. Not all the scheduled tribe communities (hereafter ST) in the state come under the 'Kukis'. Major ST communities such as the Tangkhuls (second largest ST community in the state), the Rongmei/Kabuis, and the Poumais are not involved in this ongoing clash. Similarly, none of the smaller ST communities in the state such as the Aimols, the Anals, the Marings, the Marams, etc. are also not involved in the violence. In short, the majority of the ST communities in the state are not involved in the present violence.

Correspondingly, the invocation of the category of 'tribal' brings up, either implicitly or explicitly, the category of 'non-tribal' as the reciprocal identity of the former. In other words, these authors present the crisis as a clash between the ST or 'tribal' and 'non-tribal' communities rather than the Meiteis and the 'Kukis' in the state. This *framing*, to say the least, is not only *factually incorrect but also constitutes a sinister attempt to further create and deepen disharmony in society. For, it seeks to expand and aggravate the conflict by deliberately dragging and implicating all the ST, for that matter the other non-ST<sup>17</sup>, communities in the violence.*

In fact, this act of deliberately using the expression 'tribal' in place of the 'Kukis' may also be an attempt to generate, to adapt sociologist Richard A. Schermerhorn, tribal *victimology*, "a sort of pathos" of tribals "as 'victims' conceptualising the relations between subordinate and dominant groups in such a way that the former are invariably oppressed and exploited" (1970, p.8). Such *victimology* has the potential to create disaffection towards, or demonise, the 'non-tribal' as the "dominant other". That such a false *framing* even has the potential to expand the conflict beyond the state of Manipur is shown by the developments in the neighbouring states<sup>18</sup>.

Beyond these authors, it must be said that allowing such pieces to appear in print without any regulations or ethical review is nothing but a blatant disregard for the norms set up

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<sup>17</sup> By and large, the *Pangals* are not a party to the present violent conflict, albeit as a community they have consistently expressed their opposition to any attempt to break up Manipur.

<sup>18</sup> That the violence has its ripple effects in the neighbouring states, particularly in Mizoram, is only an indicator of this attempt to expand the conflict and disharmony in the country.

by the PCI. In fact, this amounts to encouraging the misuse of the Fourth Estate as a platform for propagandist disinformation to create disharmony in society.

Similarly, the framing of the crisis as that of a conflict between the ‘minority’ and the ‘majority’ is far from being accurate; the Meiteis are not the *majority* but the *largest* community in the state. Its population is less than 45% of the entire population in Manipur (according to the 2011 census). By clubbing together, the population of the Meiteis with that of a distinct community called the *Pangals*, many have been wrongly quoting the census to claim that the Meiteis constitute 53% of the population of the state.

Moreover, the expression *minority* is a contextual reality. Who is a minority and who is not is a contextual reality, that is, it depends on specific contexts. For instance, Muslim constitutes a minority in India (around 14.2% according to Census of India 2011). However, in Jammu and Kashmir, it is the majority (68.3%). Thus, while the Meiteis constitute the majority of the population in the state and the ‘Kukis’ are the minority in districts such as the Imphal East and the Imphal West, the opposite is true in the case of Churachandpur or Kangpokpi Districts wherein the Meiteis are a distinct minority.

Camouflaging this contextual reality of minority produces a skewed perception wherein the victimhood of one community gets accentuated at the expense of the other. For instance, while the violence against the ‘Kukis’ has been prominently flagged off, the suffering of the Meiteis, including the ethnic cleansing of the minority Meiteis in Churachandpur<sup>19</sup>, has been underreported, if not practically silenced and rendered invisible, in the ‘national’ media.

By framing the crisis in Manipur as a conflict between the ‘tribal’ and the ‘non-tribal’, and between the ‘minority’ and the ‘majority’, rather than being a clash between the Meiteis and the ‘Kukis’ involving victims and perpetrators on both sides, these articles orient the readers to see the ‘Kukis’ as the victim and the Meiteis as the perpetrators of

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<sup>19</sup>The residential localities of the Meiteis have been razed to the ground, reportedly using bulldozers, in Churachandpur.

this crisis. Additionally, by seeking to invoke religious category in the conflict, these opinion pieces distort the fact that Meiteis who follow Christianity are not spared by the 'Kukis' as well or the 'Kukis' who follow Judaism are not untouched by the violence.

Indeed, the framing of the crisis in the state in terms of "*tribal - non-tribal*", which is conflated with the expression "*minority-majority*", evokes stereotypical meanings, namely, that the tribals are necessarily marginalised, exploited and oppressed, etc. In other words, it orients the readers towards what Richard A. Schermerhorn, as noted earlier, describes as "victimology"<sup>20</sup>.

Consequently, even the constitutional scheme of reserving seats for the ST and the Scheduled Castes (hereafter SC) according to their proportions in the total population has often been misrepresented. While 40 out of 60 seats are unreserved, 19 seats are reserved for the ST and one for the SC according to their proportion as per 1961 census<sup>21</sup>. However, the proportionate distribution of seats between the reserved and the unreserved categories, which has been implemented across the legislatures in the country as well as the Parliament, has been falsely described as 'disproportionate' in the case of Manipur<sup>22</sup>. Besides, the number of reserved seats for ST has been also often erroneously cited as 20. And contrary to the constitutional scheme, the 'victimology' has led to some even demanding that the seats in the Manipur Assembly should be divided into equal ratio (50:50) between the ST and the un-reserved (UR) categories.

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<sup>20</sup>Schermerhorn (1970:8) describes this *victimology* as "a sort of pathos of minorities as 'victims' conceptualising the relations between subordinate and dominant groups in such a way that the former are invariably oppressed and exploited."

<sup>21</sup> Hitherto existing scheme of reservation in the state assembly is based on 1961 census as Manipur was inaugurated as a full-fledged State with an elected Assembly of its own under the Indian Constitution in 1972. This arrangement will change once the delimitation is carried out as the population of the Meiteis has gone down while that of the ST has increased over the years. According to the 2011 census, the ST population has grown from roughly 31% to 40.33% while that of the non-ST have come down from roughly 63% to around 53%.

<sup>22</sup> The demographic politics related to delimitation has spilled over to controversy around census data. See Agrawal and Kumar (2020) for a discussion on the attempt to manipulate census data. It is worth noting, however, that the resistance to any process of determining illegal immigrants in the state come from, not all the ST population - in fact, some of them have voiced their support and demand for such determination – but from the 'Kukis'.

In conclusion, the incorrect *framing* of the crisis in Manipur in terms of the ‘tribal vs. non-tribal’ and the ‘minority vs. majority’ has produced a particular interpretative orientation towards the crisis in the state as suggested by the framing theory. This opinion piece has encouraged people to see one community in the conflict as the *victim* and the other as the *perpetrator*. That there are victims and perpetrators in both communities have been deliberately camouflaged to push a certain kind of partisan outlook towards the crisis.

Framing is not, however, the only issue that the article exhibits. The piece also deploys misleading and outrightly false information which is at the root of the disinformation propaganda and the present violence in the state. The disinformation is carried out in two stages:

- First, the way the origin and nature of the violence are being presented.
- Second, the ways in which ‘grounds for’ the violence have been explained by the author.

### **3. Origin of the Violence**

The article sets up the familiar blame game associated with the present crisis in the state. It asserts, without verified or established facts, that the violence has been initiated by the Meitei community and the Government of Manipur. Thus, it writes about the ‘spark’ of the present violence as follows:

*The immediate spark for the violence was provided by the retaliatory destruction of the Anglo-Kuki War Memorial Gate in Leisang and razing of Vaiphei houses in Kangvai village by Meitei mobs following the beating up of a Meitei driver whose tripper truck hit a bike and ran over a stock of water bottles kept for use by peaceful tribal protestors in Lamka on the same day.*

This description of the origin of the violence on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023 is not only intriguing but also based on information, which is anything but “*verified, accurate and established*”.

The first and most crucial information here pertains to a controversial structure called the ‘Anglo-Kuki War Memorial Gate’ at Leisang, an area inhabited by the ‘Kukis’ in Churachandpur District. The author uses not only factually incorrect but also unverified and unestablished information to describe what has happened to the structure.

First, the author describes what has happened to the structure as ‘destruction’, which is completely incorrect. Some miscreants have burnt a couple of tyres at the base of one of the concrete pillars of the controversial gate, and as a result, it was smeared with smoke. The author presents this act as the ‘destruction’ of the gate. The word ‘destruction’ means *an act or the process of destroying, that is, to damage something so badly that it can no longer be used or no longer exists*. The smearing of smoke caused by the burning of tyres at one of the concrete bases of the controversial gate is anything but *damaging the contentious structure badly*, let alone making it non-existent.

Besides this false representation of the defacement, the author also identified the culprit of the vandalism as the “Meitei mobs”. This assertion is against the journalistic norm laid down by the PCI which stipulates that the author of an opinion piece must base their analysis on “*verified, accurate and established facts*” or must provide the “source”. First, the author did not provide the source of this information. Second, the identity or identities of those miscreants who have set the tyres on fire at the concrete base of the controversial structure is/are yet to be *verified and established*, even one year after the incident.

It must be noted here that responsible journalists and authors of opinion pieces have referred to the incident as acts done by ‘unidentified miscreants’. Quite obviously, the author chose not to follow such ethical standards. In fact, the author did not even bother to use the sobering expression ‘allegedly’ to mediate his claim. Thus, attributing the defacement of the controversial structure to a community without any tangible proof, citing sources or verified facts is, wittingly or unwittingly, inciting people to hate and encouraging people to engage in retaliatory acts against the community being named as the culprits. That many ‘Kukis’ have, with the active support of the ‘national’ media,

repeated this unverified and unestablished fact to justify and encourage the subsequent violence is, to say the least, unfortunate and appalling<sup>23</sup>.

Incidentally, the author, not only based his analysis on unverified or unestablished information but also even provided *motives* behind the acts. Not only naming Meiteis as the culprit of an act which he falsely described as ‘destruction’, he also sought to explain away the beating of a Meitei driver by a mob earlier in the morning in Churachandpur by surreptitiously blaming the victim (“whose tripper truck *hit a bike and ran over a stock of water bottles* kept for use by *peaceful tribal protestors in Lamka* on the same day”)<sup>24</sup> (see Figure 34).

That such an article was published without restraints from the media houses at the very start while the crisis was unfolding points to the fact that platforms for opinion pieces are being used for propagandist disinformation right from day one. This is a serious lapse on the part of the author and the ‘national’ media houses.

It is pertinent to note that while people were still grappling with the ‘what, how, and wherefore’ of the violence that started on the 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023, especially with the communication being disrupted by the ban on the internet, the author, who lives in Hyderabad, miles away from Manipur, *seems to know the details of the evolving nature of the violence. Indeed, it begs a question as to whether there was a ‘pre-decided script’ of the violence as well as a narrative of the same to be presented to the world.*

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<sup>23</sup>It’s worth reminding that this incident has been used by many, especially by the ‘Kukis’, as a ‘reason’ or pretext for the violence that followed, especially those perpetrated against the Meiteis in Torbung areas and places in Churachandpur and Moreh that started in the afternoon of 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023.

<sup>24</sup> Beating of the Meitei driver and places where the water bottles were kept on the road appeared on social media in the afternoon of 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023.

### Figure 34

*A truck runs over water bottles placed on the side and middle of the road during the tribal protests and the driver is seen here being thrashed by a mob of ‘peaceful protestors’*



*Note: Sourced from social media<sup>25</sup>*

This matter is not without any basis. For instance, not only citing the burning of tyres as the ‘destruction’ of the controversial gate as the ‘spark’ of the violence and blaming the Meiteis (mob) as the culprit, but an assertion which is not verified and established, the article describes the violence as “ethnic cleansing”! In fact, he describes the violence in three different ways, almost mapping out the trajectory of the violence.

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<sup>25</sup><https://twitter.com/pukningwarol/status/1786258727965737348?s=46&t=rEHC0ntiGE62EiHYWYY8fA>

Such propagation of false information in newspapers is no different from the kind of rampant disinformation spread on social media sites<sup>26</sup> (Figure 35).

#### 4. Nature of the Violence

The author first describes the violence as a “riot” by blaming the “Meitei mobs” at the beginning. Then he went on to position it as an “institutionalised riot system” to finally describe it as “ethnic cleansing” — all in the same article published barely within 48 hours of what the author calls the ‘spark’ on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023!

**Figure 35**

*Disinformation spread on social media by portraying armed ‘Kuki’ men as ‘Meitei’*



It is worth recollecting that when the article appeared, there were still ‘Kukis’ and many of the houses and colonies where they lived were, and many are still, intact in Imphal city. Similarly, when the piece was read by people across the country and the world then, there were Meiteis in Churachandpur and many of their houses and colonies were still around!

This being the case, why did the author refer to the then violence as “ethnic cleansing”?

Incidentally, some of the ‘Kuki’ politicians have also been invoking the expression ‘ethnic cleansing’ — of course, accusing the Meiteis of indulging in it against the ‘Kukis’ — very early in the initial moments of the present crisis. Curiously, this

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<sup>26</sup> A Twitter (now ‘X’) account shared a video titled “Truth of Manipur Gen0cide” and claimed that “peaceful rally goers were ambushed by Meitei Lipun using assault rifles or guns”, meanwhile the people shown in the video carrying guns are Kukis.  
<https://x.com/Polytikles/status/1684051518855745536?s=20>

expression was accompanied by the assertion that “there were no ‘Kukis’ in Imphal” while the facts speak of something else. But the fact is, the last ‘Kukis’ families to be shifted out by the state from their houses in Imphal was in the first week of September 2023<sup>27</sup>.

It must be noted that even as they have been shifted out, their houses are still intact. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the Meiteis in Churachandpur or Moreh, particularly in the former district. In the first few weeks of the violence, not only all the Meiteis have been driven out of Churachandpur, but their houses and colonies have also been eventually reduced to dust and rubble.

Is the invocation of ‘ethnic cleansing’, therefore, a Freudian slip that reveals a ‘pre-determined script’ for the fate that was to befall the Meiteis in Churachandpur and Moreh? Correspondingly, is the invocation of the expression ‘ethnic cleansing’ and the then false claim of “there were no ‘Kukis’ in Imphal” related? Do the two constitute a tactical move to distract or mislead the world from an unfolding crisis in the state? Indeed, are these assertions of “ethnic cleansing” and “there were no ‘Kukis’ in Imphal” complementary moves to the re-assertion of the demand for “separate administration” that came up barely 10 days after the violence of 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023?

Even as these questions may be aspects that may reveal the nature of the crisis in the state, the purpose here is not to answer these questions. The concern here is whether the assertion of terming the violence as “ethnic cleansing” can be considered a verifiable claim or not.

So, what is “ethnic cleansing”?

Like most terms, this expression has various connotations. However, a prominent meaning of the term refers to it as,

“... the attempt to create *ethnically homogeneous geographic areas* through the deportation or *forcible displacement of persons belonging to particular*

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<sup>27</sup><https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/last-of-the-kuki-zo-families-in-imphal-say-they-have-been-forcibly-evicted-by-security-forces/article67263919.ece/amp/>

*ethnic groups*...[it] sometimes involves the removal of all physical vestiges of the targeted group through the destruction of monuments, cemeteries, and houses of worship”<sup>28</sup> (Andreopoulos, n.d.).

Similar usage is also found in the vocabulary used by the United Nations which refers to it as “rendering *an area ethnically homogeneous by using force or intimidation to remove persons of given groups from the area*”<sup>29</sup> (emphasis added). Incidentally, the author did mention similar features when he describes the expression as “creating fear, and *sanitisation of mixed populated areas to establish ethnic homogeneity*” (emphasis added).

From the above usages of the term “ethnic cleansing”, we may discern a couple of features, namely, it involves (a) forcible removal or displacement or deportation of a given group of people (b) by using force or intimidation, and creating fear (c) in order to make a given (mixed populated) area ethnically homogeneous or establish ethnic homogeneity, and such a process might also involve (d) removal of physical vestiges related to the targeted group or destruction of their monuments, cemeteries, and houses of worship.

Is the violence in Manipur as it happened when the article was written and published qualified to be called “ethnic cleansing”? The answer is obviously in the negative. While one might say that three (a, b, and d) out of the four features delineated above are present, at least in their rudimentary forms, one crucial aspect, that of making a given area to be “ethnically homogeneous” or “establish ethnic homogeneity” in it was absent.

However, it can be said that as the violence progresses, in some sense, it begins to acquire all the above four characteristics, especially the violence inflicted upon the Meiteis, not on the ‘Kukis’. It must be reiterated that Imphal still remains a *mixed-ethnicity populated area*, and no one has claimed or attempted to make it an *ethnically homogeneous area* (politically or otherwise). Imphal remains the capital of Manipur inhabited by various communities as its denizens, and no one has called for it to be

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ethnic-cleansing>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/ethnic-cleansing>

made into an ethnically rooted political or administrative entity. This is despite the fact that terrible violence has been perpetrated against the ‘Kukis’ in Imphal. And contrary to the propagandist claims that appeared within days of the eruption of the violence on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023 that “there are no ‘Kukis’ in Imphal”, there were still ‘Kukis’ in Imphal for four months, till the first week of September 2023.

However, the same thing cannot be said about what has happened to the Meiteis in Churachandpur (or in other areas wherein ‘Kukis’ forms the majority of the population). The reality of Meiteis being driven out of places such as Churachandpur by using force and intimidation has been accompanied by a call for making the area an ethnically rooted idea of ‘separate administration’ for the ‘Kukis’. Besides, there are still *vestiges* such as the houses and cemeteries of ‘Kukis’ still in Imphal. In contrast, almost all the physical vestiges such as houses, colonies, and places of worship of the Meiteis in Churachandpur have been reduced to dust and ashes.

In conclusion, notwithstanding the later development that points to aspects of the violence as “ethnic cleansing”, especially against the Meiteis, the use of the expression by the author is false and misleading when he wrote and published the article. The use of the expression by the author is a hyperbole that might have, wittingly or unwittingly, injected or encouraged people to pursue ethnic cleansing. That such an irresponsible and inappropriate expression was then allowed to find a place in the pages of prestigious media houses shall remain a blot in the history of media practices in the country.

In fact, inappropriate *framing* and usage of expressions/words are not the only issues that go against the established standards of ethical media practices. Sheer disinformation has also been allowed to pass off as truths in these opinion pieces. The present article under discussion not only remains the prime example of such disinformation but also a precursor and contributor to the falsehood that has aggravated the violence over the months.

## 5. Woods of Disinformation

A crucial part of the narrative that marks the crisis in Manipur is the idea that the Government of Manipur, insinuated as ‘Meitei’ and/or ‘majoritarian’ government, seeks to deprive the ‘tribals’ of their land. In this regard, it is alleged that ‘tribal areas’ have been declared as ‘wetlands’ (under 2017 Rules) and ‘protected’ and ‘reserved’ forests under the Indian Forest Act (1927), etc. Further, it is said that “tribals” have been ‘evicted’ as ‘illegal encroachers’. In pursuance of such a narrative, K.K. Suan’s article marshals a set of false information as ‘facts’ to weave a narrative of ‘tribal land rights’ being in jeopardy. Thus, he wrote:

*The declaration of large swathes of land in Kuki-Zomi-Hmar inhabited areas in Southern Manipur as Reserved Forest (RF), Protected Forest (PF), Wildlife Sanctuary (WS), and Wetlands without following established procedures and the aggressive drive by the state to evict the tribals as illegal encroachers had antagonised them to no end.*

The above assertions give a false impression as if areas inhabited by the “Kukis’ have only been specifically targeted either by declaring those areas as Reserved Forest (RF) and Protected Forest (PF) or through eviction. Besides, it also insinuates that the declaration of Reserved Forest (RF) and Protected Forest (PF) was carried out by the present government of Manipur under Shri N. Biren Singh.

However, when we cross-checked the claims, we found that the claim of areas being declared as wetlands is unfounded. In fact, none of the water bodies in Manipur, including the famous Loktak Lake, has been declared as a ‘wetland’ (under 2017 Rules) to date.

On the other hand, as far as Wildlife Sanctuary (WS), Reserved Forest (RF), and Protected Forest (PF) are concerned, these have been declared across the state, not merely confined to the so-called ‘Kuki’ areas. Moreover, none of the Reserved Forests (RF) and the Protected Forests (PF) has been declared during the tenure of Shri N. Biren Singh. In fact, out of the 37 reserved forests in the state, except for seven (last one being in 1990), all have been declared before or in 1966, that is, during the colonial period

period and while Manipur was under Delhi's rule as a union territory. Similarly, out of 23 protected forests, except for one which was declared in 1979, all have been declared either during the colonial period or while Manipur was a union territory.

Further, as far as the eviction of illegal encroachers is concerned, it is found that the eviction was carried out as per "procedures as provided in the Indian Forest Act, 1927 and Manipur Forest Rules 1971 (repealed by Manipur Forest Rules 2021)", and the evicted people are not confined to the 'Kukis' only. According to the official record, from October 2015 to April 2023 alone, the Forest Department, Manipur has evicted 413 encroachers from various reserved forests and protected forests in the state. The data shows that out of the total evicted people (413), the community-wise number break up of encroachers evicted are as follows: 143 Meitei, 137 Meitei Pangal, 59 Kuki (including 21 unoccupied huts in Kanglatombi-Kangpokpi reserved forest), 38 Naga, and 36 Nepali (see Appendix H).

In other words, the number of non-Kuki people (85.7%) evicted far exceeds that of the 'Kukis' (14.28%). Even when we look at the eviction in terms of non-ST and ST people, the former (76.5%) far exceeds that of the latter (23.48%).

The article also mentions the demolition of three churches in Imphal on 11<sup>th</sup> April 2023. It states,

*A series of evictions took place in the past couple of months and several villages in the hills and churches in Imphal were razed to the ground. The manner in which three churches were razed to the ground before sunrise, allegedly without following established law and procedure after the Manipur High Court (HC) dismissed the appeal against the state's refusal to regularise their dak chitha (land document), was seen as "lawless law enforcement."*

While the author highlights the demolition of Churches in Imphal as part of 'Kuki' prosecution, he does not specify that these Churches were built on unauthorised Government land meant for the construction of Government quarters (see Appendix E). Moreover, the author claims that the State Government carried out the demolition

“*allegedly without following established law and procedure.*” Here, the usage of the term “allegedly” insinuates the Government is at fault and they acted illegally, but he does not elaborate on what are the “established law and procedure” to which he is referring.

Thus, blatant attempts have been made in these opinion pieces to generate and reinforce a narrative of tribal victimology by presenting factually incorrect information and unsubstantiated insinuation. Needless to say, such victimology seeks to position the Manipur crisis in terms of the globally familiar narrative of ‘indigenous’ or ‘tribal’ land alienation in order to garner external support for a group which has been presented as *the victim* of the crisis. In doing so, it also seeks to incite ordinary people to feel insecure and react adversely to the authority and other community (i.e., Meiteis). In short, such opinion pieces based on false and/or unestablished information have arguably contributed to the ongoing crisis by fuelling mistrust and disharmony in society.

Besides the above undesirable impact, the fact that such propagandist disinformation has been allowed to find places in newspapers against the established norms of journalism set up by the PCI shall remain a blot on the Indian media.

## **Chapter VIII**

# **Conclusion: A Saga of Professional Blunders**

In our academic inquiry, we have embarked on a thorough examination of the role played by the media in shaping societal perspectives, particularly in a conflict situation. Media is a double-edged sword – while they bring our attention to pressing issues, they also have the potential to manipulate facts, distort truths, and stifle public access to information. They have the power to alleviate or aggravate crisis situations and to become the trouble-shooters or troublemakers in a volatile situation, as has been witnessed across space and time. The media's influence can fuel division and violence among communities, sometimes leading to serious consequences such as mass violence and genocide. However, the prevention of such negative outcomes hinges on media houses avoiding becoming tools for groups or individuals with vested interests intent on demonising specific communities, as exemplified in the case of the Ethiopian ethnic conflict.

The media plays a significant role, not just due to its power to disseminate information, but because it serves as a platform for fostering open dialogue, understanding nuanced perspectives in conflict situations, and facilitating peacebuilding efforts in strife-torn regions. To harness this potential of the media and to keep its negative consequences at bay, journalist guilds and media organisations have delineated ethical norms encompassing a list of dos and don'ts of news reporting in various situations (PCI, 2022).

It is keeping these guidelines as the framework for this study that we set out on a journey to examine whether the media reportage during the Manipur crisis followed the ethical standards established by these professional bodies. This study carried out a thorough examination of the newspaper reportage from five national newspapers surrounding the crisis in Manipur, starting from May 2023 until August 2023, using an interdisciplinary

research methodology of content analysis and CDA. Guided by the framing theory, this study sought to explain how the media constructs and presents information, shaping audience perception through deliberate framing devices. It probed deeper into the undercurrents of societal power dynamics and ideologies embedded in language and semantics, embracing CDA. Utilising the ethical codes delineated by the PCI (2022) as the framework of this study, it sought to assess the reportage regarding the Manipur crisis and to see whether their reports were fair, accurate, objective, and ethical.

The findings of the study showed that the media houses did not adhere to the codes of conduct they had laid down in many instances during their reporting about the crisis in Manipur. For instance, one of the key patterns that has been noted in the news reportage is the extent of the ‘sources’ being quoted in the news items. It has been found that the sources from the ‘Kuki’ community are quoted far more than those from the Meitei community sources in the news reports. This is true in both the non-sample study (covering all the news published in May and June 2023) as well as sample studies (covering news published from May to August 2023). The reportage on the Manipur crisis by the ‘national’ media is not fair insofar as it privileges the experiences of the ‘Kukis’ over that of the Meiteis.

Another instance of bias is in the linguistic strategies employed. The usage of the term “killed” to describe the murder of ‘Kukis’, as opposed to the usage of the term “died” to address the murder of Meiteis shows a purposeful manipulation in framing of the narrative. The use of "killed" to describe the 'Kuki' deaths implies an intentional, unjust, and unnatural loss of life, hinting at those responsible for these deaths. In contrast, the term "died" used to describe the Meitei deaths lacks the implication of intentional harm. Even when referring to an incident involving firing, it remains vague, deflecting attention from attributing responsibility to the ‘Kukis’ for the deaths of the three Meiteis who were in reality killed by ‘Kukis’.

Moreover, the reportage of various cases has presented incidents in isolation or in a disconnected manner, which does not reveal the whole story, as was seen in the Khoijumantabi incident. By mentioning the beheading of David Theik (Kuki) before the killing of three Meiteis, the news report fails to deliver a “complete” and “accurate”

picture. The conventional and ethical norm of reporting would have been to not mention the name of the communities involved, especially before verifying the facts so as to not aggravate the crisis. However, certain reports have followed this norm in a selective way, whereby the attacks on Meitei households are mentioned as victims belonging to a “particular group” but the attacks on ‘Kuki’ households are disclosed with descriptors such as ‘Kuki’, tribal, and minority. This leads to the overemphasis of the ‘tribals’ as the victims and veils the experiences of the Meitei victims.

The crisis in Manipur has unleashed a wave of death that destroyed lives, homes, and livelihoods of people across communities. About 60,000 to 75,000 people have been forcibly displaced and over 3,413 houses and 274 villages have been destroyed. While both the Meiteis and the ‘Kukis’ have suffered, national media reports portray a skewed narrative, often depicting one community solely as victims and demonising the other as perpetrators. Despite conventions of not naming communities in communal clashes, these reports unambiguously portray one community as victims and the other as aggressors. The analysis of non-sampled and sampled reports indicates a trend: while reports majorly refrain from naming the communities when mentioning the destruction of houses, in the reports that do disclose the identity of the communities, ‘Kukis’ are mentioned more often as victims and Meiteis as perpetrators, despite reported data showing more destroyed Meitei homes. This biased identification of victims and perpetrators in news reports distorts the reality of the crisis, emphasising one community's victimhood and the other's culpability, contrary to the actual destruction data.

This trend is also observed in reports on the destruction of places of worship. While the destruction of churches is mentioned in detail, there has been notable neglect in reporting about the destruction of temples, both Hindu and Sanamahi, located in the peripheral regions of the state. This might be due to the fact that 35.68% of the reports covered in the first two months were from Imphal and only 2.18% were from regions such as Moreh and Tengnoupal. Other regions in the state received even less coverage as the data for the four months was analysed. This disproportionate coverage of the places of violence could be due to the logistical challenges in reaching those periphery

areas where violence broke out. As a result, the experiences of some communities got highlighted much more at the expense of others.

In terms of the correspondents reporting on the crisis, it was noted that out of 588 reports in May and June 2023, 518 were from non-local correspondents whereas only 70 reports were from local correspondents. This was a clear case of ‘parachute journalism’ wherein reporters are dispatched from distant regions or with limited local knowledge to cover crises or events, often lacking an in-depth understanding of the region’s historical context, cultural nuances, and intricate societal dynamics. Meanwhile, local reporters provide crucial insights due to their connections to the community and a better grasp of the situation. This disproportionate ratio of the correspondents (non-local and local) raises concerns about the accuracy and depth of the coverage. This also raises a critical question as to why media organisations felt compelled to send reporters from distant regions rather than relying on local correspondents during the crisis. It also prompts inquiry into why certain newspapers had no local correspondents on-site to cover the unfolding events. Perhaps, it is the general neglect towards the northeast region as compared to the rest of the country that becomes reflected in the media landscape.

This trend of inadequate representation is intertwined with broader issues of narrative framing and community portrayal, as observed in both news reports and opinion pieces surrounding the crisis. The trend of presenting one community as victims and the other as perpetrators, along with citing factually incorrect statements and misrepresenting reality, is reflected not only in the news reports but also in the editorials and opinion pieces about the crisis. The framing of the ongoing crisis as a ‘Tribal vs. Non-Tribal’ or a ‘Minority vs. Majority’ or a ‘Christian vs. Hindu’ issue is not only incorrect and misleading but also erases the experiences of individuals who lie at the intersection of these identities, potentially creating disharmony in society. Take for example, the portrayal of the crisis as a ‘Tribal vs. Non-Tribal’ issue misrepresents the reality by implying that all tribal communities are under attack by those referred to as the ‘non-tribal’. This has been debunked in the previous chapter which highlights that not all tribal communities, such as the Tangkhuls, Rongmei/Kabuis, Poumais, Aimol, Anals, Marings, Marams, etc., are involved in the violence. This incorrect framing tends to

deepen the disharmony and adds friction to an already vulnerable socio-political climate. Moreover, the framing of the crisis as a ‘Minority vs. Majority’ is also false because the determining factor of who is a majority and minority depends on the intersections of social and geographical context and is subject to change depending on the location. Additionally, the framing of the crisis as a ‘Christian vs. Hindu’ issue is also incorrect. Many Meiteis who follow Christianity, Sanamahism, a sizeable population of Meitei Muslims referred to locally as ‘Meitei Pangals’, and many ‘Kukis’ who follow Judaism, are also affected by the violence, and have experienced immense trauma.

In addition to incorrect framing, the editorial pieces also promoted false and unverified information regarding the origin of the violence on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023. Firstly, the defacement of the War Memorial Gate, albeit a deplorable act, has been wrongly portrayed as the “destruction” of the gate. Secondly, the culprits of this vandalism have been labelled as the “Meitei mob”, even though no source has been cited for this allegation, nor has this information been verified or established to date.

False information regarding the eviction of ‘Kukis’ from “tribal areas” by declaring them as “wetlands” or “reserved and protected forests” has also been peddled by the national media. This is false on several accounts. Firstly, none of the waterbodies in Manipur has been declared as “wetlands” to date. Secondly, the declaration of forests as reserved and protected areas has been done statewide, not just in Kuki regions. Thirdly, none of the declarations were made after 1990, although the editorials insinuate that the declarations were carried out under the present government of Manipur. Moreover, as per the forest official documents, it is noted that the evicted people are not confined to the ‘Kuki’ community, in fact the number of non-Kuki (85.7%) evicted far exceeds that of the ‘Kukis’ (14.28%). Even when the eviction is looked at in terms of non-ST and ST people, it is found that 76.5% of non-ST people were evicted as compared to 23.48% of ST people.

Thus, there has been an attempt to frame this crisis in a manner that bolsters tribal victimology. In conclusion, our investigation of the media reportage during the Manipur crisis reveals a troubling reality. The media failed to adhere to the ethical standards of

reporting and often published one-sided information, thereby distorting the reality of the crisis and deepening social rifts.

Additionally, a prospective study could conduct a similar investigation on the newspaper reportage after August 2023 and compare it with the data gathered in the first four months of the crisis to discern any evolving patterns.

Further studies can be carried out by extending the period covered in the present study, (i.e., beyond May to August 2023) to see whether there is any change in the patterns of reportage and opinion pieces in these newspapers. Furthermore, to deepen our understanding of media vis-à-vis the Manipur crisis, an investigation can also be carried out by examining the newspapers published in Manipur, (especially from Imphal, Churachandpur, and Ukhrul) and other northeastern states such as Assam, Nagaland, and Mizoram.

Besides, a gendered perspective will also enrich the present study. For instance, we can break down the sources cited in the news reportage in terms of gender. By doing so, we may see whether there is any difference in the way the crisis has been experienced and articulated by people of different genders. Such insight may help us to design a peace-building process involving women.

Furthermore, it is suggested that media organisations prioritise ethical journalism and offer diverse opinions on crucial matters to promote dialogue and understanding in regions prone to conflict. By doing this, they can live up to their potential of being a catalyst for positive change, rather than a source for conflict escalation.

# POSTSCRIPT

## A Note on the EGI Report

“चिंगारी कोई भड़के, तो सावन उसे बुझाये,  
सावन जो अगन लगाये, उसे कौन बुझाये?  
मझधार में नैय्या डोले, तो माँझी पार लगाये  
माँझी जो नाव डुबोए, उसे कौन बचाये”

**when a spark flares, rains extinguish it,  
but when a fire is started by the rains,  
who can extinguish it?**

**when the boat dwindles in the mid-river,  
the boatman takes it to the shore,  
but when the boatman drowns a boat,  
who can save it?**

The quoted lyrics are from the renowned song ‘Chingari Koi Bhadke’ from the movie *Amar Prem* (1972). The songwriter skilfully poses a question: how can one salvage a sinking boat when the boatman himself is causing it to sink? This analogy prompts reflection on the present study. When unethical practices sneak into the domain of independent and free reporting, the EGI established “A Code of Practice” to safeguard ethical and objective journalism, but when the EGI itself sets such a low bar for itself and contributes to the misinformation war, then who will save it?

The EGI sets out on a fact-finding mission in response to the overwhelming allegations of biased reporting during the Manipur Crisis. However, the EGI's report contained several allegations which have later been found to be completely baseless. The following section highlights some of these claims and the rebuttals of journalist guilds and professional bodies to the EGI's report.

The EGI report claims the following:

**Claim 1:** “In addition, without following proper procedure as laid down in the Hills Area Committee Act of 1972, the N. Biren Singh government declared parts of Hills as “reserved” and “protected” forests and “wetland reserves”. All land ownership documents within these areas were cancelled and a drive started to evict them in December 2022.” (EGI report on page no. 3.)

**Clarification:** The Office of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forest and HoFF, Imphal, clarified on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2023 that no new ‘reserved’ or ‘protected’ forests were declared during the tenure of N. Biren Singh’s government in the state of Manipur. Currently, there are 37 reserved forests and 23 protected forests in Manipur which were established by various authorities over the years. The first reserved forest, *Heingang* reserved forest, was notified in the year 1913, and the most recent, *Nongmaiching* reserved forest, was established in 1990. Similarly, the protected forests were notified by different authorities between 1951 and 1979 (see Appendix H).

**Claim 2:** Photo under the caption "Smoke rises from a Kuki house on 5 May" (EGI report on page no. 5).



*Smoke rises from a Kuki house on 5 May*

*Image: ANI*

**Clarification:** This photo, with the caption “Smoke rises from a Kuki house on 5 May”, actually shows the burning of the Forest Beat Office, Mata Mualtam, under the Churachandpur Forest Division, and not a Kuki house as reported by the EGI. This office was set on fire by a violent mob on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023. An FIR concerning this incident has been filed (Appendix H).

Besides the Forest Official’s response, the All Manipur Working Journalists’ Union (AMWJU) along with the Editors Guild Manipur (hereafter EGM) and esteemed professionals raised concerns regarding the fact-finding mission report by the EGI (Appendices A and B).

AMWJU and EGM highlighted several issues with the EGI report, particularly criticising the hasty nature of the fact-finding process, which was concluded within a mere four days. They contended that this expediency resulted in numerous inaccuracies

that adversely affected the credibility of media outlets and introduced multiple factual discrepancies, some of which are listed below.

1. The EGI report claims that Meiteis initiated the riots on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023, which is an unsupported claim, as the Supreme Court appointed fact-finding committee is still investigating the origin of the violence.
2. The report cites the Hill Areas Committee Act of 1972, claiming that large parts of the land have been declared as “reserved” and “protected” forest, which lacks factual basis. In reality, there have not been such declarations after 1990.
3. The report suggests that these declarations intended to evict Kuki villages, however, records from the Manipur Forest Department indicate that from 2015 to 2023, the majority of those evicted from “reserved” or “protected” forests were Meiteis (143 houses), followed by Meite Pangals (137 houses), and then Kukis (59 houses). Various Naga and Nepali households were also affected.
4. The report does not maintain consistency regarding the number of women shown in the video – showing Kuki women being paraded naked. Moreover, the report also claims that the younger woman was raped on video. However, the 26-second video shows no instance of rape, though groping is apparent.
5. The report further claims that Kuki-Zo churches, houses, and properties were destroyed on the night of 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023, which is inaccurate. Violence in Imphal on that day was limited, and it was in the subsequent days that violence intensified in the valley, resulting in the destruction of various Kuki-Zo churches. Additionally, there were about 24 Kuki residents still living in Imphal till they were evacuated by the Assam Rifles on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023. Their properties are still intact in the valley.

In response to the EGI report, a group of professionals, scholars, and experts collaborated to write a letter to the president of the EGI (Appendix B). They have called the report as ‘biased’ and ‘baseless’ for the following reasons:

1. The EGI report contained serious methodological flaws, as it did not mention appropriate citations and references for their claims. It also failed to present a balanced view of the violence and was compromised from the onset.
2. Many of the pictures in the report lacked proper sources or captions and did not follow standard referencing formats. Some pictures had incorrect captions, such as identifying the burning of a forest office as a 'Kuki' house. Although this error has been noted and corrected by the EGI, it raises doubts about the overall quality of the fact-finding mission and the report.
3. The report claimed that the Manipur High Court directed the State Government to include the Meitei community in the ST list on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2023, yet this recommendation was not found in the original High Court order (Appendix I).
4. The report claimed that the declaration of forest areas as "reserved" or "protected" was done to evict 'Kukis' from these areas. However, as the AMJWU and EGM rebuttal also pointed out, Kukis are not the only or the largest displaced community from these forests as per official records.
5. The report portrayed Meira Paibis in a bad light and only mentioned the agitations by them while overlooking the efforts of Meira Paibis in restoring peace in the community and their condemnations of sexual assaults.
6. The report's cover page displayed a picture of the "Wall of Remembrance" from one community (Kukis) but omitted other affected communities. Moreover, the report also tended to refer to the 'Kukis' and its cognate tribes as Kuki-Zo communities, demonstrating support for and granting legal recognition to immigrants from Myanmar to India, while government records have historically referred to them as Chin-Kuki communities.
7. The EGI accused Manipur journalists of one-sided reporting, yet its report itself showed bias, portraying one community as victims and the other as aggressors, lacking neutrality and violating journalistic ethics.

Moreover, on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2023, the EGI acknowledged the contributions of various media and civil liberty organizations that assisted the guild.



In this post, the EGI had also mentioned the Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF) Media Cell which clearly shows that the EGI relied on one-sided narratives for their report, which is a violation of the ethical codes of conduct that advocates a neutral and balanced reportage.

However, within an hour, the EGI edited the post and retracted the mention of the ITLF Media Cell, as can be seen from the picture of the post attached below.



In conclusion, the rebuttals against the EGI report and its opaque functioning echo similar issues: that the fact-finding mission was rushed and the report did not produce a balanced, neutral, or holistic picture of the events, that the report contained several factual errors and false allegations which contributed to the already tense situation, that the

report failed to give appropriate references for their information and that the report violated the journalistic ethics.

The EGI claims to be working towards protecting press freedom and raising the standard of editorial leadership for magazines and newspapers. However, at a time when the EGI is supposed to fight misinformation and provide facts and evidence from reliable sources, it has instead joined the information war and contributed to the propagation of fake news. As the song lyrics at the beginning of this postscript ask, so do we, the readers: Just as the rain should extinguish a spark and the boatman should guide the boat safely back to the shore, the EGI should be safeguarding and promoting ethical

journalism. But if it fails to abide by these norms and its actions have led to a situation where the trust of the people in the media has eroded, then who will uphold journalistic integrity and combat misinformation?

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# APPENDIX A

## AMWJU & EGM rebuttal of the EGI report

### JOINT PRESS RELEASE

03/09/2023

#### **All Manipur Working Journalists Union, AMWJU and Editors Guild Manipur, EGM, strongly deny Editor Guild of India's Motivated Allegation based on Hearsay**

1. The All Manipur Working Journalists Union, AMWJU and Editors Guild Manipur, EGM, take strong exception to the half-baked so called fact finding report of the Editors Guild of India, EGI, completed in merely four days. The report has many contentions and wrong representations which are damaging to the reputation of the journalist community in the state, especially Imphal-based news outlets.
2. The EGI report claims its terms of reference is not investigating the genesis of the problem, but they all the same do so in a seemingly motivated manner, but unfortunately for the EGI, as expected, it ends up committing many factual errors in the process. Below are some of these:
  - i) The claim Meiteis were the initiators of the riots on May 3. It is surprising how they were able to establish this in four days even though there is a Supreme Court appointed fact finding committee looking into this same matter and is still not able to come out with the entire details yet though it began work on August 7, 2023.
  - ii) The EGI also refers to a certain Hill Area Committee Act 1972, but no such Act is in existence. The claim that the state government flouted the provisions of this Act to declare "reserved forest" or "protected forest" at its whim is false. There are no recently declared "reserved forest" or "protected forest". The last reserved forest declared in Manipur was in 1990 according to Manipur Forest Department records.
  - iii) It also stated that these declarations were meant to evict Kuki villages, but records of eviction by the government available with the Manipur Forest Department show otherwise. From October 2015 to April 2023, houses evicted from "reserved forest" and "protected forest" show there were 59 Kuki houses, 143 Meitei houses, 137 Meitei Pangal (Muslim) houses, 38 Naga houses, and 36 Nepali houses, totalling 413 houses. The EGI fact finding team did not even bother to confirm these data from the relevant authorities and instead apparently chose to depend on hearsay.
  - iv) The EGI report also claims that the state government has withdrawn from the tripartite Suspension of Operations agreement with the Kukis. Although the Chief Minister, N Biren did very brashly declared this abrogation with reference to 2 of the 25 Kuki militant organisations in the SoO group at a cabinet meeting on March 10, 2023, on the claim these two were foreign organisations, this decision was never pursued therefore SoO agreement with all 25 groups are still intact. The EGI again did not bother to crosscheck this before making its allegation.
  - v) In reference to the outrageous video of Kuki women being paraded naked, it seems the EGI did not even confirm whether there were two or three women for the EGI report says two in some references and three in some other in the same breath. It also says the younger woman was raped on video. The 26-second video shows only two women, and there was no rape was shown in the video, though groping was seen. Parading and groping were bad enough and need to be condemned, but the EGI chose to dramatize the tragic episode more than what was actually in the video to suit its motivated and skewed narrative.

- vi) Again, in photo of a burning building, the caption in the EGI report identifies it is a Kuki house burning, but this is the Forest Office at Maultam at Churachandpur, torched by a Kuki mob on May 3, right in the middle of the ATSUM peace rally at about 12.15pm.
- vii) The EGI report also claims that on the night of May 3 there was total destruction of Kuki-Zo churches, houses and other properties in Meitei dominated areas. This is false. On May 3, riots in Imphal were very limited. It was in the next few days that riots intensified and spread. While there were indeed wide destructions of Kuki-Zo churches and properties in these riots, there are a great number of Kuki houses still standing in Imphal, and there were even 24 Kuki residents still living in New Lambulane, Imphal, till September 1, 2023, when the Assam Rifles decided to evacuate them in the wake of another wave of heightened tensions following gun battles in the foothills which began on August 29, 2023, in the border area of Churachandpur and Bishnupur. Their properties are however still standing and intact.
- viii) EGI report also says Meira Paibis (local Meitei women) were without remorse after the viral video became public, or in other cases of mob atrocities. This broad brush is again not true and very unfair. Though there may have been some who had shown cruelty, it cannot be generalised. It has to be noted these local women were also the ones who rescued the two women paraded naked, clothed them and escorted them to a nearby security post.
- ix) EGI's claims that Thadou Kuki, Paite and Hmar news bulletins of the AIR were cancelled from May 3. This is not true. According to AIR Imphal records, while Paite and Hmar were dropped during May 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8, because of non-availability of internet access, Thadou Kuki bulletin continued unhindered. During May 9 and 10 these missing languages bulletins were read via telephone, but from May 11 onwards, all these language bulletins were on air as per schedule.
- x) The cover photograph of the EGI report itself also seems to be done with the intent to colour the readers' vision. It shows the Wall of Remembrance in Churachandpur, which has no direct relations with the present crisis. The intent seems to be to show the Kuki-Zo communities as endemically victimised.
- xi) The EGI also is too ready to quote verbatim allegation against Imphal based media by many interested parties, but fails to balance these charges with defences by the AMWJU and EGM.
- xii) It also claims most of the newspapers and news channels in the Imphal valley took dictations from the Chief Minister, N. Biren Singh's office. This damaging charge is however not substantiated, and the AMWJU and EGM would like the EGI to prove this charge.
- xiii) Again, the EGI report has no reflection at all of all the material supplied to them during 2-hour meeting with the AMWJU, EGM and MHJU representatives at the Manipur Press Club in Imphal.
- xiv) The EGI report for instance is silent on the attack on reporters by Kuki villagers after they were invited by an Indian Army commander at Henjang village near the 57 Mountain Division headquarters at Leimakhong although they were briefed of this unfortunate incident in the same meeting.
- xv) There are many more similar incidents of violence and threats faced by the Manipur journalists but the EGI team ignored them all in their report.
- xvi) The AMWJU and EGM do acknowledge there were shortcomings in its reportage of the events in the state, but these were because of unavoidable constraints, such lack of contact on account of the internet ban as well as the hard division of territories

accessible to reporters belonging to the communities in conflict. AMWJU and EGM also acknowledge there were silences maintained by the Imphal based media on certain incidents too, but these were also self-censorships to avoid escalation of dangerous emotions among the warring parties. Journalists on the other side of the current divide too would be facing the same constraints and compulsions, but the EGI does not seem to think so.

- xvii) Keeping in view these grave misrepresentations of the Imphal based journalists community, the EGI is requested to issue a clarification, or else face legal damage suit from the AMWJU and EGM.

Sd/-  
President  
EGM

Sd/-  
President  
AMWJU

## APPENDIX B

### Rebuttal of EGI's fact-finding report by academicians and other professionals

To  
Seema Mustafa  
President  
Editors Guild of India  
New Delhi

Date 06-09-2023

**Ref: Rebuttal on the Report of fact-finding mission on media's reportage of the ethnic violence in Manipur.**

Dear Ms. Mustafa,

We, the undersigned professionals, strongly condemn and denounce the report published by Seema Guha, Sanjay Kapoor, and Bharat Bhushan on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2023. The report claims to be a fact-finding mission, commissioned by the Editors' Guild of India (EGI), on media's reportage of the ethnic violence in Manipur.

While almost the entire report is biased, baseless, and assuming that other entities who will be affected by this report will take their own course, we would like to take special exception to the points below:

1. **Methodological flaws:** As the title of the report suggests, it was meant to be a "fact-finding on media's reportage of the violence". However, most of the reports are based on perception and hearsay with no appropriate media citations and references. There is no honest reportage of the impact of violence on both the communities. Thus, the basic premise on the scope of this mission was compromised right from the start of this report.
2. **Inconsistent citations:** It is worrying for common citizens like ourselves, who have always seen the media as the fourth pillar of our democracy, twisting facts in the report. The report's content does not clearly point out the respective media sources of the 'facts'. There are 6 pictures in the report excluding the cover page picture, 'Wall of Remembrance' of the Kuki community. In these pictures, there is a lack of uniformity in providing the sources and details, with some of them having only captions without dates while others having captions with dates. Two pictures are without caption, date, or image courtesy. There is an arbitrary inclusion of visuals without taking into account the details. The image of the burning government forest office at Maultam, Churachandpur burnt on May 3, is

reported as a burning Kuki house (ref. Page 7). While we understand that the EGI tweeted on this and rectified the caption, we question the quality and reliability of the field work conducted and the role of EGI to ensure quality and ethical reporting. We also wonder how the report made it through proofreading, photo editing, and copyediting. Usage of pictures and wrong captions to depict one-sided violence shows lack of honest and unbiased reportage.

3. **Misrepresentation of legal proceedings:** The report states that the Manipur High Court, on March 27, ordered the state government for inclusion of the Meitei community in the Scheduled Tribes list (ref page 3). The original order from the Honourable High Court of Manipur did not have this recommendation (ref Honourable Manipur High Court order number WP (C) no. 229 of 2023 dated 19.4.2023). This is misleading and deceptive content about a Court's proceedings produced by the EGI.

4. **Misleading Information on Evictions:** The report's argument that the eviction from reserved-forest areas was conducted in Kuki-dominated areas and Kukis were singled out (ref page 3) is completely false. We wonder how the fact-finding team missed visiting other communities who were also evicted or approaching government departments who had the exact numbers and locations. The fact is that, from 2015 till 2023, most houses evicted were of Meiteis, so far 143 houses against 59 Kuki houses. Other communities viz. Meitei pangals (137 houses), Nagas (38 houses) and Gorkhas (36 houses) were also evicted. On the other hand, a recent report from Narcotics and Affairs of Border (NAB) suggests that the scale of poppy cultivation in Manipur has spread across 15,400 acres of land in the hills between 2017 and 2023. Of this, 13,122 acres were in Chin-Kuki dominated areas, 2,340 acres in Naga-dominated areas and 35 acres under others. These two official figures are crucial to underscore the fact that the drive against illegal encroachment has no direct link to poppy cultivation, which anyone from a neutral media entity should have brought forward to the public. The fact-finding mission has failed here again by producing misleading content.

5. **Biased Portrayal of Meira Paibis:** The report has a section on Meira Paibis (ref page 8 and 9), that are not media reportage or even facts but opinions of the three authors to portray Meira Paibis in a bad light. For instance, phrases such as 'forgetting their feminist past', 'showed no remorse', 'normal rules no longer applied', and 'cheerleaders of the violent mobs' are baseless allegations. The whole section writes only about the agitations by Meira Paibi while

completely overlooking the media reportage of Meira Paibis' demonstrations for restoration of peace and condemnations of sexual assaults. There are sweeping statements all over the section. The last two paragraphs show kuki women as the only women 'victims' and engaging in similar agitations but in a 'peaceful' way. The report writes about the humiliation of the 'three kuki women' in the same paragraph about general women and children as worst sufferers, thereby portraying the kuki women and children as the victims.

6. **Misquotation of Internet Ban Judgement:** The section titled, 'Banning the Internet' refers to Anuradha Bhasin judgement of Supreme Court (ref page 18) and says that "The judgement limits the ban to 15 days" which is not true as the judgement does not mention any specific time limit for the internet ban. Rather, it is the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Amendment) Rules, 2020 with newly inserted subrule (2A) to the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Service) Rules, 2017 amended in 2020 which says that "The suspension order issued by the competent authority under sub-rule (1) shall not be in operation for more than fifteen days". The report has wrongly lifted the reference for 15 days limit from the Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF) article which says that "it violates Rule 2(2A) of the Telecom Suspension, 2017, as amended in 2020, after the Supreme Court in *Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India*" without referring to the source material. While condemning the internet ban, it is not expected to object to it using misleading statements.

While the EGI report talks in detail about internet ban and fake news, the team ends up providing selective information. This can be evidenced from their not reporting about uninterrupted internet service in Chin-Kuki dominated Churachandpur. It is an important fact that even a notice was issued by H Gyan Prakash, Commissioner (Home) on 31st May 2023 asking for justification for relaxing internet ban in Churachandpur District despite the state government order suspending internet service throughout the state from 3rd May 2023 and ordering a probe into misuse of the internet. Similarly in one incident under the Fake News and Disinformation (ref page 22), it narrates about a particular Imphal based newspaper covering a biased report on desecration of temple on August 3. However, it ignores the fact that the same newspaper the very next day carried the same news with corrections on its front page.

7. **Lack of professionalism:** It is evident from the facts that they reported a state cadre police officer as an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer and the report's cover page carries the photograph of Kuki "Wall of Remembrance" for a fact finding report. The cover page carries one picture from only one community ignoring the other severely impacted community. The major part of the report has used the Kuki and cognate tribes as Kuki-Zo communities whereas historically they are referred to as Chin-Kuki communities in the government records. This paramounts to supporting their strategy to legalise the recent immigrants from Myanmar to India.

8. **Violation of journalistic ethics:** The Conclusions and Recommendations section's first point states that journalists of Manipur wrote one-sided reports. The irony is that this report itself is a one-sided narrative portraying one community as the perpetrators of violence and the other as the victims. Violence of this kind has continued for 4 months due to its two-way attacks. The report has not maintained neutrality and objectivity, thereby violating the journalistic ethics. The EGI, a trusted body in India, possibly has not examined and scrutinised the report before it is published.

The EGI claims to work for protecting press freedom and for raising the standards of editorial leadership of newspapers and magazines. However, with a very biased and misinformed report on Manipur, as evidenced from the above points its 'Fact-Finding Team' has done great injustice to its own reputation and contributed to fake news factories which are working overtime to destroy the peace building process in the tiny state of Manipur. It has joined the information war rather than fighting against it. Presentation of facts and evidence from reliable sources to establish accuracy and team's recommendations towards restoration of peace in Manipur would be highly appreciated. We demand complete scrapping of the report and deployment of a more competent team, consultation with all affected communities and contributing to a broader peace building process.

Sincerely,

1. Dr R.K. Nimai, Social Activist, Imphal, Manipur
2. Biswanath Mutum, Social Sector Specialist, Tripura
3. Dr Angomcha Bimol Akoijam, JNU, New Delhi
4. Dr Melody Kshetrimayum, Academician, Pune
5. Dr Nambram Sushibala Devi, Planning and Design Consultant, Mumbai

6. Lenin Loitongbam, Aerospace Engineer IIT Bombay
7. Giten Khwairakpam, Development Professional, Imphal, Manipur
8. Shridhar Washikar, Airport Master Planner, Mumbai
9. Sushanta Singh Takhellambam, Joint GM, L&T Oman. Muscat
10. Chingangbam Nivason, Professional Structural Engineer, NIT Jaipur
11. Kshetrimayum Dideshwor, Research scholar, Wuhan University of Technology, China
12. Linthoi Nongthombam, Corporate Finance, Mumbai
13. Dr Shanta Laishram, Academician, Delhi
14. Sanjeeta Aheibam, Managing Director, Manipuri Weddings, Hyderabad
15. Dr Maitri Kshetrimayum, IIT Bombay
16. Hero Thokchom, Iboyaima Hospital, Imphal, Manipur
17. Dr Nongthombam Eliza, Academician, Manipur
18. Dr Sunanda Nungleppam, Dermatologist, Manipur
19. Dr Roshan Keisham, Pathologist, Manipur
20. Dr Ranjana Sinha, Dental Surgeon, Navi Mumbai
21. Leishangthem Raghumani Singh, Power System Engineer, Mumbai
22. Geetarani Takhellambam, Advocate, Manipur High Court, Imphal
23. Bisoya Loitongbam, Development Professional, Lucknow
24. Dr Khaidem Ranjankumar Singh, Scientist, Mumbai
25. Somchandra N, Information Technology Consultant, Mumbai
26. Dr Homen Irengbam, Medical Surgeon, Imphal
27. Monish Karam, CEO, 1 Million Heroes, Singapore
28. Dr Nganthoiba Pebam, Social Sector, Imphal, Manipur
29. Ngangom Junior Luwang, Advocate, The Supreme Court, Delhi.
30. Rishi Raj Sinha, Research Scholar, IISER, Mohali, Punjab
31. Swapan Ashangbam, Development Professional and Farmer, Assam
32. Dr Jiten Nongmaithem, Principal Scientist, South Korea
33. Mutum Gunodhan, Social Activist, Silchar, Assam

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## APPENDIX C

List of reserved forests appended in the Green Book published by the Forest Department

### RESERVED FORESTS OF MANIPUR

Sl. No.	Name of Reserved Forests	Notification No.	Gazette No.
1	Changkhet-Chung	Darbar Resolution No. 1 - dt. 4-8-37	
2	Langol	Darbar Resolution No. 4 - dt. 14-10-33	
3	Langol Extension	Darbar Resolution No. 4 - dt. 14-10-33	
4	Heingang	No. 432 dt. 4-8-13 of the Vice President M.S.D.	
5	Nongrenching(Khema)	Darbar Resolution No. 3 dt. 27.2.46	
6	Ningthemchakhul(Laiching)	Darbar Resolution No. 10 dt. 10.4.46.	
7	Jirimukh	Darbar Resolution No. 20 Dt. 7.2.46.	
8	Sambei Purum	Darbar Resolution No. 4(A) dt. 7.10.36.	
9	Yaingangpokpi	55/7/84-For dt.29-12-89	No. 40 January 10, 1990
10	Nongmaiching	66/1/75-For dt. 4-1-90	No. 40 January 17, 1990
11	Heirok Chingdonpok	55/10/67-For dt. 8/2/68	No. 259-E-215 Feb. 13, 1968
12	Gwarok	55/9/76-For No. 163 dt. 14-8-79.	Sept, 3, 1979
13	Thongam Mondum	No. 55/2/76-For dt. 5/2/77.	No. 210 Feb. 18.1977
14	Waikhong pine	No.55/63/70-For dt. 4-2-72	No. 132 Feb. 9, 1972
15	Thongjao Kabui Chingkhongching	55/63/70-For dt. 13/9/71	No. 58 Sept. 22, 1971
16	Khunulaba Ching	55/63/70-For dt. 13/9/71	No. 58 Sept. 22, 1971
17	Khongjaingamba	55/63/70-For dt. 4/2/72	No. 132 Feb. 9, 1972
18	Warok		
19	Konung		

20.	Kaiphundai Extension		
21.	Irangmukh	FR/25/54 (a)/19 dt. 5-11-54 FR-8/51/51 dt. 10-9-51	No. 36 Nov. 10, 1954 No. 37 Sept. 12, 1951
22.	Vangai		
23.	Tolbung	No. T/1484/6 dt. 29.5.35	
24.	Laimaton	No. T/1484/6 dt. 29.5.35	
25.	Jiri-Makru (Keiphundai)	No. 3648/Hill. dt. 10.3.41 of P.M.S.D. No. 2236/Hill	
26.	Cheklapai	dt. 6.1.39 of P.M.S.D. Darbar Resulation No. 2 dt. 12-12-45	
27.	Langjingmanbi	No. 4739/Hill dt. 16.3.35.	
28.	Dampi	FR 8/51 dt. 1-8-51	No. 27 August, 8, 1951
29.	Kangbung	Memo No. 2347/Hill dt. 16.1.39 (XVI-I) of P.M.S.D. (Hill)	
30.	Longya	Memo No. 2346-9 dt. 16.1.39 (XVI-I) of P.M.S.D. (Hill)	
31.	Yangenching	No/ 2347/Hill dt. 16.1.39 (XVI-I) of P.M.S.D. (Hill)	
32.	Kangchup	Darbar Resulation No. 1 dt 15-5-40	
33.	Kangchup Chiru	Council Resolution No. 2 dt. 22.4.48	
34.	Khamenlok-Gwaltabi	Darbar Resolution No. 15 dt. 7.8.46	
35.	Tadubi Maram	FR-32/52/5 dt. 31/2/52	No. 7-E-4 April 21, 1952
36.	Kanglatongbi-Kangpokpi	55/10/68-M No. 96-E-81 dt. 3-7-68	July 12, 1968
37.	Khumanthou Ching	55/63/70-For No. 16 dt. 3-7-73	July 18, 1973

## APPENDIX D

### List of protected forests appended in the Green Book published by the Forest Department

PROTECTED FORESTS OF MANIPUR			
Sl.No.	Name of the Protected Forests	Notification No.	Gazette No/Date
1.	M.XVI(A)	No.F.R.7.51.20 dt. 6/12/1951.	No.70. dt.26/12/1951.
2.	Uningthou Ching	No.F.R-7/51/10 dt.21/11/1951	No.70. 26/12/1951.
3.	Ukhrul  1. Chassat, 2. Bongbakhullen, 3. Ningthi, 4, Phange, 5, Chahong, 6. Chahong-khunow, 7, Lusat, 8, Mattiyang, 9. Kheyang, 10, Seroi Hills, 11. Huining, 12. Ukhrul, 13, Nungha, 14, Nungbi, 15, Pawee, 16, Kangoi, 17. Chuigai, 18. Tusom,Khunou, 19. Tusom Khullen, 20. Chekyang, 21. Chingjaroi, 22. Pao-tong, 23. Thangyang, 24. Luchai, 25. Kharasom, 26. Jesami, 27. Ongshing, 28. Chamu, 29. Spong, 30. Chungra, 31. Seraphungphi, 32. Phalang. 33, Lang, 34. Vahong. 35. Bholou Khunou, 36. Bholou Khullen, 37. Boi, 38. Huishu, 39. Khamson, 40. Lashi, 41. Kangsong, 42. Langdang and 43. Bhoitheir.	No. FR/7/51/34 dt. 21/9/53	No. .... dt.30/9/1953.
4.	Kharam	No. 15/52/24. dt. 6/12/52.	No... 10/12/52.
5.	Sendra	No. 56/3162-M dt. 11/6/62.	
6.	Sikhong Ningel Hill	No. 55/10/65-M(I) dt. 26/11/65.	No. 137-E-105 dt. 1-12-1965
7.	Soigupat	No. 55/10/65-66- M. Dt.1-6-66.	No. 40-E-31 dt. 3/6/66.
8.	Kakching Khunou Mamang Ching	No. 55/10/65-66-M(1) Dt,1-6-66.	No. 41-E-32. dt. 3/6/1966.

1.	Waithouching Hill.	No. 55/10/65-66-M (2) dt. 1-6-66.	No. 42-E-33. Dt. 3-6-1966.
2.	Churachandpur Khoupum	No. 55/10/65-66-(2) dt. 17/9/66.	No. 124-E-100 dt. 21/9/66.
3.	Tairenpokpi Tamenglong	No. 55/10/ 66-M (1) dt. 17/9/66.	No. 123 -E-99. dt. 21/9/1966.
4.	Tuining Tuichum	No. 55/10/65-66-M(3) dt. 1/6/66	No. 43-E-34 dt. 3-6-66.
5.	Kangchup-Leimakhong - Irang protected Forest.	No. 55/10/66-M dt. 9/5/67.	No. 35-E-3 dt. 10/12/67.
6.	Haraorou Protected Forest.	No. 35/10/68-M dt. 17/1/70	No. 36-E-3 dt. 21/1/70.
7.	Imphal-Iril Protected Forest.	No. 56/10/66-M dt. 9/5/67	No. 35-E-104. dt. 9/5/67
8.	Bishnupur Khoupum Protected Forest	No. 55/10/78-For dt. 18/6/79	No. 13. dt. 27-6-79.
9.	Churachandpur Thinghat Roadside Protected Forest.	No. 55/10/78-For -dt. 18/6/79	No. 13. dt. 27-6-79.
10.	Churachandpur Tipaimukh Roadside Protected Forest.	No. 55/10/78-For -dt. 18/6/79	No. 13. dt. 27-6-79.
11.	Pallel Lokchao Roadside Protected Forest	No. 55/10/78-For -dt. 18/6/79	No. 13. dt. 27-6-79.
12.	Kangpokpi Tamenglong Roadside Protected Forest	No. 55/10/78-For -dt. 18/6/79	No. 13. dt. 27-6-79.
13.	Gwaltabi Tamenglong Roadside Protected Forest.	No. 55/10/78-For -dt. 18/6/79	No. 13. dt. 27-6-79.
14.	Valley Protected Forests.	No. 55/66/60-M dt. 2-2-62	No. 266-E-222 dt. 6-2-62

1. Taknakha pat 2. Linchikpat
3. Heingang F.R. 4. Maongjam G.M.
5. Maibakhul valley & Hill
6. Koirengai 7. Awang Potsangbam
8. Haraorou 9. Awang  
Ngairangbam 10. Morok Inghol
11. Yumnam Khunou 12. Sinam  
Konjin 13. Sinamkonjin Ishing  
thembi 14. Tongnangpat
15. Yumnam Patlou

16. Sangolmang Khewa  
 Kampani. 17. Pukhao(exclude  
 Manroi) 18. Purum Khulen  
 19. Uyumpok include Khamellok  
 20. Lamboikhul 21. Taretkhul,  
 Keibikhullen 22. Keibi  
 Louangkhang 23. Keibi Khunou  
 Incl. Chanung 24. Heikak Mapan  
 25. Pourabi and Wairi  
 26. Kharasom 27. Laikot  
 28. Soubungkhok 29. Yaingang-  
 pokpi 30. Thamnapokpi incl.  
 Gwaltabi 31. Lokmang  
 32. Nongpok Sanjenbam Ching-  
 kheiching Reserve. 33. Kakching  
 Nongdam 34. Nongpok Sanjen bam  
 35. Ningthemchakhul 36. Thayong  
 Heirok 37. Tumukhong. 38. Itham  
 Laikhong 39. Moirang Prem  
 40. Andro 41. Kamu Yaithibi  
 42. Keithelmanbi 43. Nungbrang.  
 44. Leirongthel 45. Kakmayai  
 46. Changamdabi 47. Khoirom  
 Kekru 48. Wangkhem Keirao  
 valley. 49. Langol with new Extn.  
 50. Lamlongei 51. Tingri No. 1  
 Lunwangsangol 52. Tingri No. 2  
 53. West Gwaltabi 54. Maharabi  
 55. Leikinthabi 56. Sekmai  
 57. Keingam and Kanto  
 58. Phumlou 59. Mayanglangjing  
 60. Lairn Sajik 61. Longa Koireng  
 62. Moidangpok Sajirok  
 63. Khaidem 64. Heikrujam.  
 65. Kangmong Langoljam  
 66. Samurou 67. Yangoi  
 Khongbalpat Meichakpi  
 68. Laitangpat. 69. Leingangpat  
 70. Uchiwa 71. Hayel 72. Hangul  
 73. Laphupat 74. Komlakhongpat  
 75. Phougakchaou 76. Arong.  
 77. Thongam 78. Kha Sanjenbam  
 79. Thounaojam Pukhrambam  
 80. Sanapat 81. Lainambipat  
 82. Kingkham Awangpat  
 83. Uttrapat 84. Toubul Mutum  
 Yangbi 85. Khoijuman  
 86. Bishenpur S (a) 87. Bishenpur  
 S(b) 88. Kha Potsangbam  
 89. Ninghoukhong 90. Thinungei  
 91. Naranseina and Sunusiphai

92. Langhinmanbi Steward Res.  
 93. Phubala 94. Ngangkha Lawai  
 95. Kha Thimungei Thangalawai  
 incl. Moirang Khunou 96. Moirang  
 97. Kwakta 98. Kha Thamnepokpi/  
 Khoirentak 99. Saiton. 100. Kumbi  
 Kangsoibi 101. Ungamlen.  
 102. Karang 103. Khanga lamjao  
 Pat 104. Usoipokpi  
 105. Suktokarang 106. Lilong  
 Turelhanbi Mapal near Dolaithabi/  
 Khtripan 107. Waithou Soirenpat.  
 108. Waithou phumnompot.  
 109. Toubul. 110. Ningthibakhaong  
 111. Moirang Sangol  
 112. Chandrakhong 113. Shikhong.  
 114. Ningel 115. Sekmai Khunbi.  
 116. Keipha between Tentha and  
 Khangabok. 117. Tentha Khullen  
 118. Ikop Laidakolpat. 119. Heirok  
 120. Salungpham 121. Lamlong  
 122. Langol 123. Koijam Konjin No.  
 1(a) 124. Koijam Konjin No. II.  
 125. Pallel. 126. Kumbi Valley.  
 127. Aimon 128. Irengpat.  
 129. Kakchingkhul. 130. Keirak.  
 131. Lamjao 132. Laimanai Nungu  
 Sanamahi. 133. Thounaojam  
 134. Elangkhangpokpi.  
 135. Thongjao 136. Kakching  
 Khunou. 137. Thongam.  
 138. Pumlelpat. 139. Nungu.  
 140. Thangjeng. 141. Sugnu  
 Kangbung Reserve. 142. Kharung-  
 pat. 143. Lamjaokhongpat  
 144. Wangoo Ahallup Sheet No.1.  
 145. Ithai Sheet No. 2 146. Wangoo  
 Laipham. 147. Mahau.  
 148. Tonsen.

23. Yangoi Achouba Sileikhong

No. 55/69-65  
dt. 26-10-66

No. 16-66  
dt. 16-11-66

## APPENDIX E

### High Court judgement on controversies around the demolition of churches in Imphal, 4<sup>th</sup> April 2023

1

JOHN  
TELEN KOM

Digitally signed by  
JOHN TELEN KOM  
Date: 2023.04.04  
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#### IN THE HIGH COURT OF MANIPUR AT IMPHAL

MC(WP(C))No.88 of 2023  
Ref:WP(C)No.94 of 2021

1. The State of Manipur, represented by the Chief Secretary, Government of Manipur, Babupara.
2. The Commissioner(Revenue), Government of Manipur, at Manipur-795001.
3. The Dy. Commissioner, Government of Manipur, at Imphal East-795005.

*...Applicants*

*- Versus -*

The Evangelical Baptist Convention Church, Tribal Colony, New Checkon, Imphal East, PO & PS, Porompat, Imphal East- represented by its Chairman.

*.... Respondent.*

*With*

MC(WP(C))No.89 of 2023  
Ref:WP(C)No.501 of 2022

1. The State of Manipur, represented by the Chief Secretary, Government of Manipur, Babupara.
2. The Commissioner(Revenue), Government of Manipur, at Manipur-795001.

3. The Dy. Commissioner, Government of Manipur, at Imphal East-795005.

**...Applicants**

**- Versus -**

The Peniel Church (MELC), Tribal Colony, New Checkon, Imphal East, PO & PS, Porompat, Imphal East- represented by its Chairman.

**.... Respondent**

**BEFORE**

**HON'BLE THE ACTING CHIEF JUSTICE MR. M.V. MURALIDARAN**

For the Applicant	:	Mr. Lenin Hijam, learned AG.
For the Respondents	:	Mr. Th. Babloo, Adv.
Date of reserved.	:	29.03.2023
Date of Judgment & Order	:	04.04.2023.

**JUDGMENT & ORDER**  
**(CAV)**

These two miscellaneous cases have been filed by the State to vacate the interim orders dated 5.2.2021 and 3.8.2022 and the subsequent extension for maintaining status quo passed in W.P.(C) Nos.94 of 2021 and 501 of 2022 respectively and allow the State authorities to remove the unauthorized religious structures on public street, public parks, public places etc. in

compliance with the order of the Hon'ble Supreme Court dated 29.9.2009 in SLP (C) No.8519 of 2006 (*Union of India v. State of Gujarat and others*).

2. Heard Mr. Lenin Hijam, learned AG for the State and Mr. Th. Babloo, the learned counsel for the respondent.

3. The learned Advocate counsel appearing for the applicant State submitted that pursuant to the direction of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in SLP (C) No.8519 of 2006 dated 7.12.2019, the Government of Manipur issued a notification dated 3.4.2010 to make the Manipur Policy for Review of Unauthorised Construction of Religious nature on Public Street, Public Parks, Public Places and a State Level Committee was constituted for reviewing of unauthorized construction of religious nature such as Temple, Church, Mosque or Gurudwara etc. on public street, public parks or other public places etc. The District Level Committee headed by the District Commissioner/Chairperson was constituted for the purpose of removal/relocation/regularization of the religious structure located in Village No.26-Wangkheirakpam Leikai and in the meeting held on 24.6.2022, it was discussed about the existence of religious structures erected on the Government lands of 26-Wangkheirakpam Leikai, namely 9 Churches – (i) Tangkhul Baptist Church; (ii) Pineal Church Manipur; (iii) Holy Spirit Church; (iv) Zou Christian Bible Church; (v) Meitei Baptist Church; (vi) Zou Presbyterian Church; (vii) Evangelical Organization Church; (viii) Kneseeya Beith Shalom Church and (ix) Evangelical Baptist Convention Church, which

stand on the land allotted to PWD Building Division and to make further recommendation on whether to remove, relocate or regularize the churches as per the Hon'ble Supreme Court direction.

4. The learned Government Advocate would submit that Evangelical Baptist Convention Church and Paniel Church buildings were constructed on the Government Khas land meant for Government quarters without any approval from the authority concerned and without any right or title over the land. The existence of the Church buildings which were reportedly constructed on the Government Khas land without any approval for prayers by the occupants of the Government quarters in the New Checkon now nullify as the allotment of quarters in the New Checkon had been cancelled by the Government Order dated 20.3.2021 and most of the occupants have been allotted new quarters.

5. The learned Government Advocate further submitted that on 12.1.2023 a meeting was held to review the unauthorized constructions of religious nature prior to 29.9.2009 on public street, public parks, public places located in Village No.26-Wangkheirakpam Leikai. Out of the 9 religious structures located at Government Quarters Complex, New Checkon, only 4 structures are still standing.

6. The learned Government Advocate next submitted that the State Government has obtained loan from HUDCO for construction of Government

quarters and the project for construction of Government quarters, New Checkon was estimated at Rs.50 crore and the construction is going on in full swing and the new quarters will provide 392 new modern residential quarters for Government employees.

7. The learned Government Advocate urged that the Committee after going through the relevant reports, revenue documents and the order of the Hon'ble Supreme Court, unanimously recommended removal of the left over 4 religious structures after obtaining approval of the State Cabinet and orders from this Court. Since the State Cabinet in its decision dated 18.1.2023 granted approval for removal of four religious structures, the State has now filed these miscellaneous cases to vacate the status quo order that was granted by this Court in the writ petitions.

8. Refuting the submissions made by learned Government Advocate, the learned counsel for the respondents submitted that Evangelical Baptist Convention Church was constructed on a Government land in the year 1974 to cater social and spiritual needs of the Church members who are mostly Tribal Government employee residing in Imphal East. The members of the Church are enjoying social and religious services in the Church for more than 40 years without any objection and interruption from any quarter whatsoever, including the Government. He would submit that in compliance of the order of the Hon'ble Supreme Court, the State of Manipur has constituted State Level Committee and Committees for District Level for consideration of such

cases of unauthorized structures of religious nature. The State Level Committee had also recommended as many as 188 unauthorized structures of religious nature constructed on Government land and allotment orders have been issued in favour of those 188 individual cases vide allotment order dated 27.9.2011.

9. The learned Advocate counsel submitted that the Evangelical Baptist Convention Church has also submitted an application on 5.9.2011 for allotment of the land occupied by them to the concerned authorities for consideration under the instructions and protections given by the Hon'ble Supreme Court dated 29.9.2009. However, the District Level Committee has taken a decision to remove the Evangelical Baptist Convention Church in total defiance of the directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court, which is quiet contemptuous of the Hon'ble Supreme Court. The Evangelical Baptist Convention Church has possessed the land measuring 0.044 acres under Dag No.265(p) located at Village No.26-Wangkheirakpam Leikai since the year 1974 against the whole world including the State Government without any objection and interruption till today and, as such the Evangelical Baptist Convention Church has got a prescriptive right of title over the disputed land. Only after considering the nature of the case, this Court, while issuing notice, vide order dated 5.2.2021, passed the interim order for maintaining status quo under the land under dispute.

10. As far as Peniel Church (MELC) is concerned, the learned counsel for the respondent submitted that the said Church was established in the year 1997 to cater social and spiritual needs of the Church members and the members of the Church are enjoying social and religious services in the Church for more than 25 years without any objection from any quarter. The location on which the Peniel Church is standing was by then a six feet deep ditch and the Church has been established by its members by reclaiming the land by investing huge amount of money collected from the members. The Peniel Church is located at Village No.26-Wangkheirakpam Leikai under Dag No.265(P) measuring an area of 86 ft. wide and 115 ft. long, Imphal East District and the same is recorded in the name of the State.

11. The learned counsel further submitted that Peniel Church was issued with an eviction notice dated 24.12.2020 by the SDO without any authority and without taking approval from the State Cabinet or permission from the Hon'ble Supreme Court. In a similar case, when eviction was initiated at the instance of the Director, RIMS, the SDO, Imphal West has passed an order on 5.10.2018 in Eviction Case No.18 of 2017 closing the eviction process in view of the direction of the Hon'ble Supreme Court. Since the direction dated 29.9.2009 of the Hon'ble Supreme Court is to the effect to remove/relocate/regularize the unauthorized construction of religious nature prior to 29.9.2009, the Peniel Church is entitled for allotment of land already occupied by it since 1997. Considering the nature of the case, vide order

dated 3.8.2022, this Court, passed the interim order for maintaining status quo in respect of the land of Peniel Church. Thus, a prayer has been made to dismiss the miscellaneous cases.

12. This Court considered the rival submissions and also perused the materials available on record.

13. The Evangelical Baptist Convention Church has filed W.P.(C) No.94 of 2021 with the following reliefs:

- "(a) To admit this petition for hearing;*
- (b) After hearing the parties to issue a writ in the nature of mandamus for directing the Respondents authorities to expedite the case of the Petitioner for allotment in term of the allotment application dated 05.09.2011 (Annex-A/7) and the direction of the Hon'ble Supreme Court contained in the order dated 31.01.2018 passed in SLP (C) No.8519/2016 and in terms of the Government policy called the Manipur Policy for Review of Unauthorized Construct of Religious Nature on public streets, public parks, public place etc., 2010 vide notification dated 03.04.2010 and its amendment dated 05.03.2011 (Annex-A/4) within a specific period of time as done in other cases.*
- (c) To quash and set aside the eviction notice dated 24.12.2020 (Annex-A/11) as the same is passed without jurisdiction, contemptuous and illegal;*

*(d) To quash and set aside the whole proceedings of the Eviction Case No.17 of 2020/SDO/I/IE of the court of the SDO, Imphal East."*

14. On 5.2.2021, when W.P.(C) No.94 of 2021 was taken up for admission, this Court passed the following interim order:

*"Heard Mr. Th.Babloo, learned counsel appearing for the petitioner.*

*Issue notice, returnable within 4 (four) weeks.*

*Mr. Shyam Sharma, learned GA accepts notice on behalf of all the respondents. Hence, no formal notice is called for.*

*As an interim measure, it is directed that status-quo as on today with regard to the writ petitioner shall be maintained till the next date.*

*List this case again on 05.03.2021."*

15. The Peniel Church (MELC) has filed W.P.(C) No.501 of 2022 with the following reliefs:

*"(a) to admit this petition for hearing;*

*(b) after hearing the parties to issue a writ in the nature of mandamus for directing the Respondents authorities to regularize the occupation of the Govt. land by the petitioner covered by Dag No.265 (Part) measuring 86 ft. wide and 115 ft. long in Village No.26-Wangkheirakpam, Imphal East District by way of granting allotment in terms of the direction of the Hon'ble Supreme Court contained in the order dated 31.01.2018 passed in SLP (C) No.8519/2016 and in terms of the Government policy called the Manipur Policy for Review of Unauthorized Construct of Religious Nature on public streets,*

*public parks, public place etc., 2010 vide notification dated 03.04.2010 and its amendment dated 05.03.2011 (Annex-A/4) within a specific period of time as done in other cases.*

*(c) to quash and set aside the eviction notice dated 24.12.2020 (Annex-A/6) as the same is passed without jurisdiction, contemptuous and illegal;*

*(d) to quash and set aside the whole proceedings of the Eviction Case No.17 of 2020/SDO//IE of the Court of the SDO, Imphal East."*

16. On 3.8.2022, when the writ petition was taken up for admission, this Court passed the following interim order:

*"Heard Mr. Th. Babloo, learned counsel appearing for the petitioner and Mr. H.Debendra, learned GA appearing for the respondents.*

*Learned GA seeks three weeks' time for filing counter affidavit. Prayer is allowed.*

*List this case again on 7<sup>th</sup> September, 2022.*

*In the meantime, status quo in respect of the land of the petitioner shall be maintained till the next date."*

17. The respondents Evangelical Baptist Convention Church and Peniel Church (MELC) admitted that the two Churches have been constructed on Government land. There is no whisper in the writ petition that Churches have been constructed with the approval of the State authorities.

18. With regard to the removal of unauthorized religious structures in public streets, public parks, public places etc., the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of *Union of India v. State of Gujarat and others* (arising out of the order dated 2.5.2006 passed by the Gujarat High Court in SCA No.9686 of 2006) in Special Leave to Appeal (Civil) No.8519 of 2006 dated 29.9.2009 passed the following orders:

*"..... As an interim measure, we direct henceforth no unauthorized construction shall be carried out or permitted in the name of Temple, Church, Mosque or Gurudwara etc. on public streets, public parks or other public places etc.*

*In respect of the unauthorized construction of religious nature which has already taken place, the State Governments and the Union Territories shall review the same on case to case basis and take appropriate steps as expeditiously as possible."*

19. Again on 7.12.2009, when the Special Leave to Appeal (Civil) No.8519 of 2006 came up for hearing, the Hon'ble Supreme passed the following order:

*"All the Chief Secretaries, in consultation with the respective Governments are directed to frame the policy in respect of existing unauthorized construction of religious nature, which had already taken place. This Court directed the respondents to review the same on case to case base. Let the policies be formulated by all the States and Union Territories within four weeks from today.*

*We are reiterating that the Chief Secretaries, the concerned District Magistrates and the Collectors/Deputy Commissioners in-charge of*

*the Districts must ensure total compliance of our order. Any breach in this respect shall be viewed seriously by this Court."*

20. It appears that in compliance of the order of the Hon'ble Supreme Court, the Government of Manipur framed a policy and published vide notification dated 3.4.2010 and had also constituted State Level Committee for reviewing the unauthorized construction of religious nature and the District Committees headed by District Commissioner/Chairperson were constituted for the purpose of removal/relocation/regularization of the religious structure. Accordingly, the District Level Committee where the religious structures located in Village No.26-Wangkheirakpam Leikai discussed the existence of nine religious structures on the land allotted to the PWD Building Division, Government of Manipur. Out of nine religious structures located at Government Quarters Complex in New Checkon, five were removed and four are still standing on Dag Nos.410, 411, 412(P), 265, 267(P) and 265(P). Out of the four, two Churches, namely, Evangelical Baptist Convention Church and Peniel Church have come to this Court challenging the eviction notices issued against them.

21. The respondents contended that in compliance of the direction of the Hon'ble Supreme Court, the State Level Committee already recommended as many as 188 unauthorized structures of religious nature constructed on Government land and allotment orders have been issued in favour of those 188 individual cases. When the respondent Churches

submitted applications before the State authorities for allotment of the land occupied by them, the same have not been considered, instead the District Committee is taking action for removal of the Church structures, which is total defiance of the directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India.

22. The consideration for allotment of the land occupied by the respondent Churches are within the domain of the State authorities and the Court exercising jurisdiction under Article 226 of the Constitution cannot interfere with it or direct the State to positively consider the claim of the respondents, as the respondent Churches are standing on the Government land. That apart, when the Hon'ble Supreme Court issued direction to remove the unauthorized structures of religious nature standing on the Government land, whether it is 40 years old or 25 years old, it is the bounden duty of the State authorities to obey the direction of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in removing the unauthorized religious structures.

23. The specific direction of the Hon'ble Supreme Court is that in respect of unauthorized construction of religious nature which has already taken place on public streets, public parks or other public places, the State Government and the Union Territories were directed to review the same on case to case basis and take appropriate steps as expeditiously as possible. Since the Hon'ble Supreme Court's direction is to review the existence of the religious structure on the Government land on case to case basis, the

respondent Churches as a matter of right cannot claim to stand on the Government land in question without being any right or title over the same.

24. Admittedly, the religious structures which were built on the Government land in question was meant for construction of quarters solely and there was no record shown by the respondents qua sanction accorded or permission for construction of religious structures in the land earmarked for the quarters.

25. As could be seen form the records, particularly the Memorandum for Cabinet, annexed with the present miscellaneous cases, it is clear that the subject-matter i.e. removal of unauthorized four religious structures which have already constructed prior to 29.9.2009 within the PWD Government Quarters at 26-Wangkheriakpam Leikai Revenue Village was discussed and a decision was arrived at for removal of the said four religious structures built on the Government land. For ready reference, the Memorandum for Cabinet in File No.40/100/2022-R(Pt) and the decision thereon is quoted hereunder:

*"File No.40/100/2022-R(Pt)*  
*GOVERNMENT OF MANIPUR*  
*SECRETARIAT : REVENUE DEPARTMENT*

*MEMORANDUM FOR CABINET*

*Subject : Consideration of the recommendation dated 12-01/2022 of the Committee constituted vide Notification No.20/4/(76)/2009-H(Pt.1) dated 05-03-2011 in compliance of the various directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in SLP (C) No.8519 of 2006 (Union of India –vs- State of Gujarat & Ors.) for removal of the unauthorized 4 (four) religious structures which has already taken place prior to September 29, 2009 within PWD government quarters at 26-Wangkheirakpam Leikai Revenue village.*

*This is to consider the recommendation dated 12-01-2022 of the Committee constituted vide Notification No.20/4/(76)/2009-H(Pt.1) dated 05-03-2011 for removal of the unauthorized constructions of religious nature i.e. the following 4 (four) Churches which had already taken place prior to September 29, 2009 inside the government quarters built during the years 1953-1955 at 26-Wangkheirakpam Leikai Revenue Village, Imphal East District in compliance of the various directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in SLP (C) No.8519 of 2006 (Union of India –vs- State of Gujarat & Ors.)*

Sl. No.	Name of the Church	Village & Dag Number 26-Wangkheirakpam Leikai	Status of land	Remark
1	Tangkhu Baptist Church	410, 411 & 412(P)	Patta land recorded in the name of Chief Engineer (Building), PWD, Manipur	Pending in the court
2	Peniel Church	265 & 267(P)	do	do
3	Holy Spirit Church (Catholic Church)	265(P)	do	do
4	Evangelical Baptist Convention Church	265(P)	do	do

*2. As per record of Building Division-1 and Building Division-II, PWD, Manipur submitted vide letter No.EE/BD-II/Misc/2022-23 dated 23-06-2022, the government quarters at Tribal Colony, New Checkon were built during the year 1953-1955. The official number of quarters recorded was 140 in total viz. Type-1-100 (one hundred) numbers, Type-20 (Twenty) numbers and Type-III-20 (Twenty) numbers. At that time there was no official/registered religious structure at Tribal Colony. With the passage of time, religious structures were constructed by the occupants without giving any prior knowledge to the government. The religious structures were built on the land lying vacant which was meant solely for constructions of Government Quarters. There was no record of according permission for construction of religious structures in the land earmarked for the quarters.*

*The land has been recorded now as patta land of Chief Engineer (Buildings) PWD, Manipour for construction of Government Residential Quarters.*

*The earlier allotment of government quarters at the site have been cancelled and given re-allotment at other PWD government quarters.*

*3. Commissioner, MAHUD further placed before the Committee that construction of the project 'Construction of Government Residential quarters, Checkon' with an allocated fund of Rs.50 crores obtained as loan by Planning and Development Authority (PDA) from HUDCO for the purpose is under full swing at the same location. The new constructions will provide altogether 392 new modern residential quarters for the Government employees.*

*4. The significance of the existence of the church which was reportedly constructed for payer by the allottees/occupants of the Government quarters in New Checkon is now nullified as the allotment of quarters in the New Checkon had been cancelled by Govt. vide Order No.26/19/2020-W dated 20-03-2021 and re-allocated at other PWD government quarters.*

*5. The Committee has recommended for the removal of the 4 (four) religious structures mentioned in Para No.1 after obtaining the approval of the State Cabinet and thereafter seeking leave of the Hon'ble High Court in the pending case (s).*

*6. The recommendation of the Committee viz for the removal of the 4 (four) religious structures mentioned in Para No.1 after obtaining the approval of the State Cabinet and thereafter seeking leave of the Hon'ble High Court in the pending cases is placed before the State Cabinet for consideration and decision.*

*7. Hon'ble Chief Minister (i/c Revenue) has seen this memorandum and agreed to place the matter before the Cabinet.*

*8. Hon'ble Chief Minister has also consented to place the matter before the Cabinet for its consideration & approval.*

9. The proposal at para 6 above is placed before the State Cabinet for its kind consideration and approval.

(Namojam Kheda Varta Singh)  
Secretary (Revenue)  
Government of Manipur

Cabinet Decision taken on 18.01.2023

AGENDA No.1	: Consideration of the recommendation dated 12-01-2022 of the committee constituted vide Notification No.20/4/(76)/2009-H(Pt.1) dated 05-03-2011 in compliance of the various directions of Hon'ble Supreme Court in SLP(C) No.8519 of 2006 (Union of India -vs- State of Gujarat & Ors.) for removal of the unauthorized 4 (four) religious structures which has already taken prior to September 29, 2009 within PWD government quarters at 26 – Wangkheirakpam Leikai Revenue Village
DECISION	: Approved as proposed in para 6 of the Cabinet Memorandum.

(Sd)/- xxx  
Chief Secy. & Secy.  
(Cabinet)  
Government of Manipur."

26. Since the action for removal of the Churches in question is based on the decision taken by the State Cabinet pursuant to the direction of the Hon'ble Supreme Court dated 29.9.2009, this Court exercising writ jurisdiction under Article 226 of the Constitution of India cannot interfere in the action for removal initiated by the State authorities. The respondent Churches were built unauthorisedly on the Government land, which was meant for construction Government quarters.

27. Though the respondent Churches admitted that the Churches have been built on the Government land, they still claim that the Churches are in existence since 1974 and 1997 against the whole world including the State Government without any objection and interruption till today and therefore they got prescriptive right of title over the disputed land. Such a right claimed by the respondent Churches cannot be appreciated, as no record to show that Churches were built in the Government land after getting approval from the State authorities. Therefore, there is no option but to record that the respondents are rank encroachers of the Government land.

28. Since the State has framed a policy called "The Manipur Policy for review of unauthorized construction of Religious Nature on public parks, public places etc. 2010" and under the said policy, the State has regularized some of unauthorized constructions on the Government land by giving allotment as they have established right for regularization/relocation, as the case may be and in some cases, the authorities have taken a decision not to regularize the same, as they have no right to stand on the Government land.

29. It is apposite to mention that the District Level Committee meeting in regard to removal/relocation/regularization of Wangkheirakpam Leikai was held on 24.6.2022 and in the said meeting the Committee unanimously decided to recommend 9 Churches, including the respondent Churches for removal, as the said religious structures were built on the land lying vacant, which was meant for construction of Government quarters. In the said

meeting, it was further highlighted that there are multiple Churches in the vicinity within one kilometer radius from the location of 9 Churches, where the occupants of the quarters can go for worship and prayers. As such, religious right shall not be compromised without the existence of 9 Churches. The existence of the Churches which were reportedly constructed for prayer by the occupants in the Government quarters at New Checkon had been cancelled and occupants have been instructed for vacating the Government quarters for construction of new quarters. After considering all the aspects, the Committee concluded that 9 Churches, including the respondent Churches are existing without any kind of authorization. In view of the aforesaid concrete decision taken by the Committee, respondent Churches cannot contend that their claim has not been considered and left out by the Committee.

30. What the Hon'ble Supreme Court directed is to remove those unauthorized construction of religious structures at public places and wherever the Government so decides to regularize such construction, it is left to the wisdom of the Government to do so. If there is no process for regularization and the Government is not inclined to regularize the unauthorized structures in the public places, these are liable to be removed, irrespective of whether there is complaint from any quarter or not.

31. It is reiterated that since the decision of the State Cabinet to remove the respondent Churches built on the land of the Government is pursuant to the direction of the Hon'ble Supreme Court, the operation of the status quo

order dated 5.2.2021 and 3.8.2022 passed in W.P.(C) Nos.94 of 2021 and 501 of 2022 in respect of the land, where the Churches stand, granted by this Court is liable to be vacated, as prima facie, the respondent Churches have failed to prove that the Churches were constructed with the approval of the State authorities. When this Court also examined the structures of the Churches in question on case to case basis as per the direction of the Hon'ble Supreme Court, the decision of the State authorities in evicting the respondent Churches are based on the documents, policy decision and pursuant to the direction of the Hon'ble Supreme Court. Thus, the State has made out a case to vacate of the interim orders granted by this Court in the writ petitions and, accordingly, the miscellaneous cases filed by the State are liable to be allowed.

32. In the result, MC (WP) No.88 of 2023 in W.P.(C) No.94 of 2021 and MC (WP) No.89 of 2023 in W.P.(C) No.501 of 2022 are allowed. The interim orders dated 5.2.2021 and 3.8.2022 granted in W.P.(C) Nos.94 of 2021 and WP(C) No.501 of 2022 are vacated.

**ACTING CHIEF JUSTICE**


***FR/NFR***

*John Kozh*

## APPENDIX F

Gazette notification of Churachandpur- Khoupum Protected Forest notification under Section 29 which was issued in 1966 by the then Chief Commissioner, not by the State Govt.

CHURACHANDPUR-KHOUPUM PROTECTED FOREST

Manipur  Gazette

EXTRAORDINARY  
PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY

---

No.124-E100 Imphal, Wednesday, September 21, 1966 (Bhadra 30, 1963)  
No. 55/10/66-M(2)

GOVERNMENT OF MANIPUR  
SECRETARIAT-FOREST BRANCH.  
NOTIFICATION  
Imphal, the 17th September, 1966

Whereas the forest land (excepting bonafide village patta lands) described in the schedule given below is not included in a Reserved Forest but is the property of the Government over which the Government has proprietary rights to the whole of the forest produce;

And whereas the Chief Commissioner is of the opinion that an enquiry into and record of the nature and extent of the rights of the Government and of private persons in or over the said forest land is necessary but that they will occupy such length of time as in the meantime to endanger the rights of the Government;

Now, therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred on him by Section 29 of the Indian Forest Act (Act XVI of 1927) read with the Government of India, Ministry of States Notification No. 104-J dated the 24th August, 1950, the Chief Commissioner, Manipur hereby declares it as Protected Forest and that provision of Chapter IV of the said act shall be applicable to the land mentioned in the schedule below subject to the condition that this declaration shall not abridge or affect any existing rights of the individual or communities in the said land.

CHURACHANDPUR -KHOUPUM PROTECTED FOREST

North- Bishenpur-Tairenpokpi(Jeepable)road.  
East- Foot hills adjoining the Imphal Valley(Manipur valley).  
South- The foot path starting from Churachandpur and running through Phiran, Shongpha.  
West - The foot path starting from Shongpha and running through Hinglep, Noyong, Mollen, Thangshi, Mayuron, Khangbung and touching Bishenpur-Tuirenpokpi jeepable road.

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Further in exercise of the powers given by section 30 of the Indian Forest Act(ActXVI of 1927), the Chief Commissioner, Manipur hereby

- (a) declares that Wang, Wangphop, Tal, Talhao, Theibong, Khok, Nanap, Ungang, Uningthoumanbi, Pareng, Leihao, Taimareng, Khal, Sahi, Kuhi, Cham, Ushoi, Uyung, Uil, Tairel, Uningthou, Heinou, Limpoplaba, Ningnang, Gamar, and Nou-u etc. and other trees will be reserved trees from the date of publication in the official gazette,
- (b) and prohibits from the date notification in the official gazette, the quarrying of stone or buring of the lime or charcoal or removal of forest produce and breaking up of land for cultivation without orders of the Chief Commissioner, Manipur.

By order, etc.

G.H.SINGH,

Secretary to the Government of Manipur.

## APPENDIX G

### Clarification of the Forest Department on the eviction of new encroachers of K. Songjang Village from Churachandpur-Khoupum Protected Forest

#### Clarification of the Forest Department on the eviction of new encroachers of K. Songjang Village from Churachandpur-Khoupum Protected Forest

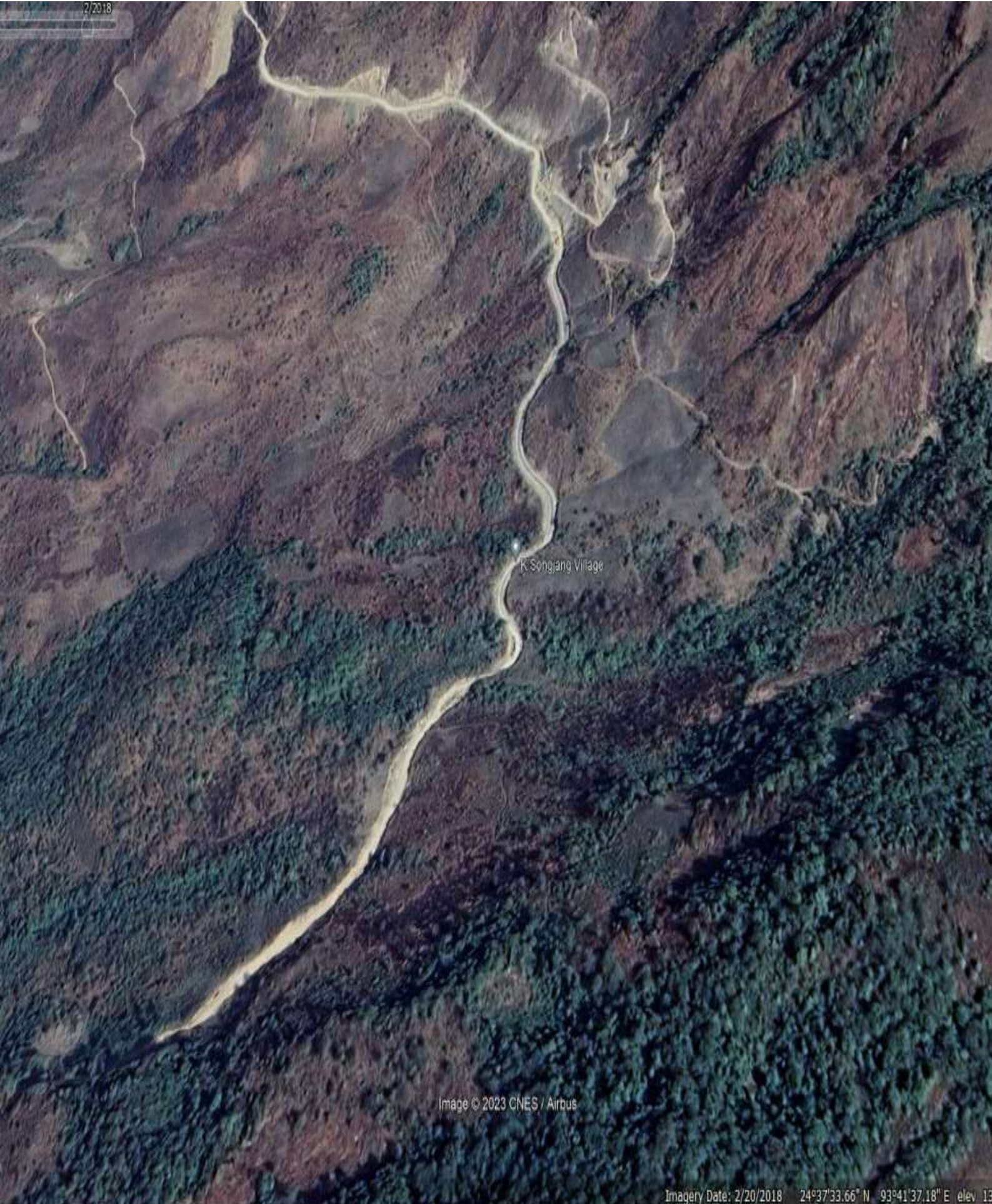
1. Churachandpur- Khoupum Protected Forest was notified under Section 29 of the Indian Forest Act, 1927 by the Government of Manipur with a well-defined schedule of boundaries vide Notification No. 55/10/66-M (2) dated 17.09.1966 and Manipur Extra Ordinary Gazette No.124-EI00 dated 21.09.1966.
2. Once Notification of the Protected Forest has been issued, no fresh right can be acquired and activities such as quarrying of stone or the burning of Lime or Charcoal or the collection or subjection to any manufacturing process or removal of any forest produce and breaking up or clearing for cultivation, for building, for herding cattle or for any other purpose is prohibited in such Protected Forest as provided under Section 30(C) of the Indian Forest Act, 1927.
3. There was no village in the name of K. Songjang village at the time of the notification of Churachandpur- Khoupum Protected Forest. The Village Chief of K. Songjang claims that his village a machete (bifurcation) of Kungpi Naosen village recognized in 1926. However, there is no record of bifurcation of K. Songjang village from Kungpi Naosen village. Once the notification of the Protected Forest has been issued, establishment of a new village inside the Protected in the name of Machete (bifurcation) is in violation of Section 30 (C) of Indian Forest Act, 1927, Rule No. 73 (4), 73(5) of Manipur Forest Rules 2021, Section 2(ii) of Forest Conservation Act, 1980 and Hon'ble Supreme Court Order dt. 12.12.1996 passed in WP(C) No.202 of 1995 and shall be treated as encroachment in the Protected Forest.
4. The Secretariat: Revenue Department, Manipur vide Order No.30/7/2014-R dt. 25.08.2018 has recorded K. Songjang as a village under the newly created Thangting Sub-Division (now Kangvai Sub-Division) which is not in consonance with the provisions of the Indian Forest Act 1927, Forest Conservation Act 1980 and Hon'ble Supreme Court Order dt. 12.12.1996 in WP(C) No.202 of 1995. Recognition of any village by any authority or establishment of any new village after the notification of the Protected Forests is a clear violation of the Forest Acts, Rules and Hon'ble

Supreme Court Order mentioned above. Recognition or establishment of a new village inside the Protected Forest shall be treated a Null and Void. The State Government of Manipur vide Order No.55/12/8-For dt. 31.5.1994 has directed that any decision taken in violation of the Forest Acts and Rules shall be treated as Null and Void.

5. The present settlement of K. Songjang village ( $24^{\circ}37'40.07''\text{N}$   $93^{\circ}41'40.84''\text{E}$ ) is a new settlement established in 2021, much after the notification of the Protected Forest in 1966, at an aerial distance of about 1.30 Km from Kungpi Naosen village, from where the village chief has claimed to have been bifurcated. The present settlement of the village is also not at the location where the Revenue Department has listed K. Songjang as a village under Thangting Sub-Division (now Kangvai Sub-Division) vide Order dt. 25.08.2018 mentioned under Para No.4.
6. Show cause notices were issued to the encroachers at the so-called K. Songjang Village on 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2022 by the DFO Noney. No reply was, however, received. After giving ample time, a reminder of the show cause notice was again issued on 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2023. A reply to the show cause notice was received on 06<sup>th</sup> February, 2023. DFO, Noney disposed the reply to the chief of K. Songjang village on 10<sup>th</sup> February stating that creation of new villages is not valid inside the Protected Forest and informed him to vacate the encroached forest land.
7. As there was no compliance by the said encroachers, eviction drive was conducted on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2023 by a team of Noney Forest Division, Noney District Police, Kangpokpi District Police and Bishnupur District Police.
8. In view of the aforesaid, the so-called K. Songjang village is a new village established only in the year 2021 by encroaching inside the Churachandpur- Khoupum Protected Forest in violation of Forest Acts, Rules, Hon'ble Supreme Court Order and State Government's standing Order.



2/2018



K. Songang Village

Image © 2023 CNES / Airbus

Imagery Date: 2/20/2018 24°37'33.66" N 93°41'37.18" E elev 13

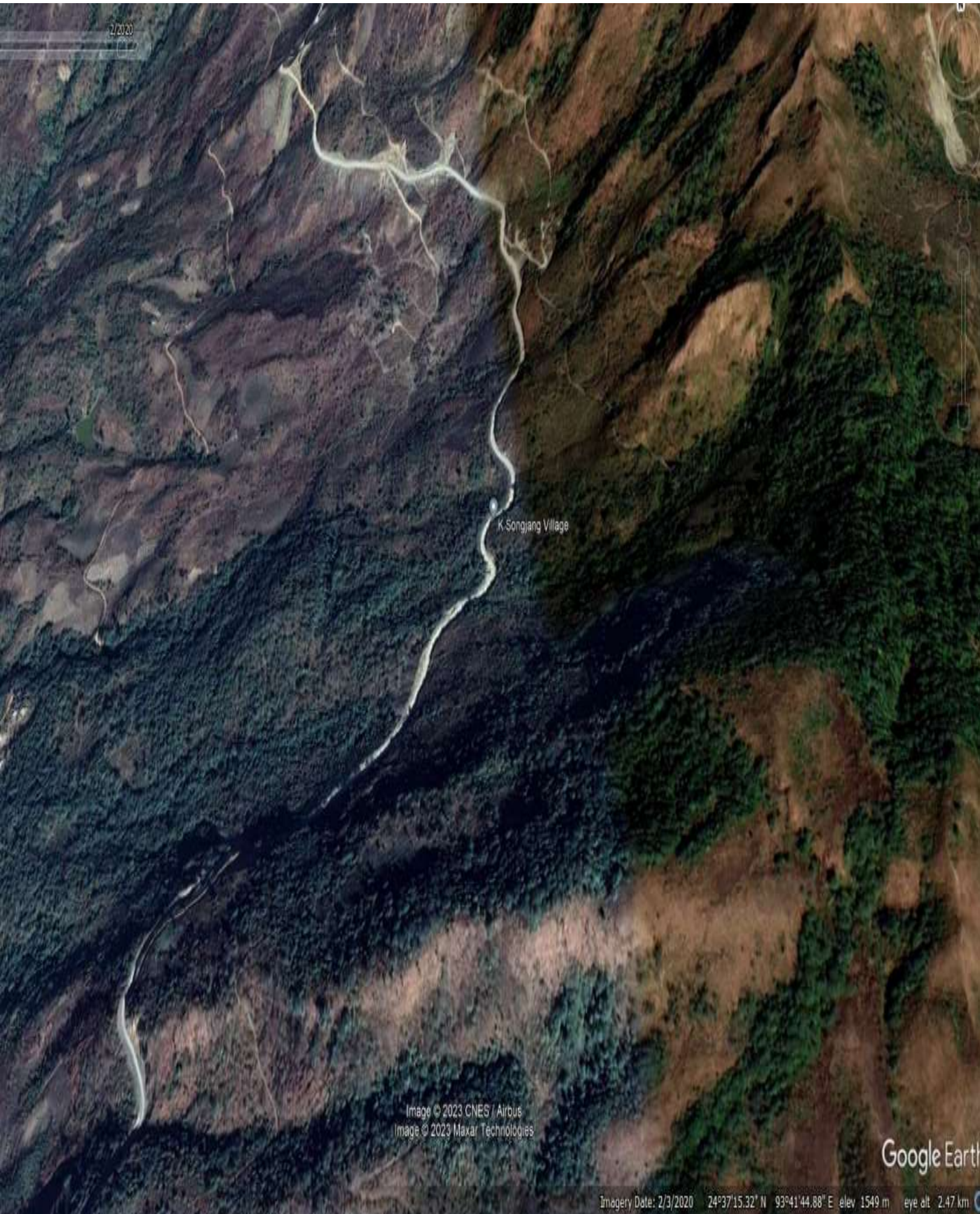
1/2019

K Songjang Village

Image © 2023 CNES / Airbus

Google Earth

Imagery Date: 1/17/2019 24°37'54.55" N 93°41'29.83" E elev 1256 m eye alt 2.00 km



2/2020

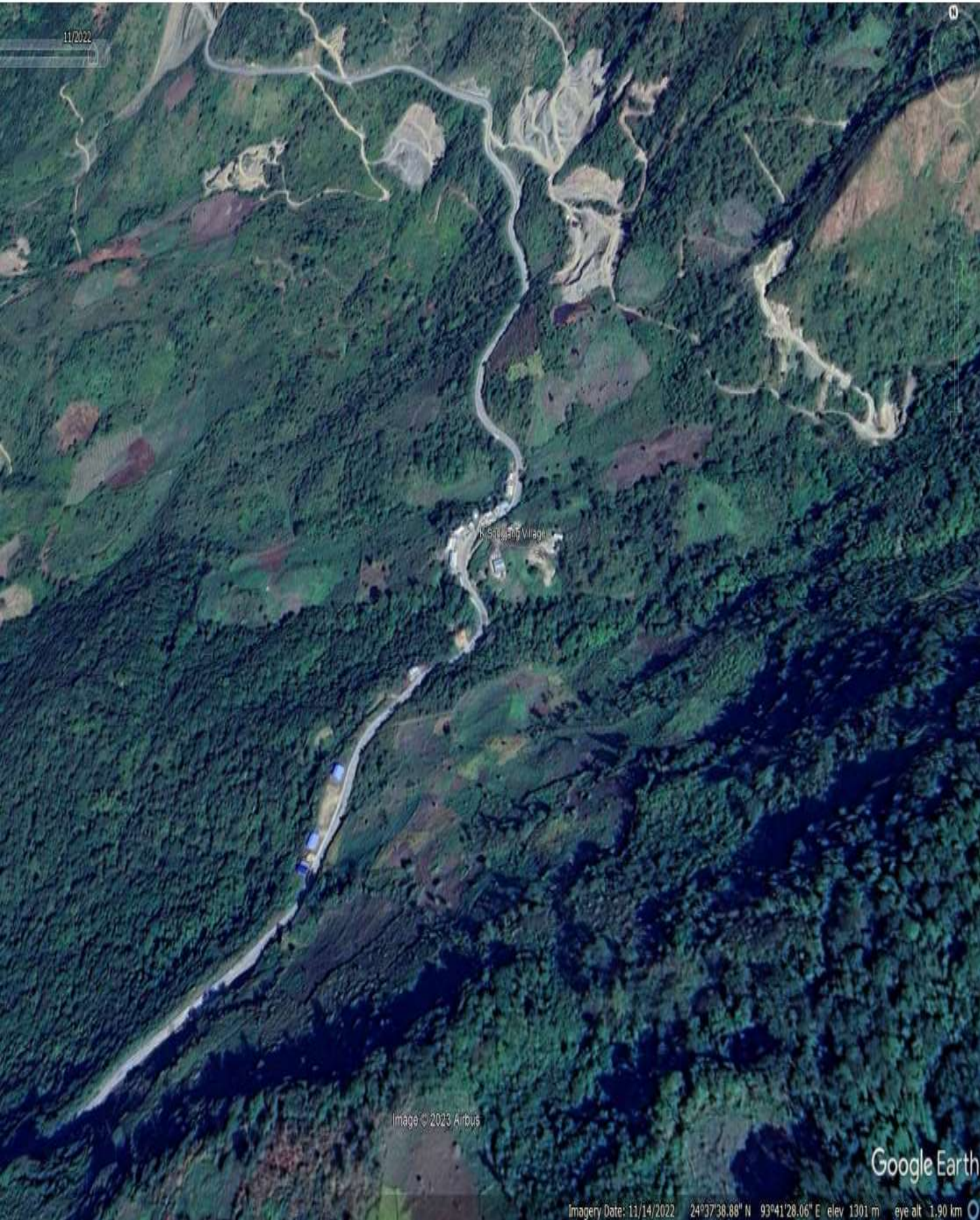
K. Songjiang Village

Image © 2023 CNES / Airbus  
Image © 2023 Maxar Technologies

Google Earth

Imagery Date: 2/3/2020 24°37'15.32" N 93°41'44.88" E elev 1549 m eye alt: 2.47 km





11/2022

K. Sanu Jagu Village

Image © 2023 Airbus

Google Earth

Imagery Date: 11/14/2022 24°37'38.88" N 93°41'28.06" E elev 1301 m eye alt 1.90 km

## APPENDIX H

### Clarification of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forest and HoFF

Government of Manipur  
Office of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests & HoFF  
Imphal: Manipur

No.22/33/2023/Forests:

Imphal, the 6<sup>th</sup> September 2023

To

The Addl. Chief Secretary (Forests, Emt & CC)  
Government of Manipur

Subject: Clarification of Forest Department, Manipur to the false reports of Editors' Guild of India's (EGI) "Report of the fact-finding Mission on media's reportage of the ethnic violence in Manipur" published on 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 2023

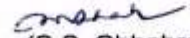
Sir

In inviting a reference to the above subject, I am to state that the reports appearing on page no.3 and 5 of the Editors' Guild of India's "Report of the fact-finding Mission on media's reportage of the ethnic violence in Manipur" published on 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 2023 are wrong and without verification from the Forest Department/ authority and has led misinformation to public and tarnished the reputation of the Department.

Therefore, I am submitting herewith clarifications on the false reports on page no.3 and 5 which relate to the Forest Department, Manipur for kind information and further necessary action.

Enclosed: **As above**

Yours faithfully

  
(S.S. Chhabra)

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests & HoFF  
Government of Manipur

Copy to:

1. Secretary to the Hon'ble Chief Minister, Government of Manipur
2. PS to the Hon'ble Minister (Forests, Emt & CC), Manipur
3. PS to the Chief Secretary, Government of Manipur
4. Commissioner (Home), Government of Manipur
5. Secretary, Commission of Inquiry (Manipur violence) 2023
6. Guard File

**Clarification of Forest Department, Manipur to false reports of Editors' Guild of India's (EGI) "Report of the fact-finding Mission on media's reportage of the ethnic violence in Manipur" dated 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 2023**

Forest Department, Manipur has gone through the Editors' Guild of India's "Report of the fact-finding Mission on media's reportage of the ethnic violence in Manipur" published on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2023. After going through the report, the Department finds all the reports on page no. 3 and photograph on page no. 5 which relate to the Forest Department, Manipur are false, concocted, and without any basis. The fact-finding committee has neither consulted the Department nor cross-checked the authenticity of the report and photograph before the same is published in the public domain. It is felt that unless clarifications are made, the report will lead to misinformation to the public and authorities and also tarnish the reputation of the Department. Therefore, the Forest Department, Manipur hereby issues the following clarifications:

- 1. Without following proper procedure as laid down in the Hill Area Committee Act of 1972, the N. Biren Singh government declared parts of Hills as "reserved" and "protected" forests and wetlands. All land ownership documents within these areas were canceled and a drive started to evict them in December 2022 (EGI Report on Page No.3):-**

**Clarification:** - No reserved forest or protected forest has been declared during the tenure of the N. Biren Singh government. There are 37 reserved forests and 23 protected forests in the State of Manipur. Out of 37 reserved forests, 21 reserved forests were notified by the Manipur State Darbar from 4.8.1913 to 7.8.1946 and 1 by the State Council on 22.4.1948, 8 by the Chief Commissioner, Manipur from 1.8.1951 to 13.9.1971 and the remaining 7 by the State Government from 9.2.1972 to 4.1.1990. Heingang reserved forest in Imphal East notified by the Manipur State Darbar vide Resolution No.432 dt. 4.8.1913 is the first reserved forest. Nongmaiching reserved forest in Imphal East for which initial notification under Section 4 of the Indian Forest Act, 1927 was issued vide notification dated 16.02.1966, and final notification under Section 20 was issued vide notification No.66/1/75-For dt. 4.1.1990 and Manipur Gazette No.41 dated 17.01.1990 is the last reserved forest in the State.

Out of 23 protected forests, 17 protected forests were notified by the Chief Commissioner, Manipur from 21.11.1951 to 17.1.1970 and the remaining 6 PFs were notified by the State Government on 18.6.1979 under Section 29 of the Indian Forest Act, 1927. The total areas of the RFs and PFs are 984 Sq. Km and 4,171 Sq. Km respectively which account for only about 4.4% and 18.6% of the geographical area of the State. The total area of RF and PF of the State is only 23% of the geographical area.

*No reserved forest has been notified after 4.1.1990 and no protected forest has been notified after 18.6.1979. Therefore, the EGI's report that the N. Biren Singh government, which formed its government in 2017 and then in 2022, declared parts of Hills as "reserved" and "protected" forests and all land ownership documents within these areas were cancelled is completely false, and without any basis.*

Page 1 of 6



2. This led to violent confrontation between the state authorities and the Kuki-zo community which had been living in these villages. The demolition drive which began in the Kangpokpi District, a Kuki-dominated area, extended by February 2023 to Churachandpur and Tengnoupal districts which also had preponderance of the Kuki-Zo community (EGI Report on Page No.3):-

**Clarification:** - As clarified in para no.1 above, no reserved forest or protected forest was notified during the tenure of Shri N. Biren Singh-led government. Therefore, *the report of the EGI that the declaration of new reserved forests and protected forests in the Hills by the N. Biren Singh government, cancellation of land ownership documents in these areas, and eviction drive led to violent confrontation between the state authorities and the Kuki-zo community is without any basis.*

The department has been taking up eviction drives of illegal encroachers from reserved forests and protected forests following due procedures as provided in the Indian Forest Act, 1927 and Manipur Forest Rules 1971 (repealed by Manipur Forest Rules, 2021). Eviction is a continuous process as the protection of forests and wildlife of the State is the mandated constitutional duty of the Forest Department. From October, 2015 to April, 2023 alone, Forest Department, Manipur has evicted 413 encroachers from various reserved forests and protected forests in the state. Community-wise, the number of encroachers evicted is 143 Meitei, 137 Meitei Pangal, 59 Kuki (including 21 unoccupied huts in Kanglatongbi-Kangpokpi reserved forest), 38 Naga and 36 Nepali as detailed below:-

Sl. No.	Name of reserved forest (RF)/protected forest (PF)	District	No. of Encroachers evicted	Date of eviction	Community evicted
1	Heingang RF	Imphal East	64	24.10.2015	43 Meitei & 21 Meitei Pangal
2	Langol RF	Imphal West	32	03.08.2016	18 Meitei & 14 Nepali
3	Langol RF	Imphal West	26	10.08.2016	Meitei
4	Nongmaiching RF	Imphal East	74	02.07.2018	Meitei Pangal
5	Chingkheiching RF	Imphal East	5	03.07.2018	Meitei
6	Langol RF	Imphal West	18	09.07.2019	Kabui (Naga)
7	Langol RF	Imphal West	3	24.04.2020	Kabui (Naga)
8	Langol RF	Imphal West	2	Oct 2020	Meitei
9	Khamenlok-Gwaltabi RF	Kangpokpi	16	21.11.2022	2 Meitei, 5 Nepali & 9 Kuki
10	Langol RF	Imphal West	1	31.05.2022	Meitei
11	Heingang RF	Imphal East	1	01.09.2022	Meitei

12	Langol RF	Imphal West	4	09.09.2022	3 Meitei & 1 Kabui (Naga)
13	Waithou PF	Thoubal	69	12.06.2022	27 Meitei & 42 Meitei Pangal
14	Langol RF	Imphal West	1	25.09.2022	Kabui (Naga)
15	Kanglatongbi-Kangpokpi RF	Kangpokpi	21	Aug-Nov,22	18 Kuki & 3 Nepali
16	Kangchup-Chiru RF	Kangpokpi	3	06.12.2022	Chiru Naga
17	Langol RF	Imphal West	2	13.02.2023	Meitei
18	Churachandpur-Khoupum PF	Noney	15	20.02.2023	13 Kuki & 2 Meitei
19	Nongmaiching RF	Imphal East	21	22.02.2023	2 Meitei & 19 Kuki
20	Langol RF	Imphal West	1	28.03.2023	Meitei
21	Nongmaiching RF	Imphal East	3	05.04.2023	Meitei
22	Langol RF	Imphal West	29	11.04.2023	3 Meitei, 14 Nepali & 12 Kabui (Naga)
23	Langol RF	Imphal West	1	14.04.2023	Meitei
24	Langol RF	Imphal West	1	18.04.2023	Meitei
<b>Total</b>			<b>413</b>		

*Eviction of illegal encroachers in reserved forests and protected forests is a continuous process and therefore the question of initiating the eviction in Kangpokpi district does not arise. Since 2015 till date no encroacher has been evicted from the reserved forests and protected in Churachandpur and Tengnoupal districts. Therefore, the report of the EGI that the demolition drive began in the Kangpokpi district, a Kuki-dominated area, extended by February 2023 to Churachandpur and Tengnoupal districts which is a preponderance of Kuki-Zo community is manufactured and without any basis.*

**3. What is significant is that the forest surveys, inquiries, evictions, and demolitions were carried out only in the non-Naga inhabited tribal areas, once again leading the Kuki community to believe that it was being singled out (EGI Report on Page No.3):-**

**Clarification:** - As already clarified under para no.2 above, eviction of encroachers from the reserved forests and protected forests was not only in non-Naga inhabited areas. The eviction drive of the Forest Department, Manipur is not against any community. Encroachers, irrespective of community, against whom no court case or any other case is pending are evicted as per the Acts and Rules. As mentioned in para no.2 above, out of the 413 encroachers evicted from October, 2015 to April, 2023, only 59 encroachers are from Kuki community which also includes 21 unoccupied huts constructed inside the Kanglatongbi-Kangpokpi reserved forest and the remaining are 143 Meitei, 137 Meitei Pangal, 38 Naga and 36 Nepali.



The State Government in the year 2019-20 took serious cognizance of rapid deforestation and degradation of forests in the State and its resultant effects. There has been a rapid loss of forest cover, especially in some hill areas of Manipur due to ever-increasing areas under illegal poppy cultivation and accompanying forest fires in the forest areas.

It is a fact that as per the India State of Forest Reports (ISFR) published biannually by the Forest Survey of India, Government of India, Dehradun, the State of Manipur has lost 491.73 Sq. Km (49,173 Ha) forest cover during the last decade from 2011 to 2021, out of which 395.96 Sq. km was in Churachandpur District only, which means 80.5% of forest cover loss took place in Churachandpur District.

The State Government also came across issues of overlapping land records between the Revenue Department and the Forest Department and documents issued by some departments or individuals without authority and in gross violation of the provisions of the Indian Forest Act, 1927, Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and rules framed thereunder as well as Hon'ble Supreme Court Orders in WP(C) No.202 of 1995. Acknowledging these issues, the State Government felt the urgency and importance of reconciling and consolidating the boundaries of Reserved Forests and Protected Forests in the State and restoring healthy vegetation in these forest areas by planting tree saplings and protecting them in the interest of the future of the State.

The State Government of Manipur constituted a State Level Committee (SLC) headed by the Chief Secretary, Manipur on 30.04.2020 with senior officers from the line Department as members to look into the matters pertaining to overlapping of records of revenue villages and forest areas, unauthorized documents issued in forest lands etc and to cause joint surveys of these areas by using modern equipment and GIS technologies with the objective of consolidating reserved forests and protected forests boundaries. At present, joint surveys in the following 9 reserved forests and 3 protected forests have been completed:

Sl. No.	Name of reserved forests (RF) / protected forest (PF)	Forest Division	District
<b>Reserved Forests</b>			
1	Langol reserved forest	Central	Imphal West
2	Langol Extension reserved forest	Central	Imphal West
3	Heingang reserved forest	Central	Imphal East
4	Chingkheiching reserved forest	Central	Imphal East
5	Khema reserved forest	Central	Imphal East
6	Khumanthouching Ching reserved forest	Kangpokpi	Kangpokpi
7	Laimaton reserved forest	Noney	Noney
8	Konung reserved forest	Bishnupur	Bishnupur



9	Maibam Lotpa ching reserved forest (proposed)	Bishnupur	Bishnupur
<b>Protected Forests</b>			
1	Kharam protected forest	Kangpokpi	Kangpokpi
2	Khunuda Laiching protected forest	Thoubal & Tengnoupal	
3	Sikhong-Ningel Hill protected forest	Kamjong	Kamjong

*Therefore, the report of the EGI that the forest surveys, inquiries, evictions, and demolitions were carried out only in the non-Naga inhabited tribal areas is devoid of any truth.*

- 4. Simultaneously, a state government committee headed by the Chief Secretary on April 3, 2023, cancelled all land/property deeds and recognition of villages within the designated reserved and protected forest area. All this was done without any rehabilitation plan for the evicted tribal population (EGI Report on Page No.3):-**

**Clarification:** - There is no order or any document of the committee headed by the Chief Secretary, Manipur issued on April 3, 2023, that cancelled any land/property deed and recognition of villages within the designated reserved and protected forests area. As clarified in para no.3, the committee headed by the Chief Secretary was constituted on 30.04.2020 to resolve the issues of overlapping areas as per records of the Revenue and Forest Department, unauthorized orders issued in violation of Acts and Rules and finally to consolidate reserved forest and protected forest boundaries. The committee does not have the authority to cancel land/property deeds and recognition of villages within the designated reserved and protected forest area.

*Therefore, the report of the EGI a state government committee headed by the Chief Secretary on April 3, 2023, cancelled all land/property deeds and recognition of villages within the designated reserved and protected forest area is unfounded.*

- 5. Photo under the caption "Smoke rises from a Kuki house on 5 May" (EGI Report on Page No.5):-**

**Clarification:** -The photograph under the caption "Smoke rises from a Kuki house on 5 May" is the photograph of the burning of Forest Beat Office, Mata Mualtam under Churachandpur Forest Division (Churachandpur District), not of a Kuki house as reported by EGI. The forest beat office was burnt down by a violent mob on 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 2023 and an FIR No. 52(05)2023 CCP-PS under Section 143/147/427/436/34 IPC, 3 of PDPP Act has been lodged with the Churachandpur Police Station.

In the violence that is prevailing in the State, 18 forest offices/Inspection bungalows/Quarters in the Kuki dominated areas have been burnt down with physical files, documents, maps, furniture, tools, and equipment. FIRs have been lodged with the respective police stations.

Sl. No.	Name of Forest Office/IB/Quarter	Division/District	Location	Date of burning
1.	Range Office, Churachandpur	Churachandpur	Tuibong	29.04.2023
2.	DFO, Churachandpur office	Churachandpur	Bijang	03.05.2023
3.	Forest Beat Office, Saikot	Churachandpur	Saikot	03.05.2023
4.	Beat Office, Mata Maulam	Churachandpur	Mata Maulam	03.05.2023
5.	Forest Beat Office, Muallum	Churachandpur	Muallum	03.05.2023
6.	Forest Beat Office, S. Kwatlian	Churachandpur	S. Kwatlian	03.05.2023
7.	Forest Beat Office, Singngat	Churachandpur	Singngat	03.05.2023
8.	Forest Range Office, Henglep	Churachandpur	Tuilumjang (Henglep)	03.05.2023
9.	DFO, Kangpokpi office	Kangpokpi	Motbung	03.05.2023
10.	Forest Range Office, Motbung	Kangpokpi	Motbung	03.05.2023
11.	Forest Beat Office, Saparmeina	Kangpokpi	Saparmeina	03.05.2023
12.	Forest Range Office, Kangpokpi	Kangpokpi	Kangpokpi	03.05.2023
13.	Forest Range Office, Saikul	Kangpokpi	Saikul	03.05.2023
14.	Forest Beat Office, Kotien	Kangpokpi	Kotien	03.05.2023
15.	Forest Range Office, Moreh	Tengnoupal	Moreh	03.05.2023
16.	Forest IB, Moreh (Old)	Tengnoupal	Moreh	03.05.2023
17.	DFO, Pherzawl office	Pherzawl	Pherzawl	24.06.2023
18.	Wildlife Range office (Moreh), Inspection Bungalow, 4 Quarters & main gate of the Range office	Tengnoupal	Moreh	26.07.2023

***Therefore, the reports of the EGI's fact-finding mission appearing on pages no.3 and 5 relating to the Forest Department, Manipur are manufactured, concocted, incorrect, and one-sided without verification from the Forest Department or any competent authority. Forest Department, Manipur appeal to the EGI and any other organization to kindly verify and cross-check any information relating to forest and wildlife before they publish any report in the public domain.***

  
 (S.S. Chhabra)  
 Principal Chief Conservator of Forests & HoFF  
 Government of Manipur

# APPENDIX I

## High Court judgement on inclusion of Meiteis in ST list, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2023

SHAMURAILATPAM SUSHIL  
SHARMA

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### IN THE HIGH COURT OF MANIPUR AT IMPHAL

#### WP(C) No. 229 of 2023

1. Shri. Mutum Churamani Meetei aged about 62 years S/O Late M. Iboton Meetei of Kabo Leikai Dewlahland, P.O. & P.S.-Porompat, District-Imphal East, Manipur who is the Secretary of the Meetei (Meitei) Tribe Union being Regd. No. 15 of 2022,
2. Shri. Puyam Ranachandra Singh aged about 43 years S/O Puyam Kushumani Singh of Langathel Laikom Bazar, P.O. & P.S.-Thoubal, District-Thoubal, Manipur who is the Member of the Meetei (Meitei) Tribe Union being Regd. No. 15 of 2022.
3. Shri. Thokchom Gopimohon Singh, aged about 73 years S/O Late Thokchom Somokanta Singh of Keishamthong Laisom Leirak, P.O. & P.S.-Imphal, District-Imphal West, Manipur-795001 who is the Member of the Meetei (Meitei) Tribe Union being Regd. No. 15 of 2022.
4. Shri. Sagolsem Robindro Singh age about 66 years S/O S. Amu Singh of Sagolband Khamnam Bazar, P.O.-Imphal & P.S.- Lamphel, District-Imphal West, Manipur- 795001 who is the Member of the Meetei (Meitei) Tribe Union being Regd. No. 15 of 2022.

5. Shri. Elangbam Baburam aged about 76 years S/o (L) E. Leipakmacha Singh of Keirak Khongnang Leikai, P.S Kakching B P.O Keirak, P.O Kakching District-Kakching, Manipur who is the Member of the Meetei (Meitei) Tribe Union being Regd. No. 15 of 2022.
6. Shri. Leihaorambam Projit Singh aged about 62 years, S/o L. Surjit Singh of Sorok Atingbi Khunou Hilghat, P.O. & P.S.-Jiribam, District-Jiribam, Manipur-795115 who is the Member of the Meetei (Meitei) Tribe Union being Regd. No. 15 of 2022.
7. Shri. Thiyam Somendro Singh aged about 46 years, S/o Th. Ibohi Singh of Ningthoukhong Ward No. 5, Ningthoukhong Kha Bishnupur, P.O. & P.S.-Bishnupur, District-Bishnupur, Manipur-795126 who is the Member of the Meetei (Meitei) Tribe Union being Regd. No. 15 of 2022 and
8. Shri. Mutum Nilamani Singh aged about 61 years S/O M. Jadhop Singh of Chingdong Leikai, P.O. & P.S.-Jiribam, District-Jiribam, Manipur-795115 who is the Member of the Meetei (Meitei) Tribe Union being Regd. No. 15 of 2022.

.....**Petitioners**

**-Versus-**

1. The State of Manipur represented by the Chief Secretary, Government of Manipur and its Office



learned counsel, accepts notice on behalf of the fourth respondent.

2. By consent, the main writ petition is taken up for final disposal at the admission stage itself.

3. The petitioners have filed this writ petition for issuance of a writ of mandamus directing the first respondent to submit recommendation in reply to the Letter No.1902005/2012-C&IM dated 29.5.2013 of the Government of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs within a period of two months or within a time frame and to include Meetei/Meitei community in the Schedule Tribe list of Indian Constitution as a "tribe among tribes of Manipur", maintaining the tribal status of Meetei/Meitei existed before 21.9.1949 i.e. before signing of the Merger Agreement as part of the terms and conditions of the Merger Agreement of Manipur into the Indian Union and also direction on the fourth respondent to restore the Scheduled Tribe status of Meetei/Meitei community.

4. In support of the prayer made, Mr. Ajoy Pebam, the learned counsel for the petitioner submitted that the status of Meetei/Meitei community before the execution of the Merger Agreement dated 21.9.1949 as "tribe among tribes of Manipur" and while merging Manipur with the Union of India, the

Meetei/Meitei has lost the identity of tribe and, therefore, Meetei/Meitei should be included as a tribe among the tribes of Manipur so as to preserve the said community and save the ancestral land, tradition, culture and language.

5. By placing on record various documentary references, which are annexed with the writ petition, the learned counsel further submitted that during the preparation of Scheduled Tribe lists of India under Article 342 of the Constitution of India, the Meetei/Meitei community are left out. But there are documentary evidence wherein showing the earlier Meetei/Meitei community also belonged to tribe community.

6. The learned counsel for the petitioners would submit that as per Article 342(1) and 366 (19) (23) (25) of the Constitution of India, the Meetei/Meitei community should be restored the tribe status by recognizing as a tribe/tribal community as the Meitei are still tribe, but the status of Meitei community were left out while preparation of Scheduled Tribe lists. Moreover, the originality, genuineness and distinctness of the Meetei/Meitei was better known by the customary institutions of Manipur, State Government and Central Government Agencies as tribe. In this regard, various individuals, organizations including the petitioners have submitted several representations to the concerned authorities for inclusion

by restoring the Scheduled Tribe status of the Meeitei/Meitei community to the List of Scheduled Tribes.

7. The learned counsel further submitted that in reply to the representation submitted by Scheduled Tribe Demand Committee, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India wrote a letter dated 29.5.2013 to the Government of Manipur whereby requesting for specific recommendation along with the latest socio-economic survey and ethnographic report. Despite the letter dated 29.5.2013, the Government of Manipur failed to submit the recommendation to the reason best known to them. In fact, the representation dated 18.4.2022 submitted by the petitioners was forwarded by the Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India for necessary action. According to the learned counsel, Meitei community is the one of major/principal tribe of Manipur is not recommended by the State Government. Hence, the petitioners have been advised to file the present writ petition.

8. By placing on record, the order dated 26.5.2003 of the Gauhati High Court made in W.P.(C) No.4281 of 2002, the learned counsel submitted that pursuant to the said order, Chongthu, Khoibu and Mate have been included in the List of Scheduled Tribes and now there are 34 numbers of tribal

community of Manipur were included in the List of Scheduled Tribe of the Indian Constitution, but Meetei/Meitei tribe was left out. Arguing so, the learned counsel for the petitioner prayed for allowing of the writ petition.

9. This Court heard the submissions of the learned Deputy Solicitor General of India appearing for the respondent Union of India and the learned Government Advocate for the respondent State on the submissions made by learned counsel for the petitioner.

10. The grievance of the petitioners is that while merging Manipur with the Union of India, Meetei/Meitei of Manipur has lost the identity of tribe and the status of the Meetei/Meitei community before execution of the Merger Agreement on 21.9.1949 as a tribe among tribes of Manipur should be maintained by including Meetei/Meitei community in the List of Scheduled Tribe under the Constitution of India. The learned counsel for the petitioners contended that as per the order of the Gauhati High Court dated 26.5.2003 passed in W.P.(C) No.4281 of 2002, Chongthu, Khoibu and Mate have been included in the List of Scheduled Tribes. Taking aid of the said order dated 26.5.2003 of the Gauhati High Court, the learned counsel for the petitioners submitted that similar recommendation may be made by this Court to the respondent

authorities to include Meetei/Meitei community as Scheduled Tribe List of the Constitution of India.

11. This Court perused the order of the Gauhati High Court dated 26.5.2003 passed in W.P.(C) No.4281 of 2002 and the said order reads thus:

*“Heard Dr. N.K.Singh, learned counsel for the petitioners and also heard Mr.K.Kumar, learned Additional C.G.S.C. appearing on behalf of the respondents 1 to 4 as well as Mr. Kh.Babul Chandra, learned State Counsel appearing on behalf of the State Respondents 5 and 6.*

*The limited grievance of the writ petitioners in this writ petition is that pursuant to the proposal of the Government of India to revise the list of Scheduled Tribes of the States and Union Territories after 50 years of the functioning of the Constitution in terms of Articles 341 and 342 of the Constitution of India, the Govt. of Manipur vide communications dated 31.12.99 and 3.1.2001 recommended 5 (five) Tribes namely, Inpui, Liangmai, Rongmai, Thangal and Zeme for modification in the existing entry with 3 (three) other Tribes namely, Chengthu, Kheibu and Mete were proposed to inclusion as new Tribes. But despite such recommendation of the Govt. of Manipur, all the 8 (eight) Tribes-5 (five) Tribes for modification and 3 (three) Tribes for inclusion in*

*the list of Scheduled Tribes as noticed above, have been left out of consideration by the competent authority.*

*The respondents mainly respondents 1 to 4 contested this writ petition by filing the affidavit-in-opposition. In paragraph 10 and 11 of the said affidavit-in-opposition it is stated that the proposal for modification/inclusion of the 8 (eight) Tribes has not been left out of consideration and the consideration of the same is under process. It is also averred by the contesting respondents that after examination, if the 8 (eight) communities are found to be eligible, necessary amendments in the order specifying the list of Scheduled Tribes of Manipur would be carried out in terms of the provisions of Article 342 of the Constitution.*

*Paragraphs 10 and 11 of the affidavit-in-opposition, being relevant, are reproduced as under:-*

*“10. That, with regard to the statements made in para 8 of the writ petition the deponent denies the correctness of the same, the proposals of five communities namely, Inpui, Liangmai, Rongmai, Thangal and Zeme for modifications in the existing entries of the list of Scheduled Tribes and cases of three tribes namely Chongthu, Koibu and Mate for fresh inclusion are being processed as per the approval modalities. Thus, the averments of the*

*petitioners that the case of the above referred eight communities has been left out of consideration is not correct. Their requests are under examination.*

*11. That, as regard to the statements made in para 9 of the writ petition the deponent begs to submit that the proposals of 8 communities are under consideration of the Government and they are being processed as per approved modalities. If after examination they are found eligible, necessary amendments in the order specifying the list of Schedules Tribes of Manipur would be carried out as per provisions of Article 342 of the Constitution of India."*

*In view of the above referred statements made by the respondents and also upon hearing the learned counsel for the parties, this Court is inclined to dispose of the writ petition with a direction that the respondents 1 to 4 shall consider the case of the petitioners expeditiously in terms of the averments made in the said paragraphs as alluded above.*

*However, liberty is granted to the petitioners to approach this Court if they are still aggrieved by any decision taken by the Respondents 1 to 4 in this regard.*

*A copy of the affidavit-in-opposition as produced by the respondents 1-4 be kept as to form part of the record.*

*This disposes of the writ petition."*

12. On 18.4.2022, the Meetei (Meitei) Tribe Union submitted a representation to the Hon'ble Union Minister of Tribal Affairs with a copy to 12 authorities, including the Chief Secretary, Government of Manipur seeking inclusion of Meetei/Meitei Tribe of Manipur in the list of Scheduled Tribe under Indian Constitution. On 31.5.2022, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs forwarded the said representation to the Secretary, Government of Manipur. In the said forwarding letter, it has been stated as under:

*"I am directed to refer to this Ministry's letter of even number dated 06/03/2019, 23/07/2021, 15/02/2022 & 07.04.2022 and to forward herewith a representation dated 18.04.2022 of Shri Salam Gourakishwor Singh, Meetei (Meitei) Tribe Union, Kaboleikai, Imphal East District, Manipur 795005, which is self-explanatory, for action as deemed appropriate.*

*2. Scheduled Tribes (STs) are notified under Article 342 of the Constitution. Government of India had on 15.6.1999 (and further revised on 25.6.2002) approved modalities for determining claims for inclusion in and other modifications in list of STs. As per those modalities only proposals recommended and justified by the state Government concerned and agreed to by RGI as well as NCSI are considered for*

*amendment of legislation. All the actions are taken as per approved modalities. The recommendation of the concerned State Government is pre-requisite to process the case further.”*

13. Thus, from the above letter correspondence of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, it is clear that there appears to be a recommendation of the State Government is pending for inclusion of the Meetei/Meitei community in the Scheduled Tribes list of the Constitution of India.

14. It is not the case of the respondent State that representations regarding inclusion of Meetei/Meitei community as Scheduled Tribes submitted by the various Union including the petitioners have not been received by them.

15. At this juncture, the learned counsel for the petitioners submitted that the Government of Manipur has been totally violating the right to equality and right to life with dignity which are enshrined under Article 14 and 21 of the Constitution of India, as in the case of other tribe of the State, the State Government had recommended without any hesitation but in the case of the Meitei community which are also one of the major/principal tribe of Manipur are not recommended by the State

Government. This Court finds some force in the submission made by the learned counsel for the petitioners, as the petitioners and other Unions are fighting long years for inclusion of Meetei/Meitei community in the tribe list of Manipur.

16. Nothing has been produced by the respondents, particularly the respondent State to show that they have sent reply to the letter dated 29.5.2013 of the Government of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs. Thus, the issue of inclusion of Meetei/Meitei community in the Scheduled Tribes list of the Constitution is pending for nearly ten years and above. No satisfactory explanation is forthcoming from the side of the respondent State for not submitting the recommendation for the last 10 years. Therefore, it would be appropriate to direct the respondent State to submit its recommendation to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs within a reasonable time.

17. In the result,

- (i) *The writ petition is disposed of.*
- (ii) *The first respondent is directed to submit the recommendation in reply to the letter dated 29.5.2013 of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India.*

- (iii) *The first respondent shall consider the case of the petitioners for inclusion of the Meetei/Meitei community in the Scheduled Tribe list, expeditiously, preferably within a period four weeks from the date of receipt of a copy of this order in terms of the averments set out in the writ petition and in the line of the order passed in WP(C) No. 4281 of 2002 dated 26.05.2003 by the Gauhati High Court.*
- (iv) *No costs.*

**ACTING CHIEF JUSTICE**

**FR/NFR**

*Sushil*

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