



BIREN'S WAR

ITLF MEDIA CELL





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Nongthombam Biren Singh, the chief minister of Manipur and the main architect of the ongoing ethnic violence in Manipur, was born on 1st January, 1961 at Luwangshangbam Mamang Leikai in Imphal, the state's capital.

He started his career as a footballer and was recruited by the Border Security Force (BSF), playing for its team in domestic competitions. After he resigned from the BSF, he turned to journalism. Though he had no formal training, he started the vernacular daily *Naharolgi Thoudang* in 1992 and was its editor till 2001.

Party and won the assembly elections from Heingang Assembly Constituency in 2002. He later joined the Indian National Congress in 2003 and retained his seat in 2007. He quit the Congress party in 2016 and joined the Bhartiya Janata Party. In 2017, he won again from Heingang constituency and became the chief minister of a coalition government. In 2022, he once again retained his seat from Heingang and was made the chief minister for the second time.

After becoming the chief minister for the second time in 2022, Biren began publicly unveiling his majoritarian agenda, spewing



His extremist views were already visible early in his public career. Through his newspaper, he strongly advocated for an armed rebellion against the Government of India, for which he was arrested on April 14, 2000.

After turning to politics, Biren Singh joined the Democratic Revolutionary People's

hatred against the Kuki-Zo tribals on his Twitter handle and Facebook page.

His legislative overreach and his anti-tribal propaganda, which turned a large section of the Meitei populace against the tribals, eventually led to the ethnic violence in the state.

Illegal immigration – the pretext to drive out tribals from their ancestral Land

The first pretext used by N. Biren Singh and his cohorts for his ethnic cleansing programme was to label the Kuki-Zo tribals as illegal immigrants and foreigners. Following the footsteps of Nazi Germany under Hitler during the 1930s, where the Jewish community was blamed for all the misfortunes that befell Germany, the CM and radical Meitei intellectuals started blaming the Kuki-Zo tribals for all the problems – real or imaginary – in Manipur.

Without any reliable data, the CM and the valley-based media began labelling the entire Kuki-Zo community as “illegal immigrants” or “foreigners” despite the decadal censuses of the Government of India from 1901 to 2011 showing that there is no abnormal growth rate among the non-Naga tribal community, which constitute just 16 percent of the state’s population.



Notification on Forest Reserves and Protected Forest Areas

Without following the due process, the state government declared large areas of the hills as “Reserved” and “Protected” forests. A committee constituted under the chairmanship of the Chief Secretary, Government of Manipur decided to cancel all *Jamabandis*, *Pattas*, *Dags*, Allotments etc. (land ownership documents), issued within the reserved and protected areas on 3rd

April, 2023. This is a blatant violation of the rights of the Kuki-Zo tribes, who have been living in these hills from time immemorial.

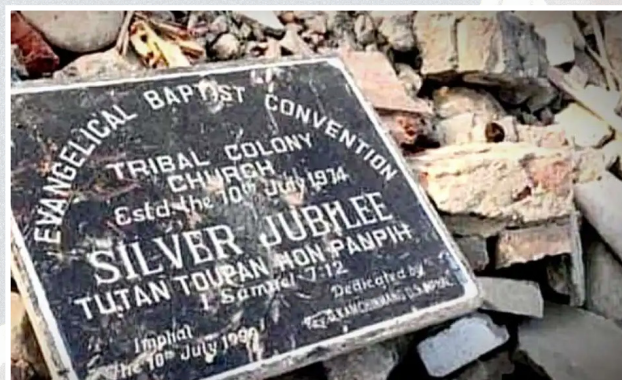
On 6th December, 2022, a surprise eviction



drive was conducted in Kangchup area of Kangpokpi district without any notice. A violent confrontation broke out over the dismantling of two houses during which many people, including one police personnel, were injured. Also, on 20th February 2023, Govt demolished all houses at K. Songjang village of Henglep Sub-Division as part of an eviction drive, stating that the area comes under Khoupum Protected Forest.

On 11th April, 2023, the state government demolished three churches in Tribal Colony, Imphal.

Also, the state government began an eviction



drive in the districts of Churachandpur, Kangpokpi, and Tengnoupal in February, 2023, declaring forest dwellers as encroachers. Demolition and eviction drives, along with forest surveys were carried out despite

opposition from tribals.

The Indian Forest (Manipur Amendment) Act, 2018 gave more power and discretion to the forest officers. This is widely seen by the hill tribes as an attempt by the government to usurp their lands.

It is pertinent to note that the government conducted enquiries as per the provisions of section 29 of the Indian Forest Act, 1927 *only* in and around the **non-Naga** tribal areas. Though a significant population of Nagas stay in the hills of Senapati, Tamenglong, Chandel, and Ukhrul districts, no such surveys, demolition or evictions were undertaken in these areas, which proves that all the actions of the state government were selective and were directed against the non-Naga tribes.

Removal of Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in the Valley

In a significant move, the Union Government withdrew the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), 1958 in the Imphal valley on 24th March, 2023 under the jurisdiction of Wangol, Leimakhong, Nambol and Moirang police stations - all within the valley.

The proscribed separatist groups who have been waging a war against the Government of India are all from the majority Meitei community. Most of their terror activities are coordinated either from the valley area or from their camps in Myanmar.

The Manipur government's selective proposal to remove AFSPA from the Imphal valley is nothing but an attempt to give a free hand to these Meitei extremist groups for the coming pogrom against the Kuki-Zo tribes.

Leaving no stone unturned to evict the indigenous hill tribes from their land, the Governor of Manipur, vide order no. 8276-2022-Forest (B) cancelled the earlier orders issued by ASOs/ISOs; and the governor ordered fresh enquiries of the nature and extent of the existing rights of private persons/individuals/communities prior to the notification of the areas as "protected forests" to be carried out and recorded as provided under Section 29 of the Indian Forest Act, 1927. The governor directed the constitution of a district-level committee to determine the rights prior to the notification of the "protected forests." This amounted to reopening for perusal the settled rights of the forest-dwelling hill



tribes.

Suspension of SoO

On 11th March, 2023, the Manipur Cabinet under N. Biren Singh unilaterally decided to withdraw the Suspension of Operation (SoO) agreement with the Kuki-Zo armed groups - Kuki National Organisation (KNO) and United People's Front (UPF). In hindsight, Mr Singh's sinister design has become crystal clear – to crush the tribals and their aspirations by using the military might of the Indian army. The central government, reading between the lines, summarily rejected the chief minister's proposal.

National Register of Citizens (NRC)

With tacit support from the CM, several radicalised Manipuri organizations have been pressing for a National Register of Citizens (NRC) to be created with 1951 as the base year. Their claim of abnormal population growth in hill areas is completely false, as clearly shown by the population growth rate in the Government of India census.

(Selective) War on Drugs

One of Biren Singh's most successful PR exercises to garner support from the majority Meitei community is his "War on Drugs" campaign, in which he selected a particular community as the villain of the story and projected himself as the incorruptible crusader.

Poppy cultivation is found in Kuki, Naga and Meitei-inhabited areas, but the CM targeted only areas inhabited by the Kuki-Zo community, often using inflammatory words like "poppy cultivators" to describe all non-Naga tribals.

His holier-than-thou persona came

crashing down after a decorated lady officer, Thounaojam Brinda, filed in an affidavit stating that the chief minister and the police top brass "pressured" her to let off an arrested drug lord.

The Manipur Human Rights Commission (MHRC) also *suo motu* registered a case based on a statement by BJP MLA Lourembam Rameshwor allegedly blaming ministers, MLAs and police officers for supporting drug lords.

But the narrative of a super CM fighting to save his land against a villainous tribe got so much support from his own community that he became more belligerent. He mobilised a large part of the state machinery to target poor tribal farmers from the Kuki-Zo community while ignoring the financiers and the drug lords.

In a video posted on social media, the CM publicly said "I will declare war on you people".

Scheduled Tribe Demand by the Meiteis

An organisation demanding ST status for Meiteis was formed in 2012, but never really gained traction. But under Biren, the



movement gained momentum. In the last two years, frequent protests and rallies in different parts of the Imphal valley were reported by the media. In the build-up to the ethnic violence in the state, rallies demanding ST status for Meiteis were held almost every week, amply highlighted by the valley-based media. The real motive is

the desire to grab tribals lands, which are protected by the Constitution of India Article 371-C.

On 20th April, 2023, a single-bench judge of the Manipur High Court directed the state government to “consider the request of the Meitei community to be included in the Schedule Tribe (ST) list.”

The Rally: May 3, 2023

The All-Tribal Student Union Manipur (ATSUM) organized a peaceful Tribal Solidarity March on 3rd May, 2023 against the Meitei demand for Scheduled Tribe. To counter this peaceful march, radical Meitei groups organised counter-blockades on all the highways leading to the hill districts. Meitei youths armed with sticks and stones

groups used the rally as a pretext to carry out the POGROM that was planned well in advance.

After the solidarity rally, participants were attacked by Meitei goons on their way back home and the Anglo-Kuki War Memorial Gate, which commemorates tribal uprising against the British, was set on fire. This ignited the violence between the two communities.

As chaos engulfed the state, radical groups like Arambai Tenggol (which enjoys the patronage of the CM and Manipur’s titular king Leishemba Sanajaoba), Meitei Leepun and Meiteis mobs backed by state police commandoes started attacking tribal settlements, killing and burning everything in their path.



were stationed in all border areas. As it was a peaceful march and not an economic blockade, the counter-blockade was totally uncalled for. However, the radical Meitei

