



Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF)
Conglomerate of Recognised Tribes in Lamka, Outer Manipur

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PRESS RELEASE

The Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum categorically refutes the allegation made by the World Meitei Council (WMC) at a press conference on June 20 that Kuki-Zo tribals started the ethnic clashes in Manipur.

Rather, it was Chief Minister Biren Singh's anti-tribal policies and the Meitei community's demand for ST status - a co-ordinated effort to usurp tribal lands - which eventually led to an unbridgeable chasm between the two communities.

Kuki-Zo communities did not demand a separate administration before May 3. There was no conspiracy, nor preparation for violence by tribals, as shown by the huge number of innocent lives lost at the hands of Meitei mobs in the Imphal valley.

We do not desire more land and power, as alleged by the WMC, but are trying to protect our ancestral lands.

The WMC's assertions that the Kukis would burn their own Anglo-Kuki War Memorial as part of a larger conspiracy is absurd. Also, the rally organised on May 3 was a peaceful march, and the burning of a forest beat office (which happened another day) was not related to the rally, which was to protest the ST demand of the Meiteis.

The Meitei community also keeps bringing up the bogey of "illegal immigrants" and "foreigners" to target all Kuki-Zo tribes - as if an Indian state is in danger of being taken over by foreigners infiltrating enmasse. How can we be foreigners in our own land?

The Meitei populace has been constantly fed with this false narrative over the past few years (especially following the military coup in Myanmar, due to which refugees fled to India, particularly in Mizoram, not Manipur) by the local media. This account has been repeatedly inflated by the chief minister and the militant intellectuals advising him. Their purpose of creating a fear psychosis among the majority community has led to ever-increasing tensions with the tribals, who they have now painted as "foreigners".

The WMC's accusations of militants directing the masses for their political ends could not be further from the truth. This is not a militant-led movement. It is the innocent civilians who are victims and it is the civilians who are defending their homes and families from repeated raids by Meitei mobs and the legislative overreach of the state government.

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