



Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF)

Conglomerate of Recognised Tribes in Lamka, Outer Manipur

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PRESS RELEASE

The Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF) is deeply offended by the remarks made by Manipur CM Biren Singh in his recent interview with the Times of India, where he blatantly lied about the cause of the sectarian conflict in the state.

Singh's accusation that the conflict was "planned years ago" by some section of tribals with "illegal immigrants" goes against all available evidence and the fact that Kuki-Zo tribals faced the brunt of the violence – in the number of deaths, displaced, and the loss of homes and livelihood.

If the conflict was planned for "years" by tribals, why was there no loss of innocent Meitei lives in tribal areas when violence broke out, while unwitting tribal civilians in Imphal Valley were slaughtered without warning? Which community was prepared and which was not? There are numerous national media reports quoting central security forces that say Meitei radicals like Arambai Tenggol carried out attacks on tribal civilians. No corresponding tribal groups targeted Meitei civilians.

The CM's allegation of tribals starting the violence to demand a "separate nation" is ridiculous, as tribals have made it very clear that any demands they have because of the ethnic cleansing of their community come under the constitution of India. In fact, the May 3 violence scuppered a peace accord between tribal SoO groups and the central government which was to be signed on May 8. A report by The Wire news website said Manipur's CM was not in favour of the peace treaty. This means that the CM had a very good reason to start a conflict. Tribals did not.

The CM's war on drugs, implementation of the Indian Forest Act, 1927, and his "illegal immigrants" rhetoric all targeted Kuki-Zo tribals and Kuki-Zo areas. A certain amount of pushback from the community was only natural in the form of protests, rallies, and civil disobedience. Meitei militia groups like Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun were the ones preparing for a violent confrontation. This led to the deaths of almost 100 tribal civilians in the valley who were totally unaware of the conspiracy in the first two days of the conflict.

We once again urge the central government to recognize the physical and emotional separation between Kuki-Zos and Meiteis. We do not accept a government that arms one community against us while attempting to portray us as the aggressor.


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