



Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF)

Conglomerate of Recognised Tribes in Lamka, Outer Manipur

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Saturday, 18 November 2023

CONDEMNATION

The Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF) strongly condemns the FIR against its general secretary Muan Tombing for his comments on a self-governing body for Kuki-Zo tribals in Manipur.

A separate administration from the Meitei government has always been our demand since the start of the conflict in May, and we have also made it clear that any political solution should come under the constitution of India. Therefore, the charges of sedition and conspiring to wage war against the Indian government are totally baseless. Police cases were also earlier filed against ITLF's chairman and spokesperson in an attempt to silence the voice of the tribal movement.

Why are we adamant with our demand for separation? Innocent Kuki-Zo civilians were butchered in Meitei-dominated areas including the capital, and those that survived have been chased out with no possibility of going back. We have been called illegal immigrants, and Meitei civil societies declared "war" on us. The state government and police have openly sided with the Meitei community, with commandos leading attacks on tribal villages.

Even NGOs in the field of development, aided by the CM, are trying to siphon off funds meant for tribal development. In the most recent case on October 23, the CM requested Tribal Affairs Minister Arjun Munda to approve six projects worth over crores of rupees to Meitei NGOs based in Imphal. None of them worked for tribal welfare. The state's education minister told a Meitei activist that he would remove a chapter on "The Kuki" from school books, an obvious attempt to erase tribal history.

Tribal government employees and our MLAs can no longer reach Imphal and are unable to perform their duties for their constituencies.

Meanwhile, we have not received any help from the state government; even central government aid like food and other essential items are routed through neighbouring Mizoram state as Meitei mobs don't allow any material to reach tribal areas. Tribals no longer have access to the highway linking us to the country's rail corridor and the airport.

Since we don't know when the central government will complete the mechanisms for a separate administration for Kuki-Zo tribals, we need a separate secretariat in the interim so that our government servants and lawmakers can continue working for their people.

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