



Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF)

Conglomerate of Recognised Tribes in Lamka, Outer Manipur

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PRESS RELEASE

First, they tried to become tribals like us, then they used violence to kill and displace us. They then unleashed a blitzkrieg of false propaganda to malign our name and history and went on to abuse the law by filing numerous police cases against those speaking up on behalf of our community. Now they are trying to erase our status as tribals.

It is no secret that the state government in Manipur, controlled by the majority Meitei community, overtly and covertly supports the Meiteis in the current ethnic conflict. The communal Biren Singh administration has now opened a new front by pushing for the removal of the Kuki-Zo community from India's Scheduled Tribes list.

The move started with a representation to the Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs by Maheshwar Thounaojam of the Republican Party of India (Athawale) demanding the removal of Kuki-Zos from the ST list. The chief minister on January 9 said a committee would be formed to decide on the subject, following a letter from the tribal affairs ministry that asked for the state's views on the matter.

This is a well-coordinated move by the state government and Meitei chauvinists, although removing a community from the ST list is no small task. The criteria used by India's government to declare communities as STs were decided by the Lokur Committee in 1965. The Manipur government is now trying to push for changing the criteria in its attempt to displace and deprive Kuki-Zo tribals of their rights and their land.

Any further attempts by Biren Singh to use the state machinery to target the Kuki-Zo community will only escalate the conflict, which will ultimately be detrimental to him and the state.

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