



Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF)

Conglomerate of Recognised Tribes in Lamka, Outer Manipur

File No: ITLF-PR-202496

Saturday, 13 July 2024

Open Letter to Shri Amit Shah, Hon'ble Union Home Minister, Government of India

The rising cases of high-handedness shown towards Kuki-Zo Village Volunteers in Manipur by central agencies are a matter of serious concern for minority tribes, who are facing the brunt of the violence in the ongoing ethnic conflict.

A number of cases warrant condemnation, especially those that occurred in Jiribam's Phaitol village and Mongbung village. Seven Kuki women were beaten up by central security forces, and two village boys were taken into custody. Furthermore, three Kuki village volunteers were arrested after an arson attack on the home of L. Hengjol village chief, and five Kuki women beaten up by security forces had to be rushed to Noney Hospital for treatment. Additionally, security forces set fire to the home of the general secretary of Kuki Inpi (Jiribam, Noney, and Tamenglong).

Meanwhile, the majority community, which controls all the state's resources, is still carrying out its ethnic cleansing campaign against the Kuki-Zos. Even to this day, we are still witnessing the burning of Kuki-Zo houses in Jiribam by Arambai Tenngol militants, while central security forces seem to have been ordered to concentrate on rounding up Kuki-Zo village defenders. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) is also arresting people on terror charges for simply trying to protect their community. NIA should not be used as a tool for suppression. Genuine cases can be taken up after a political solution is in place.

Time and again, we have witnessed Meitei terrorists from UNLF and Arambai Tenggol crossing the so-called buffer zones to attack tribal settlements. This necessitates the deployment of armed village volunteers to protect their homes and families, a fundamental right in every country. The recent instances of security forces arresting tribal volunteers and confiscating their weapons are not only blatantly unfair but also increases the vulnerability of Kuki-Zo villages along the foothills.

While combing operations are in full swing in Kuk-Zo areas, Meitei militias with automatic weapons are freely operating in the state capital and surrounding valley. State police and central security forces have become mere spectators as these militants travel freely in vehicles, brandishing guns and openly calling for the genocide of the Kuki-Zo tribes.

Around 6,000 weapons and lakhs of ammunition looted from state armouries are still being held by the Meitei militants, but no sincere effort has been taken to retrieve these stolen weapons, and none of the militant leaders, including Arambai Tenggol chief Kourunganba Khuman, have been arrested. We will not cooperate with the security forces if they continue to act in a biased manner. Action cannot be one-sided.

If the central government is sincere about disarming everyone in the interest of peace, let Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) be introduced immediately in Imphal and other valley areas where most of the looted weapons are circulating. This should be followed by an operation to retrieve all stolen weapons.

To address the bogey of “illegal immigration,” the government should document all the people who have fled to Manipur due to the crisis in Myanmar, issue ID cards, and house the refugees in designated camps. We are tired of being repeatedly referred to as “illegal” in our own land to justify the agenda of a majoritarian government and the actions of militant Meitei groups.

The Chief Minister of Manipur and the Meitei people have frequently referred to the Kuki-Zo people as narco-terrorists. While some people may have engaged in poppy cultivation, this does not mean that the whole community supported or took part in the practice. We consistently backed the government’s efforts to combat the state’s drug problem. It should be mentioned that other tribes in Manipur, including Meiteis, also engage in the practice of poppy farming. Meitei propagandists created the myth of the “narco-terrorist” to malign the Kuki-Zo community.

Regarding Chief Minister Biren Singh’s recent remarks in which he said peace talks have started, ITLF’s leadership and leaders of other tribal CSOs are not aware of any talks. The CM should stop spreading rumours to gain public support. If some people have taken part in any meeting, they are doing so in their personal capacity.

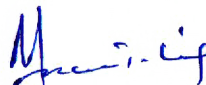
There are reports that a military camp is being constructed along the Churachandpur-Bishnupur (Torbung Bangla) border. We request authorities to relocate the camp somewhere in the middle of Bishnupur and away from Churachandpur so that no necessary tension is created.

Military operations will not bring peace to Manipur. The nature of the conflict - the death, destruction, and radicalisation of the Meitei community - means that the Kuki-Zo community will not be able to live a safe and dignified life in Manipur even if some semblance of peace is enforced by the military.

For peace to last, we earnestly request that you, the Union Home Minister, expedite our demand for a political solution: a Union Territory with legislature for the Kuki-Zo community under Article 239A of the Indian Constitution.



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