



Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF)

Conglomerate of Recognised Tribes in Lamka, Outer Manipur

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PRESS RELEASE

During the course of the Manipur ethnic conflict, it has become well established that the Meitei community targets anyone who does not tow the majority community line—from filing FIRs against academics to threatening and assaulting rights activists from within their own community. One of their perennial targets is the Assam Rifles. This is because India's oldest paramilitary force has the most in-depth knowledge and experience among central security forces in Manipur. It has a deep understanding of local geopolitics and how to deal with communities on the ground. This has interfered with the communal designs of the majority Meiteis and their attempt to wipe out minority Kuki-Zo tribes using state machinery.

Assam Rifles has also been the only central force that has stood up to Meitei police commandos when the latter abandoned any pretense of professionalism by openly leading their community in killing Kuki-Zo tribals and burning villages. This was shown in Sugnu when an Assam Rifles truck blocked the entrance to the police station on June 2, 2023, because it had become the norm for Meitei policemen to head out and lead Meitei mobs in attacking tribal villages. Drone footages obtained by ITLF clearly shows police gypsies leading mobs as they torch tribal houses in Sugnu town. In the villages surrounding Sugnu and Serou areas, tribals who survived attacks and fled to Lamka town say Meitei mobs were led by the police and Arambai Tenggol.

The recent press release by COCOMI, which accused the Assam Rifles of acting against Meitei interest in Sugnu and Serou, is particularly odd considering the vast majority of villages burned in the area belonged to the Kuki-Zo community, and all Kuki-Zo tribals have been driven out of the once-cosmopolitan Sugnu, leaving the town to be completely controlled by Meiteis.

Although Kuki-Zo volunteers guarding their land and families have suffered at the hands of the Assam Rifles—more weapons have been confiscated from tribal-dominated areas, more bunkers destroyed, and more people have been apprehended in Kuki-Zo areas compared to Meitei areas—we still support all central security forces, including the Assam Rifles, as they are non-partisan.

The Assam Rifles, in particular, are still the most able and experienced force to enforce peace in the conflict-ridden state. Unlike many other central forces, which are deployed temporarily because of the conflict, Assam Rifles has permanent bases in the state, which makes it better equipped to deal with any role that is required. Perhaps it is being targeted because it is not

subservient to the communal state government and is not afraid to call a spade a spade—a report by the Assam Rifles on the cause of the conflict partly blamed CM Biren Singh, mentioning his “political authoritarianism and ambition.”

If any force is to be called out for supporting a particular community and acting against another, it is the Manipur Police, especially the commandos. We know it, the Meitei community knows it, and many journalists who cover the conflict in Manipur know it.

The Meiteis already control the state government, all institutions, and the police. And now they also want to control the deployment of central security forces in the state! We hope the union government does not pay heed to the demands of a self-serving and entitled community that happily uses its womenfolk to obstruct security forces while their men burn tribal villages.

Issued by —

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