

# India: Fact-finding team visits Manipur, holds government responsible for violence and suffering

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**An eight-member fact-finding team, comprising leftists, lawyers, Dalit and women's rights activists from across India, visited affected villages and relief camps across the northeastern state of Manipur from August 10–14.**

The visit followed the [outbreak of ethnic violence](#) between the majority Meitei and minority Kuki-Zo communities, which began in May, and which has so far claimed more than 187 lives, displaced more than 60,000 people and created a humanitarian crisis. Shocking footage of the sexual assault of two Kuki-Zo women on May 4, circulated widely on social media in July, prompting Prime Minister Narendra Modi to belatedly condemn the violence.

The team, which included leading members of the Communist Party of India Marxist-Leninist (Liberation), the All India Progressive Women's Association and the All India Lawyers Association for Justice, visited villages and relief camps in Imphal valley, Kangpokpi and Churachandpur districts, meeting with representatives from different sections of Manipuri society, including civil society organisations, prominent leaders, legal professionals, police officers and people at relief camps from both the Kuki and Meitei community.

## Findings

They released a [summary of their findings](#) on August 13 and a [detailed report](#) on August 24.

In their report, the team blamed the political turmoil in Manipur on “the double-engine BJP governments in Manipur and at the Centre”, referring to Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

“Never before in the history of India has a government overseen such a complete decimation of society's social fabric that has resulted in entire communities within a state being ethnically segregated into different parts of a State ... which despite previous conflicts, was able to reconcile and live together,” the report said.

“It goes without saying that this ethnic segregation and violence that has been raging for more than 3 months now, is the consequence of the actions of the BJP government. Even as the Chief Minister Biren Singh proved thoroughly incompetent and reluctant to put an end to the violence, Prime Minister Narendra Modi prioritised his visits to France and the United States over Manipur. In fact the miserable response of the Prime Minister and the Home Minister in the Parliament exposes their bankruptcy in offering any comprehensive political solution to this crisis.”

The team met with several people from both the Meitei and Kuki community who believe that the trigger for inter-ethnic violence began well before May 3, though their reasons vary.

"For the Meiteis it was the rising tensions around the order of the Manipur High Court on the claim for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to Meiteis, and the subsequent incidents of arson reported on 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> April. For the Kukis it is traced back to the State-orchestrated demonisation of the Kuki community as a whole in the name of war on drugs and forest encroachments, which created a situation where a conflict was inevitable.

"The narrative from the Meitei side hinges on 2 main issues: firstly, that 'lakhs and lakhs [hundreds of thousands] of Kuki infiltrators' are entering Manipur from Myanmar and setting up thousands of new villages and secondly, expanding poppy cultivation in Kuki areas. This narrative has found its vocal proponent in the Chief Minister who has publicly endorsed this narrative, particularly on social media platforms by releasing press statements about 'War of Drugs', 'Infiltration' etc., which have caused a demonisation of the Kuki community."

Now, there is complete ethnic segregation of Kukis and Meiteis into the Hills and Valley respectively, reported the team. "On the one hand, Meiteis living in the hill districts alongside Kukis have been forced to leave their houses and take shelter in relief camps, and on the other hand, Kukis living and working in the valley area, mainly Imphal East and Imphal West, have been driven out and have sought shelter in the relief camps in Kuki majority areas such as Kangpokpi and Churachandpur."

### **Humanitarian crisis**

The scale of displacement far exceeds the figures reported by the state government in July, the team found. After speaking with local organisers and journalists on the ground, "the number of displaced persons from the Kuki community number about 60,000, while those displaced from Meitei community are about 15,000".

Hundreds of relief camps have been established in the valley and hills. "The situation in the relief camps is grim," reported the team. "Across the valley and hills thousands of internally displaced persons live in desperate conditions. Basic services are lacking, insufficient arrangements are being made as the government has wiped its hands off the suffering people."

The team found that some relief camps were "in shocking condition", others had "insufficient basic amenities" and that "grossly insufficient" food and monetary aid was being provided by the state government.

"At the relief camps at the youth hostel in Churachandpur, run by volunteers, the rooms are highly congested, and infectious diseases have begun to fast spread. Measles, chicken pox, viral fever are an everyday reality at the camp. Sanitation is poor, and the camps the Team visited, which each have internally displaced persons up to 500 in number do not have sufficient toilet facilities.

"Most relief camps are unable to provide nutritious food to the residents and are only given rice and dal twice a day.

"At Kangpokpi, the relief camps are in a similar situation with no proper nutrition and sanitation. The district has only one upgraded PHC which has been designated a district hospital and which does not have sufficient doctors, staff or medicines."

### **BJP stoking division**

"The frontier between the valley and hills, and the undeclared blockade, has severely compromised the transport of essential commodities including basic relief food items, medicine affecting thousands of internally displaced Kukis in the relief camps in hill districts. This also impacts the

mobility of Meiteis out of the Valley.”

The level of animosity and distrust between the two communities cannot be ignored, the team reported. "Every narrative of the violence lays blame on the other community. The mistrust runs so deep that one displaced Kuki person we met at a shelter in Guwahati told us that after their house was attacked in Imphal of May 3<sup>rd</sup> and they were rescued by CRPF [police reservists], some Meiteis came to offer them food, but they did not take it thinking the food might be poisoned.

"Members of Kuki Civil Society Organisations informed us that since the second term of the Biren Singh government, there has been a concerted effort to target the people living in the hills. There has been several instances of eviction notices being served on people living in hill areas in the name of forest conservation.

"Several houses in the hill have been demolished in the name of evacuating people from 'Protected Forests'," the team reported. However, they added, "It is important to remember that it is the same BJP that recently passed dangerous amendments to *The Forest Conservation Act* from Lok Sabha at the cost of livelihood of forest dwelling people, and same party that is selling out national resources to private and global corporates."

Aside from denouncing the state government of BJP Chief Minister Biren Singh, the team also took aim at the Supreme Court for not intervening to "ensure that basic steps are taken in investigating" the violence and loss of lives and property suffered by the people of Manipur.

Since the violence broke out, there have been repeated calls for Singh to resign as CM, but to date he has [refused to step down](#). The report said Singh's resignation would "mark the first step in the journey towards any feasible political solution to this humanitarian crisis".

Finally, the report appealed "to the affected communities to cease all hostilities to ensure that the displaced persons at the relief camps can receive proper aid. This will serve as an important gesture to move forward from the conflict towards any future resolution."

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**P.S.**

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