

Editorial: The Imperative of Fact finding: Truth Telling as a Route to Justice

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THE IMPERATIVE OF FACT FINDING: TRUTH TELLING AS A ROUTE TO JUSTICE

This month's bulletin carries extracts from the 'Independent Peoples Tribunal on the Ongoing Ethnic Conflict in Manipur.' The Report draws from the human rights philosophy that atrocities should be documented factually and truthfully, and that one must work towards ensuring accountability and justice for such violations, regardless of the identity of the victim or perpetrator, as a key step towards creating the basis for dialogue and eventually for peace and reconciliation.

Human rights fact-finding is based on the principle of our shared humanity and a commitment to impartial truth-telling, however hard, unpopular or unpalatable it may be. To eschew partisanship is at the heart of human rights philosophy.

A human rights report bases itself upon the twin foundations of universal human rights and constitutional guarantees, both of which are premised on the legal assumption that all human life has inherent value. It is the purpose of human rights advocacy to mobilize public opinion against human suffering and demand justice.

However, it is most challenging for a human rights organisation to

do a human rights fact-finding when one's own people are the perpetrators of rights violations. Yet human rights fact-finding at its best does precisely that. Two examples can be cited for this, one historical and one from contemporary times.

While the Gaza genocide has excited global condemnation, the voices within Israel have been relatively muted. In fact, there is actually widespread support inside Israel for its war of annihilation in Gaza. In this context, one must note the courageous report by Israeli human rights group, B'Tselem, titled simply, 'Our Genocide'. Through its documentation, B'Tselem calls the policies of Israel to account. It concludes that Israel has been systematically committing genocide through the acts of mass starvation, bombing, forced displacement, domicile, scholasticide—all committed against the people of Gaza. What is significant is that B'Tselem courageously 'owns' this 'crime of crimes' and is unsparing in its criticism of Israel and by implication the people of Israel.

The other example harks back to one of the first 'Fact-Finding Reports' in India authored by Mahatma Gandhi, on the events

which led up to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. On 13th April, 1919, a large number of people had gathered in Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar to protest against the Rowlatt Act. The British Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer ordered firing on the unarmed people who were caught in a narrow corridor unable to escape. Hundreds of people – women, children, elderly and men – were mercilessly slaughtered and thousands seriously injured. Mahatma Gandhi led his first Fact-Finding enquiries into this most abominable slaughter, which eventually became a turning point in the freedom struggle.

While Churchill contended that Jallianwala Bagh stood in 'sinister and singular isolation', the Gandhi-authored report sees the massacre as a logical end of British policy in Punjab. One of the significant factors which led to the Jallianwala Bagh firing was the arbitrary arrest of two popular leaders of the independence movement, Satyapal and Saifuddin Kitchlew, followers of Gandhiji's Satyagraha movement. This event occurred

in the background of widespread public opposition in the Punjab to the dreaded Rowlatt Act.

What is not well known is that following the arrest of Satyapal and Saifuddin Kitchlew, on 10th April, 1919, the British security forces shot at protestors, killing many. This led to a series of violent events when enraged crowds attacked British institutions, including banks, killing several British persons. An elderly, British woman missionary who ran schools for Indian students, Marcella Sherwood, was also assaulted.

In his report, even as Gandhiji condemned the Jallianwala Bagh massacre as a 'crime against humanity', he was not prepared to whitewash the crimes committed by his own people on uninvolved Britishers.

Gandhiji unequivocally wrote that 'nothing can be held to justify the wanton destruction by the mob of the innocent lives and properties...Miss Sherwood was a devoted Christian teacher and no remarks, however objectionable, that might have been made by Mrs. Easdon,

could warrant the proceedings of the mob.' He saw the murder and mayhem as 'wild and unworthy acts of the mob'. Gandhiji was prepared to hold his own people to the same standard, that all human life is sacred.

It is an ethical, legal and constitutional imperative to impartially acknowledge the facts, document the reality, stand with the victims, whoever they are, and demand an end to violence and destruction. This we learn from practitioners of human rights from down the ages.

PUCL in the course of its work, has always impartially and without having any axe to grind, documented human rights violations. The documentation is a form of truth-telling and the objective is to open the doors to dialogue, justice and peace. We endeavour to continue to take forward the best traditions of fact-finding as seen in the Gandhiji-authored report on Jallianwala Bagh as well as the report by B'Tselem and continue to raise a voice for justice and accountability.

PRESS STATEMENT ON THE INDEPENDENT PEOPLE'S TRIBUNAL ON THE ONGOING ETHNIC CONFLICT IN MANIPUR

PUCL NATIONAL

The 'Independent People's Tribunal on the Ongoing Ethnic Conflict in Manipur' released its report on 20th August, 2025 at the Press Club of India, New Delhi, in the presence of several jury and expert members.

Constitution and objectives of the Tribunal

The Independent People's Tribunal on Manipur was constituted by PUCL in 2024, in the context of prolonged state-wide violence and serious issues of failure of constitutional governance in the state of Manipur. The Independent People's Tribunal comprised of the following jury members:

- (1) Mr. Kurian Joseph, former Judge, Supreme Court of India (Chairperson)
- (2) Mr. K. Kannan, former Judge, Punjab and Haryana High Court
- (3) Dr. Anjana Prakash, former Judge, Patna High Court
- (4) Mr. MG Devasahayam, IAS (ret'd), former Addl. Chief Secy, Haryana
- (5) Dr. Swaraj Bir Singh, IPS (ret'd), former DGP, Meghalaya
- (6) Prof. Uma Chakravarti, Feminist Historian
- (7) Prof. Virginius Xaxa, Social Scientist and Author
- (8) Prof. Rosemary Dzuwachu, formerly from Nagaland University
- (9) Prof. Tanweer Fazal, Academic and Historian
- (10) Dr. Sandeep Pandey, Peace Activist
- (11) Ms. Manjula Pradeep, Senior human rights activist
- (12) Dr. Navsharan Singh, Writer, Researcher and Activist

- (13) Mr. Henri Tiphagne, Advocate, Madras High Court
- (14) Mr. Aakar Patel, Journalist and Author

Additionally, the team included three subject-experts:

- (1) Prof. Brinelle Dsouza, Public Health Activist and Academic,
- (2) Ms. Sandhya Gokhale, Feminist Activist and
- (3) Prof. Apoorvanand, Author and Activist.

The Tribunal was constituted following discussions with the various communities affected by the violence in Manipur, when it was decided that the jury members of the Tribunal should be from across India. Considering the ethno-social nature of the conflict, it was ensured that the jury and expert team members for the Tribunal were not from Manipur.

The Report of the Tribunal has been delayed due to the extensive consultations that were required and the detailed cross-verification of the data gathered. But the findings of the Tribunal still remains relevant and useful considering that the situation in Manipur continues to remain grim even after 27 months from 3rd May, 2023 when the incidents of mass violence erupted. It requires to be stressed that more than 60,000 IDPs still remain in camps with no end in sight.

The Report is important for the fact that it attempts to give voice to the experiences of victims and survivors of the violence. More than 150 victims and survivors

individually deposed before the Tribunal. Additionally many more joined group discussions both physically and virtually. Others contributed by sharing documents and insights before the Tribunal.

The Tribunal's task could be accomplished only due to the trust and confidence that the people reposed in the Tribunal. This report therefore showcases the yearning for peace, quest for justice and accountability and return to normalcy of all sections of Manipur.

The stated objectives of the Tribunal were as follows:

- 1) Document the violations suffered by the people of Manipur with a specific attention to loss of life, sexual violence and violence suffered by children, women including pregnant women and the elderly.
- 2) Examine and analyse the performance and responsibilities of the constitutional authorities by documenting the action taken to prevent the violence, provide access to remedy and justice, investigate and prosecute crimes, and in all other ways to provide redressal of violations and make efforts to establish the rule of law.
- 3) Examine the role of all security agencies as well as government functionaries at all levels of the state and central governments in ensuring law and order and also examine the role of independent national and state based institutions in protecting human rights.

4) Examine existing documentation on the Manipur situation and analyse the reasons for the continuing violence

5) Propose recommendations to repair the torn social, cultural and political fabric of the State.

Submissions before the Tribunal
In light of the serious concerns raised on the response of the government functionaries to the conflict and the role played by the various stakeholders, the Independent People's Tribunal endeavoured to understand and document the conflict and the precarious situation prevailing in Manipur, with a view to ensure accountability, justice and redressal for the people of Manipur.

The team of jury and experts visited the conflict-affected areas in Manipur and held sittings in different districts of Manipur including Bishnupur, Churachandpur, Imphal East, Imphal West, Kakching, Kangpokpi, Senapati followed by sittings in Delhi, to record testimonies and receive submissions from various stakeholders. Additionally testimonies and submissions were also received by jury members virtually. The team members also visited a number of relief camps in Manipur to talk to survivors, including children, women and elderly displaced on account of the conflict. Survivors/victims from different communities, service organizations organising and providing relief to affected people, organisations representing community interests, deposed before the Tribunal. The team members also met with various government

functionaries and officials of security forces. They heard testimonies of internally displaced persons and representatives of the different ethnic communities – Kukis, Meiteis, Nagas, Pangals and others. The team members also met advocates, journalists, health professionals, scholars, academics, activists, retired bureaucrats, public intellectuals, academics and political leaders from the different communities in Manipur. The Tribunal also received written testimonies and supporting documents from the deponents including videos, photographs and digital documents.

Observations and findings in the Report

In the Tribunal Report arrived at after this intensive exercise, the jury has sought to identify and document the causes, character and impacts of the devastating violence that shook Manipur following May 3, 2023, between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities. The Report documents the build-up, eruption and escalation of the ethnic conflict through testimonies of survivors and first-person accounts. The testimonies of the survivors present a stark picture of the failure of the state authorities and institutions to protect them, leaving them to fend for themselves. The jury also notes the failure of the Central government to fulfil its constitutional responsibility to ensure that Manipur remained under the regime of both rule of law and the Constitution. The overwhelming evidence placed before the Tribunal lays bare the gruesome and systemic nature of the violence, the role of the

radical groups, the failure of state institutions and the immense humanitarian fallout that followed.

Based on the material placed before the Tribunal, the jury has identified multiple causes underlying the conflict. Amongst the pre-existing factors were historical ethnic divisions, socio-political marginalisation and land disputes. What led to escalation of feelings of mistrust and enmity between the communities were the systematic hate campaign played out through digital media and statements made by the political leadership in the prelude to the conflict. Meanwhile, the Manipur High Court's directive dated 27th March, 2023, recommending Scheduled Tribe (ST) status for Meiteis served as a vital trigger, as it was perceived by the tribal groups, including the Kuki-Zo groups and the Nagas, as a threat to their constitutional protections. This in turn sparked protests across all tribal districts leading to a major protest programme on 3rd May, 2023 in all the Hill districts. While by and large the protests ended peacefully, violence erupted in a few places which soon engulfed the whole state.

The jury was presented with a stream of narratives that dominated the discourse around the conflict. The narrative of continuous immigration of Kuki-Zo communities from Myanmar, was heard commonly across testimonies by Meitei deponents. However it was found by the jury from a study of data, that the allegation of population influx raised by Meiteis and also propagated by the political leadership, holds little ground.

Another contending narrative

was the involvement of Kukis in poppy cultivation, in line with the then Chief Minister Biren Singh's 'war on drugs' which translated into popular propaganda against Kukis. This was strongly countered by Kuki deponents as a conspiracy to criminalise and demonise Kukis, when in fact the key players came from different communities, especially those who occupied key government and bureaucratic positions.

The deponents also expressed a strong suspicion that a larger agenda was at play, pointing toward geo-political considerations influencing the prolonged violence. The marked reluctance of the government to take concrete measures to strictly enforce the rule of law in an objective, unbiased manner and put an end to the violence, also sowed seeds of suspicion in the deponents. The jury found across testimonies, strong evidence of the impact of these narratives and hate propaganda that incited feelings of enmity and mistrust between the Meiteis and Kukis. The jury has also attributed a significant role to the media in the conflict, who actively shaped public perception and escalated tensions. While the print media was partisan and lacked investigative rigour, digital channels and social media were used to spread unverified and inflammatory content.

The Report highlights that the violence was not spontaneous, but planned, ethnically targeted and facilitated by state failures. The Report documents through the testimonies, a deep-rooted belief among survivors and victims, that the state either allowed the violence to happen or actively participated in it. Many

deponents have attributed the flare-up of violence to the political and administrative decisions of former Chief Minister Biren Singh. The state government downplayed the violence, made no significant arrests of radical groups like that of the Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun. In spite of public demand for his removal, Biren Singh did not step down for a long time until February, 2025.

The jury was extremely disturbed by the brutality of violence in which people were killed, butchered, tortured, dismembered, disrobed and sexually assaulted in public, and then through social media displayed before the whole world. The Report documents widespread sexual violence during the conflict which occurred both in the Valley areas as also in the Hills. Many incidents of sexual violence were unreported due to fear, trauma and lack of institutional support. The jury noted that even when women sought protection from the police and security forces, they were not only refused help them, but there were instances when the police handed them to violent mobs. Due to the complete loss of trust in the state machinery, the women survivors instead of reaching out to police stations, sought protection from their own communities. This displays the extent of state failure.

The jury found the relief and rehabilitation measures for the violence-struck communities in Manipur, grossly inadequate, delayed and unevenly distributed. Many relief camps suffered from poor sanitation and hygiene, inadequate healthcare, absence of mental health support and lack

of livelihood and education restoration. The jury also found that the recommendations of Joint Rapid Needs Assessment (JRNA) and Gita Mittal Committee covering shelter, nutrition, sanitation, education and psychological support were largely unimplemented.

The Report narrates how the already fragile healthcare system in Manipur crumbled completely in the face of violence. The violence was marked by attacks on hospitals and clinics, looting and destruction of medical supplies and ambulances, evacuation or flight of medical staff due to safety concerns and complete breakdown in referral networks and transport infrastructure. The 'Internally Displaced Persons' (IDPs) were forced into relief camps where healthcare became even more limited exacerbated by inadequate nutrition. This in particular affected women, children, elderly and the differently abled. The jury noted that people suffered morbidity and mortality, which could have been prevented or treated, due to the collapse of the healthcare system. The Report records how patients were also denied healthcare on communal lines. The jury observed the deep psychological impacts of the violence on the people, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in survivors, acute anxiety and depression among displaced people and the lasting consequences of the violence on the mental health of children and women survivors of sexual violence. The jury noted the complete lack of mental health intervention in place to address this.

The jury found that the conflict-ridden state of Manipur witnessed a complete breakdown of legal, judicial and constitutional mechanisms when it most needed it. The key symptoms of the collapse identified in the report include the failure of the courts to issue urgent directives to protect life and property, delayed or absent investigation into serious crimes, FIRs being selectively filed, and active participation of law enforcement officers in the violence. The Report documents the extent of police complicity and failure of security forces to maintain neutrality. The Report indicts both the State and Central governments for their failures to implement the rule of law and adherence to the Constitution. This has led to denial of justice and continued displacement of affected people for over 27 months. The jury found that the state government failed to constitute impartial Special Investigation Teams (SITs). Compounding the failure of justice was the lack of external judicial oversight. The requests from witnesses and survivors for legal and witness protection was ignored. There was also failure to ensure accountability from the former Chief Minister Biren Singh and the police and bureaucracy at all levels. The Supreme Court appointed a Committee led by Justice Gita Mittal. It also ordered CBI investigation in specific rape cases. However these interventions were narrow in scope and lacked follow-up. The jury concluded that the absence of legal redress and the collapse of constitutional mechanisms has deepened ethnic divisions.

Jury recommendations and strategies for justice, peace and accountability

Accountability and justice is foundational to rebuilding the trust, democracy and coexistence in Manipur. The report calls on India's Judiciary, Parliament and civil society to reclaim this duty and ensure that Manipur does not become a template for future impunity. Towards this, access to justice needs to be ensured for all and a permanent bench of the Manipur High Court needs to be established in the hill region. A Special Investigating Team (SIT) needs to be set up to conduct independent investigation of the thousands of cases arising from the conflict and to enquire into the role of the armed forces, security officers and police. The hate propaganda and inflammatory speeches that led to incitement and escalation of violence need to be prosecuted along with action against the authorities who failed to exercise their powers to prevent it. Meanwhile, a restorative justice framework is essential for addressing grievances and promoting healing, that is hinged on acknowledging harm, reparations, and reintegration over mere punishment. The Report emphasises that lasting peace in Manipur requires structural changes, community dialogue, legal accountability and sustained moral leadership.

The Report expresses disappointment that even more than 27 months after the ethnic violence first erupted, Manipur remains a disturbed state. This constitutes a collective failure, which can no longer be disregarded. Detailed recommendations have been

provided in the report by the jury, towards ensuring justice and accountability, and addressing the concerns raised in the report in the various chapters.

(The full report is available on the PUCL website.)

EPILOGUE: THE WAY FORWARD

EXTRACT FROM THE REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT PEOPLE'S TRIBUNAL ON THE ONGOING ETHNIC CONFLICT IN MANIPUR

More than two years have passed since the conflict erupted in Manipur. The situation between the Kuki and Meitei communities remains tense, fractured, and profoundly unresolved. The hope that time would begin to heal has not yet materialized in any meaningful way. Despite some efforts at peace-building—including the first symbolic peace talks held on 5th April, 2025—the process remains painfully slow, deeply fragile, and without the trust or groundwork needed for reconciliation.

The 5th April meeting, hosted under the initiative of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), was the first joint meeting of Meitei and Kuki representatives since the violence began. It lasted five hours and was seen as a cautious but important step. However, it must be noted that the main Meitei umbrella body, COCOMI, chose not to attend, instead sending proxy organizations. The Kuki-Zomi Council (KZC), representing the Kuki community, did attend and expressed a willingness to talk. But refused to sign on the minutes and so-called agreement reached. Yet, without the full participation of the core stakeholders, including COCOMI and the Suspension of Operations (SoO) groups, there remains deep scepticism about the efficacy and sincerity of these efforts.

Here is the 6-point roadmap, as presented by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) during the 5th April peace talks between the

Meitei and Kuki-Zo representatives:

1. Cease hostilities: Both communities are urged to refrain from attacking one another and immediately halt violence.
2. Facilitate safe return of IDPs: Support and enable the return of internally displaced persons to their homes under secure conditions.
3. Consult on long-term issues: Engage both communities in structured dialogue to address core disputes like land rights, tribe status, and political representation.
4. Prioritize regional development: Launch focused infrastructure and welfare initiatives, especially in neglected hill and valley areas, to bridge socio-economic disparities.
5. Ensure free movement on highways: Open and maintain national and state highways (e.g., NH-2 and NH-37) to reconnect hills and valley and resume essential supply chains.
6. Build inter-community cooperation: Promote collaboration—through civil society groups, local administrations, and task forces to normalize daily life and maintain peace.

Civil society acknowledged that while this was just a symbolic meeting, it was the first time that the representatives from the two communities sat together at the table and therefore it was a welcome move. Following this meeting an announcement was

made by the Governor of Manipur in the first week of July that all relief camps will soon be closed. This added a new layer of concern and fear, particularly among the displaced Kuki community. From the Kuki perspective, this announcement does not represent a return to normalcy but rather an administrative attempt to erase the reality of their displacement. Thousands remain unable to return to their homes, especially in and around Imphal. These include families who have lived in the city for generations, such as those from the old Lambulane area, now emptied of Kukis since the May 2023 violence. The fear is palpable: there are no security guarantees, no rehabilitation framework in place, and little trust in the state's promises. The reality is that if the camps are closed, many will be left to scatter in unsafe conditions, outside of any formal support.

One of the clearest indicators that normalcy has not returned is the complete lack of safe access for Kukis to essential infrastructure in Imphal. The airport remains out of reach. Hospitals like RIMS and JNIMS, once serving people from across communities, are no longer accessible to Kukis, forcing them to take interior, dangerous village roads.

This breakdown in connectivity has consequences far beyond

travel. Medical services in the hill areas are in a dire crisis. In places like Saikul, only two doctors are currently available to serve the entire area—clearly an untenable situation. Emergency healthcare, including childbirth, is dangerously compromised, and in some instances, people have had to go to other states for basic treatments. The health infrastructure has collapsed, and staffing is near-impossible, since Meitei professionals will not work in Kuki-dominated areas, and vice versa.

Similarly, the educational crisis is immense and widely unaddressed. Students pursuing higher and professional education—particularly in medical, engineering, or science disciplines—have been completely derailed. The main institutions are located in Imphal, now inaccessible to Kukis. Many young people have dropped out, especially those without the means or family networks outside the state. Online education has proven to be a hollow alternative: there is no library access, no laboratory, and no stable internet in the remote hills. Entire academic years have been lost, and many students don't know how or where to restart. The damage to their futures is incalculable.

Governance, as a system, has broken down. The administrative divide is now so stark that officers and public servants refuse to serve in areas dominated by the "other" community. The result is a near-total collapse of state services—from public transportation to ration distribution and health to infrastructure development. People across both communities

feel abandoned, but the Kukis, particularly in the hills, feel entirely cut off from the mechanisms of the state.

A particularly painful point of grievance for Kukis is the lingering assumed association with poppy cultivation and the drug trade. During the early phase of the conflict, this narrative was used as a weapon to paint them as criminal and illegitimate. Today, many Kuki intellectuals push back strongly against this characterisation.

They argue that the drug crisis affects all communities in Manipur, and the pushers are often protected by powerful political and police networks. They point out that dreams of quick riches lure many youths, whether Meitei or Kuki or other communities in Manipur. However, the real culprits—those at the top of the network—are untouched. There are even rumours, widely believed in the hills, of the son of a Union Minister being involved in the drug trade. Despite government claims of poppy destruction and FIRs, there is little public evidence of follow-through. Where are the big arrests? Where is the crackdown?

The narrative of the outsider and infiltrator also troubles the Kuki community and they are wondering whether these can be overcome without being addressed by authorities, who deny these charges. Indeed, people say that nothing has changed, except that Chief Minister Biren Singh is no longer directly in charge. But even this change has made no tangible difference on the ground. If anything, things have worsened. Roads are deteriorating fast,

particularly during this unusually heavy monsoon. Relief distribution has become irregular and inadequate. Development projects have stalled. In Saikul, people recently met with the health department to raise their concerns. Only two doctors run the local centre, which is impossible for a community with urgent needs. Prices are rising, access to urban markets remains difficult, and the feeling is one of being trapped—geographically, politically, and socially.

The para military presence, once reassuring, has shrunk. The Assam Rifles, trusted by many Kukis, are now largely absent. The CRPF and BSF are seen as ineffective, especially since they operate under the local police leadership, which is widely perceived to be biased.

The law has also not been applied equally. FIRs lodged by Kukis, numbering in the thousands, have gone nowhere. Of the total of 6000 + FIRs, on many UAPA is being applied—sometimes excessively and selectively—to both Meiteis and Kukis. The perception is that the government is criminalising dissent and arresting foot soldiers, while the real planners of violence remain free. This is particularly in the context of AT and ML.

There is bitterness among Kukis that the Governor, who assumed office during this crisis, has never met them or their representatives. He did, however, meet the Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun groups immediately after taking charge. This alone has shattered any remaining belief in his neutrality. From their side, the Meitei

community too has voiced disenchantment. Leaders, intellectuals, and even elected MPs have called the peace process a charade. They feel used and misled, their own suffering instrumentalised.

From the Meitei side, there is also despair. There is a sense that nothing is changing, that the youth are being arrested while leaders roam free. There are complaints that rehabilitation packages are inadequate—₹75,000 for a home is a cruel joke in a community that lives in shared housing. There is widespread anger at Union Home Minister Amit Shah for what is seen as a betrayal. Promises made were not kept. Women, in particular, feel they were used at the peak of the conflict and then excluded from peace efforts. Meira Paibis have withdrawn. Women are absent from both Track 1 and Track 2 dialogues. Even those willing to return to their villages are holding back. Without trust, they say, there can be no return. Buffer zones are now being treated as permanent boundaries. The Nagas are staying out. Certain Tangkhul leaders, are seen to be actively provoking unrest against Kukis, further souring relations. Hate speech, earlier virulent, has died down—not from reconciliation, but from exhaustion. People are tired. The violence has paused, but peace has not begun.

Shared grief surfaced at the tragic deaths of two young Manipuri air hostesses—one Meitei and one Kuki. A senior journalist noted that when the news broke, the state mourned both as Manipuris, not divided by community. There was even a

gesture from the Meitei leadership urging that the Kuki family bring their daughter's body back to Imphal. But fear won out. Instead, the family chose to travel from Ahmedabad to Dimapur, and from there to their current shelter in Kangpokpi. Their home in Imphal, once in the heart of Lambulane, remains abandoned.

This, according to the journalist, is the tragedy of Manipur: brief glimpses of unity, followed by reversion to division. Unless both communities can move past victim and perpetrator roles, unless they meet in truth and reconciliation, the status quo will persist. Track 2 meetings—friendly, intellectual gatherings—are happening, but they lack the political teeth to change realities. True dialogue must bring hostile parties face to face, and must include all SoO groups if it is to have legitimacy on the Kuki side. Above all, there must be accountability.

Ultimately, there is a widespread perception that the peace process is not real, that it is a spectacle, staged from time to time, but not rooted in political will or community consent. The budget for peace is shrinking, the state deficit is growing, and the cost of continued displacement and broken systems is now being borne by the people.

What is absent is what people crave the most: a process of truth, justice, and healing – the will to face the pain honestly, the courage to meet across the lines, the humility to accept that both sides have suffered, and that peace, if it is to last, must be just, inclusive, and real.

What is really needed is a Truth

and Reconciliation project to bring both sides together. The victim-perpetrator mindset needs to be put behind. For the ethnic groups to move back to their homes a process must be undertaken which builds confidence through cultural and social integration, through truth and reconciliation and government financed rebuilding of homes.

What is very clearly needed is a process of comprehensive disarmament. Transitional justice, a holistic blend of security, justice, autonomy, and development—together with continued, mediated dialogue—provides the best chance for a stable, united future in Manipur.

As far as political restructuring for autonomy maybe concerned or land and citizenship reforms, these must be not be put on the back burner.

A PUCL RESPONSE TO THE BANNING OF BOOKS BY J&K GOVERNMENT

PUCL NATIONAL

- ***Withdraw the forfeiture notification on 25 books on Jammu and Kashmir***
- ***Repeal Section 152 of the BNS which is the colonial sedition law in a decolonial avatar!***

The omnibus forfeiture of 25 books in Kashmir is an arbitrary and brute exercise of power which violates the Constitution.

The PUCL is outraged at the decision by the Jammu and Kashmir Government to forfeit 25 books in an omnibus order under Section 98 of the BNSS, basing its order on the unsubstantiated opinion that all the books are “playing a critical role in misguiding the youth, glorifying terrorism and inciting violence against Indian State”.

When a mass and arbitrary forfeiture of 25 books on Kashmir traversing different genres is ordered, one can only conclude that such a notification is an arbitrary and brute exercise of power by the state uncanalised by the discipline of the Constitution. What the state is seeking to tell the citizens is that any opinion which is not the opinion of the state cannot be tolerated. This is a form of totalitarian thinking which is unacceptable in a constitutional democracy. By the mass forfeiting of books, the Jammu and Kashmir government is utilizing a colonial, British-era law (Section 95 of the colonial, British era, CrPC finds its Bharatiya or so-called decolonial avatar, as Section 98 of the BNSS) which was designed to suppress

demands for Indian independence. This law has been used by the British to ban canonical texts like Hind Swaraj by Mahatma Gandhi.

This omnibus and hence arbitrary forfeiture notification states that ‘this literature has contributed to the radicalization of youth in J&K include distortion of historical facts, glorification of terrorists, vilification of security forces, religious radicalization, promotion of alienation, pathway to violence and terrorism etc.’ This wholly unprecedented decision to forfeit 25 books at the same time through a single notification demonstrates the government’s utter contempt for the constitutional right of citizens to freedom of speech and expression.

Disappearing an archive of literature on Kashmir

Among the twenty-five books forfeited are books by Anuradha Bhasin, Sumantra Bose, Tariq Ali, A G Noorani, Arundhati Roy, Ather Zia and a host of others. To reference some of the books banned:

- Hafsa Kanjwal in her book ‘Colonizing Kashmir: State-building under Indian Occupation’ notes that ‘to work on Kashmir, especially today, is not easy. As I write, Kashmiri academics, journalists, artists, activists, and human rights defenders are being intimidated, harassed, suspended, and detained by the Indian government for documenting

- and representing India’s long-standing colonial occupation.’ Kanjwal presciently notes that ‘as India continues to find different ways to silence and criminalize the truth tellers, the future of knowledge production on Kashmir remains endangered.’

- ‘Do you remember Kunan Poshpora?’ is an effort by ‘students and lawyers who work in Kashmir’ to remember the ‘mass rape, in the two villages of at least 31 women by the 4 Rajputana Rifles regiment of the Indian Army on 23 February 1991’ and to document how in spite of a ‘long history of inaction, botched investigations, shameless cover-ups and brutal humiliation’, the survivors have continued their struggle for justice. This book is an attempt at bringing much needed attention to the ‘question of sexual violence and impunity in South Asia.’

- In the volume ‘Kashmir and the future of South Asia’ edited by Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal there is an essay by Alana Hunt about her art project titled ‘cups of nun chai’. ‘Cups of nun chai’, seeks to remember and memorialise one episode from Kashmir’s troubled history when 118 civilians were killed during the anti-government protests in 2010. Hunt documents herself having nun chai with 118 people from around the world

- when she talks to them about the situation in Kashmir and documents their curious and interested response.
 - A G Noorani's book on Kashmir documents the history behind the accession to India. Noorani has as an annexure, a letter by Jayaprakash Narayan from 1964, in which JP writes that it 'has always seemed to me to be a lie to say that the people of Kashmir had already decided to integrate themselves with India. They might do so but have not done so yet. Apart from the quality of the elections, the future of the state of Jammu and Kashmir was never made an electoral issue at any of them.' JP acidly references the irony of the opposition to what he has written and says that 'It is remarkable how the freedom-fighters of yesterday begin so easily to imitate the language of the imperialists.' In a follow up article JP notes that, 'My recent article on Kashmir has provoked a rather fierce controversy. That is good, because after the emotional catharsis, tempers should cool down, allowing for a more reasoned approach to a question that has plagued the sub-continent for the past 17 years.' JP's letters and the response to them stand testament to the value of debate and discussion.
 - Ather Zia's book, 'Resisting Disappearance', provides an anthropological account of the work of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP). APDP consisted of 'accidental
 - activists', mainly mothers and wives of men who were forcibly disappeared by the state. The books charts the poignant protest where women 'wore headbands displaying a faceless man's profile, symbolic of the disappeared person. They wear long, black robes with photographs of the disappeared hanging from their necks, or cradled in their laps, standing in for the disappeared person.' The demand to the state from the women is to return their loved ones. In 2020 APDP was raided by the NIA, and confidential documents related to identities of victims were seized, prompting fears of reprisal against victims. Today no protests are permitted.
 - 'Kashmir at the crossroads' by Sumantra Bose begins with a poem by Tagore titled Proshno (A Query), written during a peak of British repression of Indians agitating through mass civil disobedience, as well as armed struggle by youth groups. The poem poignantly asks: "My voice is stifled today; my flute has lost its music. This pitch-dark prison has turned my world into a nightmare. That is why I ask You in tears, dear God Those who have poisoned your air, snuffed out your light Have You truly forgiven them? Have You really given them your love?"
- The books referenced above give a flavour of the realms traversed covering history, memory, poetry and politics. These books represent voices which the mainstream has forgotten be it the 118 mainly young people shot dead by the Indian security forces or the women who suffered rape in Kunan Poshpora. It also represents a vibrant history when women protested against the crime of enforced disappearances. There are voices from India's past such as JP who sought to have a reasoned discussion on Kashmir. These books represent a vibrant intellectual culture of thinking and writing about Kashmir. These viewpoints may be deemed unacceptable by the Indian establishment, but they are viewpoints which are protected speech under the Indian Constitution. The forfeiture notice is an attempt at stifling collective memory and preventing thought in Kashmir. Remembering the bravery of the mothers of the disappeared through literature is sought to be erased from public memory. By clamping down on these books, the attempt to stifle the very heart of intellectual life: which is to seek knowledge and form opinion by gathering thought from all, including contrarian, sources.

The forfeiture notification is illegal and unconstitutional

The Jammu and Kashmir government must appreciate that there may be viewpoints they disagree with, but a constitutional democracy is based on the fact that dissenting opinions exist and should be respected. As Justice Chandrachud opined in his dissenting opinion in *Romila Thapar v Union of India*, 'Individuals who assert causes which may be unpopular to the echelons of power are yet entitled to the freedoms which are guaranteed by the

Constitution. Dissent is a symbol of a vibrant democracy.'

What is not apparent from a reading of the Government notification is a reasoning as to the grounds for forfeiture. What the notification has is a bald, bare and sweeping assertion with no reference to how any of the twenty five books have contributed to 'radicalization of youth in J&K include distortion of historical facts, glorification of terrorists, vilification of security forces, religious radicalization, promotion of alienation, pathway to violence and terrorism etc.' When there is an omnibus forfeiture order of 25 books, without any specific reference to the content of any of the books, prima facie it appears that the exercise of the power of forfeiture is not a justified exercise of power under Section 98 of the BNSS and will not come within the reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2) of the Constitution.

The Supreme Court observed in 'State Of Maharashtra & Ors vs Sangharaj Damodar Rupawate' (2010), (which is the case in which the Court upheld the Bombay High Court order striking down the forfeiture of the book, 'Shivaji - Hindu King in Islamic India' by James Laine): "Undoubtedly, the power to forfeit a newspaper, book or document is a drastic power inasmuch as it not only has a direct impact upon the due exercise of a cherished right of freedom of speech and expression as envisaged in Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution, it also clothes a police officer to seize the infringing copies of the book, document or newspaper and to search places where they are reasonably suspected to be

found, again impinging upon the right of privacy. Therefore, the provision has to be construed strictly and exercise of power under it has to be in the manner and according to the procedure laid down therein".

In this case the Court also held that the grounds for forfeiture must be based upon reading of the whole book and 'the State cannot extract stray sentences of portions of the book and come to a finding that the said book as a whole ought to be forfeited'. The government extracting sentences from the book to make its case for forfeiture was deemed insufficient within the understanding of the law, by the SC.

The SC struck down the forfeiture of a single book, in which the order u/s 98 of the CrPC was accompanied by numerous paragraphs from the book which the state found objectionable enough to invoke warranting its powers to forfeit the book. By contrast, the Jammu and Kashmir government have not bothered to even seek to justify how, why and on what basis, each of the 25 books should be forfeited. The Government has thereby exhibited their total contempt for the freedom of speech and expression and also their egregious hubris (arrogance). A bald assertion is deemed sufficient, to remove an entire corpus of literature about Kashmir by reputed publishers including Oxford University Press, Routledge, Zubaan, Stanford University Press, University of Pennsylvania Press, Harper Collins, Cambridge University Press and Penguin India, showing a cavalier disregard for the freedom of

speech and expression.

The drastic nature of the censorship being perpetrated by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir comes through on a perusal of the notification. The police are empowered to seize all copies of these 25 books after searching all locations. The notification is marked to the Director Archives, Archaeology, and Museum and the Director of Libraries, among others, indicating that these published literature on Kashmir will disappear from publicly accessible facilities. This will undoubtedly be a cultural impoverishment of the public sphere. Even homes are not exempt from this power of search, seizure and forfeiture. A plain reading of the provision indicates the permissibility of this notification being enforced throughout the country, with the J& K police approaching jurisdictional magistrates in other states for warrants to search and seize these 25 books from bookstores around the country! This will have a chilling effect on the development of critical inquiry into the situation in Kashmir.

The notification also fails to appreciate the protection guaranteed to freedom of speech and expression in the constitutional jurisprudence developed by the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court in 'Shreya Singhal v Union of India', (2015) distinguished between 'discussion', 'advocacy', and 'incitement'. The Court held that, 'Mere discussion or even advocacy of a particular cause howsoever unpopular is at the heart of Article 19(1)(a). It is only when such discussion or advocacy reaches the level of

incitement that Article 19(2) kicks in. It is at this stage that a law may be made curtailing the speech or expression that leads inexorably to or tends to cause public disorder or tends to cause or tends to affect the sovereignty & integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, etc'

There is no material to indicate that these 25 books by reputed publishers most of which have been in circulation for years come within the higher threshold of 'incitement' which causes public disorder or affects security of the state. To any reasonable person the forfeited books, like literature at its best promotes discussion and may lead to advocacy. Both 'discussion' and 'advocacy' come within the ambit of constitutionally protected speech.

Sec. 152 of BNS is the colonial, British-era anti sedition law in decolonial, Bharatiya disguise

These 25 books, the J&K Government contends, need to be forfeited under Section 92 of the BNNS because these books violate Section 152 (acts endangering the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India), Section 196 (promoting enmity between different groups), Section 197 (imputations and assertions prejudicial to national integration and harming national unity), Section 294 and Section 295 (obscenity), Section 299 (acts outraging religious feelings) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023.

According to the Union Home Minister, Amit Shah, the BNS, BNSS and BSA which replaced the Indian Penal Code, Criminal

Procedure Code (CrPC) and Indian Evidence Act was formulated to make 'laws from an Indian perspective.' While 'the purpose of the old laws was to extend British rule and protect their property', 'the purpose of the new laws is to protect the life, property, and all constitutionally guaranteed rights of Indian citizens.'

Section 152 of the BNS under which, inter alia, the 25 books have been forfeited replaces the old sedition law under Section 124-A of the IPC. Section 124-A was a colonial law which unreasonably criminalised speech which the government determined was aimed at attempting to 'bring the government into hatred or contempt or excited disaffection against the government'. Section 152 of the BNS which is the so called decolonial law, strikingly goes even further than Section 124-A of the IPC in its criminalisation of speech. Section 152 criminalises, 'exciting secession or armed rebellion or subversive activities, or encouraging feelings of separatist activities or endangering sovereignty, unity or integrity of India' The even broader category which the BNS criminalises is the 'encouraging feelings of separatist activity'.

When a law criminalises the encouragement of feelings', it is permitting the policing of thought. There can be no commonly accepted definition of what constitutes encouragement' or creating 'excitement' which avoids the subjectivity or bias of the person in power. The BNS is not merely old IPC wine in new decolonial bottle but rather takes the project of criminalising

thought one step further thereby imperiling the constitutionally protected freedom of speech expression and thought.

One of the forfeited books, Arundhati Roy's Azaadi', makes the case for the power of literature as a way of creating a republic of the imagination'. For Roy, words are important as a way to begin 'Reimagining the world.' The Jammu and Kashmir government, like King Canute who sought to stop the tide, is foolishly trying to prevent people from re-imagining the world. In doing so they are going beyond the remit of the Constitution and morphing into an Orwellian thought police state.

Hence the PUCL demands:

- That this forfeiture notice of 25 books be immediately withdrawn by the Jammu and Kashmir government.
- Section 152 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita be repealed as it is nothing other than the old sedition law in a new decolonial disguise.

*(Kavita Srivastava, President
Dr. V. Suresh, General
Secretary)*

PUCL DEMANDS THAT THE ASSAM POLICE WITHDRAW PROSECUTION AGAINST SIDDHARTH VARADARAJAN AND KARAN THAPAR.

PUCL NATIONAL

- ***Freedom of the press cannot be deliberately, arbitrarily and vengefully curtailed by police action!***
- ***Repeal Section 152 of the BNS which is nothing but the sedition law in decolonial garb!***

The PUCL is outraged at the vindictive action of the Assam police in summoning renowned journalists Siddharth Varadarajan and Karan Thapar for investigation in a 2nd FIR on the same allegation with the difference being that the FIR was registered in a different police station in another district. The 1st FIR for which too they were summoned for police investigation, related to an article reporting a statement of the Indian Attache to Indonesia regarding military tactics adopted during Operation Sindoor and IAF jets. The FIR accused the article of constituting acts "endangering the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India".

Ironically, the summons were issued by the Assam police in the 2nd FIR on 12th August, 2025, which is the same day that the Supreme Court ruled that there was to be no coercive action against Varadarajan and Thapar with respect to the first FIR by the Assam police registered against them on 11th July, 2025. With respect to the fresh summons issued in the 2nd FIR, according to the Wire, no details of the alleged offence were provided by police which summoned them to appear before the police on 22nd August, 2025.

The first FIR was filed with respect to offences under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS): Sec. 152 (act endangering sovereignty); sec. 196 (promoting enmity among groups); sec. 197(1)(D)/3(6) (imputations prejudicial to national integration read with common intention), sec.353 (statements conducing to public mischief), sec. 45 (abetment) and sec. 61(criminal conspiracy).

The FIR invokes Section 152, BNS which criminalises speech which 'encourages feelings of separatist activities or endangers sovereignty or unity and integrity of India'. The facts in the FIR pertain to a report by the Wire which dealt with a statement made by India's defence attaché to Indonesia, Captain (Indian Navy) Shiv Kumar. Shiv Kumar acknowledged at a seminar in Indonesia that the Indian Air Force lost fighter jets to Pakistan on the night of 7th May, 2025, during Operation Sindoor, because of the "constraint given by the political leadership to not attack the military establishment or their air defences".

When the summons as well as the constitutionality of Section 152 of the BNS was challenged before the Supreme Court, the Court ordered that 'no coercive action shall be taken against them (Siddharth Varadarajan and Karan Thapar) and agreed to hear the constitutional challenge to Section 152. During the hearings, the Bench observed that when the offence is with

respect to articles published by a news outlet, custodial interrogation may not be necessary. "Basically these are matters where you don't require custodial interrogation" the apex court reportedly pointed out.

However, the Assam police does not seem to want to heed the implicit message in the Supreme Court order which is that freedom of speech cannot be recklessly and arbitrarily curtailed by police action. Only this heedless lack of concern for the Constitution can explain a second FIR against Varadarajan and Thapar.

The two FIR's are a part of a pattern to attempt to stifle the independent voice of 'The Wire'. It should be pointed out that on 9th May, The Wire's website was temporarily blocked for nearly 12-15 hours in India on government orders following the publication of an article regarding Rafale jets in Operation Sindoor. The website was restored later. All of this indicates a capricious attempt by the State to weaponise the law to silence questioning of state policy by the media and citizens, thereby curbing media freedoms and causing a 'chilling effect'.

The indifference of the state to its constitutional responsibility to ensure freedom of the press is only aided by Section 152 of the BNS. Sec. 152 of the BNS through its vague and over broad language criminalises what should otherwise be covered by the freedom of the press. Surely it is not an offence to fairly and accurately report what a serving

military officer says!

The fact that Section 152 gives the government a wide latitude to arbitrarily criminalise media reporting alleging that it constitutes 'encouragement' of 'feelings of separatist activities' and the endangerment of the 'sovereignty or unity and integrity of India', strikes at the very basis

of media freedom and freedom of speech and expression. Section 152, like the previous sedition law has no place in a constitutional democracy.

The PUCL demands that the Assam police stop this vindictive, malicious and unconstitutional persecution of the press now and withdraw the FIR against

Varadarajan and Thapar.

The PUCL also demands that Section 152 of the BNS which is nothing but the sedition law in decolonial garb be repealed.

*(Kavita Srivastava, President
Dr. V. Suresh, General
Secretary)*

STRONG CONDEMNATION OF ANTI-MUSLIM ACTIONS BY JAIPUR BJP MLA BALMUKUND ACHARYA AND DEMAND FOR IMMEDIATE LEGAL ACTION

PUCL RAJASTHAN

The People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), Rajasthan, strongly condemns the recent anti-Muslim acts and statements of Balmukund Acharya, the BJP MLA from the Hawa Mahal constituency in Jaipur.

In a recent award ceremony in Jaipur, the MLA forced a young Muslim man to chant "Vande Mataram" and "Bharat Mata ki Jai." When the man refused, the MLA questioned his patriotism. This incident, widely reported in the press, is yet another example of the MLA's persistent, divisive, and discriminatory behavior.

PUCL expresses deep anguish that a public representative, whose duty is to safeguard the rights of all citizens and promote social harmony, is repeatedly engaged in spreading communal hatred and targeting the minority community. Such acts not only violate Article 14 (Right to Equality) and Article 15 (Prohibition of discrimination) of the Constitution but also infringe upon the fundamental rights of freedom of expression under Article 19 and freedom of religion under Article 25.

This is not the first instance of such conduct by MLA Balmukund Acharya. As various news reports and social media posts indicate, he is notorious for making inflammatory remarks and taking actions against the Muslim community. Such incidents weaken the social fabric and spread fear, mistrust, and division in society.

PUCL firmly believes that patriotism cannot be measured by forced slogans or imposed symbols. It is a personal sentiment that must flourish freely in the heart of every citizen. Imposing it upon any individual or community is contrary to constitutional values.

It is worth recalling that Acharya's communal mindset was evident even before he became an MLA by a slim margin of 934 votes. However, his virulent anti-Muslim bias became more apparent after his election.

- **Forced Shutdown of Meat Shops:** Even before being sworn in, on December 5, 2023, he had mutton forcibly removed from Muslim meat shops, publicly berated

- municipal officials for allowing meat sales on footpaths, and pressured them to take unlawful action without due process.

- **Harassment at a Girls' School:** On January 29, 2025, during an annual function at a senior secondary girls' school, he objected to students wearing hijabs. He attacked the principal, a woman with a long and respected career, for not enforcing a specific dress code and threatened to have her removed from her position. The matter was only resolved after students protested and demanded an apology for his communal actions and for undermining the principal's authority.

- **Provocative Rallies:** He insisted on holding a rally for a "Hindu Rashtra" on September 24, 2024, through Muslim-dominated areas of the city, publicly stating that India should become a Hindu theocratic state. PUCL had condemned the Jaipur Police and administration for granting permission for this

- anti-constitutional rally despite massive opposition.
- Incitement at Jama Masjid: On April 25, 2025, following a public meeting he organized near the city's Jama Masjid to condemn a terror attack in Pahalgam, he led a rally that stopped outside the mosque while prayers were underway. The MLA attempted to climb the stairs with a provocative poster while slogans were being raised. The Muslim community exercised restraint, preventing a situation that could have provoked retaliatory action. Although an FIR was lodged by the Jaipur Police at the insistence of the community, no investigation is yet underway.

PUCL has consistently exposed the communal and anti-Muslim character of the MLA from Hawa Mahal and has openly criticized his every unconstitutional act. As

a lawmaker, he has violated his oath of office, reflecting his narrow-minded, communal, and anti-constitutional outlook.

We demand that:

1. Immediate legal action be taken against MLA Balmukund Acharya under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and other relevant laws for his communal remarks that incite hatred. An FIR should be registered against him under Sections 298 (injuring or defiling a place of worship), 300 (disturbing a religious assembly), 302 (uttering words with intent to wound religious feelings), and 351(3) (criminal intimidation) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

2. The MLA must publicly apologize for his actions and pledge to refrain from such behavior in the future.

3. This incident must be impartially investigated, and appropriate action should be taken against the MLA given the

gravity of his conduct.

4. The government and concerned authorities must safeguard the constitutional rights of all citizens and take concrete measures to preserve communal harmony.

PUCL appeals to all citizens, organizations, and communities to unite and raise their voices against communalism and discrimination. Our Constitution grants us the rights to equality, liberty, and fraternity, and it is our collective duty to protect these values. We remain committed to ensuring that social justice and human rights are upheld in Rajasthan and across the country.

(Bhanwar Meghwanshi, State President; Dr. Anant Bhatnagar, State General Secretary; Nishat Hussain, District President – Jaipur; Naveen Narayan, District General Secretary – Jaipur)

RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE INDEPENDENT PEOPLE'S TRIBUNAL ON THE ONGOING ETHNIC CONFLICT IN MANIPUR

Recommendations by the Tribunal

Regarding Gender-based Violence

1. Government as well as communities' leadership needs to provide space for women from all communities, to interact and find way forward to establish peace.
2. There is an urgent need to establish mechanisms that will provide rehabilitation and livelihood to women specifically, who have been uprooted from their homes.

3. Intercommunity relationships and families which are torn apart need financial assistance, space, counselling process, to be set up, which they can have access, with their confidentiality maintained strictly.

4. The policemen on duty who failed in their duty to protect women, from sexual assault must be held responsible, accountable and prosecuted legally. The principle of command responsibility must be evoked to acknowledge and redress the harm done to the survivors of sexual violence.

Regarding the narrative of hate

1. The state and its leadership should not under any circumstance be fueling the politics of indigeneity that thrives on creating the bogey of illegal immigration and hate propaganda that demonize the 'illegal immigrants'. This was one of the main driving factors that caused and exacerbated the violence.

2. In a situation that has been vitiated by hate propaganda, ethnic conflict and misinformation the state and its leadership have to be non-partisan.

3. There are divergent perceptions and narratives of the history of nativity, indigeneity and immigration. But such perceptions cannot be allowed to influence the state and its politics.

4. India is yet not a signatory to the Refugee Convention. But India needs to have a clear-cut policy regarding the recognition, registration of the refugees coming into India. They could be refugees fleeing war, conflict or persecution; or economic/climate refugees. Having a clear policy and procedure of recognizing and registering refugees and setting up a humanitarian response plan for refugees would go a long way in stalling the bogey of 'illegal migration' and the apprehension of the illegal immigrants.

5. Militant organizations such as AT and ML have been accused of being on the rampage, engaging in violence with impunity. They need to be held accountable for their actions through serious criminal investigation, prosecution and exemplary punishment.

6. The regression of Manipur Police into a communal force, acting in a partisan manner at the behest of the respective communities they belong to is a dangerous state of affairs that led to loss of lives, injuries and destruction of property. Looting of the police armoury by civilian outfits cannot happen without complicity of the police and the administration with those outfits at every level. There should be an impartial investigation by a sitting judge of the High Court into how this deterioration of the police force happened, the socio-

political factors responsible, the key actors within and without the force that were instrumental in precipitating this failure of security.

7. During ethnic conflict there should be a mandatory SoP for interventions – to halt violence and provide protection of non-combatant persons, while simultaneously engaging leaders of conflicting parties in peace dialogues. These SoPs should be disseminated widely known among citizens so that they can hold security forces and government officials accountable to the SoPs that they should mandatorily adhere to. Any failure in following SoPs or willful non-adherence should be considered as criminal dereliction of duty and action taken accordingly. Defining command responsibility at the highest levels across the executive is paramount in this regard.

8. The Manipur Government should refrain forthwith from issuing any notifications changing the status of forests, and the access and control of tribal communities over the forests that they dwell in and around.

9. The Manipur Government should also set up an impartial tribunal to settle in a fair and just manner, the disputes arising out of the many past contentious notifications that have deprived the tribal communities of their access and control over forests.

10. There are rumours about the ongoing conflict being orchestrated by vested interests who would want to destabilize the region so that the state-corporate nexus could take control of the hills and the forests to harness

(plunder) the natural resources in abundance there. Such clandestine geo-political interventions would be detrimental to the interests of the people of the state. It is important that the state and central governments come out transparently regarding the corporate business interventions that are being planned in Manipur and beyond. Any such interventions should not jeopardize the interests of the people, especially the tribal communities that reside in the hills.

11. It is established that poppy cultivation and drug trafficking is not carried out exclusively by any one community. There are people from all communities who have been part of it. Nevertheless, there have been efforts to malign and demonize the Kukis alone as the kingpins of poppy cultivation and drug trafficking. The government had failed to dispel false information; and it has been fueling internecine hatred since. It is imperative that the government spearheads a new peace initiative wherein it makes all information transparently available and dispels such hate propaganda and bring the communities in conflict chart out a path of peace and cooperation.

Regarding Relief and Rehabilitation

Having looked at the state of relief and rehabilitation in both Kuki and Meitei camps, it is clear that the situation is as dire as it is complicated. There is great disparity between the quality of life Kukis have compared to Meiteis in their respective camps, even though both groups have

been wasting away in temporary shelters that have taken the form of permanent prisons. With the government providing no concrete plan of action to rehabilitate IDPs into new permanent houses or help them relocate back into their original land, a sense of hopelessness and futility hangs heavy in Manipur.

Many important recommendations were made by the Gita Mittal Committee but very little seems to have been achieved on ground, as seen in the observations made post imposition of President's rule. Therefore, it becomes crucial to end this chapter with two sets of recommendations. One common set of recommendations applicable to all relief camps and another set of recommendations targeting specific relief camps depending on their typology, rather than their ethnic composition. A snapshot of the same is provided in a table below. But before we get into targeted recommendations, we focus on general recommendations.

General Recommendations

1. A special committee should be formed on direction of the appropriate judicial authority to oversee all matters pertaining to Relief, Rehabilitation and Restoration of every survivor of violence, particularly those residing in relief camps.

2. The said committee should have experts from the executive and judiciary, alongside subject experts on various fields like education, health, nutrition, livelihood, etc. The committee should also have members from

civil society and representatives from both the Kukis and the Meiteis.

3. The Committee should have sufficient authority to set up a task-force for conducting a comprehensive area-wise, camp-wise survey to ascertain the number of inmates, the loss of property or family that they faced, entitlements awarded or denied under various schemes, etc. and submit a comprehensive report along with recommendations to both the government and the public.

4. Based on the report, a phase-wise action plan for rehabilitation and resettlement should be created by the Committee and resources should be mobilized for the same. Simultaneously, coordination groups should be set up at village, block and district levels to implement the plan. These groups should consist of the local bureaucracy, civil society and community volunteers from the camps.

5. Additional steps should be taken by the Committee to align such efforts with the State and Central government's schemes and national or local-level nonprofits. The Committee should also establish monitoring mechanisms to ensure there is timely redressal of camp-specific or region-specific issues in the short-run, and basis, and a staggered, yet consistent process of relocation and resettlement for IDPs in every camp in the long-run.

A third-party evaluation of the entire Rehabilitation and Resettlement process should be undertaken so that implementation gaps can be

rectified and additional post-settlement support programs on education, wellbeing, skill-training, etc can be undertaken on a need-basis.

Regarding health

The following programme and policy measures are proposed to address the immediate and long-term health system challenges identified by the Tribunal. These recommendations draw on testimony, field observations, and expert inputs, with the aim of ensuring equitable, conflict-sensitive, and rights-based health responses in Manipur.

Policy Recommendations

1. Conflict-Sensitive Health Governance

- Legally safeguard referral pathways across ethnic lines to ensure access to tertiary care regardless of location.
- Enact a State Health in Conflict Protocol mandating service continuity, emergency supply chains, and healthcare neutrality protections during crises.

2. Equitable Resource Allocation

- Adopt a region-sensitive health budgeting framework to address the hill-valley infrastructure and staffing gap, with ring-fenced funds for underserved districts.
- Align capital investment and human resource planning with Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS) norms, prioritising facilities lacking critical diagnostic and surgical capacity.

3. Insurance and Entitlement Access for Displaced Persons

- Amend CMHT and PMJAY

- guidelines to permit service access without original documents during displacement, using alternative verification methods.
 - Fast-track the re-issuance of lost identity and health cards, and ensure empanelment of facilities accessible to displaced populations in both hill and valley districts.
 - For communities such as the Kuki population, who face barriers to accessing critical care and specialist services in the valley due to territorial boundaries, ensure that travel and treatment in other districts or states is fully covered.
4. *Disaggregated Data on Displacement and Services*
- Establish a robust mechanism for collecting and publicly sharing regular, disaggregated data on internally displaced persons by district, gender, age, disability status, and other relevant indicators.
 - Include data on the number connected to and accessing services—such as health care, mental health support, nutrition, housing, and legal aid—to ensure transparency, monitor equity, and guide targeted resource allocation.
5. *Financial Support from the Centre*
- Provide dedicated central financial packages for rebuilding and strengthening health services, recognising that the conflict has severely impacted Manipur's primarily agrarian economy and reduced its fiscal capacity.
 - Funding should prioritise restoration of damaged
- infrastructure, emergency recruitment, procurement of essential supplies, and long-term investments in specialist facilities, tertiary care in the hills, and integrated mental health services.
6. *Accountability and Oversight*
- Establish an independent health rights monitoring body with representation from civil society, medical associations, and human rights institutions to track service delivery, violations of medical neutrality, and equity outcomes.
 - Mandate transparent public reporting of CMHT/PMJAY utilisation, disaggregated by district, ethnicity, and gender during conflict periods.
7. *Reintegration of a Divided Health Workforce*
- Develop a post-conflict workforce integration plan to rebuild mixed-ethnicity teams and re-establish cross-community trust in healthcare settings.
 - Incentivise inter-district postings post-conflict to reduce long-term entrenchment of ethnic segregation in healthcare employment.
- The full list of Programme Recommendations relating to health can be viewed in the full report published on the website. These recommendations are classified under Continuity of Essential Health Services in Conflict Zones, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), Human Resources in Crisis Contexts, Urgent Filling of Vacant Health and Allied Positions, Nutrition and Disease Prevention in Displacement*
- Settings, and Women Survivors of Gender and Sexual Violence.*
- Regarding justice and accountability**
1. A permanent bench of the Manipur High Court should be established in the hill region.
 2. The Supreme Court should appoint an SIT consisting of senior independent officers from states other than Manipur to monitor the cases arising out of the conflict. The SIT should be monitored by the Supreme Court and the SIT should report to the Supreme Court every month.
 3. The Supreme Court appointed SIT should investigate into the role of the armed forces and other security forces in the conflict. There should be departmental enquiry as well as criminal action against those found to have violated the law in any way, not only by direct participation but also by omission to act appropriately.
 4. The SIT should investigate the incidents of hate speeches which occurred directly prior to and during the conflict and arrest and prosecute the perpetrators including political figures and state functionaries.
 5. The State should provide adequate protection to all the witnesses.
 6. All the reports of the Gita Mittal Committee should be uploaded to the Supreme Court website.
 7. The Supreme Court should monitor implementation of the recommendations of the Gita Mittal Committee.

8. Actions taken report with respect to the recommendations of the Gita Mittal Committee should be filed by the State and made public.

9. There are numerous instances of cases filed against persons and organisations which engaged in fact finding including the editors guild among others. The State should withdraw these proceedings.

10. Progress of the Justice Ajai Lamba commission should be made public by the Centre and followed up by the Supreme Court.

(The full list of recommendations is published on the PUCL website and can be accessed by scanning the below QR Code.

This includes a comprehensive list of targeted recommendations towards relief and recommendations, that are urgent and specific, and are a reflection of the felt needs that emerged from the testimonies and reports in the report. These are classified by Camp Typology, Community, Access to Resources, and Felt Needs and Vulnerabilities.)



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