



Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF)

Conglomerate of Recognised Tribes in Lamka, Outer Manipur

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Thursday, 05 December 2024

To,

Shri Amit Shah,
Union Home Minister,
Government of India
New Delhi.

(Submitted through the Deputy Commissioner of Churachandpur, Manipur)

Subject: Justice for 10 Kuki-Zo volunteers killed by CRPF; political solution to end Manipur violence

Hon'ble minister,

We want to earnestly remind the central government that it has been 19 months since the outbreak of the ethnic conflict in Manipur, with no signs of a return to normalcy and the minority Kuki-Zo community continuing to suffer at the hands of Meitei militants, the communal state government, and now at the hands of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).

It is no secret that each spate of violence in the past year started with unprovoked attacks on tribals for reasons best known to the state government, which is supporting Meitei militants who openly flaunt looted weapons in the streets of the capital and use them to attack tribal villages.

The latest round of violence, which started with the burning of Zairawn village in Jiribam district and the horrific murder of a 31-year-old tribal woman, has resulted in the deaths of 13 Kuki-Zo people.

What makes this episode more worrying for the minority community is that 10 tribals were killed by the CRPF, which was supposed to act as a neutral force.

The post-mortem reports of the deceased clearly show that the men were shot from the back, proving that they were not engaged in a gunfight with security forces when they were gunned down. They were most likely ambushed or murdered after being captured. Also, all of them were shot multiple times (some had more than a dozen bullet wounds, mostly entering from their back), raising further questions about the moral and ethical conduct of the paramilitary force in using such excessive lethal force. Four of the bodies were also desecrated, with each missing an eye, indicating that they were gouged out. What prompted the CRPF personnel to mutilate the bodies?

Contrast this with the burning of Zairawn village just a few days before, where Meitei militants brutally killed a mother of three children. CRPF personnel who were stationed nearby refused to come out of their camp and failed to fire a single shot to thwart the assailants even though the attack lasted for over an hour.

It is a realization of our worst fears over the replacement of the Assam Rifles with the CRPF, which took place following demands made by the Meiteis, one of the communities involved in the conflict. There are many Meitei officers in the CRPF, and we have repeatedly stressed our concern over the CRPF being deployed as a “neutral” force.

Claims that the 10 volunteers were militants and they died while attacking Borobekra police station and a nearby CRPF camp are blatantly false. The men and the entire Kuki-Zo community had nothing to gain and everything to lose from attacking central security forces. We have repeatedly stressed that we would never attack central forces and have been demanding President’s Rule since the beginning of the conflict so that security forces can better enforce peace. It is the Meitei community that has consistently opposed President’s Rule.

None of the victims were militants, as claimed by the police. One was a painter, another a computer store owner, and the rest were masons who worked on construction sites when not being on duty at the frontlines.

In light of the available facts, we demand a judicial inquiry into the deaths of the 10 Kuki-Zo volunteers so that justice is served to them and their families.

It should also be noted that the men were out on patrol to protect their fellow tribals because of the attack on Zairawn village by Meitei gunmen—a duty that the CRPF was supposed to perform but failed.

In fact, this has been a recurring theme throughout the conflict—that the state, which is supposed to protect its citizens and enforce peace under the terms of the country’s social contract as a functioning democracy, has failed to perform its basic duty for the past 19 months, forcing normal citizens to procure arms with whatever little money they have and use it to defend themselves.

As for the CRPF, it should remind its men on the ground of its purpose and act as a neutral force from now on and stand firm against the designs and actions of the communal state government and sections of the majority community that are trying to carry out genocide against the minority Kuki-Zo tribes.

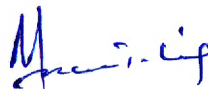
As for the path to lasting peace, a militarily enforced tranquility cannot bring permanent normalcy to a state that is now physically divided by buffer zones. A political solution that will ensure physical safety and dignity for all citizens is the only way forward.

Dear minister, we urge you to start laying the groundwork for a separate administration for the Kuki-Zo people under the aegis of the Indian constitution so that we can live a life free of discrimination and subjugation..

Sincerely,



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Chairman,
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MUAN TOMBING
General Secretary,
Indigenous Tribal Leaders’ Forum (ITLF)

Copy to:

Director General of CRPF