



Factsheet

Manipur violence, a blot

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Rapes, abductions, inhuman torture, killing of women and children must end. A solution within Indian Constitution should be found to bring peace to violence torn Manipur

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

An unfortunate turning point in violence hit north-eastern Indian state of Manipur was the horrific deaths of six people including women and children a few days back. The delicate social fabric of Manipur, where many tribes like Meiteis, Kukis, Zomis and Nagas cohabit in a complicated mosaic of history, culture, and religious ties, has been brought to light by the latest violence, crimes against women and children which have its roots in decades of ethnic strife.

The current wave of violence is not an isolated instance and it forms component of a broader story that includes narco-terrorism, historical grievances as well as external influences. Tempers were already running high and tensions gripped before undignified attack on Manipuri women. This included naked display of two Kuki tribe women that went viral on social media. National condemnation of this heinous murder was accompanied by resolute declaration by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi who promised that those responsible would undergo judicial punishment.

While the government, security forces and civil society have made great efforts to stop violence, these occurrences in last few months has led to divide between communities especially the Christians and Hindus wider. External agendas aiming to establish a Christian-dominated region encompassing neighbouring areas are further fuelling this split. External theocratic aspirations masquerading as moral crusades and cultural homogenisation under the pretence of spiritual redemption are consistent with these actions.

In our last factsheet on Manipur violence of 2023, the conflict's multi-layered complexity was revealed from the state's historical context. Since 1949, when the Manipur Merger Agreement brought the state into India, it has struggled with issues like drug trafficking, illegal immigration, and terrorist infiltration. Proselytization activities have caused Manipur's religious and ethnic composition to change dramatically, leading to profound resentment and drastic changes in the country's population. Meiteis, who identify themselves with Hindus, have protested against their exclusion from Scheduled Tribe designation. Tribals who have converted to Christianity for one reason or other are vehemently against this demand. A vicious cycle of violence, mistrust, and communal polarisation was outcome of these conflicts for identity, territory and resources.

The active involvement of non-state players like drug cartels, insurgency organisations and outside forces adds to this complexity. According to reports, the region is further destabilised by flow of weapons and ammunition from across porous border with Myanmar. Together with left-leaning intellectual narratives and militant Maoist ideologies, the Church's efforts to spread its message have complicated the dispute and frequently distorted it to the detriment of India's larger national interests.



Organisations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) have urged to stop the violence amid this unrest, highlighting the importance of humanitarian ideals and coexistence. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh termed the killings as “inhuman and merciless” and urged the government to act quickly and seriously to resolve the issue. Their viewpoint is in line with larger need to protect Manipur's varied tribal culture within parameters of India's constitution.

By analysing various aspects of the conflict, this factsheet seeks to interpret current violence in Manipur. It also examines the influence of outside forces, internal conflicts and stakeholders' attempts to bring peace back to this crucial northeastern state. For Manipur to be united, peaceful and inclusive, long-term remedies must be explored with comprehensive grasp of this issue.

Beginning of the violence

On May 3-4, 2023, incidents of violence took place in Manipur's Kangpokpi district. Till May 18, zero first information report (FIR) that was registered at Kangpokpi police station was later transferred to Thoubal police station with whose limits the incident exactly took place. As per police statement, the FIR was registered against unknown miscreants regarding abduction and gang rape, leading to subsequent investigation.

During the violence, chief of Army Staff General Manoj Pande visited Manipur to assess on-ground situation in the state (and region). Home Minister Amit Shah visited the state and interacted with civil society organisations, defence personnel, civil servants and prominent personalities to discuss and address many ethnic issues in the region.

As per Manipur Police, 129 nakas / checkpoints were installed in different regions of the state to ensure law and order is maintained. Over 650 people have been detained in connection with the case.

Discovered Dead-Bodies

On November 16, 2024, six people including children and older women were discovered dead in Jiribam after being allegedly kidnapped by Kuki extremists. Victims included:

1. Telam Thajamanbi Devi (8 years old girl raped and smashed by a rod. She was found naked and one eye is missing)
2. Yulembam Rani Devi (60 years old woman raped, found naked and smashed by a rod)
3. Telam Thoibi Devi (32 years old woman raped, found wearing a bra only, smashed by a rod.)
4. Laishram Heitonbi Devi (25 year old woman raped, found naked and smashed by a rod.)
5. Laishram Chingheinganba (two and a half years old smashed by a rod)
6. Laishram Lamnganba (eight months old smashed by a rod)

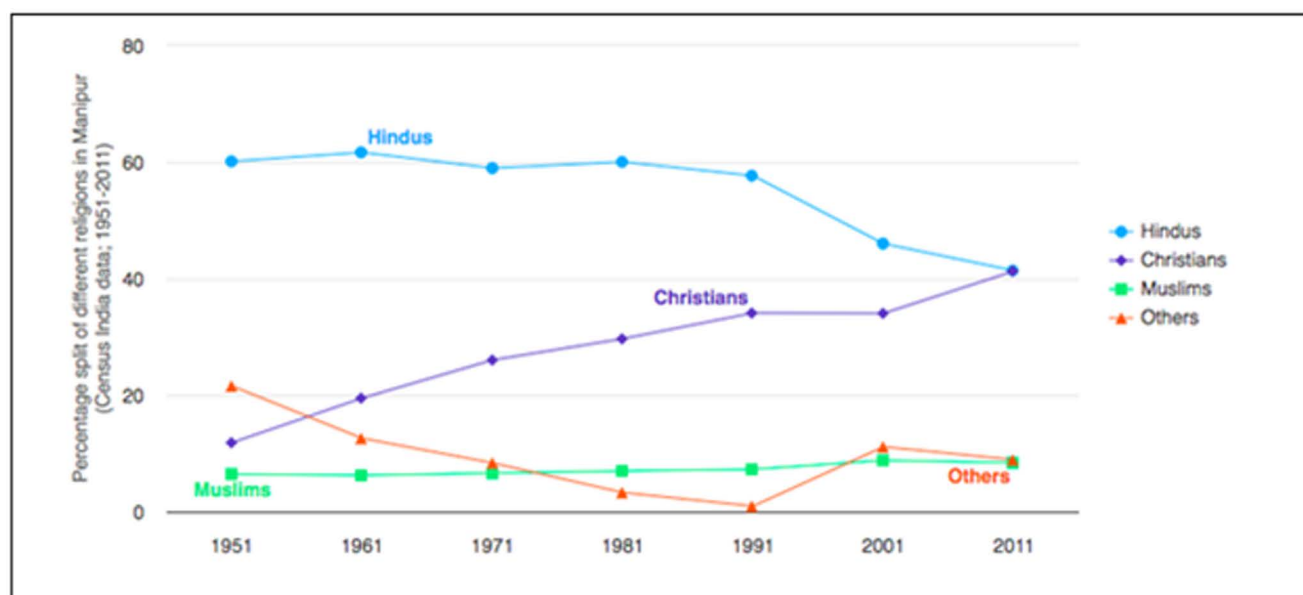
Subsequent Violence

1. As per reports, Kuki terrorists damaged property including Chief Minister N. Biren Singh's private residence and attacked homes of multiple MLAs.
2. Police arrested 23 people who engaged in attacks on MLAs houses and found that they were in possession of eight cell phones, seven rounds of Single Barrel Breech Loading (SBBL) and one .32 pistol.

Major Causes of Violence

Religious Demography of the State

Religious demographic shift in Manipur, as indicated in census statistics from 1951 to 2011 shows a sharp fall in Hindu population and a rapid increase in Christians. An ethnically and culturally diverse region has seen tensions rise as a result of this dramatic change in demographics. Shift in population has profound effect on social dynamics and co-existence because it changes the dominance eagerness in political, economic, and social systems. Kuki - Zomi tribes who are primarily Christians and Meiteis that were Hindus have conflicting interests leading to exacerbated disputes. These conflicts have included cynical cultural usage, land exploitation and a quest for political representation.



Source: Census 1951-2011; CIHS Analytics.

One of the main causes of Manipur's recurrent cycles of violence is this demographic imbalance which increased mistrust among communities and created a sense of fear. Nuanced policy intervention that upholds state's multicultural fabric and simultaneously guarantees fair development as well as dispute resolution are necessary to address this challenge.

Reports of External Interference

1. Manipur's complicated sociopolitical dynamics and continued bloodshed have fuelled reports about outside meddling, especially CIA's interest in promoting Zogam, a Christian-dominated state that includes portions of Bangladesh, Myanmar and India. These worries have been heightened by recent comments made by Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma while he was in the United States. In his speeches, he emphasised the need for a Zo reunion, referencing previous campaigns such as the ZORO Movement, and urged the Zo people to stand together across national boundaries. Critics saw his divisive statement in Indianapolis that "we cannot afford to have three enemies—India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar" as a challenge to Indian sovereignty which caused a great deal of anger. In a stern response, Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh cautioned against any attempts to contest integrity of India.

2. In order to resist Indian authority in the region, a reunified Zogam with Christian-majority communities may act as a buffer state and support Western interests. The discourse of "nationhood beyond borders," when coupled with old grievances, runs the risk of inflaming separatist feelings and undermining intercommunal harmony. These events highlight the need for close attention to external agendas and a determined attempt to resolve regional issues while preserving India's territorial integrity.

Evangelical Networks

1. Under pretence of humanitarian endeavours, Manipur's evangelical networks, supported by external entities like Baptist World Alliance (BWA) and World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), have actively sought religious conversions. By providing tangible incentives like food, healthcare and education to encourage conversion, these networks take advantage of the weaknesses of tribal and economically marginalised communities. According to data from Census of India, percentage of Christians in Manipur increased dramatically from 11 in 1951 to over 41 in 2011. This approach has resulted in a major

deterioration of tribal animistic rituals, Sanamahism and the ancient Meitei faith. This conversion movement, which some claim is in line with neo-colonial goal has been led by prominent organisations like Evangelical Fellowship of India and individuals like Reverend L. Kaipeng. Social disintegration has been exacerbated by this increase in conversions which has weakened indigenous traditions and widened ethnic gaps.

2. By portraying it as a fight for tribal autonomy while undermining Indian sovereignty, organisations such as Zomi Council and other separatist factions have looked to other countries for assistance in advancing Vatican's vision of worldwide dominance. Compassion International and World Vision International have provided resources for separatist projects including acquisition of weapons through networks rooted in Myanmar. By using faith-based narratives to divide the region under the guise of cultural and religious homogeneity, this agenda shows conscious intent to destabilise northeastern India.

Many other causes of violence have already been analysed in our factsheet of May 31, 2023, which include narco-terrorism, illegal migration and forest reserves encroachment etc.

Reactions



In a swift reaction, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh said, "It is unfortunate that 19 months old violence in Manipur starting from May 3, 2023 has remained unresolved. Due to the ongoing violence, innocent people have immensely suffered. RSS strongly condemns inhuman, brutal and merciless act of killing women and children after taking them in captivity. The act is cowardly and is against principles of humanity and co-existence. The central and state governments should "sincerely" resolve the ongoing conflict at the earliest."

Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) said, it “condemns brutal killings and violence.”

This comes as dead bodies of six abducted people including two children were found in the Jiribam area of Manipur, sparking further instability in the state.

ABVP in its press release stated, “We demand immediate action to restore peace and order, protection for innocent civilians, accountability for the failed response. We also appeal to the public: in these challenging times, we urge patience and peace. Let us stand together against violence and work

towards a harmonious Manipur. ABVP Manipur stands in solidarity with the affected families and demands swift action to prevent further unrest.”

Union Home Minister Amit Shah took immediate action in response to growing violence in Manipur holding many high-level meetings to discuss worsening security situation.

Officials averred that government's efforts to restore peace in the region was demonstrated by deployment of 50 more Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) companies in addition to 20 units that were currently in place. This firm stance may convey a strong plan to stop violence, uphold law & order and convince the public that government is committed to maintaining calm in the face of difficult circumstances.

Recommendations

1. To prevent cross-border insurgency, government must improve border security and intelligence-sharing systems.
2. Involve local leaders to encourage communication and reconciliation.
3. Organise campaigns that increase awareness to combat false information and advance peace within communities.
4. Support impacted families with psychological support and humanitarian relief.



Concluding Observation

Manipur's violence is a complex challenge driven by geopolitical desires, ethnic grievances and outside intervention. Reports of CIA's interest in a Christian-dominated Zogam complicate the precarious sociopolitical climate in the region. To resolve the issue, prompt justice, proactive leadership and dedication to maintain diversified culture of the region. Peace can only be achieved through cooperation, respect for each other and concerted effort to stop outside forces from strategically taking advantage of intercommunal conflicts.

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