

MANIPUR COMMUNAL CONFLICT SITE VISIT FOR APPROACHES BY INM PROVINCE

SALESIAN TEAM: (INM 2 + IND 1)

- Fr. Joseph Leo, SURABI Director
- Fr. Simolin, Migrant Ministry Director
- Fr. Periyanyagam, IND

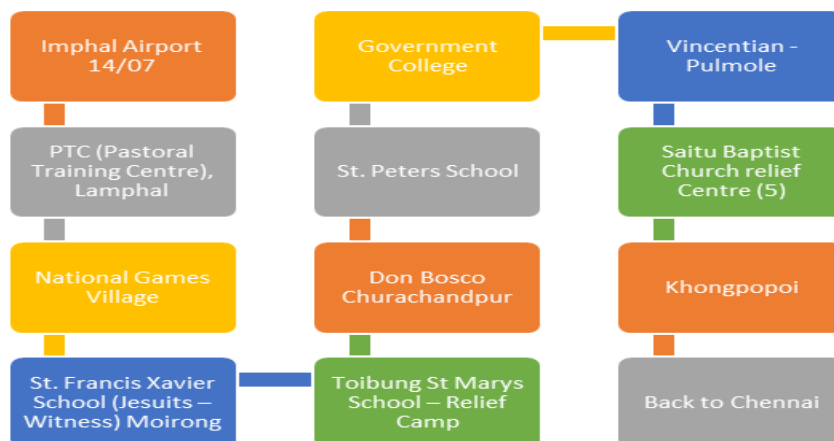
Dates of Visitation: (12th TO 16th JULY 2023)

Number of Government Officials / Rehabilitation Camps: District Commissioner (DC) of Churachandpur Mr. Dharun Kumar IAS, MLA – Kuki Shri. Haolholet Kipgen (Independent Candidate)



Fr. Simolin (2nd from left) and Fr. Joseph Leo (in the centre) paying a visit to Mr. Dharun Kumar (IAS), Deputy Commissioner of Churachandpur.

Number of Religious Heads met: Bishop of Manipur Rev. Dr. Dominic, Vicar General, Procurator



MANIPUR COMMUNAL CONFLICT SITE VISIT FOR APPROACHES BY INM PROVINCE

About Manipur State:

Manipur State lies in Northeast of India with Imphal as Capital city. The State has Nagaland to the North; Mizoram to the South; Assam to the West and Sagaing - Myanmar region to the East & Chin – Myanmar to the South as its borders. The State is well-known for beautiful landscape and nature also known as the 'Land of Jewel' as it is surrounded by nine hills with an oval-shaped valley at the centre, a naturally made Jewel.



Demographics and Ethnic Composition:



Manipur is a multi-ethnic state with a total population of 28,55,794 as per the 2011 Census **among them Meitei are 64.6% of this and occupy only about 10% of landmass. The tribals (Nagas & Kuki are 40% of population, reside across 90% of land.** The population is divided into valley and hill regions, with 58.9% residing in the valleys and 41.1% in the hills. The hill areas are predominantly inhabited by tribes, with a total population of 11,67,422. The Nagas have a history of headhunting and a strong warrior tradition, while the Kukis are part of the Tibeto-Burman language group, similar to the Nagas, Ancestrally Kukis are related to the Mizos of Mizoram, India and Chins in Burma(Myanmar).

Religious Affinity:

The State has nearly equal population of Hindus and Christians. While Meiteis are mostly Hindu, the Nagas & Kuki-Zomis are mainly Christian.

An Explosive Communal Conflict:

- There are 34 sub-tribes of the Naga & Kuki-Zomi tribes are on the Government list of STs, but the Meiteis are not. Meiteis have been demanding for ST status but are the dominant population in the State & also hold dominance in political representation. The Meitei demand continues to be vehemently opposed by the tribal groups consistently.
- For the Meitei community, there is resentment as tribals have been buying land in the Imphal Valley where they live, but they haven't been allowed into the hills.
- A Manipur High Court ruling from April requested the state administration to decide on the matter, ideally within four weeks.
- The Manipur high court admitted a review petition seeking to modify its March 27,2023 order, which directed the state government to recommend including the Meitei community in the Scheduled Tribes (ST) list. This decision sparked a wave of violence.
- On May 3, 2023 all hill districts participated in a solidarity march organized by the All Tribal Student Union of Manipur (ATSUM). The Solidarity Rally has turned violent mainly in Churachandpur area and the News spread like wild fire, the Meitei in Imphal began their hunt for persons of Kuki origin or lineage.

The Ground Reality: (From 3rd May till date)

- ❖ From May 3rd Evening onward killing, burning of houses, Churches, vandalizing of properties and the total breakdown of law and order in the state. Most of the burning happened on 4th, 5th and 6th of May 2023.

MANIPUR COMMUNAL CONFLICT SITE VISIT FOR APPROACHES BY INM PROVINCE

- ❖ The violence was characterized by organized state-supported attacks on Kuki households, involving house-by-house burnings. State commandos and army trucks were reportedly used to enter Kuki villages. Large mobs consisting of 500 to 1000 people participated in looting, burning, and causing extensive destruction.



Above Image 1: View of Churachandpur area indicating skeletal remains of Homes destroyed.

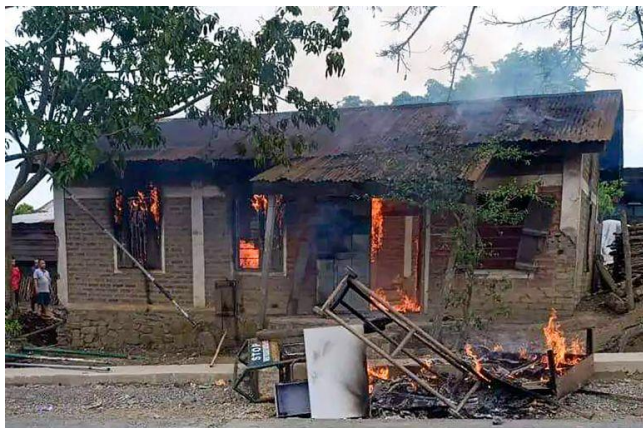
- ❖ Due to this conflict, many have died, properties destroyed and hundreds injured. Some 37,450 people live in 272 grimy relief camps. More than 40 churches have been desecrated and torched across the state as the majority of the tribals are Christians.



Wall of Grief, Kuki communities put up the faces and identity (**OUR TRIBAL MARTYRS**) of victims, to mourn their lost ones, and a sense of injustice.

MANIPUR COMMUNAL CONFLICT SITE VISIT FOR APPROACHES BY INM PROVINCE

- ❖ The confirmed number of deaths stands at 142, although there are indications that the actual number may be higher. Over 290 tribal villages were burned, along with 354 tribal churches, more than 4,500 houses, and other institutional structures. Specific instances include the looting, destruction, and burning of 12 Catholic churches, pastoral training centers, schools, boarding houses, presbyteries, and convents.



- ❖ With more than 115 deaths, over 60,000 displacements, and nearly 40,000 security forces struggling to curb violence for the past 45 days, Manipur is perhaps going through the worst phase in its decades-long history of ethnic conflicts and militancy. Even as the Centre and the BJP government is the state claim that they are doing everything possible to restore peace, the hard stance adopted by the influential organisations representing both the Meitei and the Kuki communities regarding their pending (and sometime conflicting) demands, have made the peace mission tougher. On one hand, Meitei groups have intensified their demand for an Assam-like NRC to detect the illegal migrants as well as for Scheduled Tribe status, an old demand which triggered the violence on May 3, 2023. **Ref: <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/east-and-northeast/deaths-displacements-and-shrinking-trust-characterise-manipurs-worst-phase-of-conflict-1228936.html>**
- ❖ In these unending conflict, the most affected are the Kuki tribes who in general are poor. Among the Meitei community too, there are damages but the volume of the loss, damaged property is very minimal.
- ❖ There was 12 hour bandh on 17th July and 72 hours bandh on 18th July.
- ❖ Manipur has essentially been cleaved in two, with both sides forming their own militias to drive out members of the opposing community and maintain control of their territory. Some members of the vigilante groups patrol their areas wielding automatic and double-barrel rifles, while others keep vigil through sandbag-walled bunkers. **Ref: *The Christian Science Monitor* dated 17th July 2023**
- ❖ There is no sign of immediate normalcy. It is unthinkable for the displaced persons to go back to their own locality, that was their few months back legally. So, the most affected continue to depend of the benevolence of others for their own survival.
- ❖ At this juncture, there are about 100 people who have fled to Chennai and the surrounding areas to re-start their lives from a scratch.

In Ruling Party Perspective:

Manipur is a BJP ruling State having a majority of 32 out of 60 constituencies. Among these 60 seats, Meitei community represents 40 and Tribals have won 20 seats (10 Nagas & 10 Kuki community). The Tribal communities feel that the BJP led State Government is participating in perilous communal politics by backing the Meiteis (Hindu majority) against the Tribals who are predominantly Christian.

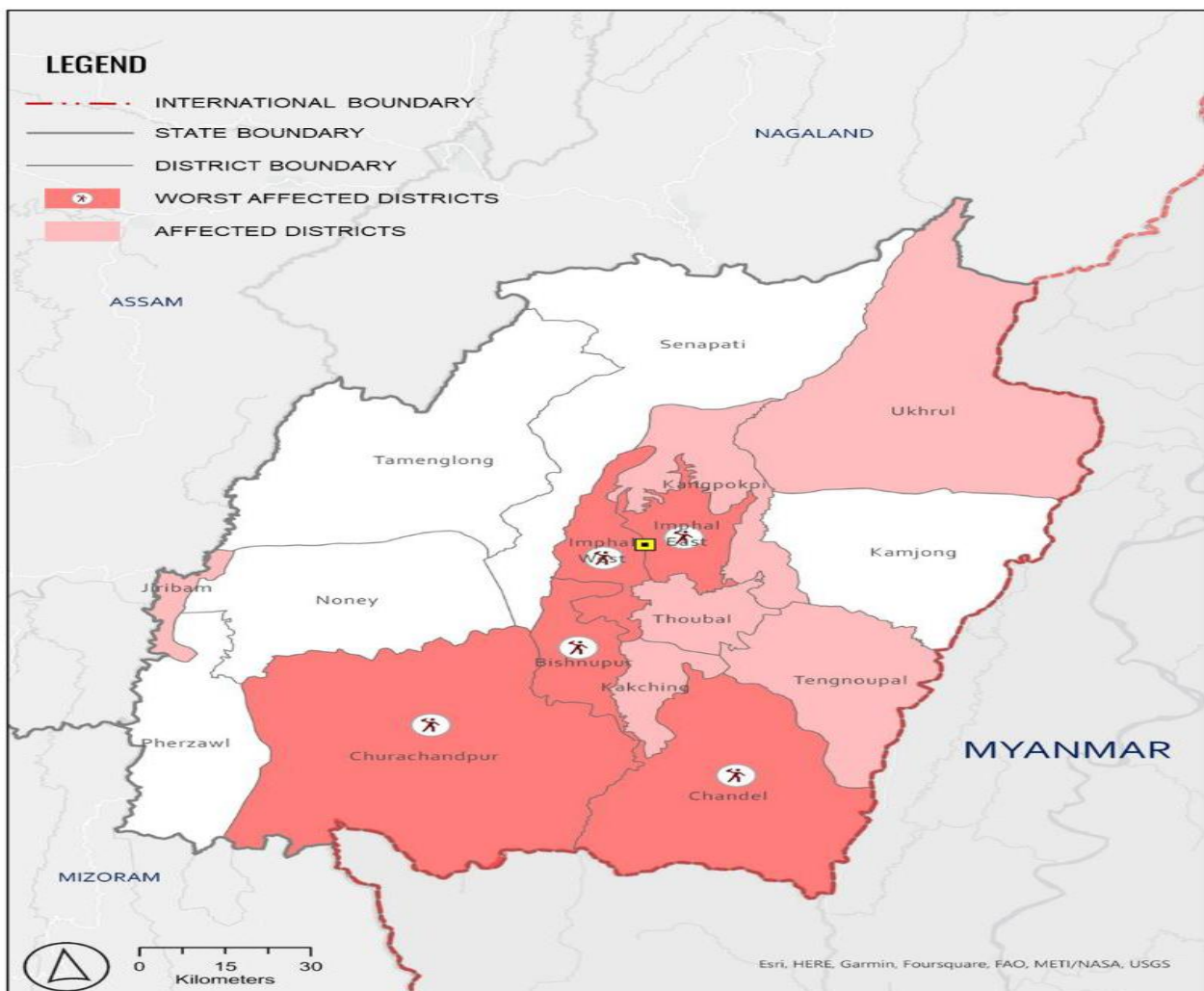
MANIPUR COMMUNAL CONFLICT SITE VISIT FOR APPROACHES BY INM PROVINCE

There is also political and economic asymmetry as 20 MLAs represent the hill areas as opposed to 40 from the valley. The State refutes allegations of large scale corruption and diversion of funds designated for Tribal welfare.

On November 22, 2021, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday said the previous governments in Manipur were hand in glove with armed insurgent groups, but under the BJP government, there had been a significant improvement in the law and order situation in the State. Ref: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/otherstates>

The mode of operation seems to indicate, this communal violence as State organized and supported violence as the surgical attacks are on Kuki properties by burning, demolishing villages by a mob of 500 to 1000 persons undertake the demolishing works. The State Government's deployment of Commandos and Army looks like to curtail the further damage as the Kuki demolition is already a foregone conclusion.

The rapid spread of the violence in number of districts seems to suggest the soft corner of the ruling party in this communal violence.



Response from Kuki community

“Deadly violence has plunged Manipur, a scenic Indian state bordering Myanmar, into turmoil for more than two months. Clashes between the Meitei and Kuki communities have resulted in their complete segregation. The BBC's Soutik Biswas travelled to the tribal district of Churachandpur, where the violence began, to explore how the profound division has led to fury and isolation. On a cloudy afternoon last week, hundreds of men and women congregated outside

MANIPUR COMMUNAL CONFLICT SITE VISIT FOR APPROACHES BY INM PROVINCE

a hastily-built bamboo hut memorial in Churachandpur, nestled amidst Manipur's picturesque hills in north-eastern India. Mostly clad in black and many with war paint on their faces, the mourners belonged to the tribal Kuki group, who are mostly Christian. The hut walls were plastered with photographs of their own, who had died in a recent bout of ethnic violence with the majority Meiteis, most of whom are Hindus. Clashes between the two communities have roiled Manipur since early May. They were sparked by an affirmative action controversy which saw Kukis protest against a demand seeking tribal status for the Meiteis. The violence has left more than 130 people dead, and nearly 60,000 have become refugees in their own land. Now the Kuki have demanded "territorial autonomy" for the group, a euphemism for a separate, independent administration. The Meitei have warned that any dismemberment of Manipur is out of question. **Ref: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-66086142>**

Those who can, with the support of whatever they could save, they are fleeing Manipur with a hope of rehabilitation, with the technical, academic skills and more importantly the linguistic skills, they are landing in Chennai (the sure source of migrants in South India and Srilanka). The State Government of Tamil Nadu's policy and culture of welcoming and industrial opportunities are luring them. They need to be supported now initially.

Relief Camps' perspective:

Currently, there are about 54,488 People displaced and accommodated in 162 relief camps in various places of Churachandpur area, Kangpokpi and Imphal city. Relief Camp Organization Relief camps are being coordinated by the **Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF)** and assisted by local government bodies such as the District Commissioner (DC) of respective areas. The ITLF places affected people in camps based on their local dialects to facilitate communication. Local NGOs and other like-minded organizations provide support through dry rations and 2nd hand clothes.

In the Relief Camps, they just have to lie down in the floor to sleep. They are still in need of Mattresses, bed spreads, Blankets, Mosquito nets. The most affected are the children of 0 to 18 years aged school going children. They need to be incorporated in the schools near their camps or in other displaced areas.

For the College students and the Working skilled persons, it is easy to rehabilitate them. The medical support especially to those suffering from Diabetes needs medicines. The admitted patients in the hospitals are in dire state with no money to spend for their food and medicine.

Visit to Relief Camps by Salesian Team:

Several relief camps were visited, including locations such as PTC (Pastoral Training Center) in Lamphel, National Games Village, St. Francis Xavier School in Moirong, Toibung St. Mary's School Relief Camp, Don Bosco Churachandpur, St. Peter's School, Government College, Vincentian in Pulmole, Senapathi, Saitu Baptist Church Relief Center (5), and Khongpopoi.

**MANIPUR COMMUNAL CONFLICT SITE VISIT FOR APPROACHES BY INM
PROVINCE**



Major Challenges being faced are,

- Lack of communication due to prolonged internet blockage entering its 3rd month.
- Restricted travel and heightened army alertness
- Implementation of curfew by 5 pm
- Closure of schools and absence of a public transport system
- Approximately 12,000 children affected in terms of school and higher education
- Loss of shelter, land, and livelihood, rendering them homeless
- Fear and anxiety about the future, especially for children
- **Education:** About 12 thousand children are affected by this harrowing time in this violence (both the school education and higher education).
- **Shelter:** They have lost completely their land, house and livelihood. They will not be able to return to their houses. They are homeless now.
- **Fear:** Fear and anxiety about their future and children's lives.
- **Children:** employed for securing their village territory as Front line warriors (They have even sophisticated guns and weapons)
- **Involvement of children as front-line warriors armed with weapons like AK47 guns.**

MANIPUR COMMUNAL CONFLICT SITE VISIT FOR APPROACHES BY INM PROVINCE



Response of INM Province to this challenge:

- ✓ *Fr. Don Bosco L, INM Provincial has donated INR 10 lacs to Dimapur Province as emergency relief support in the name of our Province.*
- ✓ Adhering to the call of Tamilnadu Bishop's Council, various campaigning, protests, silent marches have been undertaken in all of our 51 Salesian communities.

MANIPUR COMMUNAL CONFLICT SITE VISIT FOR APPROACHES BY INM PROVINCE



மணிப்பூரில் அமைதி திரும்ப மெழுகுவர்த்தி ஏந்தி பேரணி



பேரணியில் பங்கேற்றோர்.

காரைக்கால், ஜூலை 2: மணிப்பூர் மாநிலத்தில் அமைதி திரும்ப கிராம மக்கள் நாயிற்றுக்கிழமை பேரணி நடத்தினர்.

மணிப்பூரில் பெரும்பான்மை யாக உள்ள மைதேயி சமூகத்தினருக்கும், நாசா மற்றும் குகி சமூகத்தினருக்கும் இடையே பழங்குடியினர் அந்தஸ்து தொடர்பான பிரச்சனை ஏற்பட்டு, கலவரமாக உருவெடுத்துள்ளது.

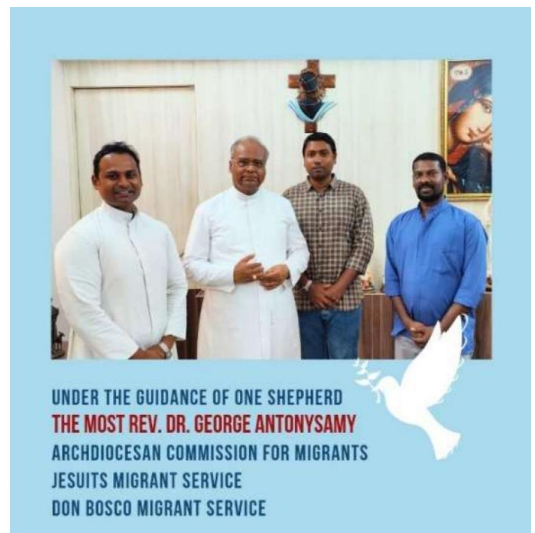
இந்திலையில் காரைக்கால் மாவட்டம், திருநள்ளாறு கொம்யூன், தென்னங்குடி இருயக ஆன்டவர் ஆலய பங்கு சார்பில், அந்த மாநிலத்தில் மக்களிடையே ஒற்றுமை ஏற்பட்டு அமைதி திரும்ப வேண்டும் என்கிற பிரார்த்தனையாக அமைதிப் பேரணி நடத்தினர்.

பங்குத்தந்தை ஜோசப் லூர்துராஜ் தலைமையில் பங்கு மக்கள் 100-க்கும் மேற்பட்டோர் ஒன்றாக இணைந்து இனையாங்குடி பகுதியில் இருந்து தேசிய நெடுஞ்சாலை வழியாக அமைதி பேரணியானது ஆலயம் வரை நடைபெற்றது. பேரணியில் பங்கேற்ற மக்கள் மெழுகுவர்த்திகளை ஏந்தியும், அமைதி வேண்டும் என்கிற வாசகங்கள் கொண்ட பதாகைகளும் ஏந்தியிருந்தனர்.

- ✓ Don Bosco Migrants Services (DBMS) lead by Fr. Simolin, took immediate action to reach out to the affected migrant families, particularly those who have settled in Chennai, specifically in the areas of Choolaimedu, Adayar and Besant Nagar, as well as various parts across Tamil Nadu. On June 27, 2023, we established contact with migrant victims residing in Besant Nagar, and on June 28, we visited the Choolaimedu area to meet with and understand their grievances. We have made efforts to intervene and provide necessary support to 58 displaced Manipuri conflict affected persons with an individual support. 2 Girls have been admitted in Stella Maris College for Studies.



- ✓ We have collaborated with the Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore in facilitating Dry ration kits to 51 families. We have also contacted other religious for the admissions in colleges and the Schools. For some reason or the other, they are unable to fulfil their commitments. Our Salesian Schools find it difficult to accommodate them as there are no boarding facilities.
- ✓ As per our personal interaction with them, many more are bound to come to Chennai by the end of this month. Efforts are on through SURABI to support 100 of such distorted individuals with SHELTER, EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT and EMERGENCY RELIEF materials atleast for 3 months.



**MANIPUR COMMUNAL CONFLICT SITE VISIT FOR APPROACHES BY INM
PROVINCE**

TO PONDER – JUSTICE OR PEACE

- Can the State and central Governments bring Peace without establishing justice to the victims?
- Is it only an ethnic violence or communal violence? If projected as an ethnic violence, how come number of Churches are burnt and no temple desecrated?
- It looks like a communal violence to bring about fear, sense of insecurity and subservient nature about the tribal population?

PROPOSED GUIDELINES

- The government of Manipur needs to create a more inclusive political system that gives all communities a voice.
- The government needs to invest in social and economic development in the tribal areas.
- The government needs to address the issue of land rights.
- The government needs to promote inter-community dialogue and understanding.

The conflict in Manipur is a challenge, but it is not insurmountable. With the right approach, it is possible to build a peaceful and prosperous future for all of the people of Manipur.