**The Peninsula Journal of Strategy and Policy**

**Volume 2, Issue 1 of PJSP** **DOI: https://doi.org/10.70646/PJSP.2026.3103**

## *Expert Commentaries*

# Tackling the Manipur Conundrum

**Brigadier Deepak Sinha***

One could say that the Central Government is presently in the midst of a perfect storm—the Hormuz crude oil dilemma, the impact of a free-falling Rupee on the economy and of systemic corruption on the exam system. If that were not enough, the government now finds itself combating an insidious social media phenomenon, the rise of the satirical Cockroach Janta Party. It has taken the internet by storm, channelling the angst and frustration of the youth against burgeoning unemployment, rampant corruption and the blatant hypocrisy of those feeding off the establishment. It is gaining immense traction thanks to the Government's short-sighted and rather inept efforts to defame and ban them. Clearly, politicians of all hues are running scared, uncertain of their fate if this phenomenon metamorphoses into a robust political movement. As it has in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh.

In all of this drama, we seem to have completely blanked out Manipur from our collective consciousness. That is truly a pity, because the already volatile situation there, the ongoing prolonged ethnic strife between the Meitei and Kuki/Zo communities from 2023, which shows no signs of ending, just got even more convoluted. The murder, on 13th May, of three prominent Thadou Baptist pastors and their driver, by suspected armed militants in the Kangpokpi district, has only exacerbated the divide between the Nagas, who make up around 25% of Manipur's population, and the Kuki/Zo community in the hill districts of Kangpokpi, Ukhrul and Tamenglong.

Further complicating tribal dynamics in the hill regions, already riven by intra-factional violence within the Hmar, Kuki and Zo communities in Churachandpur District. It must be

added that this ambush occurred in a Naga-dominated area, which has led the Kuki Inpi Manipur and the Kuki Organisation for Human Rights Trust to explicitly accuse the NSCN(IM), the Zeliangrong United Front (ZUF), and Meitei groups of colluding in carrying out this ambush. The possibility of a rival Kuki faction, opposed to the peace talks, undertaking a false-flag operation, also cannot be ruled out. The killing of the three Kuki pastors, intimately involved in the peace negotiations, has effectively derailed the peace process itself and led to further clashes and hostage taking by both sides. Clearly, the State Government, which has really not made much progress in resolving the ethno-religious conflicts between the communities, now finds itself in an even more difficult spot. Its ability to control the deterioration of the prevailing law-and-order situation seems increasingly doubtful, despite the strengthening of the police and security machinery.

The Central Government appears to have failed to recognise, or worse, has wilfully ignored, the possibility that if Manipur's descent into its self-created hellhole is not stopped and reversed quickly, it is only a matter of time before it becomes the first domino to fall in the North East. There is no getting away from the fact that such ethno-religious violence will spread in the region with disastrous consequences. If some see this as an excessively pessimistic diagnosis, they may like to read my earlier 2023 piece on the subject, 'Consequences of the Manipur Conflagration' in the Indian Defence Review (https://indiandefencereview.com/consequences-of-the-manipur-conflagration/).

In it, I had pointed out that the first casualty of the Manipur inferno would be the Government's moribund "Act East" initiative. Also, that there had already been calls emanating from Mizo factions for unity among the kindred tribes, the Chin, Kuki, Zo and Darlong, etc. These will not only get louder but also gain popularity, which could well lead to a demand for a 'Greater Mizoram', including areas in Manipur and Tripura. This is bound to have a knock-on effect, as the Naga tribes see this as an ideal opportunity to renew calls for a Greater Nagaland.

If any of this were to come about, Manipur, and especially the dominant Meitei community, would be adversely affected. Given the strategic importance of the region, an internally disturbed and volatile North East will greatly hamper and adversely impact our military preparedness, capabilities and posture in Arunachal Pradesh.

In fact, the only one to gain from this sordid episode would be China. Given the tenuous state of our relationship with them and their proclivity for using information warfare, one cannot help but wonder if we are victims of a malicious, well-organised and sophisticated information

warfare campaign aimed at damaging our socio-economic cohesion, maligning our government, hurting us economically and degrading our military. It is imperative that we act with speed; dilly-dallying or living in denial is not policy.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



*Brigadier Deepak Sinha (V) is a second-generation paratrooper with over three decades of service in the army. He has an M.A. and M.Phil. in Defence and Strategic Studies from the University of Madras. He has also attended the Armed Forces Certificate Course on Business Management from MDI, Gurgaon. During his service, he has held various command, staff and instructional appointments in India and abroad.

THE PENINSULA FOUNDATION