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To

All the Zonal /Divisional /State /Regional Units

**MANIPUR ON THE BOIL**

The State of Manipur is on the boil since May 3. The internecine ethnic conflict that started with a protest by the Kuki-Zo community against the decision of the Manipur High Court directing the State government to recommend to the Government of India grant of ST status to the majority Meiti community is slowly gravitating towards a civil war. The violence shows no sign of abating even after more than three months. More than hundred people have already lost their lives, thousands have been injured and over sixty thousand have been displaced from their homes. While hundreds of houses have been razed to the ground, more than 300 Churches and over two dozen temples have been burnt. Despite the deployment of over forty-five thousand security personnel, peace continues to elude the state. The absolute state of lawlessness can be gauged from the fact that the perpetrators of violence have raided even police armouries and have reportedly looted more than 4,500 weapons and over 5 lakh rounds of ammunition. There is a sharp division between the Kukis and Meitis. The situation has deteriorated to such an extent that the society in Manipur has been left completely bruised and divided.

What is deeply troubling in this entire episode is the indifference of the central and state governments. Let alone showing an intent to resolve the vexed issue, the Prime Minister has maintained a stubborn silence and has refused to speak. It is only after the video of indescribable bestiality showing two Kuki-Zomi women being paraded naked and sexually molested by a mob shocked the nation that he felt compelled to speak. The feral manner in which the women were treated sent shivers down the spine of every sensible person. The crime was so horrific that the Supreme Court of India took suo moto cognisance of the issue and commented that there was an absolute breakdown of the constitutional machinery and law and order in Manipur. The brief statement of the Prime Minister was however sickeningly insensitive inasmuch as he resorted to the worst forms of whataboutery by comparing the developments in Manipur to some opposition ruled states. While it is irrefutable that violence against women and minorities are routinely taking place in many states in the country, the mass rapes and sexual assault of women in full public view taking place in Manipur are emblematic of war crimes and ethnic cleansing. Rather than making a clumsy attempt at deflection, the Prime Minister should have decisively intervened for a resolution of the issue. Similarly, being a high constitutional functionary, the Chief Minister should have taken steps to cool inflamed passions and restore law and order. Instead, he was reported to be acting in a partisan manner by branding one particular community as 'illegal migrants', 'poppy cultivators', 'narcoterrorists' and 'terrorists'. Moreover, there are accusations that the Chief Minister and the state police are openly siding with one particular community. The police themselves appear to be engaged in a conflict; the Manipur police have reportedly filed an FIR against the Assam Rifles. The state of lawlessness can be ascertained from the fact that as per data submitted by the police to the Supreme Court, more than 6,500 FIRs have been filed till now.

The developments in Manipur have not only eroded the credibility of the ruling party but also debunked the carefully crafted myth of a “double engine Sarkar” being in the interest of the people. These developments also go on to establish conclusively that the present government is either unwilling to or incapable of finding solutions when confronted with a crisis. This happened during demonetisation, Covid phase I, Covid induced lockdown and more tellingly during the acute oxygen shortage during Covid phase II. People in crisis are invariably left to fend for themselves.

Manipur needed a careful handling. It is a sensitive border state. With 36 ethnic and religious communities, it is well known for its diversity. Manipur has suffered from the insurgency of armed groups belonging to various ethnic communities. The sharp communal polarisation that has been taking place in India of late has vitiated the atmosphere to such an extent that the Meitei-Kuki conflict has degenerated into a Hindu-Christian conflict. Women and children have been the worst sufferers in the prevailing atmosphere of hate and violence. There is an urgent need to restore peace and normalcy.

The Secretariat of the AIIEA that recently met at Jodhpur on 28-29 July 2023 felt that the arson and violence in Manipur has not only torn apart the social fabric of Manipur but it has the potentiality to destroy the very spirit of harmony and fraternity that is the bedrock of India’s ‘unity in diversity’. **The meeting of the Secretariat expressed concern that normal functioning of LIC and PSGI offices have been badly affected having a deleterious impact on business performance. The meeting placed on record its appreciation for the tremendous display of unity by insurance employees of Manipur under the banner of AIIEA even in these troubled times.** The Secretariat expressed its solidarity with the suffering people of Manipur and called upon them to work towards restoration of peace, trust and goodwill. The Secretariat was also unanimous in its understanding that since the issue was essentially political, a political solution to the issue has to be found within the bounds of the constitutional parameters by involving all stake holders. In the meanwhile, the government must take steps to provide immediate reliefs to the people in terms of free food, shelter, health, sanitation and see to it that education of children is given utmost importance. The Prime Minister has finally broken his silence on Manipur when he spoke for around 10 minutes during his speech of two hours and twenty minutes while replying to the debate on the no confidence motion in Parliament yesterday. One can only hope that his assurance will translate into action.

Rebuilding of lives by way of rebuilding of trust is the need of the hour.

With Greetings,

Comradely Yours

*Shreekanth Mishra*

General Secretary