

# ‘Manipur Violence Was Not Spontaneous, But Planned and Ethnically Targeted’: PUCL Report

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Representative image. Many guns and ammunition were looted in Manipur’s capital city, Imphal, during the ethnic violence that began in May 2023, and despite multiple orders by the governor to return the looted arms, a significant number remain missing as of May 2025. Photo: Yaqut Ali

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**New Delhi:** The People’s Union for Civil Liberties ([PUCL](#)) on August 20 released the [Independent People’s Tribunal on the Ongoing Ethnic Conflict in Manipur](#) at the Press Club of India, New Delhi. The 694-page report, authored under the chairmanship of former Supreme Court judge Justice Kurian Joseph, delivers the conclusion: “The violence which erupted on May 3, 2023, was not spontaneous but planned, ethnically targeted, and facilitated by state failures.”

## Wide representation

The Tribunal was set up by PUCL in 2024 with a jury of eminent figures chosen deliberately from outside Manipur to ensure neutrality. Alongside Justice Kurian Joseph, the jury included Justice K. Kannan, Justice Anjana Prakash, former bureaucrats M.G.

Devasahayam and Swaraj Bir Singh, academics such as Uma Chakravarti and Virginius Xaxa, human rights defenders like Manjula Pradeep and Henri Tiphagne, and journalist-author Aakar Patel.

Over 150 survivors gave oral testimony, while thousands more submitted accounts in writing or through group discussions. “The voices we heard,” the jury wrote, “paint a picture of systemic impunity and targeted brutality.” The report records that more than 60,000 internally displaced people “remain in camps with no end in sight, even after 27 months of violence.”

### **Fault lines and flashpoints**

The report identified long-standing ethnic divisions, socio-political marginalisation, and land disputes as the soil in which the violence was sown. These were aggravated by “systematic hate campaigns and political rhetoric” that amplified mistrust between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities.

A major trigger was the March 27, 2023 order of the Manipur high court recommending [Scheduled Tribe \(ST\) status for the Meiteis](#). The directive sparked fears among tribal groups – particularly Kukis and Nagas - that their constitutional protections would be eroded, the report said. “The judgment acted as a catalyst,” the report noted, “setting off [state-wide protests on May 3](#), which quickly descended into targeted violence.”

The report also dismantled two dominant narratives: that Kukis were “illegal immigrants” from Myanmar, and that they were driving poppy cultivation. “Both claims were found to be exaggerated and politically weaponised,” the report said, “serving to demonise the community.”

### **Brutality and complicity**

Survivor testimonies provided some of the report’s most searing insights, “We saw killings, mutilations, disrobing of women, and sexual violence on a large scale”. Women testified that police often failed to help them, and in some instances, “handed them over to mobs.”

Hate propaganda played a central role. “Social media was flooded with incendiary content, while partisan print media coverage deepened divisions,” the report stated.

One survivor told the jury: “We knew the violence was coming; the government did nothing to stop it.”

The collapse of relief measures worsened suffering. Camps lacked basic sanitation, food, and medical facilities. Hospitals were attacked, staff fled, and patients were denied treatment on communal lines. The report noted “serious mental health consequences – trauma, PTSD, and depression – with no institutional interventions in place.”

### **Collapse of constitutional mechanisms**

The report's findings on law and order were particularly severe – “FIRs were selectively filed, investigations delayed, and security forces accused of active complicity.” It criticised the state government for failing to create impartial Special Investigation Teams.

Even interventions by the Supreme Court were described as inadequate. “The Gita Mittal Committee and limited CBI probes were narrow in scope, poorly resourced, and lacked follow-up,” the report observed. Both state and central governments were indicted for “enabling impunity and worsening ethnic divides.”

### **Recommendations for justice and peace**

The report further outlined a comprehensive roadmap to restore accountability and rebuild trust in Manipur. It called for a permanent bench of the high court in the hill districts to ensure equal access to justice and the creation of an independent Special Investigation Team to probe thousands of pending cases, including those involving security forces. It urged strict prosecution of hate speech and propaganda that fuelled the violence, while also advocating a restorative justice framework with reparations, acknowledgment of harm, and survivor reintegration. Strengthened relief measures and sustained community dialogue were stressed as essential to healing deep ethnic divides.

“The people of Manipur deserve more than piecemeal measures,” the report declared. “Without a systemic response, peace cannot return.”

Justice Kurian Joseph told *The Wire*: “Justice and accountability are non-negotiable if democracy and peace are to return to the state.”

### **A warning for the future**

Two years since Manipur was engulfed in violence, the report's findings remain bleak. Survivors have consistently testified that “the state either allowed the violence to happen or actively enabled it.”

The report ends with a stark warning: “if accountability is not enforced and impunity allowed to persist, Manipur could become a dangerous precedent; a template for future instances of state complicity in ethnic violence.”

This article went live on August twenty-first, two thousand twenty five, at fifty minutes past three in the afternoon.

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