

JOINT PRESS RELEASE

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All Manipur Working Journalists Union, AMWJU and Editors Guild Manipur, EGM, strongly deny Editor Guild of India's Motivated Allegation based on Hearsay

1. The All Manipur Working Journalists Union, AMWJU and Editors Guild Manipur, EGM, take strong exception to the half-baked so called fact finding report of the Editors Guild of India, EGI, completed in merely four days. The report has many contentions and wrong representations which are damaging to the reputation of the journalist community in the state, especially Imphal-based news outlets.
2. The EGI report claims its terms of reference is not investigating the genesis of the problem, but they all the same do so in a seemingly motivated manner, but unfortunately for the EGI, as expected, it ends up committing many factual errors in the process. Below are some of these:
 - i) The claim Meiteis were the initiators of the riots on May 3. It is surprising how they were able to establish this in four days even though there is a Supreme Court appointed fact finding committee looking into this same matter and is still not able to come out with the entire details yet though it began work on August 7, 2023.
 - ii) The EGI also refers to a certain Hill Area Committee Act 1972, but no such Act is in existence. The claim that the state government flouted the provisions of this Act to declare "reserved forest" or "protected forest" at its whim is false. There are no recently declared "reserved forest" or "protected forest". The last reserved forest declared in Manipur was in 1990 according to Manipur Forest Department records.
 - iii) It also stated that these declarations were meant to evict Kuki villages, but records of eviction by the government available with the Manipur Forest Department show otherwise. From October 2015 to April 2023, houses evicted from "reserved forest" and "protected forest" show there were 59 Kuki houses, 143 Meitei houses, 137 Meitei Pangal (Muslim) houses, 38 Naga houses, and 36 Nepali houses, totalling 413 houses. The EGI fact finding team did not even bother to confirm these data from the relevant authorities and instead apparently chose to depend on hearsay.
 - iv) The EGI report also claims that the state government has withdrawn from the tripartite Suspension of Operations agreement with the Kukis. Although the Chief Minister, N Biren did very brashly declare this abrogation with reference to 2 of the 25 Kuki militant organisations in the SoO group at a cabinet meeting on March 10, 2023, on the claim these two were foreign organisations, this decision was never pursued therefore SoO agreement with all 25 groups are still intact. The EGI again did not bother to crosscheck this before making its allegation.
 - v) In reference to the outrageous video of Kuki women being paraded naked, it seems the EGI did not even confirm whether there were two or three women for the EGI report says two in some references and three in some other in the same breath. It also says the younger woman was raped on video. The 26-second video shows only two women, and there was no rape was shown in the video, though groping was seen. Parading and groping were bad enough and need to be condemned, but the EGI chose to dramatize the tragic episode more than what was actually in the video to suit its motivated and skewed narrative.

- vi) Again, in photo of a burning building, the caption in the EGI report identifies it is a Kuki house burning, but this is the Forest Office at Maultam at Churachandpur, torched by a Kuki mob on May 3, right in the middle of the ATSUM peace rally at about 12.15pm.
- vii) The EGI report also claims that on the night of May 3 there was total destruction of Kuki-Zo churches, houses and other properties in Meitei dominated areas. This is false. On May 3, riots in Imphal were very limited. It was in the next few days that riots intensified and spread. While there were indeed wide destructions of Kuki-Zo churches and properties in these riots, there are a great number of Kuki houses still standing in Imphal, and there were even 24 Kuki residents still living in New Lambulane, Imphal, till September 1, 2023, when the Assam Rifles decided to evacuate them in the wake of another wave of heightened tensions following gun battles in the foothills which began on August 29, 2023, in the border area of Churachandpur and Bishnupur. Their properties are however still standing and intact.
- viii) EGI report also says Meira Paibis (local Meitei women) were without remorse after the viral video became public, or in other cases of mob atrocities. This broad brush is again not true and very unfair. Though there may have been some who had shown cruelty, it cannot be generalised. It has to be noted these local women were also the ones who rescued the two women paraded naked, clothed them and escorted them to a nearby security post.
- ix) EGI's claims that Thadou Kuki, Paite and Hmar news bulletins of the AIR were cancelled from May 3. This is not true. According to AIR Imphal records, while Paite and Hmar were dropped during May 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8, because of non-availability of internet access, Thadou Kuki bulletin continued unhindered. During May 9 and 10 these missing languages bulletins were read via telephone, but from May 11 onwards, all these language bulletins were on air as per schedule.
- x) The cover photograph of the EGI report itself also seems to be done with the intent to colour the readers' vision. It shows the Wall of Remembrance in Churachandpur, which has no direct relations with the present crisis. The intent seems to be to show the Kuki-Zo communities as endemically victimised.
- xi) The EGI also is too ready to quote verbatim allegation against Imphal based media by many interested parties, but fails to balance these charges with defences by the AMWJU and EGM.
- xii) It also claims most of the newspapers and news channels in the Imphal valley took dictations from the Chief Minister, N. Biren Singh's office. This damaging charge is however not substantiated, and the AMWJU and EGM would like the EGI to prove this charge.
- xiii) Again, the EGI report has no reflection at all of all the material supplied to them during 2-hour meeting with the AMWJU, EGM and MHJU representatives at the Manipur Press Club in Imphal.
- xiv) The EGI report for instance is silent on the attack on reporters by Kuki villagers after they were invited by an Indian Army commander at Henjang village near the 57 Mountain Division headquarters at Leimakhong although they were briefed of this unfortunate incident in the same meeting.
- xv) There are many more similar incidents of violence and threats faced by the Manipur journalists but the EGI team ignored them all in their report.
- xvi) The AMWJU and EGM do acknowledge there were shortcomings in its reportage of the events in the state, but these were because of unavoidable constraints, such lack of contact on account of the internet ban as well as the hard division of territories

accessible to reporters belonging to the communities in conflict. AMWJU and EGM also acknowledge there were silences maintained by the Imphal based media on certain incidents too, but these were also self-censorships to avoid escalation of dangerous emotions among the warring parties. Journalists on the other side of the current divide too would be facing the same constraints and compulsions, but the EGI does not seem to think so.

- xvii) Keeping in view these grave misrepresentations of the Imphal based journalists community, the EGI is requested to issue a clarification, or else face legal damage suit from the AMWJU and EGM.

Sd/-

President

EGM

Sd/-

President

AMWJU