



Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF)

Conglomerate of Recognised Tribes in Lamka, Outer Manipur

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PRESS RELEASE

Are some lives more precious than others because of their ethnicity? Is justice served when citizens are charged for “transnational” crimes to suit the narrative of the powers that be?

The Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF) condemns in the strongest terms the selective haste of central investigating agencies, who arrested four Kuki-Zo tribals including two women without the knowledge of local authorities, and abducted two children from their homes.

There were no women police officers and no juvenile police unit, as required by law when the secret operation was undertaken in a case related to the disappearance of two Meitei students. The arrests come less than a week after the appearance of photos that seem to show the dead bodies of the two students.

If the CBI can act with such swiftness, why has it not arrested anyone in more heinous cases, like the rape and murder of two tribal girls in Imphal, the burning of a 7-year-old tribal boy along with his mother and aunt, the torture and beheading of a tribal youth, and so many other acts of atrocities against tribals? And what about the thousands of weapons and lakhs of ammunition looted (distributed?) in the Imphal valley? Does the central government think violence and shooting can stop without the retrieval of these weapons?

Incredulously, the chief minister has publicly said the “main culprits” in the students' case have been arrested, even before any questioning (forget about a trial) has taken place, adding that he was committed to ensuring “capital punishment for the heinous crime they have committed.” Tribals, it seems, are guilty until proven innocent.

Imphal has witnessed massive protests against the BJP government in the past week. It seems that the central government is trying to save the chief minister from the Meitei community's wrath by coming down hard on hapless tribals, including women.

ITLF also condemns the NIA's arrest of a teacher in a “transnational conspiracy” involving “terror groups” from Myanmar and Bangladesh. Seiminlun Gangte worked as a private teacher in Kwakta, a border area separating tribal and Meitei settlements. Whether or not he had any role in a blast which injured three persons (for which he was arrested), it seems outlandish that a teacher with no criminal record suddenly had the ability and connections to develop links to international terror networks, that too without traveling abroad even once. It, however, perfectly suited the narrative of the state's chief minister.

ITLF demands that the NIA and CBI return our tribal brothers and sisters within 48 hours. Otherwise, the shutdown imposed in hill areas will be followed by more intense agitations.

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