

ALARMING TURN: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE SITUATION IN MANIPUR

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Violence has flared again in Manipur, merely three weeks after conflagrations resulted in scores of deaths and the displacement of people in Churachandpur and Imphal in particular. Alarmingly, what began as protests against an order by the High Court of Manipur, on March 27, seeking the inclusion of the Meitei community into the State's Scheduled Tribe list, has taken a grotesque turn, with representatives of the Kuki-Zomi community including BJP MLAs seeking a "separate administration". This situation should never have come to such a pass. While inter-community relations have occasionally led to flare-ups and remained tense for years together, the conflagrations in May mark a degradation in hill-valley relations and a complete failure of the government in curbing violence committed by radicals and miscreants present in the Meitei and Kuki-Zomi communities. Partially, this was a consequence of the inability of the State government led by the BJP Chief Minister, N. Biren Singh, to rise above the fray and to act in a manner that was unbiased against particular communities. The government's so-called anti-poppy cultivation drives that were seen as moves against the Kuki-Zomi hill dwellers, raised their ire, while the High Court's single judge Bench's ill-thought-out order — as the Chief Justice of India, D.Y. Chandrachud, himself observed as being violative of a 23-year-old Constitution Bench judgment — exacerbated the situation. The government was unable to prevent the spiralling of violence in Churachandpur and Imphal, suggesting the current regime's incompetence.

The State government must get its act together, with the help of the Centre, to bring back normalcy by increasing patrolling of paramilitary and police forces in riot-torn areas, providing relief to displaced people and curtailing the influence of militant sections. A plan to allow the return of those displaced to their homes in the medium term must also be put into order with the help of the security forces. Not doing so only plays into the hands of chauvinists from either side who emphasise differences, disharmony and separation — all of which will be disastrous for the State in the long term. The Union government cannot remain nonchalant about the turn of events. Manipur, like some of the other northeastern States, needs to promote a civic consciousness among its citizens that will allow them to rise above ethnic identities to differentiate themselves. With trust fraying between community leaders and State government representatives, it is incumbent upon civil society members, within and outside Manipur, to take up the cause of rebuilding inter-community ties and not letting chauvinist and militant groups hijack the role of representation.

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