

Witness account of the Ethnic Cleansing of indigenous Meitei Residents of Moreh

The violence against us, the Meiteis in Moreh started without any prior indication on May 3rd, 2023. It was a preplanned and totally unprovoked attack on us, the indigenous Meitei (mostly Sanamahis and Hindus) by the Kukis. Due to rampant illegal immigration, we Meiteis who are the original sons and daughters of the soil, have been reduced to 25% of the net population in Moreh.

There was a peace rally held by ATSUM (All Tribal Students Union Manipur) in Moreh on May 3rd which was finished without any violence. However, by 3rd May evening, the Kuki young people started burning tyres, chairs, wooden benches and many other inflammable things on roads. Gas cylinders were being kicked and rolled around on the streets. Lamp posts were beaten to create a drum roll like effect which worried our family and made them very anxious.

Then the Meitei shops were singled out and stone pelting happened. Asharani Hotel located near Moreh Bazaar main area was put on fire. No fire brigade or police came as the hotel was burnt down. The fire spread with the evening breeze and started to burn down the adjacent hotels. The first incidents of large-scale attacks involving burning down of property, loot and vandalism happened in Moreh Bazaar. The Nongpok Hotel was also burnt down. The response from the police was delayed by more than 2 hours and the situation became uncontrollable. Policemen who were rescuing stranded Meitei people were attacked by the Kukis who pelted stones and they had to fire tear gas to control the situation. The Meitei people were given shelter in the Moreh Custom Police Station.

Then the attacks spread to Prem Nagar (the posh area where rich people live). Here the house of the President of the Meitei Council Moreh was burnt down. Fearing for their lives nearly half of the Prem Nagar residents (approx. 300 people) fled to Myanmar.

From my place Turelwangma my family (Mother, younger sister and aunt) could hear the loud noises and saw the smoke of fire from Moreh Bazaar and they hid in our bathroom for around 30 minutes. Then they could hear the police sirens and breaking the planks of our storeroom they went out and made their escape through the narrow side lanes. They managed to reach the Moreh Custom Police Station.

By 8.30 p.m. the Khunou region of Moreh was under sustained coordinated attacks. The Kukis entered all the houses, smashed and destroyed anything and everything there. A middle-aged woman was beaten up by the Kuki mob who broke her arm.

The surrounding area of the Moreh Custom Police station are dominated by Kukis. As news of the Meiteis reaching the Moreh Custom Police Station spread, a huge Kuki mob of thousands surrounded the Moreh Custom Police Station at around 9 o'clock at night on May 3rd. They started pelting stones and firing sporadically at the Moreh Custom Police Station. According to my 13-year-old sister, the Kukis were on a mission to kill everyone. The police fired tear gas to control the bloodthirsty mob and finally well after midnight the situation was under control. The mob left the Custom Police Station and reorganized to attack Prem Nagar again.

Meanwhile no food could be provided to any of the Meiteis who took shelter in the Moreh Custom Police Station. They had to spend the night horribly exposed in the I.V. which is a large open space opposite to the Custom Police Station. No one could get any sleep out of fear.

Early morning around 5.30 on the 4th of May my mother thought everything was settled. She with my aunt and sister returned to our home. They cooked and ate food. By 8 o'clock, they had returned to the Custom Police Station. After that they were directly transferred to the Moreh Army Relief Camp where they stayed for 6 days. Many displaced Meitei people were forced to stay there for 9 days.

On the 4th of May evening the Kukis attacked our residential area of Turelwangma. Both of our temples of Ima Kongdong Lairembi near the Army Camp and Moreh Bazaar were burnt down. Almost all the Meitei houses were burnt down to the ground. No action was taken by the police and the Assam Rifles who were present nearby.

During their stay in the Moreh Army Relief Camp, the displaced Meitei people were fed only daal and rice with Ficus Hispida leaves acting as plates. Water from the nearby river Khujairok was used for drinking purpose and the washroom facilities were highly unhygienic. It was impossible to change clothes or brush teeth in this situation.

On 9th May my family was shifted at night from the Army Relief Camp Moreh to another Relief Camp. Before leaving my mother sent me a series of text messages telling me that the condition of the Meitei people in Moreh was still extremely bad. There were insufficient security forces and more than 3500 Meitei people were there in the overcrowded Army Relief Camp Moreh. Taking advantage of the lack of security forces the Kukis continued to loot and burn Meitei houses and properties. Unless shifted to safer regions in different relief camps soon, a large number of Meitei lives may be lost here.

The Meitei people were shifted mostly on 10th and 11th of May during nighttime from Army Relief Camp Moreh to other Relief Camps in armoured bulletproof busses. During the journey Kuki people at a place near the Assam Rifles checkpoint of Khudengthabi shouted “Meiteis do not return to Moreh”. They also fired at one of the buses and pelted stones, but the army did not respond to such an attack.

During the journey through Tegnoupal hills the Kukis again fired at the army busses carrying the displaced Meitei people. Again there was no response from the Assam Rifles. Fortunately, no one was killed or wounded in such attacks.