

The Manipur incident speaks volumes about the fate of minority women

A CLOSER LOOK

Tasneem Tayeb
is a columnist for The Daily Star.
Her Twitter handle is
@tasneem_tayeb

TASNEEM TAYEB



"The police were there with the mob which was attacking our village. The police picked us up from near home, and took us a little away from the village and left us on the road with the mob. We were given to them by police," one of the gang rape victims in India's northeastern Manipur state recounted the hideous incident that took place on May 4 this year, during the recent escalation of violence between two ethnic groups (*The Indian Express*). Both the victims, in their 20s and 40s, were from the Kuki Zomi community, most of whom practice Protestant Christianity. The perpetrating mob, on the other hand, belonged to the Meitei community – constituting about 53 percent of Manipur's population of 3.5 million – about 83 percent of whom follow Hinduism. During the violence, more than 150 people were killed, 60,000 internally displaced, 115 villages torched and razed to the ground, 250 churches destroyed, and more than 4,573 weapons looted from the police armoury, according to various reports.

While the incident took place in May this year, it only came to light last week when a graphic video of the women being paraded naked and then taken into a field where they were gang raped brutally went viral. Interestingly, it took the police 62 days to take any action against the perpetrators of the gang rape, though an FIR was lodged

by the husband of one of the victims on May 18, as reported by *The Indian Express*.

The way the state government has handled the delicate situation in Manipur comes off as an attempt to implement the policy of polarisation that ends with minority suppression. BJP's ultra right-wing policy has influenced various discussions on Manipur recently, more prominently on March 31 this year, when the Chief Minister Biren Singh said that he will "flush out" illegal settlers in Manipur through the controversial National Register of Citizens (NRC), which had previously created a citizenship crisis and escalated tension in another state, Assam. Moreover, the measure taken in February this year by the state government to drive out tribal villagers from the reserved forests added fuel to tensions. To put this in context: while the Meitei community mostly live in the Imphal valley, the various ethnic tribes, including the Nagas and Kukis (making up about 40 percent of the population), inhabit the hills surrounding the valley, according to *The Economic Times*.

When a state High Court directed the state government to refer the demand of the Meitei community – which already enjoys the benefits of being the majority and belonging to the "right" ethnicity (meaning they are not considered illegal settlers) –

for a Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to the Union Tribal Affairs Ministry by May 29, tensions escalated. Such a classification would mean more access for the Meitei community to education and government jobs, in addition to the benefits they are already enjoying now.

It would be worth mentioning here the disparity between the representation and development of the

While the BJP-led state government is right in pointing out that many of the tribes grow poppy, they do not tell the other side of the story – that underrepresented, underserved, undernourished, and neglected by the authorities, the tribes are forced into growing poppy to meet their livelihood necessities. Had the government created robust and holistic economic opportunities for them, perhaps they

has also openly called the Kukis "not indigenous to Manipur," "not part of the family," "illegal," and "outsiders," and threatened to wipe them out from disputed areas. Such narratives provide ammunition to the criminal intentions of the extremist elements.

With state sponsorship and patronisation of violent Meitei intentions (after all, the two Kuki women were left with the mob by

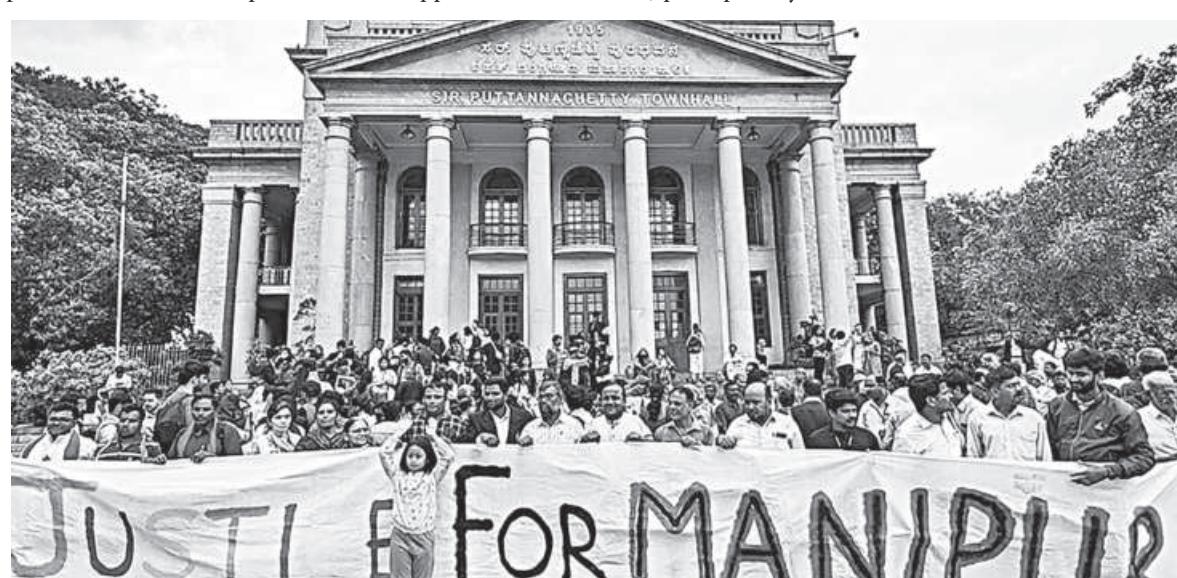
third is a Delhi based lawyer.

In the shocking aftermath of the video leak, Prime Minister Narendra Modi broke his silence and said that "Action will be taken according to the law". But one cannot help but wonder, what guarantee is there that these rapists will not be freed, like the rapists of Bilkis Bano – the Gujarat riot rape victim, whose rapists were given premature release from jail under the Gujarat state government's remission policy, on India's Independence Day last year – and received with garlands and sweets by their friends?

A few hours before the release of Bilkis Bano's rapists, Prime Minister Modi, speaking from the ramparts of Delhi's Red Fort, had asked the nation, "Can we not pledge to get rid of everything in our behaviour, culture and everyday life that humiliates and demeans women?" These words mean very little if they are contradicted by attitude towards minorities, particularly its women.

The current policy of polarisation will not only rip the nation and its values of democracy, pluralism and secularism into shreds, but its impact will be felt across the region, including Bangladesh, Myanmar, Pakistan, and the rest. India shares porous borders with most of these countries, and internal unrest in India, especially in the bordering regions, and exclusionist policies and measures, will inevitably impact its neighbours.

It is high time policymakers acknowledge that their current policy and modus operandi are working to weaken India in general. The BJP must revisit its agenda and look to unlocking the full potential of the nation, which can only happen through tolerance, respect and inclusion of the minorities.



The way the state government has handled the delicate situation in Manipur comes off as an attempt to implement the obvious policy of minority suppression through polarisation.

PHOTO: REUTERS

hills and the valley. While the hill areas account for more than 20,089 sq-km and the valley 2,238 sq-km, the hills are represented by only 20 representatives in the Manipur legislative assembly, while 40 come from the valley. Likewise, there is a disparity between the development budget of the hills and the valley. Between 2016 and 2021, of the Rs 22,000 crore stipulated in the plans, only less than Rs 500 crore was spent on tribal area development.

would not have the need for poppy cultivation.

The past has been unfair to Manipur and it is this deep cleavage of distrust that the BJP has utilised to divide the communities. The ruling party and its cronies have, provocatively, vilified the minorities, with the Chief Minister calling a Kuki human rights activist, "Myanmarese", as reported in *The Wire*. The Meitei community, including its chief, Meitei Leepun,

the police themselves), bloodshed was inevitable. It came as no surprise that an FIR was registered on July 8 at the Imphal police station against members of a fact-finding team that visited Manipur, when they said that the violence in the state was "state sponsored," as reported by *The Wire*. Two of the members of the mission are associated with Communist Party of India's women's wing, National Federation of Indian Women, and the

The 'hot' story behind the high chilli prices



Mostafa Shabuj
is the Bogura correspondent
for The Daily Star.

MOSTAFAB SHABUJ

What weighs heaviest on the minds of buyers at kitchen markets? It can only be the fact that vegetables which could be bought at Tk 25-35 per kg last year have to now be bought at three times the price. The latest example of this has been the price of green chillies.

Every year, there is a shortage of green chillies during the monsoon and their prices increase abnormally for a short period. But, until this year, the price of green chillies has never gone up as high as Tk 700 per kg.

While media reports have shown traders' syndicates being blamed for the price hike, this is not entirely true. There is another crisis in the background. Upon visiting a green chilli field in person and speaking to the farmers, one can uncover a different story.

According to farmers, the yield this season has not been good. The scarcity of rain before monsoon and the lasting heat wave caused the plants to shed their flowers and fruits.

Climate change has caused the occurrence of the El Nino phenomenon, which is a climate pattern associated with the warming of the ocean's surface in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean. Though the full effects of El Nino are still unknown, it is usually associated with floods, droughts, cyclones, and other natural disasters that affect agriculture in developing countries.

Last year, chilli growers in Bogura and Gaibandha districts got 50 to 80 maunds of green chilli from one bigha (33 decimals) of land during the Kharif-1 crop season. But this year, farmers have not only been getting seven to eight maunds per bigha. Hence, though the price of green chillies is skyrocketing, farmers are not receiving much profit due to the low yield.

Furthermore, farmers say that the leaves of the plants have curled up due to the prolonged

heat waves. The yield is also low due to the flowers not being pollinated properly. In fact, the yield of almost all types of summer vegetables has decreased this crop season.

According to the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Bogura, 20-25 types of vegetables are being produced in Kharif-1. Last year, farmers got an average of 21.25 tonnes of vegetables per hectare, but this year they are getting 20.25 tonnes per hectare. Simply put, the production of

for the staggering retail price of Rs 400 per kg. Agricultural experts in India have cited adverse weather conditions as one of the main reasons behind the low production of green chillies.

Usually, the average temperature in early June is between 32 and 34 degrees Celsius in Bangladesh. But this June saw average temperatures between 38 and 41 degrees Celsius, breaking the record of the last 50 years.

Shailendra Nath Mazumder, principal scientific officer at the Spice Research Center (SPC) in Bogura, says that chilli plants cannot withstand high temperatures. Generally, temperatures above 33 to 35 degrees Celsius disrupt the pollination of pepper flowers. As the temperature has crossed 35 degrees on many days this season, the yield of green chillies has decreased significantly.

or balconies, we would not have to buy as many green chillies from the kitchen market. But what would be the use of this if the plants cannot bear fruit due to regular heat waves?

The bottom line is that climate change is making warmer regions of the world even warmer. As a result, farmers and agriculture are suffering. The government of Bangladesh seems not to be worried at all about this, even though this might cause us huge sufferings. El Nino may disrupt food production around the world for years to come, which will put the food security of developing countries at greater risk.

During its lengthy tenure, as much as the government has emphasised infrastructural development, it has also neglected agricultural development. But during any crisis (such as a war in Europe or the Covid pandemic), it



PHOTO: STAR

vegetables has decreased by a tonne per hectare this summer.

On the other hand, last year in Bogura vegetables were cultivated on 6,500 hectares of land. But due to the lack of rainfall this year, only 4,250 hectares of land has seen cultivation.

Given this situation, at the end of June, the government temporarily allowed traders to import chillies from India. However, the price of green chillies has been increasing in India, too. One report stated that, in the first week of this month, green chillies were sold in Delhi

is our agriculture that can keep us alive and well. Modernising Bangladesh's agriculture sector would require extensive research. Since we have less land to cultivate and a bigger population to keep fed, huge efforts are needed for growing high-yield, temperature-tolerant crop varieties. The government must plan better for the agriculture sector, beyond subsidies. If we are not able to adequately address the dire effects of climate change on our agriculture, our future food security will be all the more vulnerable.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Office of the Executive Engineer
Education Engineering Department
Noakhali District



Invitation for e-Tender (IFT)

Tender Notice No. 02/e-GP/EED/ND/Code-1600101-12001601-4111201/2023-2024, Dt: 24/07/2023

The e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of following works:

Sl. No.	Package No.	Tender ID No.	Name of tender	Reference Memo No.	Tender document last selling/ downloading (date & time)	Tender closing & opening (date & time)
01	eed/nd/7016/tmed/works/01	855286	Construction of single storied academic building with 4-storied foundation in/c. sanitary, water supply and electrification works at Eshfakul Manna Alim Madrasa, Senbag, Noakhali.	37.07.0000.014 20.10.22-2598(9), Dt. 18/06/2023	Date: 20.08.2023 Time: 04:00pm	Date: 21.08.2023 Time: 11:00am
02	eed/nd/7016/tmed/works/02	855287	Construction of single storied academic building with 4-storied foundation in/c. sanitary, water supply and electrification works at Modhipur Islamia Dakhil Madrasa, Begumganj, Noakhali.	37.07.0000.014 20.10.22-2598(9), Dt. 18/06/2023	Date: 20.08.2023 Time: 04:00pm	Date: 21.08.2023 Time: 11:00am
03	eed/nd/7016/tmed/works/03	855288	Construction of single storied academic building with 4-storied foundation in/c. sanitary, water supply and electrification works at Dhitopur Darul Ulum Dakhil Madrasa, Begumganj, Noakhali.	37.07.0000.014 20.10.22-2598(9), Dt. 18/06/2023	Date: 20.08.2023 Time: 04:00pm	Date: 21.08.2023 Time: 11:00am
04	eed/nd/7016/tmed/works/04	855289	Construction of single storied academic building with 4-storied foundation in/c. sanitary, water supply and electrification works at Modhyo Nazirpur Azizia Islamia Dakhil Madrasa, Begumganj, Noakhali.	37.07.0000.014 20.10.22-2598(9), Dt. 18/06/2023	Date: 20.08.2023 Time: 04:00pm	Date: 21.08.2023 Time: 11:00am
05	eed/nd/7016/tmed/works/05	855743	Construction of single storied academic building with 4-storied foundation in/c. sanitary, water supply and electrification works at Ashwadia Nurul Ulum Farukia Dakhil Madrasa, Sadar, Noakhali.	37.07.0000.014 20.10.22-2598(9), Dt. 18/06/2023	Date: 20.08.2023 Time: 04:00pm	Date: 21.08.2023 Time: 11:15am
06	eed/nd/7016/tmed/works/06	855744	Construction of single storied academic building with 4-storied foundation in/c. sanitary, water supply and electrification works at Charkawina Sultania Islamia Dakhil Madrasa, Companganj, Noakhali.	37.07.0000.014 20.10.22-2598(9), Dt. 18/06/2023	Date: 20.08.2023 Time: 04:00pm	Date: 21.08.2023 Time: 11:15am
07	eed/nd/7016/tmed/works/07	855745	Construction of single storied academic building with 4-storied foundation in/c. sanitary, water supply and electrification works at Rongmalia Islamia Mohila Dakhil Madrasa, Companganj, Noakhali.	37.07.0000.014 20.10.22-2598(9), Dt. 18/06/2023	Date: 20.08.2023 Time: 04:00pm	Date: 21.08.2023 Time: 11:15am
08	eed/nd/7016/tmed/works/08	855746	Construction of single storied academic building with 4-storied foundation in/c. sanitary, water supply and electrification works at Maleka Gofur Obaidya Sunnifa Dakhil Madrasa, Kabirhat, Noakhali.	37.07.0000.014 20.10.22-2598(9), Dt. 18/06/2023	Date: 20.08.2023 Time: 04:00pm	Date: 21.08.2023 Time: 11:15am

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender proposal will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.
To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for last selling/downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered banks branches.
Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

Dipankar Khisa
Executive Engineer
Education Engineering Department
Noakhali District
E-mail: ee_noa@eedmoe.gov.bd

GD-1146