

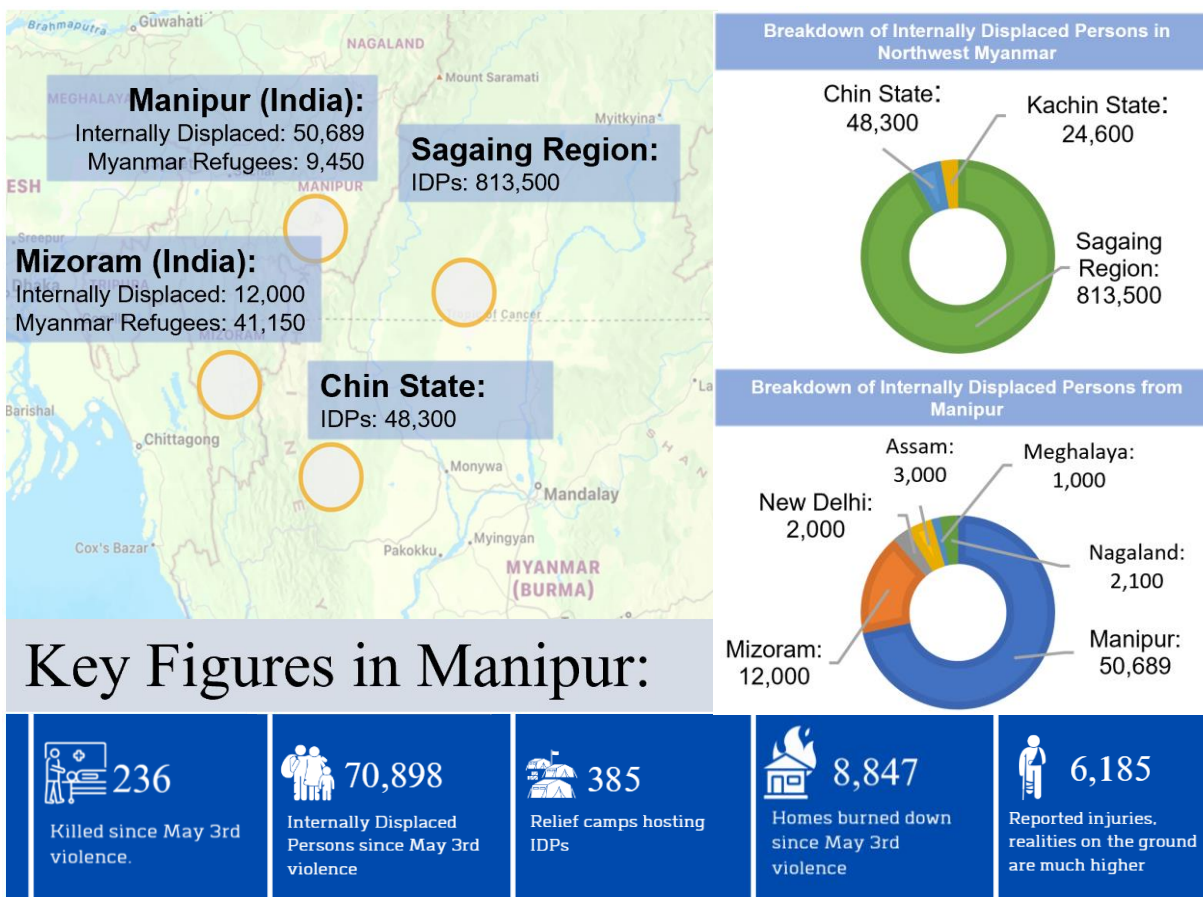


Indo-Burma Region Situation Report

September, 2023 Update

Global Alliance of Indigenous Peoples, Gender Justice and Peace

This monthly situation report tracks developing trends in the Indo-Burma region and is current with data through to October 5th, 2023. The report is compiled by the Global Alliance of Indigenous Peoples, Gender Justice and Peace, in partnership with the Manipur Women Gun Survivor's Network and the Northeast Women's Initiative for Peace.



NORTHEAST INDIA SITUATION Key Updates:

- 11 were killed in September**, adding to the **227 people** who have been killed in escalations of violent conflict in Manipur since May 3rd. Over **6,000 injured**, over **70,000** displaced, and over **8,847 houses burned** since the beginning of the conflict.^{1, 2} The escalation follows heightened tensions between Meitei and Kuki communities, in part triggered by the Meitei community's push for Scheduled Tribe Status in Manipur. Kuki groups have feared Meitei ST status would diminish job, educational, political and land opportunities.³
- 2 youth abducted and killed** in July had been reported missing until photos of their mutilated bodies began circulating social media in September. Ages 17 and 20, the graphic photos showed one of the two youths beheaded. They had been kidnapped on July 6th in Churachandpur.⁴



NORTHEAST INDIA SITUATION (continued):

- **341 arrested, 23,099 in preventative detention, and 9,332 FIRs** have been lodged in Manipur since the outbreak of violence in Manipur on May 3rd.^{5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10} Government data also reports 5,558 incidents of arson occurring since May 3rd, however, internal tracking reveals much higher numbers.
- **41,150¹¹** Myanmar asylum-seekers are currently estimated in Mizoram; however, estimates are likely an undercount. The Mizoram government continues to issue Identity cards to refugees; however, civil organizations still push the Indian government to afford stronger legal rights to asylum seekers.
- **5,232¹¹** Myanmar asylum-seekers have approached the UNHCR office in New Delhi since February, 2021. The true number of unreported refugees in New Delhi is still unknown.
- **9,450¹¹** Myanmar asylum-seekers are currently estimated in Manipur; however, estimates are likely undercounted. The majority of refugees in Manipur remain in hiding due to fear of retribution by the Manipur State government.

MYANMAR SITUATION Key Updates:

- **55,832** Asylum-seekers have now crossed the Indo-Burma border since the February 1st, 2021 coup. Numbers are expected to be an undercount.¹¹
- **1,662,000** Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are still seeking refuge within Myanmar's borders. This includes **813,500** IDPs in Sagaing Region and **48,300** IDPs in Chin State, two of the three states sharing a border with Northeast India.¹¹
- **25,227** Myanmar Nationals have been arrested by the military regime (19,640 still detained), and **4,139** civilians have been killed by the military regime. These numbers include arrests of **468** children, and **680** children killed. Many children have died or been crippled by land mines set by the military regime.¹²
- **Over 10,000 civilians** have fled their homes from Wetlet Township after a military buildup of over 600 troops. Over 50 villages have been completely abandoned in early September as civilians looked to escape arbitrary arrests, killings, and other acts of terror notorious of Myanmar's military troops.¹³
- **198 religious buildings targeted** by Myanmar's military since the military coup. Numbers include 85 destroyed in Chin State, and 50 destroyed in Sagaing Region.¹⁴



SITUATION OVERVIEW:

In Northeast India, violent conflict which erupted in Manipur on May 3rd, 2023, has to date taken the lives of an estimated **227 people**, while also injuring over 6,000, and displacing over **70,000 civilians**. Over **8,847 homes** have been lost to arson.^{1, 2}

The central government has yet to structure and implement wide-spread humanitarian and legal support for over **55,832**¹¹ Myanmar refugees and asylum-seekers who have entered Northeast India, which many view as a major contributing factor to recent unrest in Manipur.

In Manipur, violent conflict continued throughout September with heightened protests, especially in response to arrests made by officials on both sides of the conflict. The majority of incidents of violent conflict took place in Bishnupur and Churachandpur Districts, with many incidents splitting the border between the two districts. Over the month of September, at least 11 people lost their lives, including 4 paramilitary and police officers and 7 civilians.¹

In mid-September, the arrest of 5 armed civilians for impersonating police uniforms led to mass protests across Imphal valley, demanding for their release.¹⁵ Also in mid-September, photos of two youth, who had been missing since July 6th, emerged across social media. In one photo, Phijam Hemjit, 20, and Hijam Linthoingambi, 17, were sitting with armed men behind them. In a subsequent photo, the two youth lay dead, and one of them had been beheaded.¹⁶

On September 26th, students took to the streets to protest government inaction and demand the arrest of perpetrators of the kidnapping and execution of the two youth. Student protestors clashed with police and security forces near Sanjenthong, Imphal East, 80 students were injured as security forces used tear gas and batons to try to disburse the crowd.¹⁷ Many students admitted to the hospital had gunshot wounds and suggested that security forces used live ammunition to bring the situation under control.¹

7 arrests were made on October 1st in connection with the abduction and murder of the two youth, sparking widespread protests in Churachandpur to release the arrested, claiming the arrested were “abducted” by India’s NIA and CBI, and calling for a complete shutdown of Churachandpur,¹⁸ while Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh assured capital punishment for those found guilty.¹⁹ Mass mobilizations of armed crowds protesting arrests in both the Valley and Hill regions of Manipur have made it difficult for officials follow through on arrests.²⁰

On September 23rd, the internet ban was lifted after 5 months of conflict,²¹ only to be snapped again days later in response to protests of 2 youth killed.²² Also on September 23rd, Manipur CM N Biren Singh announced the permanent suspension of the Free Movement Regime (FMR), which allowed Myanmar nationals visa free entry (up to 16km) into Northeast India.²³



SITUATION OVERVIEW (continued):

While 212 displaced Manipuris who fled to Myanmar in the beginning of the conflict returned to India in August,²⁴ at least 300 Myanmar asylum seekers were deported from Manipur. They had fled for their lives from constant airstrikes and arbitrary killings in Tamu Township, of Sagaing Region, Myanmar.¹³

The Manipur government is beginning to transition IDPs to prefabricated homes, which are expected to house around 3,000 families. Many IDPs fear that after they move into the prefabricated homes, they will never again be able to return to their homes, which they lost to the conflict.²⁵

In the end of August, Manipur held its first local assembly meeting since the crisis began, however, it the session ended in less than an hour, enraging citizens across Manipur who had hoped leaders would come together to address continued violence throughout the state.²⁶

The National Crime Records Bureau arrived in Manipur in the first week of August to begin work documenting Myanmar asylum-seekers, which they term as 'illegal-immigrants'. They will begin work in Imphal's Sajiwa Jail, and have a September 30th deadline to conclude collection of data.²⁷ The Manipur Human Rights Commission assessed the living conditions of Sajiwa Jail Detention Center, where 105 Myanmar asylum-seekers are currently detained, concluding that inadequate food and medical supplies needed immediate government attention. Detainees include 6 children and 2 pregnant women, all of whom don't have access to relevant healthcare professionals.²⁸

In Mizoram, there are an estimated **40,600**¹² Myanmar refugees. The Mizoram State Government has undertaken informal measures to ensure the safety and security of Myanmar Nationals in the region. The government has led a campaign to issue Identity cards to all refugees.²⁹ Although the Identity Cards don't hold any legal ramifications, they have helped refugees and asylum-seekers assimilate more freely into society, and have also given humanitarian aid organizations a structure within which to assess needs and administer aid.

9,190 refugee students, including 2,574 children displaced from Manipur, as well as refugee students from Myanmar, resumed education in Myanmar in August. They all receive a mid-day meal, and provide the children with critical social structures. High school pass percentage among Myanmar refugee students was 90.32% last year, showing what can be achieved when a Indian states have a structured response to refugees fleeing from war in neighboring countries.³⁰

In Myanmar, heavy fighting remained constant across the nation's border states. August continued to see heavy airstrikes, arbitrary arrests, arbitrary executions, raids and the destruction of homes. IDPs grew significantly in August, especially in the Northwest Sagaing Region and Magway Region, as well as in Southeast regions of the state. Worsening food insecurities and attacks on civilian infrastructure continued to create roadblocks to survival for civilians.¹²



SITUATION OVERVIEW (continued):

In response to the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) crisis in Manipur, the Supreme Court gave a directive to ensure all IDPs have Aadhar cards,²⁴ while governor Anusuiya Uikey issued a directive to erect a temporary jailing facility in Churachandpur, as the district currently lacks holding facilities.²⁵

While Mizoram Chief Minister Zoramthanga cancelled plans to undertake biographic and biometric data of Myanmar refugees, fearing that such data would lead to discrimination,²⁶ Manipur has applied for an extension and will complete data collection by March, 2024.²⁷

In late September, India's NIA also arrested a suspect during their investigation of a transnational conspiracy by armed outfits in Bangladesh and Myanmar to exploit ethnic tensions in Manipur in attempt to wage a proxy war against the Indian Government.²⁸

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Northwest Myanmar continued to see constant airstrikes, mass arrests and arbitrary executions, as well as arson attacks.¹¹

Sagaing Region experienced widespread torching of homes and civilian infrastructure. On September 1st, over 2,000 were displaced from 7 villages in Katha Township after around 80 troops burned down over 100 homes.²⁹ After the raids on September 5th, junta airstrikes reduced around 30 more structures to ashes.³⁰

On September 18th, an additional 3,000 civilians were displaced, and at least 7 killed at 40 arrested in Military raids in Sagaing Township.³¹ In Wetlet Township, over 10,000 civilians were displaced from over 50 villages as 600 junta troops conducted village raids.³²

There are now over **813,500**¹¹ IDPs in Sagaing Region.

Chin State IDPs rose slightly to **48,300** people in September. The Chin State still experienced heavy airstrikes, and frequent phone and internet blackouts throughout September, as well as inaccessible aid and transportation across the Indo-Burma border.¹¹

Southern Chin and Rakhine Regions still maintain a ceasefire between the Arakan Army and the Myanmar Armed Forces (MAF). Access to humanitarian aid in the region is still restricted, and saltwater contamination, poor drainage, and sanitation continue to pose severe threats for a rise in malaria and water-borne illnesses across the region.¹¹



SITUATION OVERVIEW (continued):

Central, Northeast and Southeast Myanmar regions faced severe threats to IDPs in September. Raids, shelling and airstrikes have heavily damaged houses, and reduced access to food and basic needs.¹¹

Tanintharyi Region suffered from increased raids, mass arbitrary arrests and executions. On September 15th, the Myanmar military raided Let Ku Village, arresting 130 civilians and executing 4.³³ There are now over **82,200** IDPs in Tanintharyi Region.¹¹

Across Myanmar, the Military regime has continued to neglect the rights and needs of prisoners. Aung San Suu Kyi has been denied access to an outside physician, despite ailing health conditions.³⁴ In Sagaing's Monywa Prison, 14 prisoners are on hunger strikes demanding proper medical treatment and regular serving of food.³⁵ Of the 19, 10 members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) who have been arrested, 1,269 remain in detention, and 73 were elected members of parliament.³⁶

A Human Rights report given to UNHCR reveals increases in civilian deaths, children deaths, execution of captured combatants, execution of civilians, airstrikes, and intentional burnings of homes in 2023.³⁷ To date, 462 civilians have already been killed by airstrikes in 2023, and 812 civilians have been wounded.³⁸

Myanmar's military regime has postponed elections until at least 2025, however, the regime signed a memorandum of understanding with Russia in September to cooperate on election commissions, as leaders of the two countries discussed "voter education" and "effective media utilization."³⁹

A study also came out in September on the Myanmar military's weaponization of critical immunizations, most of which are only granted on the basis of allegiance to the military regime. Vaccine participation since the military coup have dropped by 40-50% for all major vaccinations, including measles (91% to 44%), BCG (87% to 48%), JE (87% to 7%), Penta3 (84% to 37%), and OPV3 (86% to 43%).⁴⁰

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE:

Manipur Response:

Humanitarian aid in Manipur remains difficult, especially in Kuki areas where education access and critical medical supplies and medical professionals remain largely inaccessible. In response to conflict, the Manipur Women's Gun Survivor Network (MWGSN) and partners distributed bedding, medical and food support to a number of relief camps in Manipur in September.¹

In response to students injured during protests, the MWGSN and partners have distributed emergency support to survivors still hospitalized.



HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE (continued):

MWGSN and the Northeast India Women's Initiative for Peace (NEIWIP) are also working with leaders throughout Manipur to build Gardens for Peace in relief camps to provide opportunities for therapeutic work, and also address food insecurity in relief camps.

Broader access to humanitarian and government aid for IDPs across Manipur needs national and international attention as conflict in Manipur continues into its 6th month.

Myanmar Response:

In **Southeast States and Regions**, 11 mobile clinics were held for 634 patients, giving support to 141 pregnant women and 93 children in Kayin. In Mon, 500 dignity kits were distributed to flood-affected regions. 7,350 families in Bago and Kayin received shelter and emergency CRI assistance.¹¹

In **Kachin and Shan (North)**, 2,816 health consultations were provided through 5 mobile clinics in across 11 relief camps and 38 villages. Critical Relief Items (CRIs) were distributed to more than 280 survivors, including firewood and tarpaulins.¹¹

In **Northwest Regions**, 1,124 tele-health consultations we conducted in Magway Region. In Chin State, 432 families received emergency shelter support, while 112 families received CRI kits in Sagaing Region. 1,936 families received cash assistance for shelter in CRIs in Chin State and Sagaing Region.¹¹

In **Rakhine and Chin (South)**, 23,905 patients were seen through mobile clinics, and cash assistance was provided to 1,100 households affected in Rathedaung Township. 10,200 families received CRI assistance, including tarpaulin and ropes. 35 longhouses were also reconstructed in shelter assistance efforts.¹¹

REGIONAL BACKGROUND:

Northeast India is home to one of the world's longest running armed conflicts, where a former British colonial martial law signed into law by the Union of India on September 11th, 1958, known as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), remains in effect to this day. The imposition of this law over the last 6 decades has led to the death of over 20,000 Indigenous peoples in the Northeast India state of Manipur alone.

Manipur Violence

In Manipur, tensions had been rising throughout April over the push by the Meitei Indigenous community to receive Scheduled Tribe status. Meitei people, who make up 53% of the population of Manipur, had applied for Scheduled Tribe in 2013. Other Indigenous groups in Manipur, including Kuki and Naga groups, fear the recognition of Meiteis as Scheduled Tribes would take away opportunities for education, jobs, political seats, and also affect land rights.



REGIONAL BACKGROUND (Continued):

Without clear communication from the Manipur government about the actual implications of approved Meitei ST status, protests became violent. Houses and communities on both sides were targeted. Tensions began to simmer on April 27th when protestors in Churachandpur torched a new gym that Chief Minister N. Biren Singh was scheduled to speak, leading to an internet shut down.

On May 3rd, the All Tribal Student Union of Manipur led a march of over 60,000 in protest of the ST status application of the Meiteis, and an armed mob of protestors attacked Meitei communities in Torbung, Churachandpur during the attack. Women groups organized human chains to stop armed mobs from entering Meitei communities. Kuki leaders, including MLAs, claim the violence was initiated by the Meiteis and submitted a petition for a separate state, citing fear of future attacks. Groups on the ground have described the desperate need for peace negotiations and leaders from both communities to invest in a mutual understanding of each other and the situation, while also cautioning that there are political interests at play which have yet to be uncovered.

Myanmar Civil War

On February 1st, 2021, across the Indo-Burma border in Myanmar, the military overthrew a democratically elected government in a coup d'état which has since left Myanmar (Burma) in a state of violent conflict and turmoil. Fleeing conflict zones where fighting and arbitrary military murders remain a daily constant, many Burmese refugees arrive in Northeast India carrying the traumas of death, sexual violence, and displacement – the traumas of war. With 1.2 million refugees and asylum-seekers, and another 1.5 million Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs), Myanmar has the 6th largest global population of refugees in the world. The UNHCR reports that over 50,000 displaced peoples, including at least 18 lawmakers of Myanmar's National League for Democracy, have crossed the Indo-Burma border in the last 2 years. The vast majority of displaced peoples have crossed the Indo-Burma border without documentation. Many Burmese refugees do not have access to Identity Cards or the means to fulfil their most basic needs.

A growing humanitarian crisis has evolved over the past two years, and exacerbates the already dire circumstances people in Northeast India face under martial law. Many survivors lack basic necessities, such as food, shelter, and medical attention. Burmese refugees who have not received official Identity Cards are at risk of detention or being returned to Myanmar.



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**Manipur Women
Gun Survivors Network**

