

## India: Ensure Peace and End the Internet Shutdown in Manipur

(Bangkok/Kathmandu – 19 May 2023) The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) expresses serious concerns regarding the eruption of [violence](#) in the State of Manipur in India, reports of excessive use of force by paramilitary troops, imposition of a curfew and an arbitrary internet shutdown.

Simmering ethnic tensions between groups in Manipur – alongside issues over land rights and alleged [discrimination](#) against minorities – led to violence, leaving at least [60](#) people dead, hundreds hospitalised, and thousands [displaced](#).

“We earnestly call upon the Indian authorities to uphold people’s fundamental freedoms and refrain from enforcing arbitrary internet shutdowns in such volatile circumstances. Instead of exacerbating tensions, security forces deployed in Manipur must exercise due caution and ensure that their actions remain proportionate to the prevailing circumstances. We remind the government of its obligations to safeguard human rights—including freedom of expression, right to information, and internet freedom—as per the Indian Constitution and international human rights standards,” said Mary Aileen Diez-Bacalso, Executive Director, FORUM-ASIA.

### Context

On [3 May](#), a protest was organised by the All Tribal Students’ Union Manipur (ATSUM) in Manipur against a court order in favour of the demand to include the [Meiteis](#) in the ‘Scheduled Tribe’ (ST) category. This reopened [ethnic fault lines](#) between the plain-dwelling, largely Hindu Meitei community and the hill-dwelling, mostly Christian Naga and Kuki tribes, which hold the protected ST status. The latter contended that Meitis are the dominant community and extending ST status would mean an infringement of their marginalized status.

The protests turned violent, resulting in unrest spreading throughout Manipur. In response to the situation, the government deployed over [10,000](#) additional troops and issued a [‘shoot-at-sight’](#) order, giving security forces undue impunity to fire at the crowd in ‘extreme cases.’

Authorities in Manipur then suspended mobile data services across the state on [4 May](#), followed by the suspension of broadband services as well. Since the extension of the internet ban, Manipur has had disrupted internet services for three weeks now. As per the latest notification on [16 May](#), the ban will continue for five more days. The government has justified the ban as a means to prevent hate speech and misinformation.

Internet bans, however, are a serious infringement of people's freedom of expression and right to access information. Such bans should only be used as an exceptional measure.

### **Call to Action**

FORUM-ASIA urges the authorities in Manipur to reinstate internet services immediately.

Internet shutdowns should never be employed as means to curtail constitutionally guaranteed fundamental freedoms. We call upon the authorities to ensure peace in Manipur and to include all relevant stakeholders in the discussion.

Furthermore, FORUM-ASIA calls upon the authorities to stop using excessive force against protestors. All actions taken by security forces should adhere to the principles of proportionality and legality.

### **About FORUM-ASIA:**

**The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)** is a network of 85 member organisations across 23 countries, mainly in Asia. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. It has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. The FORUM-ASIA Secretariat is based in Bangkok, with offices in Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. [www.forum-asia.org](http://www.forum-asia.org)

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