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ETHNIC SEPARATISM: THE KUKI-CHIN INSURGENCY OF INDO-MYANMAR/BURMA

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ABSTRACT This article focuses on the Kuki-Chin ethnic groups that inhabit mainly the north-eastern states of India, Sylhet district and Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and parts of Burma/Myanmar. The historical context of deeply contested identity formation among and within these groups, also today, grounds ongoing struggles over sharing of resources, space and power. In the complex scenario of post-colonial states and multiple boundaries, and in light of changing geopolitical conditions, the article demonstrates how efforts to distil ethnic autonomy into statehood will always leave some 'others' dissatisfied. The continuing risk of renewed ethnic violence puts pressure particularly on state parties to come up with sustainable solutions, which presently remain elusive.

KEYWORDS: *autonomy, Burma/Myanmar, ethnicity, identity, India, insurgency, Kuki-Chin, Manipur, north-east India, statehood*

Introduction and Overview

This article deals primarily with the contested claims and position of a large and internally plural ethnic group that inhabits mainly the north-eastern states of India, Sylhet district and Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and the Chin state of Myanmar, former Burma. The Kukis or Kuki-Chins are known by different names in the region and its neighbouring states. Generally identified as Kuki in India, they are called Mizo in the Mizoram state of India and Chin in Myanmar/Burma. Since local people earlier identified themselves through their ancestors, clan histories and names of villages, the Kuki nomenclature itself is a fairly recent ethnic construct.¹ The present article identifies some of the underlying reasons for the confusing manifestations of internal ethnic and linguistic diversities and plurality, and explains resulting complexities, including various competing insurgent movements. It also examines the links with often highly personalised power struggles in these locally and

socio-ethnically grounded movements. The discussion of recent central and regional state efforts to pacify warring ethnic groups demonstrates that claims to ethnically based statehood, even if partly successful, are always going to leave some stakeholders dissatisfied in this region.² It will be instructive to see how such simmering conflicts are being managed by the new Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in India, with often violent and mostly reluctant Manipur state intervention.

A brief overview sketch will be useful to set the scene for readers.³ The origin of the Kuki-Chin movements dates back to early local uprisings against colonial rule in 1845–71, starting in today's Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh (Haokip, 2008: 139).⁴ A series of further battles in 1872 and 1888, followed by the Anglo-Chin a war of 1889–90 in Burma, preceded the Anglo-Kuki war of 1917–9 in British India, presented by Haokip (1998: 75) as 'The First Kuki War of Independence'.⁵ The second Kuki uprising in 1942–5 ended again in defeat for the Kukis, who soon thereafter found themselves spread over three new nation-states.⁶

In independent India's north-east, many tribal communities gained separate statehood in due course, while most Kuki communities were left out. This, as well as genocidal violence directed at Kuki settlements, led to various insurgency movements. A combination of continuing claims for independence of a Kuki nation (Zale'n-gam) and self-defence thus underpins this particular ethnic insurgency and today, the latter is probably a more urgent agenda.⁷ The attainment of Mizoram statehood on 27 February 1987, mainly spearheaded by the Mizo National Front (MNF), still left many Kukis deeply dissatisfied with India's handling of 'unity in diversity' (Haokip, 2008: 398). On the Burmese side, too, official reluctance to grant more autonomy prompted the reorganisation of various Chin insurgent groups. Prominent among these are the Chin National Front/Chin National Army (CNF/CNA) and Chin Liberation Army (CLA). On the Indian side, when genocidal aggression against local Kuki populations increased during the 1990s, it led to a renewal of insurgency movements among Kukis, who felt betrayed particularly by the excessive atrocities inflicted upon innocent Kuki people by the Nagas.⁸ In response, some Kuki leaders formed the Kuki National Front (KNF) to carve out a Kuki homeland or Kuki state within the framework of the Indian Constitution in India.⁹ They raised the Kuki National Army (KNA) to fight for the creation of Kuki states, one in India and another in Burma/Myanmar (Haokip, 2008: 402). However, since amalgamation of the Kuki-Chin territories of India, Burma/Myanmar and Bangladesh is clearly not possible across the various international boundaries, at present, the CNF/CNA are India-based Myanmar movements and the KNA/Kuki National Organisation (KNO) is an India-based movement operating partly in Myanmar and mainly in India.

Some progress was achieved when, on 1 August 2005, various ethnic Kuki revolutionary outfits under the umbrellas of the KNO and United People's Front (UPF) signed an agreement about 'Suspension of Operation' (SoO) with the Indian Army, with immediate effect. Altogether 19 Kuki revolutionary organisations,¹⁰ operating in the state of Manipur, thereby signalled readiness to engage in political dialogue. The signing

of this agreement between the Indian Army and the KNO/UPF strengthened Kuki-Chin connections with India. It also signified unification of various ethnic Kuki-Chin revolutionary outfits into two main streams, KNO and UPF. The negotiating table of the Indian Army became the first platform for all major rival ethnic Kuki insurgent groups to enter a political dialogue, prompting these groups to shed their internal differences, at least for the moment.¹¹ Three years later, on 22 August 2008, a tripartite SoO agreement between the Government of India, the Government of Manipur and KNO/UPF was signed in New Delhi. After various annual extensions, the latest state of play is now that on 22 August 2014 in New Delhi, a formal one year extension of this agreement was signed by the new BJP government of India and the KNO/UPF, still with no concrete decisions about when to start the wider political dialogue demanded by the KNO/UPF. The unsettling effects of such limbo situation need to be discussed further.

This tripartite agreement, signed after much bargaining by all concerned parties, firmly aims to abide by the Constitution of India and explicitly mentions respect for the territorial integrity of Manipur. Not being a party to the 2005 agreement, the Government of Manipur appears to have been holding the whip in 2008 when it came to dealing with the KNO/UPF. The demand not to disturb the territorial integrity of Manipur, as a precondition for agreement on the part of the concerned state government, was vigorously criticised as a sign of hesitancy, immaturity and half-heartedness in relation to the interests of the KNO/UPF. In fact, this demand was termed an 'unnecessary hurdle' by a KNO spokesman. Having signed the agreement, KNO/UPF leaders are thus confronted with one striking issue, the question of integrity of territory, even in the initial stages of negotiation about talks.

The standpoint of the armed revolutionary parties in the agreement has been that they have come to the negotiating table in good faith, responding to the 'olive branch' offered by the then Prime Minister of India, Dr Manmohan Singh, to groups who would like to resolve their problems through dialogue. Evidently, this is part of a wider Indian policy (Haokip, 2013; Kipgen, 2013; Unnithan & Deka, 2012). The responding Kuki revolutionary parties agreed to a dialogue within the purview of the Constitution of India. However, when the Government of Manipur inserted the additional precondition clause about the territorial integrity of Manipur, the KNO's initial reaction was that there should not be any precondition, and even the Constitution of India should not be a precondition for talks. The KNO then asserted that they would sign the agreement despite this reference to territorial integrity, while reserving the right to raise their political demands when the talks begin, as a matter of their fundamental rights. The UPF stated, similarly, that they came to the negotiating table after an assurance of goodwill from the centre, which the Government of Manipur was aware of. Hence, UPF have every right to raise any issues they want, within the Constitution of India. They further asserted that there is no clause in the Constitution of India that says that a state boundary cannot be changed. According to Articles 244 and 244-A of the Constitution of India, read with Schedules V and VI

of this Constitution in particular, the tribals of north-eastern India may or shall have separate administrative units of their own. According to Nehlun Kipgen (1989: 19), founder president of the KNE, the question therefore becomes and remains: why there is no Kukiland (Zale'n-gam) for the Kukis?

Hence, Kukis claimed the right to table a number of agendas. Indeed, the UPF was not expecting the issue of territory to come up prior to defining the ground rules. While the KNO/UPF representatives regarded the signing of the agreement as a significant move and felt the need to take careful steps, one at a time, it was realised that confidence building would take a long time for the governments as well as the KNO/UPF. This shows that efforts to strengthen the autonomy of the various groups in their specific local/regional context remain deeply contested. Whether or not separate statehood or a greater degree of formal recognition of autonomy is achieved anywhere is still up for negotiation. At least the necessity of such negotiations has been acknowledged. However, the process itself remains extremely slow and substantive negotiations seem to be deliberately stalled even in 2014.

Providing a wider socio-cultural and historical context, the following sections will explore the various positions in more depth, given that even most basic facts surrounding Kuki-Chin identity issues remain contested. Later sections outline the diffuse nature of insurgency movements and examine the implications for the relationship with and between India and Burma. Finally, the article charts current developments in India/Myanmar relations in their wider geopolitical context and concludes with a critical assessment of the current agreement to highlight the risk that fresh ethnic violence directed towards the Kukis may as yet ruin the existing agreements.

Confusions and Debates over Chin Derivation

The term Kuki-Chin refers to a group of Tibeto-Burman-speaking tribal people spread today over three neighbouring countries. The term can refer to a language, an ethnic group, a social or political structure or even other things. Hence, various differences of opinion regarding a common name or nomenclature, whether Chin, Kuki, Zomi or Mizo, reflect the geographical dispersal of these communities as well as the different contexts of debate about their respective claims and positions. Leading Kuki writers are dismissive of efforts to define the key term, yet are aware of the importance of ethnic identification and its fuzziness. Haokip (1998: 31) writes:

The present intellectual generation has been unnecessarily preoccupied with a definition of the term Kuki and what it constitutes. The author finds such exercises a mere waste of energy because the term Kuki itself is vague in meaning, and its origin is also uncertain. It has an amorphous meaning, which has been changing from time to time, from context to context, and from area to area...it is an anthropologically convenient term to group together the various peoples of the region, who are bound together by a common cultural heritage, common customs, traditions and linguistic similarities.

The Kuki-Chin region covers, today, parts of different political areas in three neighbouring nation-states, India, Bangladesh and Myanmar: (i) the North Cachar and Mikir Hills, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Cachar and the Lushai Hills (all now Mizoram); (ii) parts of the extreme south of Nagaland; (iii) the state of Manipur; (iv) the state of Tripura; (v) Sylhet district and Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh; and (vi) the Chin state in Burma, parts of Magway division, the Pakokku and Thayetmyo and Arakan Hill Tracts (Haokip, 1998: 176–7).¹² Lushais/Mizos and Thadou-Kukis are major groups on the Indian side and Tedim, Falam and Haka Chins are the most important groups in Burma (Khupzago, 1988: 174). Meetei/Meitei people, who often form the local majority and inhabit the plain areas of Manipur, also have significant internal differences. Sometimes, they too are included in the Kuki-Chin group (Khupzago, 1988: 174–5).¹³

The label Kuki-Chin, then, is largely a composite result of the coining of linguists. *Kuki* is a Bengali term applied commonly to tribes on the Indian side and in Bangladesh,¹⁴ while *Chin* (written in Burmese as *Khyan*) is the name given to those same people in Burma (Khupzago, 1988: 170). Haokip (1998: 61) claims that '[t]he Kukis of the Chittagong Hill Tracts are therefore the original owners of this term'. On the whole, those in India and Bangladesh prefer Kuki and Mizo. A major group, the Thadou, cling firmly to Kuki as an ethnic label, whereas another major group, the Lushai, call themselves Mizo. Minor tribes like the Paite, Tedim (Sukte), Vaiphei and others propagate and often prefer the Zomi label.

The term *Chin* is a Burmese word not used by Bengalis. Quite imprecise on its own, it is homologous with the contemporary Burmese word meaning 'basket'. But Professor Luce of Rangoon University found that it is an old Burmese word, *khyang*, meaning 'ally or comrade' (Luce, 1959). No single Chin word makes explicit reference to all people customarily called Chin, as nearly all of these peoples have special words for themselves and others with whom they are in regular contact. In Burma, major tribes like Haka, Falam, Chho and Asho cling loyally to the term Chin. A few groups in the southern Chin Hills have adopted a variant of the term Chin for themselves (Lehman, 1980: 3). As both Kuki and Chin are somewhat foreign words however, and are contested, Kuki-Chin ethnic groups are in a real dilemma over their common name or nomenclature. In addition, there are numerous other recognised and unrecognised small tribes, both in India and Burma/Myanmar, who neither embrace nor reject the above terms; and in Burma, still others call themselves Zo (*Zou*) or Zomi (*Zoumi*). In addition, Kuki-Chin people also differ in terms of ideology, political affiliations and aspirations, leading to further struggles over nomenclature.

Linguistically, the various words serving as ethnic identifiers are almost always a variant form of a single root, which appears variously as *Zo*, *Jol Yo*, *Kseu* and *Sen*, and is said by Lehman (1980) to mean 'unsophisticated' or 'uncivilised', contrasting it to *Vai* ('civilised'), by implication to the Burmans (Chongloi, 2008: 125). The two terms Mizo or Zomi both refer to the 'People of the Hill' or 'hillmen'.¹⁵ Both terms have also been interpreted as referring to the descendants of the progenitor *Jol Zo*. On the other

hand, it is perhaps not justifiable to pronounce Mizo or Zomi as *Mijou* or *Joumi*. An important reason for such reservations is that some negative ‘othering’ seems to be going on when these terms are pronounced slightly differently. The literal meaning of *Zo*, *Jo* or *Yo* is actually ‘father’. In Thadou-Kuki, *chun le zo*, or in the Paite dialect, *tuun leh zua*, means ‘father and mother’. But when *Zomi* is pronounced as *Zoumi*, and *Mizo* as *Mizou*, their meanings become something quite different. In the Thadou-Kuki dialect, *Zoumil/Zomi* becomes ‘a giant, a leviathan, a monster or an ogre’; and ‘Mizou/Mizo, turns into ‘a liar, cheater or fraudster’. To treat them as ‘children or descendants of Jo/Zo’, it is more sensible to call them *Jomi*. The word *Zo* should thus be pronounced correctly as *Jo*, and not as *Jou*, as used in *Zomi/Mizo* nomenclatures today. *Zomi* would then become *Jomi*, to mean ‘the people or descendants of Jo/Zo’, while *Mizo* should be pronounced as *Mijo*, but not as *Zou*, *Zoumi* or *Mizou*. On account of such reasons, the Kuki group finds it hard to use *Zou* as the common nomenclature for the whole Kuki-Chin group and feels that *Zo* should be pronounced correctly as *Jo* to bring out its literal meaning as the descendants of their progenitor. More recent efforts at ethnic reorganisation and assertions of indigenous rights are clearly building on such foundations.¹⁶

Overall, this convoluted discussion shows that while using any of these ethnic labels and entities, some others cannot be completely ignored. Clearly, so many natural and man-made linguistic and other barriers separate and distinguish one group from another, and there are various agenda for making those distinctions. Regarding Kuki-Chin terminology, it was long accepted by the British colonial officials that the separation of the ‘Jo/Yo/Zo’ people as Chin in Burma and Kuki in India and erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) was an artificial classification and merely a temporary solution. Despite some earlier plans for a new ‘Frontier Province’ for them, they have remained permanently divided between different countries, though emotionally and culturally they are to some extent one. Such confusions and tensions are also reflected in the competition between various insurgency/revolutionary outfits.

Kuki and Chin are, then, like both sides of the same coin, combined as Kuki-Chin to cover a large internally diverse ethnic group which, to make things even more difficult, lives interspersed with other communities. The western mountains of Burma are occupied by these Kuki-Chin tribes, with related Nagas to the north. Both communities also have sizeable populations on the Indian side of the border. Both are traditionally animists and members of the Tibeto-Burmese linguistic family, and they compete over the same territory (Haokip, 2013; Kipgen, 2013).

Historical Background of the Kuki-Chin Movements

In Burma, according to the Chin Hills Regulation of 1896, by a notification in the *Burma Gazette* (Christian, 1942: 87), the term *Chin* includes Lushais, Kukis and Burmans domiciled in the Chin Hills and any person who has adopted the customs and language of the Chins and is habitually resident in the Chin Hills. This Kuki-Chin population in 1931 was 343,854, speaking some 45 related dialects of the same

language (Christian, 1942: 14). The Chin state in Burma had a population of 281,000 in 1974. In 1931, the Chins, including those resident in the Arakan Hill Tracts and the Irrawaddy division, still totalled 344,000. The various statistical fluctuations reflect contested definitions. It appears that the Chin today may be seriously undercounted and may actually number between 500,000 and 700,000. The total Kuki-Chin population in India and Burma may actually have reached two million.¹⁷ It is well known that, today, they are mostly Christians.

Historically, it can be argued, the Chin Hills formed an independent state entity, which was never part and parcel of the ancient kingdoms of Burma and India (Stevenson, 1943: iv–x). When the area was merged into the Union of Burma in 1947, the Panglong Conference Agreement with Burman leaders, discussed further below, sought to secure some degree of continued autonomy for the Chin people.

As briefly outlined earlier, the origins of the Kuki-Chin movement can be traced back to the Anglo-Kuki wars of 1845–71. This was a time when the British Empire expanded its hegemony in various parts of India. British incursions into the Kuki territories of western Zale'n-gam, the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Assam threatened particularly the Kukis' local self-regulatory powers and led to hostilities between them and the British. Haokip (1998: 73) summarises how, faced with threats to their supremacy, the Kukis of Zale'n-gam held meetings at various places in the hills to organise a concerted campaign against the British and drive them out from Zale'n-gam. They fought the British as early as 1845 and until 1871. Accounts of this Great War have been chronicled by the British themselves, who recorded it as the Great Kuki Invasion of the 1860s.¹⁸

After this Great War, the Kukis of this area were subjugated, like the other communities, to British control and they dispersed to many more places. Though they tried to rise against the colonial power at various times thereafter, especially in 1917–9 and 1942–5, they never succeeded.¹⁹ By 1947–8, they were faced with three new post-colonial nation-states in their traditional territory.

Panglong Convention and Union of Burma

Ethnically and historically, Chins and Burmans considered each other as different people, with a distinct language and culture. The Chin people's revolution in Burma was revived in 1933, when the Chin Union led by U Wanthu Maung and Thakin Aung Min demanded the autonomy of Chinland from the British governor of Burma. Of course, this was denied. However, the earlier recognition of Chins as a distinct ethnic group by successive Burmese kingdoms seems to have raised fresh hopes that freedom would be speedily achieved by the Chins soon after Burma attained independence from the British in 1948.²⁰ The administration of free Burma soon fell into chaos, however, partly because various ethnic minority nationals were preparing to sever ties with Burma, hoping to declare independence for themselves. In this context, U Nu, the first prime minister of free Burma, sought to appease these ethnic nationals,

calling a convention at Panglong on 12 February 1947. It was attended by members of the Executive Council of the Governor of Burma, and all royals (*saophas*) and representatives of the Shan State, the Kachin Hills and the Chin Hills.

The members of this conference believed that freedom would be more speedily achieved by the Shans, Kachins and Chins by giving immediate cooperation to the interim Burmese government. The members attending the conference agreed to cooperate without any dissent. An excerpt of the Panglong Agreement, signed on 12 February 1947, is reproduced by Furnivall (1960: 94–6) and Khupzago (1988: 111–3). Basically, it was agreed in nine major points that various forms of representation of different hill peoples should be secured, that international principles of democratic arrangements should be observed and that appropriate finance sharing arrangements should be negotiated between different levels of government. This was an offer by the local communities to interact with the new state, asking it to take on certain responsibilities in return for the loyalty of the various communities represented. All of the points raised reflect management issues in the local and state-centric balancing of rights and responsibilities in a newly emerging post-colonial polity. In the specific context of Burma, the feasibility of adopting for the Kachin Hills and the Chin Hills financial arrangements similar to those between Burma and the Federated Shan States was suggested (Silverstein, 1989: 89).

Chin Hills Charter of Demands

In order to find out the wishes of the people of the frontier areas of Burma, an enquiry commission, called the Frontier Areas Commission of Enquiry, was initially formed and authorised by the Aung San–Atlee Agreement (Furnivall, 1960: 94–6). The Commission comprised of eight high dignitaries from different communities, under the chairmanship of Mr D.R. Rees-William.²¹ A few months later, 19 local Chin members were selected at public meetings of the Chin Hills district (Khupzago, 1988: 114–9) to represent the wishes of the people of the Chin Hills to the Frontier Areas Committee of Enquiry. These representatives included six members from Falam sub-division, six from Tedim sub-division, three from Haka sub-division and four from Kanpetlet sub-division. They produced a Charter of Demands, to be presented to His Majesty's Government of Burma, submitted on 19 April 1947 at Maymyo to the Enquiry Commission, signed by all 19 representatives from the four sub-divisions of the Chin Hills. This document was originally written in Burmese. An extract of its translation into English is found in Furnivall (1960: 111–3). Numerous demands related to equal rights for the Chin people after federation with Burma, appropriate representation of their voices and needs, financial provisions for local entities and adequate community representation at central level (see Khupzago, 1988: 114–8). There was even a demand for some form of affirmative action for access of tribal people to education and employment. Significantly, item (xv) still refers to the possibility of secession in case of severe disagreement, though there was a desire to become an integral part of Burma.

Neither the Panglong Agreement of 12 February 1947 nor the Frontier Enquiry Commission of 19 April 1947 yielded any positive results and benefits for the Chins as expected by them. The hope of the Shan, Kachin and Chin people that freedom would be more speedily achieved if immediate cooperation was extended to the interim Burmese government was a far cry (Maung, 1961: 229). Much discontentment arose among the main Chin leaders at the intransigent attitude of the Burmese government, while poverty and the generally low level of development in the region continued. Poverty led many Chins to serve in the Myanmar Armed Forces (Tatmadaw), instead of devoting themselves to local politics or other activities. Indeed, this became the only career open for them (Fredholm, 1993: 180).

As ethnic insurgency grew in Burma, in 1948, Captain Mang Tung formed the Chin People's Movement for the Rights of the People. This challenged the hereditary community leadership and led to the birth of the Chin National Day on 20 February 1948. In 1957, the Chin People's Freedom League and the Chin Union were amalgamated to protect the rights of Chin people under the constitution. In 1964, after General Ne Win's military coup in 1962, an Anti-communist Freedom Organisation was formed to struggle for the Chin people.²² In 1969, Pu Tial Khal formed the Chin Liberation Front and became its president, with Thawmluai as vice-president and Thong Sei (Thawng Sai) as secretary of foreign affairs.

Fredholm (1993: 180) provides much further details of various Chin groups active in Burma. They were often closely aligned with the Chinese. Since the late 1950s, the main Kuki-Chin armed group had been the MNF, which was led most of the time by Laldenga. The MNF was related to the Chins and was also active within Burma, but its main action was focused on India. During the late 1960s, the MNF moved to East Pakistan to seek refuge there. In the early 1970s, China extended unconditional support to the MNF because of its border conflict with India. One Kuki contingent of the MNF, led by Commander Demkhoseh Gangte, marched 3,000 miles to China in 1974 (Haokip 2010: 36).²³ This relationship between the MNF and China lasted until the end of the 1970s, when the MNF returned to Burma. Meanwhile, Bangladesh had been liberated in 1971 and worked closely with India.

In 1973, there was a sudden change in the relationship between the MNF and some Chin outfits because of the MNF's intention of creating a new state including the Chin Hills of Burma. Obviously, this was not going to be acceptable to Burma. Losing Burmese support, and seeing no other option, the MNF moved north to create a new base in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. The search for a 'tribal homeland' went on, but led everywhere to bloodshed.

Retrospect of Mizoram Accord of 1986

After Rajiv Gandhi had become Prime Minister of India in 1984, he met the leader of the MNF, Laldenga, on 15 February 1985, to explore the possibilities of a negotiated settlement. The outcome of this meeting, the so-called Mizoram Peace Accord, was

signed between the MNF and the Union Government of India on 30 June 1986.²⁴ Achievement of statehood was a prerequisite of the Accord, so that Mizoram became a federal state of India soon thereafter, on 20 February 1987 (Fredholm, 1993: 181). Laldenga's underground movement was now legalised and allowed to participate in free elections after surrendering their weapons and separatist demands.

However, this meant that the earlier resolution adopted for a Kuki-Mizo state or Greater Mizoram of the Kawnpui Convention of 1965, attended by 13 tribe-based organisations of Kuki-Chin people of Manipur state, had remained unfulfilled (Haokip, 2010: 37). While there was a joyous celebration of Mizoram statehood in Mizoram, in Manipur, Nagaland, Assam and Burma, many scholars, activists and community leaders of the Kuki-Chin family, other than Lushai speakers, considered the Accord as a curse for the unity and integrity of the whole Kuki-Chin ethnic group. One major reason behind this is that Lushai speakers/Mizos are the largest among the 45 tribes of the Kuki-Chin family. Leaving behind their minor cousin tribes by surrendering the previous demands and causes and opting for a smaller Mizoram created further social and political fragmentation in the Kuki-Chin extended family.

It has been argued that apart from the British colonial regime, which had separated the Kuki-Chin people among different international boundaries, Laldenga, instead of putting together his scattered people, betrayed them and left them behind in darkness at his own Gates of Triumph. Today, many critical observers see that Laldenga's myopic political sight blurred the future of his cousin tribes, resulting in suppression and persecution of Kukis in the states of Manipur, Assam and Nagaland, especially during the 1990s, by separatists, mainly Nagas. Notably, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Issak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) killed 968 innocent Kukis, uprooting 360 villages and rendering 50,000 refugees in their own ancestral land (Haokip, 2010: 38).²⁵ Manipur valley-based militants have also, more recently, caused havoc in areas inhabited by the Kukis, killing, injuring and disabling many people, mainly women, children and elderly persons (Haokip, 2010: 36). This meant that the Kukis clearly had to resort to self-defence.

Emergence of Various Kuki-Chin Insurgent Groups

Initially, the attainment of Mizoram statehood by the MNF not only frustrated but also greatly inspired the Kuki-Chins, at first especially in Burma. Within three to four months, on 20 June 1987, the Zomi Liberation Front (ZLF) was formed to strive for a free state for the Zomis in Burma, as done by the MNF for the Mizos. On 18 May 1988, another organisation, called KNF, was raised by the late Nehlun Kipgen at Molnoi village in Burma, attended by Kuki leaders and elders from India and Burma. KNF was formed to carve out an autonomous Kukiland under the Constitution of India (Kipgen, 1989). However, due to internal leadership crisis, the KNF soon broke into two, the KNF-President group (KNF-P) and the KNF-T. Samuel group known as KNF-S, both fronts actively functioning in their respective area of operations.

Subsequently, on 24 February 1989, an Indian-based Myanmar movement called KNA, attended by Kuki leaders and chiefs from India and Burma, was founded under the initiation and leadership of Thangkholun Haokip at Molvailup village of Ukhrul district, Manipur, near the Indo-Myanmar border. He was made the first commander-in-chief of the newly formed outfit. The KNA strove for the creation of a separate state for the Kukis inclusive of both 'Old Kukis and New Kukis' (Gangte, 1993: 35), to be carved out from all Kuki-inhabited regions of India and Burma. That this would be opposed, also since it affects international borders, was clear from the outset. An overground wing of this outfit, the KNO, was then formed in 2000 and P.S. Haokip was elected as president of KNO/KNA. Since the formation of this overground KNO wing, KNO/KNA have offered the suggestion that if amalgamation of parts of India and Burma is problematic for the concerned state authorities, two Kuki states, one within India and another within Burma, should be created. At present, KNO/KNA is an India-based movement working in both countries. As indicated at the start of this article, and discussed further next, KNO has been part of the peace agreement with the Indian authorities.

Impacts of the Suspension of Operation (SoO) Agreements Since 2005

To reiterate, on 1 August 2005, a total of 19 Kuki revolutionary outfits under the umbrellas of the KNO and the UPF signed an agreement about 'SoO' with the Indian Army.²⁶ This meant that with immediate effect, a large number of Kuki revolutionary/insurgency organisations operating in the state of Manipur agreed to lay down their weapons and engage in political dialogue. Then, on 22 August 2008, a tripartite agreement between the Government of India, the Government of Manipur and the KNO/UPF was signed in New Delhi. As a formal result of this agreement, meetings of a Joint Monitoring Group have been held at various times, involving key stakeholders, such as, the KNO/UPF, representatives of the police, the army, Assam Rifles (AR), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Border Security Force (BSF) and leading officials of the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Manipur state government.²⁷

Meanwhile, however, increasing disquiet has been reported from among the insurgent groups that are party to this agreement, mainly about lack of progress in negotiations. There is growing dissatisfaction that Kuki political issues are being neglected by the centre, while more progress seems to be taking place in parallel negotiations with Naga groups, who are subject to similar holding agreements and are pushing hard for their agenda. When a KNO/UPF delegation went to Delhi in early 2014 expressing such disquiet, it received assurances that relevant discussions would be initiated soon. The Kuki groups then withdrew their boycott plans, only to find that in the 2014 elections, though the local Congress candidate retained his seat, the UPA government lost power in the centre and there is now a BJP-led government in Delhi. Dr Seilen Haokip, spokesperson of the KNO, has been saying that they are closely observing how the newly installed Modi-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA)

government perceives the Kuki issue. He expressed hope that the NDA government would deliver more progress than the earlier Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government and would not treat the signing of the pact, every time it expires, merely as a perfunctory exercise.

The latest position at the time of completing this article was that after the 2014 Parliamentary elections, the Kuki groups, threatening to boycott the continuation of the agreement, stepped up their publicity campaigns to highlight atrocities against their community. On 4 July 2014, the Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM), the apex body of Kuki tribes, held a statewide protest rally to demand justice for the terror victims of the 1990s, drawing attention to the unaddressed plight of the victimised Kukis. In this context, it is significant that frequent references to the fundamental rights guarantees of the Indian Constitution were made, as well as addressing memoranda to all relevant office bearers at central and state levels in India as well as the United Nations, the National Human Rights Commission of India and the chief ministers of all seven north-eastern states of India (*The Sangai Express*, 2014).

Then, after several last-minute meetings, and despite misgivings on the part of the KNO/UPF, on 22 August 2014, in New Delhi, a formal extension of this agreement for another year was signed by the new BJP government, the Government of Manipur and the KNO/UPF. However, there is still no concrete decision about when focused political dialogue would start and what form it will take. Ongoing fieldwork by the author finds many verbal assurances from several leading politicians, but the KNO/UPF have heard this all before and remain distrustful. Local evidence suggests that the situation on the ground is again becoming tense.

Initially, the SoO agreements of 2005 and 2008 between the KNO/UPF and the Governments of India and Manipur had far-reaching impacts on all sections of people in the state, particularly the Kuki people. At the time of the initial agreement, all members of the KNO, both armed cadres and overground members, numbered around 800, while the UPF had about 1,000 cadres.²⁸ Under the terms of the agreement, the Government of India would pay a monthly stipend/allowance of ₹3,000 each for armed cadres and ₹5,000 for leaders as incentives to abide by the agreement. The KNO was given to understand that there would be two designated camps at Churachandpur, one at Ukhrul and two in Chandel district, whereas the UPF was promised six designated camps, two in Sadar Hills, three in Churachandpur and one in Chandel district respectively. Meanwhile, a lot of money has been spent on these camps, but not only journalists are reporting that their occupants are frustrated and increasingly dissatisfied (Unnithan & Deka, 2012: 22).

The main impact of the agreement has been that, by now, the revolutionary groups have had to surrender all their weapons and the armoury is supposed to be double-locked by their representatives and the army. The designated camps where they must stay are not located in the immediate vicinity of an international border, highways or villages. The cadres are isolated and kept in virtual confinement. They have to refrain from extorting taxes and fines, kidnapping for ransom, ambushing the police and

security personnel. Significantly, the agreement does not include a clause that forbids militants from killing members of other factions. The direct impact of the agreement on common Kuki people has been that the atmosphere of terror in which they earlier lived has gradually changed and a sense of psychological and physical safety prevails in and around the vicinity of villages and hamlets. Former daily incidents, such as factional fights, kidnapping for ransom, extortions, collection of taxes and other demands, are now almost unheard of.²⁹ The Kukis are now anxiously looking forward to progress in political dialogues between the KNO/UPF and the government.

The valley-based revolutionary groups, having spurned peace talk offers by successive prime ministers for decades, are now keeping their fingers crossed while waiting and watching the ongoing developments, though, as indicated, with increasing frustration. Reports from some reliable valley outfits state that some Kuki militants have joined hands with the army in attacking insurgent camps in inaccessible mountains. Hypothetically, the NSCN-IM faction of the Nagas might be perturbed to see that parts of territory in Ukhrul, Senapati and Tamenglong districts are inhabited by ethnic Kukis, as these areas are a bone of contention for both Kukis and Nagas.

Nevertheless, the repeated signing of the agreement has opened up a new vista and is going to be a landmark in the annals of Kuki history. The revolutionary groups, on their part, vehemently assert that the Kuki nation which has a distinct ethnic and socio-cultural identity has a right to self-determination and to decide their own future, which would be possible only when political autonomy or some form of self-governance is granted within the framework of the Constitution of India. Clearly, the stakes are high, and nothing is resolved on the ground at the moment.

Geopolitics and the Indo-Myanmar Relationship

Taking a wider view, the pacifying efforts on the Indian side of the international border are probably not unrelated to the wider geopolitical scenario developing in this region. India, the world's largest democratic country, was once a strong critic of the military junta in Burma. Its response to the Burmese coup of 1988 was virulently negative. It was probably the most vociferous critic of Burma until the early 1990s and even employed U Nu's daughter as the head of All India Radio's Burma Service. India also provides refuge to about 50,000 Burmese dissidents and refugees, of whom about 40,000 are hosted by Mizoram. Dissident Burmese organisations still operate from Indian territory. It is said that George Fernandes, when he was India's defence minister (1998–2004), gave shelter to Burmese activists and the All Burma Students operated from his residence in New Delhi.

Meanwhile, the political scenario as well as ecological and commercial concerns have changed the region's geopolitics. The fear psychosis of Myanmar's military junta is now being exploited by China, which cannot be in the interest of either India or other democracies of the free world. Realisation that it is important to end Myanmar's isolation and to allay its fears that the whole world is ganging up against it made the

Indian government refocus its Burmese policy. India had never completely forsaken the democracy movement in Myanmar. When Aung San Suu Kyi was released for the second time in May 2002, the Indian government issued a discreet statement cheering her liberation, at the same time showing its trust in the democratic transition efforts of the Myanmar government.³⁰

Under the new geopolitics of the region since the early 1990s, India has dropped its general attitude of neglect towards its eastern bordering countries. In 1998–9, Indian foreign policy was still basically focused on the ‘Nuclear Issue’ and the rivalry with Pakistan. When George Fernandes was first appointed defence minister of the NDA government in 1998, he became known as one of the fiercest leaders of the anti-China campaign, seeing China as ‘Enemy Number One’ of India. He stoutly denounced the Chinese influence over the Burmese junta and accused Beijing of using Yangon’s military regime as a spear against India on its eastern flank. When Jaswant Singh took up foreign affairs in 1998, he reshaped India’s Burmese policy, anchoring a realist approach in South Block. The ‘Eastern Strategy’ of Jaswant Singh made India gain a foothold in Asia through Myanmar. It appears thus that a combination of ongoing instability in the North-East, India’s willingness to connect with Southeast Asia and the lurking Chinese threat prompted India to change its policy towards Myanmar.

The India–Myanmar relationship can now be classified broadly into two main perspectives: cooperation in developmental projects and trade, plus growing concern about counter-insurgency. These two policy concerns are evidently connected, since India launched several institutional and development projects through its ‘Look East Policy’ which would be beneficial to both countries on both counts. India also chose to get closer to Myanmar through various regional organisations.³¹ In fact, the India/Myanmar link is a major bridge between India and all countries comprising the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). According to the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, the first decade of the 21st century has witnessed growing strategic engagement between India and Myanmar. As relations with Myanmar have become truly multifaceted, several initiatives followed, including a training centre at Pakokku, set up with India’s assistance, and a turbo truck plant at Magway.

As a follow-up, on 5 March 2010, an official central delegation from Delhi attended a meeting of Border Liaison Officers at Tamu in Myanmar. The delegations not only discussed enhancement of trade relations between India and Myanmar, including a list of trade items, but also strategies to control cross-border traffic and checks on militants’ infiltrations along the Indo-Myanmar border. This confirms that, apart from developmental projects, India’s national and geopolitical interest lies in a strong and stable Myanmar that observes strict neutrality between India and China and cooperates with India in the common fight against various insurgencies raging in both countries’ border areas. Indian and Myanmar forces launched a joint counter-insurgency initiative called ‘Operation Golden Bird’ in April–May 1995. In this arduous joint venture, 40 insurgents were killed and a huge arms cache was recovered. In November 2001,

Myanmar Army staff raided several Manipuri rebel bases, rounding up almost 200 rebels and recovering 1,500 guns. Indo-Myanmar cooperation is not only essential for counter-insurgency but also aims to control narcotics trafficking and the proliferation of small arms trade. It could also be seen as part of the global War on Terror.

At the same time, some sources report that Burma, like Bangladesh and China, has been hosting Indian insurgent outfits. Therefore, the 'Look East Policy' strategy seems to be applied more intensively to counter-insurgency problems. In that context, a two-day meeting of director generals of police (DGPs) on 30–31 October 2009 set up a Regional Cooperation Mechanism. The aim of this meeting in Shillong was to increase exchange of information about battalion movements and plans for tackling insurgency outfits among the seven north-eastern states and Sikkim. In the same spirit, a delegation of India's Ministry of External Affairs raised the issue of north-east insurgent groups during a three-day visit to Burma. This started on 10 December 2009 as part of the 12th BIMSTEC ministerial meeting to cooperate in combating international terrorism (see note 31). On 22 February 2010, the Ministry for Home Affairs decided to deploy more BSF battalions along riverine areas of the Bangladesh border and to boost the AR deployment along the Myanmar border.

As part of counter-insurgency measures, delegations of India and Myanmar also discussed the installation of a hotline at the meeting of Border Liaison Officers at Tamu on 5 March 2010. Taking into account the request of the Myanmar delegation, the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs has started the process of providing Boloros, motorbikes and telephones, as well as installing and operating hotlines. Frequent reports claim that insurgents in India's north-east are using foreign-made arms procured through smugglers based in Southeast Asia and in Yunnan Province of China, through the Sino-Myanmar border and the porous Indo-Myanmar border.

A related result of such concerns has been a quite aggressive effort to engage in border fencing between India and Myanmar. Local fieldwork by the author discovered that during summer 2013, in various places, the ongoing construction work of the border fence by the Myanmar Army was encroaching on Indian Kuki settlements, including some churches. Numerous Kuki villages are directly affected and a large slice of land, 1 km into Indian territory and 10 km long, was occupied by Burmese border fencing constructors—significantly, all of this is Kuki territory. Non-governmental organisation (NGO) reports have confirmed such evidence (Laithangbam, 2013), which has led to growing demand for a re-surveying of the Indo-Myanmar border.³² While the Government of India has voiced its concerns over this with the Government of Myanmar, India seems more concerned about controlling the north-east insurgent groups than protecting its territorial integrity, while Myanmar requires the assistance and support of India for implementing development work in Myanmar. Since in all these new developments Kukis are again becoming victims, in this case through surreptitious ceding of their territory to Myanmar by India, new anger is emerging and the situation is becoming increasingly dangerous again, especially in the affected border areas.

Follow-up on the Agreement and Conclusions

The north-east of India has been going through political instability and ethnic insurgencies for decades and the whole region, inhabited by a mosaic of peoples and cultures, has experienced much ethnic conflict (Haokip, 2013; Kipgen, 2013). Since the independence of India and Burma in 1947 and 1948 respectively, various ethnic minorities have been struggling for more autonomy, with more or less success. Some groups have even been seeking independence, causing alarm in the concerned nation-states, while challenging regional authorities to contain these ethnic insurgencies and to counter emerging genocidal trends. India seems to have resorted to separate peace agreements with insurgent groups, prominently Nagas and Kukis (Unnithan & Deka, 2012).

This article demonstrates how the creation of a number of states in north-east India, specifically Mizoram in 1987, still left most of the 44 minor Kuki-Chin tribal groups groping in the dark, searching for a common platform or even a common nomenclature to bind them together, not only within India, but across international boundaries. So far, for many Kuki-Chin people, most efforts to obtain better representation have been in vain. While agreed political solutions remained elusive, the earlier sprouting of many Kuki-Chin insurgent groups since the 1980s reflected the simmering frustrations. Certainly by the 1990s, the urgent need for self-protection became prominent. At some stage, altogether 19 officially recognised Kuki-Chin insurgent outfits were operating, mainly within Manipur state and particularly in the district of Churachandpur.

However, from 2005 onwards, rays of hope resurfaced among the Kuki people when the Indian government seemed to listen to their cries for help.³³ When the Government of India, the Government of Manipur and Kuki militants under the KNO/UPF umbrella signed a tripartite SoO agreement in 2008, an important step seemed to be taken for holding trilateral talks. Since 2010, many meetings among the three major parties and various other stakeholders have indeed taken place. However, the agenda of the Joint Monitoring Group seems to focus on wider security issues, involving global, national and regional concerns. These meetings have so far failed to address the more immediate worries of local people about interethnic violence and lack of minority representation. Meanwhile, more money has been spent on construction of camps for the various insurgent groups and more young people seem to be joining the bandwagon of accepting handouts that are too tempting to reject but insufficient for building a better future. It is significant that arguments for a raising of the monthly payments are heard, but few suggestions are made about how to bring lasting peace.

The author's recent fieldwork confirms reports by journalists who visited the insurgents and have pointed to unsatisfactory conditions, boredom of those confined to the remote camps and widespread dissatisfaction with the stipends paid (Unnithan & Deka, 2012: 22). If the newly elected BJP government in India does not manage to hold constructive discussions over the various claims and interests of the various ethnic groups that compete over the same space and resources, more serious trouble

can be predicted. Paying insurgents money to keep them pacified can, at best, be a short-term, stop-gap measure. Particularly since the historical memory of atrocities remains so strong, as the current article and much of the material the author used clearly confirms, the volatile present offers not much hope even for physical safety of the Kuki-Chin people.

Kuki writers and leaders remain sceptical and demanding, if not aggressive. Haokip (1998: 259) concludes that the British handed the Kuki territory over to the three post-colonial countries which are, in his words, 'merely in constructive possession of the traditional land of the Kukis'. The same author, while laying out his vision more recently (Haokip, 2008: 407–24), claims that 'the Kukis have yet to realize self-rule, the postcolonial mantra. We continue to be victims of sub-colonial imperialism...' (Haokip, 2008: 408). Most of this speech is devoted to the memory of discriminations, old and new. Naga efforts aimed at ethnic cleansing, which went as far as Kuki villagers being served quit notices in the second half of 1992 (Haokip, 2008: 411), should have rung alarm bells for the Indian republic as the home of many different people and in view of the guiding principle of 'unity in diversity'. Locally and even regionally, the ultimate demand remains restoration of territorial integrity, when Haokip (2008: 422) asks his fellow Kukis 'to come and join this march to carve a place for ourselves on the face of the earth by resurrecting Zale'ngam, our God-given ancestral land and its rich heritage, and to take it forward to become a respected member in the comity of nations'. Such exclusionary claims for self-determination continue to be made in various fora and environments. They represent, to some extent, defensive reactions to ethnic violence targeting a minority group that lacks proper representation.

It is now perhaps high time for ethnic Kuki and Naga people to use a 'give-and-take' policy to resolve their competing claims over landholdings, to obtain a political solution and to do so speedily. Apart from that, the state government of Manipur has a specific obligation not to pose any hindrances, keeping in mind the historical records and boundaries of 'Proper Manipur' and 'Outer Manipur' in a democratic manner. All stakeholders have to give and take, probably, and cannot hide behind the others. The present central government policy of making agreements with different communities looks like 'divide and rule' and effectively delays justice, through prolonged silence regarding the bones of contention between Kukis and Nagas. On the other hand, the recent construction of border fencing which actually cedes landholdings of Kukis to appease Myanmar does not bode well. This kind of policy may create more political unrest in future. Urgent questions need to be asked about the procrastinating role of the Manipur government and the central Indian government, about democracy and the unfulfilled promises of the Indian Constitution for local minority people such as the Kuki. They suffered not only during the seven years of terror unleashed upon innocent, unarmed civilians during the 1990s by the secessionist NSCN-IM, but are also tormented in the current phase of uneasy truces. If ethnic violence were to be repeated, the carefully crafted pack of cards in the form of various government-led agreements to stop military operations in this region will just collapse. It might be

more sustainable, and cheaper in the long run, to work a little harder on more lasting political solutions that may secure better minority representation. Maybe the story of Indian state creation in India's north-east is not yet complete. Or perhaps, there is still hope that the various people of India will simply learn to coexist together peacefully, and live and let live. While efforts to create a new Kuki nation-state seem illusory, and more designed as a bargaining tool, it is evident that the Indian state cannot turn a blind eye to developments in this region. Constructive negotiations, it seems, are the need of the hour. While that is what the young and increasingly impatient insurgents clearly convey as well, the future remains uncertain. One thing is certain, though: a resurgence of genocide directed at Kuki people by Nagas and the majority Meitei community would clearly overstep limits and be completely intolerable. It remains a matter of urgency for the government of that vast state called India to sincerely look into the issue from every angle, based on custom and tradition, history and landholding, and to give justice to all three contending parties, Nagas, Kukis and Manipuri–Meiteis, as enshrined and within the purview and framework of the Indian Constitution. However, evidently that is easier said than done.

Notes

1. Haokip (1998: 26) confirms that it appears to have found its first usage with the advent of the British in the region during the eighteenth century. For further details, see Haokip (2008: 1–9).
2. One of the three peer reviewers for this article suggested that this specific scenario arises also in relation to various Kurdish groups in the Middle East, spread between Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran.
3. The author collected a large amount of material over several years since 2002, including many Web-based publications and copious interview notes. To save space and avoid excessively cumbersome referencing of webpages and interviewee responses, it was agreed that readers may contact the author directly to obtain further details.
4. For details, see also Haokip (1998: 73–4, 2008: 139–40).
5. This war is discussed in great detail by Kuki authors who stress the sacrifices that their heroes made to safeguard the community's best interests, only to be defeated. See especially Haokip (1998: 75–160, 2008: 139–239).
6. On details, see Haokip (1998: 193–203, 2008: 271–7), including also the Japanese involvement in this uprising.
7. See the explicit recognition of this by Haokip (2008: 408).
8. Particularly the National Socialist Council of Nagaland–Issak–Muivah (NSCN-IM) is identified as the most brutal perpetrator during the 1990s.
9. The realisation that this would need to happen within the framework of the Indian Constitution is documented in a letter to the Indian president, dated 27 January 1997, by the president of the Kuki National Organisation (KNO) (Haokip, 1998: 295).
10. The 11 armed wings or constituents of the KNO included the KNA, KNF–Military Council (KNF–MC), KNF–Zougam (KNF–Z), United Socialist Revolutionary Army (USRA), Hmar National Army (HNA), Zomi Revolutionary Front (ZRF), United Komrem Revolutionary

- Army (UKRA), United Minority Liberation Army (UMLA), Zou Defense Volunteer (ZDV), Kuki Liberation Army-Wilson (KLA-W) and Pakan Revolutionary Army (PRA). Another political umbrella group, the UPF comprises of eight constituent bodies, namely, Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA), KNF-Samuel (KNF-S), KNF-President (KNF-P), United Kuki Liberation Front (UKLF), Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA), Hmar People's Council-Democratic (HPC-D), KLA and ZDV-Kamkhanpau (ZDV-K).
11. Meanwhile, more groups seem to have joined the agreement, as indicated by Haokip (2008: 422).
 12. The Kuki-Chin even have a presence in various localities of Israel, which was disclosed in interviews in 2010 by J. Samuel with Mr Yitzkhak, member and chairman, Beth Shalom Synagogue (Israel Community), and B. Vengnuom in Churachandpur. The areas in Israel are Kiryat Arba, Maalot, Sdrot, Carmel and Hebron.
 13. Grierson (1904) classified Meiteilon or Manipuri as a Kuki dialect or language.
 14. The different Kuki tribal groups are listed and discussed in some detail by Haokip (1998: 31–62, 2008: 19–70). Haokip (2008: 19) states that their common origin is traced to a mythical *khul*, a subterranean dwelling commonly referred to as a cave, said to be guarded by a tiger.
 15. Mizo or Zomi actually means 'highlander(s)' or 'hill people', as *Mi* means man (human), whereas *Zo*, often pronounced as *Jou*, means 'hill(s)'. It is apparently a matter of prefix or suffix, which defines people's identity. For example, significantly, T. Gougin, a former minister, stubbornly refused the Mizo designation in interview, insisting that Zomi is the only appropriate one.
 16. This discussion is also related to renewed current activism about the Zo Re-unification Organisation (ZoRO) which aims to unite all Zo people. It incorporates larger agenda than those of the Kuki people, seeking to unite Mizo, Chin, Kachin and Kuki groups in the three concerned neighbouring countries. The First ZoRO World Convention was held on 19–21 May 1988 at Champhai in Mizoram state of India. More recent events of this kind in 2013 and 2014 in Manipur have explicitly connected Kuki/ZoRO issues with United Nations minority protection agenda and are appealing to various human rights conferences and activist bodies for support.
 17. Haokip (2008: 414–5) refers to some census figures and, on the Indian side, indicates ongoing debates and struggles over affirmative action quotas for Scheduled Tribes.
 18. Haokip (1998: 74) cites Elly (1978 [1893]: 8) with reports about a series of raids and counter-attacks. See also Haokip (2008: 139–40).
 19. Detailed accounts are found, respectively, in Haokip (1998: 75–160; 2008: 139–239) and Haokip (1998: 193–203; 2008: 271–7).
 20. Furnivall (1956: ix) lists five notorious evils in modern Burma under British rule, but makes no specific reference to the ethnic issues debated here. The index does not list Kukis, but there are three entries under 'Chins' (Furnivall, 1956: 560), described as backward hill tribes together with the Kachins. The other entries mention the conversion of large numbers to Christianity and indicate that comparatively many Chins were recruited into the army.
 21. Apart from the chairman, the list comprised eight members: Thakin Nu (vice-president); the Hon'ble Sao Sam Htun (Shan counsellor); the Hon'ble Vum Kho Hau (Chin counsellor); the Hon'ble Sinwa Naw (Kachin counsellor); the Hon'ble U Tin Tut; Bo Khin Maung Gale (Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League, AFPFL); Saw Kyint Thein (Karen Youth) and Saw Sankey (Karen National Union, KNU).

22. It arose under the initiation of Colonel Son Kho Pau, Pu Dam Kho Hau, Pu Mang Khan Pau, Pu Hrang Nawl, Pu Son Cin Lian and Pu Thual Zen.
23. This three-month long journey was 'longer than the long march of Mao Tse Tung' (Bareh, 2004: 161).
24. The official document of settlement was signed by Laldenga from the MNF, the Union Home Secretary, R.D. Pradhan, on behalf of the government, and Lalkhama, the Chief Secretary of the Union Territory of Mizoram.
25. Many other sources speak of 100,000 uprooted people. Haokip (1998: 207–58) contains a long list of the names, gender and ages of the victims.
26. By now, this number seems to have increased to 20 organisations.
27. For example, on 26 March 2010, chaired by Chief Secretary D.S. Poonia, at the banquet hall of the 1st Manipur Rifles, Imphal, Manipur.
28. Recent additional fieldwork by the author found that the numbers of cadres have increased and there are now 1,004 for the KNO and 1,094 for the UPF.
29. Unnithan and Deka (2012) refer to instances of extortion, though. Even Haokip (2008: 420) acknowledges the 'occasional hardship' caused by insurgents to their own Kuki people.
30. Relevant details are found in a conference document on 'India and Burma/Myanmar Relations: From Idealism to Realism', produced by the India International Centre in New Delhi in September 2003.
31. Examples are the Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), the Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) and the Kunming Initiative being undertaken in Myanmar, suiting the geographical node.
32. See *The Hindu* (2013). A large number of press reports from the region during August/September 2013 could be cited here. Details are available from the author on request.
33. For a record of such letters, see Haokip (1998: 261–96).

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