

India dispatch: Supreme Court action on Manipur video depicting sexual violence against minority women prompts PM to break awkward silence - JURIST

[J jurist.org/news/2023/07/india-dispatch-supreme-court-action-on-manipur-video-depicting-violent-sexual-abuse-of-minority-women-prompts-pm-to-break-awkward-silence](https://www.jurist.org/news/2023/07/india-dispatch-supreme-court-action-on-manipur-video-depicting-violent-sexual-abuse-of-minority-women-prompts-pm-to-break-awkward-silence)

Nakul Rai Khurana | Jindal Global Law School, IN



Dispatches

© JURIST (Neelabh Bist)

India dispatch: Supreme Court action on Manipur video depicting sexual violence against minority women prompts PM to break awkward silence

Nakul Rai Khurana | Jindal Global Law School, IN

July 21, 2023 10:52:49 am

Indian law students are reporting for JURIST on law-related developments in and affecting India. This dispatch is from Nakul Rai Khurana, a law student at Jindal Global Law School.

As this dispatch is reported, the nation trembles with shock, disgust and fear. On 19 July, a video was circulated widely at night, sharing a vile situation online where two women belonging to a Kuki-Zomi community (hill tribes belonging to the northeastern part of the Indian state of Manipur) were paraded naked and allegedly gang-raped. Manipur has been engrossed in violent ethnic clashes since May 3 this year. There have been inter-community conflicts in the state between the minority 'Kuki' people, who live in the hills of Manipur and the majority tribal community 'Meitei' people who live in the more well-developed Imphal valley. The violence has already claimed the lives of almost 160 individuals.

It led to the Supreme Court bench comprising of Chief Justice of India ('CJI') DY Chandrachud, Justice PS Narasimha and Justice Manoj Misra taking *suo moto* cognizance of the matter today, proving to be a significant, albeit deeply disturbing development at the national level. Voicing his agitation, the CJI remarked-

“Simply unacceptable. Using women as an instrument in an area of communal strife. Grossest of constitutional abuse. We are deeply disturbed by the videos which have emerged. If the government does not act, we will.”

The bench had called for the presence of the Attorney General for India R Venkataramani and Solicitor General of India Tushar Mehta on Thursday morning, representing the government. It sought immediate action on the part of the government and asked what steps it shall take to not only address the issue but also how are they navigating to ensure it does not happen in future. It condemned the sexual violence against women being perpetuated in Manipur amidst the civil insurgency. The CJI also dictated that the issue would be heard with the already ongoing batch of petitions against the Manipur Issue and set the next date of hearing to be 28th July. While the expeditious judicial activism on the part of the Indian judiciary was hailed as an important step, the Prime Minister of India ('PM') also voiced his concern and encountered blatant scrutiny.

Speaking at the Monsoon session of the Parliament today morning, the PM remarked-

“Today, when I have come among you and am standing near this temple of democracy, then my heart is full of pain, full of anger. The incident that has come to the fore in Manipur is a shameful incident for any civilized society.”

The PMO went on to assure citizens that all the criminals involved will be dealt with, and cognizance of the atrocities committed in Manipur will be taken. The PM addressed the nation only after the Supreme Court expressed its disturbance for the same. Furthermore, the statement made by the PM was not made in-session, in the Parliament, but rather outside the Parliament, outraging the opposition leaders, as to why the issue is not brought up within the legislature.

The leaders of ten opposition parties from Manipur, headed by the Indian National Congress Party at the national level, submitted a memorandum to the PMO voicing their dismay with regards to the ambivalent state of the PM, who had refused any audience to the leaders from Manipur, pleading for state intervention and help. It is also notable that condemnation of this incident is the first time the PM has acknowledged the unrest in Manipur, even indirectly.

In a tweet, Senior Congress leader and member of Rajya Sabha (Lower house of the Parliament), P Chidambaram was enraged and wrote:

Hon'ble PM has broken his silence on Manipur

He did not spare a thought for the people of Manipur when he was traveling to the US, France, UAE and to various states in India to inaugurate something or other

I wonder what prompted him to remember Manipur?

Was it the horrific...

— P. Chidambaram (@PChidambaram_IN) [July 20, 2023](#)

It is pertinent to note that the grim incident took place on May 4, and it is only the widespread circulation of videos online, that has now engulfed the luminaries and called for nationwide action at the highest level, two months after the incident took place. It is also unfortunate that only this particular event is reported and of which the state has taken cognizance. Amidst the myriad of atrocities that have gone unreported, this is the only one we know of. While promises for more responsive and expeditious state action towards the protection of women have often been made, the reality of the situation is heartbreaking. The situation insults the nation that associates its very nationhood or patriotism with femininity; colloquially referred to as 'Bharat Mata', a divine personification of the Indian nation.

Opinions expressed in JURIST Dispatches are solely those of our correspondents in the field and do not necessarily reflect the views of JURIST's editors, staff, donors or the University of Pittsburgh.