



Silent Networks: A Chronology of the Longest Internet Shutdown of 2023 in Manipur in India



Council for
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INTRODUCTION

The population in Manipur is diverse as several ethnic communities coexist, exclusively confined or scattered in the territory. The Meities comprise 56.9%, where they profess the Vaishnava faith and are confined to the valley. The Land Act passed in the state assembly restricts Meities or other non-tribals from buying hilly land and settling, making nine-tenth of the area limited for the scheduled tribes. The scheduled list mentions- that there are 29 tribes, and many other tribes or sub-tribes are included in the category of unspecified tribes. There have been communities in the state that remained distinct from other communities because they intended to carry their own identity; there were communities that decided under the assertion of politics of survival rather than ideological influence. Another community that has a substantive proportion of the population is Meitei Pangals, who speak Manipuri and are scattered in valleys and hills. Hence, it is evident that the diverse settlement of communities will create tension and cause conflict among people living in the state. However, the attempt is to look at the chronology of the events that caused the longest internet shutdown in the state, and they will use their voting rights in the upcoming national elections in April 2024, whose dates being announced in the coming weeks.

Month(s)	Episodes Occurred
March 2023	Direction by the Manipur High Court to consider the inclusion of majority non-tribe Meiteis in the Scheduled Tribe List within four weeks, and share the recommendation to the Central Government.
April 2023	The Hills Area Committee (HAC), Manipur Legislative Assembly passed a resolution urging the state government and central government to appeal against the order, where their consideration was towards the sentiment, interests, and rights of the Scheduled Tribe in the state. The Judgment by the single-bench affected the aspiration and inspiration of the tribal people, and it was an ex-parte , where the petitioner was heard negating the objective of positive discrimination, the All Tribe Students' Union Manipur (ATSUM).

May 2023	<p>Across the state, the Government released the notification for the Internet Shutdown after the reports of ethnic clashes; there was an imminent danger to life and loss of property, and the intent was to maintain peace and tranquility in the territory. They released the decision by exercising Rule 2, Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services Rules 2017.</p> <p>The High Court extended the submission of the report for the inclusion of the Meitei Community to the Union Tribal Affairs Ministry to May 29.</p> <p>The Apex Court said that the decision by the single-bench was 'absolutely wrong' because the HC doesn't have the power to recommend a reservation as the power lies with the President of India; they declined to stay the order because the matter is pending before the division-bench in the High Court of Manipur.</p>
June 2023	<p>The State Government sought time before taking a position on whether the Meiteis Community should be included in the Scheduled Tribe list.</p> <p>The Internet Shutdown continues across the state as per Rule 2, Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services Rules 2017, the exception specifically granted to the lease line connection by the Government, and Banking and other services which support the banking.</p> <p>Review Petition filed before the High Court to modify the order made in March accepted by the bench and notices are issued to the Central Government and state government.</p> <p>The High Court directed the state government to restore the internet connection partially.</p>
July 2023	<p>The second Review Petition was submitted before the High Court to reconsider the March order to add the Meitei Community to the Scheduled Tribe list. They submitted no material to fathom the backwardness of the community, and they referred to the no submission made by the Meitei before the Kaka Kalekar Commission 1955 or Lokur Commission for their inclusion in the list.</p> <p>In the ethnic-hit areas, the HC ordered the government to permit those who have leased lines and fibre optic connections.</p>

	Suspension of Broadband Services lifted conditionally.
August-September 2023	<p>Justices A.B. Singh and Guneshwar Sharma direct the Government of Manipur to reinstate mobile internet services for the public.</p> <p>The government complied with the direction made by the High Court, where internet access is enabled by whitelisting mobile numbers. However, the previous decision by the state executive to reinstate the broadband services.</p>
October-November 2023	<p>The Internet Shutdown continued in the state because there was apprehension towards the usage of social media to spread hate speech, and transmission of images to incite violence. The Previous Order of the State continued because there was apprehension that the anti-social elements might cause incitement through the transmission of videos, pictures, and other resources.</p> <p>The government of Manipur decided to lift the shutdown in the Four Hill district, which has suffered from ethnic strife. Operationalise Mobile Towers on a trial basis in those districts which aren't affected by the violence.</p>
December 2023	<p>Appointed Governor of Manipur order under Rule 2, Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules 2017 to remove the Internet Shutdown.</p> <p>The High Court of Manipur decided that Internet Services form an essential component of the Freedom of Speech and Expression for Residents within the Constitution of India.</p> <p>Internet Services were restored in the state till December 18 barring the two-kilometre radius dominated by Kuki-Zomi and Meities.</p> <p>The plea was submitted before the bench of the Supreme Court of India requesting to order the Government of Manipur to comply with guidelines laid out in the Anuradha Bhasin Case, but the bench led by Justice B.R. Gavi declined by stating that the guidelines shall be complied within the situations prevailing in the state/s.</p>

January 2024

[Article 355](#) of the Constitution of India since May 2023 when the [clash](#) broke out in the state, said N. Biren Singh, Chief Minister of the Government of Manipur.

[Curfew](#) was re-imposed in the districts across the valley in the state.

Internet suspension was [ordered](#) in the border areas of the nine districts.

February 2024

[Internet Suspension](#) in Churachandupur District.

The High Court of Manipur deletes the [contentious order](#) on adding the Meiteis to the Scheduled Tribe list while hearing the review petition.

Internet Shutdown