

MANIPUR NEEDS PROCESS OF HEALING, RECONCILIATION: ARCHBISHOP NELI

Imphal, Sept 15, 2025: Archbishop Linus Neli of Imphal, head of the Catholic Church in Manipur, says Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit has failed to address social divide, a crucial problem facing the strife-torn northeastern Indian state.

Modi, who visited Manipur September 14, promised a solution to the conflict that has plagued the state for more than two years. It was his first visit to the state after Meitei and Kuki communities clashed on May 3, 2023.

"He spoke of peace, prosperity, and development. He brought a package of economic aid. He spoke of the integrity of the state of Manipur and the unity of the nation," the archbishop told Rome-based Fides news agency on the day of Modi's visit.

The prelate, who is now 68, became the Imphal archbishop 219 days after ethnic violence erupted. According to government figures, the violence killed 258 people and displaced 60,000 others until November 22, 2024.

"Over 50,000 people from the Kuki and Meitei ethnic groups are suffering in refugee camps. The solution can only come from a process of healing and reconciliation and must be considered in the medium to long term," Archbishop Neli asserted.

"Modi spoke to the two groups separately, primarily promising economic prosperity and bringing a package of economic aid," the archbishop observed, "but he did not address the relationship between the warring groups, the hatred, the urgency of restoring internal and communal peace."

"Currently," the prelate added, "the management of the crisis in Manipur is in the hands of the military. The army keeps the warring communities apart, controls the territory, and provides security. This is intended to prevent further unrest and violence, but it is not a solution. The situation on the ground is entrenched. And the wounds will remain if no one does anything to heal them."

According to Archbishop Neli, "political will is required to advance a serious reconciliation process and restore peaceful coexistence between the two groups. This requires the goodwill of both sides and also mediation by the political, state, and federal authorities," he said.

"Reconciliation is possible if the issues at hand are addressed openly and according to criteria of fairness and justice, overcoming barriers and polarization: this is the task of good politics," added the prelate, who is a Manipur native.

He said the Catholic Church is present with believers among the Kuki and the Meitei communities.

“We continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the refugees and promote intercultural and interreligious encounters to foster peace and coexistence. We try to act as a bridge and initiate a process of healing and reconciliation.”

The Church has to rebuild three churches completely destroyed by violence two years ago. Two monasteries are currently occupied by the army, and the Church has no access to their facilities.

“But given the situation, there is nothing we can do; we have to wait and see,” the archbishop added