

# Manipur violence: Dead bodies unclaimed, panel says kin under pressure to not perform last rites, asks SC to intervene

The panel, headed by former Jammu and Kashmir High Court Chief Justice Gita Mittal, is learnt to have suggested that victims' relatives should be directed to perform the last rites, failing which the Manipur government should do so instead.

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The case will be heard by a bench headed by Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud on Tuesday.

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With the bodies of more than half of those [killed in Manipur](#) since May 3 [lying unclaimed in the state's mortuaries](#), the Supreme Court-appointed panel is learnt to have expressed concern over victims' relatives facing "pressure" from civil society organisations to not accept the bodies, and urged the apex court to intervene.

The [panel, headed by former Jammu and Kashmir High Court Chief Justice Gita Mittal](#), is learnt to have suggested that victims' relatives should be directed to perform the last rites, failing which the Manipur government should do so instead, and the Supreme Court should prohibit civil society organisations from interfering.

The case will be heard by a bench headed by Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud on Tuesday.

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## MANIPUR ETHNIC STRIFE

DEATHS REPORTED: 175\*

169

Bodies identified

81

Bodies claimed

06

Unidentified bodies

88

Unclaimed bodies



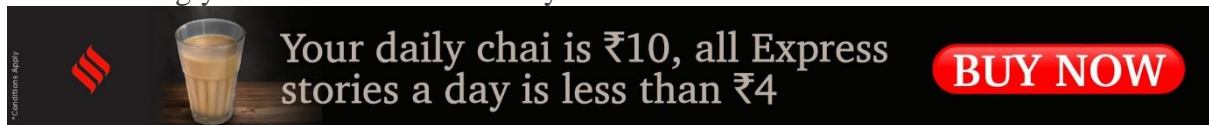
*\*\* All unclaimed bodies being kept at JNIMS (Imphal), RIMS (Imphal), District Hospital (Churachandpur)*



The toll of the ethnic strife in Manipur (Express)

The Supreme Court had appointed the three-member committee, which includes former Bombay High Court Judge, Justice Shalini P Joshi, and former [Delhi](#) High Court Judge, Justice Asha Menon, to examine the humanitarian aspects of the ethnic violence in Manipur. The panel submitted its thirteenth interim report to the Supreme Court last Monday.

The question of claiming and disposing of the bodies has been one of the most sensitive and contentious issues in the ongoing conflict. As of October 7, 175 people were reported to have been killed in the ethnic violence that erupted between the Meitei and Kuki communities on May 3. State records show that 94 bodies are lying unclaimed in the three big mortuaries in the state – JNIMS and RIMS in Imphal, and the Churachandpur District Hospital. Among these, six bodies are unidentified. The remaining 88 identified but unclaimed bodies are overwhelmingly from the Kuki community.



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In its report, the panel is learnt to have said that relatives of the victims are under pressure from civil society organisations not to accept the bodies for last rites. It has said that these organisations are opposing and obstructing the performance of last rites due to “vested interests” and to compel state authorities to meet “unwarranted” demands.



Justice Gita Mittal (retired)

Although the panel has not specifically named the incident, it alludes to the controversy in August when the Indigenous Tribal Leaders’ Forum announced that it would conduct burial of 35 bodies in Torbung, an area in the Kuki-Zomi dominated Churachandpur district, bordering the Meitei-dominated Bishnupur district. This had prompted intervention of the Union government, which asked ITLF to postpone the burial, and the Manipur government had proposed nine alternative burial sites.

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The report states that civil society organisations are insisting on “unsuitable spots” for collective burial, which would serve as a source of “constant mounting tensions” between the two communities.

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Saying that preservation of a large number of bodies for long periods is a drain on the state’s resources, and failure to perform the last rites would amount to showing disrespect to the dead, the committee has asked the Supreme Court to direct the next of kin to claim the bodies and perform the last rites. Failing this, the committee has also urged the court to “prohibit” civil society organisations from interfering with or obstructing the performance of last rites.