

Editorial

Imphal, Tuesday June 20, 2017

Deliberate mistakes

Desperate times calls for desperate measures. It would only be fooling ourselves to think otherwise. Despite the rosy pictures and the recent indication of the Government finally waking up to the realities, we still have a long way to trudge along and uncountable promises to be kept before we can truly call ours a stable and well-governed society- a common knowledge yet to be acknowledged by those who matters. What is still beyond comprehension and logical reasoning are some of the most baffling questions on the minds of all the thinking public- baffling as to why the problems- if one could ever term them as such- are allowed to exist in the first place. Instances like increasing transparency in governance: the bitter truth can be sampled if one has the patience of a saint- to try and access information of various departments through the numerous obsolete official websites launched with much fanfare and reams being written about, updated every decade with unerring accuracy. MGEL (Manipur Government Employee's List): is it still valid? What is the current position of the project? Teachers not in the list still get their pay. Relevance of such protracted exercise? If authentication and verification of employees of the Government is the target, why couldn't it constitute a separate and dedicated body to do the work? Has the department heads and employees been apprised of the procedures and workings of PIS and EIN? Is the NIC handling the technical support as efficiently and regularly as they should?

Drugs: why haven't any breakthrough been achieved till date regarding the source, the supply route and the people behind such mammoth hauls- a cartel that obviously enjoys the support and collusion of those in the highest echelon of power and influence? Pulling up and shoving a few pawns up our faces to earn few brawny points does not impress anyone. Everybody knows of the existence of a virus that is spreading the vicious disease- apparently behind a wall of immunity and protection.

Sewage project: what exactly was the purpose of the whole project? When is the completion period, after factoring in the delays in funding and others? Who will be the beneficiaries? How are the sewage from private residences be connected to the main pipe- is there any provision for it at all? How about the drainage system along the roadsides that sits way above the roads seeping water down in the middle of the road and flooding stretches of otherwise perfectly good roads?

PDS (Public Distribution System) Translation- a system conjured up to efficiently distribute Government largesse and benefits amongst the people elected by the public.

Terrorism and Militancy: the most prospective and fastest growing commercial venture in the region, with the armed personnel of the State Government proving to be great catalysts (read- more armed personnel being caught posing as militants and extorting money and terrorizing the public) Just a few of the realities facing the society today. Bottom-line- it's high time to take the velvet gloves off and deal with the issues as they should be. Things can change, and for that to happen, people entrusted with making the changes must start acting their part without further delay- or else they need to be changed.

Preserving the Macha Ebemma Khudithibi area, Ningthoukhong

The recent Eviction Notice by the Sub-Divisional Officer/SDM, Bishnupur around the Macha Ebemma Khudithibi (MEK) area has made the people of the area, specially the local Meeteis and Kabui tribes, worried of losing their age old beloved lands to the project proposal of a Technology Centre for Fragrance and Flavor to be set up by the Commerce and Industries, Govt. of Manipur. In the backdrop of the tension in the hills of Manipur, MEK area can be regarded as one of the most peaceful area, where the Meeteis, tribal and other communities of Manipur live harmoniously since time immemorial.

MEK area is 33km South of Imphal and is 3km west of the Ningthoukhong Municipal Town, which is on the NH-150. It is at the foothill of the Laimaton and Thangching hill ranges, which was famous for its role in the World War-II, fought between the British and the Japanese. The aerial distance of MEK from Loktak Lake is about 4 km, separated by the vast agricultural land. The area (about 60 hectares) is surrounded by prime paddy fields, various native trees species (some are more than 100 years old) such as State tree Uningthou (*Phoebe hainestiana* B.), Uyung (*Quercus serrata* L.), Usoi (*Schima wallichii* L.), Teak (*Tectona grandis* L.), Leihao (*Magnolia champaca* L.), Wang (*Gmelina arborea* L.), Yendang (*Cycas pectinata*), agro-forestry farms and medicinal plants. Historically, MEK area falls under a sacred place of Manipuri's local deity called Macha Ebemma Khudithibi, daughter of the famous Epuhou Oknarel, elder brother of the king Moirang Thangching. Oknarel came towards tribal village called Sadu Khuroi, after a conflict with his younger brother. He married to a Sadu (Kabui tribe) woman and descended towards the valley of Ningthoukhong. When Oknarel came down to Ningthoukhong with his family, his only daughter accidentally struck

a stone with her feet, fall-down on the road and died. The place where she died is now well preserved with lush green woods, trees, flowers and Sacred Groves. Tombs and worshiping places are erected by the local people of Ningthoukhong at the site. The area is developing in true spirits of Manipuri's historical backgrounds. MEK is proposed to be included in the "Natural Heritage Sites".

The area is naturally bestowed by indigenous flora and fauna of Manipur, which is also an ecological niche with very high biodiversity. Agriculturally, the area produced many tons of rice every year and served thousands of people of Manipur. The area is potentially high for tourism and can cater to bring tourists from whole over the World to Manipur by exhibiting its unique natural, cultural and ecological environment. It can serve as educational sites for children. The area can also empower both the youth and women of Manipur by employing them in agricultural, horticultural and tourism activities. On dated 13th January 1950, the Forest Officer, Manipur, issued order (F. Misc. Case No. 1223/48/49) to the effect that the land under Dag No. 9 of Village No. 44-Ningthoukhong Kha is not included in the Forest Area of the Manipur's reserved forest. Khundrakpam Phulinkanta, former Revenue Minister, Govt. of Manipur, De-reserved the area as homestead and agricultural land on December 1984. Prajatantra Imphal newspaper published the said decision of the Govt. of Manipur on 24th December 1984, mentioning the de-reservation of 43 and 44 Ningthoukhong Kha. On the same day, other hills and valley areas of Manipur viz. Moreh, Churachandpur, Kwakta, and Khoupum Valley were also de-reserved by the Cabinet Ministers, Govt. of Manipur.

After de-reservation, the farmers of the area acquired the land pattas allotted to them; however, marginal farmers were not able to procure it due to their financial and personal

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constraints. Thus, the areas have both Pattadars and Dag Chitha holders. Relevant documents of the farmers and official government maps were burned to ashes during the July 2004, Manipur's agitation on Manorama Devi issue. Since then (11 years), the documents of the area were never updated/processed by the revenue officials. Poor farmers were kept in dark and run from post to pillar to get their land documents. However, the officials announced the farmers as trespassers in their own land and declared the area as Khas Land. On the other hand, it was found that some of the officials of SD- Ningthoukhong issued computerized land Pattas and Dag Chitha to migrants, while indigenous people were left-out. Sub-Divisional Officer/SDM, Bishnupur, on 10th September 2015 served a "Notice of Eviction" to the poor farmers of the 44-Ningthoukhong Kha, within 10 days from date of proclamation of the order. The notice was delivered to the farmers on the evening (6.30pm) of dated 18th September 2015 by the Officer Incharge (OC) of the Loktak Police Station, giving the farmers a single working day of Saturday, 19th September 2015. On 21st September 2015 morning, the houses of the poor farmers were destroyed and evicted in a war-like situation, using many well equipped Police Personnel's. At this juncture, it is questionable, whether the mono-culture plantation of Lemon Grass (*Cymbopogon citratus*) and Shagbri (*Pogostemon purpurascens*) and employments of few people for the development of Technology Centre for Fragrance and Flavor, is better than destroying the rare and indigenous plants, wild rare orchids, native trees and paddy fields of this ecologically fragile

Manipur area? The indigenous people of the MEK area are harmoniously living socially and culturally with their natural environment. The area is the only aesthetic and recreational part around Ningthoukhong. The people continue to preserve and manage MEK with their traditional indigenous knowledge, which was passed on to them by their ancestors. Therefore, actions that may violates the guidelines of indigenous people's rights, including illegal eviction, internal displacement, termination of right to possession, right to livelihood, right to education, right to health, right to water etc. must be avoided. The present eviction will directly affect 100s of people, homestead land, religious sites, sacred grove, agricultural and agro-forestry lands, fragile ecosystem and cultural integrity of Manipur. Looking at the current scenarios, the project proponent/s should meticulously conduct "cost benefit analysis" of whether the project will, in the long run, be feasible and beneficial to the stakeholders. There is also a need for a social impact assessment (SIA) by the project proponent/s. It is imperative to mention here that, in recent years, there is a visible change in the climatic condition of Manipur. This resulted in the losses of Crores of rupees from the State exchequer and the common people suffer. Thus, climate resilient programs of afforestation of MEK area and developing it in line with the "Act East Policy" of India, such as tourism, organic farming, agro-forestry, herbal and medicinal plants productions etc. will bring more sustainable development of not only MEK area but also the state of Manipur in the near future.

National and International News

Chinese tour agency used by Otto Warmbier stops North Korea trips for Americans after his death

Seoul, June 20: The tour agency that took US student Otto Warmbier to Pyongyang said Tuesday it would stop taking Americans to the reclusive state after the 22-year-old died following 18 months in North Korean detention. Warmbier was medically evacuated to the United States last week, suffering from severe brain damage. He died six days later in his hometown of Cincinnati, Ohio, with US president Donald Trump blaming Pyongyang's "brutal regime" for his plight.

"We have been struggling to process the result," Young Pioneer Tours, the China-based travel agency that had taken Warmbier to the North, said in a Facebook post. The University of Virginia student was arrested at the airport as he was leaving Pyongyang in January last year and sentenced to 15 years of hard labour at a show trial for stealing a political poster from a hotel.

"There had not been any previous detainment in North Korea that has ended with such tragic finality," the company said, adding that Warmbier's death had made it "reconsider" its position on accepting American tourists. "Now, the assessment of risk for Americans visiting North Korea has become too high," it said, adding, "we will no longer be organising tours for US citizens to North Korea."

The agency based in the Chinese city of Xian was founded in 2008 by a British expat with a motto of

taking adventurous travellers to "the places your mother wants you to stay away from" including the North and Iran. One of a few tour agencies that visit the North, the firm offers trips that include scuba diving and cycling in one of the world's most impoverished countries.

Severe brain injury
The company, which advertised the North as "probably one of the safest places on Earth to visit," came under fire after Warmbier was medically evacuated to the US in a coma after a flurry of secret diplomatic negotiations between Washington and Pyongyang.

The North claimed Warmbier fell into a coma soon after he was sentenced last year, saying he had contracted botulism and been given a sleeping pill. Medical tests carried out last week in the United States offered no conclusive evidence as to the cause of his neurological injuries, and no evidence of a prior botulism infection. Warmbier's doctors said he had suffered extensive tissue loss in all regions of his brain, but showed no signs of physical trauma. They said Warmbier's severe brain injury was most likely given his young age to have been caused by cardiopulmonary arrest cutting the blood supply to the brain.

South Korean president Moon Jae-In has sent a letter of condolences to Warmbier's family. "It is deplorable that North Korea does not respect human rights," Moon said, according to his spokesman Park Soo-Hyun.

US rights group Human Rights Watch said Warmbier's death highlights the North's position as "one of the worst rights abusing governments in the world." His death "reflects a reality that the North Korean people know all too well: the Kim family leadership... will not hesitate to brutalise and kill to maintain their hold on power," it said in a statement. Warmbier's death came amid high tension over the North's recent series of missile tests, with Pentagon chief Jim Mattis describing the nuclear-armed state as "a clear and present danger to all."

It also drew attention to the dire

human rights records of the country ruled by the young leader Kim Jong-Un, who took over after the death in 2011 of his father and longtime ruler, Kim Jong-Il, in a third-generation power transfer. Three more US citizens are being held by the North. Two were teachers at a Pyongyang university funded by overseas Christian groups, and the third is a Korean-American pastor who was accused of espionage for the South. The North has customarily released US detainees after visits by high-profile political figures including former presidents Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter.

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