

# Editorial

*Team Imphal Times is leaving this column blank in condemnation to the burning of a specific Imphal based Newspaper on Saturday in protest against the contents which they said is derogatory statement against the Prime Minister of India instead of going to the right platform like PCI or Law Court. We don't encourage any form of mob violence by any groups or any sections of people. Imphal Times seeks apology from the organization burning the newspaper, when we welcome any move against any newspaper for any derogatory statement they published as per the law of the land. After all Chief Minister of our state had expressed strong opposition to any form of Mob Culture/violence.*

## Challenges before media with special context to Manipur

This year the Press Council of India has chosen "Challenges before Media" as the key topic of discussion on the Press Day on November 16, which is today. The challenge before media in not one of homogeneity as media practitioners and producers in different places face different challenges even as some challenges are commonly faced at global or country level. Again within a country, different regions face different challenges unique to that space depending on its location and political condition. As journalists, across the globe we are governed by and defined by the role we have been assigned to carry out to give an output which has been predetermined in the interest of the society within which we function. Our existence is justified by our role to provide information within the society in which we function so that the society may as a whole use that information to advance forward in a manner which is just and equitable for all the members of the society. This also means we have to tell the truth and also suppress truth at the same time depending on how this truth will serve public. But this is a such a huge call of judgment and the line we walk is indeed very thin. We stand to be applause or condemned depending on which side of the line we walk. Yet both the contemporary applause and condemnation will have to stand the test of time before it gets written into history. You may be condemned today for a work done before its time only to be honoured later. The challenge, therefore is functioning within that define roles amidst constraints that have been thrown before us by time and space. The Challenges of present times are many and often goes beyond the realm of journalist practice and we need to encompass the method of production of the news that has seen huge change in last few decades. Today different mediums of dissemination of information coexist side by side each trying to overshadow one another. News gathering and news sharing has changed so much since the advent of the internet and mobile technology, the big question of survival of, what was traditional media, hangs large. The question seems to be bearing towards not "if" but "when". The new media in form of social media, which has given the erstwhile consumers of media, a direct handle in creating and disseminating information has also posed a global issue necessitating several nations to enact laws and

create specialize enforcing agencies for the new law. Cyber Crime is now the buzz word as nations are challenged with a burst of information flow that may not be functioning in realm of what we know as "journalistic ethic". On the other side just as traditional "brick and mortar" retail outlets have come under unprecedented competition from the online e-commerce platforms, so have the "paper and ink" information platform we call news papers. The Challenge, therefore, before both the journalists as well as those producing what the journalist bring in, is to change themselves to fit the new skill set and business model or risk being wiped out. For remote place like Manipur, the challenge is acute and magnified in some areas. With circulation of some popular Manipuri language dailies crossing just a little bit over 50 thousand, the news paper industry in Manipur is can be relatively said to be very small scale. The raw material used to produce these dailies come at much higher price and publishers are hard pressed to find a fine balance. With many smaller news papers failing to get access to high value advertisement of multinationals and the new national tax regime bringing News papers under GST tax regime, many may be on the verge of close down. Over this, the requirements of the Majithia Wageboard to pay the journalists a higher pay scale has come as triple whammy for the newspaper industry in Manipur. Another future that stares news papers in Manipur is the fading away of the Bengali Script and the emerging of young consumers who now reads in Meitei/Meetei script. It may be transitional problem but it may be huge disruptive factor in an already rough sea. Also this factor is going to be and being played out not in matter of years but across a generation. Straddling two scripts for a long period may prove too costly for many publishers. For the journalists, the challenge is one of continuity. Manipur having been in state of conflict for last seven decades, the toll on the journalists are heavy. The challenge to its freedom to do its duty is heavy and every journalist works with a different set of 'do's and don'ts' in the back of his or her mind. This set has nothing to do with the set that defines our ethical boundary. We have been killed, bombed, threaten, attacked and all we can do is close our flanks and strike compromise. No party whether state or non state actor, can provide us a space where we are free to comment, criticize, write with only our "ethical beacon" as our guideline. The

State is ever ready to use its "reasonable restriction" clause to hilt while other may chose "bare force". With the winds of "either you are with us or you are against us" phenomena sweeping across the globe, being journalist in Manipur is no easy task. Vested interest are hell bent of labelling news as "fake news" while "fake news" are being churn out through social media to which we have sometimes fallen prey to. Today we have access to news sources like never before but verification of these sources have become a challenge and we must tread with utmost care. Steep completion has often compelled us to rush in to lap up the inputs without proper verification. This is a mine field we must negotiate from day to day basis. The other challenge before us is defining "constructive" criticism. Every political and non political players who have made media their war field, welcomes what they call "constructive" criticism. But in reality they would rather bracket all criticism directed against it as "destructive". In this atmosphere of intolerance, the media which should be "campaigning" media for public good have been reduced to "safe" reporting. This is not a healthy trend. Another challenge before Manipur media is creating an "idea of Manipur". In a state which has divided the media into valley base media and hill base media based on which linguistic group they cater to, this is a tough challenge and both the media in the valley and hills need to rise up to occasion and create a concrete idea that we can truly say is Manipur. Working amidst fractured polity is a huge challenge. Competing ideologies and identity when put in "black and white" can often be a harrowing experience when you have an atmosphere of intolerance. Accepting populous agenda and playing up to the gallery can be commercially advisable but will come at a price. Compelling media to conform to majority or brute force will also come at a price. Rising above these factor and commercially surviving is a challenge media in Manipur have been facing. There have been several instances of news papers having been banned or blocked by groups on basis of its output. And to my knowledge, till date we have not had a single case taken up by the government to ensure no news paper is banned or blocked. The onus of getting the ban revoked fell on the media house who often have to strike a compromise. True, the media in Manipur or elsewhere are prone to mistakes and misreporting. But banning it or

**By: Yumnam Rupachandra (Editor-in-Chief: Impact TV) Secretary General, Editors Guild Manipur**

forcing it out of circulation can hardly be said to be the remedy. There are means and ways within the law of the land and it is the responsibility of the government to ensure that the law of land is followed. That being not the case, the media in Manipur works with its hands tied. Despite these challenges one two fronts, the scribes in Manipur and publishers continue their battle unrelentingly. The State can help without seeming to doling out favours to news papers and media house, but as a right of the industry to a level playing field. Government sponsored advertisement should not be taken as doles and government expect the media to treat it with kids globe for doing out advertisement. After all, why should it cost us more to produce same number of pages that our counterparts in Dimapur or Guwahati do? Why should have to pay more per kilo per kilometer for everything we bring here? State determined Mijithia Wageboard rate is good for us journalist. It can and will bring in more qualified journalists into the industry and improve the quality of media output. But state also must determine reasonable transport and raw material rates so that media houses can generate enough revenue so that it survive. From time taken to the price of transportation of a kilo per kilometre from Guwahati to Imphal for all printing materials far out weighs that of Guwahati from any cities of India. Not only those running newspaper industries in Manipur but all manners of industries in Manipur operate at much disadvantage and this has been the story till date. There fore the challenge before us, to sum up, is one of existence not to think about development. After all it is in the interest of the public that a healthy, responsible, sober, vibrant, courageous, fair, accurate, unbiased, campaigning and most importantly, a credible media exists. The challenge and roadmap before us in very clear. The society, the government and the media practitioners must take collective responsibility and ownership to ensure such a media exist. ( This write up is presented by the author in the seminar organised by DIPR, Govt. of Manipur on occasion of the National Press Day Celebration at 1st MR Banquet Hall)

Contd. from yesterday

## Statement by the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation Mr. Léo Heller

In taking steps forward in the realisation of the right to sanitation, India may involuntarily contribute to violating the fundamental principle of non-discrimination. Particularly given the generations-old practice of imposing sanitary tasks onto the lower castes, the growth in number of toilets raises concerns that manual scavenging will continue to be practiced in a caste-based, discriminatory fashion. Even in the case of Clean India Mission's preferred technology for excreta disposal—the twin-pit latrine—it is nevertheless questionable that manual scavenging as a discriminatory practice will be eliminated. Firstly, communication efforts will have to be extensive and continuous for many years in order for hundreds of millions of people to acquire and assimilate the knowledge of how

they function (the first pit is filled with waste, the pit is switched, the first pit is not touched for at least one year, and after that period the waste can be removed safely). Secondly, some studies have indicated that the construction of single pit latrines is actually on the rise across several Indian states, which will require even more unsafe work from manual scavengers. SDG 6.2 also requires equitable access and special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations. To uphold India's commitment to achieve the SDGs by 2030, the Government of India needs to monitor the progress towards targets 6.1 and 6.2. Moreover, to uphold India's human rights obligations, it must develop methodologies that take into account the normative contents of

the human rights to water and sanitation, and monitor inequalities in access to these services. India must adopt a national consensus on the next steps on water and sanitation policies so that no one is left behind. My official visit to India took place at the crucial juncture of India's rapid progress towards achieving the goal of eliminating open defecation through the Clean India Mission. I would like to take the opportunity to reiterate my praise to the Government of India for the important progress that has been achieved and emphasize that the Clean India Mission, together with all other concurrent activities in the water and sanitation sector, must incorporate a human rights perspective. This will be essential to safeguard the rights of its population and for India to meet

the targets of the Agenda 2030. In other words, better access to water and sanitation in India will strongly benefit its population and will help the country to meet the commitments of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Two-weeks is not sufficient to fully understand all aspects of the situation of human rights to water and sanitation in a country as big, diverse and complex as India. After the visit, I will gather further information, provide an analysis of and recommendation to the issues that I have mentioned today, together with other issues including but not limited to regulatory framework, privatization, national legislation recognizing the human rights to water and sanitation and disaggregation of monitoring data. (Concluded)

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