Editorial

Wednesday, July, 11, 2018

Something worrying

The idea of nation having one identity, one religion, one culture, one language promulgated by some self style son of mother India has created fear psychosis to various ethnic communities in the country. At a time when chauvinistic idealism of creating a nation of only one community is seen marching ahead, it is natural that each and every ethnic communities of the nation have reason to be feared. Because it is family first then come the society then it is the nation.

India was and is a nation of diverse people. The beauty of India is the existences of different ethnic people with diverse cultural people. It is important that if India has to prove the world as the most successful democratic country, the leaders and the so called self style son of the soil should tried to become real son of the soil by accepting that the concept of one religion, one culture and one language should not be followed in the Nation called India.

During Kargil war, two soldiers from this region, that too from a border village between Myanmar and India in the state of Manipur were martyred while fighting the Pakistani troops. Family of the two did not know the common language that their sons spoke with their fellow soldiers and moreover, the villagers of the two soldiers are fighting tough safeguarding their villages from intruders of the neighbouring villages. Yet they pray for the success of India.

The Indian administrators of the time was not the one which brought victory to the Kargil war, but it was the prayers of those thousand parents, whose sons were fighting for the country, but who never see Delhi, or who never understood the common language (Hindi) that make India success. Indeed, many critics are of the views that India is still in the process of nation building. But the reality is that India is already a nation. A nation of imagine community living under the same roof.

The peaceful co existence and communal harmony was put in dead danger with the rise of communal centric feudalism classes. They spew venom of hate feeling among the various communities for their mere selfish gain. Last few decades showed rise of many such feudalists and the rise of this class raises the feeling of enmity among the various community.

Coming back to the state of Manipur, the problem facing right now has similar roots. The force annexation is often pin point as the root of all sort of trouble here, but the reality is that the root of the entire problem facing in the state of Manipur is the chauvinistic attitude of the ruling government in the mainland India.

Instead of looking on the problem, the then ruler of the mainland India had sideline the real issue submitted by the then expert officials deputed by their government, they never tried anything to put a halt to the rise of the armed opposition group. But rather the then government incited hate feeling among various communities thinking that the same technique adopted the British ruler can suppressed any movement in the region.

Instead of taking into consideration and finding a means to end all sort of violent activism, all is eying to the solution of the problem of some UGs through appeasing policy.

Well Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev, the last President of USSR had understood the important of safeguarding each community and USSR was separated into various independent nations. Problem will be there as long as human kind exists. Because they think and act and those act are sometime negative from one's view point even if he or she thought it right from his viewpoints.

The fear factor right now is felt to everyone. Man dies and sacrifices for their children and nation. If the fear factor grows no one can guarantee any untoward incident.

PIB Imphal observes condolence

IT News
Imphal, July 11,

PIB, Imphal observed a condolence meeting at its office premises yesterday on demise of L. Shyamjai Singh, the then Assistant Information officer of this office. He expired on Monday at his residence in Imphal. Abdul Hamid, Deputy Director of this office led the officers and staffs while observing two minutes silence. One staff who was with him, described Shyamjai Singh's contribution to PIB, Imphal

L. Shyamjai Singh served as Assistant Information officer of this office from 1983 to 1998. Later, he was transferred to DAVP, Imphal and retired as Field Exhibition officer, Imphal.

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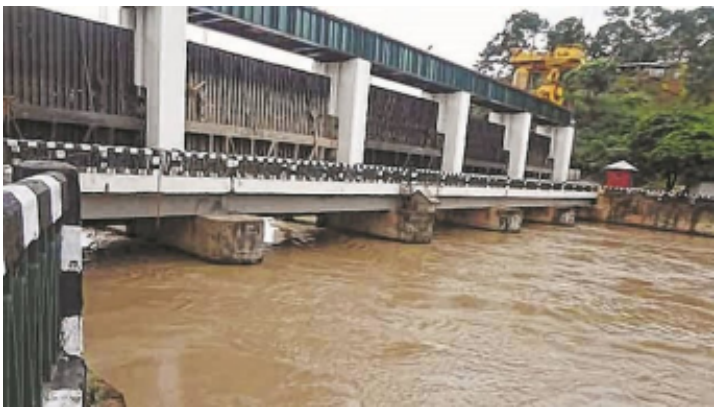
Contd. from previous issue

Ecological and social impacts of the Ithai Barrage

By - Ramananda Wangkheirakpam

The Barrage and the Pat



The Ithai Barrage was constructed in 1979 at the downstream of the Manipur River as a part of the Loktak Multipurpose Hydroelectric Project, to maintain sufficient water volume in an artificial reservoir. This river is connected to Loktak by Khordak River and is the only inlet/outlet for the Loktak. The water stored is transferred through a mountain range, west of Manipur valley to the narrow Leimatak River, which is at an elevation of 312 meters lower than Loktak (NHPC, 1994). "The main aim of the project was to regulate the water of Loktak where the rocky hump rises in the river bed near Ithai village" (ibid.). The report for the construction of the project was prepared in 1967 and the actual construction work commenced in 1971 under the control of Ministry of Irrigation, as a central sector project. The project was handed over to the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation on 1st January 1977. The construction was taken up under the Ministry of Irrigation and Power in 1971. It was executed by the National Hydro Power Corporation and commissioned in 1983 at an estimated cost of Rs. 115 crore, with a capacity of 105 MW of power by 3 units (each producing 35 MW) and to provide lift irrigation facilities for 24,000 hectares of land. (Singh, T.H., 1993) This dam has 'permanently' raised the water level of this wetland to 769.12 meters (measured at park area), and has blocked the natural flow of water to and/or from the wetland, and has altered the hydrologic cycle of this delicately balanced system. Before the construction of the Ithai barrage, the natural dredging process continuously cleared the silt that is brought down by the various streams and rivers from the valley and the hills. The roots of phumdi and other aquatic vegetation during lean season, i.e., when the water level reduces, touches the bottom for nutrients. During monsoon water level rises and with this the vegetation rises up bringing up the silt with them. Much of this silt gets washed by the current of the rivers, which flows out through the Manipur River. Along with these waters, some of the vegetation or the phumdi flows out through the river itself, serving as a natural control device to get rid of extra vegetation. This is the natural decay and regeneration, the life and death, of the Loktak. In the post-barrage scenario the water level is maintained, or at least sought to, at a particular level all throughout the year resulting in silting up of the wetland at an unprecedented rate. Other changes include gradual thinning of the floating phumdi (vegetation), endangering original aquatic vegetation, extinction of fish species, and destruction of fish migration and the increased spread of phumdi now covering almost half of the total area of the present water body. Remote Sensing studies conducted jointly by the Manipur Remote Sensing Application Center and the Space Application Center, Ahmedabad (1999) shows that the area under phumdi has increased from 10499 ha. In 1990 to 13506 ha. in 1994. Presently deposition of approximately 336,325 tons of silt annually is reported and as in other reservoirs this is 'more than the siltation rate expected when the project was conceived' (NEC, 88). According to the Loktak Lift Irrigation Project (Revised) Vol.1, May 1980, it will take about 160 years to reach the dead storage level. But considering the high rate of siltation, the life expectancy of the reservoir is feared to be much lower. The other problem associated with siltation, weed infestation and proliferation of the phumdi is the gradual reduction of the water holding capacity, which results in reduction of power generating capacity of the project.

The water pollution is due to the 'inflow of organo-chlorine pesticides and chemical fertilizers used in agricultural practices around the wetland. Further, municipal waste brought by Nambul River, soil nutrients from the denuded catchment areas and domestic sewage from the city settlements contributes to the slow death of this wetland. But recent study under the aegis of Government of Manipur indicates that the water is found to be chemically 'unpolluted'. It is instead microbial pollution that has exceeded in Keibul Lamjao area, beyond the permissible limits of drinking water. This finding indicates major health implications for the people who directly depend on the on the water for their daily need of water. On the degree of inundation it is reported that some 20,000 to 83,000 hectares of cultivable lands got submerged after the construction of Ithai Barrage. The Government's estimate of 20,000 hectares is considered an under statement, on the other hand the estimate done by S. Ibomcha of an area of 83,000 hectares seems to be slightly exaggerated. (Singh, N. L., 1993) However proper survey and estimation has not been conducted on the total inundated area, either by the Government or by others. One reason for the discrepancy in figures could be because the Loktak does not have a definite shoreline and its extent is primarily determined by rainfall pattern (N. Randhir Singh et. al. 1999). Nevertheless, it will be possible to come to a reliable estimate through an understanding of the dynamics, land use system and the cropping pattern of the population that surrounds the wetland. De Roy (1992) estimates that 30 % of them along the wetland got submerged and some 12,000 local people are now no longer able to use shallow fishing techniques".

The Loktak Khangpok People

Human habitation on the floating phumdi is claimed to have started many centuries back. The Gazetteer of Manipur of 1886 records that this wetlands is dotted with floating islands used by the inhabitants for fishing. In 1986 Singh, K.H. observed 207 Khangpok, and in 1993 the number of Khangpok increased to 688 (DRDA, 1993). Present estimate by the Loktak Development Authority (1999) is around 800 Khangpok. It should be noted here that this phenomenal increase occurred during the post-dam scenario. Among the Khangpok people, ownership of fishing grounds is based on the inheritance from their ancestors. Such grounds are collectively held and sale of these grounds is prohibited (Singh Ch. B, 1978). It is believed that disposing off the fishing grounds will invite the wrath of their ancestors. A non-member fisherman can legally fish on such areas, only by getting the permission of the elders of the descent group. But not all parts of the wetland are under the control of such patrilineal groups.

Loktak was the source for the indigenous species of fish for the valley population of Manipur. In 1992 it was estimated that almost 60% of the fish catch of Manipur came from Loktak alone[1], and more than 75% of the state's population consume fish, which is the main source of protein in Manipur. But of course the scenario has changed, as the 'indigenous' varieties are nonexistent in the post dam scenario. (Singh, K.S. 97; LDA, 99; De Roy, R. 1992). In turn the Government of Manipur has introduced exotic species. With the loss of the indigenous varieties of fish specie[2]s one also finds the degradation of the original varieties of aquatic vegetation, which in turn is substituted by alien varieties, much to the concern of the people who depend on these for their livelihood.

The conversion of the Loktak into an artificial reservoir resulted in a series of ecological changes and in the process marginalising the subsistence users of the pat. With the water level kept at a constant level and with the proliferation of the aquatic vegetation the traditional tools and method of fishing have changed. For example, the fishing nets were small and made of simple cotton threads but they now they are larger and made of nylon. The pressure to use bigger nets may have arisen due to increase in population of the fishing families and increased demand for fish. Over this, the need to use 'better' methods and tools is claimed by the fisherman, as the quantum of fish catch in the post-dam period has reduced tremendously. In order to sustain their livelihood they have to exploit more than they used to. To add to this, many of the displaced families from the inundated agricultural lands had to take up fishing, many of them by permanently living on floating huts now. Recent survey shows a two-fold increase of Loktak-Khangpok, which is indicative of such a shift in profession. The pressure felt by the Khangpok people due to the environmental groups can be observed from the protests by local population against demarcating a large portion of the wetland as Keibul Lamjao National Park. An undated and unsigned leaflet supposedly released by the Government of Manipur (A Note on Vandalism in Keibul Lamjao National Park) reports that about 600 villagers from Thanga Island attacked the patrolling officers and burnt down the Khangadong-Khuningthek wildlife check post when being treated as encroachers. What was not acknowledged by the state is that reeds with other vegetation found inside the demarcated zone are used for various purposes, and keeping out the traditional users resulted into conflict with the government. The resultant conflict between the communities living on and around the pat with those interested in 'conserving' the wetland is yet to be manifested at a larger level. Living perpetually or at least most of the year on water evolves a waste disposal system very different from what is practised on land. There is no space provided for toilet or for bath, and other waste from the kitchen. The wetland acts both as a vast space for waste that comes from different sources and as well as the source of drinking water. Before the construction of the dam the natural movement of water took care of water quality. Even the waste brought down by rivers from the city was largely taken care by the same process. But with the dam, stagnant water, which accumulates the waste, both from the Loktak based people and of the city dwellers, become hazardous for consumption. Because of dwindling natural resources, various changes are taking place in the political economy of Loktak-Khangpok people. The phenomenal increase of Khangpok population between 1986 and 1999 occurred together with the sharp increase in the number of fish farms[3] in the district of Bishnupur. There are no reliable available data on the number of families whose land have been inundated, yet an approximate figure can be arrived at by observing the increase in number of Khangpok population and the people now engaging in fish farms in the inundated areas. Many of the new fishers and Khangpok dwellers at Loktak are those displaced by the project. This increasing population of Loktak-Khangpok families may create further demand on the already depleted resources (as a result of the barrage).

(To be continued)

(This article was first published in the book called "Loktak Lake And Manipuri Lifeworld: Putting The Ramsar Sites To Inconsequential Abyss" edited by Shukhdeba Sharma Hanjabam, Aheibam Koireng Singh and Rajkumar Ranjan Singh and published by Conflict and Human Rights Studies Network- Manipur and Centre for Manipur Studies, Manipur University)