

Editorial

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Alarming State of Students' Life in Manipur; Schools and Hostels need (State) Intervention

The ongoing case of the suspicious death of Babysana in the boarding of Standard Robarth Higher Secondary School has brought to light a serious concern for the life and mental and physical health of the students of Manipur.

Concerning the toxic atmosphere of the school and its hostel/boarding recently surfaced, it reflects an alarming situation gravitating towards a collapsing education system.

Expressed by its ex-students, the school has a history of its teachers and wardens physically assaulting, abusing, and mentally harassing its students. To top it all, the school has also been exposed for running a fake residential school under the same name with no valid permit. The given scheme of things pose concerning questions about the availability of such exploitative environment and toxicity in other schools and hostels in Manipur.

How many more such fake residential schools are in Manipur? Do all the schools and hostels follow proper guidelines of running an educational institution? How many lack the required facilities to run a school or hostel/boarding? Are there enough teaching and non-teaching staffs to address the academic and emotional needs of the students? Most importantly, how do the teachers and school authorities treat their students? After the uncovering of series of abusive events in Standard Robarth School in the past till now, there has also been a case of a teacher locking a student inside a classroom as a punishment a few days back.

The recent case is the 17-year old student of Royal Academy of Advance Learning, studying in class 10, found dead by drowning in a pond near the hostel he was staying. The cases of death and physical abuse seem to be accompanied by cases of sexual assault as well. A case of sexual assault in Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya by its principal has also been filed. However, attempts to sweep it under the rug have been exposed, and charge sheets have been filed against two individuals. To everyone's surprise, one of the accused is Sumatibala Ningthoujam, chairperson of the Manipur Commission for Protection of Child Rights. Looking at the perpetrators and people involved in covering up such crimes, it does seem like the students of Manipur are in grave danger and not in the right hands.

On the other hand, Government of Manipur has just sent out the notification regarding the Regulatory Guidelines for Hostels of Educational Institutions for Children, which was formulated by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights in 2018. Even the notification states that it has been adopted in some schools/institutions. It is August 2019, now. Why is it so that the Government of Manipur took so long to even send out this notification, let alone an order for the implementation of the same? Why did it take the death of a 14-year old and an outrage of the people to take this simple yet important step? Is it the incompetency or negligence of the state government? The negligence is quite certain, so much so that even the official notification writes "The National Commission for Child Rights (NCPDR)", missing out the "Protection of". Now, it is the need of the hour for the concerned authorities to check if all the schools and hostels are valid, if they have mandatory facilities, if they are following the guidelines, and if they are violating the Right to Education, especially by physically punishing and mentally harassing the students. Apart from all the academic routines, at this point in time, it is also of immense importance for every school and hostel to have proper counselling sessions for the students in order to hear their grievances and address their needs before the issues go out of hands. It is also time that the authorities question and keep an eye on the behaviour of the teachers and wardens. Therefore, in order to protect the future and for the well-being of the students, it is necessary to put our education system in the right place with the right people.

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In Kashmir, Clampdown on Movement and Communication Fuels Anxieties

Courtesy The Wire
By: Kaisar Andrabi

Soon after Union home minister Amit Shah introduced a bill in the Rajya Sabha to end Jammu and Kashmir's special status under Articles 370 and 35A, and moved a resolution to bifurcate the state, people in the Valley, having no outside communication, learnt of the development through the radio and Doordarshan TV.

The day before, people had lost their internet connectivity at 11 pm, and by midnight, the cellular network had also vanished. When they woke up on the morning of August 5, Kashmir had lost its special status in the Indian constitution and was bifurcated into two union territories – Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

The Centre had made all the preparations on the ground before the home minister's speech. There were heavy deployments of forces on the roads which directed the people not to come out.

All shops, business establishments and educational institutes remained closed while streets wore an utterly deserted look.

Twenty-three-year-old Younis Ahmad, a resident of Zaldagora area in downtown Srinagar, stepped out from his two-storey house and said in anger: "This was their [government's] actual plan. See how they created fear amongst the people and cheated us? They will crush us completely now."

Strict restrictions on ambulances and medical facilities

Amid the chaos and anger, one could see few people sitting outside shops, looking confused and discussing what the announcement by the Centre would change in the state. "Me teer to figure ye kya kurmo (Make me understand what they announced)," said 42-year-old Waseem Ahmad from among a group of people in Zaldagora area. As a boy began explaining the developments, his first reaction was: "Gov makloo (Everything is finished now)." He then added that many people in the state probably did not have an actual idea about what the government had announced, else there would have been some harsh reactions.

His claim was clarified by 26-year-old Aasif Nabi, a student at Amar Singh College in Srinagar, who said, "Don't you know there is a huge number of government forces everywhere? How do you expect reactions? If there would be any such move, there will be huge casualties – like in 2016."

For people like Aasif Nabi, the Centre's decision has breached the trust of the people as, before the announcement, they had been assured by governor Satya Pal Malik that there was no proposal to revoke Articles 370 and 35A. Malik, in his statement, had said to the people of the Valley that, "Unnecessary panic is being created by linking this to all kinds of other issues. A pure security measure is being mixed up with issues with which it has no connection."

"By this move, they have created more gap among the people on the ground. They snatched our identity and slaughtered the trust of the masses," said Javid Ahmad, a resident of central Kashmir's Budgam district. He further added that "It seems the entire Kashmir is burning and there will be no one to hear us now."

Meanwhile, over the last three days, there have been protests and clashes in some parts of the downtown area of Srinagar, leaving scores of youths with pellet injuries. In the ophthalmology ward of SMHS on August 6, out of the five patients admitted with pellet wounds, the youngest – having pellets in both his eyes – was screaming. After a brief pause, his



attendant said pleading anonymity: "The situation right now in the Valley seems hot. There might be worse incidents than this in other areas, but who knows?"

Doctors posted at SMHS hospital told *The Wire* that the rush of patients during these tense situations was not surprising: "We have been witnessing this now for years and during such circumstances, our first priority remains to control the anger of the attendants. The only problem we have faced is of consulting specialised doctors who are needed on time. Due to the unavailability of communication, it becomes difficult," said Dr Ifat Mir.

Migration of non-locals and prolonged misery

Union minister Shah's claim in his speech of bringing people closer to the Valley seems to have already been upended. According to the 2011 Census, around six lakh non-local labourers are working in Kashmir. Soon after the Central government's decision, many began

checkpoints and the forces were not allowing us to proceed, citing reasons of security issues. It was very difficult for us to reach here. We took alternative routes that were too vulnerable," he said.

Jahangir Khan, 35, a resident of Nishat area, along with his nine-year-old son Basit, said that he had been at the hospital since Sunday. Due to the communication blackout, he had no idea about the situation back at home. "There have been announcements by the forces with hand-held speakers asking people to refrain from moving out of their homes. I have not witnessed such strictness even during Burhan Wani's uprising. I am out of cash since Tuesday morning and I am wondering how I will communicate with my family about the issue. I'm hungry and blank," he sighed.

Several youths in the Valley, however, told *The Wire* that the government's decision will not stop them from fighting for their right to self-determination. A student of

inside our houses for more than 55 hours now and there is no hope of any development in communication. My 21-year-old son is studying in Jammu, and since Sunday night, we have had no communication with him. He also doesn't know whether we are alive or dead," said 51-year-old Aijaz Ahmad Sofi, a government school teacher who resides in Khanayara area.

In a similar situation, 40 girls residing at a private hostel in Rajbagh area were restless and frightened about how they would contact their families. The owner of the guest house, Parvaiz Ahmad, told *The Wire* that the girls at his hostel are safe but the complete silence across Kashmir had led to fear.

Seventeen-year-old Asmat Jan, a resident of north Kashmir's Kupwara district, said that soon after she got to know about the removal of Article 370 and Article 35 A, she began feeling restless.

"Our teachers at the Aakash Academy went back to Delhi after they were ordered to leave Kashmir 'as soon as possible'. We don't know if they will come back or not," said Saqiba Jan, a class XII student from south Kashmir's Anantnag district.

Other girls sitting around her added that "We have no idea about the outside world and are feeling worried; will we be able to go back to our homes? We are missing our families."

On August 8, *HuffPost India* reported that a 17-year-old boy had died after being cornered by the paramilitary forces while he was playing on Monday. *HuffPost* also noted that it's correspondent's interviews with authorities at the Maharaja Hari Singh Hospital, had revealed that as many as 13 people in the treatment centre had suffered pellet injuries as well.

According to another report in the *Indian Express*, on August 7, as alleged by his family, a 17-year-old youth, Osaib Altaf died after he jumped into the Jhelum river when he was being chased by security personnel in Srinagar.

Meanwhile, as per reports, many mainstream leaders have been detained or put under preventive arrest.

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leaving. A huge number of non-locals who have been working in the Valley for over a decade were seen standing outside Srinagar's tourist centre waiting for transport to leave. "We have never seen anything like this. We have witnessed almost three uprisings in Kashmir, but the situation right now seems thicker than ever. It's scary and we want to save our lives," said 25-year-old Shahansha from West Bengal who had been living in Nawakadal area of downtown Srinagar since 2008.

The situation worsened on August 5, when several areas of the city were blocked with concentrated barbed wires, leaving patients – coming in through ambulances and private vehicles from different corners of the Valley for treatment – to suffer. An octogenarian, Ghulam Ahmad Lone, who belong to Tral area of south Kashmir's Pulwama district – some 35 kilometres away from the capital city – was sitting outside the emergency ward of SMHS Hospital wearing ragged slippers. He told *The Wire* that his daughter, 38-year-old Shaheena Jan had some health complications and the local hospital had referred them to Srinagar. However, due to strict security reasons, they had been frisked by the government forces at several places.

"After every 100 meters, there were

Government Degree College Pulwama said on the condition of anonymity: "This could become another reason for several youths to join militancy as they have realised that India has been playing with their emotions and has shown them false dreams," he said.

Anxiety after communication blackout

The sudden communication blackout in the Valley by the authorities raised anxieties of scores of parents whose children are currently studying outside the region. "We have been sieged

