

Editorial

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Threatened future and the way out

Even as the state is engulfed in the sordid death of a young girl in her school hostel and the theories surrounding the circumstances, as well as increasing demand for handing over the case to the CBI, recent developments indicate that the efforts of the state investigating agencies are nearing the completion of their work and coming out with the whole truth.

The whole state is waiting with bated breath and every passing day is an added turmoil for the family of the deceased, the students of the school and indeed for the people who would take nothing but the befitting conclusion to the tragic event. As and when the culprit/s are identified, what then? The law must ensure that every single person complicit to the crime be tried and punished to the harshest degree allowed by law. What started out with hopes and dreams of a bright and successful future ended in a coffin with tears and abject frustration for Babysana and her family. Such tragedy should not be allowed to repeat ever again. And those entrusted with ensuring the functioning of law and order in the state including the elected representatives who are overseeing the implementation of such rules must take necessary measures.

Preliminary investigation revealed various deficiencies in maintaining the guidelines laid down under National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) Regulatory Guidelines for Hostels of Educational Institutions for Children 2018. It would be of paramount importance for the state chapter to take up strict reviews and inspections on a regular basis to ensure compliance of the same.

Meanwhile, the Women and Child Development (WCD) Ministry announced formulation of guidelines for children hostels, prescribing a minimum standard of care that includes adequate safety and periodic inspections. The Ministry has directed the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) to draft guidelines in consultation with stakeholders and plans are afoot to have these guidelines notified under the Juvenile Justice Act or the JJ Rules.

To ensure safety and wellbeing of children at school hostels, the WCD Ministry will be sharing the guidelines with the Ministry of Human Resource Development for dissemination among schools providing boarding facility. The WCD ministry has also notified all states and Union Territories to undertake inspection of all Child Care Institutions and related facilities and ensure their registration. The minister added that registration under the JJ Act is also mandatory for all Child Care Institutions (CCIs) running in the form of hostels.

The pertinent question here is: are more rules and guidelines really necessary? Many are of the opinion that the current regulatory regime is perverse—over-regulation in letter leading to a culture of graft and poor governance in practice. With more than 250,000 private schools and counting spread everywhere, and our current sociopolitical culture, any regulatory mechanism will be far from perfect. Regulation of schools is the domain of state governments which should ensure that the regulatory mandate must be limited to only the minimal essentials and genuine philanthropic private initiative must not be stifled. Regulation needs have only two goals. One, that all private and public schools meet standards in basic academic and operational aspects. The other goal should be to protect the public from the exploitative practices of schools.

The state must form an independent, quasi-judicial school regulatory body. An independent body protected from political and bureaucratic interference will enable efficiency through focus, improve probity by forcing transparency, and increase accountability. Such bodies will not be perfect, but would be a substantial improvement. The school regulator must demand that schools be not-for-profit, as required by law. And for substantiating this, annual financial audits, executed with the same rigour as in companies, must be required. Accounting standards need to be developed for schools with the objective of eliminating practices that are often used for skimming money from such not-for-profit entities. A grievance redressal mechanism for parents should be made available on relevant issues such as safety, stability of fees and other financial matters. The quasi-judicial status of the regulator will enable this.

For a good, equitable education there is no substitute for a robust public system.

A regulatory mechanism will reduce rampant exploitation of the public and help improve educational quality and ensure safety of the students who are at the core of these whole exercises.

A sincere and determined mind should be the starting point of such an endeavor which can protect the threatened future of the state.

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Tourism Festivals & Tourists in Manipur.

By: Sanjenbam Jugeshwor Singh Faculty, NIELIT, Imphal

Manipur, with its salubrious climate, topographical mystique, cultural heritage and sublime natural beauty has an enormous tourism potential. In fact, the state of Manipur has immense tourism and commercial potential and destined to be a commercial hub and tourist hotspots in South-East Asia. Thus, developing Manipur's tremendous tourism potential could help generate a range of employment opportunities for the local people which may reduce the burden of unemployment problem to a great extent in Manipur.

Manipur is known for its sporting talents, especially in the field of Boxing, Football, Archery, mixed Martial arts along with our traditional games like Mukna, MuknaKangjei, Kang Sanaba, Thang Ta, SaritSara, YubiLakpi apart from Polo which was originated from Manipur. Similarly the cultural talents in the field of music (Pena, Khunung Eshai, KhonjomParva etc.), dances (Ras Lila, LeimalJagoi, Thougajagoi, Khamba ThoibJagoi and many other tribal dances), drama, Sumang Lila, cinema and many other art forms are unique in the state of Manipur. Not only these it won't be exaggerated to say that Manipur has a unique festival in every month, like Holi (Yaosang) in the month of March, Lai Haraoba, generally in the month of April/May, RathaYatra in the month of June/July, Krishnajarma/RadhaJarma in the month of August/September, DrugaPuja, Diwali & Ningol Chaokouaba in the month of October/November, Christmas, Kut and Gan Ngai in the month of December/January. All these are very important components for the attraction of tourists. In this line, with a good hope and high

expectation, Manipur Government is putting maximum efforts at its wits-end and has been organizing Manipur SANGAI TOURISM FESTIVAL since 2010 to draw the tourists. Over and above to this, government of Manipur sponsored in organizing SHIRUI FESTIVAL at Ukhrul and BARAK FESTIVAL at Senapati.

At the same time, under the aegis of State Horticulture Department, many horticulture product based festivals like Orange Festival, Lemon Festival, Pineapple Festival, Chile Festival, Ginger Festival etc. have been organizing at different places of Manipur. These Festivals not only aimed to promote and encourage the farmers to increase yield of the agro and horticulture based products but also aimed to attract domestic as well as foreign tourists and foreign buyers and investors. But a big question mark is that: whether these Festivals achieved its objectives and motto set for or not? It will be right to say that despite State Tourism Department and other line Department of the Government of Manipur organized a number of tourism cum product based festivals, it fails to achieve its goal and objective. One reason could be; these festival are something like VIP show case rather public oriented one as opined by many.

According to the latest report from the State Tourism Department, in 2018-2019, altogether 1,75,826 (1,66,032 domestic and 9,794 Foreign) tourists came to Manipur, which is the highest number of tourists landed in Manipur in the last 10 years. In 2017-2018, altogether 1,68,270 (4,483 domestic & 3,787 Foreign) tourists came in Manipur as reported by Tourism Department.

At present, the role of the private sector in the state is minimal. Most of the private participants choose to stay out of Manipur due to lack of infrastructure support and security concern. Unless the Department or authority concern is honest enough to deliver all the necessities to outreach to the stakeholders concern, the effort will be a futile attempt.

For the current year 2019-2020, from January to May, altogether 25,028 (23,015 domestic & 2009 Foreign) tourists have been in Manipur. From 2012-13 to 2017-18, only 25,975 tourists had been in Manipur. Again, seeing the data or record of the Tourism Department about the arrival of tourists in the State, the hope of State Government in the Tourism sector is still a deplorable one. To attract the attention of national and international tourists, it is imperative to ensure safe and secure environment along with necessary investment in building a modern hospitality infrastructure. But all these requirement for the tourists are not seen as of now in Manipur. Political instability, horrible law & order problem, insurgency problem, insecurity due to AFSPA, frequent bandh and blockade could also be the factors

to repel the tourists from Manipur. Another inconvenience to the foreign tourists is that though the Protected Area permit/Restricted area permit has been removed, foreign tourists need to register to the District authority of the District where he/she is, for every 24 hours. At the same time, the role of private sector is also very important to attract the tourists. At present, the role of the private sector in the state is minimal. Most of the private participants choose to stay out of Manipur due to lack of infrastructure support and security concern. Unless the Department or authority concern is honest enough to deliver all the necessities to outreach to the stakeholders concern, the effort will be a futile attempt.

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Pakistan Faces a Colossal Crisis, But It Can be Saved

Courtesy The Wire By: Imtiaz Alam

Responding to the enormity of crises faced by the Pakistani state and society, leading conscientious civil society activists along with mainstream and Left-oriented stalwarts have come up with an alternative progressive democratic agenda that will safeguard peoples' rights, uphold the supremacy of a truly representative system and ensure social security for the downtrodden masses.

The agenda seems to be broad-based and inclusive. But it is not sufficient to meet its challenges until all progressive and consistent democratic forces forge a unity, shed their past mistakes and rise above expedient party interests.

Democratic transformation, economic survival and the paradigm shift from a national security state to a social welfare-inclusive federation pose greater challenges and warrant much greater mobilisation of masses if any meaningful change is to be brought in their lives. More than the opposition's current expedient objectives, at stakes are much bigger issues that are going to define the future of the country.

There can be no doubt that Pakistan is now faced with a colossal crisis. A dependent and fragile economic base can no more take the burden of a disproportionately heavy superstructure of a national security state. The International Monetary Fund's recipes, without bringing changes in the power-structure and moving towards a people-centric development paradigm, cannot salvage the crisis of a dependent and uncompetitive economy, despite an unprecedented doze of foreign loans in recent years. The loans will further worsen a vicious debt-trap.

The crisis has further been exacerbated by political disruptions. Despite serious shortcomings of the past two elected governments, the decade old "democratic transition" is

degenerating into a de-facto authoritarian regime, dictated by autocratic forces behind the façade of a sham populist dispensation.

This has, in turn, resulted in the degradation of constitutional rule, parliamentary system, federal structures, authenticity of judicial independence, due process of justice, erosion of institutional neutrality and in sanctity of constitutional limitations on the conduct of various institutions. For example, thanks to the extraordinary extension of Article 183, judicial "activism" in the last decade witnessed Chief Justices Iftikhar Chaudhry and Saqib Nisar almost taking over the domain of the executive and packing up of successive governments, besides causing trillions of rupee losses to the national exchequer.

In the post-martial law civilian period, instead of relinquishing their extended dominant role during military rules, the security apparatuses have persisted in keeping and extending a much broader roles as if they are the state unto themselves. They exercise power beyond what the constitution has strictly constrained to the matters of security, into being an arm of the civilian executive.

As the autocratic domain extends to every sphere of national life, the freedoms and civil or human rights won earlier through protracted struggles have been drastically curtailed. Due to an inverse application of a "hybrid warfare" pretext, freedom of expression, dissent and media freedom in particular, became the first victim of the long arms of the state. All kinds of media have been gagged and are being overtly censored as corporate interests coalesce in and thousands of working journalists have been rendered jobless. While critical voices are being silenced, sinner sections of social media activists are being ostracised. Peoples' peaceful rights and internally displaced peoples' protests and efforts for lawful treatment of "missing persons" are being maligned and

suppressed. The great sufferers are women and minorities, whose rights are being trampled upon.

Baluch people are continuing to suffer at the hands of conflict and no political solution through dialogue is in sight, even though this was envisaged by the National Action Plan. What this stalemate has left is space for hostile powers to meddle with their nefarious designs.

The genuine complaints of the tribal people of the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), who have been dealt immense losses in terms of life and property in the last four decades, are not being amicably addressed.

Consequently, the process of the democratic integration of FATA into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remains a captive to bureaucratic stranglehold. Political adversaries and critics are being subjected to a witch hunt using a method of orchestrated "accountability"—which stands exposed after the Judge-Tagatep. Federalist structures and the due rights of federating units are being pushed to the margin in contravention of the 18th Amendment. The provinces are being run either through remote control, as are Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, or being subjugated through arbitrary and discriminatory ways, as were Baluchistan and the erstwhile FATA, or deprived, as in the case of Sindh.

As isolationist foreign and security policies continue to keep the country in a tight corner in international fora, including the Financial Action Task Force, the country remains locked up in perpetual conflict with all its neighbours. Despite a national consensus on a National Action Plan and military operations, the existing threat of terrorism and extremism to society continues to hurt the nation since all aspects of the Plan could not be implemented.

Successive governments and authorities have avoided ideologically taking on religious

extremism. They have rather continued to use various sectarian outfits and militant proxies to their own tactical advantage. There has been no progress on curriculum and Madaris reforms due to the pressure of clergy. These are the concerns of civil society. These have persuaded them to call upon the people of Pakistan and all its democratic and progressive forces to pursue the following agenda:

1. The sovereignty of the people and their civil, social, economic and human rights, including freedom of expression, as enshrined in the international covenants and the Constitution and unfettered right to elect their true representatives through a free, fair and un-manipulated franchise must be actualised under a fully independent and powerful Election Commission, as opposed to the farcical and controversial electoral exercises of the past.

2. There is no alternative to a constitutional, civilian, democratic and peoples' rule. This should be reflected through a sovereign parliament, autonomous provincial assemblies and authoritative local governments, participatory federations and provincial autonomy, subordination of all institutions of the state to the will of the people (parliament), and a responsible and truly representative government serving the interests of the downtrodden people of Pakistan.

3. The trichotomy of power and separation of legislative, judicial and executive arms of the state have to be observed with a sovereign parliament without any encroachment by any institution in the domain of other institutions. All unconstitutional incursions by the state institutions, such as by the security institutions into matters other than security, and unrestrained judicial "activism" that undermines legitimate governance, must be stopped forthwith.