

# Editorial

Wednesday, September 11, 2019

## Climate Crisis, People, and the State

The recent Amazon Rainforest disaster has brought back to global platform the issue of climate crisis and the survival of its indigenous people. Burning at a record rate continuously, it is an environmental catastrophe and should be a concern for all across the globe. It houses 10% of the planet's diversity and helps in stabilizing the global climate. Lately, Manipur has also been experiencing soaring temperature with unbearable heat. According to a report from Environment Directorate of Manipur, Chandel district has recorded its highest 40 degree Celsius in the month of May. If it continues at this rate, it is likely that people may not be able to go outdoor in summer. 20 years back, May season's favourite outfit for the people in the state of Manipur was either a jacket or a sweater. Today, we cannot even wear a full casual shirt or a pair of long pants. The mercury is rising and by next year, it could be worse. During late 90's, when people, particularly the environmentalists, showed serious concern to the rise in the mercury, the temperature recorded in Manipur on April 14, 1999, was 36 degree Celsius. That was the hottest day. April normally was most of the pleasant days during 80s. The climatic condition was excellent. The temperature those days was much lower than 30 degree Celsius. Months with maximum temperature was during June and July. Everyone in their 40's knows that the mercury level during the hottest month here in the state did not exceed 35 degree Celsius. As of today, there are no report of any death due to the rise of temperature, but for sure newspapers of tomorrow will have to reserve space for news about deaths because of the scorching heat.

Well, whom are we going to blame for this kind of alarming events? Is the drastic change in the climatic condition a natural phenomenon or is it because of the kind of crime committed by the human being? What is the role of the state and its policies in this crisis? - A matter everyone needs to ponder. Leaving aside the environmentalists, it has now become a fashion for the ministers and bureaucrats to talk about environment. A selfie while planting trees in their best outfit seems to be a matter of pride for them. According to environmentalists, the geographical character of our state is perhaps a boon. The climate of Imphal and other valley districts are maintained by the hills surrounding the valley. As for the Imphal Valley, it is the Langol Hill Range and the number of trees on it that has been controlling the carbon emission. The Khoubrui Hill range, the Baruni etc. too are also important factors that control the climate of the state. Saying so, it was the number of wild trees that grow on those hills that actually controlled the climate. With no trees on the mentioned Hill ranges, they, too, will become helpless in maintaining the climatic condition of the state.

Is it the common men that has to be blamed for the cutting of the trees? Well, common man always struggle for life and they do whatever is available to feed themselves as well as their family. Those in the villages are left with no choice but to cut down the trees for earning their livelihood. For instance, the construction of Mapthel dam had destroyed large areas of fields, livelihood and settlement of various villagers, resulting in cutting of trees for survival. As for holding top job in the government and those ruling the state, they know that trees should be saved. Crore and crore of rupees have been spent to make plants grow at barren land of the state. They also know that until a proper planning is taken up by framing a policy for those who are depending on the forest product, the hills of the state, which had been controlling the Imphal valley, will look barren. So, it is definitely the government that is responsible for the kind of destruction of forest that has been taking place in the state.

Seizure of truck loads of woods is also a means to help in protecting the forest, but if it is done for photo session and publicity matters, then Manipur may perhaps become a desert-like state someday.

Government authority's lack of commitment is reminded as the recent plantation of saplings by volunteer of Manipuri Students' Federation at the peak of the Koubru Hill will make no sense.

Villagers of Koubru should be rehabilitated so that they themselves started protecting trees in the hill range. On how to change the mindset of the villagers, it is left upto the bureaucrats to think on it, otherwise, what is the use of spending so much public money for each of them in the form of paying salary and allowances?

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# No School bag day in Manipur



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**It is great to learn that on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2019 Government of Manipur Secretary of Education(S) Department issued an office Memorandum No-29/22/2019-SE(S) Misc.; that every working Saturday should be "NO SCHOOL BAG DAY" for all students from class I to VIII in all schools of Manipur. It's great initiative but there are still miles to go to completely remove the heavy burden carried by our children.** Why? Doctors say, carrying heavy school bags cause neck and back pain, shoulder strain and fatigue amongst other. Because when they carry a heavy bag what they do is they tend to bend down too much and they look little short, otherwise it will have not much of effect. When a backpack is too heavy, the body will have to compensate by tilting forward to counter the effect of gravity. This will alter the alignment of the child's posture and increase the strain on the spine. It is said that school children's backpack should not exceed more than 10% of their body weight. Research has proven that carrying heavy school bags will have adverse impact on students' health as they enter into adulthood. The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons recommends students to carry only 10% of their body weight. For instance, if a child weighs 20kg, then the child should carry only around 2kg of weight. Children use backpacks every day to get their books back and forth from the school. Many students carry larger school bags with excessive weight. Some parents help carry the school bags, most carry on their own.

Much has changed in the school for the better of our students. Ways of teaching and learning have changed. School environments have also transformed to absorb the changes in teaching and the learning. Despite these changes, one thing has remained unchanged that is the excessive weights of school bags that our students lug to their schools. It is common sight to see students carrying school bags that are unnecessarily heavy, that often larger than their backs. Scientific studies offer a range of adverse implications on students, as they grow into adulthood from carrying heavy school bags. It is time that parents and policy makers also understand both the short-and long term impacts as reported in these studies, because our students carry their bags from home to school and back, six days a week, nine months a year, for thirteen years of their developmental period.

Some of the commonly discussed effects are: fatigue; muscle strain, back pain, distortion of spine's natural curves, rounding of the shoulders, poor body posture and short attention spans. Heavy school bags are also known causes of cervical and lumber pains. Convincing claims also points out that reduction and shortening of the lumber spines in proportion to the weight of the school bag will result in overloading and degenerative changes in spine. Such changes are known causes of back pain in later year. It has also been reported that growth points in the bones from which bones grow will be damaged by carrying excessively heavy school bags resulting in abnormal or stunted growth. The above impacts are alarming in various ways. Firstly, the impact will have a huge burden on our health system and some studies terms these impacts as healthcare time bombs. Secondly, the toll of excessive weight of school bags on our school children will result in underdeveloped human capital, because some studies have made persuasive claims of casualty between healthy bodies and high

student achievement. While our country is unusually quiet on the silent struggle of our students to carry heavy school bags, other countries have not only recognized the socio-economic problems associated with their students carrying heavy school bags but also implemented diverse solution to the problem. In Australia some state governments provide their public with advisory information about the risks of heavy school bags, ways of reducing the risks, alternative to carrying school bags and ways of reducing the number of books, students carry. In India, some courts have issued orders to state governments to formulate policies for advertising students from carrying heavy school bags. In USA, health specialists have recommended the critical ratio of the weight of school bag to the students' body weight. In the United Kingdom, health specialists have called for a review of the weights students carry. In some countries the media awakened the public on the issue. All these concerns show that the impact of carrying heavy school bags by our students need quick intervention as the concerns are no less relevant to our country and the state of Manipur.

When the body weights and weights of school bags of one hundred students from middle secondary school in the country were randomly measured, the average weight of the school bags that the students carry to their school was 17% of their average body weights of 40.20%. This falls outside of the recommended range of 10-15% of the body weight. As the number of participants is small, this finding may be only the tip of iceberg of diverse ill effects of heavy school bags that our students experience on a daily basis as they traverse between their school and dwellings over a few thousand meters of rough uneven foot paths. The risk is too obvious to pretend not to know. It is a fact that students cannot go to the school without books. Therefore

health experts do not say that the students should not carry school bags. The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons recommends that it is alright for students to carry less than 10-15% of their body weight as mentioned in the beginning of this write up. This implies that our children can still carry some books in their school bags, which will allow them to complete their home tasks and other extended learning activities within their permissible limit of the weight of the school bag. Many countries have implemented many measures. Some countries provide students with locker facilities in their class rooms for keeping their books. Some countries requires school to formulate students home work time tables so that students get home work in no more than two subjects in a day. According to experts, children need proper rest and sufficient sleep for their all-round physical & mental development. **It is fact that, in almost all the schools in Manipur, heavy home works are being given to these young & tender children. On the contrary, in Manipur, home work are being done either by parents or tuition teachers. Parents are happy when class teachers gave good marks for the home work done either by parents or tuition teacher. But is that mark, the mark obtained by real works of the children? Nobody cares.** Some countries mandate schools to develop class time tables to use only some subjects on a day, not all the subjects. Some countries provide specifications for the size of note books. These remedial measures have no less potential in our country as well to address the ill effects of carrying excessively heavy school bag by our students. Our children, born in the Gross National Happiness (GNH) country, should not learn happily in the GNH-oriented schools but also develop into adulthood with healthy bodies, free of the ill effects of heavy school bags as they graduate from their schools.

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## Justice Deepak Gupta: Law of Sedition Needs to be Toned Down if Not Abolished

16. Cartoons or caricatures are visual representations, words or signs which are supposed to have an element of wit, humour or sarcasm. Having seen the seven cartoons in question drawn by the third respondent, it is difficult to find any element of wit or humour or sarcasm. The cartoons displayed at a meeting held on 27 November, 2011 in Mumbai, as a part of movement launched by Anna Hazare against corruption in India, were full of anger and disgust against corruption prevailing in the political system and had no element of wit or humour or sarcasm. But for that reason, the freedom of speech and expression available to the third respondent to express his indignation against corruption in the political system in strong terms or visual representations could not have been encroached upon when there is no allegation of incitement to violence or the tendency or the intention to create public disorder."

I think our country, our constitution and our national emblems are strong enough to stand on their own shoulders without the aid of the law of sedition. Respect, affection and love is earned and can never be commanded. You may force or compel a person to stand while the National Anthem is being sung but you cannot compel him within his heart to have respect for the same. How does one judge what is inside a person's mind or in his heart? In Chhattisgarh, a 53 years old man was arrested on charges of sedition

for allegedly spreading rumours over social media about power cuts in the state. It was said that this was done to tarnish the image of the then government running the State. The charge was absurd and again highlights the misuse of power.

In Manipur, a journalist made a vituperative attack on the chief minister of the state and used totally unparliamentary language against the prime minister of the country. The language was intemperate and uncalled for but this was not a case of sedition. It was at best a case of criminal defamation. The man was kept behind bars for months under the National Security Act.

In West Bengal, a party leader was arrested for morphing an image of the chief minister and in Uttar Pradesh, a man was arrested for morphing the image of the prime minister of the country and shockingly this image had been morphed five years back. What was the hurry to suddenly arrest this man after 5 years?

A rapper who does not even live in India has been charged for sedition. The language used by her may be totally uncalled for, some other offences may be made out, but sedition does not appear to be one of them.

In another extreme case, a film maker in Tamil Nadu has been booked under Sections 153 and 153A IPC for inciting caste enmity because he allegedly made remarks against the Chola dynasty king for being caste oppressive. This Chola dynasty king

lived more than a thousand years back. The law of creating disharmony and Section 66A of the Information Technology Act, 2000 which has been held unconstitutional are still being used day in and day out to arrest people. In fact, a bench of the Supreme Court has been constrained to pass directions on February 15, 2019 that copies of the judgment of the Supreme Court in the case of *Shreya Singhal* be made available by every high court in this country to all the district courts.

It does not speak well of the Indian judiciary that the magistrates are unaware of the law of land and day in and day out we hear of magistrates granting judicial custody or police remand in relation to such offences wherein the basic offences are not made out and under Section 66A of the Information Technology Act, a law which is no longer valid.

The law laid down in *Kedar Nath Singh's case*, being the law of the land, has to be applied in letter and spirit and unless the actions lead to creation of public disorder, disturbance of law and order or incitement to violence, no action should be taken. In fact, in my view, the law of sedition needs to be toned down if not abolished and the least which the government can do is to make it a non-cognizable offence so that the persons are not arrested at the drop of a hat.

In many countries all over the world, recognising the right of freedom of speech, the laws of sedition have been abrogated or withdrawn. Even in England, sedition is no longer an offence and the crime of sedition was

abolished from 2009 on the ground that sedition and seditious and defamatory label are archaic offences - from a bygone era when freedom of expression wasn't seen as the right it is today.

India is a powerful nation, loved by its citizens. We are proud to be Indians. We, however, have the right to criticise the government. Criticism of the government by itself cannot amount to sedition. In a country which is governed by the rule of law and which guarantees freedom of speech, expression and belief to its citizens, the misuse of the law of sedition and other similar laws is against the very spirit of freedom for which the freedom fighters fought and gave up their lives. The shoulders of those in power who govern should be broad enough to accept criticism. Their thinking should be wide enough to accept the fact that there can be another point of view.

Criticism of the policies of the government is not sedition unless there is a call for public disorder or incitement to violence. The people in power must develop thick skins. They cannot be oversensitive to people who make fun of them. In a free country, people have a right to express their views. Everybody may not use temperate or civilised language. If intemperate, uncivilised and defamatory language is used, then the remedy is to file proceedings for defamation but not prosecute the persons for sedition or creating disharmony.

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