

MACR appreciates government but not happy over delay in approving Draft State Child Policy, 2017

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Manipur Alliance for Child Rights earnestly appreciates the recent decision of the state government for setting up of two Fast Tract Courts for trial of POCSO Cases. However, the State is yet to approve a very crucial Policy document, i.e. the Draft State Child Policy, 2017 for dealing all the child rights issue in a holistic manner, which remains stuck for the last three years.

The draft policy was submitted to State Government by the Manipur Commission for Protection of Child Rights (MPCPR) in the year 2017 after a rigorous rectification process, involving key line departments, academicians, media, intellectuals, judiciaries and inputs from NCPDR. The Policy mandated to embark upon for synergizing all line departments, convergence of various child related programmes and schemes, to ensure an enabling child friendly environment to promote and protect child rights effectively in Manipur. The Chief Minister N. Biren Singh, gave his assurance to adopt the state child policy soon in the state on the 29th September 2017, in a similar hint. Honorable Governor Smt. Najma Heptulla also expressed her confidence that the state government would earnestly consider implementation of the Policy, on the 30th September, 2018.

In connection with the requirement for a State Child Policy, a statement by MARC said that Since the state is highly inflicted with constant

civil unrest situation, bandh and blockades, general strikes, agitations, apart from a perennial armed conflict situation, affecting right to education and right to life of children at the most, MACR strongly felt that a conflict sensitive and Comprehensive State Child Policy could be the best solution to resolve the existing gaps and challenges and address the child rights issues significantly.

Population of Children of Manipur comprises a 38 percent of the total population of the State, our children are still facing crucial issues, to mention a few; uncontrollable child trafficking, escalating child sexual assault cases, deteriorating child substance abuse phenomenon, issues of lack of rehabilitation, shortcomings on care and

treatment of children living with HIV/AIDS, issues of school drop outs, mismatch in the enrolment ratio of students (almost 70% in private schools and 30% in Govt. schools), unseen child labors population, unreported incidents of child marriages cases etc. Although the State is implementing bundles of Child welfare Schemes, major challenges faced in the field, are the immense incompatibility of National Flagship Schemes and programmes which lacks conflict sensibility, adaptability in socio-cultural, administrative setups specially in tribal areas across different geographical terrains. Our child rights issues are caused by and manifested

with specific local issues having distinct geo-specific characters and unique political environment.

For example the National ICPS guidelines for setting up of VLPCPs is based on Panchayat raj system of India, and it does not explicitly mention about the role and responsibilities of Village Authority and the Autonomous District Councils (local authorities) operational in the hill areas of Manipur. Similar problem is happened in the case of formation of School Management Committee (SMC) setup under Rights of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act. Therefore, MACR draws the immediate attention of the State Government and all the

Hon'ble legislators of Manipur Legislative Assembly, to debate and discuss on the issue of State Child Policy to make it approve at the earliest.

Lack of a Manipur oriented State Plan of Action for prevention, rescue, rehabilitation of Child trafficking remains as a big intervention gap in combating the serious menace.

Further, Anganwadi Centres under ICDS do not supply locally suitable nutritional foods to the Children, as a result children of the state specially in hills, by and large unwilling to take the supplied ready to eat food at Anganwadi centres. These foods should be suitable with local or tribal's food habit and culture.

Nazamia Education Group announces scholarship for higher studies

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The Nazamia Education Group will be conducting a scholarship test for the north east students excluding students of Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh on 19th April of this year for those students who wants for graduate and post-graduate in the College and Universities of India.

Speaking about the process of the scholarship, the CEO of Nazamia Education Group Diana Kongkham said that those top 500 selected students in the scholarship would be getting opportunity to get admission for free in the

Universities under this Education Group across India. And the scholarship test would be conducted twice according to the choices of streams of students.

She further said that the Nazamia Group would provide fees and hostel fees in the form of scholarship for those 500 selected students in getting admission.

She continued that next 1500 and 3000 selected students in the scholarship would be given laptops and capitals and its branch office for Manipur is at Singamei Chingamkha Meisnam Leika and she added that a student is being charged Rs.500 for the registration as well as form price.

Prices of Chinese goods shot up due to slump in supplies

By Raju Vernekar
Mumbai, Feb 21

Due to slump in stocks, following stoppage of shipments from China, because of the outbreak of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), the prices of fancy electric lights have shot up to five per cent and if the situation continues, the hike of 15 to 20 per cent in Chinese goods is expected shortly.

Fast-moving Chinese products like mobile covers, accessories, phones, electronic items, clothes, etc have already seen a price hike of almost 10 to 15 per cent in the last couple of weeks. The hike of 5 to 7 per cent in multi media items and toys and a steep hike in electronic goods

is also anticipated. India receives 3% of the total exports by Chinese companies. Apart from spare parts of electric items, China supplies over 90 per cent of decorative light strings, lamps, and other such electric items and since the production has stopped, the hoarding of such products is on the rise.

The Bhagirath Palace Electronics Market, located at Chandni Chowk in New Delhi, considered as Asia's largest electric goods wholesale market, is largely dependent on China for the supply of spare parts. All fancy electric lights are mostly manufactured in China and the prices of such items have shot up to five per cent in the last three months.

The prices of TV, washing machines and AC are also likely to be shot up due to probable shortage of spares. "There has been an acute shortage of spare parts for many electric equipment as China has shut down factories and other units in more than a 1,000 km radius of Wuhan province. This has led to a blockade of import of such goods," Bhagirath Palace Electric Market Association President said Bharat Ahuja said.

Sameer Lalani, of Mira Road, near Mumbai, engaged in a wholesale business of Chinese plastic and home utility products said that "last stock I received was in the second week of January. I had placed the order in "Yiwu"

personally in September last year. It usually takes 20 to 25 days for the shipment to arrive at Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) after being loaded on a ship in China. The stock I have will last for a few more weeks," His work involves visiting China's Yiwu market, known as the world's largest small commodity wholesale market, every three months. He sells his wares on the website wholesaledock.com.

The arrival of seven ships from China between February and March at JNPT (Jawaharlal Nehru Port, Navi Mumbai) has been cancelled. "We have been following the directions of the Ministry of Shipping. International crew members on-board cargo

ships entering JNPT are being screened by the port health officer (PHO). A thermal scanner has been installed and screening reports are being sent to the union government. Some cargo vessels, especially containers, originating from China and crossing Malaysia, Singapore and Colombo have rescheduled their calls to JNPT," a JNPT spokesperson said.

An expert working for a shipping company, said that measures are being taken on cargo ships going to Chinese ports with the crew not allowed to venture out. "We too have a ship going to China, but our crew has to follow a strict protocol. The epidemic has also impacted

revenue earning for most freight and cargo carriers".

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has not yet found any case of the disease being communicated through a non-living object such as containers or electric or other items that are being imported from the neighbouring country. Even doctors here too have expressed similar opinion. But the trade between India and China remains shut.

As the industry is expecting the epidemic to be resolved by March end, it is expected trade will resume by April. However there may be a huge inflow of goods from Chinese industries when the market reopens, which may cause a temporary increase in freight rates.

Manipur's ex-journalist chief minister pursues Imphal Free Press for defamation

Courtesy : **Kunal Majumder and Aliva Iflikhar**
CPJ Asia Program

On the morning of February 1, instead of working on her usual assignments for the *Imphal Free Press*, journalist Babie Shirin drove with the newspaper's publisher Maycengbam Satyajit Singh to a court on the other side of town. On arrival, they were arrested, then granted bail on a bond of 30,000 rupees (US\$420) each. Their crime was to document the local chief minister's ranking in a nationwide TV poll.

The IFP, as the privately-owned, English-language daily refers to itself, operates in Imphal, the capital of Manipur, a small state on India's northeast border with Myanmar. In 2018, the local government filed a criminal defamation case against the publication for reporting on the popularity of the state's Chief Minister Nongthombam Biren Singh, as CPJ has documented and local media reported at the time. The Manipur High Court recently moved that case

forward, Paejol Chaoba, a senior editor with the newspaper told CPJ by phone. His two colleagues were required to surrender at a lower court and get bail, he said, along with Pradeep Phanjoubam, a former IFP editor also named in the complaint. Hearings were ongoing in mid-February, Chaoba said.

CPJ interviewed Biren Singh about the case on a trip to Imphal in September 2019. CPJ also spoke with nearly a dozen senior journalists and editors, but almost none of them were willing to speak on record. Many shared privately that they were careful about criticizing the government to avoid criminal charges. Their concerns are shared beyond the state: CPJ has documented how defamation cases filed against journalists and media outlets have been used as a form of harassment and intimidation across India. Manipur has faced a separatist movement since its integration into India, with the height of the armed conflict lasting nearly a decade before a ceasefire in 2018. Caught between underground

separatist groups and the government, journalists were pressured and attacked; in 2013, newspapers stopped publication for four days to protest pressure from militant groups.

Journalists told CPJ that the security situation has improved since the ceasefire, and the pressures they used to face have eased. Recently, however, two Manipuri journalists have run into legal trouble in relation to political commentary published in a private capacity on social media. Kishore Chandra Wangkhem, a local TV reporter, spent 134 days in prison on sedition charges after sharing his opinion of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) state government on social media, according to *Outlook* magazine, which documented his release in April 2019. In December, video blogger RK Echanthoibi was arrested for criticizing the government and the chief minister, according to news website *Scroll.in*. Echanthoibi was released on bail but the defamation investigation involving her comments is ongoing, she told

CPJ by phone in February. CPJ requested comment on the charges against Wangkhem and Echanthoibi from Biren Singh's media advisor and secretary, but did not receive a response before publication. One editor of a newspaper in Manipur, who asked not to be named for fear of retribution, told CPJ that his newspaper shied away from government criticism to avoid controversy. The local BJP government was "ultra-sensitive," he said. "[Imphal] Free Press has been very bold," he told CPJ. "We haven't done that."

Acting on directions from the secretary to the chief minister, the Manipur state department of home affairs instructed the public prosecutor to file the defamation case against the IFP journalists on October 27, 2018, according to an order that CPJ has reviewed. The order accused them of publishing with an "intent to create enmity, hatred or ill will between different classes" against the chief minister. Defamation carries up to two years imprisonment and possible fines under the Indian Penal Code.

The IFP article in question

analyzed the reported results of a nationwide survey conducted by India Today TV, a New Delhi-based private news channel, to identify India's "best performing" chief minister.

"I couldn't believe the [chief minister] would come after me over such a silly matter," Shirin told CPJ by phone. The 27-year-old journalist, who had been with IFP for less than a year at the time, said the case came as a shock. "Initially I was really nervous. I couldn't concentrate on my work," she said. In a meeting with CPJ in September 2019, Chief Minister Biren Singh accused the newspaper of maligning his reputation by deliberately misinterpreting the survey results. "Criticism is okay, but decency should be there," he said in his office. "They're making a mockery, how can I allow that?"

Biren Singh is the former editor of a Manipuri-language daily called *Naharolgi Thoudang*. In April 2020, he was himself arrested for publishing comments by a local human rights activist that criticized the government. He

spent 20 days in jail on sedition charges, which were ultimately quashed, according to news reports and human rights groups. Two years later, he joined electoral politics, and was eventually elected to do the top job in the state. As a former journalist, Biren Singh has strong relationships throughout the media community. While CPJ was in Manipur, Biren Singh gave a speech at the All Manipur Working Journalists' Union honoring its foundation 46 years before. He told CPJ about a health insurance scheme for journalists launched by his government.

Yet while the chief minister agreed that freedom of expression was a constitutional right that had to be protected, he also told CPJ there had to be a limit. "When we take advantage of Article 19, some people forget morality," he said. CPJ pointed out that he had himself been punished for his reporting. "I went to jail, too," he said.

"Biren Singh seems to have completely forgotten that he was once a journalist," Shirin

told CPJ. "But I haven't. I will continue to fight this case, as well as do my job."

Phanjoubam, the former IFP editor, told CPJ that the defamation case sent a message to the rest of the media that there would be consequences if they didn't fall in line.

Since the case began, IFP has spent nearly 350,000 rupees (US\$4,900) in legal fees and other costs, Paejol Chaoba told CPJ. While a New Delhi-based human rights lawyer initially offered to represent the newspaper pro-bono, IFP couldn't afford the cost of flying him to Imphal for hearings, he said. Because the case had a link to the chief minister, it was difficult for IFP to find representation locally, according to Chaoba.

"Instead of doing our work as journalists, the last one and half years have been spent hiring lawyers, strategizing, raising money to pay lawyers," said Chaoba. "Fighting a legal case against the might of the state isn't easy," he said. "But we are not going to give up on our principles."