

## MSAD-NEWSLETTER: AN INITIAL MOVE

MSAD is currently undertaking an initial move towards encouraging participation especially of students into the working of MSAD. The move is largely an attempt to bring about informed opinions regarding MSAD's programs in each executive term. The Newsletter is an endeavour towards realizing it. It seeks to provide shared understandings among the Manipuri students in Delhi. The MSAD-Newsletter aims at articulating its main concerns for every term by way of redistributing accent to various activities. The newsletter is conceptualised with an objective of building a common platform of participation, which would encourage debates and discussions among the students. The objective is to build a general awareness among the students about MSAD and its activities and thus opening the decisions of the Executive for a closer scrutiny in future. (Continued in page 2)

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## DEVELOPMENTAL CHALLENGES IN MANIPUR: AIRPORT & UNIVERSITY EXPANSION

By: Jiten Yumnam

In Manipur there has been currently an unprecedented response of the people to Government's efforts to introduce 'developmental projects', by contesting its rationality and purposes. After the residents of Kyamgei came out in unison to successfully defend the highly productive agricultural asset *Kyamgei Loukol*, against construction of a NIT complex, the residents of Langthabal are in full preparedness to defend the Phumlou Konjil loukon from being used for the expansion of Manipur University. Similarly, the residents of Malom, Mongsangei, Ningombam, Konjeng Leikai have also resisted by questioning the rationality and purpose of the massive acquisition of agricultural land by the Government for expanding the Tulihal Airport, Imphal. The Airport expansion move is slated to acquire 512 acres of farmland and the Manipur University expansion is envisaged to acquire at least 200 acres of agricultural land.

One may wonder how the current moves for Imphal Airport expansion, Manipur University Expansion, NIT Complex construction on agricultural land and residential areas are consistent with forging a self-reliant political economic culture in Manipur? Are these moves guided by any (continued in page 4)

(Continued ... an initiative move)

## Following is a brief feature of the MSAD-Newsletter.

1. The MSAD-Newsletter creates an information pool consisting of all activities organized, participated and undertaken under the official banner of MSAD in every two months previous to the publication of the newsletter. However, in the first issue some selective activities of the last year i.e. 2007 will also appear.
2. It also provides other information, which will be useful to the students for various purposes and also highlights tentative programmes to be organized in the next couple of months, if there is any.
3. On every issue of the MSAD-Newsletter, at least, one article of five hundred words will appear provided the article is already available to the editorial team. Students are encouraged to contribute articles to be published in the MSAD-Newsletter on any topic of their choice. However, the question whether to publish it or not shall be decided upon by the editorial team of the MSAD-Newsletter.

## MSAD Activities October to December 2007

MSAD Executive committee for the term 2007-2008 was reconstituted in September 2007. On 27 September MSAD Freshers' Meet was organised. Newly drafted MSAD Constitution was passed on the same day. In October the Executive committee released a Plan Chart for the term 2007-2008. The Plan Chart is reproduced at the end of this newsletter.

MSAD, at various instances, intervened in the issues of rape and molestation in Delhi as a part of the larger struggle against the harassment of women. For example, a press note was released regarding the case of three Manipuri women who were molested by some persons who came for the recruitment examination of Delhi Police Constable in October 2007 at Kingsway Camp. MSAD also intervened into the case of a Hmar woman who was allegedly molested by some local goons.

MSAD submitted a memorandum on December 12, 2007 to the Governor of Manipur, S. S. Sidhu demanding immediate replacement of the non-Manipuri employees at the two Manipur Bhavans at Delhi with those who are familiar with Manipuri language and culture. The memorandum also brought to the notice of the Governor that a total land area of 4.25 acres in Gurgaon, which was allotted by the Chief Minister of Haryana, Mr. Devi Lal for the construction of Institute of Manipuri Performing Arts, is now being under a lease to a firm from Gujarat, M/S Adani Exports. MSAD strongly opposed in the memorandum to such misuse of official premises by the Govt. of Manipur.

As a part of MSAD's commitment to building a peaceful society in Manipur, a Panel Discussion was organised on 11 December 2007 at Tagore Hall, Delhi University to discuss on the possible ways of bringing an end of the ongoing Indo-Manipuri conflict.

As a part of the campaign against sexual harassment in Delhi, MSAD gave full cooperation to Delhi police in punishing the culprits who assaulted a woman from Manipur at Gandhi Vihar in January 2008. MSAD also submitted a memorandum to the Governor of Manipur in relation to the case demanding an appointment of a 'care taker' in either of the two Manipur Bhavans to look into such cases of sexual harassment in Delhi. A rally was also organised with the participation of about 200 students. In a leaflet distributed in the rally MSAD strongly expressed opposition to the ways in which the image of women from the Northeast is received and circulated among the local population.

MSAD appealed to the people of Manipur to closely watch and resist wrong representations of the people and their struggle in Manipur as suggested in a statement made by the Minister of state for Home, Prakash Jaiswal. Mr. Prakash told in a session of the House that the outburst of peoples sentiment culminating into setting fire of the State Assembly in 2001 was a terrorist act.

### **MSAD activities till April 2008**

In January 2008, MSAD football team participated in R.N.Tamchon Memorial Football Tournament at I.G. Stadium and secured runner up position in the tournament. Some representatives of the Executive visited Manipur Information Centre in February of this year and a press note was released on 14 February about some of the findings of the visit. In the release it was brought to the notice that MIC, which was established in 1980, is not still having a library of its own which, if properly maintained, can provide opportunities for all those who are interested to study about Manipur in some ways. It was also found that apart from the post of Joint Director, rest of the employees are those who do not know or are less familiar with Manipuri culture.

MSAD had issued a press release on 16 February 2008 in connection with a attempted gang rape of a Manipuri woman in South-ext (Delhi) by 5/6 persons on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2008. The press release narrates the various steps that have been taken up by MSAD with regard to the case.

On the 25 February MSAD organised a cultural programme at Polo Ground, Delhi to showcase the rich cultural heritage of our society. The programme included not only Thabal Chongba and various traditional dances, to highlight its rich cultural heritage and underlying unity among various com-

munities of Manipur.

MSAD distributed exam-wishing card for Manipuri students in Delhi in March 2008. Around 300 cards were distributed across Delhi.

MSAD in its press statement of 20 March condemned in no uncertain term the killing of non-Manipuri labourers on 17, 18 and 19<sup>th</sup> March 2008. In the press statement MSAD called for public attention on the grievous condition of human rights violation and appealed to both state and non-state actors to desist from making the civil population their soft target. On the 21 March MSAD, along with other progressive groups, had organised a sit-in-protest at Jantar Mantar against the killing. The collective statement that ensued the protest resolved to carry on the struggle to ensure a total protection of life from armed violence. It also strongly condemned any kind of violence perpetrated against the civil population in the form of rape, murder, displacement and disappearance.

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### Continued Developmental Challenge ...)

visionary developmental framework based on creation of such values of protection of people's livelihood and production bases? Are these massive land acquisition moves guided by any understanding of use and management of land and natural resources policy? Do we see any instance on the part of the Government of the efforts to analyze and scrutinize the short and long term implications of the sacrifices of such scarce agricultural land for such superficial projects? Can the loss of arable wetlands due to such projects be compensated with only in terms of monetary insights? Should we accept these disastrous programmes that do not recognize peoples' rights to land and resources?

The government fails to positively capture the peoples' movement for restoring their land and resources. This failure is an indication of the gradual marginalisation of the voices for sustainable development that would seek to ensure food security, dignified existence and taking part in developmental process. Rather than positively responding to the legitimate and alternative concerns, which are being addressed by the peoples' movement, the State resolves to suppress the democratic struggle of the people with brutal force, threats and intimidations, negating the universally upheld principles of peoples' rights over their land and resources. Development becomes meaningless when livelihood becomes destroyed on the basis of class and other divisive strategies.

The increasing protests against the Airport Expansion, University expansion, NIT construction bear testimony to the fact that the intention be-

hind these projects have disregarded the peoples' rights to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). These moves undermine all efforts for sustainable development by consuming increasingly scarce farmland and residential areas, thereby seriously undermining our food sovereignty, consequently worsening dependency to outsiders. The main occupation of nearly 80 % of the population is agriculture and there is no other equally capable industry to generate productivity in the economy. Today, the valley of Manipur, where main agricultural activities are taking place, is under pressure due to such disastrous of developmental activities. As a result, a huge number of families will be displaced by such expansion moves and will be subjected to perennial impoverishment, further exposing them to social exclusion, discrimination, health risks etc. Women and children will remain as the most vulnerable targets.

When much of the valley areas are already conscripted and much of its agricultural land already been taken over in the name of development, how will our coming generations of Manipur secure a dignified survival? This is one among serious other questions. The followings are quite alarming to cite as examples. The commissioning of Loktak Multipurpose Hydroelectric Power Project in 1984 has now led to inundation of nearly 50,000 hectares of arable land along the Loktak Wetlands, causing displacement of several thousands of people living along and in the Loktak Wetlands. In the absence of any rehabilitation and resettlement process, it simply results in ever increasing poverty, fragmentation of social cohesion, economic livelihood and environmental disaster.

The move to expand the site of the Imphal Airport has failed to explore other alternatives. It does not seek to look into assessing how small international airports in other parts of the world function efficiently, all with only one runways over minimal spaces and land, as in the case of Tribhuvan International Airport of Kathmandu, Nepal, Phnom Penh (Pochentong) International Airport of Cambodia, Bandarnaike International Airport of Colombo, Sri Lanka. Interestingly, even big international airports like Heathrow Airport of London manage more than 1000 flights a day from only two runways.

The Airport expansion will increase noise pollution in Imphal, posing multifaceted health hazards and risks. Night flights are what several residents living near airports around the world had long been complaining against. The case of residents around Heathrow airport of London, Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi airport etc complaining to their respective Supreme Courts and international human rights Organizations can be mentioned. Villagers around the Imphal Airport are already subjected to traumatic experiences with noise pollution from the airport. The Airport construction will lead to further militarization of Manipur

through deployment of paramilitary forces which will further intensify the scale of civil rights violations under the Armed Forces (Special Powers Act, 1958). To remind one such incident is the Malom Massacre of 2 November 2000, which was carried out by 8<sup>th</sup> Assam Rifles located inside Imphal Airport.

It is high time that the Government of Manipur reconsiders as to how and why Manipur had degenerated alarmingly from a food exporting country to a food dependent state. Prior to the forcibly arranged merger of Manipur to India in 1949, Manipur enjoys a subsistence agricultural economy with minimal industrial base in the form of handloom and handicrafts. Notwithstanding its nature of subsistence production, Manipur had been a surplus exporter of rice during the British rule. For example, rice surplus extracts increased from 26% in 1891 to 34% in 1942.

Perpetuation of the present status of Manipur after 1949 as a peripheral economy is quite evident from the pattern of plan outlays of the State. Marginalization of agriculture and industry compelled the state to depend heavily on imports from the core economy of mainland India right from the initial stage of planning. Manipur was steadily transformed into a market and its people only consumers. Agriculture, the mainstay of economy with 80% of the population engaged in it suffered immensely as a result of mis-prioritization in the Centralized plans.

Now a new set of policies, purely extractive and exploitative, is aggressively being pursued. Planning is restricted to a few elites at the cost of the common people, whose livelihood and survival depend on the land and the resources by which they live for generations. The planning and introduction of such exclusionary policies led to massive displacement, forced and arbitrary disconnection of people from the sources of their survival, massive takeover and conversion of agricultural land into the wheels of military industrial complex. Occupation of agrarian production areas for other counter productive activities is designed to benefit only a few, who are in the position of power.

Today efforts for protection of productive agricultural land and to involve people in developmental decision-making process are met with brutal state repression, a conventional measure that further strengthens the state terrorism. Residents of Malom and Ningombam who campaign against Airport Expansion are already subjected to harassment by the state law enforcing agencies. In December 2005 the Border Security Force and the Indian Reserve Battalion killed three villagers who were affected by Khuga Dam and 25 others including women and children were injured. On 21 April 2007, Manipur police commandos baton charged and fired rubber and live bullets to villagers of Kyamgei, injuring many, who tried to defend their land from being occupied for

construction of National Institute of Technology.

The brute response of the government to the villagers affected by the Airport and University expansion moves clearly demonstrates that the government remains callous to the loss of agricultural land. The people are being pushed to the periphery to defend for themselves, while multitude of other social, economic and political issues remaining unresolved. It amounts to a sheer inappropriate and insensitive approach to proceed with this kind of developmental initiatives without involving people in the development process in Manipur.

The question still remains to answer: is there any policy of the government in order to promote wise and sustainable use of our land, forest, rivers, wetlands, mountains, and that surely invokes peoples' participation and consent. Are the current policies based on the recognition of the rights of peoples over their land and resources for their livelihood and dignity? Do we have in Manipur our own vision for development? Shall we wait for the World Bank or the Asian Development Bank or the leadership in New Delhi to decide on the terms to define what Manipur should have and what it should be? In the absence of any practical involvement of the people for a mutual assessment of alternatives, questions will emerge about whose interest are these expansion moves and for whose benefits. It remains another anxiety for how long the state is going to insist on a aggressive development model, using its military might. It is also true to say and this is quite evident from what is happening that the people of Manipur will reject irrational decisions, which are taken at far away places without their participation and then being aggressively imposed on them.

The demands of the agitating peoples of Langthabal, Malom, Ningombam, Langol, Lamphel to stop further acquisition of agricultural land in the name of development is now a timely and appropriate movement in Manipur given the alarming extent of the loss of agricultural land and the need to secure our food sovereignty. The State Government should now listen to the demands of the affected peoples and should arrange to ensure that land is available for expansion inside the existing airport implying further land acquisition is unnecessary. All irrelevant office complexes and establishments, including military should be removed. The State government should now find other viable alternatives for the expansion. Units of Manipur University can also be established in Hill districts of Manipur. Why should everything be concentrated only in Imphal? Such consideration will reduce present developmental disparity in Manipur and will bring about understanding among the communities. The Airport and Manipur University Expansion moves should not be

taken up without free, prior and informed consent of people of Manipur.

Development pursued under threats and intimidations with "barrels of guns" cannot be acceptable to the people. The Manipuri peoples who enjoyed self reliant and subsistent economy before the merger with India are now reduced to a dependent nation, reeling under poverty amid the increasing military brutality and suppression of democratic rights. Today free determination of political, economic, social and cultural rights of the people of Manipur becomes extremely crucial for defense of their land and resources. There should be a complete moratorium on mega developmental initiatives in Manipur till the peoples' rights over their land and resources and their rights to take part in development process are fully recognized.

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#### **MSAD EXECUTIVES (2007-2008)**

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