

Condemn Manipur Governments' attack on the livelihood of people: Protest displacement of Lei-Ingkhol in the name of Development

Appeal for solidarity and support
Circulated by Campaign for Peace & Democracy (Manipur)
Dated 20 May 2011

The Manipur¹ State cabinet decision, dated 16 December 2011, to acquire land at the cost of the Lei-Ingkhol village (village), in addition to the already allotted 12.40 acres of land in the Mantripukhri area to construct components of the controversial Capital/ Capitol Complex,² subsequent forced surveys under the protection of police and land acquisition notifications³ has created tension and unrest in Lei-Ingkhol.⁴ Lei-Ingkhol villagers, as they had carried out continuous protest from February 2005 to September 2006, resolved to defend their village from any form of displacement. Although the Capital Complex issue has not been seriously taken up by bourgeoisie intellectuals in Manipur, the Lei-Ingkhol resistance to defend their village invokes deeper question about the ongoing trend of displacement forcibly carried out in the name of development in several parts of Manipur. On the other hand, the consistent resistance by Lei-Ingkhol suggests for analysing the dialectics of resistance and counter-resistance between forces respectively representing the oppressed and the oppressors within the structural parameter of an overarching exploitative political economy.

Where is Lei – Ingkhol

At present, Lei Ingkhol is located at village No 8 Mantripukhri, Sheet No 2, Tahsil Imphal Eat II, and about five kilometres away from the heart of the Imphal city in Manipur. It was originally marshy land whereupon bushes and reeds were grown, and without any occupation. It was isolated and considered as disgusted area where many would not dare to tread on for fear of diseases and other socially perceived evilness. Around 1940s when medical service was begun to be provided to lepers and tuberculosis patients in certain portion of the present location of the village, several socially stigmatised and ostracised landless patients suffering from these diseases who could no longer reunite to their original families, gradually filled the marshy land, cleared the surrounding bush and founded the village. For several decades, as late as 1970s, due to social fear of spreading the diseases, outsiders had compelled them to confine and relied upon hunting, fishing and water roots and other resources available in and around the village for survival.⁵ In course of time, migrant labours and landless families immigrated and settled on it. With the passage of time Lei-Ingkhol became a well established village dominantly inhabited by workers' families who subsequently enjoyed scenic beauty, favourable climate, rich natural resources and prospects of tourism in the village.

The six decades of Lei-Ingkhol from 1940s onwards corresponds to two contradictory processes characterised by; (a) recognition of the existence of Lei-Ingkhol by the government, and (b) subsequent encroachment by policy makers. Firstly, electoral politics played positive role in terms of listing the villagers in the electoral roll,⁶ fund allocation to village entrepreneurs and recognised institutions,⁷ housing schemes⁸ and other facilities. Secondly, pertinent to the reaction trend of the rulers to occupy land at the cost of people; the

¹ Manipur is located in the Northeastern part of India. It became part of India in 1949. There has been armed movement to form a different country.

² (a) Above Rs. 300 Crore Project under Special Plan Assistance sanctioned by the Government of India.

(b) 'Lam Amukkasu Lousin-gadouri' in Poknapham Daily, Sunday, 19 December 2010, page 1.

³ (a) Secretariat, Revenue Department, Notification No. 4/42/LA/2010-Com (Rev) dated 24 March, 2011.

(b) Deputy Commissioner Imphal East District, Notification No. DC (IE)/59/2006 (Pt) dated 6 May 2011.

⁴ Memorandum submitted by the villagers of Lei-Ingkhol to the Chief Minister of Manipur, dated 28 December 2010.

⁵ Statement of Giridhon (70), a leper who belong to the first generation of immigrants, dated April 2005.

⁶ Since 1960s in the list of Wangkhei Assembly Constituency; Statement of Ahanthem Tolen, dated April 2005.

⁷ Leprosy Patients' Welfare Society (1976); Destitute Children Home; Community Care Centre (1999); Anganwadi and primary learning centres.

⁸ In 1990 DRDA, Govt. of Manipur, under Social Housing Scheme constructed houses as an incentive to 39 families.

government representing the interest of the ruling class took advantage of the minority condition of the villagers⁹ and accordingly decided to displace them in the name of development. As all India crisis of creating Special Economic Zones by displacing economically backward population would suggest; in Manipur, there is exploitation, oppression and suppression when public resource¹⁰ is being channelized by the reactionary regime,¹¹ in the name of development, to pay for unrestraint and indiscriminate use of repressive forces whose brutal actions are buttressed by the colonial Land Acquisition Act 1894, thereby having destructive impact upon the affected population. The controversial Capital Project (CP) is being implemented without adhering to the international standard of Free Prior Information and Consent of the population to be affected by the project.

What is Capitol/ Capital Project

The CP is an above Rs. 300 Crore construction project financed by the Government of India under Special Plan Assistance scheme since 2004. The potential inflow of fund through SPA opens up an arena of scramble for money among the commission seekers belonging to political elites, bureaucrats, contractors, and other stake holders who by practice accumulate wealth through misappropriating public fund and bribery. High ranking bureaucrats and several other subordinate officials who subscribe to luxurious and splendiferous living, on their part, are eager to have new bungalows and quarters to be located in Imphal.¹² In the name of CP, all these categories of parasites made collusion to construct a *fortified elite zone*. Accordingly, the State cabinet announced that the present Legislative Assembly Hall and the Secretariat building were not large enough and that the existing Guwahati High Court (Imphal Bench) required a new building. These infrastructures including quarters had to be built in one compact area. To give a shade of 'people' in the proposed construction work, a People Forum structure was included.¹³

The CP *per se* though cosmetic infrastructure innovation,¹⁴ is not opposed by the Manipur public. However, the project became controversial and is protested for lack of transparency, public accountability, and for its displacement and destructive tendencies. Selection of construction site suffers from hastiness, arbitrariness and violation of prescribed norms.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, blue prints of the project were altered & changed from time to time as per whimsical cabinet decisions. For instance, as a result of protest against installation of foundation stone for Assembly Hall in the Kangla Fort premise without obtaining clearance from the Archaeological Department, the site for construction of the entire components of CP was shifted at Chingmeirong Maning Lampak in Imphal. The *Kairang Khong Wetland* in Chingmeirong was filled up only to create environmental catastrophe, and foundation stone was inaugurated by the Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh on 20 November 2004, without fulfilling legal requirements including Rapid Environmental Assessment/ Environmental Management Plan and clearance from the Union Ministry of Environment and

⁹ In 2005 out of the total number of 89 households 41 were Below Poverty Line card holders. In February 2011 population figure was 524 residents, organised into 115 households; only 24 persons (in 20 households) are government employee, mostly in the Grades III and IV pay scale; i.e., 84 head of families are wage labourers with irregular and lowest income; majority of 186 students are enrolled in the most neglected government schools.

¹⁰ Such as Special Plan Assistance sanctioned by the Government of India.

¹¹ By reactionary we mean the force that withhold forward march of the society towards development and democracy in true sense of the term.

¹² "apart from the functional requirements of the High Court, the Complex should be built to accommodate, residential Bungalows for the Hon'ble Chief Justice, other judges, judge's library, residential quarters for officers and staff of the Registry, High Court Guest House with recreation centre, Medical Dispensary, Bank, Post Office, Telephone Booth, Railway / Air Ticket Reservation Counter, High Court Officers and staff training centre, PWD Office for maintenance of building, 75 cubicles for the Advocate's Chamber etc. with enough space for parking vehicles for the lawyers and the litigants"; File, No, HC, III-83/2004 / 1801 /G, Dated 26 May 2005, From the Registrar General, Guwahati High Court, Guwahati, to the Chief Secretary, Government of Manipur, Imphal.

¹³ While, there is some idea on what the first three buildings are, there is no information on what a People Forum is.

¹⁴ Neglect of primary and secondary economic sectors but heavy expenditure on construction of office buildings and institutions at the cost of agricultural land and land resources.

¹⁵ Statement of Yumnam Jiten, Citizen's Concern for Dam & Development, dated April 2005.

Forest. Arbitrary notices were issued to acquire 1.22¹⁶ acres and 2.73¹⁷ acres of land respectively from Thangmeiband and Chingmeirong, and eviction order was issued to the Tharon village.¹⁸

As a result of successful resistance the government withdrew its decisions¹⁹ and on April 20, 2005 a press release was issued to acquire 111.06 acres of land in the Mantripukhri area including the Lei-Ingkhol Village.²⁰ Lei-Ingkhol resisted the decision and carried out several forms of protests, including road blockade and pitch battles with the repressive forces. Despite protest the main route of the village leading towards the National Highway 39 was occupied permanently and fortified in 2006, thereby diverting the route without any compensation and rehabilitation. As the resistance intensified and in response to appeals from different circles, after one and half year of continuous relay hunger strike by Lei-Ingkhol, the then Indian Minister of State for Labour & Employment, Oscar Fernandes²¹ made a visit at night on 12 September 2006 and gave assurance to exclude the village from the CP.²² However, after the lapse of about four years, the State cabinet took a decision on 16 December 2010 to destroy the village. In January 2011 the wooden bridge constructed by the villagers for the purpose of transportation was destroyed by the government agents.

What is crucial for understanding is the oppressive character of the government while upholding the interest of the parasites. Firstly, Lei-Ingkhol was neither informed, nor their consent taken before it was included in the project. On the contrary brutal repression of protest had created severe bloodshed, psychological and physical insecurity among the villagers.²³ Secondly, piecemeal construction of components of the project in different sites, to evade EIA/EMP norms,²⁴ does not rule out piecemeal destructions which put together is expected to be very high. Thirdly, the sudden change of site and size of structure suggest that the planning of CP is subjected to the changing interest of the rulers. Fourthly, militarisation of the project site to suppress protest and construct the project at any cost²⁵ indicates reign of terror that has no respect for democratic rights, dialogue and consensus. Apart from this, destruction of pre-existing infrastructures,²⁶ i.e., addition to economic burden to Manipur that have been suffering from economic backwardness and bankruptcy, exhibit vested profit motive of those who execute the CP.

Accumulation of wealth

¹⁶ Notification by District Collector, Imphal West, No.DC (II)/6/186/LA/MLAs/2004, dated 11 January 2005.

¹⁷ Notification by District Collector, Imphal East District, No. DC (IE)/12/52/2004, dated 20 January 2005.

¹⁸ Press statement of Tharon Village Authority sent to the ISTV Network, Imphal, dated 12 November 2004.

¹⁹ Imphal, *Sangai Express*, 5 April 2005.

²⁰ (a) Imphal, *Sangai Express*, 21 April 2005.

(b) original blue print for the whole project was drawn on 32.76 acres, for which more land was required from the Thangmeiband and Chingmeirong villages as the Chingmeirong Maning Lampak was not larger than 27 acres. M/S Raj Rewal Associates, New Delhi was hired as consultant for this project and it drew the blue print for the whole project.

²¹ (a) General Secretary of the All India Congress Committee and in charge of North East.

(b) Minister of State for Labour & Employment (Independent Charge), Government of India.

²² Letter from Minister of State for Labour & Employment (Independent Charge), Government of India Oscar Fernandes to the Secretary, Joint Action Committee against the Eviction of Lei-Ingkhol, dated 7 November 2006.

²³ 6 June 2005; women agitators N. Pakpi, S. Ibeni, N. Borni, K. Yumsangbi, A. Bino, S. Rakhisana, Sh. Shanti (pregnant), were severely injured by mock bomb and rubber bullets in police repression. W. Gunamani, N. Rajen, Bokul and eight leper women, N. atumbi, Punimashi, Memcha, Nupimacha, Sanahanbi, Soro & Tombi, Miss Nanao & Ms Shanti were arrested.

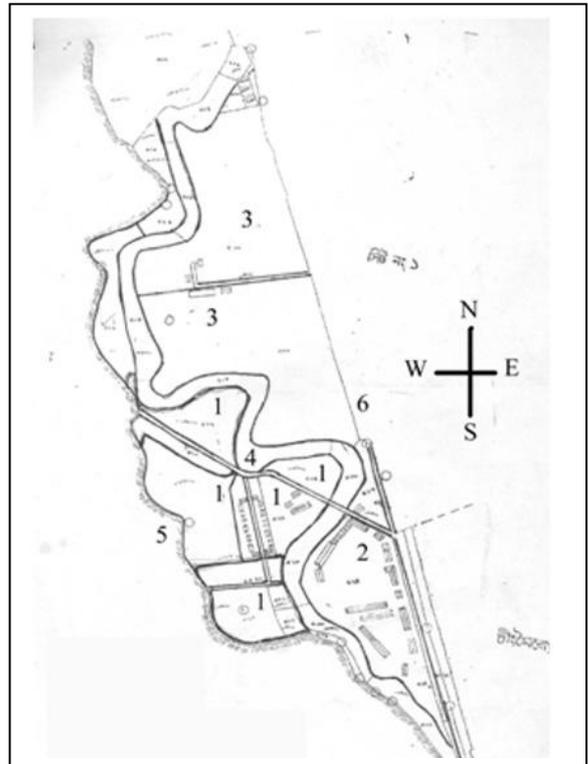
²⁴ The Environment Protection Act (EPA), 1986, was amended on 7 July 2004 requires that any construction project falling under entry 31 (i.e. New Construction Projects) of Schedule-I (of the EIA Notification) including new townships, commercial complexes, hospitals and office complexes for 1,000 (one thousand) persons or more or discharging sewage of 50,000 (fifty thousand) litres per day or more or with an investment of Rupees fifty Crores or more, should obtain environmental clearance from the Ministry of Environment and Forests. The Government of Manipur, in order to evade EPA had planned for piecemeal construction of different components.

²⁵ A detachment of IRB has been deployed near the Chingmeirong Maning Lampak in order to prevent unauthorised individuals from entering into the project site or taking of photograph of the controversial foundation stone of the CP.

²⁶ Such as agricultural infrastructure, P.W.D Store House, Cold Storage, Soil Testing Laboratory, Seed Stockades, Trial & Multifunction, Tissue Culture Laboratory, Fruit Processing Factory, Mushroom Laboratory, Model Floriculture, Fruit Preservation Factory, T.B. Hospital, Leprosy Hospital, Destitute Children Home, Lower Primary School, Mental Hospital that had been under construction and Community Care Centre.

The CP construction process involves psychological campaign to create development hype among the misinformed public, and to divert away public attention from (a) understanding accumulation of private wealth in the name of development (b) ongoing concentration of power to be exercised from a fortified elite zone (FEZ). Firstly, the rulers, as they lack capitalist investment in the primary & secondary economic sectors, relied upon misappropriation of public fund, bribery and corruption as means of wealth accumulation. They are shareholders in the CP. They destroyed pre-existing infrastructure so that; (a) they extract commission out of the total cost of expenditure to be incurred in the eviction/ demolition process and at the same time parcel out among themselves unaccountable materials derived from destruction / demolition, and (b) they extract commission and materials from reconstruction / relocation of the demolished infrastructure to new sites. Therefore, the CP is not constructed at a site where there would be no controversy, no displacement, and less destruction.

Secondly, as the illustration shows, the entire enclosed area constituted the CP site in the Mantripukhri area. In the last decade several agricultural lands in and around the Mantripukhri area have been acquired to construct government offices and institutions.²⁷ Indication No 6 is the National Highway No 39, which is likely to be shifted away in the near future. Indication No 5 is the hill range acting as the natural fort on the western site. Indication No 4 is the Irong Rivulet that passes through the entire area in the middle. No 3 is the area of the Manipur Agricultural Farm. Indication No 2 is the PWD Store House campus. Indication No 1 is the Lei-Inghkol Village. Adjacent to the indication No 3 on the Northern side there is a CRPF station. At few kilometres distance away from it there is an Assam Rifles station located on the foothill. At a distance very close to the indication No 2 on the southern side there is a police station and an Assam Rifles post. On the foothills of the indication No 5 there is route that could be used for regular frisking and flag march by troops.



The entire area is located at about 5 km from the heart of the Imphal City. The area is noted for its scenic beauty and moderate breeze in the evening. As a result vast tracts of land stretching from Indication No 3 on the foothills and on the eastern side of the National Highway have been purchased by wealthy landed barons such as bureaucrats, contractors, businessmen and political leaders. Since the land covered by Indication No 2 alone would be used for the construction of High Court Complex, rest of the area would be used for the construction of the structure of People Forum and quarters. As the past experience had shown, the possibility of buying up of the proposed CP quarters by the landed barons could not be ruled out. Logically, a belt of elite housing complex clubbed together and defended by the natural wall and security barracks would be established in the long run. All these selfish designs are covered up by using the official jargon such as development. Repression and intimidation are used to discourage protest, and local leaders are bribed to divide opinion and to create confusion and frustration among the affected population. However, it is very clear that controversies and protests against projects such as the Tipaimukh Dam Project, the Mapithel Dam Project, the Khuga Dam Project, the attempted construction of NIIT campus on the agricultural land at Kyamgei, Airport Expansion on the agricultural land in Changangei area, and so on arose for want of transparency, accountability, and for undermining the role of people in developmental process. Not surprisingly the CP becomes controversial for the destructive and expropriating objectives. The Government of India is responsible for it.

²⁷ Apart from acquiring 50,000 sq ft of land for construction of IT Park, 27.12 acres of agricultural land was acquired and fenced for construction of an IT- Special Economic Zone (IT-SEZ). The President of India Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil inaugurated the Information Technology (I.T.) Park, Manipur on 11 March, 2011; Manipur DIT Times, Vol.1, Issue 1, May 2011.

Appeal for solidarity and support

When capital penetrate into Manipur in the guise of grant, investment, economic packages primarily for construction of dams, roads, military installations, office buildings and institutions; practically it sponsored local reactionary regimes to let the exploiters enjoy free control of resources,²⁸ exploitation of people, and extraction of surplus value. The local reactionary regime, constituted by the parasites and who enjoys commission and bribes from capitalist intrusion, suppress democratic voice of the people. When economic livelihood is being targeted the democratic rights of the people remain practically suspended for the majority of the population who are leading towards poverty and slavery.

Village communities in Manipur such as that of Lei-Ingkhol have their own subjective perception of livelihood and objective relation attached with their village, e.g., history, natural boundaries, environment, economic survival, social network, common daily activities, and psychological makeup. Displacement will shattered these bonding and affect livelihood, particularly those of marginalised working people. The government has committed blunder by imposing displacement project and by denying them the right to stable existence and economic progress. The struggle to defend Lei-Ingkhol, therefore, may not be overlooked and unaddressed, but related to the international struggle for a world free from subjugation, exploitation and oppression. When majority of those in Manipur who are leading bourgeoisie democratic revolution²⁹ became shareholders of the capitalist project, and most of them are comparatively blind to the plight of the peasant and working families who are victims of oppressive regime in several parts of Manipur, it is crucial that the Lei-Ingkhol question is correctly understood from class perspective and one raises ideological issue focussing on class character of the CP. We must carry forward the democratic struggle of the oppressed people for survival, dignity and economic growth.

Campaign for Peace & Democracy (Manipur), therefore, appealed to progressive individuals and organisations for support and solidarity to condemn anti-people Capital Project and press upon the Government of India and its State government in Manipur to:

- revoke the Manipur State cabinet decision of 16 December 2010 to acquire Lei-Ingkhol to construct components of the Capital Complex, and to publish such revocation in the Manipur official gazette,
- impress upon the Manipur Planning Commission³⁰ to exclude from any planning that would led to the displacement of Lei-Ingkhol and its natural boundary demarcations.
- open up the land route that has been blocked by the government and repair the route passing along the hill track, and
- adequately compensate for physical casualty, economic loss, psychological trauma incurred by Lei-Ingkhol during the course of agitation to defend from CP.

Endorsed by:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Organisation/ Party</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Comment (Please e-mail separately)</u>

²⁸ Land, fossils, forests, water, other natural resources.

²⁹ Manipur freedom movement from India.

³⁰ Chief Minister is the chairman of the advisory board of the State Planning Commission.