

# Manipur Association of Science and Society (MASS), Human Rights Initiative (HRI), INTACH (Manipur Chapter) and Citizens Concern for Dams and Development (CCDD)

2 Feb 2009, Imphal, Manipur

## Press Release

### On the occasion of the WORLD WETLAND DAY 2009

Manipur Association of Science and Society (MASS), Human Rights Initiative (HRI), INTACH (Manipur Chapter) and Citizens Concern for Dams and Development (CCDD) observed the World Wetlands Day today at the HRI office. The meeting primarily discussed the broad critical issues facing wetlands in Manipur. The day was marked by an introduction of wetlands and the importance of preserving them. Dr. R.K Ranjan, Chairperson HRI further explained that there is an urgent need for engagement at both local and broader level to safeguard the wetlands in Manipur. There is also a need to help NGOs, CSOs to know about wetlands and the need for them to work toward protecting them and not just focusing on civil and political rights. He also picturized the role of wetlands in conserving biodiversity, as climate regulator, as source of nutrients for the well being of the people. He explained how in Manipur the numerous wetlands of 500 and more has been reduced to around three now. He emphasized that the survival and well being of the peoples of Manipur depends on the survival of the Wetlands especially Loktak Lake.

Lc. Jinine Meetei also of HRI reiterated the need for human rights to broaden its application to saving land, water, farmlands, wetlands and those which linked to civil and political rights. He said that human rights groups must now work on other HR aspects as rights are indivisible.

Somorjit T. hailing from the downstream of Mapithel Dam explained about the wetlands formed by the river flow. He went on to say that the wetlands which is closely linked with the livelihood system of riverine habitation is now severely affected due to the construction of Mapithel dam. The downstream impact which has not been recognized by the dam authorities need to account the negative impact. This will ensure that the real cost of the dam is recognized and incorporated in the management and also rehabilitating the to be affected people downstream. On the issue of Loktak, Dr L. Sarat of MASS brought to the attention of those who participated that there is a renewed strength to revitalize loktak. He lamented that Loktak is dying and that the people of Manipur will need to work together to save this very important wetland system. The present Loktak Development Authority (LDA) is not designed to save Loktak but to just to support the hydro-electric project. There is a need to re-think the role of LDA and must be expanded to look more holistically at the status of wetlands in Manipur. Questioning the Loktak Hydro Electric project and its implications on the health of Loktak lake, he stressed the need for urgently re-orienting the current policy and planning in manipur in-order to save the wetlands in Manipur.

Participants also raised the issue of the present spat of project initiatives of railway line, industrial growth center, dams, airport expansion, highways etc. Participants expressed that these projects will necessarily take away valuable and scarce wetlands, agricultural land etc. The people must look at these projects critically before giving consent to them.

The gathering have proposed certain recommendations for the government and for the public. Firstly, it was identified that there is a need for a **Comprehensive water policy for Manipur**. Specific to wetlands, the house recommends that there is need to urgently put together a **Wetland Board** that looks into the wetland system as a whole. As the third, the house recommends that a policy be formed that seeks **no disturbances in the ecosystem of river basins and implementing best alternatives**, and lastly the house recommends a new **Land use policy** that protects all arable land.

Dr R.K Ranjan

Chairman, HRI

Dr L. Sarat

Member, MASS

Ramananda Wangkheirakpam

Member, CCDD