



Imphal Town Ring Road Project in Manipur: Impacts and resistance of affected communities

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ACROMYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
SASEC	South Asia Sub Economic Cooperation
NESRIP	North Eastern States Road Investment Program
CPS	Country Partnership Strategy
MoRTH	Ministry of Road Transport and Highways
PWD	Public Works Department
IPSA	Initial Poverty and Social Analysis
AEP	Act East Policy
IEE	Initial Environmental Examination
EMP	Environment Management Plan
EIA	Environment Impact Assessment
SIA	Social Impact Assessment
PH	Public Hearing
INR	Indian Rupees
DC	Deputy Commissioners
Hectares	Ha
MoEFCC	Ministry of Environment and Forest and Climate Change
GRM	Grievance Redressal Mechanism
OSPF	Office of the Special Project Facilitator
IPAP	Indigenous Peoples Action Plan
R&R	Rehabilitation and resettlement

ADB-FINANCED IMPHAL TOWN RING ROAD PROJECT OVERVIEW

South Asia Sub Economic Cooperation (SASEC) and North Eastern States Road Investment Program (NESRIP): The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has been investing in series of road projects in Manipur and across North East region of India, including the Trans Asian Highway section in Manipur. Manipur is one of the states in North East India targeted for a US\$ 300 million loan agreement signed between the Government of India and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) on 26 March 2015 for development of infrastructure project. Loan agreements between Government of India and ADB were also signed for the North Eastern States Road Investment Program (NESRIP) on 9th July 2012 (Tranche I) and for the tranche II on 17th February 2014 at a total cost of US \$ 200

million¹. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) and the States of Manipur and West Bengal were the implementing agencies for the project².

The goal of ADB transport sector support under India's country partnership strategy (CPS) 2013 – 2017 and CPS for India for 2023-2027 is to increase the movement of people and goods in a safe, sustainable, inclusive and climate resilient development manner³. The investment program also finds its consonance with ADB's regional cooperation operations business plan (2014–2016), focusing to create an enabling South Asia to integrate its cooperation initiatives with neighboring regions⁴.

INTRODUCTION: IMPHAL TOWN RING ROAD

The proposed Imphal Town Ring Road Project (Imphal Ring Road) is one of the infrastructure road project, part of ADB's South Asia Sub Economic Cooperation (SASEC) Road Connectivity Investment Programme. The Imphal Town in Manipur, forms a key node in the SASEC transport corridors. The project aimed to improve road connectivity and increase domestic and regional trade along the North Bengal-North Eastern India region international trade corridor⁵. Two roads in Manipur envisaged for construction under the SASEC initiative includes the Imphal-Kangchup-Tamenglong Road and the Imphal Ring road. The Imphal Ring Road will serve as intermediary road between the ADB financed Imphal to Moreh Road, the Imphal to

Tamenglong Road and further to Haflong in Assam and the Imphal to Kohima Route etc. The Trans Asian Highway and the Trans Asian Railway projects will also connect to this road. The status of the Imphal Ring Road is still in "Proposed" status as of September 2024. As per the project sheet, the project will be financed with an ordinary capital resources at a cost of US\$ 166 million. Additionally, a Technical Assistance Special Fund of US\$ 1 million has also been allotted for the project. The proposed project has been allotted project number, 55361-001 in India.

The Project has been categorized as category 'B' under ADB's Environment Safeguard Policy, Category 'A' under Rehabilitation and

Rehabilitation Safeguards and Category 'B' under indigenous peoples safeguard policy. An Initial Poverty and Social Analysis (IPSA) has been prepared for an initial poverty and social assessment of people who may be beneficially or adversely affected by a project. This document dated March 2023 is prepared for the ADB project, number 55361-001 in India.

ADB outlined the project rationale as to decongest the Imphal Town, which is the most populous city in Manipur. The project proponents further reasoned that India's Act East Policy (AEP) and trade expansion with South East Asian countries would enormously increase traffic volume, thus requiring the Imphal Ring Road. ADB maintained that the proposed project primarily serves as a strategic road connection providing an enhanced route for intra-state and regional traffic to (i) access the state's administrative, judicial, medical, and educational institutes surrounding the Imphal city center; and (ii) facilitate inter-state and regional connectivity⁶.

ADB outlined the operational priorities of the project with the following priorities.

- ▶ OP1: Addressing remaining poverty and reducing inequalities
- ▶ OP2: Accelerating progress in gender equality
- ▶ OP3: Tackling climate change, building climate and disaster resilience, and enhancing environmental sustainability
- ▶ OP4: Making cities more livable
- ▶ OP6: Strengthening governance and institutional capacity
- ▶ OP7: Fostering regional cooperation and integration

As per the project sheet for the project, ADB maintained that the proposed Imphal Ring Road will improve quality of life in Imphal by helping to decongest the city and promoting the use of e-vehicles. ADB further stated that provision will be made for use of e-vehicles as last mile connectivity to support implementation of low carbon-emission pathways and the proposed project will align with the requirements of the Paris Agreement for climate change mitigation and adaptation⁷.

The project outputs includes development and maintenance of Imphal Ring Road and further to support the implementation of Manipur Electric Vehicle Policy and to strengthen the capacity for planning, sustainability, gender equality and social inclusion.

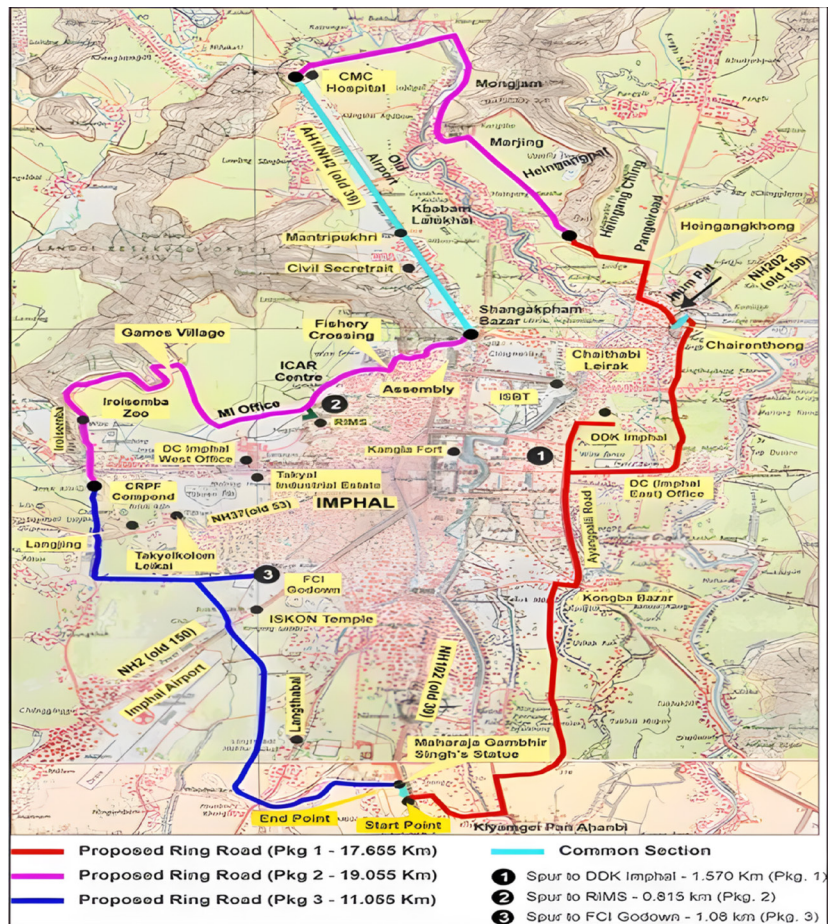


Figure-1 Index map of the Imphal Ring Road comprising of different roadway segments and the obligatory points

Pic: Proposed Route Alignment of Imphal Town Ring Road Project (Source: IEE for Imphal Ring Road, Prepared by PWD for ADB, 2023).

Project pursuance in 2014

The proposed Imphal Ring Road was earlier pursued in the year 2014 in Manipur⁸. Media then reported that the proposed project, envisaged to be 46 km long and with a width of 30 metres, was planned to be constructed within a period of five years at an estimated cost of around 346 Crores Indian Rupees (INR), which is (approximately 42 Million USD) and expenditure envisaged at 8.17 Crores INR (approximately 1 million USD) for each kilometre⁹.

In September 2014, the Public Works Department (PWD), Manipur, project authority of the proposed project in Manipur, issued a tender inviting consultants to take up a feasibility study and prepare a detailed project report with support from the ADB. Then, a team of experts from the Erieye Ground Interface Segment (EGIS International), France subsequently inspected roads and crossings in Imphal city¹⁰. Representatives of Mr. MK Mohanty, Resettlement Specialist and ADB consultant for the project, also commenced surveys for rehabilitation in Kongba, Langthabal, Langjing, Langol and other areas¹¹.

The Imphal Ring Road, initially pursued in 2014 has been delayed substantially after several communities affected by the project, such as those in Langthabal, Patsoi, Langol, Kongba area in Imphal West and Imphal East Districts, Manipur etc raised concern and objected the road project due to potential adverse social and environmental impacts. Villagers of Tarung, Tharon villages raised concern then in media that the project will affect their homes in the villages. The consent of the affected villagers concerned were also not obtained, which amounts to gross human rights violation¹².

A team of the ADB visited Imphal, Manipur based on the complaints by affected communities in 2015. In January 2015, the ADB, through the local project authority, Public Works Department (PWD), Manipur convened a meeting for communities affected by the project in Imphal Town.

The affected communities met the visiting ADB representatives and highlighted their concerns with submissions and call to define alternative routes and to desist from financing the Imphal Ring Road Project till their grievances are fully addressed¹³. The project has since been delayed due to the concerns raised by affected communities.

Implementation processes since 2020

The pursuance of Imphal Ring Road resume again in 2020. The Department of Economic Affairs, Government of India had conveyed “In Principle Approval” to the PWD, Manipur concerning Manipur State’s proposal for taking up the Imphal Ring Road project in 2019¹⁴. The Survey works for the Imphal Ring Road commenced in September 2020 during the Covid 19 Pandemic in Manipur. The Government of Manipur met the representatives of ADB on 17 January 2020¹⁵. Media reported that the ADB officials in the meeting outlined conditions for the Manipur Government before taking up the project, including updating the Detailed Project Report prepared in 2015 and for the Manipur Government to fund its own share of INR 95 lakh (Approximately 120450 USD) for the project¹⁶.

The PWD, Manipur had engaged M/s Intercontinental Consultants & Technocrats Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi for the Consultancy Services of preparation of Social and Environment Safeguard documents for “Construction of Imphal Ring Road”. The Contract has been effective from 9th March 2021¹⁷. As per the revised alignment, the total length of Imphal Ring Road is 54.155 Km out of which proposed improvement length is 47.765 Km. The revised project cost stands at INR 1636 Crores (Approximately 196 Million USD) as per IEE prepared for the project¹⁸.

The Government of Manipur inaugurated the project on 30 January 2024. The government maintained that the project will cost around INR 1,766 crores (Approximately 212 Million USD) and will be implemented with financial assistance from the ADB. **90 percent would be of grant and the remaining 10 percent, i.e, INR 137 Crores (Approximately 21 Million USD) of the loan amount and the interest would be repaid by the Central government of India. The project is being targeted for completion by 2026¹⁹.**

As per the ADB's Safeguard Policy Statement, the proposed project has been classified as Category 'B' project requiring Initial Environmental Examination (IEE). There is no provision of "Ring Road" in the "SCHEDULE" of EIA Notification. Therefore, as per EIA Notification 2006 and its subsequent amendments, Environment Clearance is not required for the Imphal Ring Road. Stage-I Forest Clearance was granted by the Ministry of Environment and Forest and Climate Change, Government of India (MoEFCC) on 1 December 2022.

Series of notifications for survey and land acquisition were issued in 2021 for the project by the Deputy Commissioners (DC) of Imphal West and Imphal East Districts, Manipur. The DC, Imphal East District, Manipur and the PWD issued notifications on 7th and 8th September 2020 to commence demarcation of road in the villages to be affected by the road. The DC, Imphal West issued notice on 16 July 2021 for direct purchase of land along Langjing to Ghari via Lamjaotongba and FCI Godown in Imphal West District, followed by eviction order for Tharon village. (*Annexures of eviction notices*).

The DC, Imphal East District, Manipur and the PWD, Manipur issued notifications on 7th and 8th September 2020 to commence demarcation of road in the villages to be affected by the road. The Sub Divisional Order (SDO), Lamphel, Imphal West District, Manipur issued an eviction order on 27 August 2021 under the Manipur Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorized Occupants) Act, 1976 for the project.

The eviction order of 27 August 2021, which was based on a prior notification of the DC, Imphal West District, dated 28th July 2021 levelled the Villagers of Tharon village as encroaching on the Langol Reserve Forest²⁰. Another eviction notification was issued by the SDO, Wangoi to remove unauthorized structures at Heibokching on 16 September 2021. The eviction notice was issued under the Manipur Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorized Occupants) Act, 1978.

The Central Forest Division, Manipur also issued a notice on 27th October 2021 to villagers of Langthabal Chingthak, inhabited by Kabui Tribe, levelling them as encroachers in Langthabal Hill. The office of the DC, Imphal West District also issued another land acquisition notification on 19 September 2022 for acquisition of 17 acres of land at Bashikhong, Porompat, Heingang and Sawombung circles of Imphal East District for the project²¹. (*Annexure*).

The Revenue Department, Government of Manipur also issued notification on 3 November 2021 outlining intent to acquire 28.2 hectares of land in Kongba, Kyamgei, Wangkhei, Bashikhong, Khurai Konsam Leikai, Khomidok areas for Imphal Ring Road Project in Imphal East District²². *The order is notified under the Rule 3(1) of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (Social Impact Assessment and Compensation) Rules, 2014.*

These eviction notices were also issued even as the requisite project related documents were not even finalized by the ADB. Series of public hearings to prepare Social Impact Assessment for the project was held from the 19th till the 21st April 2022 in Imphal East District by the Directorate of Environment and Climate Change,

Government of Manipur. Affected communities could raise their concerns with the project authorities during the public hearings, which were also covered in the media.

A project level “Grievance Redressal Committee” (GRM) for the project affected communities in Imphal East and Imphal West District was constituted by the project authority, the Public Works Department on 15 December 2023, after affected communities of Kongba Nandeibam Leikai filed complaint with the Accountability Mechanism of the ADB, seeking to desist from any involuntary displacement for the project and to define alternate alignment of the route in non-residential and less congested areas. The Government of Manipur continue to pursue for an early commencement of the project in the year 2024.

IDENTIFYING THE THREATS AND RISKS POSED BY THE PROJECT ON AFFECTED COMMUNITIES IN MANIPUR AND IMPHAL TOWN

Road projects in Manipur proposed for ADB financing already lands in controversies and delays. For instance, several communities affected by the proposed ADB financed Imphal Ring Road plan already expressed concerns and even filed complaint with the local authorities in India and with ADB and even sought legal interventions and relief. Key challenges highlighted by affected communities includes:

Threats of Displacement

One of the major impacts of the project is the threats of displacement of affected communities. Affected communities are apprehensive of involuntary eviction threats due to the pursuance of Imphal ring road. The villagers of Khurai Konsam Leikai and Kongba Nandeibam Leikai expressed concern with threats of displacement from their localities and even petition Government and ADB to desist from forced eviction. Earlier, several villagers of Tharon²³, Langthabal Chingthak, Tarung, Patsoi in Imphal West District etc raised concerns of threats and eviction due to the project.

Around 200 people will be affected from 30 households in Khurai Konsam Leikai, Imphal East District. Several homes will also be affected in Kongba Nandeibam Leikai. Earlier, the villagers of Tharon Village and Langthabal Chingthak Villages raised concerns of losing around ten (10) homes due to the project²⁴.

The two villagers expressed concern that the project will significantly affect their village. Earlier, the Tharon villagers launched protest and decried the eviction notice levelling them as encroachers, maintaining that their village was established 500 years before during King Lamgramba's reign (1512–1523). The Tharon villagers even petitioned the Manipur High Court to quash the land demarcation and eviction notices of the Deputy Commissioner, Imphal West District, Manipur and the PWD, Manipur, issued on 7th and 8th September 2020 and the order of the Sub Divisional Order, Lamphel, and Imphal West District on 27 August 2021 (*Annexure*).

The IEE prepared by the PWD outlined that the land required for construction of Imphal Ring Road is tentatively 94.8606 hectares (ha), which includes 12.9746 ha forest land and 81.886 ha non-forest land. Out of 81.886 ha non-forest land, 27.1985 ha agricultural land, 19.56 ha is residential / commercial land and 35.1275 ha is government land. Based on the full census survey, 840 households with 4829 persons are identified to be affected due to the project.

Most affected people are already impoverished and the displacement and land acquisition for the project will worsen their impoverishment. The involuntary eviction plan without the consent of villagers and clear rehabilitation plan will affect their livelihood.

Affected communities maintained that any amount cannot compensate the loss of their land and property.

Lack of Information Disclosure

A major challenge of the project is the non-provision of detailed information related to the project, the Detailed Project Report, Environment Impact Assessment, Social Impact Assessment, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Plan, Indigenous Peoples Action Plan etc. However, eviction notices to affected communities were served despite the non-provision of detailed project document, the rehabilitation and resettlement plan, Social and Environment Impact Assessment etc to the affected communities.

Lack of Consent of Affected Communities

One of the major challenge of the project is the failure to take the free, prior and informed consent of affected communities. The provision of detailed project related documents has long been a challenge, which undermine meaningful and participatory decision making process on the project. There are concerns that detailed project

related documents were not fully revealed to indigenous communities affected by the project, including to those communities, which the project authorities engaged in good faith negotiations.

The affected communities of Khurai Konsam Leikai complaint that the Project Authority and the consultants appointed failed to take the consent of affected community members during the land surveys. The surveys were conducted by excluding the affected individuals / complainants.

The proposed project clearly failed to take the consent of affected indigenous communities of Kongba, Khurai Konsam Leikai etc. The Meitei people, indigenous to Manipur, will be most affected by the project in localities such as at Kongba Nandeibam Leikai, Khurai Konsam Leikai etc in Imphal East District. The Kabui people will also be affected by the project at Tharon and Langthabal Chingthak villages. Earlier, the Kabui people of Langthabal Chingthak raised concern with the project.



Protest by villagers of Langthabal Chingthak to take villagers consent on 19 April 2022.

The affected communities from Kongba, Khurai Konsam Leikai etc sought alternative routes during the public hearings held in Imphal East Districts in April 2022. The Road alignment has been pursued without considering the alternative suggested in submissions to project authorities by the affected communities.

Impact on Cultural Sacred Sites

The road project will acquire and undermine the sacred cultural space of Ipum Pat (Wetland) located in Khurai Konsam Leikai village in Imphal East District. The Ipum Pat wetland has profound historical significance for the Meitei people. The wetland has been referred to as "Hangen Turen" in "Puya" of Manipuri historical accounts, and used to connect the Imphal River in the West and Kongba River in the East and then the Iril River in the further east. It was of extreme importance for inland navigation for commercial purpose in the olden days. During the reigns of the Meiteis Kings, there is account of "Hiyan-Hiren Tannaba" a traditional boat race in the wetland. Ritual ceremonies are still observed every year by the local 'Meitei' residents, while seeking blessing from their ancestors.

The Project will adversely affect part of Langol and Langthabal hills, which are sacred and revered by the Meitei people. Earlier, the Tharon villagers raised complaint with both ADB and even the Prime Minister of India that the road building will lead to destruction of temple of Tingkao Ragwangh Chapriak Phwam, which is ancestral worship of the Kabui people in their village. There is clear need to protect and uphold the cultural heritage of affected indigenous peoples.

Lack of Feasibility of Ring Road

One of the concern of the Imphal Town Ring Road project is the lack of feasibility as the project has been pursued in highly congested areas. As the Ring Road will serve as intermediary road between the ADB financed Imphal to Moreh Road, the Imphal to Tamenglong Road and further to Haflong in Assam and the Imphal to Kohima Route along with the Trans Asian road and the Trans Asian Railway, the road requires careful planning considering the potential increase in vehicular movement for several decades to come.

The plan for Imphal Ring Road to pass through congested part of Imphal Town in Chingmeirong and Tharon areas with important landmarks such as Manipur High Court, Manipur Capitol complex etc will undermine the objectives of the project, i.e to decongest Imphal Town.

The proposed route of Imphal Town Ring Road in Khurai Konsam Leikai is clearly in Zig Zag mode, which lacks feasibility. The road also lacks consideration of growing urbanization in Imphal in coming decades. According to the proposed plan of the Ring Road, the total width of land for the road will be 44.29 feet. Out of which, the width of ring road which has two lanes will be only 24.6 feet. There will be one service road measuring 9.8 feet separated by a crash barrier throughout the whole length²⁵. The remaining length will be kept for foot path etc. This indicates the lack of future vision as surely this narrow stretch of 24.6 feet as a ring road will not be able to hold the traffic, thereby inviting the possibility of further road widening in the future. This would displace more people from the area and affect the historic Ipum Pat.

The Road alignment in Kongba Nandeibam Leikai and Wangkhei Ayangpalli road is already congested even without the ring road.

Ms. Nungshithoi Meinam of Wangkhei, during the public hearing held at Wangkhei on 20th April 2022 shared that the Imphal Ring road is much required but Ayangpalli to Kongba road is super busy. Many government office, DC office, medical institutions, Sky Hospital, Banks and residential areas besides schools and colleges are located close to the road. So, the road should be built outside congested areas.

Ms. Lourebam ongbi Mema of Wangkhei shared that the Wangkhei Ayangpalli road is already congested even without the ring road. The Ring road will add more traffic and inconveniences.

The proposed Ring road, besides affecting residential homes and agriculture land, envisaged creating multiple traffic point in Kongba and Ayangpalli area and will cause major traffic problems, with playing of heavy vehicles. There are also concerns that the routes of the Imphal Ring Road are meant to accommodate the elites and people in power instead of promoting the needs of communities. Such development process that victimizes communities and destroys livelihood sources will foster inequality²⁶.

Environment impacts and non-application of Environment Laws

The project has failed to conduct a detailed impact assessment despite the fact that the project will pass through ecologically sensitive areas like the Lamphelpat Wetlands, Ipum Pat wetland, Langthabal Hill, Cheiraoching Hill, Langol Hills and Reserve forest areas etc.

Several trees will be felled for the project in Khurai Konsam Leikai.

The Road project will pose problems of air, noise pollution due to the increased vehicular movement, causing safety and health problems among the affected communities. The project will cause landslides in the area close to hill areas, besides dumping of excavated earth and rocks in the area. The loss of wetlands and felling of trees for the project will contribute in aggravating the climate change in Manipur and the ability of people and nature to adapt to impacts of climate change.

A detailed impact assessment for the project is still lacking. The project has been exempted from conducting environment impact assessment (EIA) citing the location upto 100 kilometres of international border areas, as per the notification of the Ministry of Environment and Forest and Climate Change, Government of India²⁷. As such, there is no environment impact mitigation and detailed environment management plan, based on the preparation of a detailed environment impact assessment.

Loss of Livelihood

Many communities who eke out their livelihood through farming, fishing and small scale economic activity will lose their livelihood. The Ipum Pat is the only perennial source of water in the area. With climate change and deficits in rainfall, the Ipum pat serves as primary water source for Khurai Konsam Leikai and other neighbouring villages. The Ipum pat wetland is also fishing source of the communities nearby. The project construction will deny water access and undermine the fishing rights. The project will also affect the lives and livelihood of the nearly 500 remaining population adversely.

Series of land acquisition notices has been issued already for the project. An initial assessment indicates that the Imphal Ring Road will affect more than 200 acres of agricultural land in Kongba, Langol, Langthabal Lamphelpat, Patsoi etc in

Imphal West and Imphal East districts. Many small business, viz, road side stall, eateries, groceries and other small scale establishments, will also be affected, which will adversely affect livelihood of several thousands in Imphal East and West Districts. The impact of displacement and acquisition of cultivable land will consequently be followed by the loss of economic activities with limited means of settlement and basic services, which can create social turmoil.

Increase in Traffic and Accidents

The connection of several other National, State and International highways, viz, the Trans Asian Railway and Road project with the Ring Road project will add much pressure to the traffic volume to the road project. The proposed alignment of the Imphal ring road forms unnecessarily **zig-zag pattern** and many sharp corners in several areas, including at Khurai Konsam Leikai, Imphal East District.



The Imphal Ring Road Project in Manipur, India — framed as progress, but raising deeper questions about whose development it truly serves and at what environmental and social cost. Photo: India TV News / ANI

The area would become an accident prone area owing to the fact that in a 950 metre stretch in the thickly populated area of Khurai Konsam Leikai, there are **3 (three) schools** directly facing the road. This would not only hamper the safety of the localities but also of school children. There is a heavily congested Traffic Crossing at Popular High School Gate in Khurai area, which is a crossing point for National Highway 202 (Imphal Ukhrul Jessami Road) and two Inter Village Roads. Adding additional traffic of ring road at this junction will only worsen the **traffic deadlocks** in the area and can defeat the project's objectives.

Intimidations to affected communities

Representatives from affected communities involved in filing complaint with the project authorities, local Government, ADB country office in Delhi, India, in policy advocacy for ADB's revised safeguard policy discussion, in advocacy with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) headquarters, for a participatory and a rights based alternative development process has been subjected to intimidations in early 2024, with threats to stop objecting the project and rather to support the project. This has led to much fear and confusion among the project affected villagers, especially the affected communities of Khurai Konsam Leikai in Imphal East District.

Mental and psychological Impact

The constant threats of eviction, failure to consult and consider alternatives of affected communities and the exclusive and unfair practices in land surveys caused physical and mental trauma, psychological woes and impacts on the affected families. Villagers of Kongba Nandeibam Leikai and Khurai Konsam Leikai expressed concern with repeated surveys by project authorities

without their information and consent, leading to affected villagers confrontation and tensions with the surveyors.

The project authorities need to uphold the rights of affected communities and to stop all forms of threats, intimidations and violence on affected communities, even before the full approval of the project. There is clear need to promote the accountability of the project authorities. The policy to protect the human rights of all affected communities is critical as per the ADB's safeguard policy and guidance notes.

Alternative call undermined

The affected peoples' maintained that their call for an alternative development and to reroute the ring road in less congested areas in submissions to the project authorities has not been considered in affected areas such as at Khurai Konsam Leikai etc. Further, alternative route is required given the potential increase in traffic volume in the project due to connection with several other ADB funded national and international highways, including the Kangchup to Tamenglong Road project and the Imphal – Moreh section of the Asian Highway 1. The project authorities need to define feasible alternatives in consultation with the affected community.

Manipur in Multiple Crisis and conflict situation

Manipur has been afflicted with multiple crisis, conflict and humanitarian crisis. Manipur has been heavily militarized to address both the ongoing armed conflict and the ethnic conflict in Manipur since 3 May 2023. In the year 2023 and 2024, Manipur has been engulfed by increased cases of violence

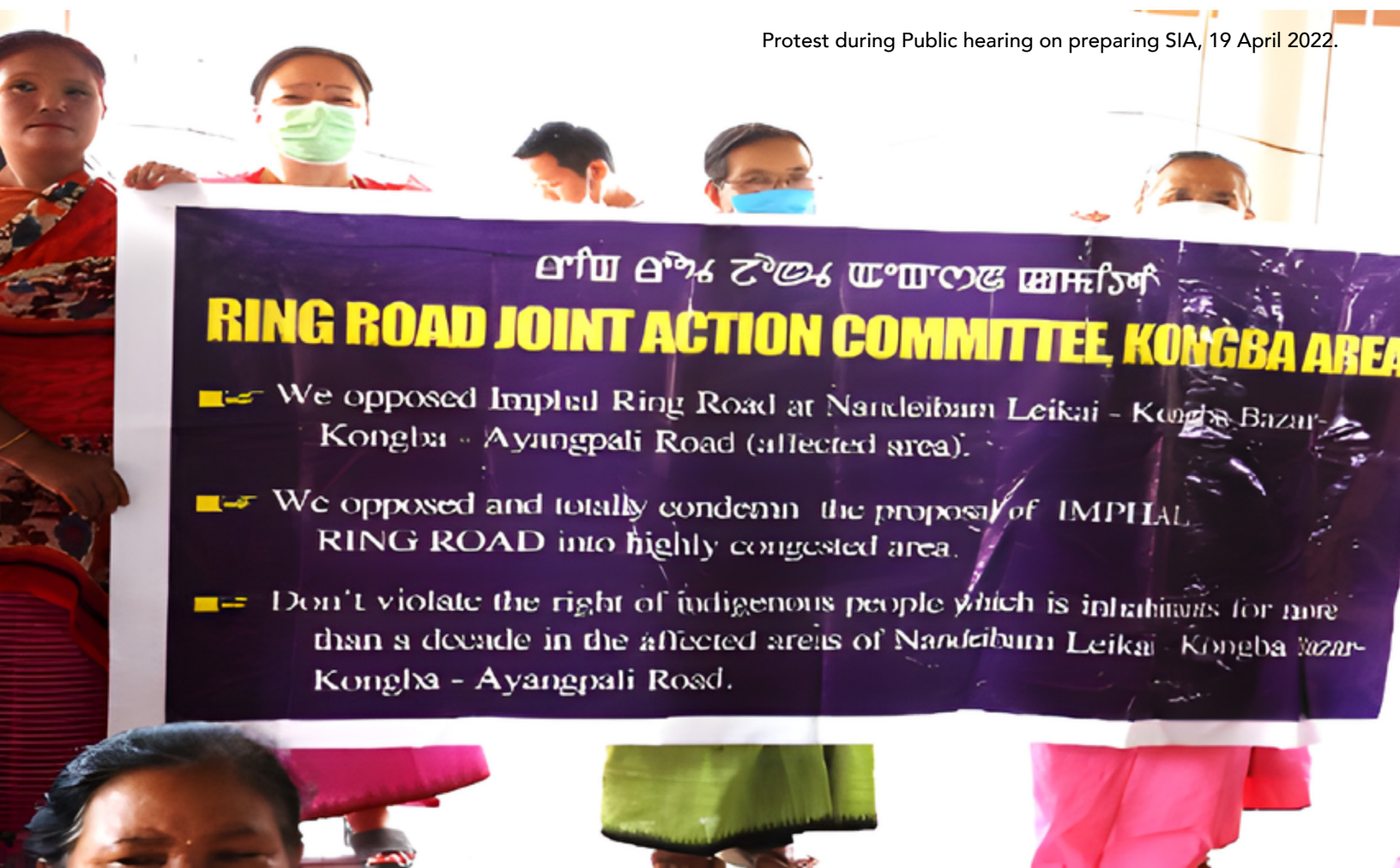
and other unlawful criminal activities, which the Government of Manipur struggles to fully enforce law and order²⁸. Much tension persist in the aftermath of the attacks on civilians using sophisticated guns, weaponized drone and long range rockets in several occasions in 2024 by suspected armed Kuki militants, enjoying suspension of Operation (SoO) with the Government of India, causing death to several civilians. Manipur is marked by increased tensions and challenges in upholding the rule of law and securing justice for multiple cases of violations, crimes and other unlawful activities²⁹. The state is clearly in a state of fragility, multiple conflict and humanitarian crisis. There is need to assess the risk and challenges of financing a major infrastructure project amidst a situation of fragility, conflict and crisis for necessary mitigation, emergency and contingency plans.

Objection and Resistance from Affected Communities

The proposed Imphal Town Ring Road plan provoked concerns and objections from affected communities in Imphal West and Imphal East districts, due to lack of information on the project, lack of consultation, lack of clarity on the rehabilitation and resettlement of affected communities

The residents of Khurai Konsam Leikai, Kongba, Tharon, and Langthabal Chingthak expressed objection to the proposed Imphal Town Ring Road. Locals of Khurai Konsam Leikai and adjoining villages in Imphal East District also staged protest on 17th December 2020, protesting the project (Annex). The villagers also organized a democratic call to stop forced displacement of Tharon villagers on 17 June 2021³⁰.

Protest during Public hearing on preparing SIA, 19 April 2022.





Protest against Imphal Ring Road during public hearing for the project on 19 April 2022.

Due to concerns of impacts, the Tharon Villagers also resolved to stand against the Imphal Town Ring road project in their village. The residents of Tharon village staged a sit-in protest at a community hall of the village against the proposed Imphal Ring Road project on 26 June 2021. Affected locals staged protest, raising demands, 'Government Should Respect Human Rights', 'No Road Through Our Home' etc. The Tharon villagers and the Langthabal Chingthak villagers, affected by the project, challenged the eviction orders and filed a petition with the Manipur High Court in August 2021, which passed an interim order on 10 September 2021 to suspend the eviction order till the next hearing.

Affected villagers tendered their objection to the project in the series of public hearings held from 19th till 21st April 2022 in Imphal East District. Affected communities highlighted the irrationality of pursuing the project in congested areas of Imphal Town, besides highlighting social and environment impacts.

OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN THE AFFECTED COMMUNITIES, THE PROJECT DEVELOPERS AND ADB

Petition to the Government of India and Manipur

The Affected communities of Khurai Konsam Leikai already raised complaint with the Public Works Department, Manipur, the DC, Imphal East District, Manipur on 10th August 2022. *Complaint were also filed to DC, Imphal East District, Manipur on 13 October 2022 to desist land acquisition.*

The affected locals engaged with the project authority, the PWD on 2 May 2022 at the office of PWD, Manipur. Submission to

avoid impact on local people and to define alternative routes has also been submitted to the Grievance Redressal Mechanism (GRM), established by the project authorities, PWD on 9 January 2024. The affected villagers of Kongba Nandeibam Leikai also filed submissions to the GRM/ OSPF in *December 2023.*

The Affected Peoples Joint Coordinating Committee on ADB Financed Imphal Town Ring Road Project, from Khurai Konsam Leikai, Tharon, Langthabal Chingthak and Kongba submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India on 19 December

2021 to withdraw eviction notices, to desist forced eviction and to define alternative route outside congested areas. (Annexure).

Petition to the ADB India office at Delhi

The affected communities, comprising the affected villagers of Kongba Nandeibam Leikai, Khurai Konsam Leikai, Tharon and Langthabal Chingthak, also filed complaint with the India country office of the Asian Development Bank in New Delhi on 19 December 2021. The submission called for taking the consent of affected communities before pursuing the proposed Imphal Ring Road and to desist from all forms of forced eviction. Earlier in 2015, affected communities also submitted complaint to the ADB India resident mission in New Delhi on 5 January 2015³¹.

Engagement during Public Hearing for SIA

Affected villagers submitted their objection to the project in the public hearings for the preparation of the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) held from 19th till 21st April 2022 in Imphal East District. Affected communities highlighted the irrationality of pursuing Imphal Ring road in congested part of Imphal Town and called for alternatives routes³².

During the first public hearing held at Bashikhong Shin Suba Shanglen, Basikhong in Imphal East District on 19th April 2022, many affected villagers raised objections to the project.

Ms. Puyam Romibala of Kongba Nandeibam Leikai shared that that the ring road will affected many houses, including her own home. There's no information provided to the affected villagers.

Ms. Waikhom Ibeton of Ayangpalli, also shared that the Kongba Ayangpalli road targeted for Ring Road is highly congested area of Imphal Town. Many school, colleges, medical institutions, Government offices lies along the proposed route and the road will affect peoples' access to these services. The Ring Road will also lead to filling up of water bodies along the Ayangpalli – Kongba road, which will worsen water shortages and flood situation during heavy rains. People will even find it difficult to cross the road.

Ms. Bimolata Ningombam, Prdhan, Bashikhong Gram Panchayat refuted the Government claim that livelihood and land will be provided for those giving up their land for the road and questioned where the land will be provided. The affected people who lose their land will be impoverished further. The acquisition of agriculture land will further worsen food dependency of Manipur from outside.

Mr. Ngangkham Naobi, resident of Khurai Konsam Leikai, during the public hearing at Kairang on 19th April also shared that Khurai Konsam Leikai is heavily congested areas and accident prone. He asserted that his village will not sacrifice even an inch of land to be affected in Khurai Konsam Leikai and shared, the resistance against ring road is to protect our future generation.

Legal Interventions (Tharon and Langthabal Kabui Villages)

The Tharon villagers and the Langthabal Chingthak villagers, affected by the project, challenged the eviction orders and filed a petition with the Manipur High Court in August 2021, which passed an interim order on 10 September 2021 to suspend the eviction order till the next hearing³³.
(Annexure)

Complaint with ADB

The affected villagers of Kongba Nandeibam Leikai in Imphal East District also submitted a complaint with the compliance review panel of the ADB in October 2023. However, the complaint that opted for problem solving for project affectees was found ineligible by ADB due to lack of final approval for the project. The affected villagers decided to withdraw the complaint to OSPF in October 2024 based on an agreement with the project authority, Manipur. Earlier, the affected villages, submitted complaints to the Office of the Compliance Review Panel (OSPF) of ADB on 15th December 2014. The project was delayed till resumption in 2020.

IDENTIFY ADB RESPONSIBILITIES IN TERMS OF ADB SAFEGUARDS POLICIES AND ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISM FOR THIS PROJECT

Indigenous Peoples Safeguard Policy (IP safeguard)

The project will impact the Kabui people, recognized as a scheduled tribe under the Constitution of India and the Meitei people, who has been demanding Scheduled Tribe status. Both are indigenous communities of Manipur, possessing community and individual ownership of land in Manipur with strong traditional institutions and cultural practices. The Langol Hill, the Langthabal Hill, Cheiraoching Hills etc are revered by the Meitei, as a sacred hills with their revered forest diety, the Langol Lairembi, being worshiped in Langol Hill. Similarly, the Ipum pat (wetlands) has been revered by Meitei as culturally significant in Khurai Konsam Leikai, with sacred rituals and ceremonies being performed in the wetland. The project will undermine the culture, heritage and sacred sites of the Meitei, such as Ipum Pat.

The proposed project clearly failed to take the free, prior and informed consent of affected indigenous communities of Khurai, Kongba and the villagers of Tharon and Langthabal Chingthak, that raised concerns earlier. The issuance of eviction order undermines the ADB safeguard policy that requires the consent of the affected indigenous communities, the Kabui and the Meitei people of Manipur.

The submissions by the affected communities of Kongba Nandeibam Leikai to the Government of Manipur during the Public Hearing for preparation of Social Impact Assessment (SIA) on 28 April 2022, to seek alternative route outside their village area has not been considered.

The non-consideration of the concerns and demands of affected communities undermined para 10 of ADB's Safeguard Requirements 3 on indigenous peoples, that outlined "The borrower/client will undertake meaningful consultation with affected Indigenous Peoples to ensure their informed participation in (i) designing, implementing, and monitoring measures to avoid adverse impacts on them.....".

ADB stated in the project sheet ADB participated in meaningful consultation with affected communities as part of due diligence to validate the results of good faith negotiation between project authorities and the affected villages. However, there are concerns that project related documents, viz, Detailed Project Report, Environment Impact Assessment, Social Impact Assessment, **Indigenous Peoples Action Plan** has not been provided to indigenous communities affected by the project, including to those communities, engaging on good faith negotiations with the project authorities.

There can no meaningful good faith negotiations with out the provision of these documents, which is a key criteria for free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples.

Para 16 Safeguard Requirements 3 on indigenous people stated that, " If the screening and SIA indicate that the proposed project will have impacts, positive and/or negative, on Indigenous Peoples, the borrower/client will prepare an IPP in the context of the SIA and through meaningful consultation with the affected Indigenous Peoples ...". However, No IPP has been prepared for the project. The project will cause physical displacement, livelihood loss and cultural impact on affected communities.

The proposed project undermine indigenous rights, with clear challenges in upholding the free, prior and informed consent of affected indigenous communities of Khurai, Kongba etc as required under the provisions of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007 and even under ADB's own safeguard policies.

The issuance of eviction order violates the ADB safeguard policy that requires the consultation of the affected indigenous communities and to advance their rights. Many communities who eke out their livelihood through farming, fishing and small scale economic activity will lose their livelihood and constitute a clear violation of right to life, as guaranteed both by the Article 21 of Constitution of India. Any forced eviction, if carried out without the consent of affected communities, will violate Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The

impact of displacement will led to the loss of economic activities with no ways and means of settlement and basic services.

Rehabilitation and resettlement (R&R)

Safeguard Requirement 2 on Rehabilitation and Resettlement of ADB Safeguard policy stresses the importance of rehabilitation of affected communities.

Rehabilitation and resettlement of affected communities remains one of major controversy for the project. The project sheet of ADB outlined that the project will require an estimated 94 hectares of land, of which 46 hectares are private land to be acquired following the provisions of India's Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013; Manipur's Direct Purchase Guidelines, 2016; and ADB's Safeguard Policy Statement (2009).

The project sheet mentioned that land acquisition and clearing the existing right-of-way from encroachment will potentially affect 669 titled and 171 non-titled households. About 95 households (191 persons) will require relocation from shelter and 467 households (2,764 persons) will lose greater than 10% of land. The ADB outlined that the state government will meet the cost of resettlement plan implementation. ADB maintained that the project authorities prepared one resettlement plan.

However, a major concern is on the rehabilitation plan of project authorities. The affected villagers of Kongba Nandeibam Leikai, who filed complaint with the Accountability Mechanism of ADB outlined in their complaint that the project authorities are inconsiderate in determining how the affected/victimised persons are to be compensated adequately. The compensation amount for the lands stipulated by the state authority, vide notification of the Government of Manipur dated 26th July 2023³⁴, is far less than half of the market rate expended for purchase of the same land five (5) years before. Villagers complained that the project authorities have not consulted the affected communities enough to consider their demands.

This undermined para 28 of the Safeguard policy requirement 2 on Rehabilitation and Resettlement of ADB SPS, that outlined, "The borrower/client will conduct meaningful consultation with affected persons, their host communities, and civil society for every project and subproject identified as having involuntary resettlement impacts".

Affected villagers of Kongba Nandeibam Leikai, in their complaint to the ADB AM stated that "Whereas the sale or purchase of lands anywhere in the state of Manipur (India) is transacted on the prevailing market rates, which is undeniable even by those involved in calculating compensation amount, it is a matter of concern that the land rate applied by project authority has depreciated more than 50% with time while the law of the nature indicates otherwise". This pattern of

compensation process, which is minimal and much below market rate will only be suicidal and can cause impoverishment and much suffering of the affected communities.

This constitutes a direct violation of the provision of the Right to Fair Compensation and Rehabilitation, 2014, which outlined that affected communities will be compensated adequately for any acquisition and alienation of their land. This undermine para 21 of the ADB's Safeguard Policy Requirement 2 on RR, that outlined, "The borrower/client will include detailed measures for income restoration and livelihood improvement of displaced persons in the resettlement plan". The affected villagers are not only worried of involuntary displacement, but also livelihood loss.

Ms. Bimolata Ningombam, Prdhan, Bashikhong Gram Panchayat, during the public hearing held at Wangkhei Ayangpalli, refuted the Government claim that livelihood and land will be provided for those giving up their land for the road and questioned from where the land will be taken and provided by the Government for the affected communities.

Comprehensive impact assessment, including environment (Environment)

The IEE prepared by PWD outlined that the proposed project cause environmental impacts which are less adverse in nature and few of them are reversible and mitigation measures can be designed more readily for the identified impacts. There is no protected area and buffer zone of protected area within 10 km radius of the proposed alignment. No cultural heritage site, wetland, mangrove etc. are adjacent to the proposed alignment. Hence, as per the ADB's Safeguard Policy Statement 2009, the proposed Imphal Ring Road has been classified as Category 'B' project requiring Initial Environmental Examination (IEE)³⁵.

Para 4, 5 and 6 of the ADB's Safeguard Requirement 1: Environment safeguard stresses the importance of environment impact assessment and then need for an alternate assessment. For projects with potentially significant adverse impacts that are diverse, irreversible, or unprecedented, the borrower/client are required to examine alternatives to the project's location, design, technology, and components to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts and risks.

Para 9 of environment safeguard stressed that, "Depending on the significance of project impacts and risks, the assessment may comprise a full-scale environmental impact assessment (EIA) for category A projects, an initial environmental examination (IEE) or equivalent process for category B projects, or a desk review". Though, an initial environment examination (IEE) was prepared in accordance with ADB's Safeguard Policy Statement (2009), the IEE undermined the anticipated environmental impacts.

Further, no detailed impact assessment has been conducted despite the potential impact on ecologically sensitive wetlands and forest areas. IEE for the project prepared by the project authority outlined that the the proposed project is unlikely to cause any significant adverse environmental impacts and no further detailed study is required.

However, Imphal Town has been experiencing increasing floods due to multiple factors, including climate change impacts. At least three major flooding affects Imphal Town in 2024³⁶ (Annexure). The Lamphelpat wetlands is highly flood prone too, both due to unplanned development and climate change impacts. There are concerns that the Ring Road will also lead to artificial filling up of water bodies along the Ayangpalli – Kongba road and several other roads, which will worsen water shortages and flood situation during heavy rains.

The multifaceted environmental impacts of the project has been undermined by the proposed project. A detailed environmental impact assessment has still not been prepared. The preparation of comprehensive environment impact assessment and to review the project for its environment feasibility, implications of climate change and to seek Environment clearance for the project is critical as the project will pass through the Eco sensitive zones like the Lamphelpat Wetlands and the Ipum Pat wetlands, which are ecosensitive zones in Manipur, besides the forest areas in Langol Hill, Cheiraoching Hill, Langthabal Hill etc. The increased flood situation in Imphal need be considered too.

Para 12 of the environment safeguard policy also outlined, that, "The borrower/client will prepare an environmental management plan (EMP) that addresses the potential impacts and risks identified by the environmental assessment". No EMP has been prepared as of September 2024.

There are concerns that Environment Clearance has not been obtained as environment impact assessment and environment clearance is exempted for infrastructure projects in areas falling within 100 kilometres from International border areas, as per the notification of the Ministry of Environment and Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), Government of India (MoEFCC Circular dated 14th July 2022 [S.O. 3194(E)]. This exemption and the absence of a detailed environmental impact will undermine the critical need and importance of environment management plan for the project.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

Recommendations

The community members affected by the Imphal Town Ring Road Project contend that the Government of India, Manipur and the ADB make the following recommendations:

For Government of India

- ▶ Consult and seek consent of the affected complainants before pursuance of Imphal Town Ring Road in Imphal Town, Manipur.
- ▶ Withdraw all eviction orders related to the project, viz, the Eviction Order of the Sub Divisional Officer, Imphal West on 27th August 2021 and the Deputy Commissioner, Imphal West on 28 July 2021, Order of Revenue Department, on 3 November, notification of the Forest Department on 2 October 2021 etc.
- ▶ Conduct detailed environment and social impact assessment and necessary mitigation and environment management plan for the project with affected peoples' participation.
- ▶ Provision of all project related documents to affected communities, in accordance with the safeguard policy of ADB, 2009.
- ▶ The Ring Road should not affect residential and agriculture land.
- ▶ The Government of India, the Government of Manipur and the ADB should refrain from construction of the Imphal Town Ring Road in congested areas of Imphal Town.
- ▶ Define alternatives for route alignment of Imphal Town Ring road in areas outside settlement, congested residential areas in consultation with all affected communities.

For ADB

- ▶ The ADB should implement the Safeguard Policy of ADB, 2009 for the project to address the plight and rights of affected communities.
- ▶ The ADB should review and desist the financing the Imphal Town Ring Road Project till the grievances, rights and demands of all affected complainants are fully considered and resolved.
- ▶ The ADB should conduct risk assessment of financing the Imphal Town Ring Road amid the ongoing conflict, crime, humanitarian crisis and challenges in maintaining law and order
- ▶ Stringent monitoring of the application of the Safeguard Policy even before the project approval.

Government of Manipur

- ▶ The Government of Manipur should implement the Safeguard Policy of ADB, 2009 for the project to address the rights of affected communities.
- ▶ Stop all forms of reprisal, threats and intimidation on affected communities for raising their concerns and filing complaints with the accountability mechanism of ADB.
- ▶ The Government should stop causing fear of displacement and psychological health impacts due to the project.
- ▶ Promote a participatory, democratic development decision making process in Manipur respectful of affected indigenous peoples rights

ENDNOTES

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