

Altogether 318 cases under POCSO Act yet to come up for trial

Panel concern over pending cases

ANDREW W. LYNGDOH

Shillong, Aug. 22: Over 400 cases relating to crimes against minors are pending trial in various courts across Meghalaya, causing concern to the Meghalaya State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, which has appealed for speedier disposal of cases.

The commission was informed that as of February this year, 318 cases under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 are pending for trial in the special courts in six districts.

The court of the district and sessions judge has been designated as special court to try cases under the act.

While the legislation states that special courts should complete the trial, as far as possible within a year from the date of taking cognisance of the offence, the pending cases date back to 2012, commission chairperson Meena Kharkongor said here today.

Apart from the pending cases in the special courts,

Kharkongor said till July, there were 133 cases relating to minors pending in the East Khasi Hills District Council court.

From among the various cases, the commission chairperson said as per the February data, convictions have taken place in only four cases, two each in East Khasi Hills and West Khasi Hills.

According to Meghalaya police statistics, last year there were 257 cases registered under crimes against children. Of the 257 cases, 118 were registered under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act.

Until June this year, the statistics reveal that 115 cases were registered under crimes against children, and out of these, 54 cases were under the POCSO Act.

Commenting on the rise in crimes against children, Kharkongor said, "We are worried about the crimes. Imagine the trauma the child has to live with as she grows older." □ To improve the disposal and conviction rates, she said it was important for



Meena Kharkongor. Telegraph picture

Meghalaya to commence the much-talked-about directorate of prosecution and to invigorate its forensic laboratory.

On April 15, 2008, the

Meghalaya governor had approved the setting up of the directorate of prosecution. However, the directorate is yet to be operational.

In April 2013, the Meghalaya government announced a separate directorate for prosecution to improve quality of investigation.

The government is said to have plans to make the directorate function under the home department. It will be responsible for conducting the prosecution in all the courts in Meghalaya, and will scrutinise the evidence in all cases.

"If we have better evidence, credible medical reports coupled with proper investigation, we will definitely see a change," Kharkongor said.

Calling for the need to have special courts to exclusively try cases under the POCSO Act, she said the high court along with the state government can work on the setting up of such courts.

She stressed the need for "community participation" in tackling crimes against children and the need to introduce sex education in schools.

She also said life skills should be introduced in higher secondary school level while more vocational centres should be opened in all districts to engage school dropouts as a means to discourage them from taking the "wrong path".