

Child Rights chief asks schools to appoint counsellors

By Our Reporter

SHILLONG: The State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCR) has asked all schools to appoint counsellors who can look into the problems of students.

Talking to *The Shillong Times*, Chairperson of the Commission Meena Kharkongor said, in 2000, the Supreme Court had introduced a law banning corporal punishment but enforcement of the law is lax in most of the states.

In Meghalaya too, several cases of corporal punishment go unreported. "The Education department of the state has issued a notification to all schools to not resort to physical punishment or mental harassment. Most schools

Corporal punishment

have a School Managing Committee (SMC) and in case of harassment, the matter should be sorted out with the school management," she said.

The Department's notification states, "In pursuance of the provision under Section 17 (1) of the Right of Children to Free & Compulsory Education, 2009, the state government hereby notifies that no child shall be subjected to physical punishment or mental harassment in any school."

The Commission has sent a draft of the Child Protection Policy to the Social Welfare Department

and if it is cleared, it will be taken to the Government for consideration. SCPCR has not received any cases of corporal punishment till date.

"Parents/guardians should be aware that any violation of child's rights be it physical, mental, moral, abandonment which affects the child should be brought to the notice of the Commission as it is an appellate body to hear cases on the educational rights of the children," she added.

When asked on how to deal with today's aggressive students she said, "Counsellors should

be present in each school to help students with their problems. Rehabilitation centers should be set up with all the basic amenities provided."

Accordingly, every school needs to set up a Child Rights Cell where children can lodge complaints.

Kharkongor informed that the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development has issued a new set of guidelines that bans punishment of students. Under the new guidelines, first violation of the ban will invite up to 1 year in jail or fine of Rs 50,000 or both, and for subsequent violations, imprisonment could be extended up to 3 years with an additional fine of Rs 25,000. (Contd on P-10)

Child Rights chief asks...

(Contd from P-3) The guidelines also state that heads of institutions will be responsible to prevent corporal punishment and teachers found guilty could be denied promotion and increment. The teacher is liable to prosecution under the Law if the offences are serious.

Referring to the Juvenile Justice Act 2000, the SCPCR chairperson said Section 23 of the IPC prohibits cruelty to children and the law does not excuse teachers and parents. She informed that according to Section 83, any child who has not done homework or has not followed dress code should not incite any form of corporal punishment in India, any child below the age of seven is supposed to be exempted from criminal liability and any mistake they may have done cannot merit to invite corporal punishment in schools as they are in the age of innocence and unable to comprehend complex issues.

Raising concerns over the mushrooming of private pre-nursery schools, Kharkongor said, "The education department should strictly scrutinize these schools before giving permission to them. There should be rules and regulations for all private schools to check on the teacher-student ratio and even the quality of teachers."