

Delay in passing a strong anti-trafficking law is putting scores of women at risk

Last week, eight girls, three of them minors, were rescued from Manipur's Churachandpur district [in the nick of time by anti-trafficking officials](#). The traffickers had offered her a job in Singapore, which seemed to the girl as her best chance to escape poverty. The minor, however, had no idea that she would become a victim of an international trafficking racket and sent illegally to Myanmar, which borders Manipur, to be flown later to Singapore to work as domestic worker. India and Myanmar have a free-movement agreement, which allows people from either side residing within a 16-km radius of the international border to travel to the other side and stay for a maximum of 72 hours without visa or passports. Traffickers use this arrangement to make fake documents for the trafficked girls so that they are able to enter Myanmar through the Moreh-Tamu border for their onward journey to Yangon.

Human trafficking has is a big problem in the Northeast. This is not surprising since the region is politically instable and poverty-stricken. Along with the State, various NGOs provide assistance and aid for trafficking victims, but corruption often limits their ability to make a large impact. Sometime victims are scarred and they are not able to receive the psychological help they need and are dragged back into trafficking.

To address the situation, India needs a strong anti-trafficking bill. [The draft Trafficking of Persons \(Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation\) Bill, 2016](#), has been criticised as it is "inadequate" and because it does little to alleviate 'modern slavery'. "The bill in its current form will not achieve its objectives of preventing trafficking and providing protection and rehabilitation to trafficked victims," wrote academic Prabha Kotiswaran recently. The sooner the Centre comes out with a well-thought-out law, the easier it will be for enforcement agencies to tackle the menace better.

It will also help if areas vulnerable to trafficking are marked, as this paper by Eli Kumari Das — Human trafficking in North Eastern region: A study with global perspectives, mentions. In addition, the paper adds, "government and NGOs and other social organizations should spread education in the remote areas particularly about these kinds of crimes because due to proper knowledge most of the uneducated even educated women and girl child become the easy prey of traffickers". Additionally, concerned authorities should take the missing persons report seriously and should take necessary action without fail. This may sound very doable but actually doesn't happen in many cases.

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