

# The army is totally out of line

As a journalist who has covered the North East for more than two decades for television as well as edited a newspaper in Nagaland, would you describe this letter from the Assam Rifles as an unprecedented development? Has the Nagaland media been asked before, categorically, not to cover statements by a banned group?

The letter is not just an unprecedented development but a direct interference in the affairs of the fourth estate by an organisation deployed for 'counter-insurgency' operations. The order, addressed simultaneously to the press and the heads of the state government, can be construed as a diktat by a paramilitary force to a democratically elected government and cannot be brushed aside. India is not a military state.

Would the Assam Rifles dare extend the same order to 'national' media houses? The order is discriminatory in nature and reflects a poor relationship between the two entities. In over 60 years of the Indo-Naga imbroglio, the media in Nagaland has never been issued such a 'gag' order. If anything, this is detrimental to creating 'normalcy' in the state and tantamount to stating that the media has had a role in fanning militancy.

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It is naive to conclude that press releases in the media by militant outfits influence the public to support them. The Naga public is more mature in these matters than the credit given to them and besides, the topic of 'militancy' is far more complex in the context of Nagaland, a state created politically rather than by consensus.

The newspapers in the state are by and large regarded as neutral platforms for the public to reflect their opinion and this 'gag' threatens to disturb this fragile balance. Moreover, the Assam Rifles order mentions that the NSCN (K) has been declared a banned outfit to 'prevent and curb fresh recruitment, violent and terrorist secessionist activities and collection of funds'. It does not explain how publishing any article on the NSCN (K) negates these objectives.

**What about newspapers or**

**television in Manipur or Assam?** As far I am aware, no newspaper or television houses have ever received such orders by the Army. Even at the height of activities by the ULFA in the early 1990s, the press in Assam had the freedom to carry press releases issued by the ULFA. More often than not, it was these press releases that provided inputs for the administration on the policies being adopted by the militant outfit.

As far as television in the 90s went, Doordarshan monopolised the broadcast medium and self censorship was the rule when it came to such press releases. Very often, the operations carried out by the army in 'busting' ULFA hide-outs, seizure of arms, and mass surrenders often conducted by the army found regular 'space' in television coverage.

Interviews with ULFA leaders appeared first in the vernacular papers and later were followed up by the state and national media. The media played a significant role in Assam in stemming the growth of ULFA by providing space for free speech and opinions.

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**Have militant groups ever pressured media outlets in any way to carry their statements? I am told by editors in Dimapur that in this case there was no pressure from the NSCN (K) but they carried these statements because it was news. But editors in Manipur, for instance, say they feel caught between the militants and the state.**

In one instance cited by the Assam Rifles regarding the publication of an appointment of an NSCN (K) cadre to oversee its trade and commercial transactions in a certain zonal area, this item was best not published by the papers. But an outfit issuing warnings to lawmakers (no names published) they deemed as 'collaborators' in compromising 'Naga sovereignty' is news, shocking as it may appear. Which newspaper house will let this pass?

If the death threat had not been picked up by the state media, it would have been covered by papers outside the state. Does that make it any less threatening? But more importantly, the statement reveals a lot about

what has been happening since the Naga Peace Accord was signed by the Government of India with NSCN (IM) on August 3rd 2015, the subsequent announcement of a ban on the NSCN (K) on September 10th 2015, and the extension of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act earlier this year following the ambush and killing of 18 army jawans in the Indo-Myanmar border by the NSCN (K) in the first week of June, 2015.

Yes, there are occasions when media houses are ordered to carry statements in their entirety and sometimes told to make it headline news. Media houses have different equations, styles of functioning with militant outfits in every state.

In Manipur, the relationship between media houses and the militant groups gets a little complicated because of the plethora of 'outfits'. But a united front of media houses under the banner of the 'All Manipur Working Journalists Association' has withstood threats from militants and evoked support from the public. No militant outfit or the Assam Rifles will be able to issue a similar diktat to the media in Manipur.

**In this instance the NSCN (K) actually issued a threat of elimination to senior lawmakers which was carried by the press. Have there been such instances before of statements conveying death threats through the media?** The news item published in the papers on October 17, 2015 is not the first instance of 'warnings' issued by the insurgent groups to their alleged detractors and published in the papers.

There are individuals who are regular contributors to the dailies and who express their opinions freely on the Naga political issue. They have also been in the receiving end of such threats from the various underground outfits, the NNC, NSCN (IM), and NSCN (K). Individuals such as author Kaka Iralu, Khekiye Sema (IAS Retd), and Thepfluhoivi Solo (Retd IFS) have been targeted.

**Is the army the competent authority to censor the media? Has its censorship been accepted in other parts of the North East?**

The army cannot be the competent authority to censor the media. This is the first time that the Army has formally issued a letter to the media directing it not to publish a news item and directly informing the state government of its diktat. The letter is being justified by stating that the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act 1967 is invoked with regard to the NSCN (K) after it was declared an unlawful association.

Requests, rather than orders to the media, work out much better, especially when the army is clearly overstepping its mandate. I don't believe that media houses can or will refuse to publish statements from militant groups but they can exercise choice on the contents.

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**Do some of them have a policy on this?**

I don't know of any newspaper house or media channel that currently has a specific policy on dealing with news from militant outfits.

*Bano Harulu has been a correspondent in the North East for Doordarshan and later for NDTV. She is former editor of the Eastern Mirror*

(Courtesy The Hoot)

## National & International News

# Belgian Police arrests several people in Brussels over Paris attacks

**AFP Brussels, Nov. 15:** Belgian Police arrested several suspects in Brussels on Saturday during raids connected to the Paris attacks, including one who was in the French capital at the time of the carnage, officials said.

The arrests — local media said three people were detained — were in connection with a vehicle found near the Bataclan concert hall where the majority of the 129 victims were killed, they said. The arrests were in the poor Brussels district of Molenbeek, which has been linked to several other past terror plots amid concerns Belgium has become a hotbed of European militancy. Prime Minister Charles Michel said there had been "several" arrests and told RTBF television: "It is believed or suspected that one of these people was in Paris last night."

Belgian Justice Minister Koen Geens said separately that the arrests in Molenbeek "can be seen in connection with a grey Polo car rented in Belgium" found near the Bataclan.

"The person who rented the car was Belgian. We know this from his brother," said Geens, adding the brother had been arrested. Parking tickets from Molenbeek were found inside the car with Belgian license plates, Belgian media said. In Paris, several

witness reported that some of the attackers arrived in a vehicle with Belgian licence plates.

Separately the Paris prosecutor, Francois Molins, said one of the vehicles used in Friday's attacks in the French capital was registered in Belgium and hired by a French national living there. That Frenchman and two others travelling with him were arrested by Belgian police during a traffic stop in another vehicle, the prosecutor said in Paris, adding that they were not known to French intelligence.

**'On his knees'**  
The Belgian federal prosecutor meanwhile said authorities had now opened a formal terrorism investigation.

Footage on Belgian television showed plainclothes officers pointing automatic pistols at a man on his knees, while a uniformed police officer carrying a sub-machine gun warned onlookers to stay away.

"An old model Golf was stopped as it was driving. The police made the man get out and they shoved him in the back, made him kneel and then put a blindfold on him," a resident told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"The man was between 30 and 40. He was dressed normally in jeans and a hoodie. He wasn't bearded, he looked normal," the witness added.

# Indian Army captain dies in Siachen avalanche in JK

**IANS Jammu, Nov. 15:** A captain of the Indian Army was killed in an avalanche on Saturday at the Siachen Glacier in Jammu and Kashmir's Ladakh region, an official said.

"Captain Ashwini Kumar of Ladakh Scouts was killed when an army patrol was hit by an avalanche in the southern ridge of the Siachen Glacier," Colonel

S.D. Goswami, spokesman of the army's Udhampur-based Northern Command, told IANS here.

The others in the army patrol were rescued, and the injured were being treated, he said.

Siachen is regarded as the world's highest battlefield where the Indian and Pakistan Army face each other in an eyeball-to-eyeball situation.

Belgium has the highest per-capita number of nationals who have travelled to fight with the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, officials and analysts have said. In January, just days after the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris, two suspected militants were shot dead in a police raid in the eastern Belgian city of Verviers. Police later said they had smashed a cell aiming to kill police officers. The alleged mastermind of that plot — Abdelhamid Abaaoud — was from Molenbeek.

Investigators said they also suspected a Belgian man could have supplied Amedy Coulibaly, the gunman behind a Jewish supermarket attack also in Paris in January, with his weapons. Meanwhile the man behind August's foiled attack on an Amsterdam-Paris train, Ayoub El Khazzani, had stayed with his sister in Molenbeek before getting the train.

# Seven bombs seized from train

**PTI Bihar, Nov 15:** Seven bombs were recovered from a passenger train on the Katihar-Malda section of the North-East Frontier Railway, a railway official said today.

Acting on a tip-off, Railway Protection Force (RPF) and Government Railway Police (GRP) personnel launched a search in the Malda-Katihar passenger train and seized an unclaimed carton box containing seven crude bombs underneath a seat in a general class compartment last night, Superintendent of Railway Police (SRP) Jitendra Mishra said.

The bombs were defused by the bomb disposal squad. Mishra said the bombs could have belonged to dacoits.

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# Pfürhitsu remark 'I am a Man' put .....

It represents our assessment of ourselves, and our determination to learn to go forward with others as we should. Yet we are keenly conscious that Nagas are just at the start of their journey in a world where others far larger, much more experienced, than them are shaping the course of events. I am saying this to say we consider the coming of our two closest neighbours, our distinguished guests from Assam and Manipur, to be with us on this occasion as a highly valued gesture of friendship and goodwill. You have accumulated so much more than us from your wider, longer encounters with others in the world from which we need to learn for our own future growth.

Now coming to paying tribute to our people, I start by expressing my sincerest appreciation to Rev Dr VK Nuh for his pioneering initiative in getting this Archives established today. It is a priceless contribution to our society.

Conscious as I am of our serious shortcomings and of the consequences of our mistakes and wrongs we have done to ourselves and to others over the years of our crisis, I do believe the pioneers of the Naga struggle did the right thing in launching their struggle. I do believe also that by taking their stand to desperately defend their

identity based on the facts of their history, the Nagas have achieved something, they have covered some distance, namely, that they are a people and a nation. To limit the status of nationality only to those who have become members of the elite club of the UN is a conceptual construct made by a few old nations in a hurry. Membership of this Club is not the final word on the stories of peoples and nations. The world and mankind are going to discover possibilities for societies and communities to live together than what have prevailed thus far.

So I pay my humble but deeply felt tribute to our people for the tenacity and courage they have shown thus far to assert what they believed was true, right and honourable for themselves. They launched out without counting the cost because they could not know what it was going to be from their limited exposure to the wider world.

What I want to emphasize is that we urgently need to know ourselves correctly without fear or pretense. If compared to others we have discovered we have completed only up to Upper Primary School level, we do not need to waste our time and resources and damage ourselves

by regretting we are not able to do what others who are University graduates are capable of doing and achieving! We need to discover what we have achieved and know that we are not more than what we really are. But we need to rejoice and find confidence in the fact that we are not less than what we are. The Nagas of today should be humble, compassionate towards one another, realistic, responsible, and intelligent enough and build on the foundation your grandfathers and pioneers have achieved and passed on to you. Feeling for one's own identity and defending it, at the same time accepting joint responsibility by all to help one another to learn to live together in mutual trust and goodwill is now the toughest challenge for all mankind. For that way alone we will be able to grow safely together on this planet earth, our common shrinking, threatened sanctuary.

I want to end with Cardinal John Henry Newman's well-known observation: **"To live is to grow. To grow is to change. To grow fully is to change often."**

This surely is the clear unquestionable roadmap we have to understand and accept for the challenging years ahead.

## Wanted Sub-Editor

Imphal Times is looking for an experience sub editor with excellent writing skill in English who can read Bengali written script. Working hour is 12 noon till 3 pm. Honorarium is Rs. 3000 p/m. Preference will be given to candidate who had already work in English daily as desk editor. Age no bar, and Imphal Times have no problem with those candidates working in other newspaper at night shift.

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