

Editorial

Imphal, Friday, June 10, 2016

Threat to press- threat to society

According to the 2016 'World Press Freedom Index' released by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) India ranks an abysmally low at 133 among 180 countries. The release further states that Prime Minister Narendra Modi seems "indifferent" to the threats against journalists. Though improved from the previous year as India jumped three spots from the 136th position it had in 2015, the scenario still presents a bleak picture regarding the safety and security of the journalists across the country. The situation does not fare any better in our own state of Manipur.

Threats from the mushrooming armed separatist groups in the state is nothing new, and there have even been instances where the media fraternity have suspended publications to mark their protests against unwarranted threats and intimidation which is seen as an attempt to suppress the freedom of the press and the right of the public to avail timely and correct information. Though the situation could be expectedly termed as improving, the safety and security of the journalists who often have to work at odd hours collecting news from often dangerous zones and conflict situations cannot be assured. There have also been sporadic veiled insinuations from the high and the powerful rulers of the land when reports threatening to expose their sordid underhand dealings or that of their dear and near ones are published. The state, like the rest of the country have also witnessed blatant abuse of power when the press was stonewalled by the state authorities on a series of narcotics smuggling cases which made obvious the firm grip certain individuals with power and influence have on the system and the government, though there have not been an outright curb on the freedom of the press, it has been experienced more times than one would care to keep tract the fact that various components of the society- the state government, the armed separatist groups, civil society organizations and individuals have tried to arm-twist the press into downplaying or exaggerating reports according to their conveniences, and the trend is unfortunately going on.

While there have been instances of the media playing favorites, the fact remains that there is a very big platform for the disgruntled public to bring up the issue, and there is no way such issues will be distorted or played down. Leaving aside the unintentional mistakes and errors of details, one can say with certainty that the media in the state has been trying to uphold the sanctity of journalism, and the biggest challenge to that is standing our ground against severe criticisms and threats of bodily harm. The media is not any party's or individual's mouthpiece. It is a medium for mirroring the society in its starkness, without distortions or justifications. When the pureness of the image gets tampered with, then everybody stands to lose- be it the mighty, powerful, daring, influential, wealthy or plain desperados.

6.1 Magnitude Quake, Aftershocks Shake Northwest Nicaragua

Nicaragua, June 10: A strong 6.1 magnitude earthquake and at least four major aftershocks shook northwestern Nicaragua on Thursday night, triggering panic among residents and damaging some homes, officials said. There were no immediate reports of casualties. The quake struck at 9:25 pm (0325 GMT), centered 17 kilometers (10.5 miles) east of Puerto Morazan near the Honduras border at a depth of 10 kilometers, according to the United States Geological Survey.

It was followed by four weaker aftershocks over the course of about an hour, USGS said. "The quake was felt almost throughout the country," government spokeswoman and First Lady Rosario Murillo said, calling it "unusually strong." She urged residents to stay calm, warning of the threat of more aftershocks. As of late Thursday, there had been at least 80 small aftershocks, Murillo said. Some homes were damaged but there were no immediate reports of deaths or injuries, she said.

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Framework for a Shared Future.....

The Government of India's acknowledgement of the unique history and situation of the Nagas is according to me, an affirmation of Naga integration. The land that belongs to the Naga people will belong to them wherever they are and under whatever administrative setup they may come under. This is the reality.

That Nagas of Manipur have been living in Manipur for ages in peaceful co-existence with the other communities, including the Meiteis, this is also a reality we should not forget easily.

The so called demand for 'Greater Nagalim' or integration of Naga areas has been a subject of huge public interest as also the subject of intense media and public scrutiny. This topic is bound to generate renewed interest given the recent 'Framework Agreement' that was signed by the Government of India's Interlocutor R.N Ravi and Th.Muivah, the Chief Negotiator of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (or NSCN-IM).

And so whether we like it or not, the question of Naga integration is of immense importance to the peace process with both past (during the NNC time) and present talks (with the NSCN-IM) with the Government of India, having underscored this point in their agenda.

Even the 16-Point Agreement, on the basis of which Nagaland State was formed, has a clause called 'Consolidation of Contiguous Naga Areas' where the then Naga leaders who were signatories to the agreement expressed the view that "other Nagas inhabiting contiguous areas should be enabled to join the new State" (Nagaland).

You will understand therefore that there is a basis to the present claims and the position taken by the Naga people on this issue.

I want to quote herefrom an article appearing in the online news portal, The Quint dated August 13, 2015. Former Union Home Secretary, K Padmanabhaiah, also the Government of India's interlocutor for the Naga peace talks between 1999 and 2009 had this to say.

"A possible solution that has been suggested to them is the creation of a Naga Regional Council - comprising representatives from all major Naga tribes in the North East - which should be consulted by the concerned state governments on matters relating to the socio-economic development of Naga tribes living in those states".

Coming from someone like Padmanabhaiah, the longest serving interlocutor for the Naga peace talks, the above proposal appears to be credible and a distinct possibility. In fact Padmanabhaiah goes on to say that the idea of a Naga Regional Council has been suggested to the NSCN (IM) as "a possible solution" to the question of Naga integration.

To add to what the former interlocutor has disclosed and in the light of the present inability to redraw state boundaries, the suggestion of a 'non-territorial model' has been put forward for quite some time now as a way forward in the ongoing Indo-Naga peace talks.

For instance, Late BG Verghese, a much respected Indian journalist had suggested a non-territorial approach that would strengthen the Naga way of life and would not affect the integrity of other states. He is also reported to have recommended the formation of a 'Naga Regional Council' that would have given the Nagas, beyond present Nagaland state, some say in non-political areas like culture and social mores.

Noted anthropologist B K Roy Burman, has gone on to suggest the creation of an institution modelled on the Saami Council, similar to the case of the Saami people living in Sweden, Finland and Norway. Other writers in India have also

commented on this 'non-territorial' approach to resolve the present demand of the Nagas for some kind of a common platform to administer them.

Within this broad imagination of a 'non-territorial' model includes talk of a 'Pan-Naga Hoho', Supra-State body and many more, including the disclosure by Padmanabhaiah of a possible Naga Regional Council. Of course, till now no clarity exists on the specifics of how to evolve a system that works on the ground. The parties to the current negotiation, i.e., the Government of India and the NSCN (IM), I am sure would have studied the matter in depth on the so called 'non-territorial model'.

Similar to the 'non-territorial model' is the idea that has evolved in Europe, of 'cross-border regions'. According to the Madrid Convention which provides a legal framework for its establishment in Europe, the basic purpose of 'cross-border regions' is to deepen and broaden integration through cross-border institution or cooperation without the need to redraw international or state boundaries. The reasons for the attention given to cross-border cooperation in Europe should be seen in its historical background. Many centuries of wars have created Europe's present boundaries. In many parts of Europe political divisions have created unnatural divisions in ethnic and cultural regions. The Nagas in India and Burma or the Kurds in the Middle-East are similar cases.

It is quite clear that the Naga case for unification of its contiguous lands for now will have to come through a similar innovation of a cross-border arrangement. The question now is if Nagas are willing to bargain for such an eventuality, will the people in Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh also come half way to support such a move to create a non-territorial model.

This is a way forward—on how a 'non-territorial' or even say 'cross-border regional' model can be worked out that best suits the present reality of the Nagas, their neighbours and the working of Indian federalism.

As a Naga commentator, you may question some of the arguments put forward. My intention is simply to encourage an informed dialogue and greater understanding on this particular issue so that some formulations can be worked out. We have seen thus far that whether it is for the Meiteis or Nagas, the 'integration' question, which-ever way you would like to interpret it from, is an emotive issue and so it is all the more necessary that we treat this with utmost care and matured deliberation without disturbing peaceful coexistence. As I see it, if you bring in party politics or take extreme and exclusive positions then it will become very difficult to resolve this problem confronting us.

Can we therefore look at a 'middle-path' solution in the context of the Naga peace process? That is a question I put before you. Is it possible that without disturbing existing State boundaries, a federal solution through a non-territorial approach can be worked out for the Nagas of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in India and those eastern Nagas in Burma?

Having studied and analysed this complex and sensitive issue, my own opinion is that for now, the next best bargain for Nagas is to have some form of localized integration as defined under Article 244A along with perhaps the idea of a Special Administrative Region and one that does not disturb the existing State boundaries.

I am sure some formulations will have to be worked out. If we can do this, it will also lead to the larger goal of peace, unity and integration of the North East in general and

Manipur-Nagaland in particular while allowing our people to coexist as neighbours.

Federalism and democracy - A relook at State systems

Another important point that I want to pick out from Dr Lokendra's speech that he made at the inauguration of the Naga Archives & Research Centre Dimapur on November 7, 2015, is the one where he has mentioned about Manipur as a "historically established entity" and how the "the issue of ethnic relations had become mired with issues of the modern state's inability to design a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-linguistic polity and community...."

Correct me if I am wrong but what I understand here is that the numerous challenges that Manipur is presently faced with, including the aspiration of various sections of people, will require an appropriate response that goes beyond the present constitutional arrangement. Without going into the specifics, the present state of affairs in Manipur I believe requires a 'tectonic shift' somewhere.

And as Dr Lokendra alluded to in his speech, the need to design a multi-ethnic polity "is demanded by the very nature of Manipur's geography and polity nursed since its ancient history and their emergence into the globalized world of today".

This for me is a fitting analysis of everything that is going on in Manipur. More importantly, it points to the need to explore and write new political alternatives.

To give the benefit of doubt, Manipur is perhaps one of the few States in India with both a multi-ethnic demography and therefore poses its own challenge when it comes to governing the State. It is not surprising to witness so many upheavals taking place in Manipur, especially the

increasing division and acrimony between the people in Manipur valley and the surrounding Hill tribes.

Having recently read about it, social scientists and researchers are probably right when they state that historical forces over the centuries, including British rule are also to be blamed for the unequal relation between the hill and the valley. As AK Ray in a research paper titled "Ethnicity: A Manipur Case" points out that "in the field of politics, administration, law and religion the hill people were kept apart from the rest".

Despite all these historical flaws that were inherited, I must also point out the observation made by Sir James Johnstone, political officer of Manipur for several years, who wrote about the "remarkable aptitude the Manipuris possess or have for dealing with the hill-tribes". It is said that the Burmese tried in vain to subdue the Tangkhis. And as stated in Johnstone's book, in one case, a force of seven hundred men that were sent against them, were entirely destroyed. However, as the Manipuris advanced, the different tribes quietly submitted. There was peace and order.

Can we reclaim that era of peace and order? Power, politics and aspirations all change with time and it is no exception to Manipur and the people who live here. But the fundamental thing that should not change is fraternity and to live in peaceful co-existence. This applies to the Meiteis, Kukis, Nagas. We need to restore that relationship—to live in peace and amity but perhaps in a new political arrangement.

And so coming back to the question of a political alternative—a way forward has to be found to end the vicious cycle of strife and unrest in Manipur. (To be contd....)

MANIPUR LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY SECRETARIAT

NOTIFICATION

Imphal, the 9th June, 2016

No. 1/13(6)/2014-LA(E)/Rctt.: It is hereby informed to all the candidates who have failed to appear the viva-voce for direct recruitment to the post of Compositor, Security man and Security woman in the Manipur Legislative Assembly Secretariat due to the present law and order situation in the state that the viva-voce for the above posts will be held on the date time given below :

Sl.No.	Name of posts	Date	Time
1.	Compositor	16-06-2016	11:00am
2.	Security man/woman	16-06-2016	11:30am

All the candidates are, therefore, informed to appear for the said viva-voce on the date and time as shown above and collect admittance card on or before the scheduled date without fail.

Sd/-
(G Tapankumar Sharma)
Deputy Secretary (Admn).
Manipur Legislative Assembly

MANIPUR LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY SECRETARIAT

NOTIFICATION

Imphal, the 9th June, 2016

No. 1/13(6)/2014-LA(E)/Rctt.: It is hereby informed to all the candidates already appeared for speed test (Computer typing) for direct recruitment to the post of LDA in the Manipur Legislative Assembly Secretariat held from 17-05-2016 to 24-05-2016 that the viva-voce for the said post will be held from 14-06-2016 to 15-06-2016.

Sl.No.	Roll No.	Date	Time
1.	1 to 200	14-06-2016	11:00am
2.	201 to 423	15-06-2016	11:00am

All the candidates are, therefore, informed to appear for the said viva-voce on the date and time as shown above without fail.

Sd/-
(G Tapankumar Sharma)
Deputy Secretary (Admn).
Manipur Legislative Assembly