

Editorial

Imphal, Saturday, May 14, 2016

Minding the consequences

Humans are, by nature, whimsical creatures. The only defining element is the ability to reason and think out the consequences of such whims, if and when carried out. This unique trait differentiates humans from other species, and makes them master better and stronger creatures. If we take out the part that relates any of his or her actions to any consequences, the result will invariably baffle and amuse us. Or have we been witness to these conditions without our being aware of it? What about the Armed Forces Special Powers Act 1958? Isn't there startling similarities with the situations where one's actions are separated from the consequences? And what are the repercussions that we've been witnessing - rather experiencing in our society? The word "immunity" in the legal context connotes "impunity of action". Man is perhaps the only being that attacks without any provocation or reason - a sense of ego often ruling over the reasoning mind. Perhaps that explains - albeit to our consternation the unfortunate incidents where the state security forces as well as the civil society organizations have a proven proclivity to resort to arm-twisting, intimidation and even brute force at the slightest opportunity to impose their point of view or wishes. What comes as not-totally-unexpected fallout is the blot in the efforts of the police department to revitalize and strengthen the trust and cooperation of the public which has been on the decline for a long time on the one hand, and the continuous strive by the various social bodies to bring relevant social issues and make the state government to address them on the other. There have even been positive results, with the public and various media houses highlighting and applauding the positive steps and mature decisions, as and when they happen. But as the social conditions worsen, it is getting evidently clearer that these security forces and social organisations still need to be sensitized on relating with the public - of handling a high pressure situation and winning the trust and respect of the common people and not venting their frustrations and imposing their position on them. The hard earned admiration and uneasy accolades needs to be built upon. It is upto the officials and experts to devise ways and means to ensure such undesirable incidents do not repeat for the public to repose their faith and trust and not tie themselves into knots in their haste to assert themselves as symbols of power and authority - of which they certainly are not. The onus of proving their worth in donning the mantle of the protectors of the law, or the interests of the society as the case may be rests entirely on their shoulders. Getting blinded with their self-worth and failing to appreciate the roles of others in the larger scheme of things is a perfect recipe for disaster. Reigning in the emotions and curbing the urge to impose one's view will go a long way in fostering understanding and cooperation.

National News

JKLF opposes construction of army colonies in Kashmir

ANI Srinagar, May 14: Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) chief Yasin Malik has strongly objected to a government plan to construct colonies for army soldiers and officers in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. "Whether the soldier is a resident of Jammu and Kashmir or is a resident of India, we will not accept this colony on any grounds. Tomorrow, you will ask for land to build colonies for CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force) and BSF (Border Security Force). Already a lot of land has been given to the army," Malik told media here on Friday.

In April 2015, the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, N.N. Vohra, approved the establishment of army colony in Srinagar and said that 21.6 acres of land had been identified for the colonies. However, under severe criticism, the state government has denied the allotment of land to army colonies. Malik also claimed that "atrocities" on native Kashmiris have risen ever since the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) combine came to power in the state last year. He also protested against the creation of separate settlements for Kashmiri Hindus in the state.

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Reflections on the Conflicts of our Times :

Attempt at Common Sense reading of the Manipur Experience

By : Lokendra Arambam
 Introduction

On the 6th February 2016, a massive rally of over a lakh people were organized by three civil society organizations of the Manipur valley, when the congregation circambulated the thorough fares of the Imphal city for some three hours raising slogans for a Common Future of Manipur. Conflict watchers attentively listened to the speakers at the public meeting held at the Khuman Lampak, where representatives including some eleven tribal communities spoke about Hills and Plains Unity, at the same time expressing concerns about non-communication amongst the communities on issues of public interest. Four resolutions were adopted which stipulated the anxieties of major sections of the people of Manipur. The highlight of the resolutions were on the necessity to safeguard the territorial integrity of Manipur, that the Government of India should respect it. The second resolution also denounced the Government of India playing a Divide and Rule Policy amongst the indigenous communities who had lived in amity for more than two thousand years, that the GoI should respect its pluralistic, multi-ethnic and multi-religious character. Thirdly the meeting re-affirmed the relationship of the indigenous peoples as being of the same mother (homeland). And lastly, the meeting sternly warned neighbouring states not to meddle into the internal affairs of the state.¹

The signals emitted symbolically from the rally of this nature was a product of two critical issues the people of Manipur experienced conflictually in the last sixty five years after Manipur's integration into India. The one more immediate was the simmering threat on the disintegration of the Manipur territory, fear of which was induced by the Government of India's policy of settling the long-drawn Indo-Naga conflict, which had dragged on for some seventy years. The new Modi Government's desire to end the conflict once for all, and settle the incompatibilities between the two entities India and the Nagas, seemed to have been reflected under the recent Frame-work of Agreement signed on the 3rd August 2015, the Indian Government's recognition of the unique history, culture and situation of the Nagas and the promise to honour the historical rights of the Nagas. It implicated, in the minds of certain sections of the Manipur hill and valley people, that part of the territories in the Manipur state, especially in the eastern, southern and south western hills would be incorporated into an enlarged Nagalim which has claims over certain Naga inhabited areas of Manipur to be incorporated in the proposed Nagalim. This was the apprehension which led to the sacrifice of eighteen people in the valley in 2001, when the Indian security forces fired upon the agitating crowd when the NDA Government signed the Bangkok agreement with the NSCN (IM) on June 14, 2001. (The ceasefire without territorial limits was rescinded by the NDA Government on July 28, and the

clause 'Without territorial Limits' was struck off from the agreement). The NSCN (IM) however refused to recognize the actions of the Indian Government, declaring that it was a unilateral decision by the Indian Government and the NSCN (IM) had not been consulted over the decision. When Mr. R.N. Ravi, the new interlocutor for the Indo-Naga Peace Talks met some civil society representatives in the valley, he was asked about the continued presence of NSCN (IM) armed cadres in the Manipur hills, and their harassment and killing of Manipur people, taxing transporters and civil employees in the hill districts. Mr. Ravi was reported to have replied that the ceasefire between the GoI and the NSCN (IM) was not extended beyond Nagaland, and if the NSCN (IM) armed cadres were perpetrating violence in the hills of Manipur, the responsibility of preventing it was that of the Manipur Government. Hence the Centre has nothing to do with the matter. This attitude was confirmed by the actions of the Central Security and the paramilitary in the hills who didn't intervene whenever armed cadres perpetrated rampage over valley people with their goods and vehicles passing the National Highways for the last twenty five years or so. R.N. Ravi, before he became interlocutor, wrote in the Hindu that 'In the guise of giving the NSCN (IM) a secure political space for building a workable consensus on the fractious Naga issue, New Delhi has given the militia a free military run of the Naga inhabited areas'.²

It seems Mr. R.N. Ravi in his interlocutory role in the peace talks also assured the civil society representatives of the valley that the Centre has no intention to give assent to demands of disintegration of Manipur territory, for satisfying Muivah's demand for the same, and when he was pressed for an answer for the continuous public speeches by Muivah that the NSCN (IM)'s demand for Naga integration remains an integral part of the settlement, he again was reported to have retorted that let them make speeches as freedom of speech is allowed by the Constitution, and that those in the Centre who have power over the issue need not decide in his favour, so the valley people need not worry. This attitude was also shared by the Bharatiya Janata Party, that they stood for Manipur's territorial integrity, and they would never allow Manipur's territories to be given away to the NSCN (IM). **Enigma of Unique Histories** As for the issue of the GoI's decision to recognize the unique history, culture and situation of the Nagas, the people in the valley have other fears. Because the demographic situation of the Manipur state is composed of a plural spread of some thirty four ethnic communities all over the hills and plains and certain smaller ethnoses had been converted into the denomination of Nagas, like earlier anthropological understanding of some old-Kuki communities like the Moyon, Monsang, Anal, Maring etc. have identified themselves as Nagas, and there are resistances to this programme. The Aimal community had refused to

be recognized as Nagas. They wanted to remain Aimal, and some other smaller communities like Chothe also refused to be incorporated into larger tribes. When the NSCN (IM) submitted their demands for the settlement of the Indo-Naga Peace Talks, they surely must be presenting to the Centre a history of the Nagas as they claimed to be unique, and one is not sure what is the representation of the Manipur Nagas, apart from their solid history of the Nagas in Nagaland and Burma, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. When the civil society representatives asked for a White Paper from the GoI to produce the documents of the Indo-Naga Peace Talks since 1997, Mr. Ravi was reported to have brushed aside the idea curly, saying that he didn't bring any 'baggage' of the past, meaning GoI had rejected the earlier 17 years old non-settled ambivalences of the UPA Government of the Congress, that the Modi Government was starting afresh on the issue. This means that the Modi Government had also rejected certain decisions reported to have been communicated to the Naga representatives by Mr. Maumdam Singh as Prime Minister that the idea of sovereignty of the Nagas shall not be recognized and that Naga integration of territories and people in neighbouring states are also ruled out. This sudden turn-about in the policies of the Centre, and recognition of the History of the Nagas as told by the Nagas only, not the history of ethnic components of neighbouring states, which are as yet not invited by the Centre from them. Here lies a complex bind on the case!

It is feared that the case of the Manipur Nagas, and their history in Manipur could have been wrongly reported by the NSCN (IM) to the Centre. It had been widely circulated that the Nagas of Manipur had never been conquered by any other power other than the British in Manipur history. It was circulated that the Meetei kingdom before they came under British rule in 1891 was only in the valley of Manipur. The Nagas of Manipur were therefore represented as being 'independent' in the hill regions of Manipur till the advent of the British. It looks like the history of the Nagas in Manipur were being presented to the Centre in a one-sided version. The history of pre-colonial Manipur was not much studied as public knowledge, and not much of studies had been done on ethno-history, the issues of authority relations in the pre-colonial polity, the ritual relationship amongst communities with the state, and the facts in history about progressive awareness of self-hoods amongst pre-colonial ethnoses as against others, the development of the in-group consciousness of solidarity and out-group hostility being only a late phenomenon in our lives. The Indo-Naga Peace Talks, which was freshly started by the Modi Government, with Mr. R.N. Ravi's perceptions of having carried no baggages from the past, was based on mistaken paradigms of conflict resolution exercises. Mr. R.N. Ravi himself was carrying a baggage of severe mistaken notion of Naga history, a discourse of unique history and

situation of the Nagas, told by the NSCN (IM) and accepted by the NDA Government under Atal Bihari Bajpayee since the Amsterdam Conference of 2002. No other neighbouring states in Northeast India, which have Naga citizens in their territories, had ever been invited to relate their ethnic histories and cultures.

The civil societies in the Manipur valley have a relevant point to demand a White Paper of the GoI-NSCN (IM) negotiations since 1997, for the very issues of the Manipur Nagas could have been wrongly represented in the context of the negotiations. A correct perspective of history must be established about Naga uniqueness, if ever that too was reflected in Manipur history. There would be another uniqueness of Manipur history, if the pages of pre-colonial Manipur are opened. For it will be discovered that the hill tribes were participating as voluntary components of the pre-colonial Manipur polity since the tenth century of the Common Era. A ritual of mutual relationship with collective solidarity in a town known as Mera Haochongba (Dance by the Hillmen in October) was established during the reign of King Irengba (984-1074 C.E.). Both the lowland and highland dwellers fought together in Manipur's wars against foreign powers like the Burmese and the English. The hills and the plains had a symbiotic relationship, forged by the geographic, ecological and economic inter-dependencies of the natural environment. The Manipur Nagas were not being understood as Nagas, which was a British invention. The Manipur polity recognized them in their ethnonyms, their original ethnos names like the Tangkhuls, the Mao, the Maram, the Thangals etc. The spread of the idea of Naga uniqueness was a fairly recent phenomenon, a post-19th development. Even the legendary sacrifices of Jadonang and Gaidinliu from the Manipur hills against the British imperial power, as interpreted as forerunners of Naga nationalism was found to be an incorrect interpretation. For the two leaders fought for kingdom of the Makam people, which now is represented by the Zeliangroup people. Such critical nuances in the interpretation of historical events did create a lot of misunderstanding in the study and analysis of conflict. The story of the actual participation of the Nagas of Manipur in the overall Naga ethno-national movement should be dispassionately debated in the Naga inhabited areas, understood by the neighbouring communities so as to encourage proper treatment of the subject of their dignity, status and autonomy appropriate in context. **(To be contd.....)**

(New Delhi missed the vital fact that the NSCN (IM), notwithstanding its Pan-Naga pretensions, is essentially a militia of the Tangkhul tribes of Manipur with little resonance with the broad Naga family. A deal cut with it would not be acceptable to the Naga society.
R.N. Ravi in 'Nagaland : Descent into Chaos'
The Hindu, January, 23, 2014.

Contd. from previous issue

Dismantled ninth times and safer in the tenth times

Twisting the fate of the welfare oriented programmes into profit seeking, business oriented assertion will propagate endless disorientation, disorganisation and conflicts in the society. Internal displacement arising out of the various development projects in the state jeopardised the integrated lives of women in a traditional society. Distrust, frustration and helplessness have deeply impacted the life of the woman that she believes the avenging self with the mystic oracle of cursing the government. She expresses herself as a mystical woman, 'maibi' the one who is believed in the Meitei society of possessing some sort of supernatural power to communicate with the supreme soul, carry out religious rituals and foretell one's fortune. She manifested a big blow will befall the fate of the government and the authorities concern. She finally concludes her sharing with a hard, ".....in a shaken voice, trying hard to subdue her exaggerated expression....) Now I am no more afraid of anybody or anything, once being born then, we are destined to die someday, my father and mother deities will never forgive them and the government will end splitting and clashing from my curse."

Socio-cultural, economic and political perspectives corrode in a displaced community. The intrinsic fabric constituting the vital social fabrics, rip apart in disoriented societies, tangling into endless chaos and conflicts. The plight of the women and children become vulnerable and are prone to fall prey of oppressions. Personal experiences with Displaced Women Short experiences with shallow understanding limit my experiences with the women affected by forced migration. Chadong is an upstream affected community of the controversial Mapitah Dam. The commissioning of the dam has submerged a tract of land including prime wetland agricultural land, forest, homestead land, grazing grounds, heritage sites and many more. It directly affect 6 (six) villages, out of which Chadong is the worst affected village. The unwarranted ascending water from the dam has deluged the whole village. The impounding water took away every belonging of the people in the chadong village. They shifted their village up to the higher Mapitah ranges. The only means by which the village connect with the rest

of the world is through a boat and bamboo rafts. Words will fail to describe the pathetic plight of women in that displaced village. Their values of lives overturned and deformed means of sustenance, directly appraising multiple impacts in every possible spheres of life's pedagogy. Undermining every other odd, the most disheartening reality in this village is the life threatening maternity challenges and sanitation concerns of women. Approaching due dates of expecting mothers haunts every while of their lives. They have to arrange a place for short stay at a relative's place, an acquaintance or a tent around the valley, preparing for days to come. However, other little kids multiplies the challenges with the increasing negative social elements evolving a mental insecurity. Dichotomy of desperately striving for livelihood with simultaneous doubling of expenses glared at this stance. This tangent of life struggle splits life from the real pursuit of life. Frequently, women are compelled to opt for or voluntarily resign to the traditional method of childbirth which put to risk both the mother and the infant. The drastic increase in infant and maternal

mortality rate in the village is the artefact of development injustice. One woman from the village shared their experience, "I cried sleepless nights with due dates approaching and helplessly resign our fate to God for safety. Hatred filled our hearts for rendering helpless and miserable in the name of the larger good. Are we not human who are excluded from the understanding of 'larger good'?" A house is built by hands, a home by hearts. Merciless dismantling of a poor man's house is not merely an apprehensive physical threat but a symbolic mental oppression. The dumb walls have witnessed the epitaphs of life events of its members. Standing upright for years, the blind walls have sensed the laughter and silent tears. Destruction without proper resettlement measures will injure the core of human hearts. Such acts will aggravate the conflict situation in the state, backtracking the disbelief in the development activities taken up by the government. The helpless victims bear the burnt in their heart with subdued voice of queering "whose development?" Someday those subdued voices will burst and echo, shrilling into the deaf ears of the development stakeholders. **(Concluded)**