

Major Bob Khathing
The profile of a Nationalist Manipuri Naga

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Extracts

CHAPTER IV
CIVIL SERVICE

Bob was jobless for about six months. With some help from Shri Nari Rustomji¹, Bob Khathing joined the Assam Rifles in March 1950. He was posted to 2 Assam Rifles at Sadiya, Upper Assam, as Company Commander, Major. In the first week of August, Bob led an expedition to explore upper Lohit river. The party consisted of Bob with a half section (about five men) of Assam Rifles, Major P.K. Roy and Captain Gupta, both of Kumaon Regiment with a half section of Kumaonis. Captain Gupta was the intelligence Officer of his battalion.

During this reconnaissance expedition, a service earthquake with epicenter at Rima hit upper Lohit area on 15 August 1950. Bob and his party were declared missing for fifteen days. The quake was so severe that the cracks on the ground measured more than ten feet between the lips. Somehow the party reached Hayuliang and arranged air-drop of relief supplies to the local people. They stayed on till September and awaited opening up of road communication. Then the party returned to Sadiya to be welcomed as heroes.

¹ Advisor of the Governor of Assam for NEFA.

The present State of Arunachal Pradesh was known as North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) somewhat equivalent to NWFP (North West Frontier Province) now in Pakistan. NEFA was largely inhabited by tribal people and some Bhutia-Lepcha-like tribal Buddhists. Most of the tribal people like Apatanis, Daflas, Mishmis, Adis, Monpas etc. were, at that time, uninhibited by modern civilization, and they maintained their own life style of living close to nature. NEFA administration was under the External Affairs Ministry of the Government of India. The Assam Governor was directly responsible for its administration. Even the Government of Assam was kept dark about NEFA administration; NEFA Secretariat was separate from Assam Secretariat. Whereas NWFP was at least administered, even though ferociously, NEFA was practically left unadministered. Though the official boundary between India and Tibet was McMahon Line, this line existed on map only, but not on the ground. For the tribals, there was no McMahon Line and they roamed as they pleased. In fact, they did not even know which country they belonged to, nor they cared two hoots.

In 1949, the civil war in China came to an end with the triumph of communists under Mao Zedong and Generalissimo Chiang Kaishek took shelter in the Island of Formosa (now Taiwan). China officially declared Tibet to be part of their country without physically occupying it. Since Tibet was not in a position to defend herself, the atmosphere became tense. The impending invasion and the likely political fall-out caused nervous breakdown of many Tibetan leaders. Ultimately, Tibet was swallowed up by Communist China in 1951. Suddenly, India and China shared common boundary. It then dawned on India that absence of Indian civil administration upto the McMahon Line would pose problems for boundary adjustment for the new Republic of India (India became a republic on 26 January 1950) with Red China. To ensure presence of Indian administration in the remote areas, forward policy of the Government of India was launched

in 1951. The aim was to establish administrative outposts in key places with the backing of Assam Rifles. A series of reconnaissance missions were carried out by Indian Army, particularly by Corps of Engineers. The aim was mainly to present an authentic communication map and to make friends with the tribals. Many precious lives were lost by the poisonous arrows or plain swords and spears of the suspecting tribals, who did not like the intrusion in their privacy. Anyway, that was part of the game in the consolidation process of a nation and must be endured.

Now, to man these remote administrative stations, a new breed of civil servants was needed. The established services like Indian Administrative Service or Indian Foreign Service were not only insufficient in number but was not cut for the rough and tumble of NEFA terrain and the ferocious tribals. So, the Government of India zeroed their sight on military and para-military officers. During the heyday of British Empire too, in addition to having I.C.S. (Indian Civil Service), there was I.P.S. (Indian Political Service) whose personnel were drawn mostly from military or police. IPS officers were generally posted in border areas.

NEFA in 1950 had six-agencies, later called division/districts, namely Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit, Tirap and Tuensang (Tuensang, later got amalgamated to Nagaland). Government of India's plan was to put an officer known as Political Officer (P.O.) in charge of each division, who would have a number of Assistant Political Officers (A.P.O.). Of course even during the British period some P.O.s and A.P.O.s existed for NEFA administration, but in a haphazard manner. A portion of NEFA Secretariat from Shillong moved to Charduar.

Bob was picked up for this service. The service came to be known as IFAS (Indian Frontier Administrative Service). Many military officers and some civil service officers of adjoining States joined this service.

In October 1950, Bob Khathing bade farewell to Colonel Freyer, IGAR (Inspector General of Assam Rifles) Shillong. On joining IFAS, Bob was appointed A.P.O. in Tirap Agency and was posted to Pasighat in November 1950. As stated earlier, the atmosphere in Tibet was tense with the Red Chinese invasion looming large. So Tibetans, who did not like the taste of regimented life under communism, fled their country. These fugitives who later became refugees poured into all routes of NEFA. Pasighat was one such refugee concentration centre. Bob did refugee rehabilitation work for the fleeing Tibetans. In January 1951, he was shifted to Kameng. Major Geoffrey Allens was the Political Officer. The Headquarters of Kameng Agency was located at Charduar at the foot hills in Assam. Bob was posted as A.P.O. of Sela Sub-Agency.

The Governor of Assam of that time was Shri Jairamdas Daulatram. Before shifting Bob from Tirap to Kameng, the Governor summoned him to Shillong for an interview. The Governor told Bob pointblank that his job as A.P.O., Sela was to occupy Tawang and extend Indian administration upto that place. He was to establish an advance administrative headquarters at Tawang and stay put there. The good soldier said okay to the Governor and left Shillong for Charduar to plan his Tawang expedition with Major Allen, the Political Officer, who was Bob's immediate superior. Their plan must be success-oriented as failure would bring national shame and international repercussion.

Sela Pass, which became famous during the Chinese invasion of 1962, was a windy, barren, desolate, bitterly cold and God-forsaken place. Though the pass itself was barren, lower down on the slopes surrounding the pass, one could find beautiful rhododendrons flowering to glory. Of course, the general get-up of the area near Sela Pass has changed considerably now. The road to Tawang from Bhalukpong at foothills, passing through Tenga valley, Bomdila and Sela is a good, tar-macadam two-way motorable road now. But

in 1951, when Bob was to hoist the Indian tricolour flag at Tawang, there was no road. A bridle path was all that they could make use of. Undaunted, the planning for the expedition went on.

The road construction work in NEFA area started only in 1952 with the induction of 640 Northern Troop Engineers of Indian Army under Colonel Vijh, at Missamari. The Engineers took direct orders from Headquarters, Eastern Command, Calcutta. During that period, there was no Army Division or Army Corps in North Eastern India. There was only a brigade at Shillong. Brigadier (later Lieutenant General) L.P. Sen, commanding the 181 independent Brigade at Shillong was visibly piqued for not putting the Engineers under his command. Colonel Vijh made the worst of the situation by putting up "ROAD CLOSED" sign boards in areas the Commander from Shillong was to visit. His movements being restricted, Brigadier Sen would fume and fret. Vijh would slyly smile and expect a request from Sen. Request received, the road would open up. Knowing all these, Sen would retaliate in other matters. They had many axes to grind. The progress of (road construction) work suffered.

There was a battalion of Assam Rifles, to be exact, 5 A.R. at Lokra. For Bob's expedition, the battalion was to provide about company strength of troops for the security of the party. Captain Hem Bahadur Limbu and his company less a platoon was selected for the job. Subedar Akal Bahadur (later Subedar Major and Honourary Captain) was the company JCO (Junior Commissioned Officer). Akal Bahadur subsequently became Subedar Major A.D.C. to the President of India.

To provide medical cover, Captain Monteiro of IAMC (Indian Army Medical Corps) and his medical staff with adequate medicines and stores accompanied the Tawang party. Necessary money for portage charge was collected from NEFA Advance Secretariat, Charduar.

On 17 January 1951, the Tawang expedition party left Lokra camp at 2 p.m. by mechanical transport for Foothills camp. To cover this distance of 27 miles (43 kilometres) the party took more than two hours, as the road condition, even in the Brahmaputra valley was bad in these days. At that time, a journey along the valley was a nightmare. The jeep or the light vehicle in which one was travelling had to be often ferried (once every 10-20 miles) by unstable rafts of country boats across the many swollen tributaries of the Brahmaputra river, due to absence of bridges. The ghats where the loading and unloading of vehicles, stores and passengers were done, were veritable obstacle courses. Very often, one had to wait for ferry for hours since the raft was on the other bank.

Anyhow, Bob's Tawang party arrived at Foothills camp at a little past 4 p.m. There, they found that the tribal porters had not reported yet. Bob recorded in his diary thus "It was disappointing that the porters had not reported as yet, but can't be helped". Bob immediately wrote to P.O. Allen apprising him of the situation and of the necessity for a night halt at Foothills, Dr. Baruah, the Superintendent of Foothills camp was a jolly fellow and he made Bob's party comfortable. Baruah, a confirmed optimist promised that the tribal porters would certainly come, but punctuality was not their forte. Indeed, by nightfall the tribal porters trickled in by ones and twos. It seems Baruah knew his tribals better. But still the number of porters was insufficient.

In the morning of 18 January, Bob Khathing and Captain Limbu went for physical exercise and games with the jawans. At about 9 a.m., Major Allen the Political Officer arrived at Foothills and discussed the move plan and the problem of porters. He sent a long letter to Mr. Imti, A.P.O., Charduar to enquire the Assistant Tibetan Agent (A.T.A.), Headquarters about tribal porters. After Major Allen's departure at 10.30 a.m. for Sisiri camp, Bob spent the day fishing in a nearby river.

On the 19th at 7.30 a.m. the party left for Sisiri Camp. They followed the main track to Doimara which was about 5 miles from Foothills. At Dolmara, a good number of tribals from Rupa with their belongings joined the party. These tribals had come for winter trading. They brought goats and ponies from the hills to be sold to the plainspeople and in return, purchased salt, clothes, nails etc for selling to their fellow hill people at home.

From Doimara, climbing started in a gradual manner. One of the nursing orderlies fainted on the way – 2.5 miles short of Sisiri Camp. Sisiri in local language means nettles. These hair-like thorns of the weeds and creepers constantly tormented the party. The tiny thorns once inside the flesh in hundreds could not be removed but had to be endured. Another source of trouble was the innocuous dim-dim fly. They are very small in size something like hair-lice but with wings. They bite without causing sensation. When a mosquito bites, because of the irritational sensation, one becomes aware of the bite and can swat the mosquito and kill it. A dim-dim bites and flies away without the victim knowing it. At the end of the day, one's hands and face get covered with tiny red spots like warts. Then after a day or so, one starts feeling the irritational sensation and if one scratches with fingernails, the red spots which have now turned blackish will peel off exposing flesh and may even become septic needing medical care. The order was "Don't scratch dim-dim bites, suffer it". The correct thing to do was to use dim-dim repellent oil or cover one's body as much as possible with shirt sleeves rolled down even in the hot and humid condition of broad-day light. At night-fall dim-dims disappear only to hand over charge to mosquitoes. Sisiri camp was full of dim-dims, but this may not be true now, as destruction of jungles and foliage drives the insects away. Bob and his party arrived at Sisiri camp at 3 p.m.. Before their arrival Major Allen had already left Sisiri camp for inspection of road construction near Bampula camp. The Sisiri camp was fairly good and well maintained with an inspection

Bungalow. However, absence of an Assam Rifles camp and a Namghar or hostel for transit tribal-folk was acutely felt by the party.

After a night halt the party left Sisiri next morning at 7.30 a.m. and arrived at Bampula at 12 noon of 20 January 1951. The distance covered was only 7 miles but since Rupa was another 13 miles, the party settled down for the night at Bampula. The camp was almost on flat grounds and was airy with no insects or pests.

On 21 January 1951, the party started at 7 a.m. for Rupa. An hour long climb of about 2 miles over zig-zag track took the party to the saddle, where men had to work hard to avoid slipping due to frozen snow. The sky was clear and visibility was perfect. One could have a good view of the plains down below. It was a lovely sight because the blooming rhododendrons painted the hillside red amidst the towering pine trees which were green. The main body reached Rupa in early afternoon and by 2.30 p.m. all the porters were accounted, Captain (doctor) Monteiro and two nursing orderlies did not arrive. A search party with a civilian doctor from Rupa Camp was sent out to meet Captain Monteiro and his men. All ended well with Doctor Monteiro and others trooping in by dusk. The party settled down at Rupa for the night with liberal consumption of Lal Bahadur (rum) and all that. It will be interesting to mention here that Bob liked his Lal Bahadur so much that he detested whisky of any type including the world famous Scotch or any other brand of drinks. Whenever he came to Imphal from Shillong, Bob used to be invited to Raj Bhawan dinner parties, which he tried his level best to avoid without offending. His Excellency, the Governor of Manipur. But since he could not always say No to the Governor, he would occasionally relent but he was to be assured that the company for the Raj Bhawan evening party would include some Army chaps and that his favourite Lal Bahadur would be served to him, NOT whisky of any brand. Incidentally it may be mentioned here that though Bob himself was a light eater, but he liked varieties. His

dinner parties consisted of all sorts of dishes and amounted to at least a ten-course dinner. He was a magnificent host. Continuous foot-slogging for five days had inflicted a few minor casualties. Doctor Monteiro and some others were bone-tired. It was time to rest and consolidate and give the ailing blisters some airing and sun-shinning. So 2 January was made a rest-day at Rupa, where the climate was salubrious.

On the morning of 23 January, the party left Rupa for their onward journey. One interpreter, named Dupa Aka joined the party. After climbing about three miles, the track followed a nullah which became a biggish river. Another two miles of journey brought the party to tea-place where all such caravans make tea and drink. The place was a kind of narrow valley. The clear and ice-cold river water was drinkable too without any treatment. Tenga was the name of that river. The place became famous as Tenga valley. In local language, 'thi' means plenty and 'nga' means fish. So the river which was full of fish was known as Thi-nga, which became Tenga. Now Tenga valley is the Headquarters of an Indian Army Division with a beautiful cantonment.

After taking tea, the party climbed to Bomdila, which on later days, developed into a beautiful township now housing the Headquarters of Political Officer of Kameng Division. Bomdila means a pass with plenty of bamboos. Again in local language, 'bam' means bamboo, 'thi' means plenty and 'la' means pass. So a pass with plenty of bamboo was called "Bamthila" which became Bomdila. Even now Bomdila possesses beautiful bamboo forests. Luckily, there was no snow at Bomdila, but snow was visible all around on the mountain peaks. Bomdila normally experiences snow fall. It has an altitude of about 9000 feet above mean sea level.

A little further down, the party; reached Rahung camp where they halted for the night. The camp was ill-organised and accommodation which was inadequate was made uninhabitable due to filth and dirt. Anyhow, the party

made the best use of whatever resources the camp could offer and the night passed off peacefully.

On 24 January, before leaving camp, Doctor Monteiro visited Rahung village which was about a mile up-hill. Mr. Masser, the Assistant inspector in-charge of the area between Rahung and Dirang Dzong also joined the party. Mr. Katuk Lama, A.T.A. (Assistant Tibetan Agent) in charge of Dirang Dzong and village elders of Dirang Dzong welcomed the party on the track one mile ahead of destination. Bob and his men reached Dirang at 2 p.m. It may be mentioned here that ATAs were officials of NEFA Administration and worked for the Government of India, not for Tibetan Government as the name might mislead.

Before the development of Bomdila, the most important township in the area was Dirang Dzong, Because of the existence of a salt spring, the town attracted some population. It had a few administrative set-up as well. So Bob and his party dug their heels and prepared themselves for observance of the second Republic Day Celebration. So, the 25th of January was spent preparing for it. The area near ATA office was cleaned up and the usual chuna-lagao (lime-painting) and other bandobast were done. Bob hoisted and saluted the tri-colour flag on the morning of 26 January 1951 at Dirang Dzong, before a sizeable gathering of Army and Assam Rifles personnel, civilian government officials and curious locals. The Army personnel were the reconnaissance party of one Captain Mukherjee who returned from Nyumkadzong. So far, the progress of Bob's expedition was reported on wireless, though the wireless sets kept on packing up very often.

The party halted till 31 January at Dirang Dzong, while supplies were being replenished through air-drop. These air-dropped consignments were repacked into porter-loads, and all these operations took time. Then the march resumed on 1st February, When the party reached Senge Dzong, the majestic Sela peaks could be seen which about 5 miles away was. Not much

snow was encountered on the track itself. But snow could be seen all around. The rivers had water flowing under the frozen snow roofing. The correct time to cross Sela was before noon, for in the afternoon thick fog and snowfall would set in when the ambient temperature dropped. Bob and his advance party crossed Sela at about 10 a.m. in the morning. Sela, at an altitude of about 14,000 feet presented the problem of rarefied atmosphere. Due to lack of oxygen, the party had to stop every one hundred yards to gain breath. The climb was steep and slippery too. However, after crossing the pass, the going became easier as the track passed through a flat plateau for about half a mile. Then came two beautiful small lakes with transparent and clear water astride the track. The lake shore was like paradise among the treeless, snow covered mountain peaks. Leaving the lakes behind, the route changed to a stiff descent for about one and half miles. Then, the usual road-side tea-place was reached. There, water could be drawn from water-holes found on the frozen ice platform.

Bob waited at this tea place for the rest of the party for about one and half hours. Then, information reached Bob that some twenty chaps had run into difficulty and that these stragglers were coming slowly, steadily and certainly. From this tea-place, Nuranang camping site was only about 2 miles of descent. The advance party with Bob pressed on to Nuranang to prepare camp site and reached it by 1.30 p.m. However, at 3 p.m. news came that the twenty odd chaps who fell out on the way to Sela could not cross the Sela Pass as yet. It was also reported that Sela was covered by a thick curtain of fog and the visibility was nil. Tea was prepared hurriedly and arrangements were made to send a rescue party with hot tea, rum, blankets and stretchers. Bob himself went with the rescue party upto tea-place with bottles of rum. One by one, the stragglers dragged on and closed in, onto the Nuranang camp by about 5.30 p.m. when it was dark.

Though everybody was tired after crossing Sela, Bob decided to leave Nuranang the next day morning since Jang village, the springboard for Tawang offensive was only 8 miles away. The party struck down camp and left Nuranang at 7 a.m. After trekking for a little over two hours, they reached Sumetang where the tracks were covered with snow and frozen ice. Shovels and pick-axe were used to clear a passage. The party arrived at Jang village at 11 a.m. of 4th February 1951.

Soon after arrival, Bob talked to the headman of Jang and some elders. With their help he sent two villagers to Tawang to inform the inhabitants of Tawang about the presence of Indians in the area. Also he sent messengers to the surrounding villages summoning headmen and elders to Jang to meet him. While his men entrenched themselves firmly at Jang, Bob carried out diplomatic parleys with the elders. He also made sure that his party did not deprive the villagers of their meager resource of food, on the other hand, the local populace benefitted from the liberal leakage of supplies brought by the Indian contingent. Tinned food, sugar, salt and cigarettes were the favourites of the locals. Village elders of Rho, Changda, Jang and several adjoining villages called on Bob. The purpose of the visit by Bob and his party was explained to them and they were told not to accept orders from the Tsona Dzongpen of Tawang, who as representative of Lasha [Lhasa], ruled the area.

The British Indian Government earlier, attempted to extend their administration upto Tawang. Captain Nevill, Political Officer of western section of NEFA visited Tawang in 1913-14. He proposed the establishment of police posts at Dirang and Rupa as symbol of extension of British administration into the hills. He suggested that, that measure was necessary to stop the frequent raids by Akas and Mijis on the more peaceful Monpas and Sherdukpens. But his proposal was turned down by Shillong on account

of lack of resources and the financial and manpower crunch due to First World War of 1914.

Again, after more than twenty years, Captain Lightfoot also visited Tawang in 1938, but his programme of administrative consolidation was cut short by the outbreak of another World War, that is, the Second World War. As happened so many times earlier once the forces of the expedition left, then the old system of loose control by Tibet and intra and inter tribal wars returned to the area. That was the kind of atmosphere, when Bob and the Indians made their presence in 1951 in Tawang area. It is interesting to learn that Bob unwittingly followed the trail blazed by the redoubtable Lieutenant Younghusband of Lasha [Lhasa] Expedition fame.

The then existing Tibetan administration emanating from Tawang Monastery was oppressive. Two Dzungpens were appointed by Lasha for Tawang area. One Dzungpen looked after the spiritual or monastic side of life and the other Dzungpen, called Tsona Dzungpen did all the secular activities like administration, justice, law etc. They were Governors of Lasha. The Tibetan spiritual and administrative influence extended upto Dirang Dzong as the name-suffix of Dzong suggested. Tawang was important to Lasha because, it was the birth place of the sixth Dalai Lama, Tsangyang Gyatso. Further, Tawang had close cultural and spiritual affinity with Tibet. Tawang monastery, constructed in mid seventeenth century, was a big stronghold of Gclukpa Buddhism (The Yellow Sect). But Tawang was definitely south of McMahon Line and India, as successor to British Indian Empire had full rights as per Simla Agreement to claim it.

It was the law of Tsona Dzungpen that two-fifths of the produce of land were to be retained by the villagers while three-fifths were to go to the coffers of the Governors. Thus the subject people almost starved. The distance between the rulers and the serfs, that is, the villagers was so great that the villagers were not allowed to talk directly to the Dzungpens. They were to

talk through officials like Tsorgens and Tsas. In the then existing cho-structure of administration, a number of villages were grouped together to form a Cho. Three Chos made the Choksum. The three Tsorgens of the Choksum were the heads of three Chos. Tsas were minor village officials. To demonstrate servility, the villagers were to bow down very low in presence of the Dzongpens. They could not turn their back to the Dzongpens. The people had to retreat backwards. Twenty forced labourers, by turn, worked as domestic servants of the Dzongpens, collecting fire wood, drinking water fodder for animals etc. from places as far away as one mile in hilly terrain. Indeed, the Dzongpens were some sort of mild dictators among the mild and non-violent Monpas.

The offer of Bob, guided by his administrative experience of hill areas of Manipur, was a house tax of Rs.5/- per annum incidentally, Indian currency was found to be in wide circulation despite the Tibetan administration. Trade was carried out mostly in Indian currency, just as nowadays Japanese yen, American dollar, British pound sterling, and German deutschmark dominate international trade. The Monpas liked the offer of Bob for taxation in kind was heavier. When Bob was free from such meetings with the local leaders, he went around to select a site for check post and construction of barracks for troops. Bob went up and down on the Sela-Jang track with Captain H.B. Limbu, Subedar Bir Bahadur and Jamadar Udaybir Gurung. A suitable site was ultimately selected and the NCO (non-commissioned officer) in charge of construction of Inspection Bungalow and barracks was taken to the site for commencement of work. The check-post and camp at Jang were selected from military point of view.

On 6th February, Bob left for Tawang. The distance from Jang to Tawang was 12 miles. The initial climb of 2 miles was very steep and this was followed by a gradual climb of 4 miles upto Sarul ranges. At a bridge across a small stream, before the final climb to Tawang started, the Indian Expedition party

was received by representatives of Tsona Dzongpen. The Expedition party camped outside Tawang near Gyankar. The day was the Tibetan New Year Day (First Day of Iron Hare year). In the evening, there was a heavy snow fall and the villagers commented that it was a very good omen.

Next day in the early morning, Khathing accompanied by Captain Limbu and Shri Katuk Lama went to western and then eastern upper slopes which overlooked the ancient Tawang monastery to select a site for the establishment of a permanent administrative headquarters of Assistant Political Officer of Sela Sub-Agency. The selected site should have sufficient area to house a small military cantonment, police lines, civil lines, office accommodation, residential accommodation, schools, hospital and so on, In addition,, a parade-cum-playground would also be required, which would consume lot of area. No suitable site was found as the ground was too undulated and broken.

In the afternoon, porters were paid and most of them returned to Dirang area. There was shortage of money too. So, some of the porters, who came from Dirang Dzong proper and nearby villages, were told to get payment from Transport Superintendent, Dirang Dzong. With the departure of about 600 (six hundred) porters, the camp locked deserted. The military component of Bob's party was a company of Assam Rifles less one platoon, and therefore had more than 100 (one hundred) men. In addition, the civilian official component was also over 20 (twenty) men. So with arms, ammunition, tentage, ration, camp furniture office equipment documents and stationery etc. the number of porters required was large. Tawang, with just about 300 houses then might have a population of about 2000. The presence of Bob's party of nearly 800 with a substantial number of armed personnel must have been formidable and awesome.

The morning of the next day, that is, 8th February 1951 was again spent on reconnaissance for site selection, with Captain Limbu in tow. At last, a

suitable site was located in the area north-east of Tawang monastery with sufficient area for playground etc. and having a good water source. The area was wasteland or khasland, but it seemed to Bob that the NEFA administration had to pay compensation for acquiring the land.

In the afternoon, Bob got busy on the job for which he had been sent and come. He called the Tibetan and monastery officials for a meeting. Notices were served on the two Dzongpens and other officials. Since intelligence reports indicated that the Tibetan officials did not like the Indian presence and had accordingly warned the local Monpas from co-operating with the Indians. There upon the newly arrived Assistant Political Officer of Sela Sub-Agency decided on a show of strength. He informed Charduar and Shillong about what was happening and sought clear-cut orders to implement the amalgamation of Tawang area to India, by force, if necessary.

Despite the fact that the local Monpas had close religious and cultural ties with Tibet and despite knowing the fact that Tibetan susceptibilities might be wounded, Bob was determined to flex his muscle. A nice high-ground close to Tawang Monastery, the seat of power, was selected for meeting the Dzongpens, elders and local people. Bob marched his troops from campsite to the meeting place. His one hundred riflemen formed a box completely encircling the high-ground, a reminder of pre-Napoleonic battle formations. On instruction from Bob, Captain Hem Bahadur Limbu ordered "fix bayonet" to his troops. One hundred "click" sounds of bayonets coming in unison seemed to say "we are even ready for blood". The shining bayonet blades reflected flickeringly the golden rays of the setting sun in a cloudless afternoon of 8 February 1951 at Tawang. The Dzongpens and officials did not attend the meeting. But they must have been watching the scene from peep-holes of the monastery, and receiving the message. However, the crowd which had gathered, must have realized which camp to side with.

Exuding supreme confidence and exhibiting rare charm, Bob held court for the crowd which included some elders and leaders as also women and children. He spoke to them through interpreter. He told them that the people should not have any apprehension about any interference on their monastic rituals and functioning. Religious freedom was assured by him now and also for future too on behalf of the new administration. He explained to them that the constitution of the new Republic of India tolerated religious freedom and even Godlessness and irreligiousness, As Indians, they would enjoy the same rights and privileges as enjoyed by, say, a Bengali, or a Bihari, or a Maratha, or a Punjabi. All Indians were equal, he hammered into the brains of the Monpas. It is arguably conjectured here that Bob's Mongoloid features and tribal frankness must have produced electrifying trust in what he said to fellow Mongoloid Indians of Tawang. Had a clever and highly qualified say, a Punjabi A.P.O. been sent to Tawang, it is doubtful if he could have been as successful as Bob, This great Republic of India, inhabited by people of Aryan stock of Mongoloid origin, of Dravidian ancestry and of Negroid family (Andamanis etc) must be made greater and fully integrated. Unfortunately India will never be integrated unless there is a sense of all-round participation in government and the sharing of common national responsibility by all sections of the people. The key to national integration are participation, belongingness and joint responsibility. Big words uttered in National integration. Council meetings speak less and mean nothing. Action speaks more and effectively too.

Bob, the intensely patriotic Indian tribal from Manipur, talked unmistakably in tough words. He said that no representative of Tibetan Government could exercise power any longer over the people inhabiting areas south of Bumla Range, which he considered, was the McMahon Line. They would not pay any more tax to the Dzongpens. Instead, they would pay only Rs.5/- per annum per house. They would also enjoy liberal Indian Administration as free

citizens. He informed them that no one was above law and all were equal before the eye of law.

Whether Bob subjugated the people of Tawang or liberated them from serfdom is for the world to decide. But one thing is very clear-that is, Bob did his job. Nari Rustomji, in his own words, said that the Government of India could not have found a fitter man than Bob for this job. The crowd welcomed and cheered Bob's announcements, while the Dzongpens and Tibetan officials sulked. Sure enough. The Dzongpens sent message to Lasha [Lhasa] who in turn complained to India's Consul General in Lasha, and ultimately, the complaint went to the External Affairs Ministry through Gangtok in Sikkim. From Bob's side too, wireless messages after wireless messages were sent to Charduar, Shillong and onward to New Delhi giving details of what he was doing. At the same time, he sought approval of Government of India of the actions he had taken and intended to take. Shillong and New Delhi were aghast with what Bob did. They must have preferred a peaceful, non-violent and Panchsheel type of approach. While Shillong was reduced to a mere post-office forwarding information only, lots of consultations and conferences took place in New Delhi and lots of tea were drunk without any decision. In the meanwhile, Bob was told by Shillong to be patient and understanding and above all sympathetic, as if he had terrorized the local people. He was further instructed not to precipitate a crisis.

At that point of time, Tibet was under siege. The Peoples Liberation Army of China was concentrating on Tibet's border. The impending invasion and the subsequent annexation of Tibet to China was just a matter of time. Perhaps, because of this pre-occupation, Peking (now Beijing) did not respond to the Indian offensive at Tawang.

Meanwhile Bob went ahead with his own programme of establishing as well as extending the authority of the Government of India. On 9th February he

went for reconnaissance of Bumla route in the face of heavy snow fall. He wanted to consolidate India's frontiers upto the blasted McMahon Line said to be the Bumla range and Thangla ridge. He could not make much progress and had to return. Anyhow, he visited as many villages as possible and proclaimed the arrival and presence of Indian administration in flesh, blood and strength too. This way, a few days passed.

Hoping that New Delhi would support all his actions, Bob called on the officials of the Monastery and offered political presents like gramophone, tiffin carriers, andi (Assam raw silk) chaddar etc. on 11th February 1951. He informed them that the Government of India had nothing but goodwill and friendship Still the Dzongpens were hostile. To match this hostility, Bob was keen to ameliorate the condition of the people by a welfare oriented administration.

On the next day, that is 12 February 1951, he summoned the junior officials like Tsorgens and Tsas and village elders and issued orders direct to them that they were not, any more, to the orders from the Dzongpens but to act on Bob's. They were told to pay no more tributes to the Dzongpens. Bob introduced gaonburrah (village headman) system and appointed gaonburrahs. Again, political presents like salt, tea, sugar, red blankets (sign of authority in hill villages) etc. were distributed and drinks were also served. The meeting ended in a very cordial atmosphere which Bob did not expect. Knowing fully well that the staff officers of NEFA Secretariat at Shillong and the high officials of New Delhi, who had not exposed themselves to leech-bites and dim-dim torment and mosquito menace would not be able to grasp the realities of the ground, Bob decided on strong action. Perhaps, he was a trifle disappointed at the lethargy of New Delhi So he shot a wireless message saying that unless he got clear instructions, he would pack-up and leave and that someone else might be sent to relieve him, As usual, Delhi and Shillong adopted ambivalent stance. Simply, Bob

was advised not to be impulsive. New Delhi was lost in complexities of the problem. But neither New Delhi nor Shillong countermanded the actions taken by Bob, so far. Inaction and procrastination were the theme of External Affairs Ministry's policy. No replacement for Bob was also sent. Thereupon, Major Bob Khathing continued with his own method. When Bob was able to consolidate extension of Indian administration by his no-nonsense method, without provoking hostile Tibetan reaction, then there was slow but gradual acceptance of Bob's usefulness at New Delhi and Shillong.

In the afternoon, the Tibetan officials paid a return visit. They conveyed that the Dzongpens wanted to continue to exercise their powers till they heard from Tibetan Government. They wanted more time. Khathing refused point blank, asserting that the area belonged to India, not to Tibet, as per 1914 Treaty of Simla. The fact of the matter was that when Indian Government (including British India Government) was not extending her administration, the Tibetan Government simply encroached on India's land. Bob told the emissaries that as the Tibetans were encroachers there was no question of waiting for a reply from Lasha, and therefore, there was no question of extension of time.

On 14 February, he moved his administrative headquarters to the permanent site he had selected. Bob hoisted the tri-colour national flag, while a few sang the Jana-Gana-Mana. Thus Major R (Bob) Khathing M C., M.B.E., the non-descript tribal born in remote Ukhrul town of Manipur, made Tawang and its adjoining areas, part of our great Republic of India. Tawang was saved by Bob from the jaws of Red China, because continuance of Tibetan administration would have provided China with an excuse to annexe Tawang area just as Aksai Chin is now lost. Bob was later awarded the Padma Shri title by a grateful Indian Government. Nari Rustomji commented that no one deserved it as much as Bob.

On 15 February, he called on Tsona Dzongpen at Gyankar. Also he met the other, spiritual Dzongpen too. The two Dzongpens wanted to collect arrears of tax and then leave. Bob instructed them to submit list of defaulters for his examination and orders and that they could go if they so desired. They left. Bob devoted himself on his administrative duties, On 20 February Katuk Lama left.

Bob developed his headquarters so well that in around 1974, even a young unmarried IAS girl. Miss Neeru Nanda was able to stay all alone at Tawang as Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Kameng Division. Miss Nanda, the daughter of a Colonel of the Corps of Engineers, Indian Army, enjoyed her assignment so much so that she wrote a book titled "Tawang the land of the Mon" on the cultures, customs and other aspects of the tribals of Tawang. Bob Khathing made sure that Tawang was safe and secure, even for lady officials.

For more than a year, Bob continued as A.P.O. Sela. Then he took over from Major Geoffrey Allen as Political Officer of Kameng Division in April 1952. He shifted his Headquarters from Charduar (which is actually in Assam) up in the hills to Bomdila. Then there was outbreak of Naga insurgency movement in Tuensang Division. At the height of Naga insurgency covering Naga Hills District of Assam and Tuensang Division of NEFA under the late A Z. Phizo, Major Bob Khathing remained as the sole in charge of Tuensang Division. To quell the uprising, Indian Army moved in and Kohima became the centre of military operations. Shillong became a civil control centre of lesser importance. Immediate and quick decisions were always taken at Kohima, not at Shillong. In order to facilitate Bob's working, and on his persistent requests, Tuensang Division was removed from NEFA and was directly administered by the Centre. Shillong was removed from the chain of civilian command. However, for counter-insurgency operations, Bob had to depend on Kohima, where the military was headquartered. This Delhi-Kohima chain

of command business did not work well for Bob's style of functioning. So to further streamline the civil and military operations, Tuensang Division was amalgamated to Naga Hills. Thus the nomenclature, Naga Hills and Tuensang came into use. So when Naga Hills ultimately became a full-fledged State of India on 1st December 1963, Tuensang became a part of the new State. The new State was named Nagaland. It can be said quite rightly that Tuensang was a gift of Bob Khathing to Nagaland.

Bob remained in Tuensang area till December 1957. Then he was selected to attend National Defence College, New Delhi. On completion of NDC course, which lasted about a year, he was posted to Sikkim as Development Commissioner. Shri Baleshwar Prasad who was Chief Commissioner of Manipur in 1965-67 was the Dewan of Sikkim. The next few years were spent in the quiet atmosphere of Gangtok except for the management of heavy influx of refugees in the wake of Dalai Lama's flight to India in April 1959.

Around this period, the Government of India decided to institute a service known as IFAS (Indian Frontier Administrative Service) in order to give service protection to serving POs, and APOs, These officers could apply or opt for this service, if so desired. Bob applied and got selected in IFAS. In October 1962, the Chinese People's Liberation Army attacked India simultaneously at Tawang and Lohit area of NEFA and at Ladakh. When the Chinese overran Tawang, Sela, Bomdila and upto Foothills, Bob could not resist the temptation to be with his beloved Monpas. Notwithstanding the debacle of 4 Corps and regardless of others running away from the scene of fighting, Bob volunteered for service in NEFA. He was in Shillong at that time. His offer was accepted. It is said that he was the only chap to volunteer for service in this dangerous area, Quite erroneously, Pandit Nehru was accused of abandoning Assam to her fate AIR (All India Radio) Broadcast of the Prime Minister, on the occasion when Tezpur (district

headquarters of Darrang) was evacuated included the words 'My heart goes to the people of Assam in this hour of peril', Nehru's critics and Assamese chauvinists interpret Nehru's words as abandonment of Assam to the Chinese hordes, whereas these words were spoken by Nehru innocently with a genuine sense of sharing the sufferings and difficulties to be faced by the Assamese in the event of Chinese invading the plains. The imputation of motive was unjustified and speculative. When panic gripped Tezpur and when everyone was running south of Brahmaputra river, there was one person going north and that was Bob Khathing. He reported to Headquarters 4 Corps as Civil Liaison Officer, Lieutenant General Brij Mohan Kaul, commanding, the 4 Corps, said "Bob, you have come at the most inopportune moment.

Unfazed even by the remarks of the Corps Commander, Bob Khathing went ahead with his own idea of lending civilian help to the Army. He visited Pasighat, on 23 rd November 1962 and discussed plans of starting a kind of 'V' Force, with Major General Ajit Singh Pathania, Commanding the Army Division there. Bob was toying with the idea of raising a civil force trained on Army lines for sabotage and infiltration work. Suddenly, the unilateral withdrawal of the Chinese Army back to McMahon Line put the warlike plans of Bob Khathing to cold storage, Anyhow, Bob kept himself busy looking after the Adi and Monpa refugees.

Taking a leaf from the exploits of Lawrence of Arabia or Ernesto 'Che' Guevara or even Bob's 'V' Force, the Government of India decided to start a new organization called S.S.B. (Special Service Bureau) and VVF (Village Volunteer Force). The personnel of SSB/VVF are trained in use of small arms weapons for self-defence and in small scale demolition work for sabotage activity, In case a war breaks out and some parts of the country is overrun, as the Chinese did in 1962, these SSB/VVF personnel are to operate behind the frontline by mixing with the civil populace in enemy occupied area of our

country and help in recapturing the lost territory. Bob was told to join this new organization as Divisional Organiser covering the entire NEFA. He was also made the Security Commissioner of NEFA. The SSB and VVF organizations still exist. By 1966, he was made second Adviser to the Governor of Assam, the First one being Nari K. Rustomji.

Very soon, Bob was senior enough to become the Chief Secretary of a State. He was offered the Chief Secretaryship of Manipur, but he politely declined. On being asked why he did not accept the offer, the wily Naga blinked his small eyes and said nothing. His silence spoke more. He must have anticipated the kind of politicians which unlucky Manipur had to bear. Bob did the right thing, for he would have faced immense difficulty working in his own home-state. In neighbouring Nagaland where he had no or very few relatives, he accepted the post of Chief Secretaryship from where he retired from service. Thus ended his illustrious civil service life.