

Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru¹

Series II, Vol. 19

To B.R. Medhi²

New Delhi

July 17, 1952

My dear Medhi,

Please refer to your letter of July 19th about compensation to Nagas for losses caused during the last war.

I should like to make it perfectly clear that it is quite impossible for us to consider any question of giving further compensation. We have given compensation handsomely and strained our finances to the utmost.³ The only part of the area which has not received compensation on that basis thus far was a certain hilly area of Manipur which is also a Naga area. They will be given some compensation soon more or less on the same basis as in the Naga Hill districts.

As a matter of fact, it is exceedingly difficult to distinguish between damage caused by the Japanese or by the British or the Americans. The general impression is that the greatest damage was caused by the Anglo-Americans. Whatever compensation we have given is not meant for one particular type of damage but covers both these types.

¹ Published by the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, Teen Murti House, New Delhi

² JN Collection

³ During the Second World War, the Japanese army penetrating into the Naga Hill Districts subjected the people there to the dangers and hardships of the modern warfare. The people of this area were later compensated by the Government of India for damages caused as a result of this and the Allied action.

You refer to the Indo-Japanese Peace Treaty and the fact that we have claimed no reparations from Japan.⁴ There is no particular generosity involved in this because it is impossible to get any reparations from Japan, whether one wants to or not. In any event, it is utterly beyond our capacity to give any further compensation. We have gone to the utmost limit possible so far as we are concerned. We have not only paid Rs 20 lakhs but a very large sum of money six years ago.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

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To B.R. Medhi⁵

New Delhi
August 19, 1952

My dear Medhi,

I have received today a letter from your Governor in which he gives me an account of the visit of our official team to Assam.⁶ I have also had a report this evening from H.V.R. Iengar. His full written report⁷ will be presented to

⁴ India had decided not to demand reparations because the damage done by the Japanese to India was relatively small. The history of reparations also showed that it was hardly possible to realize them even if promises were made. See Nehru's letter to Thakin Nu published in Selected Works (second series), Vol. 16 Part II, pp. 604-605

⁵ JN Collection. Copies were sent to K.N. Katju and Jairamdas Doulatram

⁶ A team of Central Government officials led by H.V.R. Iengar toured Assam from 26 July to 17 August 1952 to study the immediate and long-term problems of the area. They also made an aerial survey of earthquake-hit parts of the NEFA.

⁷ Their main recommendations were: (i) a four-mile long stone revetment at Dibrugarh as a permanent safeguard against erosion; (ii) collection of adequate hydrological data for preparing a long-term plan for prevention of erosion and flood control; (iii) a contour survey of Assam; (iv) adequate priority to various schemes for embankment and drainage

us in about three days' time. I am going away to Kashmir day after tomorrow for a week or so.⁸ I have however arranged, in order to avoid delay, that this report should be circulated immediately to members of the Cabinet. I hope that we shall consider it in Cabinet early in September. I am anxious to avoid all possible delay.

I am very glad that the visit of this official team had led to a better appreciation of some of the problems of Assam, and that certain definite proposals are being made by them in consultation with you. Thus far I have only a general idea of these proposals.

I was distressed to learn of the condition of the hill people in the Garo and Khasi hills. H.V.R. Iengar had seen them three years ago and he said that during these three years there was very marked physical deterioration of the people there. This is very disturbing and I hope that the earliest possible steps will be taken to render help to them.

As you perhaps know, I am very fond of these tribal hill people and I think it is our duty not only to help them in every way, but to make them feel at one with us. We should go all out to give them this feeling of social and national solidarity with all of us.

Iengar told me of the good work done by the missionaries in the Garo Hills. He also spoke of the excellent work that the nuns were doing in your Shillong hospital. Missionaries have sometimes misbehaved, but there can no doubt that they have set an excellent example of social work which I wish we could follow.⁹ Because of the fine work they have done in various

works already prepared by the Assam Government and Central assistance for Grow More Food schemes; (v) improvement in communications in the State, construction of roads and bridges; (vi) improvement in border security; and (vii) improvement in the economic conditions of the tribal people of the hill areas.

⁸ Nehru visited Kashmir from 21 August to 30 August 1952.

⁹ About 80 per cent of the people had been converted to Christianity in the Lushai Hills and about 30 per cent in the Naga Hill Districts. In other areas the percentage varied between

ways in these tribal areas, I should like to encourage them, even though I might not like some of their activities. I am particularly struck by the trouble they take to learn the tribal languages. How many, I wonder, of our officials take that trouble? I think it should be made a definite rule that no official who does not learn the tribal language should serve there.

I was told that the state of the State hospitals in Assam was deplorable, even in Shillong. In fact, the only decent hospitals were those run by missionaries.

I was further told that the standards of the Assam Public Works Department were astonishingly low and lacking in competence. I heard of a story of a bridge which sounded fantastic. It is evident from the accounts I have - heard that your Chief Engineer and may be other engineers are not of much use.

I have often laid stress in my letters to you that it is quite essential to maintain certain standards in our public services. One of the difficulties of Assam has been that these standards have not been maintained.

Sometimes when we have suggested sending someone from the Centre, you have not approved of the idea. We have no desire to thrust any person from the Centre, but we are very anxious that Assam should go ahead. It will not go ahead unless these standards are kept high. I was really shocked to learn of the inefficiency of your PWD.

Iengar told me also about the flood situation, about the proposal to collect data which appears to be totally lacking in Assam, about having a river investigation division directly working under CWINC. He also told me of the position in Dibrugarh and the proposal to have a small revetment on the river there.

these two limits. The missionaries had done good work in the fields of education and medical help but also had encouraged narrow-mindedness, distinct from the true Christian spirit and values, among the converts. Certain anti-Indian feelings were also said to be inculcated by the foreign missionaries and some British officials.

We discussed border security also and I was sorry to learn of the bad condition of our border police - bad in the sense of being neglected. I hope that the Central Government and your Government will be able to do something soon about these various matters.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

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To Jairamdas Doulatram¹⁰
New Delhi September 1, 1952
My dear Jairamdas,¹¹

It is clear to me for a variety of reasons that the North East Frontier Agency should not be merged with the State of Assam and should remain as it is.¹² I am interested to know about Rani Gaidilieu.¹³ If she requires any help, I shall gladly send it.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

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¹⁰JN Collection. Extracts

¹¹ Governor of Assam

¹² The Assam State Congress had passed a resolution calling upon the Central Government to transfer the tribal areas being administered directly by the Centre through the Assam Governor to the control of the State Government.

¹³ She was a Naga leader from Manipur who was arrested in 1932 for revolutionary activities. She was released in 1947, but was not allowed to return to Manipur and had to stay in Nagaland. The Government granted her a pension afterwards

To B.R. Medhi¹⁴

New Delhi
October 2, 1952

My dear Medhi,

Your letter of the 24th September about Zapu Phizo. I do not think we need trouble ourselves much because he is reported to have gone to Burma.¹⁵ He cannot do any real mischief outside Assam. Anyhow we shall try to find out what he is doing in Burma.

I have asked Hazarika,¹⁶ my Parliamentary Secretary, to accompany me in my tour in the tribal areas of Assam, Manipur and Tripura. Probably my daughter, Indira, will also come with me. Otherwise my party will be a small one.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

¹⁴ JN Collection

¹⁵ After boycotting the elections to the District Council in 1951 and the General Elections in 1952, Philo decided to take the Naga issue to the United Nations. In August 1952, he declared that the Naga National Council "will have -no truck with India" and organized a civil disobedience movement. As part of the movement, national and official celebrations were boycotted and acts of sabotage perpetrated. However, as the pressure of the security forces increased on Philo, he went underground in September 1952 and fled to Burma in December where he was detained

¹⁶ J.N. Hazarika.