

Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru¹

Series II, Volume 20

TRIBAL WELFARE

1. Upliftment of the Tribals²

I arrived here from Calcutta³ and via Gauhati in the afternoon for a lunch.

2. I met two deputations; one from the United Khasi Jaintia Hills and the other from the Garo Hills. They consisted of MPs, MLAs, and Members of the two District Councils.

3. I addressed a very largely attended public meeting⁴ later and afterwards had a talk with the Ministers of the Assam Government.

4. Tomorrow I shall see more delegations and meet other people. I am noting down today's reactions and impressions.,

5. On the 7th June, 1952, I spoke at the Scheduled Tribals Conference in New Delhi.⁵ I spoke on the spur of the moment. That speech of mine has been quoted in the addresses that were presented to me. The Governor had copies of it printed and distributed to all officers and others. Finding that speech had produced an impression, I got a copy and read it again this evening. I think that it expresses my point of view as well as I can put it and, from the point of view of basic approach to the problem of the tribal people, this speech might well be considered as laying down the general policy.

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

² Note, Shillong, 19 October 1952, JN Collection

³ Nehru as Prime Minister undertook for the first time a tour of some tribal areas in Assam from 19 to 25 October 1952.

⁴ See ante; pp. 3-9

⁵ See Selected Works (second series), Vol. 18, pp. 370-377

6. It is desirable that this should be borne in mind because there is still, I find a good deal of confusion in the approach to this important question and well-meaning people act in a manner which, I think, is not right and which is likely to produce undesirable consequences.

7. We use the word tribal people or Scheduled Tribes and think of them as if they were more or less like each other. As a matter of fact, there is infinite variety among them, variety of every kind, and it is hardly possible to lay down the same rules as applying to all of them. Most people in India, when they talk of tribal people, probably think of the Bhils, the Santhals and the like. I think it should be borne in mind that the Assam tribals are different from the others and should be considered rather separately.

Among the Assam tribes again there is a very great variety. There are the Khasis, who are fairly highly developed and who can hardly be classed with the other tribes, and there are the Nagas, some of whom are head-hunters. Between these two there are many varieties; even among the Nagas there are numerous tribes. In fact, to describe that group as Nagas is very misleading, because they are not one group. This mistake was perpetrated by the British and we have kept it up.

8. A fact to remember is that these people of the Frontier areas never came in contact with our freedom movement. They were isolated and kept apart from it and, therefore, they were not prepared psychologically for the changes that have taken place. They had hardly come in contact with Indians as such and most of their dealings in the past, were with the British officers and foreign missionaries. Thus they lack the feeling of oneness with the rest of India or the Indian people and are greatly afraid that their small numbers will be swamped by others and that they would lose their distinctive customs and culture, apart from suffering economically. Their minds are full of apprehension about the future.

9. The problem essentially, therefore, is how to remove this fear and suspicion from their minds and how to make them feel at one with India. Everything else is subordinate to this, even economic betterment, although that is highly important. It was, no doubt, with this idea that the makers of the Constitution drew up the VI Schedule and made some special provision for these tribal folk.⁶ Whether that VI Schedule is adequate or not, I cannot say.

I rather think that some changes in it might be necessary, even though that involves a change in our Constitution. I would not hesitate to make these changes if they serve to remove the feeling of apprehension from the minds of these people.

10. In the past, they have largely dealt with British officers or foreign missionaries, who have, no doubt, instilled in them a feeling of slight contempt for Indians as weak people and who have, at the same time, made them a little afraid of the mass of India. For this reason we have to start not only from scratch but behind scratch and have to remove the impression that was previously created in their minds. This requires a very friendly approach on the one hand and firmness, where needed, on the other. As far as I can see, this can be done and no great damage has been done thus far. Generally speaking, tribal people are in a questioning mood, trying to find out what is going to happen to them. (This is not merely a

⁶ The constitutional provisions for the administration of the tribal areas of Assam including NEFA were based on the recommendations of the North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-Committee, presided over by Gopinath Bardoloi and A.V. Thakkar as one of the members. The Sixth Schedule provided for autonomous District and Regional Councils, which were primary representative bodies and had the power of law-making in certain specified fields such as management of a forest other than a reserved forest, inheritance of property, marriage and social customs, assessment and collection of land revenue and imposition of certain specified taxes. These Councils also had judicial powers, civil and criminal, subject to the jurisdiction of the High Court as the Governor may from time to time specify.

question of Constitution but of governmental and human behaviour). Their attitude thus is a mixture of hope and apprehension and every little incident emphasizes one or the other aspect.

11. I would except the Nagas from the above, because the Nagas are definitely non-cooperative and even to some extent hostile. I refer particularly to the Nagas of the Hills Districts here and not to the Nagas elsewhere. These Nagas here have prevented, by their disciplined and their very effective noncooperation, the formation of a District Council for them as provided for in the VI Schedule.⁷ All the other District Councils have been formed. Recent reports indicate that these Nagas are becoming slightly aggressive, though no major incident has yet taken place. The person who appears to hold authority amongst them is Zapu Phizo.⁸ I met this man twice and formed a poor opinion of him. His demand on behalf of the Nagas is for independence. I have explained to him and to others in the clearest language that this is nonsense and were not going to consider it. In spite of this, however, the hostility of these Nagas appears to continue and Zapu Phizo talks about going to the UN or doing something else. He takes up, more or less, the proud attitude of. not acknowledging the Government of India or at any rate somewhat ignoring its directions. I think we can ignore Zapu Phizo as a person. Too much importance has been attached to him in the past. But he represents some kind of widespread feeling among the Nagas. That is important.

12. I have referred to the human approach. I have an impression that this has been lacking. Indeed, Ministers hardly ever go to these areas in the interior and have to rely on reports of some local officials. Even officials at headquarters seldom go there. The approach thus, instead of being human

⁷ See ante, p.7

⁸ Leader of the Naga rebels and founder-member and President of the Naga National Council since 1949

and personal, is very largely official, departmental and bureaucratic. This latter approach cannot succeed in gaining their goodwill or understanding.

13. I propose to visit the Naga territories soon,⁹ or some of them and shall note down my reactions then. For the present, I have met representatives of the Khasi and the Garo Hills. I cannot easily distinguish between these various types. But the Khasis rather stand out. I find them a very attractive people and generally fairly -well educated. Indeed, their standard is at least as high as the normal standard of others in Assam or elsewhere. In addition, they are far more disciplined in common with other tribal folk. I think we should definitely encourage them' in every way. We should encourage others also. But probably the field to choose from will be greater among the Khasis. They should not be made to feel that they are inferior in any way or are dominated over by others. This approach could be helped much if the Khasis, as well as some others, were associate more closely with the working of Government. I should have liked to see Khasi officials in the Secretariat apart from clerks. It would be a good thing if there was a Khasi Deputy Minister. There is at present a Khasi Parliamentary Secretary. It would be better to have a Khasi in a more important position.

14. But even more important than ministership is association with the working of the Secretariat. I would commend this to the Chief Minister. I have an impression that the Secretariat work is done in an official routine way and does not think much of the personal touch or the human approach.

15. Both the Khasis and the people of the Garo Hills laid stress on the conditions of scarcity and poverty prevailing over considerable areas, more particularly those adjoining Pakistan which have very bad communications' with the rest of the State. There is no doubt that Partition has fallen heavily upon them and many well-to-do people among them have been reduced to

⁹ Nehru alongwith U Nu, the Prime Minister of Burma, undertook a tour in March 1953 of the Naga areas on both sides of the Indo-Burma border

destitution because of the stoppage of the normal trade between their part of the world and East Pakistan.¹⁰ Requests were, therefore, made to me for immediate relief chiefly in the shape of public works. These works are likely to be road-making. The point that was stressed was that of urgency.

16. On the recommendation of the Iengar Committee,¹¹ some arrangements have been made for supplying rice to them at the Shillong rate. That means that a transport subsidy is paid by Government. That is an improvement. But it does not get over the difficulty of people there not having the resources to buy rice even at that rate. The only way out appears to be to take up some development scheme which is part of our Five Year Plan and which will give immediate relief to a considerable number. The scheme must be the construction of roads first of all and later other things.

17. No one on these Hills should really starve, because they have all kinds of cheap and good fruits. They produce a vast number of oranges. They also produce pineapples, bananas, potatoes, sweet potatoes, Indian corn, or maize and a little tapioca. I have no doubt that, if properly organized, what they produce should be enough. It seems necessary, however, that our experts should advise them and help them in changing, wherever necessary, the nature of their cultivation. But, in any event, some relief will have to be given. I understand it has' been agreed to build some roads there, but some routine comes in the way. Also the heavy rains prevented much being done in the shape of public works.

18. The Khasis pointed out that their District Council could not function effectively for lack of funds. They wanted help. The Assam Government has

¹⁰ These people had suffered greatly from the Partition of India as their markets had been cut off completely and they could not get essential articles such as rice, etc. Their economic status having been adversely affected, they were living in conditions of scarcity and poverty.

¹¹ See Selected Works (second series), Vo1.19, p. 198

given each District Council Rs. 30,000, just to start working. Obviously this does not go far. It appears that no land revenue is collected 'and any attempt to introduce land revenue would, I was told, lead to a revolution.

19. Another matter on which they laid stress was that of Rs. 4 lakhs and odd which had been put in a separate account for the development of these areas but which was taken over by the Assam Government and merged in its own funds. Technically and legally the Assam Government was right. But this has produced a bad impression. They want, therefore, to get this money back as also half share to future revenues of a particular kind.

* * *

2. The Sentinels of the Frontier¹²

I call upon the nation to declare war against poverty, disease and unemployment and to work hard for the common prosperity of the country. I also warn you against communalists and other destructive elements undermining the freedom of India and weakening the nation in other ways. We shall make no compromise with communalists and other destructive elements, and we will fight them to the last. I call upon the people to co-operate with the scheme drawn up by the Government under the Five Year Plan which can change the present picture of India and bring prosperity to the country.

The people of the State should remember that tribal population of Assam are their countrymen. I therefore specially urge the students and Congress workers to visit the tribal areas to educate them and to understand them. I have come to Assam to meet and understand the tribal people. Assam is surrounded by foreign countries and the borders of Assam are inhabited by

¹² Speech at a public meeting, Tezpur, 21 October 1952. From the Amrita Bazar Patrika, 22 October 1952, Extracts

tribals. Therefore, there should be better understanding and feeling of trust between tribals and the people living in the plains. The Britishers tried to divide tribals and the plains people to serve their purpose. Some of the tribals are demanding separation from India, but we will have to make them understand the futility of the proposal. We will have to make our borders strong and united.

I would like to see the progress of those industries, say a factory or some industry that would produce something concrete and provide employment for the unemployed in the country. I may warn my countrymen that unless they do away with this growing feeling of lassitude and casualness, their future will be nothing but disastrous. The need of the hour is hard work on the part of the people. If the people co-operate with the Government in executing these plans and projects with their hard work, then the future of the nation will surely be bright.

As a frontier State Assam has certain special problems as well as responsibilities. Many other States in India probably have such problems, but these problems are not so diverse, as the people in other States are not so different from one another as the people inhabiting Assam are. In solving all these problems and in leading a State on the path of progress to contribute its share in the progress of the country, the people of Assam have to move very cautiously. You should develop a broad outlook and look upon the whole of India as your home. You should not indulge in fruitless bickerings over provincial or religious feelings.

Constitution does not allow the domination of one part over the other, be it on a provincial, religious or any other ground. All people should be allowed to manage their own affairs as they like and any imposition will be disastrous.

My only advice to you is to love the tribal people. Do not hate them. Do not consider them lower than yourselves. Try to learn their way of life, their

language and customs. You should neither try to impose anything on them contrary to their customs, nor try to change any of their existing institutions, for that would wound their feelings. All progress comes slowly, and by slow and steady endeavour alone you can improve the lot of the tribal people.

* * *

3. Equal Share in Prosperity and Freedom for Tribal People¹³

I am happy to come and meet the tribal people. I assure the Nagas that they will be allowed to manage their affairs as soon as it is practicable.¹⁴ I never wanted to interfere in their own matters. I want them to prosper. India achieved freedom five years ago and now the citizens of India, irrespective of distinction of caste and creed will have to equally share it. In India there was no ruler and the ruled; all were equal.

I have not come here as a great ruler, but as a friend and comrade of the tribals. As a result of the last elections, I have become the Prime Minister of the country. In the past we had rajas and maharajas as rulers, but now we elect our Chief Ministers and the President. One day a Naga boy or girl may become the Prime Minister or the President of the country. You have some of our officers to administer this part of the country; they do not come to rule over you but to help you and look after you. It has only been five years since we became an independent nation. It will, therefore, take time to achieve what we want to. I know there should be roads, schools and hospitals in these areas, but these things cannot be had all on a sudden. All

¹³ Speech at a public meeting, Mao, on Manipur-Naga Hills border, 24 October 1952. From the Amrita Bazar Patrika, 25 October 1952

¹⁴ A Naga deputation sent by Phizo met Nehru at Mao to reinforce the demand of Naga sovereignty. Nehru told them that the Government was not prepared to discuss this issue any more.

our countrymen whether they live in the hills or in the plains, should equally prosper; you should not feel that there is any difference between Nagas and other people. We are all comrades working together for the welfare of the country.

As I am also from the hills I can appreciate the problems of the tribal people and feel quite happy and at home among them. Having gained the freedom, the problem is how to make the people prosperous. I will try to do whatever is possible. The tribal people have every right to claim that they should be at liberty to control their local affairs. The Government of India does not wish to interfere with their customs and way of living. I am aware of the territorial division of the Naga population between Manipur and the Naga Hills. Some of these people are for administrative purposes in Manipur area, while others are in the Naga Hills. This is for administrative convenience.

* * *

4. Caution against 'isms' and Slogans¹⁵

In the ancient times, India became great because our ancestors kept their minds open to new ideas and to all new developments in the outside world and showed adventurous spirit when they undertook perilous voyages across the high seas and cultivated great minds.

In later period, that spirit almost disappeared and India degenerated because she lost contacts with outside world, while internal quarrels weakened the nation making her a prey to foreign aggression.

¹⁵ Speech at a public meeting, Agartala, 25 October 1952. From the Amrita Bazar Patrika, 26 October 1952

Modern India should derive inspiration from our ancient history as well as learn lessons from the world outside. We cannot grow by closing our doors and shutting ourselves in dark cells.

Tribal India with its rich traditions, customs and language is a part and parcel of India. It will be absurd to think that there should be only one religion and one way of thinking in India. Followers of different religions and shades of thought must live in peace with each other in our country. The principle of common nationality which we have accepted as one basic principle had enabled us to throw open the citizenship of India on the basis of equality of rights and

privileges to everyone irrespective of his religious views or the place or region he might belong to. It should, however, be the common duty and concern of all to always keep in view the goal of the national progress and not remain preoccupied merely with our parochial or sectarian interests in our thoughts and actions.

The task before us is to build a socialist State in India that will benefit the millions. Our leadership is at stake as to whether we could bring about in our country a unity both in thought and action out of the diversity that characterizes India with the ultimate aim of fulfilling our cherished dreams. Now that political freedom has been achieved we can study and decide what changes we should make in our social structure to ensure better living for the crores of people in the country. Uplifting the thirty-six crores of Indians is not an easy task. This cannot be achieved by mere shouting of slogans.

Hard work and great toil on the part of each and everyone of us will be needed for this. There are so many 'isms' in the world but none of us can ever conceive of doing anything in effecting the desired change for the better without hard work and mutual understanding among the people.

I urge you to eschew violence. Violence in whatever form it may appear does not pay. We should realize that in India violence and hatred and separatist and disruptive tendencies have no place. There are people who talk of revolution without knowing that the meaning of the word never connoted terrorism, loot and oppression of the people.

We want to transform the society so as to become healthy. This is a matter of life and death for us. Violence and disruptive activities will take us farther away from our goal. Two things we should avoid definitely namely thought without action and action without thought. Disruptive activities will only stop the progress of the nation. I warn those still harping on violence to bear in mind that violence breeds violence. Happily, India now is strong enough to crush any violent movement. I request you to calmly ponder over the consequences of violence which will cause definitive harm to the country in every respect.

In this connection a recent change in the policy of the Communist Party of India indicates a growing realization that violence will not take place in this country and that social transformation cannot be brought about by that method. You should avoid narrow outlook and learn to co-operate with one another and appreciate persons having different views. It is by the interaction of ideas that we will grow stronger. Narrow outlook is the very anti-thesis of culture and progress. I believe that we have nothing to be afraid of because the culture of India is strong enough to help us resist any undesirable influences of foreign culture.

* * *

5. To U Nu¹⁶

New Delhi

¹⁶ File No. 8/248/53-PMS.

October 25, 1952

My dear U Nu,

I returned this evening from a tour of the north-eastern border regions of India. On my return I received your letter of the 17th October.¹⁷ In this letter you suggest that I might postpone my visit to the Naga areas of India. As a matter of fact, I have already gone there, or at least some of them. It is not an easy matter to visit to many of these areas because it takes too much time. I can only go to places where there are airstrips. I spent one week in all these border regions, more especially the borders of Tibet where we have recently added to our administrative apparatus. Our officers and others have normally to go there by road and it takes them sometimes some weeks to reach there.

We send supplies by air droppings.

When you suggested that I might join you in visiting some of the Naga areas in Burma, I welcomed the idea. I welcomed it specially as that would give me another chance of being with you and discussing matters with you. If it is possible to arrange such a visit some time in March or so, I shall certainly try to come. But before this can be fixed, the airstrips have naturally to be put in proper condition. Our Air Force people, more especially when they are carrying me or any important guest, are very particular and I have to bow to their decision. Flying over these hills and landing there requires great care. In fact, I myself noticed these difficulties during my last week's flights over the mountains. Only two days ago, one

¹⁷ U Nu, the Prime Minister of Myanmar, wrote that due to heavy rains landing on the airstrip in the Naga Hills had become unsafe and Nehru might therefore postpone his visit to Naga Hills and arrange a separate visit in February or March when he might include a visit to the Naga Hill areas of Myanmar also. He also mentioned about the "New Life in Backward Area" scheme covering health and mass education introduced in Myanmar. U Nu also suggested that Nehru might consider the possibility of a meeting of Prime Ministers of India, Myanmar and China.

of our Air Force aircraft, which was engaged in dropping operations near the border of Tibet, came to grief.

I am looking forward to your coming here for the ceremonies to be held at Sanchi at the end of November.¹⁸ You have not written about this to me, but your Ambassador¹⁹ communicated with us on this subject. I am glad to know that your wife and daughter will also be coming. I hope you will be our guests in India and will be able to stay with me in Delhi for a little while. We can go together from Delhi to Sanchi. I shall be grateful if you will let me know what kind of a programme we should draw up for you in India.

In some of our tribal areas in the north-east, and this includes one of the Naga areas, we have constituted District Councils with some autonomy. These District Councils are very largely elected and they have certain powers within these areas. Nearly all these District Councils have now been formed, except one which relates to a particular Naga area. It is called the Naga Hills District Council. The Nagas of course are spread out in other places too, notably in Manipur State. We are having co-operation from them elsewhere, but in the Naga Hills District, there has been some trouble. A man of the name of Zapu Phizo has been demanding complete independence for that area. It is obvious that we cannot think of an independent country, tiny in size, just on our border. It could not possibly function. We are agreeable to autonomy in a large measure.

The result has been that the Nagas in this particular area have non-cooperated and refused to elect their District Council.

¹⁸ The relics of Sariputta and Maha Moggallana, two chief disciples of Lord Buddha, were being brought from Victoria and Albert Museum, London, to be consecrated in a new Vihara built near the Sanchi stupa on 30 November 1952.

¹⁹ U Kyin was the Burmese Ambassador in India at this time.

During the British period, all these hill areas were grossly neglected. Some educational work however was done by missionaries, American or British. Now we are proceeding with spreading our administrative apparatus there and concentrating, first of all, on communications, i.e., roads and sometimes air strips. Without roads nothing can be done. Schools are being opened also.

When you come here, we can discuss these matters further and profit by each other's experience.

With all good wishes to you.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

* * *

6. Visit to the North-East Frontier Areas²⁰

This visit of mine to the North-East Frontier was, if I may use the word, rather extraordinary because I saw new aspects of India and new types of people, completely different, and my whole conception of what are called the tribal folk has changed. Take the Khasis in the Shillong area. I think their general standard is higher than the average standard anywhere else in India. I am talking about the general standard of their education. They are chiefly taught by Christian missions with the result that there are quite a number who know English. In fact, when I asked in Shillong in what language I should address them, there were more people knowing English than Hindi. The number is not so important because it depends on opportunity. They were a fine lot of people, quite intelligent. They talked to me in a straight way. One or two addresses I got were remarkably well

²⁰ Impressions given at a meeting with the officials of the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, 26 October 1952. JN Papers, NMML. Extracts

drafted. I do not know who drafted them for them. They were very well drafted-I am not talking about the style-but they were rather courteous and frank and they had expressed themselves quite frankly. There were no inhibitions.

The Khasis are probably the most advanced. The Lushais probably come next. Again it is, as I said, a question of opportunity. I met all these people. The women especially are most attractive-I am not talking about their physical appearance. When the Iengar Committee went there, they came across a girl with a heavy load of wood on her head. They were surprised that she could talk in very good English. They found out that she was a college girl and because of the economic depression, she was suffering. The women there are healthy, strong, attractive, generally of the Mongolian type. Take the Nagas. I could not go to their remote Villages but when I had a meeting, people came all dressed up.

The Nagas are most remarkably attractive; both men and women. The Nagas in the remote villages go about practically naked with 6 sq. inches of cloth floating about in front of them, but fine physically, deep chested, with good legs and not afraid of anyone. They talked to me in a straight way. I was told that in the army they have about 500 Nagas in the battalion. They all talk very highly of Nagas as being fine soldiers, quite loyal, etc. There were some Naga doctors too. Given the opportunity they will come up very well.

Then there were the Abors, the Abathamis and the Daflas. I saw them at a place called Ziro. The other day an aeroplane accident occurred in Ziro. A place like Ziro is, normally, about three weeks' journey over the mountains. They are all frightfully disconnected. It is in the middle of the hills, full of cultivated fields. Communication is only by air. They have built air-fields there, not so good but they are functioning all right. The private air companies that normally go to these places do a fine job. They have got

fine pilots. One is an Englishman or an Anglo-Indian, who is supposed to be the topmost man. We flew over Tawang. Of course, we could not land there. But when we went up we got lost in the clouds and ultimately we had to come back. The maps were not very accurate and not in big enough scale to show each valley so that once you turn into a wrong valley, you go all along in the wrong direction. We understood that thousands of people were waiting for us, and mind you, they had come after many days journey for the meeting. Of course, they all felt disappointed. There were people who had walked for seven or eight days, one person said he had walked for twenty days. We could not go to Tawang.

I wanted to fly over Walong. We did not miss it, of course, but I did not wish to press our pilot who was rather nervous. So we decided to go back. We went half way to Walong. If we had a man who knew the area, we could-have visited the place. We went on and turned round to Ziro and spent several hours there. The Political Officer there is one Mr. Menzies, an Anglo-Indian type of officer with a Lushai wife - a very fine woman. He has been living there completely cut off from the rest of the world. Occasionally some plane comes to bring in supplies. The people there are rather backward. They never wash. The reason given is that if they wash, they feel cold. But their methods of cultivation are remarkable. They have made canals and water channels high up in the mountains and bring water to their fields. In fact our Governor of Assam proposes to send some people there to study these improved methods of cultivation.

Coming down to the Naga Hill area, I did not go to the Naga Hill District from Manipur. I went to a place called Mao. There were two or three gatherings.

The Nagas were very friendly. They gave me spears, etc. You might have heard of what happened in Kohima; I mean the recent unfortunate shooting incident? For the last five or six months, the local Nagas, including the

students there, have been becoming progressively aggressive. A Naga boy was arrested for theft. He was produced in court and he felt very weak and more or less fainted. The Naga story was that he had been beaten by a constable or a sub-inspector. The result was that the sub-inspector, when he came out, was assaulted by the Nagas and was given a beating. Later they surrounded the court house and broke some panes. Then an officer, I think of the Assam Rifles, was going on his motor bicycle. This officer, apparently, was very unpopular and the Nagas surrounded him and gave him a beating. This continued for some time and it was then that one of our men fired a revolver and killed a Naga. The man who was killed was some sort of a judge. The Assam Government has, of course, appointed a Committee of Inquiry consisting of a Judge and another person who is some sort of a Commissioner (an Englishman). The other story is that this Naga boy who was arrested had never been beaten but the constable in question was unpopular. He was in court and they thought that the boy had been beaten by him. I sent the Brigadier of the Assam Rifles²¹ to enquire and report to me. I have got his report. The report is that the boy and the constable had nothing to do with each other.²² The constable was unpopular and the Nagas thought that he had done it and they beat him. I think a Captain in the Assam Rifles²³ also got a beating. It seems he misbehaved himself. He drinks a lot and his transfer has already been ordered. All these excited the Nagas. When I went to Mao I was told that a number of people

²¹ Brigadier Bhagwat Singh, I.G., Assam Rifles

²² On 18 October 1952, a demonstration was held in Kohima to protest against the alleged torture by the Assam Police of a Naga boy. Accidentally, a Naga demonstrator was felled by a police officer, who was surrounded and badly beaten up by other demonstrators. A colleague of the police officer opened fire and killed a Angami Tribal Court Judge who had intervened to save the wounded police officer. An enquiry commission, later, exonerated the police officer of any wrong doing

²³ Captain Virik

had come for the Naga National Council. They gave me a long memorandum, highly offensive and insulting. My own impression was that the Deputy Commissioner²⁴ of that district was not at all up to the mark. He is an Assamese. It is largely due to his lack of competence that all these things happened.

Then we went to Manipur. We met the Manipuris, the Nagas etc. The Nagas are very much advanced. In" Manipur, the Maharaja²⁵ had put up a show of Manipur dancing and Naga dancing-a very fine show artistically and aesthetically and extraordinarily good. I am not talking about the style of dancing. The Naga dancing was, of course, perfect. The same might be done elsewhere too. As a matter of fact, we may have it here on the Republic Day. It is not the style but the way it is done. I have seen some Manipuri dancing here and also some Naga dancing. In fact, it was done by our Naga soldiers in our army and the general effect of it was rather extraordinary. The whole atmosphere created by the song was terrifying-not only the vitality and the energy but the artistic features of it. The Nagas are a fine lot. They are not the kind of people who can be subdued. They take a life or give a life.

In Tripura again, I could not go to the Lushai hills. The way they live completely cut off is extraordinary. In real life they have no clothes at all. I intended to go to their headquarters town by car but the road gave way and so I could not go there. The whole communication system of Tripura passes through East Bengal. In fact, even now, in spite of everything, our Chief Commissioner has to go from one part of Tripura to another through East Pakistan.

I do not know about the racial background of the Nagas. They are spread out over Burma and India. There are dozens of tribes-separate tribes- they

²⁴ S.C. Kagti

²⁵ Bodh Chandra Singh

are vaguely called Nagas. There is no single language. There are many dialects and they do not understand each other. Therefore they cannot easily combine, although there is some racial affinity. Many of these names have been imposed. For instance, they objected to the name Lushai. The Lushais are a very small tribe but the British called the whole area 'Lushai area'.

I propose to write a note²⁶ about my North-East Frontier tour. I should like to do it in the next one or two days, because otherwise impressions will fade away. I shall write a note which will be sent to Ministers, Heads of Missions etc., but not to the public. About my speeches, I do not know how far they have been reported in the press. First of all, the whole approach to this, the whole conception of these tribal areas was completely wrong. Of course, one does not expect much cultural advance from them. We must leave them to themselves giving them opportunities for education, etc. These people will, I think, be a great strengthening element for India, if properly handled.

Some of the qualities which these people have are not to be found in the North-East Frontier people. The NEF people are tough but the tribal folk have character. I met some of their officers, especially one or two Englishmen or Anglo-Indians. Mr Menzies, for instance, struck me as a very good officer. There is another man who had been there. He came to see me. He has left service and has gone to tea planting. He is an Englishman. The Assamese rather deliberately impose themselves on these tribal people. There is a movement in Assam for what they call "making the Province homogeneous."

The Khasis came to me and asked me "what about our language. The missionaries have written some books in Khasi language. We are learning that language. We are supposed to learn Assamese. We are supposed to

²⁶ See, post pp. 160-172

learn Hindi. We must learn English also--on the whole four languages in three scripts!" It is terrible. They suggested that they might study Assamese in Nagari script. The Assamese language is their lingua franca. I feel that these people should be given as large a measure of autonomy as possible. Unless a person is thoroughly acquainted with them and is accepted by them, he does not fit in there at all. The officer must have the feeling of human sympathy and kinship: otherwise he cannot work there. The average Indian does not possess that. I am sure an officer working there should have more allowances. Probably one thinks it is a less expensive life that he leads there but it is not so. Everything has to come to him from Calcutta and other places by air....

One rather odd thing is this. The North-East Frontier Agency covers the entire border from Tibet to Burma except a little bit. Why that bit has been left out, I do not know. It would be better if they controlled the whole border....

The political consideration is there. If these tribal people are not treated well, they will become the opposition, and join the Muslim Leaguers. The Khasis are separate and the Assamese are separate and they do not mix. We can think in terms of a common judicial authority or a common Governor. As much of local autonomy as possible should be given to these tribes. In Tripura I found that it has a most ancient history running to thousands of years. Everywhere, in these places, the desire is for schools and communication is rather a pressing thing.

* * *

7. To Jairamdas Doulatram²⁷

New Delhi October 26, 1952

²⁷ JN Collection. Extracts

My dear Jairamdas,

I have just replied to your telegram about Brigadier Bhagwat Singh's report about the Kohima incident on 22nd October. Bhandari²⁸ also gave me a report,²⁹ which I enclose in original.

The effect of these reports on me is firstly that certain sections of the Nagas, probably including the students, have been progressively 'becoming more aggressive and losing such respect as they had for governmental authority. This is not a good thing. The whole incident appears to have been the result of certain accidental happenings and there is no appearance of planning in it. The Deputy Commissioner does not come out well of it. He appears to be a weak man, unable to deal with a critical situation. I feel sure that a more wide awake person might well have dealt with the situation better and prevented it from developing as it did.

As a judicial enquiry has been ordered and probably started, it is best to await the result of that enquiry. It is quite possible that the local Nagas might boycott it. That should not prevent us - from going on with it.

The report states that Captain Virik was unpopular with the Nagas and was even beaten on a previous occasion. Such a man should not have been kept there, more especially as he has not a good reputation otherwise. It is not stated what action was taken when he was previously beaten. Surely something ought to have been done then.

The Deputy Commissioner's behaviour in trying to plead with the Nagas when they were beating Captain Virik, seems to be extraordinary. That is not the way to deal with a situation like this....

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

* * *

²⁸ S.K. Bhandari, representative in the North-Eastern Areas and Orissa

²⁹ See the preceding item

9. Character and Culture of the Tribal People³⁰

My recent tour³¹ of the North-Eastern Frontier Areas proved not only exceedingly interesting but, if I may say so exciting to me. It was in the nature of a discovery of new and fascinating aspects of India. I learnt much by it which I could never have done by reading reports. I think also that from various points of view, my visit did good in many ways. I spent just about a week there, constantly moving about by air or car. I visited parts of the hill areas of Assam, the North-East Frontier Agency, Manipur and Tripura. I had intended going to the Lushai Hills district also, but the only approach was by road, a long journey and a breach had occurred on the road, which prevented my undertaking this journey. I was very sorry to miss this area, which from some points of view especially deserved a visit.

2. Flying in these hill area is fascinating with their numerous and tortuous valleys. It is also not free from risk if any clouds are present, which is often the case. To fly right above the clouds has no value, except perhaps to reach a particular destination. Even that destination is missed as I missed it twice in spite of repeated efforts. I wanted to visit Tawang, near the Tibetan border. This is a place of some importance to us as we had recently extended our administration to it some two years back. It was on our side of the McMahon Line, but it had not been occupied by us and was practically under Tibetan control till then. In fact our going there and occupying it, led to protests from the then Tibetan authorities. It had thus some political importance. It was not possible to land there as there was no airstrip. To go by mountain path was many weeks' journey. We had

³⁰ Note on a tour of the North-Eastern Frontier areas. The first twenty paragraphs were written on 27 October 1952 and the remaining on 29 October 1952. IN Collection. Also available in File No. 25(6)/52. PMS. This note was sent to all the Chief Ministers, the next day. Also printed in G. Parthasarathi (ed.) Jawaharlal Nehru: Letters to Chief Ministers, 1947-1964, Vol. 3, pp. 147-163. (New Delhi, 1987).

³¹ From 19 to 25 October 1952

decided, however, to fly low over it and had announced this fact. We carried some flowers to throw over the monastery there. But we did not succeed in finding the place although we flew round about it for some time. Later we heard that hundreds of monks and nuns, as well as the neighbouring village population and our Assam Rifles, had gathered there just to see us in the air. They had come from long distances on foot and it was a great pity that we lost our way. On another occasion, we intended flying to Walong, also another of our posts near the Tibetan frontier. Here too, we could not land. As a matter of fact we would not reach the place because of low clouds.

3. These places are cut off from the rest of the world and can only be reached normally by long marches along the mountains. Supplies are sent to them by air and are dropped from the aircraft. Two days after our attempt to reach them, an Indian Air Force aircraft, carrying supplies, came to grief in these very mountains. This was evidence of the risky nature of flying there. And yet, these flights have been going on for a year or two, regularly and they had become almost a routine for the men of our Air Force as well as for a private air company which is especially engaged for the purpose. I was full of admiration for the pilots.

4. I do not know what ideas most people in India have about tribal folk. My own general impression has been largely derived from such people as the Bhils, the Santhals, the Gonds, etc. For my part, like these somewhat backward or even primitive people, but I recognize that they are primitive in their normal ways of life. Given the opportunity, however, some of them can make good in other ways also. During my visit to the North-East Frontier, I had to change my conception of these tribes. I found a great variety of them, differing from each other very greatly. Some of them were undoubtedly rather primitive, but many of them were remarkably developed and advanced. Indeed, it is quite absurd to call them backward.

An average crowd of some of these tribes would probably be more advanced in many ways than an average crowd elsewhere in India.

5. I do not propose to give lists of these tribes or to deal with them separately, but I should like to mention that the Khasis struck me as very advanced as well as attractive people. So also the Lushais. Their women are intelligent, attractive and hard-working. Generally speaking, many of them have been educated in missionary schools and can speak English. Indeed, the proportion of people speaking English was higher than I would find in most other parts of India. An instance that was mentioned to me threw some light on these people and more especially on their womenfolk. A bright-faced girl was carrying a heavy load of wood. She was asked some questions and, to the surprise of the questioner, she spoke in excellent English. She was a college girl. But because her family had suffered in recent years, chiefly owing to the Partition, she was carrying these loads just to earn some money for her parents. I could hardly conceive of any girl of a like station elsewhere in India doing this kind of work.

6. What appealed to me about all these tribal people was not only their physique and health and straight-limbed bodies but their frank demeanour. They looked one in the face and were not afraid or inhibited, men and women alike. Altogether, they struck me as a fine lot of which any country can be proud. Almost everywhere there was a passion for education. The two principal demands were for roads and schools. I can well imagine that given these communications and schools, they would advance rapidly and be a credit to the country in many ways. Even now many of them occupy responsible positions and do well. Even the Nagas, who are supposed to be very primitive, profit by education. They make very good soldiers. Our Army has a battalion of them, and so also the Assam Rifles, and their officers spoke in the highest terms of them.

7. The names of the tribes are somewhat misleading. The Nagas consist of many entirely separate tribes with different languages or dialects and not too much contacts with each other. The name, "Naga", has been imposed upon them. The Lushai is a generic name to a large number of tribes living in what are now called the Lushai Hills. As a matter of fact, only one small tribe there is really Lushai and the others object to this appellation. They want their name changed to "Mizoram". The Garos would like to be called the "Achiks" which, according to them, is their real name.

8. We have looked upon the question of the tribes as a social problem, which of course it is. But in these North-Eastern Frontier areas, it is very much a political problem also because of the frontier and because these people are culturally related to the people on the other side of the Frontier, e.g., the Tibetans or Burmese. The whole area as all real frontier areas are, is full of these mixed racial types with a Mongolian element present in greater or lesser degree. The languages they speak are numerous. They have no written script and it was the missionaries who taught them the Latin script and wrote grammar and dictionaries for them.

9. Another fact to be remembered is that all these tribes and other people in these areas were almost completely cut off from the rest of India during British rule. Few of them came out of their areas and few from outside went there. The British did not like this journeying to and fro. Thus they never experienced a sensation of being in a country called India and they were hardly influenced by the struggle for freedom or other movements in India. Their chief experience of outsiders was that of British officers and Christian missionaries who generally tried to make them anti-Indian. As Indian independence gradually approached and it became obvious that British rule was coming to an end in India, some of these British officers and Christian missionaries induced them to think in terms of independence. This had some effect on some sections of the Nagas.

10. Generally speaking, these tribal people have marked customs and ways of living, which are different from those of the Assamese and thus they have not mixed and do not even now mix easily on the social plane. There is a feeling of separateness in these tribes and some apprehension that they might be merged in the sea of Indian humanity, that they might have to give up their customs and ways of living, that they might even have their land taken away from them.

11. There is a tendency in Assam for what is called integration of these tribes and for the establishment of a homogeneous State. This really means merging in a cultural and like sense the tribal people into the Assamese. I think that this is not a desirable movement and instead of achieving its objective, will lead to conflicts and difficulties. There is bound to be a process of assimilation, but this will have to be developed by itself through education and contacts without any special effort. Indeed the effort should be in retaining their individual culture, much of which is certainly worth retaining. They have an innate sense of art and are a strong and virile people. It would be a great pity if in this respect they were brought down to a lower level, even though they might advance in some other ways.

12. The first problem we have to face there is to inspire them with confidence and to make them feel at one with India, and to realize that they are part of India and have an honoured place in it. This can only be done by allowing them to retain their own cultural traits and habits and leaving them to develop along their own lines without any compulsion from outside.

13. In some places the question of language was raised. Thus a Khasi or a Lushai learns his own language, which is the medium in the primary schools. He has to learn Assamese also and Hindi and English. The Khasi or the Lushai language is written in the Latin script. The Assamese is written in a slight variation of the Bengali script. Thus not only have several

languages to be learnt but their scripts. This is a great burden. It is true that Assamese has become, to some extent, a lingua franca in those areas. A Khasi told me of this difficulty and asked me if Assamese could not be written in the Devanagari script, as this would make it easier for them to learn both Assamese and Hindi. I think there is much in what he said.

14. The people near the Tibetan frontier were till recently under some kind of a Tibetan administration. On the whole, some of them appeared to be pleased with the change-over, as the system of forced labour, etc. had now disappeared and some attempts had been made to improve their lot. Their representatives asked me repeatedly for schools, roads and dispensaries. On the other hand, in some other areas bordering on Tibet, I was told that comparison was being made with conditions on the Chinese side and that this was not always to our advantage. Many of our people go across the border to work on the other side and get good wages. They say that the Chinese are building roads and schools, etc. In fact, it appeared that the Chinese treated our people somewhat better than they treated the Tibetans.

15. Thus the problem of these areas is to make the people feel that they have perfect freedom to live their own lives and to develop according to their wishes and genius. India to them should signify not only a protecting force but a liberating one. Any conception that India is ruling them and that they are the ruled, or that the customs and habits with which they are unfamiliar are going to be imposed upon them, will alienate them and make our frontier problems more difficult. It was glad to see that the Governor of Assam, Shri Jairamdas Doulatram, was very sympathetic and friendly to the tribal people and fully appreciated the policy that we had laid down. His chief difficulty, and indeed this is a common complaint, was lack of funds. Schools are relatively cheap and they are in high demand. Communications are expensive, and yet, without communications, nothing can be done.

During the British period these areas were left completely undeveloped and it is exceedingly difficult now to move about in the interior. Probably the worst developed area of all lies in the Lushai Hills, but really this applies to most other parts also. Post offices are very rare, telegraph offices are rarer and of course telephones practically non-existent. I was told that it took a month or more for a letter to reach some parts of the Lushai Hills.

16. As I wandered about these areas, New Delhi, with all its paraphernalia of Government, seemed to be very far away and I realized that the reverse was also true. These areas, so full of promise and with such a fine and often sensitive and intelligent population, were hardly remembered by New Delhi.

In a vague way no doubt they existed as some outlying tract which had to be kept going. But there was no intimate appreciation of their existence, their difficulties, and their problems. Certainly no feeling that these people would add greatly to the strength of India as well as to their own prosperity, if properly helped. I wish that more people from New Delhi visited these areas and came in contact with these very attractive, intelligent and hard-working people.

17. Many of these tribes, notably the Khasis, Lushais and the Garos, have suffered greatly from the Partition of India. All their communications system led to Eastern Pakistan and their markets lay there also. These markets have now been cut off almost completely and they cannot get necessary articles, such as rice, etc. Large numbers of prosperous people have been reduced to poverty because of this, and yet they produce oranges in very great abundance. All bananas, pineapples, potatoes, Indian corn, sweet potatoes and, to a slight extent, tapioca. They are good cultivators. I noticed how the Khasis took advantage of every strip of available land in the mountains. Sometimes there was terrace cultivation which was good. In other areas the usual form of cultivation is what is

called "jhooming" or a shifting method of dry cultivation of paddy. The forest is cut down and used for this kind of cultivation and then that patch of land is left and people move on to the next. This is obviously very harmful. Possibly this growth of "jhooming" cultivation is also partly responsible for the floods.

18. These people realized that changing conditions required them to change what they cultivated. I was asked to send them experts to advise them as to what to do. AU of them wanted markets for oranges, timber, bamboos, etc. Some cotton also is grown, but this is short staple. It was not used locally and used to be exported to foreign countries to be mixed with wool.

19. A proposal was made for arrangements for cold storage -of oranges. If this was done, it would prove very helpful indeed to the people there, more especially the Khasis. I was told that a plant of this kind was estimated to cost about 4 or 5 lakhs of rupees. This would save them about ten times that figure annually. Some such proposal was examined some time ago. I think that we should consider this afresh as soon as possible.

20. Airstrips were asked for and people offered to make them for us. I think that we shall have to make a number of airstrips because roads over the mountains will take a much longer time. That airstrips need not be very long ones. It would be enough if small planes would land there. I am told that our Air Force people, as well as civil aviation, do not approve of small planes flying there. I do not myself see why this should be so provided the small plane is two-engined. Probably a helicopter would prove of great use. Indeed a helicopter appears quite essential. If there is an accident, there is no way to reach the place within a reasonable time except by a helicopter.

21. The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution provides for the formation of autonomous districts and autonomous regions in the hill areas of Assam. This, if I may say so, was a very wise provision. It is quite essential that

these tribal people should be given the largest possible measure of local autonomy.

According to the Constitution, there should be six autonomous District Councils.

Five of these have been formed, but the sixth, in the Naga Hills District, has not been formed because of the non-cooperation of the Nagas there. They demand an independent State, which is rather absurd. But they have another grievance. According to them, the understanding arrived at on their behalf with Sir Akbar Hydari, then Governor of Assam, was not given effect to in the Sixth Schedule. In so far as this is so, we should be prepared to honour that understanding and even to vary the Sixth Schedule to some extent. That question, however, does not arise at present, though I should like to consider the grant of further powers to the District Councils.

22. The Constitution lays down that each District Council for an autonomous district shall consist of not more than 24 members of whom not less than three-fourths shall be elected on the basis of adult suffrage. The stress is on election and on a limitation of nominated members. In effect, however, this has been interpreted as limiting the elected members to three fourths only. This system of nominations has given rise to trouble in one district (I think that is the Khasi area) where demonstrations took place against nominations and firing had to be resorted to. In the other autonomous districts, no particular objection has been raised to the system of nominations. I do not think that the system of nominations is good or, at any rate, that it should extend to one quarter of the total members. As we have to produce a sensation of real autonomy, we should reduce this nomination to the lowest figure, if we keep it at all. It may be necessary to reserve a right to appoint one or two competent persons who might not be elected or to give representation to some minority group. I should imagine that it is enough to have two nominated members for this purpose, or at

the most three. It should be possible to make this change even now in the Khasi District Council by getting three nominated members to resign and then having an election for this. This would undoubtedly create a good impression.

23. The real problem of the District Councils, however is that of finance. They have very little money and everywhere I was asked for more financial assistance. The Assam Government has given Rs. 30,000 to each District Council for initial expenses. This does not go far and it is difficult for these people to raise much money from their own resources right at the beginning. It is very important that this experiment of District Councils should succeed. Their members are anxious to justify themselves and to do something, but they cannot do much in existing circumstances for lack of money. The success of these District Councils would be a tremendous factor in this area. It would affect immediately the Naga area also, where thus far no such Council has been constituted.

24. The Khasi District Council raised a question of a sum of about Rs. 4.5 lakhs which has been kept in a separate account for them previously for the development of these areas. This sum, however, was taken over by the Assam Government. This has caused a good deal of resentment because the money was really earmarked for that area. I mentioned this matter to the Chief Minister of Assam and he informed me that there were legal difficulties because that money had automatically become part of the consolidated fund of the province.

It is obvious, however, that any legal difficulty can be got over and, if necessary, the money can be given as a grant by the Assam Government. The Chief Minister appreciated this argument and the demand and was inclined to view it favourably. I hope that this money will be given to the Khasi District Council. That would solve their immediate difficulties. The other District Councils will, however, remain still in an impecunious state

and something will have to be done for them. They are even prepared to take loans.

25. There is also the question of their annual revenue from some kind of taxation. In many of these areas, there is no land revenue system and there are not many possibilities of raising money, at any rate to begin with. This matter might be explored.

26. As I have said above, no District Council has been formed in the Naga Hills District. The situation there is a difficult one and so-called Nagas National Council headed by Zapu Phizo, commands considerable influence and is non-cooperative. Indeed, during the past few months there have been many incidents which indicate that the Nagas there are becoming more and more aggressive. Even while I was in the neighbourhood, an incident took place which resulted in the death of a Naga leader and injury to some of our officers. The Assam Government has appointed a committee for a judicial enquiry into this matter. Apart from the fact of this particular incident, it is quite clear to me that it is of the highest importance to appoint the right type of officer in these areas. Perhaps it is not easy to get the right type of officer, but he must be found. The wrong type does a great deal of harm. The Nagas, as most other tribal people, respond fairly easily to a friendly approach. They are proud and sensitive and do not like being treated as subject people or being looked down upon in any way. An officer has both to be friendly and understanding, and, at the same time, firm and very wide awake. I had the feeling that the situation in the Naga Hills would have been much better if it had been handled a little more competently by the local officers and if some officers who were notoriously unpopular had not been kept there. Also, any attempt to impose new ways and customs on the Nagas merely irritates and creates trouble.

27. The Assam Government appears to feel that the tribes are the responsibility of the Government of India and hence perhaps they have not

in the past paid quite so much attention to them as they might have. The Government of India undoubtedly has a certain responsibility but so has the Assam Government also. The economic structure of this region has been upset by the Partition and is also inevitably undergoing a change because of other reasons. During this period of transition, some help to them appears essential.

28. Complaints were made to me by the Khasis round about Shillong that land there, which had been deforested, had been given to non-Khasis, usually to clerks, etc. who had come from the plains below and were employees in the Secretariat. This has been resented by the Khasis who feel that if land was available, it should have been given to them. The impression, therefore, has grown that the people of the plains are encouraged at the expense of the people of the hills and there is an apprehension that a deliberate attempt is being made to increase the non-Khasi population of Shillong so that they might be ultimately in a majority. Land always, and more especially in this area, roused people's passions. Our Constitution has very rightly made an exception to the Fundamental Rights for the purpose of protecting the rights of the Scheduled Tribes in land and other property.

29. Owing to the Partition chiefly, people living on the border areas have suffered greatly and their resources have been completely exhausted. In fact, as our Secretaries Committee reported, they had obviously become impoverished and had suffered from lack of adequate nutrition. Thus there is lack of purchasing power and unemployment. An urgent request was made to me for some kind of relief work especially in the Khasi area. This appears to be desirable, particularly in the form of roads.

30. In some of these areas, there are some kind of chiefs or siems. There is a demand for their removal by the District Council concerned. Legal opinion was taken and I believe our Law Ministry advised that this could not be

done without payment of some compensation to them for the income in kind that they used to get. The sum involved, I think, was Rs. 8 lakhs and it was proposed that this should be paid in installments. It is obvious that the District Council is in no position to pay this compensation and they want the Assam Government or the Central Government to do so, even though this might be in the form of loan advanced to them, which might be gradually paid off. I might mention that some of the chiefs also came to see me and did not particularly appreciate the idea of their being deprived of the privileges they had so far enjoyed.

31. Round about Cherrapunji, there is fairly good coal for lime, but transport is difficult and it can only be used in the neighbourhood.

32. I was repeatedly told that no responsible office was held in the Assam Secretariat by any of the tribal people. Even in the Tribal Department of the State Government, there was no such person. A good deal of importance was attached to this. I think that it is desirable to appoint someone in the State Tribal Department, so that they might have a feeling of being connected with the working of Government.

33. We have a Commissioner for Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes in the Government of India.³² He has done good work and he has some local representatives. I found that this representative for the North-Eastern areas (he is supposed to cover Orissa also) was a good man but he appeared to be rather frustrated. It was not quite clear what he could do except to send reports occasionally. He was anxious that something should be done and was disappointed at this slowness of progress. Partly this is due to the fact that enough importance has not been attached to these tribal people; partly to the way our Secretariat machinery works. There is too much of a legalistic and bureaucratic approach to a problem which above everything, requires a human approach and imagination. Because of

³² L.M. Shrikant

this legalistic approach, there was certain lack of confidence among the tribal folk. I am sure that this can be overcome if the approach changes somewhat, the right officers are appointed, and there is no indication that new ways will be imposed upon the tribal people against their wishes.

34. I have referred above to the language problems. This is to be faced especially in the schools. Also the teachers appointed were frequently unsuitable and could not get on with the students. They had no feeling of kinship with those students. These hill people may in some ways, be backward, but they have a certain pride and appreciated comradeship. They do not like being dominated over by people for whom they may not have much respect.

35. I must add that for some of our officers in the hills I have a good deal of admiration. They live quite cut off from the rest of the world and can only be reached occasionally by air. They have a hard life and only those who are especially suited can survive this for long. I think the question of special allowances for these officers should be given early consideration. It is difficult to get the right type of persons and the normal officer is not likely to be suitable. He does not want to go there and if he is sent, he is unhappy. I believe that the Assamese rates of pay for the hills are rather low.

36. The States of Manipur and Tripura stand on a somewhat different footing, although there are many common problems. Communications are bad. Tripura is partly surrounded by Pakistan. In fact, the only practicable way of going from some parts of Tripura to other parts is via Pakistan. Their trade was with Pakistan. The dominant people in these States are of course Manipuris and the Tripuris, both quite advanced. There are other tribes also and in Manipur there are many Nagas. Both of these States are rather small with a population of a few hundred thousands. And yet I think that it would be very unwise to merge them in some other States. That would create

dissatisfaction and new problems. Both are in their way very distinctive with a special cultural development and both have a longish past history of their own. Both produce fine handicrafts. Indeed all the tribal people produce finely and artistically woven textiles, which exhibit a remarkable sense of colour.

37. The artistry of Manipur produced a strong impression upon me. I saw, at the instance of the Maharaja, a show containing a number of dances Manipuri, Naga, and others. That show was quite a revelation. It was perfect in its artistry and aesthetic content. The normal dances that we see elsewhere in India (excepting of course the classical dances like Bharata Natyam) seemed pale and insipid in comparison with this show at Manipur. The dancers were professionals and had many years of hard training. But no amount of training can give that artistic touch and vitality which I found there, unless the people possess it.

38. Manipur textiles are famous and should certainly be encouraged in every way. One of the complaints made to me was that of a sales tax on handmade textiles. As I looked at these textiles there, a feeling of regret came to me at the advance of our so-called civilization which might in the future push out these textiles and replace them by mill-made cloth. Indeed a worthy Marwari gentleman suggested to me, to my horror, that a textile mill might be started in Manipur.

39. The women of Manipur dominate the scene in the State. They are the workers and the producers; the men apparently prefer generally to relax and allow their womenfolk to earn money for them. There was a very large bazar, called the Women's Bazar, where hundreds of women had stalls and not a man was visible, except possibly as a purchaser.

40. Both in Manipur and Tripura, there was the demand, strongly expressed, for what is called a democratic form of government, which meant an assembly, ministry and presumably all the paraphernalia that

accompanies them. The fact that they had Chief Commissioners governing them, hurt their pride very much. I think that very early steps have to be taken to vary the present system at least. We have already passed legislation authorizing the appointment of advisers. This is least that should be done as soon as possible. I rather doubt if this will satisfy the people there. I think that a beginning should also be made, in Manipur especially, in the constitution of a municipality, local boards and gram panchayats. That will be a sound foundation for future growth. Ultimately, I think both Manipur and Tripura should have something much more than advisers. At the same time, I cannot view with any pleasure the expensive apparatus of an autonomous state being introduced in these small areas. There is no reason why there should not be a common Governor, or a Lieutenant-Governor and a common High Court as well as possibly some other common features in services. To that extent they might be attached to Assam, the Governor of Assam being their Governor also. But I feel sure that it would not be desirable to merge them in any greater degree in a bigger State. For Manipur to lose its distinctive character and culture would be a misfortune. Manipuris, I might add, are an amazingly clean people and one does not see a person wearing dirty clothes as is so common in the rest of India.

41. Manipur has apparently always been a self-sufficient or even small surplus area in regard to food and possibly in regard to clothing also. The price of rice, I was told, till a few years ago was 'Rs. 5 per maund. Only a year or so ago, it was Rs. 10. Then it started rising steeply and reached the figure of Rs. 45 or even more. This was a tremendous shock and caused great distress. I do not know all the details of the story, but obviously the principal reason for this was the export of 4,000 tons of rice from Manipur to Assam. I suppose Assam's need was great, but that need was met at the cost of great scarcity and much misery in Manipur. People naturally did not

like this early fruits of their close association in an independent India and compared it to their previous more prosperous condition when there was no lack of rice. I was told that later some rice, about 400 maunds, was sent from Assam to Manipur. This was a very small fraction of what had been taken away. There is strong feeling on this subject and repeated demands were made for an enquiry as to who had bungled. The poor Chief Commissioner at the time had to suffer most from this resentment. I hope that in future, no such considerable export of rice will be encouraged from this small area.

42. Owing to the scarcity thus caused and also to floods which caused some damage, there was a demand for relief. Some relief was given. The new crops are supposed to be good, in spite of the damage caused by the floods.

43. In Manipur there was some feeling of resentment at land being given to refugees from East Pakistan. But there were really not many refugees, probably under 500. In Tripura, however, there was a flood of these refugees and in recent weeks, I believe, about 50,000 more came. This had created a difficult situation. There was apparently plenty of land available there, but owing to lack of communications it could not be easily reached. The town of Tripura, which had a population of about 20,000 four or five years ago, has now a population of 70,000 in the municipal area and 150,000 if the suburbs are included. The municipality is rather primitive and cannot possibly cope with this. It has no resources. It had only two taxes—a kind of income-tax and the other a latrine tax. Evidently it was not thought fit to encourage latrines too much.

44. To my great regret, I could not visit the Lushai Hills District. I had hoped to go to Aizawl, headquarters of the District, but the one passable road was partly washed away by the rains. This District is more cut off from India than any other part and lacks communication even more than the

other hill areas. It lacks post offices and telegraph offices. And yet the Lushai people are fine and very attractive. Many Lushais came to see me elsewhere and begged for roads, post offices and schools. Also for landing strips for aircraft.

45. To sum up I would say that all this North-East border area deserves our special attention, not only of the Governments, but of the people of India. Our contacts with them will do us good and will do them good also. They add to the strength, variety and cultural richness of India. As one travels there, a new and vaster richness of India comes before the eyes and the narrowness of outlook which sometimes obsesses us, begins to fade away. One feels that India is not just one particular part which we might know intimately, but something infinitely more—a meeting place of all manner of races, languages and cultures. Rabindranath Tagore wrote in one of his famous poems about India:

No one knows at whose call so many streams of men flowed in
resistless tides from places unknown and were lost in one sea: here
Aryan and non-Aryan, Dravidian, Chinese, the bands of Sakas and the
Hunas and Pathan and Mogul, have become combined in one body...

* * *

9. Tribal People of Assam³³

Jawaharlal Nehru: Lastly somebody said, "Assam Border." What do you want me to tell you?

³³ Remarks at a press conference, New Delhi, 2 November 1952. PIB. Extracts. For other parts of the conference, see pp. 74-76, 319-322, 376-377, 410-413, 471-472, 491-494, 523-526

Question: It will be interesting to hear about the border areas and the conditions there.

JN: I went there and Came back so full of those areas and the people there that I have been talking about little else since then. Wherever I have spoken, I bring in those borders and the tribal folk, because I have been tremendously 'impressed by those people, as they are a very fine lot, and for anyone to imagine that most of these border people are backward and all that is grossly mistaken. Of course, there are certain primitive types there, but I am talking about the big tribes, the Khasis, the Lushais and others who are very attractive, hard working and intelligent and important for us because of their border position. I should like our Government to help them, to the best of its ability.

What they want are, first of all communications, roads, secondly, schools-it is extraordinary, their passion for schools-and thirdly, hospitals and dispensaries. These are the three things that they wanted....

Q: Did you find many Chinese there on the eastern border?

JN: I did not see a single Chinese. I met a large number of people who might be called Tibetans who live in our part of the country. There are many Tibetans living on our side. They came long distances. One person came after marching for twenty days, but mostly they came after eight or ten days' march to the place where I held a meeting in the hills. That was a very attractive gathering, colourful. They gave me all kinds of presents.

One- I have got with me, what is called a Himalayan panda,³⁴ just like a bear. It is a baby which is very attractive.

Q: Would you bring it to your next press conference?

JN: It is difficult to bring it. It has rather big claws. There was a pair really but one of them died before they came to me. We must realize the condition on this border.

The lack of communications is something amazing. In the Lushai Hills there is hardly any communication. The Lushais are very advanced people. It takes months for a letter to reach some parts of the Lushai Hills. I could not go to Aizawl because the only road by which I intended going broke down on account of rains. But take the other hillside - the Tibetan side. I wanted to, go to a place called Tawang which is fairly near the Tibetan border. I could not land there-it is a month's journey by road-there is no road but by footpath or whatever it is. I said at least I shall fly over it. We sent word that I will fly over it and over a big Buddhist monastery. I decided to take a lot of flowers and throw it from the air on the monastery, but I never reached there. We could not find the place. We flew over thrice but it was hidden in some valley. My pilot had never flown there and what with clouds etc., it was not safe flying there and ultimately I never found it. I was exceedingly sorry and I heard later that thousands of Buddhist monks and nuns had collected there just to see us fly over their hills.

There is another place I went to, a place called Ziro.³⁵ It is the indigenous name and it has nothing to do with the numerical system. This was three weeks' march from the end of the road. I went by air because they had

³⁴ On 22 October 1952, when Nehru visited Charduar and Balipara frontier tract the tribal chiefs presented him with silk chaddars, caps, skins of Himalayan bear and a Himalayan panda

³⁵ Visited Ziro, headquarters of Subansiri district of NEFA on 22 October 1952

some kind of airstrip which our people had made. This is a District H.Q. and one of our Political Officers of the NEF Agency is there. It was a very lovely valley surrounded by mountains, a broad valley full of rice fields. The local people were somewhat primitive but their agriculture was extraordinarily good. In fact, the Governor of Assam was thinking of importing some people from outside to see their agriculture and profit by it. They bring water down from the mountains and they use bamboo piping and nothing else, from one field to the other. How they bring water by simple devices and how they avoid soil erosion by simple devices is extraordinarily interesting. In this place of course they had not seen carriages or even horses because no horse can go there. The first thing that they saw was the aeroplane which came down then. Our people originally went by road of course and established there the Assam Rifles and some others like the administrative, personnel etc.-and then came a plane bringing a jeep along with it. It was the first kind of conveyance they saw and they were very excited about it. They have an exhibition of all kinds of games, very interesting ones though they were indigenous ones-the high jump and the long jump, mounting up poles, etc. It is extraordinary that all these people treat us in a friendly way and they are frank, they look at you in the eye, they are not inhibited and there is a spirit of sturdy independence about them: They want to be friendly and they don't want to be sat upon by anybody.

Q: Did you find them free from the germ of politics? What about the Nagas?

IN: It depends, not all, some were free, some in the remoter parts. But what is politics anyhow. About the Nagas. The appellation "Naga" was, I believe, given by the British to a variety of tribes-twenty, thirty who are more or less, distinct from each other, each speaking a different language.

They do not understand each other, the languages are so different. So to call them all by one name is wrong to begin with. It is extraordinary they do not understand each other. But certainly, they have common features. We must forget the head-hunting Nagas, right on the Burma border, they are far away. The Nagas that I met were quite attractive people with fine features, deep chested and quite frank. And all these people, I must say, are very artistic. I saw a dance show at Manipur-not only the Manipuri dance but also the Naga dance, and I must say I have seldom seen a more artistic and aesthetic performance-not the jumping about, the devil dance, but quite artistic and a very fine performance.

There are some Nagas in particular areas, who have been asking for independence, as in the Naga Hills District. But there are many other Nagas elsewhere who do not associate themselves with this. I addressed some meetings of them.....

10. To K.N. Katju³⁶

New Delhi November 10, 1952

My dear Kailas Nath,

Deshbandhu Adhikari came to see me today. He has been working at Imphal with the Nagas on behalf of the Adimjati Sevak Sangh.³⁷ He has established an ashram there and people speak well of this ashram. He gets on well with the Nagas. He has had some financial help from the Gandhi Memorial Fund.

³⁶ JN Collection

³⁷ Bharatiya Adimjati Sevak Sangh was founded in 1948 by Thakkar Bapa, a Gandhian social worker, for social, economic, cultural. and educational upliftment of the tribal people in India

As I am greatly interested in the Nagas and the difficulties we are having with them, I discussed the matter with him. A suggestion that he made struck me as good. This was to the effect that a centre of work among the Nagas should be created at Mao which is in the Manipur State but bordering the Naga Hills District of Assam. I went to Mao during my recent tour³⁸ and had a good meeting of Nagas there.

Mao is a good location. While it is in Manipur, it commands a considerable power in the Naga Hills District which is giving us so much trouble. I think it would be highly desirable for us to encourage work at and round about Mao. Probably Adhikari would be a good man to do it, as he is there at Imphal and has an ashram there. He seems to be the right person. Purely official work does not go far. I want to influence the Nagas of the Naga Hills District as well as the Nagas in Manipur. I am, therefore, inclined to help Adhikari to open a centre there. He can report to the Chief Commissioner³⁹ and keep him in touch. I do not think this is a very costly business. It is not much good asking the Chief Commissioner to give him money as his resources are limited. Can we make some special provision for it and watch results?

I was on the point of giving a small sum, about Rs. 2,000/- to Adhikari today for his Naga work, but then I desisted as I began to think on bigger lines.

I am convinced that what these tribal areas require is basic training. I have suggested to Medhi, Assam Chief Minister, and Jairamdas that they should invite the Hindustani Talimi Sangh at Sevagram to take charge of an area in the Naga Hills District and open basic schools there. They agreed to the principle and will probably communicate with Aryanayakam.⁴⁰ This area is

³⁸ See ante, p. 173

³⁹ V.L. Nanjappa

⁴⁰ E.W. Aryanayakam

the place where Zapu Phizo is giving us trouble. Government agencies cannot function with ease there.

I would apply the same rule to Manipur or, at any rate, to a part of it. But to begin with, I think it would be worthwhile and much cheaper, of course, to allow Adhikari to expand there.

Adhikari is here for the next ten days or so, and if you would like to see him you can send for him.

I enclose two papers he gave me.

Yours affectionately,

Jawaharlal

11. To Jairamdas Doulatram⁴¹

New Delhi November 10, 1952

My dear Jairamdas,

Your letter of November 8th about basic education in the tribal areas. You know I entirely agree with you. I spoke about this matter to Medhi also and he agreed.

I do not think there should be any question, for the present, of additional cost. Let us take the money which has been allotted for it and start with that.

The proper course appears to be to approach Aryanayakam and give him a relatively small area to begin with. A whole district would be too much, I think. Anyhow that is for you and Medhi to judge. Let him tackle basic education as such, that is the seven-year course from 7 to 14. This really includes secondary education also. We must proceed on the basis of basic

⁴¹ JN Collection

education continuing even after this. By that time, no doubt, we will have made arrangements for it.

I am quite sure that basic education will be approved by the Nagas and others and it is not necessary to educate public opinion about it. Indeed, the Nagas at Sewagram were quite clear that this was better than the other ordinary education. The best thing to do, even from the point of view of public opinion, is to start in one place and let the people see.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

12. To B.R. Medhi⁴²

New Delhi November 12, 1952

My dear Medhi,

As you were going away, I mentioned to you about the necessity for encouraging the tribal people. I think that one of the most important things that we should aim at is the success of the District Councils that have been established in the autonomous areas. If these Councils are successful, then we go a long way towards the solution of these problems in those areas. It is obvious that these District Councils cannot function effectively unless they get a good start and have enough money at their disposal. You have given them Rs. 30,000/- each. That obviously cannot go far. In regard to the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District Councils, you have given them over four lakhs out of the deposit fund. That will no doubt help.

I hope you will be able to give financial help to the other District Councils also.

The other point I am anxious about is to make these tribal people feel that they are parts of the administration. They must not think that they are

⁴² JN Collection. A copy of the letter was sent to the Governor of Assam

governed by somebody else. This makes it necessary to associate them as much as possible with the administrative apparatus. You wrote to me that you had a Khasi Minister, etc. That is good. But I would like something more, more particularly in the administration proper.

In appointing these people, no doubt, you might have to face difficulties with the Public Service Commission, who would want to see certain educational qualifications. I think that we will have to make some arrangements in these cases for the tests to be somewhat different.

Educational qualifications are good, but other types of qualifications are even more necessary. The most important one is a capacity to get on in a friendly way with the tribal people and make them feel at home.

You might give thought to this matter and perhaps discuss it with the Governor. The more we associate the tribal people with our work, the more likely we are to succeed in our objective.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

13. To Jairamdas Doulatram⁴³

New Delhi December 2, 1952

My dear Jairamdas,

I have been reading in newspapers of the attempt being made by the Nagas of the Naga Hills District to induce the other autonomous districts to line up with them and demand an autonomous Province as a whole. .This makes it even more important for us to get the District Councils functioning fully. If these Councils fail, then some demand of a more far-reaching nature is inevitable. I am anxious, therefore, to help financially or otherwise these District Councils. I wrote to you about this subject the other day as to

⁴³ JN Collection. Extracts

what could suggest we should do. I am awaiting your answer. I hope you will impress upon Medhi of the necessity for going ahead with these District Councils and not wait for further developments which might prove embarrassing.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

14. To Mahavir Tyagi⁴⁴

New Delhi December 2, 1952

My dear Mahavir,⁴⁵

The situation in the North-Eastern Frontier areas, more especially the autonomous tribal districts of Assam, has been a difficult one. In the Naga Hills District the situation is peculiarly difficult because of the demand of the Nagas there for independence. They are so well disciplined that they have prevented any elections being held there for the District Councils. Not even nomination came in.

This raises many questions of a political character. This is a border area and these frontier tribal people are tough. They have been mishandled somewhat in the past; hence our difficulties. Anyway, we have to be very careful about them now.

These autonomous District Councils that we have created -have practically no money to start their work. The Assam Government, which is responsible for them, has given them Rs. 30,000 for each Council as some kind of a loan, I believe. This will take them nowhere; one of the District Councils, namely the Khasia one, has got some money, about rupees four lakhs, which have accumulated in the past in the days of the British Government. So they have something to carry on with. The others can hardly function.

⁴⁴ JN Collection. A copy of the letter was sent to the Foreign Secretary.

⁴⁵ Union Minister of Revenue and Expenditure at this time

It would be a great pity and harmful if this experiment of District Councils collapses. That would surely mean a demand for something much greater which would prove very embarrassing to us. Indeed, there is already some kind of a demand for an autonomous Province of those areas while the Nagas are demanding independence. I am anxious, therefore, that we should help these District Councils immediately, whatever the form of expenditure of our help might be. This is really the responsibility of the Assam Government, but I fear they are -incapable of doing much. I have written to the Assam Government about this, but I wish to tell you how important it is that we should not allow this matter to go by default in case the Assam Government cannot do anything.

Then there is the question of the North-Eastern Frontier Agency which is directly under External Affairs. About this, the Governor, Jairamdas Doulatram, has sent me a letter,⁴⁶ a copy of which I enclose. This matter will go up the Finance Ministry through External Affairs. This is also very important, politically and otherwise.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru.

15. To B.R. Medhi⁴⁷

New Delhi December 9, 1952

My dear Medhi,

Thank you for your letter of the 5th December which I have read with interest.

⁴⁶ Jairamdas wrote on 28 November that he had sent the budget proposals for the North-East Frontier Agency for 1953-54 for consideration of the Ministries of External Affairs and Finance.

⁴⁷ JN Collection

I am very glad that Dr. Katju went to the Lushai Hills.⁴⁸ It would have been most unfortunate if he had omitted this from his programme.

As you know, I am very anxious about the work of the District Councils of the autonomous regions. I wrote to your Governor about this. I have a brief reply from him and I am expecting to hear more. Unless these District Councils get going, we are likely to have a good deal of trouble. We must help them to the best of our capacity.

I note what you say about the Pakistan proposal to remove our border Police 500 yards away from the border. I think that your reaction to this proposal is right and at least so far as the civil armed police force is concerned, they should be completely free to go right up to the border.

I am glad that you are providing work to the people of Sylhet-Khasi and Jaintia Hills who have suffered so much because of Partition.

You mention in your letter that a traveller's tax known as the Girls Release Tax is being realized by Pakistani officials on the border. I should like to have more definite information about this. One cannot rely on an odd statement.

We are very worried about the closure of the tea gardens.⁴⁹ We want to help in so far as we can and in fact our Economic Committee is meeting tomorrow to consider this question again. But it is obvious that no Government can take the whole burden of the tea gardens

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

⁴⁸ Katju visited in the first week of December 1952

⁴⁹ One of the reasons for the closure of these tea gardens was that the commercial banks refused to give them any credit facilities for the current crop as the return on the crop of the previous year had not been remunerative enough due to fall in tea prices

16. To Shaikh Abdullah⁵⁰

New Delhi December 16, 1952

My dear Shaikh Saheb,

In one of these large hill areas, the Naga area, there is a demand for complete independence which is absurd, the area lying between Burma and India. We have, under our Constitution, given a considerable measure of autonomy to many of these areas. We have created six Autonomous District Councils, as they are called. These are elected except for two or three persons who might be nominated from such groups as are not represented. They have powers of taxation and expenditure and a good many other powers too. They have just begun and we are very anxious to see that they succeed. If they fail, the problem will become still more difficult for us. These people are, on the whole, a fine lot but tough and not liking to be ruled over by anybody. In some ways they are like the tribes of the North West Frontier. They make excellent soldiers and, in fact, we have got some battalions of them in our Army. They have a special dislike for the Assamese who, in the past, have tried rather to lord it over them. Frequent incidents happen there. We are now trying to hand over their education to the Hindustani Talimi Sangh of Sewagram which will conduct it on basic lines. This is to avoid the Assam Government doing it directly which would create some opposition and resentment.

I give you this example as it is, in some ways, rather similar to that of Ladakh, though obviously there are differences. The problem before us always is how to create a sensation of self-rule or of partnership in self-rule. If this is not present, then there is frustration. The old days are past now when people put up with anything that was imposed upon them.

I cannot offer you any advice about Ladakh because you know the place much better than I do. I can only deal with the broad approach to the

⁵⁰ JN Collection. Extracts

question. I am not concerned at all with Kushak Bakula,⁵¹ but if Kushak Bakula can get many others to support him because of their discontent, then he becomes a nuisance and a new situation develops. It is wiser to deal with that situation before it takes a head.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

17. To B.R. Medhj⁵²

New Delhi December 17, 1952

My dear Medhi,

As you know, I am very anxious about the proper functioning and success of the Autonomous District Councils in the tribal areas. I have written about this both to you and to your Governor. If these Councils do not succeed, that will mean a tremendous burden on Assam. It will be a failure of our policy.

It seems to me essential that we should help them financially as well as otherwise and give them a sensation of autonomy and self-government. I hope your Government will do its best in this respect. I am prepared to move our Finance Ministry to help a little also.

I am told that the Khasi-Jaintia District Council wanted to give an allowance of Rs. 100 to its Members for touring and others purposes. I think this was

⁵¹ K.G. Bakula (b. 19]7); Head Lama of Ladakh; President, National Conference, Leh,]949-53; Member, Jammu and Kashmir State Legislature, 195]-67; Minister of State for Ladakh Affairs and Trade Agencies, Jammu and Kashmir Government, 1957-62, for Health, Local Self-Government, Ladakh Affairs and Trade Agencies,]964-67; Member of Lok Sabha, 1967-76

⁵² JN Collection

a proper and justifiable demand. I am sorry to learn that your Government did not approve of it.⁵³ That was unwise and I hope you will reconsider this. If we do not succeed in winning over these people now, they will go the Naga way and become a thorn in our side. We should, therefore, make them feel that they can function without interference as far as possible. They must have a sensation of self-government.

Yours sincerely, Jawaharlal Nehru

18. To C.D. Deshmukh⁵⁴

New Delhi Decemoer 17, 1952

My dear Deshmukh,

When I went to the North-East Frontier, I was rather worried by the problems and difficulties of the tribal areas. The North-East Frontier Agency is directly under us, that is, under External Affairs Ministry functioning through the Governor. Then there are six Autonomous District Councils under the Assam Government. In fact these District Council areas are, I believe, two-thirds of Assam Province.

Autonomous District Councils have been created here because of the incessant demand of the people there for a measure of autonomy. Indeed one of these areas-the Naga District-has non-cooperated and refused to elect a Council. They demand independence, which is rather absurd. But others have elected their District Councils. They are, on the whole, good and the people are fairly competent. But they have practically no resources of any kind. Ultimately they will, no doubt, raise some fund by taxation,

⁵³ Referring to this allowance, Jairamdas-wrote on 14 December that the Assam Government had rejected this particular provision and wanted a reduced amount to be fixed in view of the unsatisfactory financial position of the District Council.

⁵⁴ JN Collection

although that will not be a very easy matter, as the people there are not used to taxation at all. They have also been hard hit by the Partition and their trade with the Pakistan areas is gone. There are hardly any communications there. In any event they cannot function without some initial support. I believe the Assam Government gave them Rs. 30,000 each, which does not go very far for a large area. They have to start from scratch and have practically no offices, buildings, etc., in many areas. It is of great importance that these District Councils start functioning and the people there have a feeling of self-government within certain limits. . . Unfortunately there is not much love lost between them and the Assamese. The Assamese rather look down upon them and the others resent this greatly. When I was in Assam, I pressed the Assam Government to help them in some way or other, even by loan, so that they might start functioning. The Assam Government said that they realized the importance of this, but they were hardly in a position to give much help. I do not know what they are going to do, but I expect very little. Meanwhile the situation might well worsen and the whole experiment of the District Councils might fail. I think that we should try to do something to help them, even though it is not our direct responsibility. When things go bad, the responsibility of course inevitably becomes ours.

The Governor has been writing to me about this- repeatedly. Today I received two letters from him, copies of which I enclose. He has made various suggestions, among them being that someone should be sent. by us to look into the finances etc., of these District Councils.⁵⁵ This would be a good thing. I do not remember how far the team we sent considered this matter. But I rather doubt if they went into it deeply. Jairamdas suggests also that we should provide a special subvention of Rs. 10 Lakhs for all the Autonomous District Councils. That works out about a lakh and a half per

⁵⁵ Jairamdas wrote to him on 14 December.

district. This is not big for the work. It might even be treated as a loan, though I do not see what is going to be paid back in the foreseeable future. I should like you to consider this matter, as I wish to avoid trouble in future in this frontier area. It is a good area and likely to strengthen us if properly dealt with. Otherwise it will be a source of weakness.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru