

Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru¹

Series II, Volume 36

NEFA

1. To G.B. Pant²

New Delhi,

December 13, 1956

My dear Pantji,

A young Naga Christian³ who has recently returned from America and who has been recommended to me by an American friend of Vijayalakshmi's, came to see me a few days ago. He has sent me a letter, a copy of which I enclose.

Some of his suggestions⁴ do not seem to me feasible at all. But I have been thinking about this matter for a long time and I feel that we must not allow this question to rest where it is. From the point of view of any major military resistance, we have succeeded in breaking it. But small-scale guerilla warfare and occasional raids may continue indefinitely. As you will have noticed, there have been a number of raids in the villages in the plains from the Sema area. I think the Intelligence reports also say that the position is not satisfactory. General Thimayya⁵ also feels that from a military point of view he can do little except to protect convoys and hold the Nagas in check.

We must, therefore, give fresh thought to this matter and I think we must do it certainly before the elections. What exactly we should do, is not quite

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

² JN Collection

³ I. Ben Wati

⁴ See the next item

⁵ General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Command

clear to me. But, as a first step, I think we should decide to put the Naga Hills district and the NEFA area together under the Central administration. This may involve a change in the Constitution. We need not do that immediately. But we might get the Assam Government to agree to this and make an announcement to that effect.

This will not be enough of course, but the rest can follow.

I should like you to give thought to this.

Yours affectionately,

Jawaharlal

* * *

2. To I.B. Wati⁶

New Delhi,

December 13, 1956

Dear Wati,⁷

Thank you for your letter⁸ of December 11th which I read with much interest.

As I have told you, we have no desire to punish or harass the Nagas. They can have as much freedom as anybody in India, and more in a sense, that in the shape of local autonomy. This trouble in the Naga Hills was none of our making.

⁶ IN Collection

⁷ A Naga Christian and an admirer of Nehru. He met Nehru on 11 December

⁸ Watt suggested the following steps to solve the Naga problem: (i) the Nagas imprisoned in connection with the political movement be unconditionally released on Christmas eve; (ii) the rebel leaders Phizo and Imkongmeren and their subordinates be given a general pardon, leaving the doors open for a reasonable settlement; and (iii) the majority of the Nagas being Christians, the National Christian Council Relief Committee be invited to do rehelpwork among the Nagas to restore their confidence

I am not referring to mistakes of some civil officers previously, but to the violent methods that Phizo⁹ and his supporters have adopted. No government in the world can submit to this kind of thing. I doubt if any government anywhere would have dealt with the situation in the way we have done.

So far as Phizo is concerned, he has repeatedly broken his firm promise to us and has brought this misery on his people.

We have offered amnesty to the Nagas who give up fighting.¹⁰ It would be rather extraordinary to pardon people who go on shooting our men and who have killed any number of Nagas.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

* * *

To S. Fazl Ali¹¹

New Delhi,

1st January, 1957

My dear Fazl Ali,¹²

Your letter of December 26th, 1956, about Rathee,¹³ Financial Adviser for the NEFA. I am surprised to learn of his frequent visits to Delhi and his subsequent behaviour in this respect. I am asking our Secretary General to

⁹ A.Z. Phizo, President, Naga National Council

¹⁰ Raj Kumar Kochhar, General Officer Commanding, Assam, issued a declaration in May assuring full protection to those Nagas who surrendered their arms unless they were involved in murder or heinous crimes. See also Selected Works (second series), Vol. 33 p. 185, p. 187 and p. 189

¹¹ JN Collection

¹² Governor of Assam

¹³ K.L. Rathee was Financial Adviser for the NEFA since April 1955

inquire into this matter. I am quite clear in my mind that the Financial Adviser for the NEFA¹⁴ should function there and not visit Delhi so frequently. Also, that his behaviour in this respect does not appear to be satisfactory.

Rathee in his note says something about his visits being undertaken at the request of the Ministry of External Affairs. I am inquiring into this matter. But I am quite clear that he had no business to try to bypass you in the manner he has done.

As regards the development programme in the NEFA, I am beginning to have serious doubts about one matter and I spoke about this to our Foreign Secretary¹⁵ soon after my return from Assam some weeks ago.¹⁶ I mentioned this matter also, I think, in Shillong itself when I was addressing some of your chief officers.

We are anxious to improve conditions in the NEFA, but there is considerable danger, in my opinion, in our trying to push things too fast in an area which is still very primitive. This may well produce bad reactions. In particular, I do not want too many people from outside to be sent there in subordinate capacities.

They do not fit in there. There is friction between them and the local people and sometimes, I am told, there are entanglements with the local women which leads to dissatisfaction and possibly greater trouble. I am therefore

¹⁴ In view of the large-scale development projects and the urgent need of establishing and extending administration in the North East Frontier Agency, the Government of India appointed a Financial Adviser, with effect from 24 June 1954, for assisting the Agency in effecting economy, expediting financial sanction and avoiding delay. The Financial Adviser, an ex-officio Deputy Secretary in Finance Ministry, had the power to grant financial concurrence on the spot within certain limits

¹⁵ Subimal Dutt

¹⁶ Nehru visited Assam from 17 to 20 October 1956

beginning to think that we should go more slowly in regard to these so-called developments.

Probably, the most important development is roads.

Some of our enthusiastic people even think of transplanting some of the Indian institutions to the NEFA such as boy scouts and the like. I think this is rather absurd.

I am going away tomorrow to Indore. Our Secretary General, N.R. Pillai, will be dealing with this matter.

A happy New Year to you

Yours sincerely,

Jawaharlal Nehru

* * *

4. Functioning of the Financial Adviser¹⁷

I enclose a letter from the Governor of Assam and my reply¹⁸ to him. I should like you to enquire into this matter. Prima facie, Rathee's behaviour has been undesirable and I get the impression that he is not too much interested in the work there and has some other objective in his seeking to come to Delhi frequently. If this is so, this is not the kind of man who is suited for the NEFA.

He must be clearly made to understand that he is functioning there under the Governor and he must not bypass him in any way and should carry out the Governor's directions.

2. His long absences from the NEFA are really extraordinary. On one occasion he was away for 44 days in July and August. In April for 22 days.

¹⁷ Note to N.R. Pillai, Secretary General, MEA, 1 January 1957. JN Collection

¹⁸ See the preceding item

In May and June for 25 days. It passes my comprehension how he can possibly be required in Delhi for these long periods.

3. One would almost think that his post is a surplus one.

4. You will notice that in my letter to the Governor I have referred to my anxiety about our development programmes not being pushed too fast. I do not want to upset the life of the NEFA too rapidly and I am particularly anxious that too many people from outside should not go there. We have had enough trouble with the tribal people and it would not be right to uproot the NEFA tribals suddenly. I spoke to the Foreign Secretary on this subject sometime ago.

* * *

5. To S. Fazl Ali¹⁹

Camp: Indore,

January 3, 1957

My dear Fazl Ali,

You sent me a copy of your letter to the Home Minister dated 26th December.

Pantji has now sent me a copy of your letter again as well as the other papers you sent him and I have read through them a second time at some leisure.

In the circumstances mentioned by you, it seems clear that we have to carry on operations against the hostile Nagas. The methods adopted might vary and will have to be decided upon by our military advisers. We cannot, for the present, think of any long-term solution. Nevertheless, I think we should give thought to this and I hope you will do so. I do not think that

¹⁹ JN Collection

constitutional difficulties need ultimately come in the way of what we wish to do.

I was much interested to read your note in which you refer to having visited Nowgong jail and met a number of persons, chiefly relatives of Phizo. I am inclined to think that we should err on the side of leniency with such persons. If you feel that any of these people are in a proper frame of mind, why should we not release them. There may be a risk but there may also be a definite advantage.

It is perfectly true that women have considerable influence among the Nagas, especially some educated women. Ranu²⁰ I think, was quite an important member of the independence movement. I have an idea she once came to Delhi though I did not meet her. If by any chance she wants to see me, and you think she might be released, she can be told that she can see me in Delhi.

I entirely agree with you that we should show kindness to these people and help them with money wherever this is considered necessary for their education or other purposes. I shall gladly send you some more money when you write to me for it.

You refer in your letter to the location of the oil refinery. Presumably you want the decision about the location postponed because you think that the decision is likely to be adverse to Assam. Suppose the decision is in favour of Assam, would you still want it postponed? I have myself no idea of what the decision is going to be. Personally, I am in favour of Assam but this view is not based on any detailed consideration of the problem. I have not even seen the report of the committee appointed for this purpose.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

* * *

²⁰ Ranu Iralu, a niece of Phizo's

6. To S. Fazl Ali²¹

New Delhi,

January 22, 1957

My dear Fazl Ali,

Your letter of January 14 from Dhubri. I have read this as well as its enclosures with interest and care. I am glad that you are applying your mind to various aspects of the Naga problem. It seems to me that many of us have got into some grooves of thought and cannot easily get out of them. To some extent you have brought a fresh mind to this problem and can, therefore, perhaps see more light.

To begin with, it is clear that no important step can be taken in regard to the Naga Hills or Assam till the elections are over. We shall then consult together and assess the situation and decide on any new line of action. But the thinking part must go on and before we meet for the purpose of a decision, our own minds should be fairly clear.

You refer to the question of the refinery. I agree with you and see your point now which I had missed previously. It is desirable to defer the decision about the refinery till after the elections. It may be helpful to have a decision then about the same time as we deal with some aspects of the Naga problem.

I might mention, however, that our present thinking about the refinery is on somewhat different lines from that of the Special Committee's report. We are now thinking that instead of having a pipeline for 400 miles through Assam and another 400 miles then to Calcutta the crude oil should be moved by river in specially made barges. This would save a great deal of capital expenditure on the pipeline. Also it could be taken in hand much more quickly. The special barges would have to be built. This method of

²¹ JN Collection

transportation by river is not considered efficient from the American point of view, but in our circumstances it seems to me far better.

In any event, a pipeline would have to be constructed from the Brahmaputra to Calcutta. That would be a subsequent development. So far as the refineries are concerned, it is possible that we might have more than one refinery. One of these could be situated in Assam and another perhaps somewhere in Bihar and so on.

I am merely mentioning this to you not because anything has been decided but this is the general approach that is being considered.

About the Nagas, I am much worried. This worry is not due so much to the military or other situations but rather to a feeling of psychological defeat.

Why should we not be able to win them over? I do not like being pushed into repressive measures anywhere in India. I can understand that action has to be taken and the action must be effective, when necessity arises.

But this long drawn out business has a bad effect, both internationally and nationally and, if I may say so, personally on me. I am, therefore, prepared to consider any reasonable approach to this problem which promises a settlement.

We rule out independence. I do not know what Churnmini means by saying something "short of complete independence." I cannot conceive of anything just short of complete independence being feasible. I can conceive of local autonomy. But my mind is not clear yet how far all this is feasible in these present circumstances. Much as I regret, I do feel that the Nagas must realise that they cannot indulge in this kind of violence and warfare and that we shall not submit to it.

About an amnesty I have no difficulty. I would be prepared to extend the principles of amnesty as far as possible though I think it would be dangerous to include Phizo in it. But even this declaration of an amnesty

has to be a part of a settlement and not in the air, although we can make some general approach to it even earlier.

The more I think of it, the more convinced I am that the first step that we should take is to take away the Naga District from the jurisdiction of the Assam Government and to put it together with Tuensang Division under the Central Government. This would be a temporary provision to enable us to deal with them separately, if necessary. I know that this will not be to the liking of the Assam Government or the people but they will have to swallow it some time or other. This can only be taken up after the elections and we may make it clear then perhaps that this is a temporary provision, the whole problem being considered step by step a little later.

We shall, of course, have to meet and discuss these matters. I think it is desirable for you to come to Delhi some time after the elections are over. We can fix this later.

As for my interviewing some of the Nagas, I should leave this entirely to your judgment as to when and whom I should see.

I am sending your letter with its enclosures to Pantji, as desired by you. As you know, Dr Katju is leaving the Defence Ministry and is taking over as Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh.²² It is my intention to take over the Defence Ministry myself. This will add to my work but, in some ways, it will have some advantages also. This is for your private ear only at present.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

²² Katju was sworn in as the Chief Minister on 31 January 1957