

No More Army Rule

Friends,

Do you know:

- That 38 million people of our country residing in the North East are forced to live under a military rule and an undeclared Emergency.
- That this military rule has been carried on without a break for 46 years.
- That even a non commissioned army officer of the lowest rank has the power to shoot to kill anybody, to forcibly enter any house, to destroy any building and to arrest anyone without a warrant.
- That to take such action the officer needs no permission from a superior and is not answerable to anyone.
- That people have no right to approach the court and launch prosecution for atrocities committed by any such officer.
- That all this is sanctioned by a law called the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act which came into being in 1958.
- That despite an eight year ceasefire and efforts towards a peace process between the Government of India and the NSCN, the army is still deployed in Naga areas.

Why was a law for Army deployment enacted for the North East?

This law was last in a series of laws aimed at extending the rule of the newly independent Indian state into North Eastern territories. The people residing here had a long history of fighting the British to maintain their independence and the same resistance was opposing the Indian state. The Indian State's attempt to bring the people of the North East within the framework of the Constitution was increasingly being done through violent means that violated the letter and spirit of the Constitution. The opposition in Parliament had already criticized this law as a means to bring in an Emergency in violation of constitutional provisions. The greatest casualty was to be the life, dignity and well-being of people as the Indian state decided to treat people's aspirations as law and order problems.

What does Army rule mean for the people of the North East?

It is the infamous history of rape, torture, custodial deaths and prolonged detention that the army has gifted to the people of the North East in these 46 years. The very nature of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act disallows people the right to protest, the right to legal redress and grants the army the power to shoot at will. Hence, ordinary people who want to live a life of peace and tranquility, and also to protest against injustice have been framed as 'suspects' and 'terrorists' linking them to banned organizations. Even those who document excesses by the army and demand the end of army rule have been picked up, tortured and even killed. And those who resist through armed movement know the might of the army: the forced surrenders, disappearances and fake encounters. Such is the power of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act.

Why is the Army an enemy of the people?

Long-term deployment of the army has certain very serious consequences. Since the army is trained to kill the 'enemy', it creates situations of maximum damage. Secondly, the law grants army personnel impunity that encourages further lawlessness. Thirdly, since the army is organized along regional and ethnic lines, the forces stationed in the North East are non-locals who view the local population as aliens with little or no understanding of the various histories of the people living under its shadow. Therefore the army's vengeance against those they believe who support or help the armed militants extends to the whole population. Fourthly, the army also develops a stake in staying on given the financial gains from corrupt practices that nobody dares to question. Fifthly, the escalating tensions between different ethnic groups, arming of one over the other, cultivating informers and creating sarkari militants leading to mass killings as well as "secret killers" is a direct result of the illegal policies the army is to put into operation at the behest of the state. The combined effect of long-term army deployment to tackle civilian conflict thus leads to the vicious circle of – frequent "abuse of power", greater alienation among people, intensification of violence, and more army deployment.

Has it helped elsewhere?

Given the scenario described above, it is not strange that 46 years of undeclared emergency-cum-military rule has led to no solution. That the lesson of the North East were never learnt is clear from the continual complaints of human rights abuses in Kashmir. That it pushes the possibility of solution further is borne out by experiences from Sri Lanka to Ireland. While people in the rest of the country feel that the army presence in the North East does not affect them, it does in more ways than one. Resources drawn from the entire population either directly through taxation or through cuts in social spending finance the army. Hence, the people and particularly the poor suffer as they bear the costs of the army misadventures directed by the state. Moreover, the impunity given to state functionaries through the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, if not opposed, threatens to extend itself into every place and every institution of our country.

There is only one way out:

Demand the repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act.

Attend Convention on 29 July

At Constitution Club, Rafi Marg, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Speakers: K.G. Kannabiran, Nandita Haksar, Prabhash Joshi,
Reports from the North East by NPMHR, NECOHR and NESO

Join Protest Rally on 30 July

Starts from Mandi House at 1 p.m. and proceeds to Parliament Street

Cultural Programme on 30 July

From 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. JNU City Centre, Mandi House

**Delhi Committee for the Repeal of
The Armed Forces Special Powers Act**