PREFACE

The world is becoming an increasingly violent planet. The century that has just ended, was the most violent one humanity has ever experienced. Nearly three times as many people were killed in armed conflicts in the twentieth century as in the previous four centuries combined. Moreover, the number of international armed conflicts has been decreased considerably; while that of the internal armed conflicts are on the rise. While defining international armed conflicts, characterized by war between two nations, is not a contentious issue, defining internal armed conflict has not been free from conflicting interpretations. Different perceptions are developed at times and armed rebellion is obviously being interpreted differently as per convenience by different groups to serve their specific interests. In a particular situation of armed violence between the regular armed forces of the government and identifiable armed groups, or between armed groups within the territory of one state, one section may like to brand it as an internal armed conflict while another section may opt to term it either as a law and order problem or terrorism.

There has also been no internationally accepted mechanism at present
that can define and redefine the conditions of an internal armed conflict situation. Moreover, as a matter of diplomatic strategy, no ruling group of a country has ever accepted that there is an armed conflict situation in their country. Even though many global bodies and independent groups attempt to monitor the situation of ongoing conflicts all over the world, the definitions of war, conflict, armed struggle, armed violence, revolution, terrorism and other terms which describe violent opposition between states and organized armed groups, are not precise enough to distinguish one completely from the other. Still, violent confrontations within the territory of one state between the regular armed forces and identifiable armed groups or between armed groups are being accepted as indicators of a situation of an internal armed conflict.

The safety and security of journalists covering situations of conflict are often exposed to serious dangers. Even though there is a convention from time immemorial of not targeting messengers during the course of a war or an armed conflict, the same is not honored at times by the warring parties. The spurt of ethnic and civil conflicts in the recent past has prompted the media professionals to look into the ways and means to evade from impending threats and sometimes when the circumstances compel, to
mitigate the looming dangers while covering the dangerous locations of armed conflict.

The present discourse titled “Journalists in an Armed Conflict Situation: A Case Study of Manipur (1996-2006)” is an attempt to diagnose comprehensively the professional hazards faced by journalists in the armed conflict situation in Manipur. It is also an attempt to explore the ways and means to better protect the safety and security interests of the journalists working in such a situation.

The north eastern part of India is reeling under the impact of insurgency for almost half a century and the growing ethnic strife has brought about more complexity to the issue. Reporting conflicts here has become the greatest challenge for the journalists. There have been glaring instances of journalists targeted by separatist outfits, threatened, assaulted and harassed by law enforcing agencies of the state. While the Government of India will refuse to describe the prevailing situation in a number of states in the region, particularly in Assam, Manipur and Nagaland, as situations of armed conflict, there are adequate grounds to contend that situations of armed conflict prevail in certain parts of the region. The magnitude of the armed confrontations between the government forces and the armed rebels,
the quantum of human lives and properties claimed by the same and the commonly accepted notions of an internal armed conflict bear ample testimony to the fact that there is a state of armed conflict in Manipur.

The present thesis has been structured into seven chapters to closely examine the occupational vulnerabilities of the media persons in the armed conflict situations. The introductory chapter begins with a conceptual clarification of the terms ‘conflict’ and ‘armed conflict’. It also highlights media’s interest in the armed conflict situations and communication politics played by the warring parties during such situations. It also scales the cost of human security in such circumstances. The chapter further describes the vulnerability of media persons in such situations. The challenges before media persons in the armed violent zones of the world and the role of media in conflict resolution are also discussed in this chapter.

The second chapter examines the present armed conflict scenario in Jammu and Kashmir and the north eastern states of India. A legal perspective of the freedom of the press in India and professional hazards faced by journalists in the country, particularly in the armed conflict torn states of the north east, Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab (during the height of militancy) have also been scrutinized herein.
The third chapter is a narration of the changing face of Journalism in Manipur. It traces the origin, growth and development of newspapers, radio, television and new media in Manipur. The media reach, as of now, in the state has also been assessed in this chapter.

The fourth chapter outlines the genesis of the armed conflict situation in Manipur. It also tries to exemplify the gravity of the situation by scaling the cost of human lives and properties claimed by the conflict from 1980 onwards. The professional hazards of journalists in the armed violent state of Manipur, e.g., murder, life attempt and harassment by unknown miscreants, legal and ultra-legal forces as well, have been discussed in this chapter. It also reflects on how the mainstream and local media cover the armed conflict scene in the north eastern states at large and the scene in Manipur in particular.

The fifth chapter examines the casualties inflicted upon the journalists of the state by the clash between the government security forces and the armed militants as well as by the inter-organizational fights among insurgent groups and intra-organizational factional feuds within revolutionary outfits. The subjective and objective contemporary factors which have led directly or indirectly to murders, attempts to murder, imprisonments, assaults,
threats, hostages, kidnap of distraught journalists in the state etc. and their repercussions have been highlighted in this chapter.

The sixth chapter is an assessment of the level of risk awareness among the working journalists of the state. It also looks into the possible ways and means for mitigating the vulnerability of newsmen in the armed conflict situation in Manipur on the basis of opinions averred by academicians, police personnel, and editors of newspapers, news editors of radio and television channels and journalists who have already experienced the bitter occupational hazards in the prevailing situation.

Finally, the seventh chapter is a systematic summarization of the findings of the previous chapters. Besides, certain measures are also being suggested at the end of the chapter with a view to better protect the safety and security interests of the journalists working in the situation of armed conflict.

Aribam Ibomcha Sharma

(Aribam Ibomcha Sharma)