

Naga Insurgency

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Abstract- Commission in 1929 “to leave us alone to determine for ourselves as in ancient times”. Naga National Council (NNC) was formed in the year 1946. In the beginning, the political objective of the NNC was solidarity of all Nagas, including those of the unadministered areas and the inclusion of their hills within the province of Assam in a free India, with local autonomy and adequate safeguards for the interest of the Nagas. This demand of the Nagas was well received in the circle of the Indian National Congress. The return of Angami Zapu Phizo from Burma (now Myanmar) helped the undercurrents of the Naga politics to come to the surface within a year in the form of NNC’s June 1947 declaration that the Naga Hills would cease to be part of India with the departure of the British NNC declared Nagaland an Independent State on August 14, 1947. The NNC resolved to establish a ‘sovereign Naga State’. This declaration marked the beginning of a new chapter of confrontation and conflict, of armed insurrection by a section of the Nagas and the counter offensive resorted to by the Indian security forces. The assumption of the direct leadership of the NNC in Dec 1950 by Phizo, the ‘referendum’ in the year 1951 by NNC (NNC claimed that 99 percent of the participants supported an independent Nagaland), establishment of a parallel govt in 1956 are some of the important developments that led to an armed struggle by a section of the Nagas.

On Dec 1, 1963, President Radhakrishnan inaugurated the State of Nagaland at Kohima and P. Shily Ao became the Chief Minister. But the underground activities still continued. NNC, Federal Govt of Nagaland and its army were declared as ‘unlawful associations’ under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 on Aug 31, 1972.

‘Shillong Accord’ was signed with a section of the NNC leaders on 11 Nov 1975. Important leaders such as NNC President Phizo, Isak Chishi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah were not parties to the Shillong Accord. On 31 January, 1980, National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) was formed with Isac Chishi Swu as the Chairman, SS Khaplang as Vice President and Thuingaleng Muivah as its General Secretary. This outfit which initially had a strength of 150 cadres has been carrying on an armed struggle with the security forces of India.

On 30 April, 1988, an attempt to assassinate Muivah and Tangkhul cadres in NSCN was executed in which a large number of cadres were killed. However, Muivah escaped the attempt. As a result, NSCN was vertically split into one faction headed by SS Khaplang and the other led by Isac Chishi Swu and Muivah. Khaplang was suspecting that Muivah was secretly initiating talks with Indian Govt.

PV Narsimha Rao as PM set the ball of negotiations with the Naga insurgent groups when he met Isac Chishi Swu and Muivah in Paris on 15 June 1995. Since then the talks are held with the insurgent groups by an interlocutor on behalf of Govt of India. The talks with NSCN headed by Swu is in an advanced stage of finalisation.

The term ‘Naga’ is a collective name or nomenclature given to the various tribes of Mongoloid racial stock, inhabiting in the compact area “between China, India and Myanmar”, covering an area of 120,000 square kilometers with a population of more than four million,ⁱ Nagas are not a homogenous group and comprise many groups. In India, Nagas reside in the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and in Nagaland. In Myanmar, they are present in the Sagaing division and in Kachin State.

Similar to the ancient Greek city-states, from ancient times, Naga tribes lived in permanently established village-states or village-republics, each independent of the other with a definite territory or boundary of its own. From time immemorial, Nagas had great attachment with their land. It

was remarked that the Naga identity is not only rooted in their history, culture, economy and polity but it is also deeply intertwined with their land and its resources.ⁱⁱ

The Naga conflict is one of the oldest insurgencies in the country. The Naga ethnic conflict traces its roots back to 1918 with the formation of the Naga Club by 20 Naga members of the French Labour Corp, who had served in World War I ⁱⁱⁱ. The Club submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission in 1929, in which it stated that the people of Naga areas, and that of mainland India, had nothing in common between them; therefore, it would benefit both to stay separate and form their own political entities as and when the British left India.

The Movement for separate Naga homeland gained momentum after the formation of the Naga National Council (NNC) in 1946 under the leadership of A. Z. Phizo. On 29 June 1947, Sir Akbar Hydari, the then Governor of Assam signed a 9-point agreement with the Naga moderates T Sakhrie and Aliba Imti. In the said agreement the Nagas' right to develop themselves freely was recognized. Clause 9 of the agreement stated that after a period of 10 years the NNC will be asked whether the agreement be extended or a new agreement arrived at.

This clause was interpreted by Nagas as attainment of sovereignty where as the Government of India interpreted it as the signing of new agreement with Indian Union. This is the root cause of the Naga conflict. This 9-point agreement was rejected by Phizo. On August 14, 1947, the NNC, led by Phizo, declared independence, a day before India attained its own independence from British colonial rule. Militancy in Naga areas was on the rise and the State responded with military response based on acts like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, amended in 1972.

The crossfire between the state forces and the NNC resulted in many non-combatant deaths. The first Conference of the all the Naga tribes was held at Kohima on May 14 and 15, 1950 in which the representatives decided that, the future of the Naga should be an independent state. Despite the differences that existed among the tribes constituting the Naga, they were all united on the common issue of sovereignty and the objectives of the Movement for sovereignty became clear.

In a significant move during this conference, it was also decided to hold a plebiscite on the issue of Naga self-determination. The Nagas in Myanmar refused to enter into an agreement known as the 'Panglong Agreement' on which basis the Federal Union of Burma was formed. Phizo was elected as the President of NNC on 11 December 1950. The Naga Hills, a district of Assam, was notified as a separate state of India on 1 December, 1963.

The areas of the Nagas were further subdivided with the inauguration of Nagaland. While Tuensang and Mon subdivisions of North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) were carved out and added to the Nagaland State, Tirap and Changlang subdivisions now forming part of Arunachal Pradesh and other Naga areas were left out of the Nagaland. A portion of Nagas were in Manipur and some in Assam. Some scholars are even of the view that "formation of Nagaland state is a success story on the part of national integration of India, but a failure story on the part of Naga national integration" v The statehood given to the union territory of Nagaland has not satisfied the Naga insurgent groups as some areas having Naga people are still scattered in neighboring states of Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh.

Hence, the demand of a 'Greater Nagalim' is yet to be achieved. In April the next year, Jai Prakash Narain, Assam Chief Minister Bimala Prasad Chaliha and Rev. Michael Scott formed a Peace Mission, and got the government and NNC to sign an agreement to suspend operations that September. But the NNC/NFG/NFA continued to indulge in violence, and after six rounds of talks, the Peace Mission was abandoned in

1967, and a massive counter-insurgency operation was launched by the Government.

On November 11, 1975, the Government signed the Shillong Accord with a section of NNC leaders (led by Zaishe Huire). Under this accord, section of NNC and NFG agreed to give up arms. A group of about 140 members led by Thuingaleng Muivah, who were at that time in China, refused to accept the Shillong Accord, and formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) in Myanmar in 1980. Muivah also had Isak Chisi Swu and S S Khaplang, a Naga from Myanmar with him. In 1988, after a violent internal clash the NSCN split into NSCN (IM) under Issac Chisi Swu and Muivah and NSCN (K) under SS Khaplang.

While the NNC began to fade away, and Phizo died in London in 1991, the two factions of NSCN came to be seen as the "mother of all insurgencies" in the North-East region. The prime objective of the Naga insurgency was to achieve "Greater Nagalim" comprising "all contiguous Naga-inhabited areas", along with Nagaland. That included several districts of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur, as also a large tract of Myanmar. The map of "Greater Nagalim" given by the NSCN factions has about 1,20,000 sq km, while the state of Nagaland consists of 16,527 sq km only.

The claims have always kept Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh wary of a peace settlement that might affect their territories. The Nagaland Assembly has endorsed the 'Greater Nagalim' demand i.e., "Integration of all Naga-inhabited contiguous areas under one administrative umbrella": in December 1964, August 1970, September 1994, December 2003 and on 27 July 2015. The NSCN (IM) has structured itself on the lines of a state. NSCN (IM) assumes that it is running a parallel government with 11 sub-divisions and has two separate wings (political and military), to control parts of Nagaland and Manipur. It has four ministries: defence, home, finance and foreign affairs.

The NSCN (IM) interacts with formal and non-formal world bodies and the media to garner support for its cause. The Government of the People's Republic of Nagaland (GPRN) sends emissaries abroad to garner support, and raise funds, for the Naga cause. The outfit has also opened up contacts with UN Human Rights Organisation in Geneva, the Unrepresented Nations People's Organisation (UNPO) at the Hague and the UN Working Group on Indigenous People (UNWIGIP) vi. NSCN (K) also has similar structure and indulges in taxing the people of the Naga inhabited areas. In 2011, a new NSCN (Khole-Kitovi) group was formed as a breakaway faction of the NSCN (K).

It is widely accepted that the NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K) are mainly responsible for the continued insurgency in the North-Eastern states of the Indian Republic. It has also been supporting other smaller regional insurgent groups of North-East. According to RS Jassal, a Manipuri columnist, if the NSCN (IM) organisation was dismantled, half the issues related to the North-East insurgency would be resolved. The NSCN (IM) has forged a deep nexus between drug traffickers and the arms cartels of South Asia through the Indo-Myanmar border.vii

Extortion, trafficking of drugs, weapons and timber are the main reasons for inter-tribal and inter-insurgent group clashes. The space and influence, left out by one group is taken over either by a splinter group, or by a rival insurgent group. The Naga-Kuki clashes in 1993 in Manipur were triggered by a fight for control over the smuggling of drugs and the illegal border trade between India and Myanmar through Tamu-More. It led to ethnic clashes in Manipur and gave birth to Kuki insurgent groups, initially as a counter to the Naga insurgent groups.

They later developed political aspirations for a separate Kuki state within Manipur state. It is a fact that the NSCN (IM) has control over a huge cache of illegal sophisticated weapons and control over the illegal trade and a parallel economy worth thousands of crores of rupees. China's relationship with the NSCN (IM) dates back to the Fifties when it trained the first batch of Naga insurgents who included Khaplang, Muivah and Isak. The relationship was further strengthened in 2008 when it agreed to host Anthony Shimray, who was not only their permanent emissary but also a major conduit for weapons trafficking, when he was arrested on September 25, 2010.

All external links come at a price and, in this case, the price was to "give information on the movement and activities of the Dalai Lama in India and the movement and facilities of the Indian Army in Arunachal Pradesh and enjoy our support."⁶ At the same time, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) has been making concerted efforts to establish links with the NSCN (IM). In 2008, an ISI agent, stationed in Bangladesh, offered "financial help as well as military training" if the Naga insurgent group broke the ceasefire with India.^{viii} Muivah, Swu and other top NSCN (IM) leaders escaped to Thailand in the early 1990s. While Nagaland Governor M M Thomas, a Church leader from Kerala, extracted the first positive response from the NSCN(IM), Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao met Muivah, Swu and others in Paris on June 15, 1995. In November 1995, then MoS (Home) Rajesh Pilot met them in Bangkok.

Subsequently, Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda met them in Zurich on February 3, 1997, which was followed by meetings with officers in Geneva and Bangkok. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee met them in Paris on September 30, 1998. The government of India signed ceasefires with the two main Naga militant outfits, the NSCN (IM) (and the NSCN (K)IX in 1997 (signed on July 25, 1997, which came into effect on August 1, 1997) and 2001, respectively. According to the terms of the ceasefire, both the Naga militant factions were to remain in the designated camps and could only move out by giving prior intimation to the Ceasefire Monitoring Group (CFMG).

The CFMG was formed in 1997 and consists of members of the security forces, intelligence agencies, government officials, the NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K) Government of India has engaged NSCN (IM) on peace talks and so far more than 80 rounds of talks were held with them. Public pressure, opposition to the high-handed approach of the NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K) cadres, the burden of taxes on the population

and resistance of village committees against interference by the NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K) in development activities have acted as catalysts for these groups to have a ceasefire agreement with the Government of India.

The Framework Agreement of August 3, 2015 between the Government of India and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Issak-Muivah) NSCN(I-M) is a catalytic moment promising a more flexible template of peace-making. The agreement, signed on August 3, 2015, has established the broad principles that would guide the future deliberations between the Government of India and the NSCN(I-M). According to Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, the much awaited Naga peace accord is in its "final stages" and issues related to "autonomy" have been settled between the Centre's representative and Naga groups and that only symbolic issues such as flag and passport are to be resolved. X

END NOTES

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