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***In Search of the Blue Bird:
Auditing peace negotiations in Nagaland***

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***In Search of the Blue Bird:
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The Naga struggle for their right to self-determination has been one of the oldest self-assertion movements in South Asia. It posed an early challenge to the nascent Indian nation-state, and the concept of unity-in-diversity invoked by the leaders of the newly independent nation.

The Nagas, a small tribe living in the Indo-Myanmar frontier, defined themselves as separate from the Indian nation and demanded the right to choose their own destiny.

Denied that, the Nagas appropriated the politics of secessionism. India's use of military power to repress the movement pushed it underground, transforming it into an organized armed insurgency. It was the beginning of a sixty-year-old confrontation between the Naga underground and the Indian State.

The Naga National Council (NNC) formed in February 1946, signed the Akbar Hydari agreement with the Governor of Assam in July 1947, agreeing to remain in India with provision for safeguards of their special interests and requirements, which would be reviewed after 10 years.

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Disagreement over the interpretation of the 9th clause of the agreement regarding the 'temporary' nature of the Accord, led to its collapse. The extremist element depicted it as a betrayal by the Indian state and popularized the idea of 'secession' among the people. As the Indian army battled the underground Naga guerillas, the civilians were caught in the crossfire. A civil society grouping, the Naga Peoples Council took the initiative to talk peace in 1960. Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, despite opposition from his own party and the opposition, agreed to grant statehood to a tiny Naga population, placing it paradoxically under the external affairs ministry (MEA). It failed to break the struggle.

In 1975, the Shillong Accord was signed by a section of the underground (UG) NNC and the Indian State to bring an end to the violence. In what appeared to be a unilateral concession, the UGs agreed to disarm, the GOI promised nothing in return. The NNC split. The new organization, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) would continue the struggle under Th Muivah, Isac Chisi Swu and S.S. Khaplang. In 1988 the NSCN split into two factions, the NSCN (IM) and NSCN-K. Khaplang had opposed the Tanghkul-Sema supremacy of the NSCN.

The 1997 Ceasefire and Its Backdrop

While the UGs were on the run outside and battling counter-insurgency military operations inside India, the civilian population had to bear the brunt of violence. They were caught between the insurgents and the army, repeated curfews and reprisals from both sides. Such a volatile situation created a strong urge for peace. The change in the government in New Delhi facilitated the peace initiative. The then prime minister, H. Deve Gowda, during his visit to the Northeast invited the UG for negotiations,¹ and actually met some insurgent leaders to initiate the peace process.² Prominent Naga citizens and organisations seized the opportunity to strengthen the initiative. The obstacle was the factionalism within the Naga underground.³ The Naga people decided to take the initiative to get the NSCN (IM) to work for unity and then sit for talks. The Naga Hoho, the apex body of the Naga tribes, along with prominent NGOs like the Naga People's Movement for Human

Rights, Naga Mother's Association, Naga Student Federation and Church leaders held a United Naga Conference on 6 Feb. 1997 to pressure the two parties to resolve the conflict.⁴ GOI declared a cease-fire agreement with the NSCN (IM) in Nagaland on 1 August, 1997. After almost fifty years the guns were silent in the hills. A similar ceasefire agreement was signed between the NSCN-K and the government in April 2001, though both sides are yet to start a process of dialogue.

Hope at the End of the Tunnel

The sixty-year-old insurgency and militarization of the zone had taken a tremendous toll on the people of Nagaland. The NNC had become defunct. The two factions of NSCN were busy fighting their war outside Nagaland state, at a distance from the civil life. Only the permanent presence of the army in Nagaland, empowered by draconian laws, weighed negatively on the people. A virtual state of prolonged martial law had made the days in the life of the Nagas shorter and nights longer. All activity came to an end by four o'clock in the evening. Outside there were uniformed men moving about and any civilian out and about risked harassment. At times civilians, mistaken for an UG were shot dead. In Nagaland, as in Mizoram and now Manipur, it was only a daytime civilization. With no possibility of a social or community life, young men took to drugs, readily available from across the Myanmar border. Smuggling became a job opportunity. People longed for the return of normal life.

The 1997 ceasefire brought high expectations and the promise of the Naga imbroglio being resolved, especially as the Indian government had agreed that Naga history was 'unique'. The government accepted the nomenclature of two equal parties talking India and the Naga, i.e., Indo-Naga talks. The other factions of the Nagas were soon included in the ceasefire. Civil society was part of the consultation. There was a 'successful' Mizo Accord (1986) as example. Things seemed to be moving in the right direction.

The 1997 ceasefire, led to a relatively peaceful law and order and security situation within Nagaland as well as in the adjoining states.

More than 70 rounds of talks have been held on issues of shared 'sovereignty', territorial integration, the Kashmir model, Mizoram model and even the East Timor model. The involvement of the civil society added a new dimension to the peace process. The 1997 ceasefire renewed people's faith in the movement. There was even appreciation of the Indian state and its responsiveness toward the dissident constituents.

Dejection and Loss of Hope

The historic Indo-Naga peace talks held on 31 July 2007 at the circuit house in Dimapur, extended the cease-fire between the government of India and the NSCN (IM) for an indefinite period of time, albeit with the condition that it is "subject to the progress of the talks". Earlier agreements were for a fixed period, normally six months to a year. The two sides have had talks both in India and abroad but with little headway on the core issues. Ordinary Nagas have begun to lose hope and fear the collapse of the peace negotiations. They worry about returning to the bad old days when they lived as interned people in their own state.

The people suspect the sincerity and commitment of both parties. They feel that the government of India is not serious and, the negotiations are a tactic of buying time in the expectation that the movement would die a natural death. They are critical of the underground organizations as they have failed to respond to the hopes and wishes of the civil society even after 14 years of the ceasefire. They have refused to end their factional fights, unify for a common goal and present a united voice to Delhi. The tension, the violence, the killings and the divisions among the Nagas weakened their position as negotiators rendering them vulnerable to the pressures of the Indian state. The violation of the ceasefire not just by the insurgents but also by the Indian armed forces was deplored by the Naga civil society.⁵

The Naga Hoho has questioned India's bid for a seat in the United Nations Security Council. The Ho Ho has challenged India's bid at the high table, without first doing away with "such outdated, draconian, imperialistic, aggressive, uncivilized acts like the Armed Forces Special



Power Act”. While demanding AFSPA’s repeal, it appealed for sincerity in expediting the peace process, “so that the gun is not the ultimate solution but a temporary one”.⁶

In the last few years the stalemate in the peace negotiations has led to pessimism among ordinary Naga citizens, who are frustrated by the long delay in finding a solution. Some recent civil society audits of the peace process have expressed dismay at government negotiators, who are basically bureaucrats, making speculative public statements about mutual understanding on accommodating Naga demands within the Constitution. It suggested that the premise of “unconditionality” on which the dialogue had begun had been compromised.⁷ What added to the uncertainty was that within the Indian political establishment, no concerted initiative has been made to debate and discuss the Naga demands either within Parliament or outside it.⁸

Naga civil society groups also question the sincerity of the Indian government, especially its projection of the multiple insurgencies in the Northeast as terrorism to the international community. The Indian state, it was felt, followed a divide-and-rule policy, creating division between the insurgents and the respective ethnic communities.⁹ The State was accused of negotiating while at the same time trying to divide the people they are negotiating with.¹⁰

Lack of Transparency in Peace Negotiations

There has been little information in the public domain of what the multiple rounds of talks have been about, what issues were raised and discussed and what is the nature of the progress made. The lack of transparency has fired speculation about “deals” with the National Socialist Council of Nagalim—Isac Swu-Muivah (NSCN (IM) leaders. Although Naga social organizations such as the Naga Hoho, Naga Student Federation (NSF), United Naga Council (UNC), Naga Mothers’ Association (NMA), Naga Peoples’ Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR) have been in the forefront of facilitating the peace process, they are unaware of the contents of negotiations. Other stakeholders in the process, like the National Socialist Council of Nagalim—Khaplang (NSCN-K), Naga National Council (NNC-

Adino) and even the splinter group of National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Unification) (NSCN-U)—are not at the peace table. The Naga peace process impinges upon international borders (Myanmar) and neighbouring states like Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, as well as non-Naga ethnic groups—Kukis, Meites, Dimasas etc. Also, the Naga insurgency has lit a prairie fire on secessionist and sub-nationalist movements elsewhere in India, equally its negotiated political resolution will have a huge demonstration effect. Hence the Indian people in general and people of Northeast India in particular have a right to know.

The NSCN (IM) claims to be the sole spokesman of the Nagas, but other Naga political organizations have objected to it. The Naga National Council (NNC), the oldest Naga organization currently led by Phizo's daughter, Adino Phizo, rejected the peace negotiations. NNC will challenge the outcome of the talks between Muivah and the GOI as NSCN did not have the mandate of the Naga people. She said that the Centre's approach to the inclusion of NNC in the talks was absolutely non-serious.¹¹

The NSCN (IM) took strong exception to the union Home ministry's recent suggestion of starting talks with the rival factions, like the NSCN-K and Unification. The NSCN (IM) press office hit back with a clarification that as per the agreement between India and NSCN (IM) "no one should issue any statement except the Prime Minister, Home Minister and Centre's Peace interlocutor R.S. Pandey regarding the peace process". It reminded the Centre that according to the understanding reached with then Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao on 12 June 1995, no other outfit would be included in the peace talks.¹² It should be added that there is good reason to suspect the role of Indian state agencies in fomenting factionalism and materially backing the emergence of such groups as "Unification".

What adds to the confusion about the talks are the contradictory signals emanating from the peace table. For example, Muivah in several interviews has complained that India was not serious about resolving the Naga issue. But on his arrival in New Delhi for talks in February 2010, he said, "I feel very proud that Prime Minister of India invited



us to come to India to resume political talks. We will accept anything that is good for the Nagas. If India respects us we will also respect India”.¹³ A year later, in 2011, Muivah sounded even more positive. “We acknowledge the positive attitude and the effort of the Indian government for creating such a conducive atmosphere... . We are prepared to work out what is honourable and mutually acceptable to both sides and is a lasting solution...”¹⁴ Muivah concluded, “For me, I respect the history of India. Will they respect the history of the Nagas? If no, then there can be no meeting point”.¹⁵ Clearly, no solution was in sight despite Muivah’s claim that negotiations were “concretizing into a final solution”.

Ceasefire Violation: Cause of Concern

The many violations of the ceasefire ground rules agreed upon by the negotiating parties has been a constant concern, threatening the peace process. The movement of cadres in uniform with arms in populated areas was prohibited. But frequent movement of armed cadres and even detention of underground leaders by the police have been frequently reported in the media. The cadres of the militant outfits move freely brandishing their arms openly and use them for carrying out large scale extortions. The police, army and central para-military forces have been unable or disinclined to take any significant steps to stop this.

In 2009 alone two major incidents took place wherein the ceasefire was on a thin edge and peace in the states of Manipur and Nagaland was threatened. When the situation in Manipur was precarious, the unfortunate incident of Sakok (May 2009) literally added fuel to fire. The Assam Rifles had reported that they had received an intelligence report and radio intercepts about the movement of Manipur (ethnic Meitei) armed militants of UNLF and PLA along with NSCN (IM) cadres in the area and their patrolling party was fired upon. In retaliation 3–4 cadres of NSCN (IM) were killed. The NSCN termed the killing as a brutal and blatant violation of ceasefire rule. They asked whether the Centre was working towards abrogating the ceasefire by such action.

A similar situation occurred in February 2009 at Shirui, where approximately 30–40 cadres of NSCN (IM) took over a state tourist lodge and security forces had laid siege for almost 20 days. The army said that the NSCN (IM) was trying to establish a new camp at Shirui. When questioned about the violation of ceasefire rules, the army and home ministry said that the ceasefire applied only to Nagaland and Manipur. Of course taking advantage of it, the underground outfits are extending their bases outside Nagaland.

Factional clashes have also threatened the ceasefire. A number of instances can be cited. On October 26–27, 2007 about 160 cadres of NSCN (IM) and 100 cadres of the NSCN-K engaged in fierce clashes at Amiphoto colony of Zunheboto, home to three functionaries of the NSCN-K General Secretary Kitovi Zhimomi, his brother-in-law and NSCN-K Kilonser (minister) Kughalu Mulatonu and ‘Brigadier’ Niki Sumi. The militants used rocket launchers, mortars, AK-47s, AK-56s and sniper rifles in a war-like campaign that continued from 9 am till 6.30 pm on both days. There was even a warning of “dire consequences” from the NSCN (IM) against any potential intervention by the security forces. The district police reacted by putting up barricades to prevent the entry of non-combatants into the “war zone”. The administration, along with three companies of the Assam Rifles and two of the India Reserve Battalion watched on in silence. Among the numerous houses damaged was that of K. Hollohon, parliamentary secretary and advisor to the state chief minister. The intensity of the clashes forced 4,000 people to desert their residences and move to safer locations. Such clashes and conflagrations have been frequent both in Nagaland-Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh zone where the Naga underground outfits move freely endangering the peace of the area.

Cessation of Fire, time for new outfits

The ceasefire period has witnessed the splintering of the underground organizations. The most important among them is the NSCN (United). **The National Socialist Council of Nagaland- Unification (NSCN-U)** was formed on 23 November, 2007 with an inter-factional “truce agreement” signed between the few cadres and

leaders of the NSCN (IM) and the rival NSCN-K at Hovishe under Niuland subdivision in the Dimapur district. The meeting was initiated and chaired by Hokiye, president of the Western Sumi Hoho, an influential body of the Sumi (Sema) tribe. The NSCN(IM) was led by ‘Kilo-Kilonser’ (Home Minister) Azheto Choppy and the NSCN-K by ‘Kilonser’ (Cabinet Minister) C. Singson. The NSCN(IM) later rebuffed the agreement and said that it is not a party to the decisions arrived at the meeting. Both “chairman” Isak Chisi Swu and “general secretary” Thuingaleng Muivah of the IM faction alleged that the Niuland Declaration was made without the knowledge of the group’s “higher authority”, and accused Azheto Choppy of defection.

The NSCN-U aims at unifying the two warring factions of the NSCN. The outfit is headed by a “core committee” and Azheto Choppy is its “convener”. Khekiye Sumi is its “financial kilonser”, Akhoota Choppy its “defence kilonser” and “brigadier” Nikki Sumi its Army chief. The outfit is estimated to have about 200 cadres. Internecine clashes between the NSCN-U and NSCN(IM) and seizures by the security forces indicate that the NSCN-U cadres are armed with sophisticated weapons. These include AK-47 rifles, 22 rifles, 7.65-mm pistols (Italian made), 38 revolvers, double barrel 12 Bore DBBL guns and Chinese grenades. The group has strategic linkages with the NSCN-K. Both outfits, on some occasions, have participated in joint attacks on the NSCN(IM). The NSCN-U cadres to begin with were stationed at Vihokhu, 25 kilometres from the commercial township of Dimapur. Most activities of the outfit have been observed in this particular district, except for a handful in the Wokha district. While news about unification of the arch-rival factions of Isaac-Muivah and Khaplang was welcomed by many amongst the Naga community, reports from November 2007 indicate that the unification has, in fact, produced a third front, NSCN-U almost isolating Tangkhuls dominating NSCN(IM). Newly recruited cadres of Sema, Lotha, Konyak, Angami and some other tribes, except Tangkhuls and Maos, defected to NSCN-U after the “passing out ceremony”. This proves that Semas are not the only ones who want to quit NSCN(IM) to join NSCN -U. Other tribesmen are keen to do so too. On 30 January 2008, a meeting of the *Gaon Burras* (village headmen) of Lotha tribe and Lotha NGOs was held at Lotha Hoho Office, Dimapur to discuss

the tribe's support to NSCN (U). Earlier there were reports indicating likely defection of Lotha cadres from NSCN (IM). About 60 cadres of NSCN (U) are camping in Dimapur and approx 150 are deployed from there to Chumukedima to prevent tax collection by NSCN (IM).

In June 2011, the NSCN Kaphlang group split, vertically. Kaphlang displaced the group's force commander General Khole. Backing the General, Kitovi, the NSCN-K group's Prime Minister along with a dissident group effected a coup. He announced the impeachment of the NSCN Chairman, S. Kaphlang, and his expulsion from the NSCN. Both the factions, one led by Kaphlang and the other by Khole-Kitovi were engaged in a violent show of strength. While the armed wing expressed loyalty to Kaphlang, the other group mobilized new arms and cadres. Both groups are serving extortion notices to people and at the same time warning people not to pay "taxes" to the rival faction. It marked the beginning of a fierce turf war.¹⁶

Factionalism among the Naga groups is not unprecedented. But the split in the faction of NSCN led by S.S. Kaphlang could turn out to be a major development. Moreover, Kaphlang not only led the group from his base inside Myanmar but also allowed other insurgent groups like UNLF and ULFA, to use his camp. Kaphlang's expulsion could weaken the NSCN's Myanmar connection and impact its activities in Nagaland, and the ongoing Naga peace process. Now Delhi has to decide whether to give legitimacy to the new leadership that has replaced Kaphlang. Since the new leadership is now based in Nagaland, and not Myanmar, it might have different implications. The reactions from other organizations such as NSCN (IM) will also shape the peace talks. The most significant consequence of the split is the branding of Kaphlang as a Myanmar Naga, the struggle of Indian Nagas will be by the Kitovi faction. The differences between Myanmar Naga and Indian Naga is likely to have an important impact.

Other new splinter groups are much less significant. A new Naga outfit came up in Manipur called Manipur Naga Revolutionary Front (MNRF). It was known for its anti-NSCN (IM) position. In April 2011

some militants ambushed the convoy of Wongnaoshang Keishing, MLA of the area, at Riha village of his Phungyar constituency in Ukhrul district when he was returning to his official quarters on 15 April 2011. Six Manipur Rifles personnel including two havildars who were escorting him and two other civilians, including a driver, were killed in the ambush while five jawans were injured. This was the first major attack on security personnel in the past few years. In recent years the attacks on security personnel and VIPs in the state had gone down drastically. Security agencies suspected the involvement of the NSCN (IM) in the attack because Keishing was a supporter of the creation of a Phungyar district out of Ukhrul which the NSCN has opposed. The MNRF condemned the attack, and accused the NSCN (IM)'s Kishimung battlalion.¹⁷ Sensing the growing tension between the two Naga factions the United Naga Council of Manipur (UNC) urged restraint and said politicizing the issue might jeopardize the decade old peace talks.¹⁸ Subsequently there was another attack and assassination of Vareingam Shimray and his wife Ngaheria in Ukhrul. In a statement the NSCN (IM) took responsibility saying they assassinated the couple for supporting the MNRF which was considered an anti-Naga activity. Shimray was a very respectable Naga elder known for his social services.¹⁹

The NNC, the oldest of the Naga insurgent organizations also appears to be heading for another split in the wake of allegations of mismanagement of funds and a shakeup in the organisation's hierarchy.²⁰ The NNC had first split in the early 1990s after the death founder A.Z. Phizo.

On 19 May 2008, the formation of a new militant outfit, United Naga People's Council (UNPC), was formally announced in the Senapati district of Manipur. It consists of cadres of a splinter group of the NSCN(IM). The "president" of the group, S.S. Max, stated that the UNPC's aim is to restore peaceful co-existence amongst the people living in both hills and valley and to safeguard territorial integrity and sovereignty of Manipur. He however adds that the new splinter group had no enmity with the "revolutionary movements" waged by the NSCN(IM), NSCN-K and NNC.

More recently, in February 2011, a Zeliangrong based militant outfit, Zeliangrong United Front (ZUF) announced its existence.²¹ It is committed to defending the culture, customary habits, lands and resources of the Zeliangrong Nagas in Assam, Manipur and Nagaland.

Irritated by the State government's decision to rename the NC Hills as Dima Hasao district to appease the Dimasas, the various non-Dimasa tribes had teamed up to form a new militant outfit, named Hill Tiger Force (HTF). Kapsi Naga, who is from the Naga community is the president, Arnol Kuki is the secretary of the HTF while the "commander-in-chief" is Harathang Hmar, Lunen Kuki the publicity secretary and Stephen Lunchua is the foreign secretary.

In another blow to the NSCN (IM) struggle for integration of Naga areas, two Naga outfits operating in Manipur—the MNRF and United Naga Peoples Council (UNPC) merged on 28 June, 2013 to form a new group called the Manipur Naga Peoples Front, with an armed wing. This merger reportedly followed a discussion on the "shaky condition of the present Naga revolutionaries".²² In a scathing attack on the dominant Naga organizations, the statement issued by the new outfit said, "time has come for us to struggle together for our common goal by surrendering one's own interest and accommodating parallel bodies. ...we encompass all parties for a united struggle is our loud and clear message. We shall not demoralize our political vision by remaining aloof like the organization under ceasefire pacts (NSCN(IM), NSCN-K, NSCN (Khole-kitovi) whose interest is either higher autonomy or economic package. Their submissive policy at the cost of people's blood and sweat has demoralized the revolutionary spirit thereby losing people's confidence. The principal objective of the MNPF, the statement said, was the restoration of sovereignty and right to self-determination. Another objective was to bridge the gap between all revolutionary underground organizations working in various northeastern states. The outfit promised to eliminate social and economic disparity among different communities and strengthen "cohesion and revolutionary unity" for a strong and vibrant federal administrative system."²³



Factional Turf War

Insurgent violence in Nagaland has persisted despite protracted “peace processes”, though SF operations against the insurgents have ceased, barring occasional arrests of militants of either factions. However, internecine clashes among the IM and K factions, and targeted attacks against their “sympathizers” continue to keep the state on the boil, even as extortion is pervasive. As many as 82 fatalities have been reported in 2006 (till November 21) despite the “peace”, of which 88 per cent comprised insurgents, most of them killed in factional clashes. As many as 39 such clashes have been reported from seven of Nagaland’s 11 districts till November 21, with Zunheboto accounting for one third of these. The rest of the clashes occurred in the geographically contiguous districts of Kohima, Dimapur, Peren, Phek, Tuensang and Mon. With the State government doing little beyond appealing to both factions to end violence, the small townships and villages of Nagaland have been turned into battle zones by the two outfits.

Both the militant factions are engaged in fierce contests to extend their areas of dominance, and there is little hope that such clashes would cease in future. The Chief Minister, Neiphiu Rio, is on record claiming that such clashes are a part of the “political problem” between India and Nagaland, thus indicating that these would continue as long as the “conflict over Nagalim” is not resolved. The GOI, however, insists that the clashes between the militant outfits are a law and order problem. On 20 June, 2006, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh told a seven-member Congress team from Nagaland that the conflict between the militant Naga factions was a “law and order problem” which the State’s home department has to solve on its own, instead of blaming Delhi. The Chief Minister’s refrain, however, closely echoes the NSCN(IM)s position that the factional violence is due to the New Delhi’s failure to restrict the movement of NSCN-K cadres.

It is felt that the current peace process has not brought much internal unity. In fact it has increased competition among the factions to get the attention of the Centre. NSCN-K has separately declared ceasefire with the GOI and NNC has been trying to reassert its importance. Efforts to bring together all factions has so far not achieved much.

Building Reconciliation

The Church-led **Forum for Naga Reconciliation**, which has representatives from 42 community groups as well as the militant outfits, organized several reconciliatory meetings both within and outside the country. Two such meetings were held at Chiang Mai in Thailand in June and September 2009. The NSCN(IM), NSCN-K and NNC made a “declaration of commitment” in the September meet and decided to work together for solving the Naga issues. But still there is not much improvement on the ground.

In another development, the Joint Forum of Nagaland *Gaon Burah* federation (GBs) and *Do-Bhashis* association (DBs) in December 2007, brought together all the underground organizations, which included the NSCN(IM) (Kilonser Yanger Pongen), NSCN-K (Kilonser R.M. Lotha), NNC (General Secretary Vizosielhou Nagi) and NSCN Unification Core Committee (Maj. A Chuba Ao). A four-point resolution was jointly signed at Kohima by these organizations that called for putting an end to atrocities against the Nagas, creating a peaceful atmosphere, pursuing peace and unity among different groups and extending the inter-factional ceasefire for a further period of six months from 7 December, 2007.

While the NSCN (IM) is trying to negotiate with the GOI, NSCN-K has condemned the NSCN (IM) for having dropped sovereignty in the list of its demands. Whereas NSCN-K has not come up with any proposals for settlement and been dumped by NSCN (IM) as a stooge in the hands of some politicians who are at loggerhead with the collective leadership.

Interestingly, although the NSCN-K has been on the receiving end on most occasions in previous years, it appeared to be gaining in strength in Nagaland, even as it continued to face reverses in its periodic encounters with the Myanmar Army in the Sagaing division across the international boundary. Within Nagaland, the Khaplang cadres have engaged the rival IM faction frequently, often inflicting tactical losses. In February 2006, the NSCN-K wrested the Meluri area under Phek district from the NSCN(IM). The gain in the battlefield also translated

into a reverse defection process of cadres from the IM faction to the Khaplang group. Though the numbers are not significant, 16 IM cadres, including a senior cadre, “Major” Lokishe, defected to the outfit, abandoning the IM faction, between 5 August and 17 November 2006.

The NSCN-K’s new-found confidence was evident in the outfit’s “quit notice” delivered on 16 August, 2006 to members of the Tangkhul tribe in Nagaland, accusing them of being “terrorist masterminds”. The notice meant very little for the civilian population, as Tangkhuls are a tribe mostly based in the neighbouring Manipur state, and are a microscopic minority within Nagaland. Understandably, the “quit notice” was directed solely at the NSCN(IM) “general secretary”, Thuingaleng Muivah, a Tangkhul from the Ukhul district of Manipur. The NSCN-K resisted appeals from various bodies to withdraw the notice and killed at least two civilians belonging to the Tangkhul tribe in the Kohima district.

In fact, the futility of the ceasefire agreement was underlined on 22 September, 2006, by the Inspector General of Assam Rifles (North), Major General S.S. Kumar: “The ceasefire is giving the NSCN(IM) an opportunity to consolidate. Earlier, there were about 800 cadres of the NSCN(IM). Of late, the figure ranges between 2,000 and 2,500.” The Ceasefire Agreement provides for no restriction on fresh recruitment, thus encouraging competitive recruitment on the part of all outfits—state and non-state.

Although NSCN (U) was launched to bring unity among all the Naga underground outfits, it has got embroiled in internecine factional wars. More than 10 NSCN(U) cadres were killed during a clash between NSCN(IM) and its rival NSCN(U) on 3 June, 2008 in Dimapur.²⁴ In May 2008 another factional clash led to the death of 14 cadre of GPRN/NSCN. On the same afternoon angry civilians attacked NSCN (IM) ceasefire monitoring cell office at Diphupar and set it on fire. Nearly 50 people, including civilians, were killed in and around Dimapur in the stepped up violence by rival NSCN groups in the first few months of 2008. Both the state government and public had asked underground cadre to vacate civilian populated areas and confine themselves to their respective designated camps. On 4 June

2008, at least 15 cadres of the NSCN(IM) and NSCN-U were killed in separate factional clashes in and around Dimapur.

On 16 May 2008 the NSCN-U announced that Nagaland is not the Gaza Strip to rehabilitate “others”. The outfit added that the NSCN(IM) ‘general secretary’ Th. Muivah’s intent of “advocating communism and consequent annihilation of thousands of Nagas in the name of sovereignty thus far, has been exposed as nothing but a policy of rehabilitating deprived Nagas of Manipur in Nagaland state and that the economy of the Nagas of Nagaland has been drained into ‘their’ private coffers”.

On 16 May 2008 at least 14 cadres of the NSCN-K and the NSCN-U were killed by the rival NSCN(IM) militants during an internecine clash at Seithekema C village in the Dimapur district. Two civilians were later killed by the NSCN(IM) militants when they opened fire indiscriminately on people who attacked the ceasefire monitoring cell of the outfit located in the same area. An internecine clash between the NSCN(IM) and the NSCN-U was averted on 14 May, 2008 in areas surrounding Khehokhu, Hoito and Nihoto in the Dimapur district when the locals of the area asked the warring militants to vacate their villages. Schools in the areas were closed, and normal life affected. At least six civilians belonging to the Tangkhul community were abducted and later killed by the NSCN-U militants at Vihokhu village in the Dimapur district on 13 May, 2008.

Such intensity of internecine factional clash is unprecedented in the history of the Naga movement. The Cease-Fire Supervisory Board (CFSB) was forced to ask the NSCN-K to shift its “Unification” camp at Vihokhu in the Dimapur district to avoid further clashes with the NSCN(IM), since the camp is not a “Designated Camp”.

Expansion of Territorial Claims

On 26 August 2000, Isaac Swu of NSCN (IM) wrote to the then prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee charging his government of betraying its commitment to the ceasefire. K. Padmanabhaiah, the Center’s interlocutor with the Nagas had reportedly agreed to the

extension of ceasefire provision to all Naga inhabited areas of Northeast, not just Nagaland. The NSCN argument was that observing ceasefire only in Nagaland but continuing the fight between NSCN and the Indian Army in other areas did not prove meaningful. It vitiated the atmosphere for the continuation of peace discussion. Swu warned that the NSCN (IM) would no longer be under any obligation if the Indian government did not officially implement the ceasefire in all Naga areas by 5 September 2000. In reply in 11 September 2000, K. Padmanabhaiah replied to Swu stating that none of the government representatives have agreed to extend the ceasefire to all Naga areas. He also pointed out that the government would consider extension of ceasefire with NSCN (IM) to other areas in Northeast subject to the condition that NSCN (IM) accepts and agrees to issue a statement that extension of ceasefire to other areas will not be interpreted by them as a step towards recognition of their claim to a “Greater Nagaland”.

Padmanabhaiah’s statement had a context. The Naga underground organizations have long been demanding that all the contiguous areas of Nagaland which have a preponderant Naga population, such as Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur should be amalgamated into a single Naga unit. From this emerged the concept of greater Nagalim. In fact for these organizations it was not just the sovereignty of Nagaland but the carving out a greater Nagaland that was also part of the goal. Predictably there was fierce opposition to this proposal. Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh protested and opposed the idea of greater Nagaland and refused to part with even an inch of their respective territory.

As soon as the Swu-Padmanabhaiah’s dialogue became public, there was vociferous objection compelling the prime minister to convene a meeting with the chief ministers of these states. In this meeting of 28 September 2000 the leaders of Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya opposed the extension of ceasefire beyond Nagaland on the ground that this would legitimize the claim of the Nagas to their territory. It would become the basis of their future claim of a “Greater Nagaland”. Secondly, the ceasefire extension over these areas would provide free access to the NSCN to construct their camps, carry their

tax collection and extortion drives, recruit local youths and give birth to dummy insurgent outfits. All this would disrupt these otherwise peaceful areas. In fact, even the Nagaland chief minister S.C. Jamir, in his meeting with the home minister L.K. Advani said that the extension of ceasefire beyond Nagaland was fraught with dangerous consequences. But the NSCN (IM) was not ready to continue peace discussion without such extension. It threatened to call off the negotiation if ceasefire to all Naga areas were not implemented. In a significant move on 14 June 2001, New Delhi decided to agree to ceasefire “without territorial limits”.

The Fall Out of Hasty Appeasement

The fall out of this extension of ceasefire over areas of other states was cataclysmic. The state of Manipur was up in arms. Led by the students’ union, the state experienced unprecedented violence in the form of protests. The State Assembly building was burnt, legislators threatened and government establishments attacked. The uprising continued unabated for almost a month. With more and more people joining the protest, women and youth were in the forefront defying State’s repression and prohibitory orders, the movement continued to gain strength. Gradually the protest movement spread to other areas of the region too—Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. While students’ organizations and political parties protested against government’s decision, it threatened to become violent when insurgent organizations like Dima Halom Daoga (Assam) and United Liberation Front of Asom also joined the protest. The situation became volatile and threatened to erupt. In Manipur the Meithei and Nagas were on the warpath.. Terrified of violent attack on them, the Naga’s of Imphal valley evacuated to safer place. The Kuki and Vaiphei etc., non-Meithei tribes of Manipur also supported the protest of the Meitheis.

Taken aback by the unprecedented protest, New Delhi convened a series of meetings with the protesting groups as well as the Naga organizations. On 27 July 2001, a high level meeting was held at the 7 Race Course, New Delhi, the official residence of the Prime Minister. Subsequent to this, the home minister announced that while ceasefire continued the words in the agreement “without territorial limit” was

being withdrawn. In other words the status quo was maintained and ceasefire would not be continued only within Nagaland. It was also added that the officials had discussed the matter with the NSCN (IM) and the latter agreed to the decision.

While the announcement quelled the disquiet in Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh it had the expected repercussion on Nagaland. The people of Nagaland as well as the Nagas of Manipur rose in protest terming it as a “betrayal”. To make matters worse the NSCN (IM) stated that contrary to the statement of the government of India it had not agreed to this “reversion”. The breach of agreement was done unilaterally by New Delhi. Although the latter insisted that despite the setbacks the negotiation with the NSCN (IM) would continue, the future appeared uncertain yet again. The only hope was the Naga Hoho, NMA and Naga People’s Movement for Human Rights which made untiring efforts to bring the peace process back on track.

For the next round of meetings, New Delhi was keen that the NSCN(IM) leaders come to India. It facilitated their visit by withdrawing the ban on the organization. Responding positively to the invitation, the NSCN(IM) leaders T. Muivah and Isaac Swu reached New Delhi on 8 January 2003.

This visit marked a historic day as this was the first time a Naga delegation was meeting the Prime Minister after the last meeting with Indira Gandhi way back in 1967. The two parties held a series of negotiations. While it is not known what transpired, the signals were positive. The Naga leaders assured that there would be no more fighting between the Indian Army and the NSCN cadres. It also expressed its satisfaction at the progress of the discussions.²⁵

The concept of Greater Nagalim and the territorial expansion proposal of the NSCN(IM) had embittered the traditional amicable relations between the Nagas and Meitheis in Manipur. The age-old ties had turned into a relationship of mistrust, hostility and tension. There was fear of ethnic riots between the two groups . Luckily this did not happen. Another result of the hostility was economic blockade of Manipur. Nagas would frequently block the national highway linking

Manipur with the rest of India and stop all supplies to this landlocked state. The blockade would be called by so called civil society groups and would not be called off till it reached life threatening situation in Manipur.

The blockade of 2010 had huge ramifications. It all started with the All Naga Student Association of Manipur calling for an economic blockade of the national highway No. 39, demanding greater autonomy and financial power to the hill areas. This was nothing new. The Nagas had frequently blocked this lifeline of Manipur in the past to achieve their demands. The last long blockade also lasted for about two months. As the blockade was on, another unforeseen development took place that produced a much more dangerous stand-off.

The NSCN(IM) leader Muivah in Delhi for the bi-annual ritual of “discussion” with the Indian leaders on the so called Indo-Naga problem, proposed visiting Somdal, his ancestral village in the Ukhrul district of Manipur. He had not visited his home for last 47 years since he began fighting for the cause of a united Naga nation. He sought permission from the union home ministry which granted him permission after clearing it with the Congress-ruled Manipur state authorities. However, as the news of his visit spread, and there was jubilant preparation for his welcome in his ancestral village, the Manipur administration panicked. It perceived that Muivah’s visit would be seen as a step toward the realization of the concept of Nagalim which meant separation of Naga inhabited territories of Manipur to create a unified Naga homeland called Nagalim. The Manipuris suspected that Muivah would use this opportunity to campaign for Nagalim. It was anticipated that it would provoke violent reaction from the Meitheis and cause Naga-Meithei ethnic riots. So the state government proclaimed it would not allow Muivah to enter Manipur, citing severe law and order problems and sealed the Nagaland-Manipur border.

The Centre called Manipur’s Chief Minsiter Ibobi Singh to Delhi to get him to agree to Muivah’s visit. But for once, Ibobi stood by his assessment of the situation and stuck to his position. An embarrassed government offered to fly Muivah to his village by army helicopter. Muivah too refused and insisted on visiting his home by road. It was

a stalemate. To stop Muivah from entering Manipur, the state administration posted a large contingent of armed police men at the Mao gate. On 6th May a large Naga crowd gathered at Mao gate to protest against the sealing of border where they clashed with the Manipur police. The encounter left two Naga students dead in police firing and several injured. The fear of reprisal led more than a thousand people leave their border homes and seek shelter in safer areas. In a chain reaction the incident sparked off violent protests in other Naga districts of Manipur. Government buildings and vehicles were attacked. In Delhi members of Delhi based Naga Students Federation (?) entered the Manipur Bhavan and damaged property. Naga legislators of Manipur resigned in protest.

Chief Minister of Nagaland, Niephieu Rio asked for an explanation from the Centre. New Delhi tried in vain to persuade Ibobi Singh to reconsider. At the same time, New Delhi requested Muivah to postpone his visit till the situation was favourable. Muivah who was camping near the Nagaland-Manipur state border in Viswema village, refused to cancel his visit. He merely shifted to Phek, a strong hold of the NSCN(IM) from where he started visiting Naga villages ostensibly on a “peace mission” but actually to rejuvenate its support base in areas where his social base was historically weak. Meanwhile the Naga Student Federation, the powerful body of the Naga Students and a stakeholder in current Naga imbroglio, also reinforced the indefinite Highway 39 blockade indefinitely till Manipur permitted Muivah’s entry. The two month blockade resulted in immense hardship for this landlocked state which depends on all its staples from food, petrol, diesel and medicines from the rest of the country.

As a consequence of the blockade food prices skyrocketed as people began to hoard. Government’s *godowns* (warehouses) of food stocks ran out of supply. Petrol and diesel stations were closed. Baby food and medicines were not available. The Regional Institute of Medical Science ran dry of medicines. Emergency operations were postponed as life-saving drugs and oxygen were not available. The government of India initially turned a blind eye, and under pressure airlifted certain items. The state imported 1,000 tonnes of rice from Myanmar and tried to obtain other items from the Mizoram side. The

crisis multiplied. It was not the Meitheis alone but Naga tribes of Manipur too were subjected to acute sufferings. It was an artificial famine resulting from Indian state's peace politics. The Kolkata based *The Telegraph* in an editorial wrote:

Imagine this happening to a big state or city elsewhere in the country and the furore it would have sparked... [The inaction of the centre] shows how cavalier New Delhi can be about the people and issues in the north east ... such insensitivity on the part of the administration has been the primary reason for the growing sense of alienation among the large sections of the people of the region.²⁶

Taking a broader perspective of the crisis, Bela Bhatia, a Delhi based human right activist who was present at the Mao Gate border stand-off sought to locate the simmering Naga Meteï tension in the historical context of the marginalized and subordinated situation of the Nagas of Manipur. She wrote, "any mention of humanitarian crisis caused as a consequence of the road blockades should not also forget the other humanitarian crisis caused due to years of neglect, discrimination, political marginalization and subjugation that has been the lot of the tribal population in general and Nagas in particular".²⁷

Politics of Competitive Identity Mobilization & Extension of Territory

The Nagas claim to be a conglomeration of at least 34 tribes, which is a substantial increase from the 16 tribes that the Nagaland state claimed. Historically, a number of these tribes were never listed as Nagas. The conversion of these tribes into 'Nagas' was a result of *Naga-isation* process. The major non-Naga tribes are the Kukis, Dimasas, Hmars and the Karbis.

Due to the 1992–2007 Kuki-Naga conflict most of the Kukis migrated from Naga inhabited areas. But in parts of Assam and Manipur, the areas which are claimed as part of greater Nagaland (Nagalim), there are a huge number of these tribes. They are opposed to Nagalim. But neither the movement leaders nor the Indian state has sought the opinion of these tribes.

The Dimasas, Hmars and Karbis were an integral part of the Naga hills as their territorial boundaries over-lap. In fact when the NNC was formed in 1946, there were representations from Dimasa, Kuki and Karbis in it. These tribes were also part of the Naga movement in its initial stage. But they were systematically eliminated and now their present habitat in Assam is being proposed to be included in the Nagalim. As a result they are already involved in a bloody war with the Nagas over their inclusion in proposed Nagalim.

The fierce Kuki-Naga conflict in the 1990s had created a situation where smaller tribes faced threats from the powerful underground organization representing the major tribes. Hence a number of Chin tribe living in the Kuki-dominated area, hitherto known as appellate Mizo tribes, had declared themselves as Kukis whereas many declared themselves as Nagas, as it ensured protection from NSCN(IM). The Anal, Moyon, Monsang, Chothe and Purum, for example, share socio-cultural commonalities with the Kuki tribes and Naga tribes. These tribes live close to the Tangkhul and Maring Naga territories. Often the merger of identities took place through a formal agreement.

The role played by Anal tribe leaders in the pre-independence political activities of Manipur paved the way for their merger.²⁸ The Anals, who fall under the generic Kuki group, had joined the Naga movement for self-determination at an early stage. Similarly, the Moyon and Monsang leaders also participated in the Naga political movement. The role of the Christian Church and collective participation in ecclesiastical affairs produced a sense of closeness that facilitated the merger of identities. For some tribes like the Koirang of Manipur, the decision towards such a merger was more difficult. The Koirang are a small tribe of Manipur (949 in 1981) who live in the plain-hills border of the Imphal valley, found it difficult to resist the socio-economic and political pressure from larger tribes. In the competition between larger tribes to increase their numerical strength and enlarge their political confines, the smaller tribes face immense threats, physical and political. During the 1990s, tribes like the Koirang and Chiru came under pressure to join the larger group of tribes.

The movement of smaller tribes towards merger with the Naga tribes was largely activated under the banner of the “Greater Nagaland”

movement of the Nagas and spearheaded by underground organizations that led the secessionist movement against the Indian State. There was a sudden intensification of this movement during the Kuki-Naga conflict. Again, some smaller tribes participated in both Naga and Kuki cultural practices and were not sure of their genuine identity. For them then, labels like Naga or Kuki were mere *loci alignment*.²⁹ But after the protracted violent conflict between the Nagas and Kukis, many of those who had identified with the Kukis disavowed their Kuki identity, and declared themselves to be an independent tribe or a Naga. With the Nagas backed by the NSCN(IM), cadres, the 'Kuki' minority tribes living in the vicinity of the Nagas found it safer to declare themselves as Nagas so that they could live in the area without being uprooted or eliminated. The NSCN found it advantageous too as it increased the Nagas numerical strength and claim to greater territory for the prospective Nagaland state. Scholarly, field studies have demonstrated that smaller tribes like the Anal, Chote, Lamkang, Chiru, Moyon and Monsang, who originally belonged to the old Kuki classification, were influenced by the powerful Tangkhul Naga tribe and adopted the Naga identity.³⁰ During his fieldwork amongst various small tribes of Manipur, the anthropologist R.K. Das found that the Tangkhul Nagas were taking a leading role in transforming the smaller tribes into the Naga ethnic label through different instruments.

The NSCN(IM)'s political emphasis on 'Greater Nagaland' has a territorial dimension. This includes the contentious issue of Naga areas of Manipur, as well as Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. Both the factions of NSCN have designs on the territory of Arunachal Pradesh and are trying to appropriate the fragile identity of the smaller tribes in this area too and push them to affiliate to the greater Naga identity. The NSCN(IM) has launched the **Operation Salvation** scheme by which it is trying to propagate Christianity among the Nocte, Wancho Tutsa and Tangsa tribes who inhabit the district of Tirap and Changlang.³¹ In view of the ban on the entry of the Christian missionaries, the underground outfits are using their own cadres as pastors and priests to propagate Christianity. The tactic, earlier used in Manipur, is to convert the tribes to Christianity and then through the Church engage in a sustained campaign to achieve the goal of changing their identities. Once these small tribes declare themselves as Naga, the territorial claim over their land would follow to justify *Nagalim*.



Territorial Claims outside Naga Areas

In Assam the NSCN(IM) is involved in a scheme of evicting non-Naga settlers from the Zemi Naga dominated areas of North Cachar and Karbi Anglong, settling Zemi and other Kacha Nagas systematically in non-Naga areas so as to expand the Naga-dominated territory and stake claim to it. It has had major ramifications giving rise to conflicts between the tribes who had earlier lived amicably for centuries. In fact, the Dimasas who were once part of the constituents of Naga National Council are now demanding the restitution of their erstwhile capital Dimapur, which was transferred to the Naga Hills by the Indian government. To demographically consolidate this demand, the Dimasas had unleashed a campaign of ethnic uprooting of the Zemi Nagas. There are the Karbis, who also were once a constituent member of the NNC. They too are in bitter dispute over territory with the neighbouring Nagas. Nepali ex-service, once a part of the Naga underground movement, are now targeted for expulsion from these areas. Thus we have multiple conflicts between the Naga-Kuki, Zemi-Dimasa as well as the Dimasa-Karbi, Hmar-Dimasa, Karbi-non-tribal turning the Northeast into a zone of perpetual conflict and bloodshed. The sponsorship of these ethnic cleansing drives by their respective armed underground outfits has complicated the situation.

This is a major spin-off result of the prolonged peace process with the Nagas and the politics of identity mobilizations.

Soaring Crime in Times of Peace

The NNC or even the NSCN in its early days or MNF of Mizoram was careful enough not to disturb civil life. Hence, it used to secure arms by ambushing army or police personnel and snatching arms from them. It also levied and collected small amounts from each government employee, professional and businessmen either local or outsiders as “tax” to the government in Exile which covered its expenses. But from the 1990s there has been a radical transformation in the character of insurgency in the regions for various reasons.³² Extortion, kidnapping, looting of treasury has become rampant. Small taxes from ordinary citizens are no more enough to maintain its burgeoning expenses. Hence,

extortion of corporate houses, has become the prime source of resource mobilization. Beside the tea gardens, the public sector units like ONGC, OIL, NEEPCO, BRPL and even the Railways have to pay out substantial amounts. The biggest casualty has been the tea industry. The home ministry notification of 2002 declaring various underground outfits as “outlawed” gave “continued collection of funds and extortions” as one of the reasons for their proscription.³³ Extortion in Nagaland has been institutionalized. At Dimapur railway station, the insurgents levy a tax of Rs. 4 lakh per wagon of foodstuff.³⁴

The primary target of extortion are the migrants or non-tribals in a tribal area. E.N. Ram Mohan, then advisor to the Governor of Manipur, commenting on the criminal activities of the insurgents in Manipur in 2002, “The insurgency has degenerated and proliferated into a number of rag-tag group is now primarily, a widespread extortion racket, which has spread like a cancer into all facets of politics, administrations and the social life of the state”.³⁵ This would seem to apply to parts of Nagaland today.

The vicious circle of extortion reached a new dimension when the Nagaland Chief Minister N. Rio appealed to Delhi for “fixed grants” for both the factions of the NSCN to prohibit the two outfits from regular extortion from the traders and civilians. The argument was that if the center paid a fixed amount every year to the outfits for meeting their expenses, it would not disturb the civil life by their regular extortion demands through illegal taxation.³⁶ The issue of extortion in Northeast was also recognized by the national parties when CPI (Communist Party of India) general secretary Pranab Bardhan urged the center to stop collection of illegal taxes by the NSCN (IM). He said the outfit taking advantage of the peace process was illegally collecting money from trucks plying along the national highways.

The most recent trends have been the underground sponsoring candidates in elections. They not only back him financially but also issue orders to people to vote for their candidate and often force the opposition candidate to withdraw. The candidate, especially if he gains a ministerial berth, pays them back by siphoning off state allocated funds. Such deals are common place in Northeast which confirms the

politician-militant nexus through which the subversion of the state economy takes place. On 7 December 2002, the Chief Minister in a move to forestall the interference of the NSCN(IM) in the state elections scheduled for February 2003, appealed to the outfit not to sponsor candidates in view of the on-going peace negotiations.³⁷

Since these outfits do not have their own resources, money for their sustenance had to be siphoned off from the economy of the Indian state. This gave rise to a parallel underground economy in the region. It is the economy of the insurgent outfits, the features of which are parallel tax collection, arms and narcotics trade, extortion, kidnapping and demand of ransom, aid generated by the organisation in foreign countries in support of the movement, profit sharing with corporate houses, diversion of developmental funds. This economy has expanded not only due to the proliferation of insurgency in the region but also due to the economics of high returns being ensured.

Nagaland's commercial hub Dimapur has turned into a safe haven for different militant groups carrying out extortion activities. Nagalands Home Minister, Imkong L. Imchen revealed in July 2013 that 10 non-Naga insurgent groups are operating in and around Dimapur, including the cadres of Dima Halim Doaga (DHD-D), Dima Halim Doaga (DHD-J Black Widow), Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA), People Liberation Front (PLF), United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), Gurkha Liberation (GLA), Peoples United Liberation Front (PULF), All Adivasi National Liberation Army (AANLA), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA). The Home Minister claimed that militant groups from outside the state were able to operate because of the connivance of the Naga underground groups.

The NSCN(IM) holds supreme power in most parts of the state. It has a "finance department" which indulges in wide-spread "tax-collection", its "home department" virtually runs the administration. Its "crime suppression department" ensures control of its areas of dominance, administering selective "justice" over "offenders". Cadres, who are supposed to stay within the confines of the designated camps, move unhindered in the townships and countryside, enforcing the militant group's diktats.

The NSCN(IM) extorts people in the name of levying taxes. It has asserted that it is a de facto government and has the legitimate right to levy taxes on people within *Nagalim*. The newly appointed chairman of the Ceasefire Monitoring Group, Lt. General (Retd) S.K. Singh (2013) has asked the outfit to stop extortions and so called taxes.³⁸ But the secretary of the Imcha Longkumer group, has clearly asserted that the ground rules of ceasefire agreement has not mention of the NSCN(IM) not having the right to levy taxes. This was in reply to Singh's statement that the spirits of ground rules meant it had no such rights. Naga student bodies and civic bodies have also been protesting against these illegal levies. A newly formed body called the Action Committee Against Unabated Taxation (ACAUT) has asked people to stop paying such NSCN(IM) levies. The centre had also asked the rebels to desist from levying taxes. The Union home ministry in June 2013 described the situation as serious. It is obvious that Naga peace talks have cut no ice. The levying of taxes was tantamount to demanding sovereignty in a limited way. The previous declaration of the NSCN (IM) that it did not demand a separate constitution and was willing to relent even the *Greater Nagalim* demand appeared a eye wash.

There are now six underground factions, (i) NSCN(IM) Khaplang group, (ii) Kholi, (iii) Ketovi, (iv) Unification group (Semas) consisting of defectors from other factions, (v) NNC/ Federal Govt. of Nagaland who accept the Shillong Accord, (vi) who do not. Everyone pays taxes in one form or another from Ministers, MLAs, Government servants, officers, contractors and the business community. At the Dimapur border, police and rebel sit together to collect taxes. The price of every commodity is soaring; even poultry and kerosene are not spared. To stem the tide, ACAUT was formed and 18th June, 2013, a "Black Flag Day" was observed by a dawn-to-dusk bandh—all business establishments at Dimapur were closed with the support of other beleaguered townships through the aegis of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Kohima, Mokokchung, Wokha and Zunheboto. On the emerging public protest against taxes, Wati Aier, Convener of the Forum for Naga Reconciliation, says "We talked about one government—at the back of our mind was a unified tax system, and of course an eventual solution to the Naga issue". This campaign, according to Dr. Wati, will push the Naga groups to think, so, "let us

wait and see what happens”. According to Niketu Iralu, peace and social activist, “The Naga groups taxing the community with impunity and thoughtless of the consequences, have pushed their people to bearing the unbearable and accepting the intolerable. This has deeply enraged them. The Naga leaders should never have let the situation come to a stage where people have to rise up against them as they are doing now”.³⁹

The Centre has asked the Nagaland government to stop NSCN(IM) from levying “tax” on common people, saying that such action by the Naga insurgent group is leading to price rise of commodities and this cannot be allowed to continue. In a hard-hitting letter to Nagaland Chief Secretary Alem Temshi Jamir, the home ministry said there has been a serious situation following NSCN(IM)’s declaration that every Naga as well as others residing in ‘*Nagalim*’ shall pay tax. The NSCN(IM) has justified the system of taxation and asserted that it was the only outfit mandated by the Nagas for holding political talks with the Government of India. Home ministry Director (NE) J.P.N. Singh, in his letter, said NSCN(IM) has been arrogating itself the responsibility of finding a political solution on behalf of Nagas, of which the outfit clearly is not the sole representative. The NSCN(IM) is not only not observing the ceasefire ground rules, but also violating all the existing laws rules and regulations. He said. “You may kindly agree that this is a situation in which the mere argument of having ceasefire with the government of India is no excuse to go on a rampage and destroy the public confidence in the state.”

“It is high time that the state takes its responsibility seriously and starts looking after the interest of its subjects. Unbearable pressure of rising prices cannot be allowed to continue adding to the miseries of the people. You are requested to initiate measures to stop what is going on and also ensure security of the office bearers of ACAUT (Action Committee Against Unabated Taxation),” Singh said.⁴⁰

The Naga militant outfits, under the initiative of the Forum of Naga Reconciliation decided to jointly carry out operations against anti-social activities after a spurt in abductions and extortions in the state. The three groups NNC, NSCN(IM) & NSCN-K, have decided to carry

out joint operations against kidnapping and extortion, said N. Venuh, a senior member of the Forum.⁴¹ In a joint statement the three outfits have expressed concern about the increasing kidnapping and extortion particularly in Dimapur, the commercial hub of Nagaland. This has become a serious concern for the people of the state. Ironically the reconciliation process of the three outfits which was expected to end fratricidal killings, has not done so. Instead it has also resulted in an increase in kidnapping and extortion. Dimapur which was once the domain of the NSCN(IM) has now become a heaven for all Naga militant groups and over ten different groups from the Northeast which is disliked by the NSCN(IM). The crime graph has soared because the militants have a free run.

The Forum said it was not in a position to check anti-social activities like kidnapping and extortion. Its spokesmen said they can only appeal to the groups to stop such activities which are against society. Another member of the Forum, who did not want to be identified, said some of the so-called Naga nationalist leaders do not know about Naga political issues and their only objective is money and wealth. He regretted that such people exist in Naga groups claiming to be champions of the cause of the Naga people without any vision for betterment of the people.⁴²

The NSCN(IM) through its ministry of information and publicity said countering anti-social elements remained the subject of common understanding among the signatories of the Covenant of Reconciliation. It said this also signified that any element not coming under the three groups—NSN(IM), NSCN-K and FGN (Singnya) would be treated with a different yardstick and confronted in a manner the situation demanded. The NSCN(IM) also expressed concern over several groups collecting and extorting tax in Dimapur in the name of Diamsa, Meitei and Kukis and said this has alarmed the Naga army and prompted it to be more vigilant.⁴³

Dilution of Sovereign Powers

Nagaland was created through an agreement between the GOI and a Naga Forum in 1960 granting the Naga state special powers. Article 371A, which was incorporated as a partial fulfillment of this

agreement, facilitated negotiated sovereignty of the Nagas on matters pertaining to their religious and social practices, customary laws and procedure, administration of civil and criminal justice, ownership and transfer of land and resources, as the Nagaland Legislative Assembly (NLA) can make any law of Parliament inapplicable by passing a resolution.

The Nagas have been objecting to the mining operations of GOI for oil and gas explorations. They considered it as Naga resources and refused it to be mined and transferred out of Naga soil even though the GOI agreed to pay a huge royalty. The GOI was looking for legal recourse to overrule the objection of the Nagas and start oil and gas exploration in Nagaland. After obtaining the opinion of legal luminaries like H.M. Seervai, F.S. Nariman, R.C. Sirkar, and M. Hidayatullah in the 1980s, and that of Gopal Subramaniam in February 2011, all of whom concurred that “land and its resources” as used in Article 371 A(1)(a)(iv) included mines and minerals, the NLA passed a resolution on 26 July, 2010, that laws made by Parliament on petroleum and natural gas could not apply to Nagaland with retrospective effect. Drawing upon its special status, and after extensive legal consultation and advice, the NLA bypassed Entry 53 of List I of the Seventh Schedule and the Mines and Minerals (Regulation and Development) Act, 1957 (MMRDA), which exclusively invests mines and minerals as the “occupied field” of the Union, while framing Nagaland Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulations in December 2012. It has since suspended all oil operations in the State. Subsequently, the Nagaland Government invited “Expressions of Interest” (EoI) from companies to explore and exploit the 11 oil and gas fields it identified across 11 districts of the State early 2013. The apex-decision making body headed by the Nagaland chief minister, reportedly shortlisted seven of the 23 companies which expressed interest. Immediately a letter was issued by R.N. Choubey, Director General of hydrocarbons, to the Petroleum Ministry in February 2013 where he asked the Nagaland Government to discuss—what he considered the unilateral and unconstitutional move of NLA to invite EoI—with the home ministry and prevail upon Nagaland to rescind its move. This was seen by the Nagas as a dilution of the the special status that Nagaland enjoys under Article 371A which supports the legislative competence of Nagaland to regulate and

develop petroleum and natural gas or a deliberate attempt to foist a centralist federal framework.⁴⁴ Nagas are agitated over what they perceive as the Centre's "threat" to override the exceptional status they enjoy under Article 371A of the Constitution. On 13 June, Veerappa Moily, the Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, asked the NLA to withdraw the Nagaland Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulation, 2012 (NPNGR) that it framed within the ambit of Article 371A. Taking a serious note of Mr. Moily's request, the Nagaland government held a consultative meeting with various sections of civil society on 12 July. The meeting resolved not only to reject Moily's request but also demand that the GOI implement the unfulfilled clauses of the Sixteen Point Agreement, of 1960, and place Nagaland under the Ministry of External Affairs. This had set up a new confrontation with New Delhi and attempt to subvert the substantive rights that the Nagas enjoy under Article 371A.

A Partisan Civil Society?

The most significant development of the ceasefire period was the emergence of a very active civil society in the Naga Hills. A number of organizations comprising of church leaders, women groups, social workers, students, peace activists and human right activists had come forward to bring stability to this troubled society. The Naga Hoho took the leadership of the civil society organizations. In fact it was the ceaseless efforts of these groups that encouraged the underground organizations to come to the negotiating table and thrash out a resolution to the sixty-year-old vexed problem. In the course of the 14 years long ceasefire and peace negotiations, it patiently sustained support and offered consultations to the underground groups as well as the Indian state so that the peace process was not derailed. On several occasions, the underground outfits threatened to go back to the jungles or use fire power to resolve conflict situations. Similarly, state agencies also demonstrated a propensity to resort to security measures.

Given the violent factionalism in the Naga movement, inevitably, civil society activism also gets implicated in partisanship politics of the underground. For example, during the recent confrontation over Muivah's proposed visit to his ancestral village in Manipur, civil society



groups intervened over the Manipur government blocking Th Muivah's visit. An NSCN-K group leader accused rival militant leader Th Muivah of being "a terrorist" who was trying to use hundreds of innocent Naga civilians as human shields to try to enter Manipur and visit his birthplace. The rival 'K' group accused Muivah of violating the human rights of the people of Manipur and stoking communal tension. Civil society too came in for attack, for blockading the highway at the behest of the NSCN(IM).⁴⁵ NSCN-K group warned the Naga Hoho that if Manipur resorted to violence against the Nagas as a result of the confrontation at the border at Mao Gate, the Hoho would be responsible and blamed it for irresponsibly following a script written by Muivah.

However the Joint Working Group of the NSCN Isak-Muivah and Khaplang groups and the NNC (that had been brought into being with the help of the the Forum for Naga Reconciliation) slammed the Manipur government for not allowing Muivah to visit his ancestral village. An NSCN release said that the Nagas would take only what belonged to them and not an inch more from the Meitheis. It said it did not bear any ill will towards anyone but the conflict between two communities should not be left for posterity. It was imperative to demarcate clear-cut boundary lines today but such exercise must not disturb the harmonious co-existence and inter trade whatsoever.⁴⁶

Influential columnists of the Northeast such as Patricia Mukhim also blamed the civil society organizations of the Nagas for being partisan:

The blockade of the national highway 39, Manipur's lifeline competed its second month on 11th June but the United Naga Council and other groups that are literally holding the state to ransom do not intend to budge from their obdurate state ... what has aggravated the matter further is the compulsion of Naga civil society groups in Nagaland to adopt a tough, belligerent stances instead of taking a non-partisan stand aimed at resolving what some has rightly termed 'biggest man made humanitarian crisis'. Even in a state of war international conventions do not allow for such embargoes particularly on life saving items and food.⁴⁷

However, the Naga civil society organizations defended their stand, with the Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights (NPHR) stating,

The Nagas are fully aware that after more than six decades of political struggle, our future is bound together not only with our neighbours but also with the world's community in a global village. But if our aspiration to attain our rightful humanity is constantly denied, we should rather face challenges with the worth of human beings.⁴⁸

Nearly a year later, Naga civil society organizations like the Naga Students Federation (NSF) realizing the political exigencies of co-existence with neighbours have reached out to rebuild better relations. The NSF which has enforced many road blockades and bandhs, on the eve of the organization's 24th general conference at Pfutsero from 27–29 April, 2011, put out a conciliatory statement. The former NSF president and convener of the conference Achumbemo Kikon said, “Naga political issues are pending without a concrete solution. We have to build a better relationship with our neighbours to bring out solution.” He acknowledged that in course of the Naga struggle, our neighbours might have been hurt unintentionally.⁴⁹ In a significant move at reconciliation, NSF invited the All Manipur Students Union and All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union to participate in the event.

Civil society groups working in Nagaland or Manipur reflect the interests of their own ethnic group and are partisan. They have shown no sensitivity towards the persecution of the non-tribals in the town of Dimapur. Moreover, although, it is the same Baptist Church all over the Northeast, church leaders represent their specific ethnic constituency. In times of crisis, civil society initiatives at dialogue between the ethnic or nationality groups or across states are sadly missing. Unless there is a proactive civil society which is able to rise above narrow sectarian interests, partisanship will continue.

Emergence of New Autonomy Movements

Demands for autonomy from smaller tribes who rejected the hegemony of the bigger tribes have been common within the Naga

movement. Interestingly whenever any peace negotiations with the bigger groups are initiated such autonomy movements surfaced.

Zeliangrong Autonomy: The first to resist NNC hegemony and demand separate statehood were the Zeliangrong Nagas. The Zeliangrong was not a single tribe but incorporated such tribes as the Rongmei, Liangmei and Zemei which were related through kinship ties, traditions and territorial proximity. Colonial interruption had dispersed them in the different political units of Assam, Manipur and Naga Hills state. The major Naga tribes had looked down upon these numerically small and timid groups, often raiding their areas and demanding their produce. They were not included in the Naga movement in Independent India.

On 15 February 1947, the leaders of these three tribes met at a Kabui Naga village in Manipur and announced the merger of the tribes to form a new single political identity. Its name Zeliangrong is constructed by joining Ze (Zemei), Liang (Liangmei) and Rong (Rongmei).⁵⁰ The Zeliangrong Council was formed by representatives of the respective tribes living in different parts of the Northeast. Bolstering the distinct identity construct of the Zeliangrong tribe was the inspirational association of Rani Gaidinliu and her steadfast resistance to conversion of Nagas to Christianity. Gaidinliu as a young Naga girl had led a strong millenarian uprising against the British in the 1930s. She was captured and jailed till independent India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru released her in 1947. Her opposition to conversion to Christianity isolated the Zeliangrong Nagas and prevented them from supporting the self-determination movement of the Naga Hills, as a majority of the Nagas were already Christians. She demanded a separate territorial unit for the Zeliangrong tribes.

Being a Naga, Gaidinliu did not support the NNC's secessionist demand, nor oppose it. But her closeness to the Indian state and her hostility to large-scale conversion of the Naga tribes into Christianity was well known. The Naga elite criticized her for holding back the progress of the Naga community and its liberation struggle. Her demand for the constitution of the Zeliangrong areas into an autonomous state was seen as a conspiracy to divide and weaken the Naga liberation

struggle. She was accused of acting like an agent of India. As her life was threatened and the State government refused to provide her security, she went underground, once again with her followers. Theirs was a parallel movement to the underground Naga move. Just as the NNC formed the Naga Federal government in exile, she formed an underground government for the Zeliangrong tribal state. It was not specified whether it was to be within India or a sovereign state. The army of Gaidinliu met with strong opposition from the rival Federal Naga Army. On 14 October 1964 she submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India, Lal Bahadur Shastri demanding an autonomous state for her people.

Meanwhile in the jungles, there were frequent clashes between the underground forces of the federal group and Gaidinliu's army. The local administration was aware that Gaidinliu's underground movement was within the framework of Indian constitution and did not really cause any law and order concern. But clashes between the two rival factions were endangering the civilian population. In a move to bring Gaidinliu group overground, on 16 January 1966, a peace agreement was signed. Gaidinliu came overground from her jungle hideout after six years and surrendered to the authorities. Dinesh Singh, then the Minister of State for External Affairs told Parliament that the constitution of a single administrative unit was under active consideration. The underground Nagas denounced these talks with the Zeliangrongs as a divide-and-rule ploy of the administration.

Eventually, in 1972 when new states and autonomous districts were created in the Northeastern region, Zeliangrong aspirations were ignored. Gaidinliu felt betrayed. In 1977, when the Janata Party was in power she appealed to the then Prime Minister Morarji Desai for a Zeliangrong state. Holding aloft the promise of statehood, the Hindu elements in the government used her to get her support to pass the Freedom of Religion bill in Arunachal Pradesh in 1979, which made her a target of all the Christian tribals. On 26 January 1982, Gaidinliu was conferred Padma Bhushan. The Congress was back in power. Reports of Indira Gandhi favourably considering a separate Zeliangrong district, prompted the Manipur state administration to launch a vehement protest.

Eastern Naga Frontier State: The demand of eastern Nagas for autonomy followed the ceasefire and peace initiative of 1997. The eastern Naga tribes decided to separate from the ongoing Naga struggle and fight for a federal state for themselves within the Indian Union. The call for a Frontier Nagaland state was given by the Eastern Nagaland Peoples Organisation (ENPO) comprising tribes like the Sangtam, Chang, Konyak, Yimchungur, Phom and Khamniungan. It comprised a population of nine lakhs and included 60% of the Khamniungans and over 30% of the Konyaks living in Myanmar and Arunachal Pradesh. Hence it would include parts of Nagaland, Manipur and Changlang and Tirap districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Currently of the 60 Assembly seats in Nagaland, there are 20 legislators from four backward districts of Kiphire, Longleng, Mon and Tuensang. The organization organized a series of rallies in the four backward districts to press for the separate state and submitted a memorandum to the Union government in November 2010.⁵¹

At a rally in Kiphire, ENPO Vice President Ynglam Konyak said that although the Constitution had made special provisions for the area, successive governments in Nagaland had not heeded them, resulting in the backwardness of the area.⁵² The people of the eastern Naga areas had been discriminated against by the governments of Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh in development, job reservation and education. In particular the “elite tribes” who had taken power in Nagaland had ignored these indigenous people. The difference between the economically and educationally backward areas shows up in the literacy rates—35% as opposed to 80% in Kohima.

The then state Congress president S.I. Jamir, called upon the ENPO to reconsider its demand at a time when all Nagas were willing to reconcile and unite for a solution to the political conflict. But the eastern Nagas were firm on their stand. According to the ENPO, some concerned citizen had admitted that the demand was genuine, for a separate Frontier Nagaland state had weakened the Naga peace process. ENPO clarified, it had never stood against any group or hindered the peace process.⁵³ The state government immediately tried to pacify the eastern Nagas and devised a plan to reserve 25% of all categories of posts, both gazetted and non-gazetted, for persons

belonging to six tribes of the four backward districts of the state with immediate effect.⁵⁴

Alternative Arrangement: The southern Nagas or the Manipuri Nagas in 2010 represented by the United Naga Council of Manipur (UNCM) demanded an “alternative arrangement” within the Indian constitution as they no longer wanted to remain with the communal government in Imphal. The UNCM, an apex body of the Nagas in Manipur raised the demand after the Okram Ibobi Singh government foiled the attempt by Muivah to enter Manipur through Mao gate on 6 May 2010 and the subsequent death of two students in police firing at Mao gate.

Subsequently, the Naga civil society organizations severed all ties with the Manipur government. An association called the Committee for Alternative Arrangement was constituted to discuss with the Centre an alternative administrative arrangement that would make the Nagas of Manipur autonomous outside the purview of Manipur state administration. The NSCN(IM) was hostile to this demand as it weakened the demand for Naga Integration.⁵⁵ Most likely it would persuade the centre to counter the NSCN(IM).⁵⁶

It was reported that every villager chief from 680 villages in the eastern Nagaland had signed the memorandum demanding the new state which could easily counter NSCN (IM)’s argument that every Naga is supportive of his demand for *Nagalim*.⁵⁷

Non-tribals & the Minority Question

When the author asked the leaders of the Naga movement about the minority question in Nagaland, they replied that there are no minorities in Nagaland. The so-called non-tribals are Indians. When asked about the non-Naga tribes the reply was that there are no non-Naga tribes in Nagaland. To talk of non-Nagas and minorities in Nagaland is seen as jeopardizing the peace process. But my argument was in a peace process the question of minorities and non-Nagas have to be discussed and resolved.

The prospect of ceasefire and an autonomous Nagaland outside India is of great concern to non-Naga tribes and minorities who live in the state. The underground organizations are completely silent on the issue of their future. The NSCN(IM) has declared Nagaland's state religion as Christian. Although silent on minority issues, it has said that practice of other religions would be allowed. At the same time it wanted to "defend Nagaland's independent existence" and the domination of Hinduism. It also proposed Nagaland to be a "socialist" society. The Naga outfits work for the integration of all Naga inhabited areas, but are silent about returning Dimapur to the Dimasas which is their ancient capital.

There is a sizeable Nepali population in Nagaland. They were former British soldiers who were settled in the area by the British. They were used by the colonial government for expeditions against the tribes. In Mokokchung and Mon districts of Nagaland, a large section of these soldiers were settled. In Mon and Ao areas of Nagaland they were adopted as members of the tribal communities where they were earlier counted as legally indigenous people. Some of the Naga leaders are heavily dependent on the Nepali voters during elections. In fact quite a few Nepalis had joined the Naga underground outfit (NNC) to fight the Indian state. These Nepalis have been facing eviction and persecution in recent times. These settlers are worried about their future.

In Nagaland interestingly, another significant minority are the Bengali (Bangladeshi?) Muslims. Their percentage has increased from 0.14% in 1901 to 1.71% in 1991. These apprehensions have been further reinforced by the fact that, as the Census 2001 records, the population of Muslims in the state has more than trebled in the past decade, from 20,642 in 1991 to more than 75,000 in 2001. Illegal migrants are widely believed to account for an overwhelming proportion of this recorded increase. It is suspected that a large chunk of them are Bangladeshi infiltrators who are now citizens of Nagaland. Nagaland does not share a direct land border with Bangladesh, but illegal migrants are infiltrating into the state from Assam, with which Nagaland shares a nearly 500-kilometre-long land border. Areas around Dimapur town and the foothills along the Assam–Nagaland border have emerged as

the prime entry points for migrants. The very cosmopolitan nature of the Dimapur area makes detection of illegal migrants a difficult task. Worse, the illegal migrants are also in possession of valid official documents like ration cards and voter identity cards procured from the states of Assam or West Bengal, where these are available for a small bribe. The fact that Dimapur town and its surrounding areas are not covered under the Inner Line Permit (ILP) system, which prohibits all non-Naga outsiders (including Indian citizens) to settle in the area, is exploited by the immigrants. Bangladeshis, providing cheap labour, have become the preferred option, rather than the relatively expensive and inadequate pool of local workers.

Estimates of the numbers of illegal migrants staying in Nagaland vary between 75,000 and 300,000. These estimates underscore the magnitude of the crisis in this tiny state, which has a total population of barely two million. The Dimapur area alone is believed to have more than 100,000 illegal migrants. Way back in February 1999, the former Nagaland Chief Minister S.C. Jamir said that there were about 60,000 Bangladeshis illegally staying in Dimapur. The NSCN (IM) at one point wanted to take steps to check the influx. They decided to register the shops and business establishments owned by non-tribals, and to issue identity cards to all non-Nagas residing in Naga inhabited areas.⁵⁸ Non-Nagas now have to carry at least four identity cards—from student organisations, the administration and two Naga outfits NSCN (IM) and NSCN-K. The Naga organizations also asked the centre to scrap the Indo Nepal Treaty of 1952 to stop the influx from Nepal to Northeastern states. The cadres of these outfits have begun to extort money from shops and business establishments in the form of tax and donations.

The social impact of the illegal migration of Bangladeshi Muslims is reflected in the emergence of a new tribe called Semiya or Sumias. Marriage with Naga girls, has produced several thousand such Sumias. The concentration of the Semiyas is the highest in Dimapur and Kohima districts. According to a Dimapur-based newspaper, on any Muslim religious day at least half of the shops in Kohima and some 75% in Dimapur remain closed. A recent survey conducted by the state directorate of Agriculture showed that 71.73% of the total business

establishments are being controlled and run by non-locals. Out of the 23,777 numbers of shops in the state, the local people own only 6,722 shops (that is 28.27%).

The impact of Bangladeshi migrants is also visible in the unstable demographic profile of the state. With a population of 19,88,636 in the Census of 2001, Nagaland recorded the highest rate of population growth in India, from 56.08% in 1981–1991 to 64.41% in the decade, 1991–2001. Worried over such developments the NSF has sought to impose restrictions on Naga girls marrying illegal migrants. In addition NSCN-K tried to introduce a regulatory system called the Temporary Resident Permit (TRP) to Bangladeshi nationals. Under the new system, the number of these migrants would be restricted to 2,500 in each district in the state. The TRP would be renewed annually. There is a constant complaint that the non-Nagas are taking away all the jobs and opportunities in Nagaland. As a result the government appointed a commission of enquiry in 2007.⁵⁹

Excluding the Women

The Naga women have not only suffered tremendously in the 60 years of turbulence, they were also a major player in peace negotiations. The best known women peace workers in Northeast India belong to the NMA. It was formed on 14 February, 1984 as a welfare organization, but in the 1990s it adopted as its motto “*shed no more blood*”. The Mothers mediated between the Indian state and the NSCN (IM) to facilitate a ceasefire from 1997. The Naga Womens Union of Manipur collaborated with the NMA in ushering peace in Naga inhabited areas of Manipur.

Unfortunately, the Naga women did not find inclusion in the shaping of the prospective Naga polity. The patriarchal orientation of Naga society excluded the Naga women from public life. This exclusion begins at the village councils which make all the important economic, social and political decisions. The village Council Act on paper mandates one-third representation for women. But barring some tribes, most village councils are exclusive male bastions. To contest elections to these seats, women have to take permission from the Councils, which

are generally prompt to veto the proposal. In fact Nagaland is one of those Indian states where gender biases are most visible. Apart from regular agricultural works and domestic chores that even highly educated and employed women are expected to perform, the women earn a living by weaving and producing exquisite art and craft. The income generated goes to the family coffer and in most cases is used to support the education of the children. Families make tremendous sacrifices to educate their offspring. Sadly in the case of girls, the Naga society still expects them to come back from school and tend to the household chores. What is most restricting for Naga women are the customary laws which are strongly embedded in the tradition of patriarchy. They do not enjoy property rights and divorced woman usually has no rights to keep or bring up children even if the divorce was not her fault or she is perfectly capable of looking after the kids.

The cultural assimilation to Christianity instead of elevating their position has actually strengthened the bias against them. The state government refused to set up the mandatory state's women commission stating the situation in the state did not warrant setting up of the commission at the state level as "Nagaland is predominantly a tribal state where women in general enjoy a fair amount of equality with men and do not suffer sever disabilities and discrimination on grounds of sex".⁶⁰ The women's organization in the state strongly condemned the statement. Rosemary Dzuwichu, an "expert" from Nagaland in the National Commission for Women, stated that contrary to the government's claim of the high status of women, there were scores of cases of atrocities against Naga women and domestic violence was common. She accused the policy makers of being gender insensitive. She challenged the government's alibi of paucity of funds for deficiencies in the protection of women when it could spend crores on everything else.⁶¹ Nagaland and Manipur are two states where there is not a single woman representative in the Nagaland State Assembly, and these are states where women's organizations are said to be the strongest.

Emboldened by their entry into active politics, which was encouraged by the men folk, albeit in the field of peace work and social welfare, the Naga women desired to participate in state politics. Initially leading women members appealed to various village councils

and political parties to nominate women as representatives to the State. But their appeal fell on deaf ears and were brushed aside or trivialized. The political parties would have to drop a male member to nominate a woman, and that they were not willing to do so. A group of Naga women decided to take the initiative and organized themselves into a non-governmental organization called *The Initiators*. It included a leading women journalist, Monaliza Changkija, educationist Rosemary Dzuwichu, Akali Sema, Ayangla Longkumer, V. Soho and Rozelle Mezo. The group resolved to take matters in their own hand and claim public power:

Over the past couple of decades, Naga women have been making repeated pleas to our men to give scope and make space for Naga women in the decision making process. The system that exists today is biased, discriminatory, obsolete and inimical to welfare, uplift, development and progress of our society and State. Unfortunately our men see our pleas as a threat to what they believe to be their sole prerogative (or is it divine rights?) to acquire and retain political power. Having traversed not only across time since the days of our forefathers but also having achieved a level of progress much superior than our men's in all fields of human endeavor, Naga women have decided that the time has come to stop pleading for but to work and earn it.⁶²

On 8 March 2004, International Women's Day, the group resolved to field two female candidates for the upcoming May elections for Nagaland's lone Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha seats. This would be a "start" as "*the Naga women are well aware that it would take a very long time for our state Assembly, a male bastion to resolve to legislate women friendly acts and laws, especially power sharing.*"⁶³ They decided to contest as independents.⁶⁴ Prof Akali Sema of Nagaland University was put up by the group to contest the Rajya Sabha seat. But the all male electoral collegiate of Naga legislators refused to propose her name.⁶⁵

The condescending attitude of Naga elite was evident in the disparaging comment of P. Shimray of NSCN (IM), "*Women are still to prove themselves worth of such offices. We do have a women's*

wing. Women campaign for our cause. But yet they are not in a decision making position because we have not come across women competent enough to be in these positions."⁶⁶ No wonder that the official chronicle of the Naga peace movement compiled by the Naga Peoples Human Right Movement does not refer to the contribution of NMA in its publication.⁶⁷ Observing the duplicity of the Naga men, Monobina Gupta in the *Telegraph* wrote "On the one hand Naga patriarchy boasted of its militant women and on the other kept them on a leash in order to preserve the male domination—one way to retain its exclusive hold over institutions that decided that fate of people."⁶⁸ The excuse given is women are not yet capable enough to handle decision-making offices. But if there was no faith in the capabilities of women why were they co-opted in the peace initiative. The answer lies in the fact that peace work is not considered "politics" by the patriarchy. Women's organizations are considered part of "a-political" civil society. It is not only the male leadership but women's organizations also believe that peace-making is not politics.

Since independence the only Naga woman to make it to the Lok Sabha was Rano Saiza in the post-Emergency Janata Dal period. But she was from Manipur. Since its first state election in 1964 there were no women in the Nagaland assembly. In the 2013 assembly polls too it is the same story. Two women contested the election—Rakhila Lakhiumong was given a ticket by the non-existent party in the state BJP and Yangerla who contested as independent. Widow of former minister A. Lakhiumong, this was not the first time Rakhila has mustered up the courage to contest elections. In 2008 she contested as an NCP candidate but narrowly lost to the Congress. She commented, "I need to do this for all Naga women. The men don't think we are good enough to sit next to them in the Assembly and its up to us to prove them wrong."⁶⁹ The feeling of alienation was so deep that she wants the other women candidate Yangrela too to win the election. A doctor by profession, Yangrela was the former director of health and family welfare services. Strangely, the NMA which went to the Court demanding 33% reservation for women in the Municipal elections of Nagaland did not come out to support the two female candidates. When asked, NMA Secretary Kheseli Z. Chishi said on February 2013, that the NMA has their own policy and one should wait for the

results of the election before hastening to any conclusion. In other words the defeat of the female candidates was anticipated which is why they were not supported. But the actual election participation showed that female voters in Nagaland surpassed the male voter percentage in the 2013 election. In the 59 assembly segments in the state which registered a total of polling percentage of 90.51%, the polling percentage of male voters was 89.82% while it was 91.22% for the female voters. Of the total 11,71,335 electorates there were 5,81,782 male voters and the rest were females in Nagaland.⁷⁰

The woman journalist Monalisa Changkhija actually found the Nagaland Peoples Front (NPF) manifesto humorous where it promised a better deal for Naga women. Coming from a party that actually strives to keep women chained to traditional domestic roles and not allow them any space for political participation this really “was a bad joke and an insult” wrote Rosemary Dzumichu, professor of Nagaland University and a women activist. In fact the other political formation the N. Rio-led Democratic Alliance of Nagaland when in power had set up a women’s development department where it proposed to perpetuate women’s role in stitching, knitting and cooking.⁷¹ In Meghalaya election of 2013, on the questions of fewer women being fielded as contestants for the assembly membership, the political parties replied that women are not interested in contesting polls as is evident from the lack of interest in applying for party tickets. In this matrilineal structure there are so far 15 candidates out of the 350 odd candidates.⁷² Most women are however *crorepatis*.⁷³

Even in the case of women’s peace work, the women organizations had no say in decision-making and were kept on the fringe. NMA and NWUM, when asked about their role during the strategic meetings with the I-M leaders in Bangkok, “*In reply they gave a wry smile and say we only speak to the leadership after consultation between men is over.*”⁷⁴ Similarly when Muivah and Swu of the NSCN (IM) visited Delhi for the first peace confabulations there were no I-M women representatives with them. The only role of women during this high level discussion was back at home in Nagaland where they were made to blow hundreds of balloons and hang them as decorative festoons.⁷⁵ Is women’s peace work mere decoration to the peace negotiation like this balloon-blowing and festoon making? In a



devastating revelation 74% of the Naga women in our survey said the ceasefire had effectively stopped physical violence but 69% said it did not significantly halt sexual violence.

Women are not included in the influential Naga Hoho. *“It is too early to include women now. We have to tread carefully because the peace process is very fragile and the Hoho itself is a body that has just emerged,”*⁷⁶ explained a veteran Naga Hoho member. It brings into question the value of the Naga women’s organizations in fostering peace. There are exceptions too. The Naga Hoho secretary Keviletvo Kiewho felt women should be allowed to extend their role into policy-framing and decision-making. But the then NMA Secretary Kheseli Z. Chishi, was diffident about women being overtly political. She reiterated, women ventured into peace work largely as suffering mothers. Decision-making was outside their purview.⁷⁷ Was this an example of internalizing the male gaze or a tactical ambivalence?

The Present Situation

There was a record turn-out of about 83% voters in the 2013 state elections. The N. Rio-led NPF came back to power with absolute majority bagging 37 seats out of the 60 seats. This time two female candidates also contested election though they both lost it. Asked about the political implication of such a record turn-out in an ‘Indian’ poll, the Naga ideologues said participation in election is a way of “staying alive”. Nagas had boycotted twice, in 1952 and 1998. It did not elicit any response from the Indian government. For most Nagas sovereignty is still a dream. But the leadership recognizes that its meaning has changed over the generations. What sovereignty meant to the generation of Phizo did not mean the same to Muivah and Swu. Similarly the present generation who are exposed to a new globalized world it means different things. They are in a world where corporate capitalism has broken the barriers of the whole world and the nation-state is a disintegrating concept. They have experienced different democratic processes and different political ideas. Today’s political realities are different and hence the Naga leadership is open to adjustment and accommodation of these new realities and new political ideas.

Nagas realize that they cannot live alone or antagonize all their neighbours. They have to live with their them. This realization had come within the first four-and-half years of challenges that the peace process faced. The Indian government back-tracked on several of its promises. For example, it agreed that Naga history is unique. It was a diplomatic wording of the recognition that Nagas were not a part of India before the British and hence they have the right to be sovereign once the British left Nagaland. The government also agreed to use the word Indo-Naga talks—as was generally done for any bilateral negotiation between two sovereign countries. But in practice India continued to use and treat the Nagas as one of the rebel constituents of the Union. It agreed that the talks would be at the highest level, meaning Prime Ministerial level. That was rather naïve of the NSCN. They should have known that PMs never take part in such negotiations. These are left to officials. Only when the signing has to be done at the last stage, the PM would be involved. But in practice the NSCN leaders had to meet lower level bureaucrats and at the most just the home minister and interlocutors. The talks were to be held in a third country but after the first two rounds, the NSCN leaders were asked to come over to Delhi for the negotiations. This was done exactly when the Indian state realized that if the NSCN leaders withdrew from negotiations, there would be a backlash in the Naga home state. It was agreed that NSCN(IM) would be the only group with whom the government of India would talk but subsequently it started to discuss with all Naga factions like NSCN-K. In fact the Indian government soon found another way of delaying discussion and decisions. It insisted that Nagas should be united and speak in one voice before any decision is taken. At the same time it was talking and signing ceasefire agreements with different Naga factions. Like any other community Naga society is also stratified. In the last 60 years the Indian polity has divided the Nagas further by identifying them as moderates and extremists, Underground Nagas and overground Nagas.

The Naga leadership has agreed that it had a lot of faith on the Church which is why they had invested on the various Naga churches to unify the different tribes and help resolve the Naga problem. But church, a religious institution indeed failed to tackle political issues. It did not succeed in the role assigned to it. It not only failed to bring

factions together, it even failed to stop the factional violence. Same goes for the the Naga Hoho. The Naga Hoho was a product of the ceasefire. It was organized as an apex body to bring in different Naga voices and halt inter-tribal hostilities. It existed before the ceasefire but had just a social role. It was given a greater role after the ceasefire. It was hoped that like the church, it would lead the peace initiative within the Naga community. The Hoho was to be the apex body of the Nagas, with the clearly defined task of bringing the factions, groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) together under one umbrella and speak in one voice. But after the initial success, Hoho's authority and power was undermined by different Naga bodies who refused to accept the authority of the Hoho.. However as long as the Hoho had its supreme voice, the Naga peace process proceeded smoothly. In 1998 it gave a call to all political parties to boycott the state elections. Responding to this call most of the political parties boycotted the election. Taking this opportunity the Congress contested the election and formed the government under the leadership of S.C. Jamir. The next election was due on 2003 in which the Hoho gave a call to dislodge the Congress party from power. A new political front called NPF was formed under the leadership of N. Rio. It was sponsored by the Hoho. The Rio government came to power with a huge margin. It was seen as a Naga party against the Congress which was seen as an Indian party. The new government was pro-Hoho, pro-people and pro-nationalist front in power in Nagaland. It not only acted as a facilitator of the peace negotiations but often acted as pro-NSCN (IM). This angered other underground Naga factions which weakened the Hoho as it supported the Rio government. But in its 10 years of power the Rio regime degenerated into a corrupt government where not just the ministers but the bureaucracy, officials, lower grade personnel and contractors were thoroughly corrupt. The last hope of the Nagas disappeared with the degeneration of the Rio Government. As a counter to the Naga Hoho a new organization named Naga Tribal Council (NTC) was formed with the declared objective of promoting, protecting and preserving the social fabric and cultural heritage of the people and to foster a sense of unity, fraternity and brotherhood among the Naga tribes of Nagaland. The Naga Hoho criticized the formation of NTC as premature and inappropriate in a juncture when the Nagas "are struggling for social and political fraternity".⁷⁸ NTC countered it

saying its formation does not supersede and substitute the existing organizations and civil societies but only strengthens them.

Conclusion

The Naga-Indian state imbroglio had several phases. There were peace initiatives by the Naga civil society earlier too which resulted in the grant of Nagaland state with special provisions. From 1964 there were a ceasefire, an accord signed in 1975 and then another ceasefire from 1997. It can be observed from various phases of the Naga struggle that the struggle period actually resulted in the unification/reunification and consolidation of the Naga identity even though there were factional fights among the underground outfits. It is in this period that a pan-Naga sentiment worked strongly. In a SAFHR survey 47% of the Nagas felt that they identify more with the ethnic identity than national, 32% would go by both national and ethnic identity and only 17% of the Nagas identified with the national (Indian) identity. Among women 61% identified more with their ethnic identity than the national identity.

Peace processes have always divided the Nagas. In the 1960s, it divided the Nagas into those who wanted to have a state and settle down to a peaceful life while the others opposed it. In 1975 the Shillong Accord raised a lot of hope, brought a large number of underground workers over ground but also resulted in the formation of NSCN. The 1997 ceasefire again unified the Nagas again towards a final agreement. But the prolonged ceasefire not only brought all the Naga factions into the fold of ceasefire but also increased their factional fight. Each group wanted to establish their hegemony over the other. The competition for arms and propensity to violence increased. On the one hand, there was a desire for the integration of Naga areas and on the other hand there were demands for autonomy from within the Naga groups. There were attempts to partition other states and include their areas into the proposed Nagalim while other states and ethnic groups led a strong resistance to such a proposal. There are armed groups moving around freely and levying taxes and extorting people. There are regular fratricidal wars and casualties which has a demoralizing effect on the people. The Nagas are gradually losing their hope on the armed groups.



The SAFHR survey showed that support for the armed groups during the struggle was 66% which has declined to 33% over the years. A unified Naga voice is still a far cry. On the one hand the negotiations are not transparent and on the other hand there is endless wait for a result. The Nagas are in the midst of the most serious crisis of their lives. In the last 60 years, the present phase of peace initiative has been the most serious which almost assured a lasting resolution to the vexed Naga problem. Instead it has resulted in dangerous portents, generating new cycles of conflict and violence which is encompassing and extending to newer areas. These fresh areas of conflict and new factionalism are threatening to vitiate the peace process once again. Both the Nagas and the Indian state seem to be looking for a perfect “peace” solution which continues to evade them. It is like the proverbial “*blue bird*” that does not exist.

Notes

¹ *The Sentinel*, 25 October 1996.

² *The Sentinel*, 5 March 1997.

³ *The Sentinel*, 26 May 1997. The main fight was between the Khaplang and Muivah-Swu faction. Khaplang was a Myanmarese Naga while Isaac Swu was a Sema and Muivah was a Tangkhul. The bulk of the cadres were Konyaks. In 1988 the Konyaks murdered 88 Tsngkhuls leading to the separation of the Khaplang and Muivah faction.

⁴ *The Sentinel*, 18 February 1997.

⁵ 'Seize and fire slur cast on Assam Rifles', *The Morung Express*, Dimapur, 15 March 2011, p. 5.

⁶ 'Naga Hoho demand political prisoners release', *The Morung Express*, Dimapur, 10 March 2011, p. 1.

⁷ *Proposal for Civil Society Audit of the Indo Naga Peace Process, Kohima, 2009.*

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Karunamay Subudhi, 'Structure, Processes and Conflict Discourses: Problems and prospect of conflict-resolution and peace building with a focus on North-East Region'. Presanjit Biswas & C. J. Thomas, *Peace in India's North-East*, New Delhi, Regency Publication, 2009, p. 34.

¹⁰ 'Sitting Around the Fire', *The Morung Express*, Dimapur, 29 March 2011, p. 1.

¹¹ 'Challenge to Naga talks', *North East Sun*, 1–4 December 2001.

¹² *The Sentinel*, Guwahati and Silchar, 23 April 2011, p. 3.

¹³ 'Naga Talks back on track', *North East Sun*, 31 March 2010, pp. 14–15.

¹⁴ 'Hopes High, Destiny beckons', *North East Sun*, 15 February 2011, pp. 16–17.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ 'NSCN groups in tax war', *The Telegraph*, Guwahati, 2 July 2011, p. 15.

¹⁷ Reported in *The Telegraph*, Guwahati, 18 April 2011, p. 17.

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- ¹⁹ *The Sentinel*, Guwahati and Silchar, 28 July 2011.
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- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ *Assam Times*, 4 June 2008.
- ²⁵ *North East Sun*, vol. 8, no. 12, 15–31 January 2003.
- ²⁶ *The Telegraph*, Guwahati, 17 June 2010.
- ²⁷ Bela Bhatia, 'Justice denied to tribal of the hill districts of Manipur', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. xlv, no. 31, 31 July 2010, pp. 38–46.
- ²⁸ R.K. Ranjit Singh, *op.cit.*
- ²⁹ T.T. Haokip, 'Ethnic Conflicts and Internal Displacement in Manipur', in C.J. Thomas (ed.) *Dimensions of Displacement in North East India*, New Delhi, Regency Publication, 2002, pp. 221–240.
- ³⁰ R.C. Ranajit and Ananda Charan Bhagabati, 'The Monsang of Manipur: A Preliminary Report on Identity Orientation', *The Bulletin of the Department of Anthropology*, Dibrugarh University, vol. 9, 1982, pp. 67–85.
- ³¹ Jaideep Saikia, 'Prolegomena: Quest for a proximate frontier' in his (ed.) *Frontier in Flames: North East India in Turmoil*, New Delhi, Viking-Penguin, 2007, p. xxi.
- ³² For a discussion on this theme, see my *Contesting Marginality, Ethnicity, Insurgency and Subnationalism in North East India*, New Delhi, Manohar, 2002, pp. 296–312.
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- ⁴³ Ibid.
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- ⁴⁹ Reported in *The Telegraph*, Guwahati, 18 April 2011, p. 17.
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⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ News report in *The Telegraph*, North East Section, Guwahati, 14 June 2011, p. 17.

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⁶¹ Cited in *ibid.*

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⁶³ Ibid.

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⁶⁷ 'Naga Peoples Human Right Movement', *Naga Resistance and Peace Movement*, New Delhi, 2002.

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