

IDSAs

Policy Brief

The Naga Peace Accord: Manipur Connections

Sushil Kumar Sharma

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Summary

NSCN(IM) cadres in Taken Note Of camps in Manipur should also be rehabilitated along with its cadres in Nagaland, and these camps should be closed as per the guidelines of the peace accord. Other Naga groups active in Manipur need to be engaged and given the option of joining the peace process. And the Autonomous District Councils in Manipur need to be brought under the purview of the Sixth Schedule so as to make them effective.

A framework agreement was signed between the National Socialist Council of Nagalim-Isak-Muivah [NSCN(IM)] and the Government of India on August 3, 2015. The leadership of NSCN(IM) has shown flexibility and realism in terms of its willingness to alter goals from complete sovereignty and Greater Nagalim to acceptance of the constitutional framework, albeit with a provision for the grant of greater autonomy to the Naga inhabited areas outside of Nagaland through the establishment of autonomous district councils.¹ The response to the accord has been guarded in that no celebration has been observed in Nagaland. However, the Nagas in Manipur have welcomed the peace accord.

The Government of India had signed a ceasefire agreement with NSCN(IM) on July 25, 1997, which came into effect on August 1, 1997. The cease-fire in Nagaland had political implications in Manipur, particularly to the insurgency in that state. The demand of Greater Nagaland by the NSCN(IM) had created a political storm in the region particularly in the states of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. On June 14, 2001, the Union government had decided to extend the ceasefire with the NSCN(IM) 'without territorial limits' to all Naga-dominated areas in the North East. This decision was perceived as threatening the territorial integrity of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh, by the people of these states. This resulted in widespread violent protests against this ceasefire extension, especially in the Meitei-dominated areas of Manipur on 18 June 2001 and following days in which 18 people lost their lives. This day is now remembered as the 'Great Uprising Day'. Faced with violent protests in Manipur, the Union government, on July 27, 2001, reverted to the original ceasefire ground rules with the NSCN(IM).²

The people of Manipur feared that the Government of India may accede to the NSCN(IM) demand of 'Greater Nagalim', which would result in the redrawing of the inter-state boundary, with the Naga-dominated districts going to Nagaland. While this fear probably has been dispelled with the signing of the framework agreement with NSCN(IM), it is important to understand the connections of this accord to Manipur for possible policy interventions.

Factors that need Consideration

Topography

Manipur's boundary runs along Myanmar in the east and south, Nagaland in the north, Cachar (Assam) in the west and Mizoram in the south-west. The impact of insurgencies in these neighbouring states and the interplay of measures being implemented in other states with the steps undertaken in Manipur are relevant factors that need consideration.

The Manipur valley, in the middle of the state, is surrounded by hill ranges in circles. Manipur is divided into the valley (Imphal Valley) and hills. Due to rugged terrain and poor connectivity, the hills are at a lower standard of development than

¹ M. R. Biju, "The Naga Peace Accord 2015: A Step in the Right Direction," *Mainstream*, 31 August 2015, <http://www.mainstreamweekly.net/article5902.html>, (Accessed on December, 09, 2015).

² SATP, "Manipur Assessment 2001," http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/manipur/assessment_2001.htm (Accessed on December, 16, 2015).

the valley. Four hill districts of Manipur, viz., Ukhrul, Tamenglong, Senapati and Chandel, form part of Nagalim as demanded by NSCN(IM). Fear that these areas may eventually be amalgamated with Nagaland is one of the reasons for the sustenance of insurgency in Manipur.

Demography

The Manipur valley is home to more than two-thirds of the state's population, i.e., the Meiteis, including Muslims and Pangals. The surrounding hills are inhabited by Nagas, Kukis and other ethnic groups. Nagas form the second largest community after Meiteis in Manipur. They constitute approximately 22 per cent of the state's population. The important Naga tribes in Manipur are Tangkhul, Mao, Zeliangrong, Anal and Maring. Other sub-tribes in Manipur with lesser representation include Maram, Moyon, Monsong, Koirao, Lamgang and Chiru. Demographic and geographic divide between the valley and hill areas is primarily between the Meiteis and Nagas. This has resulted in three movements of ethno-nationalism, i.e., the Meitei nationalist movement, the fallout of Naga national movement in Manipur, and the Kuki problem. The majority of the leadership of the NSCN(IM), including General Secretary Thuingaleng Muivah, is from Manipur. Trans-border tribal affiliation and its impact on the political and social fabric of the state is the most important issue given its adverse ramification on the polity of Manipur, the most obvious being the Nagalim issue centred in Nagaland with its impact in the hills of Manipur.

Naga Insurgency in Manipur

Background

The Nagas of Manipur were neither a signatory to the memorandum submitted by the Naga Club to the Simon Commission nor did they take part in Phizo's plebiscite of 1951 on the question of Naga independence. Moreover, they were not included in the proposed idea of 'unified Nagaland' as demanded by the Naga Peoples' Convention (NPC) in 1957. However, the demand for the unification of Naga-inhabited areas in Manipur was brought into sharp focus following the establishment, and ascendance to hegemony, of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and subsequently NSCN(IM). The Naga insurgency in Manipur is now therefore an extension of the insurgency in Nagaland. NSCN(IM) has been active in the Naga areas of Manipur. After the 1997 ceasefire agreement, three NSCN(IM) camps, one each in Senapati, Tamenglong and Chandel districts, were established in Manipur. These camps are known as "Camps Taken Note Of". Cadres of these camps are actively involved in taxation, extortion and other illegal activities.

NSCN(IM) Camps Taken Note Of (TNO)

Consequent to the 1997 ceasefire, the NSCN(IM) suspended its armed activities and its cadres moved to designated camps in Nagaland and to "Camps Taken Note Of" in Manipur. The legitimacy and implementation of the ceasefire with NSCN(IM) in Manipur is restricted to the three "Taken Note of Camps" in Manipur, i.e., Oklong, Bunning and Chandel Camps. The point to note is that, though the Manipur Government does not recognize these camps, the fact remains that these camps

have been in existence in Manipur since 1997 and the Ceasefire Ground Rules are being followed as in the case of Nagaland. There are approximately 500 NSCN(IM) cadres in these camps.

Zeliangrong United Front (ZUF)

A new underground Naga group named as Zeliangrong United Front (ZUF) was formed in February 2011 in Khopum Valley with 15 to 20 defected cadres of NSCN(IM). These were later joined by defected cadre of NSCN(K) and NNC, including civil wing cadres. The aim behind the formation of this group was to defend Zeliangrong land, forest resources, culture, traditional values, history and customary traditions. ZUF is slowly and steadily spreading its wings toward Jiribam, Nungba, Bishnupur and Tamenglong. The group predominantly comprises of Zeliangrong Nagas from Khopum valley and surrounding areas of Tamenglong District. ZUF ideology was conceived with a political motive to contain NSCN(IM) influence in Khopum Valley. The formal declaration of ZUF was made with an aim to gather maximum popular support from the entire Zeliangrong-inhabited areas of Assam, Manipur and Nagaland. It is important that this group is also considered during the process of finalising and implementing the Naga Peace Accord.

After the peace accord with the NSCN(IM), it has been reported that more than 30 ZUF cadres have defected to NSCN(IM) under the garb of homecoming. This defection occurred mainly been due to the feeling of a secure future under the NSCN (IM). The apprehension by security forces of self-styled chief of army of the ZUF, Jenchui Kamei alias Khanghiamngam, in Assam on 21 October 2015 has been another blow to the outfit. ZUF has been further marginalised in Tamenglong due to intense pressure exerted by the Security Forces. This is the ideal time to provide ZUF an opportunity to lay down arms and join the mainstream. Its cadres can also be rehabilitated along with those of the NSCN(IM) for larger peace in the region.

NSCN(K)

NSCN(K) is also active in Manipur, although it does not have any designated camp in that state. It operates in Tamenglong district along the border between Manipur and Assam, with an assessed strength of around 80 to 100 cadres. There are reports of the NSCN(K) operating in coordination with ZUF. After being declared a terrorist organization by the government, and a subsequent large scale manhunt by Security Forces, most of NSCN(K)'s cadres have run away or have defected to NSCN(R) or NSCN(IM).

Autonomous District Councils (ADCs)

The Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act, 1971 was passed by Parliament to provide for the establishment of Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) in the Hill Areas of the then Union Territory of Manipur. Unlike the ADCs created under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, the 1971 Act does not provide legislative and judicial powers to the said ADCs, but merely provides limited Administrative Powers under the pervasive control of the State Government. However, following strong opposition by tribal groups, who demanded that unless these councils were brought under the purview of the Sixth Schedule, no elections to these councils could be held, these councils were suspended for

more than two decades (1988 to 2010). Despite initial opposition from Naga and Kuki Civil Society Organizations, elections for the ADCs were held in 2010. These councils managed to function for five years, from 2010 to 2015. But most ADC members operated from Imphal and were consequently ineffective.³

Against this backdrop, district council elections were held in Manipur in June 2015. It was the most keenly contested council elections in the last 42 years. These were distinct from the previous elections not only because of the high voter turnout and the participation of an overwhelming number of independent candidates, but also because of the entry of the Nagaland People's Front (NPF) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for the first time in the electoral battle. The demand for bringing the ADCs in Manipur under the purview of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution continues, and there is logic in the demand since it is presently prevalent in the case of ADCs in Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura and Assam.

Policy Recommendations

Rehabilitation of NSCN(IM) Cadres in TNO Camps

NSCN(IM) cadres in TNO camps in Manipur should also be rehabilitated along with its cadres in Nagaland, and these camps should be closed as per the guidelines of the peace accord. While integrating these cadres, a holistic approach would have to be adopted involving the civil administration, the judiciary, the local police and socio-political bodies to ensure that the process of integration is sustainable and does not fail. The emphasis should be on a sincere and strong-willed approach. Global history has shown that insurgency has been eliminated only through complete disarmament of the insurgent groups and their absorption into the mainstream. The most important aspect of absorption is assured employment. The greatest hindrance to ceasefire is the surrendered cadres' fear of legal action. As a one-time measure, a general amnesty could be granted to these cadres. And the camps vacated by these cadres should be converted into Security Force posts to ensure protection of the locals.

Dealing with Other Naga Groups

It is important to engage other Naga groups active in Manipur while rehabilitating NSCN(IM). Otherwise, it would lead to them extending their areas of influence. It is recommended that they may be given the option of joining the peace process, as is being done in Nagaland. As a one-time measure, their surrender may be accepted and their cadres should also be rehabilitated along with those of the NSCN(IM). This is important to bring peace in Naga-inhabited area of Manipur and in turn also in Nagaland.

Empowering Autonomous District Councils

ADCs in Manipur have more or less been functioning from Imphal due to the pressure from socio-political and militant organizations. Unlike previous elections, the 2015 ADC elections in Manipur were keenly contested with enthusiastic

³ Kham Khan Suan Hausing, "From Opposition to Acquiescence: The 2015 District Council Elections in Manipur," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 10 November 2015, http://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/2015_50/46-

participation by the people. The Naga People's Front (NPF) President Shurhozelie Liezietsu greeted the elected members of the ADCs, reiterated the Front's support that has been extended to the ongoing Naga peace process, and stated that the signing of the 'Framework Agreement' between the Union Government and the NSCN(IM) on August 3 was the beginning of the process of a final political settlement.⁴ This indicates the relationship that exists between the Naga peace accord and functioning of ADCs in Manipur. It is important that the ADCs are empowered in accordance with the Sixth Schedule to make them effective and restore the faith of the people.

Conclusion

The Naga peace accord is a historic and positive step to bring peace and prosperity in Nagaland in general and Manipur in particular. The non-territorial resolution framework agreement would allay the apprehensions of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur. It would enable these states to maintain their territorial status quo while only giving up developmental privileges in their Naga-inhabited areas to a new Naga non-territorial body.⁵ The Naga Peace Accord has implications for Manipur and it is important that these are understood and necessary policy interventions are considered.

⁴ "Nagaland NPF president greets elected candidates of Manipur ADC," *The Shillong Times*, 30 November 2015, <http://www.theshillongtimes.com/2015/11/30/nagaland-npf-president-greets-elected-candidates-of-manipur-adc/>, (Accessed on December, 12, 2015).

⁵ Namrata Goswami, "The Naga Peace Accord: Why Now," *IDSA Strategic Comment*, August 07, 2015, http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/TheNagaPeaceAccordWhyNow_NamrataGoswami_070815 (Accessed on December, 10 2015).

Brigadier Sushil Kumar Sharma is presently posted as DIGP, CRPF in the Northeast Region.

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About the Author

Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses
1, Development Enclave, Rao Tula Ram Marg
New Delhi 110 010 India
T +91-11-2671 7983 F +91-11-2615 4191
contact.idsa@nic.in www.idsa.in
Twitter @IDSAIndia
www.facebook.com/InstituteForDefenceStudiesAnalyses