



## Chasing Peace in Nagaland

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(This editorial is based on the article “Chasing peace in Nagaland” which appeared in The Indian express on 19th January 2019.)

**Despite signing of historic Naga framework agreement 4 years back between the central government and the Naga groups led by National Socialist Council of Nagaland Isak-Muviah (NSCN-IM) long lasting peace remains elusive in the region.**

**The peace framework remains a work in progress without a concrete shape and timeline making it nothing but a mere disappointment.**

Nagaland is called the epicentre of insurgency in north-eastern India running as deep as in the late 50s.

### History of Nagaland Insurgency

- The British annexed Assam in 1826, and in 1881, the Naga Hills too became part of British India.
- In 1946 Naga National Council (NNC) was formed under the leadership of **Angami Zapu Phizo**. It declared Nagaland “an independent state” on August 14, 1947.
- On March 22, 1952, Phizo formed the underground Naga Federal Government (NFG) and the Naga Federal Army (NFA).
- The Government of India sent in the Army to deal with insurgency and, in 1958, Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act was enacted.
- The Naga Hills, a district of Assam, was upgraded to a Nagaland state in 1963.
- On November 11, 1975, the government got a section of NNC leaders to sign the **Shillong Accord**, under which this section of NNC agreed to give up arms.
- A group of about 140 members led by **Thuingaleng Muivah**, who were at that time in China, refused to accept the Shillong Accord, and formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) in 1980.
- In 1988, the NSCN split into NSCN (IM) and NSCN (Khaplang) after a violent clash. While the NNC began to fade away, the NSCN (IM) came to be seen as the **“mother of all**

**insurgencies”** in the region.

## Loopholes in the Naga Peace Accord

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- The foremost challenge of the peace accord is the framework **without clear mandate or objectives**. The accord although remains out of public view but there has been talks about **‘special arrangement’** providing great scope of confusion to both government and the insurgents.
- The Naga issue not only pertains to the Nagas but also **impacts the whole region**, including Naga-inhabited areas of Myanmar.
- The issue of **integration of contiguous Naga-inhabited areas** of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in view of the demand for territorial unification of ‘Greater Nagalim’ will trigger violent clashes in the different affected states.
- There is a **demand for a separate “frontier Nagaland or Eastern Nagaland”** under the aegis of the Eastern Nagaland Public Organization (ENPO) which will undermine any attempt at making one greater nagalim.
- Another major hindrance to the peace process in Nagaland is the **existence of more than one organisation**, each claiming to be representative of the Nagas.

## Demands of the Insurgents

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- The current demands of the NSCN (IM) have toned down from complete sovereignty to greater autonomous region within the Indian constitutional framework with due regard to the uniqueness of Naga history and traditions.
- NSCN (IM) seeks a “Greater Nagalim” comprising “all contiguous Naga-inhabited areas”, along with Nagaland. That includes several districts of Assam, Arunachal and Manipur, and also a large tract of Myanmar.

## What Affects the Land of Nagas

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- Armed Cadres or Military Wing of insurgent groups remains Intact in spite of Ceasefire and despite Suspension of Operations and have not shrunk, neither their resources have dried up which remains a constant threat to peace in the region.
- Insurgent groups have become a way of life in the region, with every group running their own parallel government and extorting huge amount of money from Nagas as well as non-Nagas.
- There are violent differences between the NSCN (IM) and the NSCN (K) led by S.S. Khaplang which are a huge roadblock for any accord to succeed in the region.
- Politics has played a far greater role in destabilising the region. Insurgent groups have been used, raised and protected by political parties to settle scores or to come to power.
- One of the major drivers of any insurgent movement is ideological belief and hope of

success. However, the Naga movement seems to have lost its original goals and ideological stand on the basis of which it was initially established.

- The leaders and cadres now seem to be motivated by the more materialistic benefits coming out of the conflict and most of the Naga insurgent groups are no more than extortion and crime syndicates.
- Government has often exploited villager's land for their resources, violating the constitution which results in corrosion of the tribal's belief in any governmental scheme.
- Despite resource rich region, development has remained a distant dream for tribal people with very few jobs and scarcity of basic amenities.

## The Road to Resolution

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- The history of Indo-Naga conflict shows that various past agreements have broken down due to different interpretations of the provisions by the parties at their convenience.
- Failure of government to address the issue holistically will result in new revolutionary Naga movement which will be much dangerous due to globalisation, greater availability of resources for sustaining any rebellion, and greater scope for international intervention in case of a violent struggle.
- A greater understanding of the issue, especially the tribal factor and changing aspirations of the civil society, needs to be developed in order to bring an acceptable and comprehensive solution to the Naga problem.
- One way of dealing with the issue can be maximum decentralisation of powers to the tribal heads and minimum centralisation at the apex level, which should mainly work towards facilitating governance and undertaking large development projects.
- For any peace framework to be effective, it should not threaten the present territorial boundaries of the states of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. As it will not be acceptable to these states.
- Greater autonomy for the Naga inhabited areas in these states can be provided which would encompass separate budget allocations for the Naga inhabited areas with regard to their culture and development issues.
- A new body should be constituted that would look after the rights of the Nagas in the other north-eastern states besides Nagaland.
- Any final resolution package must also have the consent of the NSCN (K) as well. Only then will the Naga inhabited areas in Northeast India witness real peace after decades of violence.
- A non-territorial resolution for one of the oldest armed ethnic conflicts in the Northeast will offer a way forward to resolving many other ethnic conflicts such as those involving the Kukis, Meiteis, Bodos, Dimasas, Hmars, and Karbis.
- Any arrangement thus worked out should lead to social and political harmony, economic prosperity and protection of the life and property of all tribes and citizens

of the states.

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