

# Nagaland

## Insurgency and Factional Intransigence

Sashinungla\*

You cannot live crooked and think straight. We talk of political freedom but are enslaved by our greed and thirst for personal power.<sup>1</sup>

No one, least of all S. S. Khaplang, Thuingaleng Muivah and Isak Chisi Swu, would have thought that the deep differences between them would one day constitute the greatest hurdle in arriving at a workable solution to the decades-old Naga conflict. The two factions of National Socialist Council of Nagaland, the one led by Isak and Muivah (NSCN-IM) and the other by Khaplang (NSCN-K), are both involved in a formal peace process with the Government of India, but have not stopped training their guns on each other, and the result has been unending and fratricidal bloodshed and violence.

To pretend that this divide will not have any impact on the Naga peace process is simply to refuse to call a spade a spade. Unfortunately, differences between the two factions are far too

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<sup>1</sup> Prof. Visier Sanyu, North Eastern Hill University (Kohima campus), as cited in Kiranshankar Maitra, *The Noxious Web: Insurgency in the Northeast*, Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, 2001, p. 55.

entrenched to yield to any easy solution, and it will take more than mere appeals from Naga civil society and the state for them to terminate their internecine war.

The search for unity is an imperative both on ideological grounds, and in order to end the fratricidal inter-tribal rivalry which manifests itself in the factional war, but essentially reflects a clash between the Sema, Thangkul and Zeliang groups who are aligned with Muivah and Isak Swu; the Ao and Konyak groups who are with Khaplang; and the Angami and Chakesang groups who remain Naga National Council (NNC) loyalists. By and large, politicians and officials have tended to line up behind these groups on tribal lines as well, thus deepening the fragmentation within Naga society.

### **Genesis of the split**

New Delhi took the Shillong Accord, which was signed on November 11, 1975, between the representatives of the NNC-Federal Government and the Government of India, as the final political settlement of the 'Naga problem'. However, with this development, the entire senior leadership in the NNC-Federal Government ended up in disarray and disappeared from the scene. Elements within the NNC were divided over the Shillong Agreement and the acceptance of the Indian Constitution, and soon afterwards, Isak Swu and Muivah denounced the Accord as 'treason' and the signatories representing the NNC-Federal Government were proclaimed traitors.<sup>2</sup>

A NNC meeting was organized in August 1978 in 'eastern Nagaland' (Burma, now Myanmar) where Angami Phizo's leadership<sup>3</sup> and policy line were rejected. And in March 1979, a 'national assembly' session was held at Laimong where Khaplang, a Hemi Naga from Myanmar, was elected President of the 'Federal Government'. Muivah and Swu were, however, able to win over Khaplang, and the three staged a coup, following which they formed the NSCN and on February 2, 1980, proclaimed a new 'Government of the People's Republic of

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<sup>2</sup> Tajenyuba Ao, *The British Occupation of Naga Country*, Mokokchung: Naga Literature Society, 1993, p. 299.

<sup>3</sup> Angami Phizo is widely considered to have begun the Naga insurgency.

Nagaland' with Isak Swu as the chairman, Khaplang as the vice-chairman, and Muivah as the general secretary.<sup>4</sup>

The NSCN vowed not only to lead the struggle of the Indian Nagas but also of the Nagas living in the then Burmese frontier. To this effect, a base was established on the Burmese side of the border and cadres were given systematic training. The Nagas on both sides of the border also undertook massive mobilization. According to the NSCN, there existed a large un-surveyed and un-administered area inhabited by the Nagas, straddling the Indo-Burmese frontier, where 'the impact of the outside world was virtually nil.' The NSCN also simultaneously launched a military offensive. On May 12, 1981, a major attack was executed on the Indian outpost at Fakmali in the Tuensang District, killing 12 soldiers and looting two light machine guns, two sten-guns, three rifles, one wireless set and a large quantity of ammunition.<sup>5</sup> Thereafter, activities like bank robberies, attacks on Government officials, the ambush of Army personnel and the elimination of suspected informers, were stepped up in the post-1984 period. In another major attack on July 9, 1987, on the Assam Rifles post at Oinam in the Senapati district of Manipur, the NSCN killed nine soldiers and also carried away a large cache of arms and ammunition.<sup>6</sup>

In early 1988, Muivah was informed that the Government would be prepared for talks within the framework of the Indian Constitution.<sup>7</sup> Although the offer was rejected, there were widespread rumours that Swu and Muivah had 'sold out' and planned to oust Khaplang, seize arms from the Konyak cadres and surrender in India. Amidst a 'National Assembly' session that was called to resolve the controversy these reports had generated, Khaplang's cadres and Burmese troops attacked Muivah's group in a pre-emptive strike at dawn on April 30, 1988. Some 140 of Muivah's cadres, primarily Tangkhuls, were killed. This was "a

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<sup>4</sup> B. G. Verghese, *India's Northeast Resurgent: Ethnicity, Insurgency, Governance, Development*, Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1996, p. 95.

<sup>5</sup> Sajal Nag, *Contesting Marginality: Ethnicity, Insurgency and Subnationalism in North-East India*, Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2002, p. 284.

<sup>6</sup> V. Venkata Rao, *A Century of Government and Politics in North East India*, vol. 6, Manipur, Delhi: S. Chand, pp. 183-7.

<sup>7</sup> "The abortive coup attempt of 1988", *Nagaland Post*, July 26-30, 2003.

horrible setback to the Naga struggle for sovereignty” resulting in a vertical split into the Khaplang (Hemi and Konyak) and Muivah-Swu (Thangkhul-Sema) factions of the NSCN.<sup>8</sup> In view of the precarious situation created by Khaplang’s abortive coup, a National Hoho (apex body of all Naga tribal councils) was held at the Jordan camp in Nagaland on November 7, 1988. The Hoho declared Khaplang as a ‘national criminal’ and expelled him permanently from the council. It also reaffirmed the leadership of Isak Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah.<sup>9</sup>

Some elements are said to have accused Khaplang and Tali (Dally Mungro, his second-in-command) of having spread the canards about Muivah and Swu’s ‘treachery’ at the behest of Indian agents and some Konyak underground cadres. As one insightful Naga writer commented,

...the brutal massacre resulting in the split of NSCN was caused through Mr. Chingan Konyak pastor who acted as go between (between) Indian government and NSCN in 1988. In the name of unity move, the Indian Government laid a trap to entangle the NSCN leaders. The NSCN headquarters received information from Mr. Chingan Konyak saying that the Government of India wanted to hold talks with NSCN within the framework of Indian constitution. Isak Swu was away to Kanchin land..., also the situation between the Konyaks and Tangkhuls in the NSCN was not cordial as the Konyaks were mostly uneducated whereas the Tangkhuls were fairly qualified... the State Government was playing its own role through Mr. Chingan and the Central Intelligence was spreading false propaganda that Isak and Muivah had flown to Delhi for talks.<sup>10</sup>

Differences arose between the Konyaks and the Tangkhuls leading to a violent confrontation in which a large number of Tangkhuls were killed, resulting in the group’s division. The Konyaks, living in North Nagaland, formed one new group, which came to be called the NSCN (North), and the Tangkhuls,

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<sup>8</sup> Verghese, *India’s Northeast Resurgent*, p. 96.

<sup>9</sup> Tajenyuba Ao, *The British Occupation of Naga Country*, p. 306.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 304.

inhabitants of Southern Nagaland and parts of Manipur, constituted the NSCN (South).<sup>11</sup>

## **Tribalism**

The entire Naga insurgency has been dominated by inter-tribal rivalry and a struggle for hegemony.<sup>12</sup> Life in Nagaland begins with the tribe and the village. History shows that tribal and ethnic rifts predate all peace processes in Nagaland. Geography has divided the hearts and minds of the people and is now a potential stumbling block on the pathways to reconciliation.

The intensified inter-gang warfare among the rival NSCN groups has induced fear of a fresh break out of tribal rivalries that could create further social divisions. Allegations and counter-allegations on the basis of tribal identity or origin have dominated the political struggle of the factions. While Khaplang describes Muivah as a Tangkhul and not a Naga,<sup>13</sup> Muivah, in turn, terms Khaplang as being of Myanmarese origin.

The degree to which tribal loyalties are deep-rooted in Nagaland is exemplified by the violent Naga-Kuki encounters that have led to ethnic cleansing, as well as in the inter-tribal warfare unleashed within the Naga fold as a result of the armed rivalry between the Muivah and Khaplang factions of the NSCN. Although the concept of Naga identity has gained greater momentum over the decades, many Nagas still remain Angami, Sema, Konyak, Tangkhul or another tribe first. Verghese notes in this context that, "Localism (love for village) and tribalism (placing the tribe before the larger collectivity) are among the chief problems that have dogged Naga efforts at nation building or the concept of 'Naganess' or 'Nagahood'."<sup>14</sup> Indeed, tribalism was to undo what 'nationalism' had done after years of toil and bloodshed.

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<sup>11</sup> "NSCN ban affects insurgency", *The Times of India*, Delhi, January 17, 2003.

<sup>12</sup> M. Horam, *Thirty Years of Naga Insurgency*, Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1990, pp. 142-3.

<sup>13</sup> See "Khaplang olive branch to Muivah tribe," *The Telegraph*, Kolkata, February 5, 2003.

<sup>14</sup> Verghese, *India's Northeast Resurgent* p. 96.

Regarding the ongoing dialogue between the NSCN-IM and Government of India, in the perceptions of the rival NSCN-K faction these cannot be termed 'Naga peace talks' since they are led by Muivah, a Tangkhul. There are more than 35 tribes that are, together, called Naga. Although the Tangkhuls are classified among these, some sections of the Nagas believe otherwise. Thus, one NSCN-K release stated, "Muivah is a foreign national and the elder brother of Meities... Any kind of agreement entered between the Government of India and Muivah would be termed as 'contradiction'."<sup>15</sup> The NSCN-K 'Publicity Minister' K. Mulatonu takes the issue further: "Muivah is not a Naga by birth and he does not even hold a temporary citizenship in Nagaland. How can he negotiate on behalf of the Nagas with the Government? Swu has never visited Nagaland for several decades and so has no right to talk to the Government unless he visits Nagaland and holds discussion with community leaders and other groups."<sup>16</sup> The NSCN-K further asserted in September 2003,

The Tangkhuls preferred peace by being with the Meiteis, but want war with the Nagas, when Nagas fought 'tooth and nail' against the mighty Indian Army for ten years, i.e. from 1954 to 1964. The Tangkhuls were Meiteis and joined Naga national movement only after the Nagas entered into a ceasefire with the Indians just to create misunderstanding among the Nagas... Not because of their legitimacy but on humanitarian grounds the Tangkhuls may remain in Nagaland though not a single Tangkhul village exists in Nagaland.<sup>17</sup>

However, it needs to be noted that inter-tribal or inter-factional rivalry and distrust existed even before the Naga movement commenced. Unfortunately, the leadership question of the political struggle took precedence and intensified distrust among the factions. In a socio-cultural milieu like Nagaland, where the community is greater than the individual, it becomes apparent that, when one kills individuals in the context of the Naga crisis,

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<sup>15</sup> "NSCN-K to oppose 'intruders' in Naga issue", *Imphal Free Press*, Imphal, July 12, 2002.

<sup>16</sup> "NSCN-K: Swu, Muivah not true representatives of Nagas", *The Sentinel*, Guwahati, January 13, 2003.

<sup>17</sup> "NSCN-K condemns", *Nagaland Post*, Dimapur, September 3, 2003.

various tribes are alienated and hurt as a consequence. Nevertheless, Naga groups do not want to subscribe to the idea that tribalism dominates factional issues. The NNC President, Adino Phizo, thus stated in a letter from London, addressed to Hoho President, M. Vero, "Naga society was festered with tribalism had no historical basis and was no more than a fantasy in the minds of a section of educated Naga people."<sup>18</sup> Popular attitudes among the larger mass of the Naga people have been acknowledged by others as the source of the divisive culture in Naga society. A statement issued in July 2003 by the NSCN-K thus claimed that, "Ignorance about the truth of the Naga struggle is the main reason behind the confusion and disunity among the Nagas."<sup>19</sup>

However, the Khaplang faction also believes that policies pursued by Muivah have always been the biggest obstacle to the Naga political struggle. According to the NSCN-K 'Revenue Minister', K. Zeloulie Angami, "political ambition nurtured by the NSCN-IM top leader Thuingaleng Muivah, a Tangkhul Naga from Ukhrul district of Manipur, had been the major hurdle in the path of unification of Naga groups so far."<sup>20</sup> In its press statement issued on August 27, 2002, the NSCN-K highlighted the differences that existed between the groups on the issue of 'Nagalim' noting, "the so called dream episode of the Isak group on 'Nagalim' is an anti-Naga programme because it is outside the charter of the Nagas' struggle for sovereignty be it the NSCN (GPRN) or the NNC/FGN."<sup>21</sup>

## Operational dynamics

### Structure

The NSCN-IM has a 3,000-strong armed cadre as also a political and military wing. The military wing – the Naga

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<sup>18</sup> "Adino Phizo question Naga Hoho's White Paper", [www.e-pao.net](http://www.e-pao.net). Accessed on July 6, 2002.

<sup>19</sup> "NSCN-K ask people to forgive and forget", [www.northeasttribune.com](http://www.northeasttribune.com). Accessed on July 24, 2003.

<sup>20</sup> "NSCN factional clash on", *Assam Tribune*, Guwahati, April 22, 2003.

<sup>21</sup> "NSCN (K) cautions Isak Swu," *Nagaland Post*, August 27, 2002.

Army – consists of ‘one brigade and six battalions’ with a ‘General Headquarters’ (GHQ), called the ‘Oking’, at Niuland in the Dimapur district of Nagaland. There are also several ‘town commands’ and specialized mobile groups. The political wing also has a GHQ and the 11 ‘regions’ are organized primarily on tribal considerations. In June 2003, a top security official based in Nagaland had claimed that the outfit was taking advantage of the cease-fire with the Government of India to strengthen its organizational base. Media reports of June 2003 had indicated that in the preceding five years, the group had raised its cadre strength from 3,000 to 5,000 and also increased its weaponry two-fold. It has also reportedly raised three more battalions called ‘Operation Salvation’ for Arunachal Pradesh, ‘Jetlee Command’ for Phek district and the ‘Kisumingan Battalion’.<sup>22</sup>

The NSCN-K has an estimated strength of about 2,000 cadres. The group runs a ‘government-in-exile’ called the Government of the People’s Republic of Nagaland (GPRN) and is organized on similar lines as the NSCN-IM. The GHQ of the GPRN/NSCN-K is located in ‘Eastern Nagaland’ (Myanmar).

### **Finance**

The budget allocation of both the NSCN factions depends on ‘tax collection’ and the income generated by sale and transportation of arms and ammunition to other militant groups in the region. Drug trafficking from Myanmar is another major source of income for the NSCN-IM, and this group also allegedly engages in extortion, bank robberies and other criminal activities to obtain funds. In addition, it generates funds through international mobilization.<sup>23</sup> A March 2003 report thus claimed:

With an annual budget that runs to more than Rs. 44 crore, the entire budget allocation for the outfit’s army wing, ‘Naga Army’, for the current fiscal is the ‘income’ from collection of ‘ration tax’, ‘employee tax’ and ‘tax’

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<sup>22</sup> “NSCN-IM alert routine: Forces”, *The Asian Age*, Delhi, June 29, 2003

<sup>23</sup> See Ajai Sahni, “Survey of Conflicts and Resolution in India’s Northeast”, *Faultlines: Writings on Conflict and Resolution*, vol. 12, May 2002, p. 77.

collected from Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. According to the outfit's 2002-2003 'budget' documents, the total budget of Rs. 44.66 crore for the current fiscal ending July is the 'targeted income' set for its two wings, the 'Naga Army' and its 'Finance Ministry'.<sup>24</sup>

According to the confessional statement of an arrested NSCN 'finance secretary', Khayao Huray, Pakistani diplomats in Dhaka handed over more than \$1 million to the NSCN-IM faction between 1993 and 1994. With these funds, the group was reportedly able to purchase large quantities of Chinese rifles, machine guns, mortars and explosives from the black markets in South-East Asia and Bangladesh.<sup>25</sup>

### **The 'Coordination Game'**

Very substantial resources are also generated through a wide range of services, including training and coordination, offered to other militant organisations in the region. In fact, throughout its history, the NSCN has been struggling to establish its supremacy not just in Nagaland, but across the Northeast. Now with varied front organizations, which look up to the NSCN factions as their parent body, it has firmly established its preeminence in extended parts of the region.

Khaplang had been instrumental in trying to unite the insurgent outfits of India's Northeast and Burma under the banner of the Indo-Burmese Revolutionary Front (IBRF) at Mukpa in West Burma on May 22, 1991. The IBRF defined 'Indo-Burma' as "the region between India and Burma comprising the so-called north-eastern region of India and the present north-western part of Burma," adding that it "is one of the few regions in world which remains to be liberated from colonial rule."<sup>26</sup>

To strengthen its own position, the NSCN-IM also set up an umbrella organization called the United Liberation Front of Seven

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<sup>24</sup> "How NSCN-IM manages its budget", *The Hindustan Times*, Delhi, March 1, 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Binalakshmi Nepram, *South Asia's Fractured Frontier: Armed Conflict, Narcotics and Small Arms Proliferation in India's North East*, Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2002, p. 152.

<sup>26</sup> Nag, *Contesting Marginality*, p. 287.

Sisters (ULFOSS) comprising the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), Dima Halim Daogah (DHD) of Assam, United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) of Assam, Arunachal Dragon Force (ADF) in Arunachal Pradesh, People's Liberation Army (PLA) of Manipur and the Revolutionary Democratic Front (RDF).<sup>27</sup> Subsequently, on November 30, 1994, it reshaped its strategy by forming another umbrella organization called the Self Defence United Front of South East Himalayan Region, to coordinate the activities of the other constituents and to 'fight Indian expansionism and Indian state terrorism.' The signatories were the NSCN-IM, Hynniewtrep Achik Liberation Council (HALC), National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), Karbi National Volunteers (KNV), Hmar People's Convention (HPC), and Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL).<sup>28</sup> Needless to say, the NSCN-IM was the dominant voice in this organization.

### **Popularization**

The 1990's saw a transformation in the character of the NSCN primarily through a variety of projections on 'social reforms'. The NSCN prohibited drug and liquor consumption, gambling, prostitution and also opposed the construction of the Thoubal Dam in Manipur.<sup>29</sup> The NSCN-IM has always tried to project the image of a 'benefactor' in the region. After a fortnight-long tour of Delhi in January 2003, the NSCN-IM leaders had called on the militant groups in the region to commence talks with the Government. Further, on October 17, 2003, after the NSCN-IM signed the 'Geneva Call Deed of Commitment', a document that calls for banning the use of landmines, Muivah appealed to other armed groups in the Northeast to follow suit.<sup>30</sup> In a similar effort on October 31, 2003, the NSCN-IM organized a seminar on wildlife at its General Headquarters in Punglwa under the Peren

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<sup>27</sup> See 'Joint militant forum against 'greater Nagaland'', [www.nenanews.com/OT%20Aug.%2022-%20Sept.6,01/oh1.htm](http://www.nenanews.com/OT%20Aug.%2022-%20Sept.6,01/oh1.htm).

<sup>28</sup> "NSCN-IM redraws its strategy," *Sentinel*, February 21, 1995.

<sup>29</sup> "NSCN strikes against all addicts, whores in Ukhrul," *Nagaland Post*, May 15, 1991.

<sup>30</sup> "Anti-landmine deal signed by NSCN-IM," *Sentinel*, October 22, 2003.

district and resolved to enforce the *azha* (order) banning hunting and logging.<sup>31</sup>

### **Expansion**

The split in the NSCN weakened the organization considerably, and this is evident from the fact that between 1987 and 1990 it did not launch any major operations. In 1990, it returned to the limelight with the attempt on the life of S.C. Jamir, the then Chief Minister of Nagaland. This was followed by several ambushes on the security forces' and public leaders in the State.<sup>32</sup> Since mid-1992, the NSCN-IM shifted its area of operation with a series of violent attacks in the tea gardens of Assam along the Assam-Nagaland border. And, in the Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar Hills districts, the NSCN-IM and its front organizations launched a massive extortion drive targeting businessmen, Government and bank employees. The campaign reached such an intensity that banks operating in the area began to contemplate withdrawal.<sup>33</sup>

Another facet of this expansion was internationalization. On January 23, 1993, the NSCN-IM was admitted as a member of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples' Organization (UNPO) with its headquarters at The Hague. Besides Amsterdam, Muivah visited the United States, British and German missions in Geneva, Paris and Bonn, and addressed a Human Rights Convention in Geneva.<sup>34</sup> Although the Khaplang faction refused to credit much significance to these developments, these were, nevertheless, important milestones in the history of the NSCN-IM.

### **Sponsoring insurgency**

The 1990s saw a sudden spurt in the emergence of new insurgent groups in the Northeastern region. The NSCN-IM was able to

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<sup>31</sup> "NSCN-IM on wildlife preservation," [www.northeasttribune.com](http://www.northeasttribune.com), November 2, 2003.

<sup>32</sup> "New turn to NSCN struggle," *Sentinel*, June 29, 1992.

<sup>33</sup> "Bank to withdraw from region", *Sentinel*, February 27, 1995

<sup>34</sup> "Naga leaders attended World meet of Militants," *Telegraph*, March 30, 1993.

successfully sow the seeds of insurgency even in the most peaceful of areas, including the Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills Districts in Assam. These hills were inhabited by one of the most peaceful tribes of Northeast India – the Dimasas – who had not manifested any discontent till that time. The NSCN-IM first used the dense forests in the hills in this area as a transit base. This was followed by the setting up of an underground organization called the Dimasa National Security Force (DNSF). However, the NSCN-IM soon withdrew its support to DNSF and formed a counter-outfit called the Dima Halim Daogah under the chairmanship of Jewel Burman.

Seeds of insurgency were also planted in the peaceful hills of Meghalaya, where the NSCN-IM sponsored two organizations – the Achik National Volunteers Council (ANVC) to operate in the Garo hills, the Hynniewtrep Achik Liberation Council (HALC) to function in and around the capital city of Shillong. A third organisation was set up in Manipur, called the Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL).

At the other end of the spectrum, in January 2003, the NSCN-K leader Zeluolie Angami said during an interview, “We have been providing armed training to cadres of the United Liberation Front of Assam, the People’s Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) and the KYKL for the last several decades on Burmese soil.”<sup>35</sup>

From 1995 onwards, the insurgency situation in the Northeast was entirely dominated by the NSCN factions, with the IM in the forefront. Although the NSCN-IM did not declare its policy on spreading insurgency in the region, its unstated motive was: First, to have as many front organizations as possible through which it could generate funds, collect and procure arms, and secure assistance in its operations; and second, to create severe disturbances in the region. Strategically, the calculation was that both these steps would attract the attention of the Indian state and compel it to negotiate with the NSCN-IM. The idea was that, if the group emerged as a key player in the region, a settlement with it would help neutralize other outfits as well. The immediate

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<sup>35</sup> “NSCN breakaway outfit wants its own pound of flesh”, *Times of India*, January 27, 2003.

attention of the Indian state was also sought because the Naga insurgency had become too protracted, with no sign of any prospective solution.

Violence, then, was not confined to the geographical boundaries of Nagaland alone, but had spread into neighbouring States, notably Assam. In addition to the violence perpetrated by the NSCN-supported groups such as the ULFA, the Naga insurgents themselves carried out several attacks in such areas. On February 25, 1995, for instance, suspected NSCN-IM cadres carried out a massive bomb blast in a train near Nailung under the Lumding police station limits in the Nagaon District of Assam.<sup>36</sup> Further, six persons, including a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) officer and his wife, were killed and five others injured in an ambush by the NSCN-IM at Lailing forest outpost near Halflong in the North Cachar Hills district of Assam on February 7, 1996.

Violence within Nagaland was also sustained. On December 25, 1996, State Commerce Minister K.K. Hollohon's wife, daughter and grandson were killed and 11 others sustained injuries as the NSCN-IM set off a powerful explosion targeting their vehicle at Arai Mile, 14 kilometres from Kohima on National Highway (NH) 39. Twenty-nine persons died and another 29 sustained injuries as NSCN-IM cadres ambushed a bus at Jhalukie in Kohima District on December 9, 1996. Amidst all this violence, Muivah, in a press statement issued on July 15, 1996, expressed willingness to hold talks with the Union Government provided it "is sincere about the settlement of the Naga problem."

### **Areas of influence**

After the split, the NSCN-IM gradually built its base around Kohima and in the Manipur Hills among the Tangkhuls, while the NSCN-K, under pressure from the Myanmar Army in the Hukwang Valley, moved to the more-friendly Konyak and Ao areas in the Tuensang and Mokokchung region of Nagaland.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> "Bomb blasts in Lumding," *Sentinel*, February 26, 1995.

<sup>37</sup> Verghese, *India's Northeast Resurgent*, p. 96.

While the NSCN-IM's influence in the neighbouring State of Manipur is limited to the four hill districts of Senapati, Ukhrul, Chandel and Tamenglong, the group has been able to extend its influence in the North Cachar hills and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam and to some parts of Meghalaya.

The NSCN-K has a following among the Konyaks, both in India and Myanmar, among the Pangmeis of Myanmar, among the Aos of Mokokchung district, among the Phoms and Yimchungers of Tuensang district and among the Angamis, Semas and Lothas. It also commands influence in parts of Nagaland, the Tirap and Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh, and the Hemei and Pangmei settlements in Myanmar.<sup>38</sup>

While Mon district is an NSCN-K stronghold, the stretch from Tizit through Phomching near the India-Myanmar border is dominated by the rival NSCN-IM. These boundaries are ruthlessly enforced. Thus, for instance, on September 4, 2003, three NSCN-K members were killed by NSCN-IM cadres when the former were camping at Neitome village in Tizit sub-division on the Arunachal border, apparently after crossing into the area from Longtem in Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>39</sup>

Internationally, the NSCN-IM is known to have created bases in, or to be operating from, at least nine countries, including Thailand, Philippines, Germany, Switzerland, Bangladesh, Malaysia, China, Australia and also the USA. The last of these came to light when a media report disclosed the NSCN-IM had set up an office in Washington DC close to the White House.<sup>40</sup>

## **Battle for Supremacy**

In the war of attrition between the two factions, "a raid or ambush is replied by a raid or ambush and this constant warfare goes on in order to be always one up against the enemy."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ajai Sahni, "Survey of Conflicts and Resolution in India's Northeast," *Faultlines: Writings on Conflict and Resolution*, vol. 13, November 2002, p. 77.

<sup>39</sup> "Khaplang men die in rival fire," *Telegraph*, September 6, 2003.

<sup>40</sup> "Delhi fumes as NSCN reaches American shores", *Asian Age*, August 19, 2003.

<sup>41</sup> Tajenyuba Ao, *British Occupation of Naga Country*, Mokokchung: Naga Literature Society, 1993, p. 145.

The NSCN-K has been trying to prevent its marginalisation at the hands of the NSCN-IM by rallying around anti-NSCN-IM forces in the region. In August 2003, the NSCN-K reportedly approached the ULFA and Meitei insurgent groups – the PLA, PREPAK and the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) – to join the outfit in its fight against the NSCN-IM. The NSCN-K also plans to recapture markets in Arunachal Pradesh to assist the supply of essential commodities for stocking its camps in Myanmar.

Within this context, the greater co-operation or polarization between the ULFA, the NSCN-K and the Meitei militants is likely to result in an increase in inter-factional clashes in Arunachal Pradesh and South Assam.<sup>42</sup> There have been reports that the NSCN-K is attempting to regain lost ground in Arunachal Pradesh and extend its base to parts of neighbouring Assam with a new operational strategy, codenamed ‘Operation Rocket’. According to an unnamed intelligence official, “The militant group used to dominate Tirap and Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh until the rival NSCN-IM elbowed it out. But with the NSCN-IM lying low, it is inching its way back into the frame. They are concentrating on Changlang district and the border areas, including Ledo, Jagun and Margherita. They are expected to gradually move towards Tirap district.”<sup>43</sup>

Subsequent to the Khaplang faction losing one of its top leaders, *Kilo Kilonser* (Home Minister) Tongmeth Konyak, along with a ‘captain’, to its rival faction in October 2003, leaders of the NSCN-IM claimed they were expecting more defections from the higher echelons of the former. “Many of its regional commanders and political leaders are in a state of utter confusion over its anti-people policies,” said one NSCN-IM leader.<sup>44</sup> An intelligence report corroborated the NSCN-IM’s claim, indicating that the defection of two leaders from its rival group could prompt other militants to follow suit. The Khaplang cadres from the Konyak tribe are expected to be the first to switch allegiance to the rival group.<sup>45</sup> The defection of two Konyak leaders to the Isak-Muivah

<sup>42</sup> “Naga peace process,” *Assam Tribune*, August 3, 2003.

<sup>43</sup> “NSCN-K in quest for lost ground,” *Telegraph*, September 30, 2003.

<sup>44</sup> “Defection game on Naga rebel turf,” *Telegraph*, October 17, 2003.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

group was likely to give it the leverage required to make inroads into Mon district, which has long been a stronghold of the NSCN-K. The Konyak tribe contributes the bulk of the Khaplang factions' manpower and any such mass defection could fracture the group's strength and enable the NSCN-IM to increase its presence in the district. Another advantage for the NSCN-IM in the event of more defections from the rival group would be the opportunity to project itself as the 'sole upholder' of the Naga cause. Interestingly, the NSCN-IM describes any defection from the rival group as a 'homecoming'.

The battle for supremacy also has a political tenor. While it is an established fact that over-ground political groups and militant outfits selectively support each other for mutual benefit, political vendetta not only contributes in keeping the insurgency alive in the State but also inflames factional rivalries among the groups. Rev. V.K. Nuh once noted, "There is not a single MLA in the 60-member (Nagaland) Assembly without links with either the Muivah or Khaplang faction... This is a known fact."<sup>46</sup>

Factionalism is said to thrive in Nagaland because a number of politicians prefer to sustain it. Former Nagaland Chief Minister S.C. Jamir is alleged to have had close links with the NSCN-K and even funded it, while the rival IM faction openly supported the combined anti-Jamir Opposition, which is now the ruling coalition in Nagaland. The former Governor of Manipur, Lt. General (Retd) V. K. Nayyar, who was for some time the acting Governor of Nagaland, had, in a report to the Centre, once charged the Jamir Government with patronizing the NSCN-K.<sup>47</sup> Adding to the complexity is the nexus between the politicians, insurgents and the security forces. For instance, in March 1995, after the Border Security Force (BSF) arrested four NSCN cadres at Dawki and reportedly seized Rupees 700,000 in Indian currency, Chief Minister S. C. Jamir alleged the BSF had actually seized Rupees seven million and had declared only a tenth of the sum.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Kiranshankar Maitra, *The Noxious Web: Insurgency in the Northeast*, Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, 2001, p. 57.

<sup>47</sup> Ved, Marwah, *Uncivil Wars: Pathology of Terrorism in India*, New Delhi: Harper Collins, 1995, p. 282.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p. 285.

On the eve of the 2003 State Legislative Assembly elections, the NSCN-IM alleged that Jamir was using the Khaplang cadres to forcibly get his party candidates elected. On the other hand, the NSCN-K accused the IM faction of issuing death threats to non-Nagaland People's Front candidates, particularly those belonging to the ruling Congress party.<sup>49</sup> In the process, three NSCN-IM cadres were shot dead on January 30, 2003, at Lumuthsami village in Zunheboto district. Further, one NSCN-IM cadre was killed by the Khaplang faction on February 14, 2003, at Zunheboto and another at Pungluwa.

Both the NSCN factions have been bitterly opposing each other since the split in 1988. About the split, Khaplang had once remarked, "During the later part of 1987, Muivah and Isak had secretly conspired to sell the rights of the Nagas through a negotiated settlement with New Delhi which was only a shade better than the Shillong accord."<sup>50</sup> In one of the most stinging remarks against the NSCN-IM, he accused the Tangkhul tribe of Manipur, to which the NSCN-IM chief Muivah belongs, of selling out to the Meities, the dominant ethnic group in Manipur, and of collaborating with the State administration. He was especially critical on the choice of the phrase "accommodative manner" which Muivah and Union Government interlocutor, Padmanabhaiah, used to describe the progress of their talks in early July 2002.<sup>51</sup> At the other end of the factional spectrum, Muivah once decried Khaplang as an undisciplined man involved in drug-trafficking and poppy cultivation and willing to be "utilized by the Indians."<sup>52</sup>

The severity of the factional strife is indicated in the threat that NSCN-K has held out vis-à-vis any plausible agreement arrived at with its rival group. The Khaplang faction has made it public that "If the Centre arrives at a unilateral settlement with the NSCN-IM, it (the NSCN-K) will 'start a revolution'."<sup>53</sup> And on the eve of the then Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's visit to

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<sup>49</sup> "NSCN-K death-threat charge on rival," *Telegraph*, January 26, 2003.

<sup>50</sup> "Nagas must unite, says IBRF," *The Northeast Times*, Guwahati, July 26, 1991.

<sup>51</sup> "The voice of Khaplang, Shangrila debate," *Statesman*, July 27, 2002.

<sup>52</sup> Verghese, *India's Northeast Resurgent* p. 100.

<sup>53</sup> "Tribal feuds impede Naga peace talks," *Times of India*, January 18, 2003.

Nagaland in October 2003, while warning the NSCN-IM and Union Government, it said New Delhi would be making its 'greatest mistake' if it hoped to bring about a solution to the Naga problem by entering into a deal with only the NSCN-IM. The underlying factor in the Khaplang faction's opposition to any uni-dimensional peace formulae is that it considers "the problem to be an 'Indo-Naga-Myanmar issue'."<sup>54</sup> To promote this objective, Khaplang has laid emphasis on unity among the various Naga factions and Naga tribes.

Muivah, at the other end, has constantly accused Khaplang of maintaining covert links with the former Nagaland Chief Minister S. C. Jamir, and with the Indian Army. Striking a similar vein, NSCN-K 'Finance Minister' Kughalu Mulatonu said during an interview at Mokokchung in July 2003, "The Isak-Muivah group is an Indian-sponsored group and the Government of India is talking to its own good citizens. A political agreement happens between two nations and governments."<sup>55</sup> Incidentally, the NSCN-IM has maintained a cease-fire with Indian security forces since August 1997 and although the Khaplang faction initially disengaged itself while accusing the 'detractors' of selling themselves out, it also eventually announced a unilateral cease-fire as well, on April 9, 2000.

## Reconciliation and Unity

The core issues of the Naga conflict are reconciliation, the unity of Naga factions and the need to talk in unison. While the unity factor is conceded by both the factions as being sacrosanct for a final settlement of the Naga imbroglio, it is the interpretation of unity which has remained crucial and has often proven to be a divisive factor. In the early 1990's, Khaplang had opined, "Unity of the Nagas is a must to reach the goal, but the unity must be based on principles and strategies."<sup>56</sup> Muivah echoed a similar sentiment, declaring, "Unity is not a mass,"<sup>57</sup> during a

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<sup>54</sup> "NSCN (IM)-Delhi can't bring Naga peace," *Sentinel*, October 28, 2003.

<sup>55</sup> "NSCN-IM is government sponsored, they are betrayers: NSCN-K," *Times of India*, July 29, 2003.

<sup>56</sup> "Nagas must unite, says IBRF," *Northeast Times*, July 26, 1991.

<sup>57</sup> "Naga Consultative Meeting," *Asian Age*, July 21, 2002.

Consultative Meeting at Niuland in 1999. Both the factions have, in fact, drawn upon the unity factor to oppose each other and have consequently enhanced the complexity of the Naga insurgency.

Khaplang has consistently striven to advocate that Nagas must not “randomly press for a solution but must first restore ‘peace and unity’ among themselves to achieve a political settlement and dispel the evils of today’s factionalism.”<sup>58</sup> Just two days before the IM leaders were scheduled to arrive in New Delhi in January 2003, the NSCN-K noted that, “The so-called talks with Swu and Muivah in New Delhi are not going to solve our problem unless the entire Naga community is united.”<sup>59</sup>

That Swu-Muivah and Khaplang went separate ways is not surprising, and although there have been many rumours about what went wrong between them at their Myanmar hideout in 1988, the bone of contention in their much reported diatribes against each other remains the issue of negotiations with the Union Government.

On October 9, 2001, while calling for unity among the different Naga outfits,<sup>60</sup> the NSCN-K suggested that negotiations with the Union Government should be conducted from a common platform for a successful and durable solution to the Naga insurgency. In an attempt to consolidate the Naga peace process, the NSCN-K, on December 18, 2001, offered a month-long ceasefire to the IM, and also announced suspension of ‘military operations’ during this period.<sup>61</sup> In the year 2002, NSCN-K ‘General Secretary’, Kitovi Zhimomi, declared a unilateral truce with the rival group and other warring Naga factions for a period of 30 days with effect from December 19 as “an acknowledgment of the prime aspirations of the Nagas to implement the sacred code of unity and peace.” The decision to declare a truce and suspension of military operations was taken in order “to make the Nagas and the world aware of the outfit’s efforts for peace and reconciliation among the Nagas irrespective of the differences

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<sup>58</sup> “GPRN Statement,” *Eastern Mirror*, Kohima, May 18, 2003.

<sup>59</sup> “Khaplang factions’ strikes a jarring note,” *Telegraph*, January 7, 2003.

<sup>60</sup> “Deal with NSCN-IM alone won’t solve Naga issue: NSCN-K,” *Sentinel*, October 10, 2001.

<sup>61</sup> “NSCN-K offers month-long truce to rivals,” *Assam Tribune*, December 19, 2001.

that may exist.” He, however, pointed out that the ‘Naga Army’ would have every right to protect itself against any ‘inimical terrorist’ if forced to do so.<sup>62</sup> Emphasizing the need for unity and a common ideology among the Naga groups, the NSCN-K said in a statement, “no matter what artifice may play its role, Nagas must conclusively stick to one principle, the capacity to achieve a political settlement.”<sup>63</sup>

However, this stated position on unity masks the reality of tribal dissension and the struggle for supremacy. While announcing his organisation’s desire to hold talks with the IM faction, the NSCN-K ‘Finance Secretary’ Tony Wangmao said, in July 2002, “The tribes must repent for past mistakes, otherwise peace is not possible. We are sceptical about the Tangkhuls, as they were involved in almost all past killings.”<sup>64</sup> While it sporadically holds forth on the need for unity and reconciliation and the intent to traverse the ‘extra mile’ to achieve the same, the Khaplang group has made it clear that unity and reconciliation must be within the parameters of ‘national principles’.<sup>65</sup>

The NSCN-IM while expressing full support for the reconciliation process, it emphasises the following factors:

- The NSCN-IM welcomes any genuine efforts for reconciliation and unity among the Nagas;
- As the organization supports and accepts reconciliation and unity based on national principles, the necessity of strict adherence to the standing historical and political principle of the Nagas as a free people and the nation as a separate entity is regarded as inevitable; and
- Reconciliation without distinguishing the truth from falsity amounts to compromising the truth, which is only a temporary marriage of convenience that could do more harm than good to the Naga people in the long run.
- Finally, the people cannot afford to go for another fresh experiment and prolong the suffering of the Nagas.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> “Factional fights continue”, *North East Sun*, Delhi, vol. 7 no. 13, February 1-14, p. 5.

<sup>63</sup> “No solution without Naga unity, says NSCN-K,” *Times of India*, May 18, 2003.

<sup>64</sup> “NSCN-K ready for talks,” *Asian Age*, July 12, 2002.

<sup>65</sup> “New faces in NSCN-IM,” *Asian Age*, July 3, 2002.

<sup>66</sup> “Naga Reconciliation Process,” *North East Frontier*, January 2002, pp. 9-10.

The IM faction has consequently, laid down three conditions for unity:

- The Naga National Council (Adino faction) should publicly declare their rejection of the Shillong Accord, having failed to do so earlier.
- The Khaplang group should admit and stop their alleged collaboration with New Delhi.
- The NNC (Merupfu faction) should recognize the IM group and stop calling themselves the ‘true NNC’.<sup>67</sup>

The inflexibility of attitudes is common to all factions. When asked about the possibility of unity with the IM faction, NSCN-K leader Kughalu Mulatonu said in July 2003,

The IM has betrayed the cause of the Nagas. How can you unite with the betrayers? They can be included in the social fabric of the Nagas, but never politically. We are prepared to accept the NSCN-IM in the fold of the Nagas if their leaders give up their Indian passports in front of millions of Nagas.<sup>68</sup>

The consequences of this obduracy have long been felt by the people of Nagaland. As one senior security official in Mokokchung aptly noted,

Everybody knows that the factional problem has doubled the instances of tax collections and killings in the State... but the possibility of unification between the NSCN factions is still very remote.<sup>69</sup>

The General Secretary of Naga Students Federation, while noting another facet of the factional strife, stated, “Though the two factions want to unite, each is still adamant about its stand and wary of the other, waiting first for the other to give in.”<sup>70</sup>

The motive of the NSCN factions is to merely seek reconciliation and express a willingness to participate in the peace talks to win the support of the people, a critical construct in the seemingly intractable Naga insurgency. This particularly appears

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<sup>67</sup> “Frozen hearts produce dangerous politics,” *The Pioneer*, Delhi, August 5, 2001.

<sup>68</sup> “NSCN-IM is government sponsored, they are betrayers: NSCN-K,” *Times of India*, July 29, 2003.

<sup>69</sup> Author’s interview with senior official, Mokokchung, July 30, 2003.

<sup>70</sup> Author’s interview with NSF General Secretary, Kohima, May 5, 2003.

to be the view of the Khaplang group which maintains that talks would fail unless all groups are involved in the process. However, the warning by NSCN-K of a failure of talks in the absence of all the parties should be seen as a direct challenge to the IM group as well as an admonition to the Union Government that merely negotiating with one faction, as New Delhi has done since 1997, will not bring about long-term peace among the Nagas.

### **Conflict dynamics**

After the cease-fire agreement between the Government of India and the NSCN-IM in August 1997, Nagaland has witnessed a continuous, at times violent, factional feud between the latter and the Khaplang faction. There is a widespread perception among the Nagas that the rivalry between the two factions amplified after the ceasefire agreement. In what is essentially a fight for supremacy between the two groups, the crime graph in Nagaland has been a matter of concern. According to official sources, a total of 489 cases were registered in 2002 as against 463 in 2001. Moreover, there were a total of 93 insurgency-related killings recorded in 2002 as against 67 in 2001. In all, the Nagaland Police arrested 1,349 persons involved in different category of cases of which 126 were insurgent cadres, 172 were extortionists and the rest were other criminals involved in different crimes.<sup>71</sup> However, the 2003 data<sup>72</sup> shows a change in the trend with at least 15 insurgents killed, 13 arrested with no security force (SF) or civilian casualty. Between May 1 and June 18, 2004, security forces arrested at least 58 persons, including 14 extortionists, seven vehicle thieves, one arms dealer and 36 insurgents. In addition, seven persons were abducted and six persons were killed. In almost all the arrests, arms were recovered.

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<sup>71</sup> "Crime rate increases," *Nagaland Post*, January 12, 2003.

<sup>72</sup> Tabulated from the English and local media reports, 2003 and 2004.

**Factional killings in Nagaland, 2002-2003**<sup>73</sup>

Year	NSCN-IM	NSCN-K	Others	Total
2002	8	27	0	35
2003	8	20	0	28
Total	16	47	0	63

Frequent clashes regarding the manning of specific areas of operation and the domain for extortion are widely evident. However, behind all this is the deep-rooted ethnic conflict which dominates the whole Naga peace process. The desperate attempts of the two factions to secure dominance over each other is so deeply entrenched that it vitiates even their professed political ideology. As a result, society is on the verge of a gradual disintegration with the average Naga angry and vengeful. Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio notes, “The five-decade-long, militancy-related conflict has caused psychological problems among the youth leading them to substance abuse.”<sup>74</sup>

Competition over ‘tax payment’ has had a significant impact on the course of the factional conflict, as well as on the lives of civilians and on the State’s economy. Despite peace talks between the NSCN-IM and the Government of India, as well as the official cease-fire between the Khaplang faction and the Government, large-scale ‘tax collection’ by both insurgent groups continues all over the State and even in areas in other neighbouring States where these groups have considerable influence. Official data indicates that, for instance, just during July and August 2003, 18 insurgents and 29 extortionists linked to either of the insurgent groups were arrested under various sections of the law.<sup>75</sup> A senior Naga Mother’s Association (NMA) leader notes:

In any developmental project or business transaction, the bulk of the tax levied by the NSCN-IM also results in a similar, though reduced demand by the NSCN-K and the

<sup>73</sup> Tabulated from English and vernacular media of Nagaland, 2002-2003.

<sup>74</sup> “Militancy blamed for drug addictions,” *Asian Age*, August 20, 2003.

<sup>75</sup> Sashinungla, “Nagaland: The Dynamics of Extortion,” *South Asia Intelligence Review*, vol. 2 no. 22, December 15, 2003, South Terrorism Portal, [www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org).

NNC. With the kitty exhausted, there is very little left for the people and development is sacrificed.<sup>76</sup>

Narola Chang, who runs a cloth shop in Tuensang town, rues, Giving tax to all groups every year is really a big problem, especially for those who run small businesses since their earning is just enough to meet their basic daily requirement.<sup>77</sup>

Notwithstanding a lack of reportage on the region and the qualified silence of the civil society, extortion remains a fact of everyday life in Nagaland. Both factions have even been extorting money from Government employees, in addition to the trading community. While the IM faction has fixed 25 percent of gross salary as the amount to be contributed to its coffers annually, the Khaplang group collects 24 percent as its share from each Government employee in the State, as well as in all Naga inhabited areas of neighbouring States.

The situation in Mokokchung illustrates the *modus operandi* that is executed over all ten districts of Nagaland.<sup>78</sup> Every household in most villages in Mokokchung district has been paying Rupees 120 to 150 to both the groups (IM and K) annually under two separate categories: 'house tax' and 'army collection'. Additionally, Rupees One per head is collected annually as 'membership fee' by each faction. The payment demands are met mechanically, as any opposition carries an inherent threat of death. On occasion, a separate collection called 'public collection' is also done in the name of 'civilians' (a sort of go-between between the armed cadres and the public). Villagers are also obliged to provide the armed cadres food and lodging during their periodic 'area tours'. The costs are met by '*ajungben saru*' (emergency collection) from every household in the village. During an interview, a Village Council Member in Mokokchung district said, "It is not just about the amount of money we pay, but also the negotiation, threats, process of collection, 'nature and place' of payment and much more."

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<sup>76</sup> Author's interview with Sanu Vamuzo, Ex-President of NMA, Kohima, May 20, 2003.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Narola Chang, Tuensang, August 12, 2003.

<sup>78</sup> Sashinungla, "Nagaland: The Dynamics of Extortion," *South Asia Intelligence Review*, vol. 2 no. 22.

Another major source of such revenue consists of collections from the drivers of each truck passing through Kohima.<sup>79</sup> A sum of Rupees 500 is collected from each truck as ‘protection money’. The stretch of NH-39 between Kohima and Dimapur provides a perfect setting for this sort of activity. Trucks carrying onions and potatoes from Assam into Nagaland also pay a ‘patriotic tax’. In August 2002, a Member of the Legislative Assembly from the Manipur People’s Party, Okram Joy, in a letter to the then Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, pointed out that NSCN-IM militants had opened their office at Dimapur in Nagaland to collect illegal taxes from drivers from Manipur. The Manipur Chief Minister, Okram Ibobi, had also drawn the attention of the Prime Minister to the fact that the NSCN-IM militants were collecting Rupees 30 million per month from Manipuri vehicles in Nagaland. During 2002, the India-Myanmar border trade in the Chandel district of Manipur was severely affected due to non-plying of vehicles after the NSCN-IM served notices to all owners of vehicles operating along the Imphal-Moreh NH-39 to pay a ‘tax’ ranging between Rupees 900 and 1,700 per trip. As many as 200 such vehicles ply daily on the route. Furthermore, the NSCN-IM, according to a report of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs in 2001, made over Rupees 1,500 million per annum through extortion and other means.

The NSCN-IM claims a traditional right over ‘tax collection’. In a statement on August 1, 2003, the outfit declared, “Collection of taxes could not be termed as an extortion or looting as the organization had been collecting ‘legal taxes’” to run the organization. To people familiar with the dynamics of the group’s operations, it is not difficult to understand the rationale behind such collections, even when peace parleys continue with the Government of India.

This ‘traditional right’ of ‘tax collection’ has led to Government employees in the State being unable to take home even a fraction of their month’s salary; shops close down by mid-day and by 3 pm the streets wear a deserted look; demanding free meals from hotels and essential commodities from shops is part of the militants’ ‘style’; vehicles are taken forcibly without paying

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

money; lists of medicines are demanded from pharmacy owners; free use is made of commercial printing presses; officers and public leaders are constantly subjected to threats and demands by way of calls, notes and messengers.

The widespread extortion machinery has also given rise to fake cadres who collect money in the name of the established insurgent groups. In August 2003, reports suggested the presence of a gang of unidentified extortionists who had been extracting money from small traders and businessman at gunpoint, and who had injured one person near the High School area at Kohima.

However, even in the prevailing environment of enveloping fear and anxiety, where refusal to pay brings death, occasional voices of protest do emerge. Thus, the people of Tuensang made a submission to the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC) Peace Committee, which toured the Shamator, Noklak and Tuensang towns between April 11 and 17, 2003, stating,

Independence cannot come by killing the innocent public by the Nagas. Illiterate villagers and village council members are treated as second-class citizens. Villagers are dying because of their beating. Poor villagers cannot longer feed them.<sup>80</sup>

The case of Tuensang also brings to light the extent of the fratricidal sentiment among the insurgents in Nagaland. During the 1990s, Tuensang was known as a 'war zone' as both the factions were trying to establish supremacy in the town. Amongba Chang, a senior resident of the town, recalls,

Since both the NNC and NSCN-K in Tuensang region were unitedly fighting the NSCN-IM since 1996, it enabled the NSCN-K to enter the town. In those days, families in some localities had to move out to other places for months due to the crossfire between the warring NSCN factions.<sup>81</sup>

The situation remains, by and large, unchanged. For instance, following the sudden arrival of the cadres of both factions in August 2003, people of Longleng sub-division under Tuensang District, became a worried lot since they feared factional clashes.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Recorded during author's interview in Tuensang, August 13, 2003.

Around 80 armed NSCN-IM members carrying sophisticated weapons arrived at Hukong village. In addition, two groups of armed NSCN-K cadres began camping in and around Longleng town.<sup>82</sup> Such a turf war is also visible in other districts of Nagaland. During August 2002, NSCN factions were at war in the Zunheboto District, which had earlier been demarcated as a 'peace-zone' for several years. In the build-up by heavily armed cadres of both NSCN factions to get a control of Zunheboto town, a clash eventually resulted in which one NSCN-IM cadres was killed on August 25, and an indefinite economic blockade was subsequently imposed by the NSCN-K on the town, commencing August 28, 2002. It is useful to reiterate, here, that in year 2000, Zunheboto had been declared a 'common area' for both the factions by the Sumi Hoho after a mutual understanding between the concerned leaders.<sup>83</sup>

Both the NSCN factions have signed separate cease-fire agreements with the Government of India, with each underground outfit striving to avoid any kind of activity that might invite military action. However, the only manner in which the two factions communicate with each other is either through slanderous press statements or through the gun. The aftermath of a factional clash in an area often results in combing operation of a Naga town by the security forces, or the deserted look towns where innocent villagers have been at the receiving end. The internecine rivalry since 1988 has caused more bloodshed than the collective Naga political struggle. Consequently, its impact on the health of society and on the people has been so detrimental that all development has come to a halt. Caught between the factional feuds and the state, the repeated curfews and counter-insurgency operations, normal life in the villages has been paralyzed.

In a situation where leadership and tribal egos take precedence over the 'greater interest of the Nagas', efforts at bringing about a reconciliation look dim, notwithstanding the fact that the struggle for supremacy among the various factions is self defeating. From what is said and written in the public sphere, it

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<sup>82</sup> "NSCN cadres cause tension in Tuensang," *Shillong Times*, August 7, 2003.

<sup>83</sup> "Security alert as NSCN factions spar," *Hindustan Times*, August 27, 2002.

seems that each person speaks only on behalf of himself or of a tribal sub-community.

The ethnic divide created by the splintering of insurgent groups runs counter to the goal of forging a larger Naga identity. At the heart of the matter is the issue of a politics of betrayal and treason. The Naga Hoho President, M. Vero, observed,

There is no example in history of a divided people solving any of their problems. Nagas must resist the divisive tendencies within themselves and stop blaming one another. Is it possible for the national workers to solve the Naga issue on their own when they are not able to solve their own differences first? Can the accepted constituents show more imaginativeness towards settling the Naga issue instead of only retaining power for as long as possible? And finally, can the Naga NGOs and public learn to be more open and neutral instead of pleasing or siding with any one of the underground groups?<sup>84</sup>

Unity is possible only when the parties involved are willing to cast off their primordial and narrow loyalties. New debates and fresh questions connected to the issue on the basis of which the factions are eager to unite need to be thoroughly discussed. Questions regarding the stated ends and adopted means must be transparently articulated and widely debated: Is violent factionalism a justifiable means for a cause, however noble it may be? Can extortion be a necessary part of the struggle? Do human rights include only the rights of a particular group or community? Is it ethical for the group to use terror to fight terror? Is it not necessary for the different factions to first establish against whom their fight is directed? And finally, does the fight have the mandate of the Naga people?

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<sup>84</sup> *Reasoning Together*, Naga Students' Federation, Kohima, 2001, pp. 4-5.