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24/2
J.N.B. & Fals

Assam: accord and discord

By Wasbir Hussain

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The February 10 MoU gives the Bodos a politico-administrative structure called the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) with a total of 3,082 villages and four districts to be carved out of existing districts by a Delimitation Commission. The BTC, that has come up under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, will have 46 seats: 30 reserved for Scheduled Tribes, five for non-tribals, five open to all communities, and six seats to be nominated by the State Governor. It will also have 40 departments transferred by the State Government to its control, receive a Rs. 100-crore assistance a year for five years to develop the socio-economic infrastructure in BTC areas, a Centrally-funded university and a Central institute of technology. The BLT is to be disbanded and disarmed within a week of the formation of the BTC's interim committee that can be in power for a maximum of six months till the first elections to the Council are held.

As much as Rs. 500 crores in five years for infrastructure development, political space in which their leaders could hope to achieve their aspirations, and most importantly a package deemed good enough to withdraw their separate statehood demand were obviously reason enough for the Bodo masses to be euphoric. As Mr. Basumatary said:

"The Bodos will not be required to launch another mass agitation if the provisions of the BTC Accord are implemented in letter and spirit." The Bodos are optimistic and as such the influential All-Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) has formally announced the withdrawal of its demand for a separate State.

As expected, the signing of the BTC accord has been received with fear and anger by non-Bodo groups,

extinguish the rights and privileges enjoyed by a citizen of India in respect of his/her land at the commencement of the BTC; and (2) that the BTC cannot enact any law barring any citizen from acquiring land either by way of inheritance, allotment, settlement or by way of transfer if such citizens were eligible for such bona fide acquisition of land within the BTC area.

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such as the Karbis and Garos, have not been satisfied even after creation of autonomous councils for them, and, therefore, a Rs. 500-crore assistance package over a five-year period cannot be expected to make the Bodos happy. The NDFB would continue with its armed struggle, he said, but added that the outfit was ready for talks with New Delhi on the issue of the Bodos' right to self-determination.

The BLT emerged on the scene in 1996 after the Bodo Accord of 1993 turned out to be a non-starter. In keeping with the popular perception in the Northeast that New Delhi is moved only by the power of the gun, the BLT began a violent campaign, hitting the headlines with the bombing of the New Delhi-bound Brahmaputra Mail near Kokrajhar on December 30, 1996, that killed 33 passengers. Besides, the BLT came into direct conflict with its rival, the NDFB, and a bitter fratricidal feud followed. Finally, in March 2000, the BLT entered into a ceasefire with the Government and began peace negotiations that culminated in the February 10 MoU. This agreement, by giving legitimacy to the BLT, could in fact raise the hopes of outfits such as the NDFB that they would someday be able to achieve their objective of achieving an independent homeland if they keep fighting.

Therefore, the Government as well as the mainstream Bodo leaders must try and make the NDFB see reason rather than embark on any deliberate strategy to push them to the wall. The NDFB has suffered major reverses in recent months with its vice-president, Dhiren Boro, and general secretary, Govinda Basumatary, landing in the security net. If tackling the NDFB is a major challenge for the Government and the Bodo leadership in the days to come, allaying the fears of the non-Bodos with certain visible moves is equally important. That is, if the Bodos really want peace to close a violent chapter in their history.

(The writer is Associate Fellow, Institute for Conflict Management, New Delhi.)

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Groups such as the SJSS particularly fear that the land rights of the non-Bodos might be curtailed under an administration that would now be solely controlled by Bodos. There is also an apprehension that if their land rights are infringed upon, it will only be a matter of time before the non-Bodos are forced to pack up and go elsewhere. The Bodo leaders have said the non-Bodos have no reason to fear and that their rights and privileges would be protected.

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Insofar as the NDFB is concerned, there are two possibilities. Either it will be marginalised, now that the dominant mood among the Bodos is for peace and progress, or it could try and stage a

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119-1
26/2

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26 FEB 2003

THE HINDU

ULFA: victor or vanquished?

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10-10 By Wasbir Hussain 29/3

AFTER WHAT appears to be a tactical hibernation, the separatist United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) was on a rampage earlier this month, hitting at soft targets across the State. The outfit's hit-squads launched a rocket attack on the 102-year-old Digboi Refinery in eastern Assam, setting a 5 million litre petrol tank ablaze, blew up a gas pipeline of the public sector Oil India Limited (OIL), swooped on a village and shot three Hindi-speaking persons dead, and fired a mortar at a police line in the western district of Bongaigaon, missing the actual target of the armoury.

The ULFA's elusive commander-in-chief, Parsh Barua, was quick to claim responsibility for the raids at the oil installations. He called newspaper offices in Guwahati to say that oil has been made the target to protest against New Delhi's "continued exploitation of Assam's natural resources". The ULFA leader signed off on an ominous note, saying such attacks as the ones carried out between March 7 and 8 would continue in the days to come. As if to prove the threat, the ULFA in the next few days lobbed grenades at a police station, injuring seven, and exploded a landmine under a bus, killing seven and wounding more than 50 others.

Now, what does this stepped-up offensive mean? Does it indicate a resurgence of the ULFA? Providing an answer to this is not easy. But, these attacks came less than 36 hours after the Assam Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi, made an unprecedented speech in the State Assembly saying he was ready to travel to either Bhutan or Bangladesh to meet the ULFA leadership and start the peace process, provided the rebel group and New Delhi were ready to approve of the move.

By striking within a day of Mr. Gogoi's peace overture, the ULFA could well have sought to send out a message that it was opposed to the idea of possible peace talks with the

Chief Minister or the Government of India itself. This brings us to the question of ULFA-Government talks. At least for general consumption, the ULFA is still sticking to its three pre-conditions for a peace dialogue: talks outside India, on the core issue of Assam's sovereignty, and under the supervision of the United Nations.

Talking outside India is not a problem for New Delhi. The Centre

all, Mr. Barua and his key aides who are controlling the ULFA's army may well have tried to send out clear signals to its cadre, and to the authorities, that it is the armed wing and not the political wing of the outfit that calls the shots. In fact, the sudden decision to actually observe the "Sainik Divas" could be an outcome of the ULFA's inner contradictions.

The authorities battling the ULFA

What needs to be found out is whether the outfit has succeeded in regrouping, which actually seems likely.

can even decide to hear out ULFA's arguments in favour of a sovereign Assam.

But, involving a third party in any talks is the one condition that is totally unacceptable to the Government of India. But, what needs to be examined is whether the ULFA is at all interested in peace talks in the first place. Reports suggest that while the rebel group's political wing headed by the chairman, Arabinda Rajkhowa, is not averse to entering into peace negotiations with New Delhi, the military wing commanded by Mr. Barua is against any such move.

It is against this backdrop that the renewed offensive by the ULFA to mark or coincide with its "Sainik Divas" or "Army Day" on March 16 needs to be viewed.

Nothing much was heard of the ULFA observing "Sainik Divas" in any big way in the past although the rebel group has always stepped up its offensive around its foundation day on April 7 every year, besides important Indian national days as Independence Day and Republic Day.

Is there a hidden message in the ULFA's decision to observe "Sainik Divas" this time? Not unlikely. After

are still fond of fire-fighting measures, 13 years after the Army was first put on the trail of these rebels (Operation Bajrang, that began in November 1990) and six years after the Army, the police and the paramilitary in the State were brought under a Unified Command.

The first response of both Mr. Gogoi as well as security officials has been that the fresh attacks were nothing but "desperate acts" by the ULFA that is "cornered". The Assam Government was quick to seek an additional 30 paramilitary companies from the Deputy Prime Minister, L. K. Advani, for specific deployment in oil installations, and reiterated its demand for deployment of a "dedicated force" to guard the 265-km porous border with Bhutan where the ULFA has well-entrenched bases. The point that needs to be noted here is that Digboi and Duliajan, where the oil facilities were attacked, are located 600 km away from the Bhutan border.

Therefore, the Digboi Refinery attack in all probability was carried out by ULFA cadres located in the vicinity and not those from their Bhutan bases who would have had to travel across almost the entire State to reach the oil town in eastern Assam. If the Refinery attack was

carried out by the ULFA's Myanmar-based rebels, as suggested by security agencies, it would again mean that the militants of the group are still spread out, and are mobile. In reality, the ULFA may not be in as bad a shape as one might believe or be made to believe. The spate of mortar attacks indicates that the rebel group has a good stockpile of this form of weapon. Besides, the use of mortars, fired from a distance of anywhere between 400 metres and 1.5 km, looks like a new strategy adopted by the ULFA to avoid carrying out strikes from close range. This might mean that the ULFA does not want to lose more of its men in view of the fact that it has lost quite a number of its cadres in recent months who have either been killed by the security forces or arrested.

Dismissing the latest strikes by the ULFA as nothing but "acts of desperation" would be much too simplistic an assessment. If the ULFA has indeed lost nearly 14,000 cadres in the past six years and is still capable of striking at will deep inside the State, it means that the outfit has been engaged in a continuous recruitment drive. What needs to be found out is whether the outfit has succeeded in regrouping, which actually seems likely.

Instead of allowing complacency to creep in, the counter-insurgency authorities would do well to analyse whether the Unified Command has been a success, and find out the gaps that need to be plugged.

The Government leaders must also avoid airing such contradictory positions as dismissing the ULFA as a spent force that is trying to stay afloat by indulging in "desperate acts", and saying at the same time that they are ready to travel to a foreign country to talk to the rebel leaders. After all, the ULFA may not be the victor, but it is certainly not vanquished yet.

(The writer is Associate Fellow, Institute for Conflict Management, New Delhi.)

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HOPE FOR ASSAM

Inter-Linking Of Rivers A Step In the Right Direction

By BK BHATTACHARYYA

The Government of India's recent decision to inter-link the major rivers of the country by 2016 for preventing drought and flood is a step in the right direction. The people of Assam will also heartily welcome it if it really reduces or controls the havoc of floods in their state. Floods are an annual visitor to Assam. The Brahmaputra and its tributaries have been causing extensive damage to the state's economy and bringing untold misery to the people. The state may have become self-sufficient in food production but for the recurrence of floods.

Isolation

After Independence, Assam found herself isolated from the rest of the country as rail and river routes connecting her went to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Assam thus lost its direct link with the mainland. Consequently there was geographical isolation of Assam and it adversely affected her economic growth. The legacy of isolation is still continuing despite substantial improvement in rail and road transport in Assam over the last two decades or so.

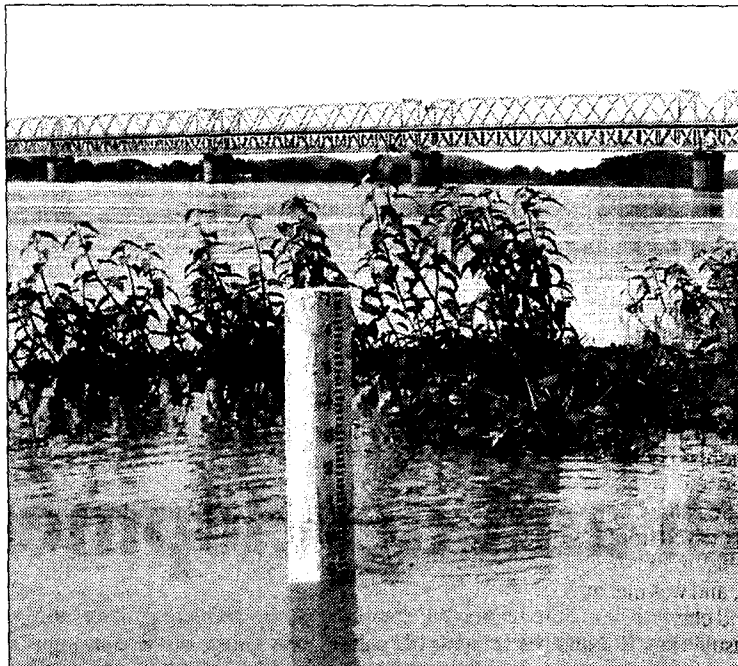
The Brahmaputra is the lifeline of Assam and has been part and parcel of its history, culture and heritage. It played a vital role in the economic life of Assam. Long before the railways started their operations in Assam, the Brahmaputra maintained the link by transporting goods and people from Assam to other parts of the country and vice-versa. Describing the pivotal role of the riverways in Assam, the National Council of Applied Economic Research in its Techno-Economic Survey of Assam (New Delhi 1962) stated that in 1958 "the main exports of Assam are tea, jute, mineral oil of all kinds, wax and timber. Of these, 93 per cent of tea and 90 per cent of jute grown in Assam have to

The author is a retired joint secretary in the government of Assam.

find their way to Calcutta for internal distribution in India and export overseas. These have necessarily to be carried by the inland waterways

When Assam did not have a dependable railway system after Independence (there was no road link between Assam and the main-

With the proposed inter-linking of the major rivers, it should now be possible to plan and arrange navigation between Assam and Kolkata entirely through the Indian territory — thus replacing the existing river route through Bangladesh. It bears recalling here that in the sixties of the last century



land for several years after Independence), it was the river route which sustained its economy for 18 years (1947-1965) till its closure during the Indo-Pak war of September 1965.

Steamers

At that time the East Pakistan government also impounded Indian steamers stranded in its territory containing goods worth several crores of rupees. After the creation of Bangladesh, a skeleton river service has been resumed between Kolkata and Assam. We should not, however, depend on Bangladesh owing to various reasons and should have our own navigation channel through our waters.

there was a proposal mooted by the Centre known as the Ganga-Brahmaputra Canal which envisaged linking of the Brahmaputra with the Ganga for navigation to and from Kolkata to Assam entirely through the Indian territory.

The profile of the Ganga-Brahmaputra canal was that "it will be 300 feet wide and nearly 200 miles long and about eight feet deep with lock gates enabling navigation direct from Calcutta via the Hooghly and Canal to Dhubri in Assam. The distance will be shortened by 200 miles compared with the present riverways through Pakistan" (East Pakistan).

The underlying objective in constructing such a canal was to put an end to the inherent risks

and hazards involved in the plying of Indian steamers from Kolkata to Assam and vice-versa through the territorial waters of East Pakistan — now Bangladesh. Dr KL Rao as Union minister of power and irrigation at the time also thought of linking the Ganga-Brahmaputra Canal with the Cauvery in South India in course of time. The proposal gained ground, but was shelved owing to the daunting cost involved.

Assam is connected with the rest of the country by rail and road through a narrow corridor via Siliguri in West Bengal and at the same time Assam is the gateway to the north-east. The strategic importance of this region demands an alternative route. The recent Sino-Bangladesh defence cooperation agreement should be kept in mind in this regard.

Economy

Besides, a direct navigational link between the Brahmaputra and the Ganga will revive the sagging economy of Assam and will open up new vistas in its economy, boosting tourism in Assam and the north-east since many tourists will prefer to travel through this river route. During the pre-partition days many visited Assam from Kolkata through this river route as the journey was a pleasant one. Further, this will restore the old river link between Assam and Allahabad via Kolkata and Patna through the Ganga. The consumer price index is the highest in Assam and movement of essential commodities through the river route will provide relief to consumers of this region because of the moderate cost of river transport.

The waters of the Brahmaputra within the boundaries of Assam are her natural wealth. The government of Assam should legitimately claim some sort of royalty or cess on the quantum of water that will move out of its territory for inter-linking of the Brahmaputra with the major rivers of the country.



Jamir: Clarifying facts

Jamir cites missed chance

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Kohima, Jan. 14: Striking back at the NSCN (I-M) for charging him with "blocking" the road to peace, Nagaland chief minister S.C. Jamir today said he was all for a solution to the present imbroglio and never a hurdle in the negotiations.

Addressing a news conference here, Jamir virtually blamed the Rajiv Gandhi government for his animosity with the NSCN (I-M). "When Rajiv Gandhi was in power, we had sent emissaries to the undivided NSCN. A minister in my government, K. Hollohon, had even arranged the NSCN leaders' visit to India, but the government of India backed out at the last moment," Jamir said. "It was the beginning of their (NSCN's) suspicion about me," he added.

NSCN (I-M) leader Th. Muivah had yesterday questioned the sincerity of the Jamir government in solving the Naga problem, saying the Congress chief minister did not represent the true aspirations of the Nagas.

Jamir said he had even asked the then home minister S.B. Chavan and internal security minister Arun Nehru to clear all hurdles for the NSCN leaders' visit to India. Accordingly, a base camp in Tuensang district was identified for the meeting. But suddenly the Centre changed its mind, saying that they (NSCN leaders) would not be allowed to visit India, Jamir said.

"I did not sabotage the initiative...It was a misfortune that the best opportunity to solve the Naga problem was missed," he said, alleging "our own people were working against us". He said the NSCN (I-M) leaders could visit New Delhi only because he had withdrawn the cases against them.

Jamir accused the NSCN (I-M) of trying to weaken the Congress in Nagaland by attempting to wean away leaders.

Acknowledging the NSCN (I-M) stand that it will not interfere in the Assembly polls, Jamir, however, was sceptical about whether the "promise will be implemented". He also said the elections could not be a "road block" in the peace process, stating that the two could go side by side. Spelling out his party's poll plank, the chief minister said his party would focus on development issues.

The NSCN (Khaplang), too, blasted the Muivah-led faction, saying the concept of Nagalim was confusing Naga minds.

Khaplang's deputy *kilonser* (minister) for information, Kughalu Mulatonu — in a statement issued from Oking, the outfit's roving headquarters — cautioned NGOs who were supporting the "concept of Nagalim".

Manipur 'emergency'

The United Committee, Manipur, declared an "indefinite emergency" in the state from tonight to prevent communal clashes in view of "provocative" statements by NSCN (Isak-Muivah) general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah, reports our Imphal correspondent.

The UCM, an influential apex body of social organisations, said emergency has been declared as a precautionary measure and to safeguard the territorial integrity of Manipur.

The "emergency" was aimed at preventing violence in view of the threat to the territorial integrity of Manipur and the decision was taken at the organisation's executive meeting, said its chief Sapamcha Jadumani.

21 FEB

THE TELEGRAPH

Recluse leader submits NSCN group submits formula to council

in cry for Naga unity

ON KHAPLANG'S TRAIL: A TELEGRAPH SPECIAL

NSCN-K Council headquarters (somewhere in the jungles of Myanmar), Feb. 3: Given a choice, NSCN (K) chief Shangnyu Shangwang Khaplang would remain a recluse. Recent developments on the Naga front have, however, forced the 63-year-old militant leader to make an exception.

Interacting with the media for the first time in several years, Khaplang said at his headquarters inside the jungles of Kenup Tephak Joku Valley in Myanmar that his outfit had submitted a "unity formula" to the Naga Hoho to end fratricidal clashes.

"Neither we nor they (the NSCN-IM) can independently hammer out a solution to the Naga problem. After all, there cannot be two solutions to one problem. There has to be a consensus," he said in reference to the political dialogue between the Centre and the NSCN (I-M).

Since the NSCN split into two in May 1988, hundreds of people have been killed in clashes between the two factions. Several attempts by the Church and tribal councils of Nagaland to bring about a rapprochement have not borne fruit.

Though the NSCN (I-M) had "reached Delhi", Khaplang claimed his group's priority at the moment was "unity and not talks". He said the split in the original NSCN was an unfortunate occurrence and that a "hon-

ourable solution" to the vexed Naga problem would have been found by now had the community been united.

Dressed in a grey suit, the Hemi Naga from Myanmar spoke continuously for over five hours on all issues concerning the Nagas. He shares his headquarters with camps of several other militant outfits, including the Ulfa, the United National Liberation Front, the People's Liberation Army and the People's Revolutionary Army of Kangleipak.

These camps are located on the banks of two streams that flow along the foothills of the Patkai range. Khaplang lords over the NSCN (K) council headquarters and is addressed as "Baba" by the cadre of all outfits.

The militant leader said his "unity formula" was all about "seeking forgiveness from God and the Naga people". He urged

between militant outfits in Na-

Elusive Naga leader S.S. Khaplang speaks to Samir K. Purkayastha of The Telegraph in his first interview in five years. Purkayastha trekked for two-and-a-half days through the jungles and hills of upper Myanmar to reach the NSCN-K Council headquarters



Khaplang with wife outside his official residence. Picture by Samir K. Purkayastha

galand. Khaplang said the Centre and the NSCN (I-M) were to blame for it. He accused the Centre of employing divisive policies and the NSCN (I-M) of "pouring cold water" on his ef-

orts to unite the community. "The Southeast Asian Forum had arranged a meeting between me and Isak and Muivah in the presence of Ulfa leaders Arabin-da Rajkhowa and Anup Chetia

and UNLF chief Sanayaima. That was at Geneva in 1997. Though I was willing to interact with them, both Isak and Muivah refused to even shake hands with me. They should under-

stand that in politics there is no permanent enemy or friend," he said. Khaplang denied having links with Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

Hope is still the key

THE most striking fact in Assam's economic development is that it is falling behind that of the rest of India. In 1950-51, per capita income was 4 per cent above the national average. By 1998-99 it was 41 per cent below the national average at current price, and 45 per cent below the national average at 1980-81 price. What is more alarming is that the gap is growing. Between 1980 and 1990, the per capita income at 1980-81 price rose by 20 per cent in Assam compared to 40 per cent for the rest of India. Between 1980 and 1998, per capita income in Assam grew by only 10 per cent, compared to the national average of 39 per cent.

From 1951 to 1979, Assam's economy grew at more or less the same rate as the rest of India. Yet, Assam's per capita income fell, because of the higher growth rate of population owing to immigration. During that period, Assam's population grew at an average rate of about 4 per cent a year. The widening disparity since 1980-81 is, however, because of the slower growth in economy. While the Indian economy grew at 6 per cent between 1981 to 2000, Assam's GDP rose by only 3.3 per cent. And, while the growth rate of the Indian economy accelerated in the 1990s, that of Assam's decelerated. The poor growth performance is seen in all sectors. Agriculture grew only at 2.1 per cent a year between the 1980s and 1990s, while services growth fell marginally from 4.9 per cent to 4.5 per cent.

The poor growth rate meant fewer new jobs, with the number of educated unemployed rising. Governments in the past took the easy way out to increase government and public sector employment. Thus labour-employing activities under public sectors such as electricity and water supply grew rapidly in the 1980s. The situation today is such that 90 per cent of Assam's tax and non-tax revenue, inclusive of its share of Central taxes and non-plan grants in 1997-98, was spent towards the expenditure of government servants, past and present, on their wages, salaries and pensions (NIPFP, 1998, and State Fiscal Studies: Assam, p. 40). Very little is left to do what the government is supposed to exist for.

It isn't that Assam has made compensatory progress in other aspects of human welfare. Its progress in education and health is just about the national average. Assam has a higher rural poverty ratio than the rest of India, and poverty alleviation too has been much lesser than the national average. Rural poverty shows a decline only in recent years. Assam is the only major state in India where rural poverty increased during a long period, from 1957 to 1994, even though inequality, as reflected in Gini coefficient, to consumption expenditure constitutes only 11 per cent of the total population in Assam compared to 25.7 per cent in the country as per the 1991 census.

Reasons for Poor Growth

Floods have been an exogenous source of handicap to the development of Assam. Floods in the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys cause "serious erosion, loss of life and livestock and heavy damage to infrastructure and property retarding agricultural productivity... and sand casting, disrupting communications and education and posing health hazards. The flood damage to crops, cattle, houses and utilities in Assam alone between 1953 and 1995 is estimated at Rs 4,400 crore with a peak of Rs 664 crore in a single bad year." Floods have impeded the technological transformation of agriculture in Assam. For farmers do not apply costly inputs such as fertilisers and HYV seeds for the fear of their being washed away by floods. About 92.6 per cent of the cultivated land is flood prone.

Apart from floods, inadequate attention to agriculture has also been responsible for slow agricultural development. Thus, poor agricultural development is partly owing to neglect of agriculture and partly owing to the difficulty in increasing productivity because of a high probability of floods that

Assam has to move at a faster pace to catch up with the rest of India, says a report prepared by Indira Gandhi National Institute of Development Research, Mumbai



Ulf and National Democratic Front of Bodoland militants after they surrendered at Assam's Rangiya Army camp last week. They complained of miserable conditions in their hideouts in southern Bhutan. — AFP

may wash away costly inputs. Its consequences on an economy with 89 per cent rural population are overwhelming. Its reflection can be seen in the much higher number of people living below the poverty line in 1999-2000.

Industrial growth in Assam and North East too has been very poor. Industries lack good infrastructure and adequate markets. The local market does not create enough demand. And they have not been able to compete outside the region because of high transportation cost.

Partition created huge disadvantages, of transport and accessibility, in Assam and the North East. This discourages industries from setting up base in Assam. Only those based on raw materials available in the North East are likely to be set up here. To move a 9-ton truck from Guwahati to Kolkata, a distance of 1,100 km, costs about Rs 16,000. This also reflects on the condition of roads connecting the North East with the rest of the country. Before 1947, boats laden with tea, coal and timber reached Kolkata from Dibrugarh in eight days. But now the Kolkata-Guwahati distance takes more than 25 days because of Customs formalities at various points. The transport cost has thus increased. The net effect has been that people pay higher prices for goods imported from the rest of the country and Assam's producers do not get the right prices for their products.

Of course one could have developed industries to feed the North East market only. The high transport cost would have provided some protection. But this did not happen. North East industries suffered from lack of infrastructure in the early decades after Independence. This led to a much slower growth of industries and income in the North East and Assam. Once industrial growth stagnated so did in-

come growth. And demand for manufactured goods slowed down in turn. Thus industries to serve the North East did not grow. A vicious circle developed.

In recent years, successive governments have offered many concessions to the North East industries. They have reduced taxes to compensate for the disadvantage in transporting goods to and from the region. The New Industrial Policy offers attractive incentives. But as long as the taxes that the government waives are collected by others, these incentives would not be effective. If the problem of governance can be solved, Assam would be an attractive place for many industries.

Strategy for Development

Assam's economy has to accelerate and catch up with that of the rest of the country. And it has come to a stage where this seems possible. Infrastructure, especially roads and railways, is in better shape now. Civil aviation can improve quickly. The power situation can be improved too if projects under implementation are completed soon. Telecommunication is growing rapidly and the new technology makes it possible to get connected from any place at a modest cost without waiting

If Assam's development is to be based on its natural resources and a participatory basis, the following sectors will play important roles:

- Agriculture
- Horticulture and Agro-processing
- Silviculture and Handicrafts
- Fishery
- Forestry and related industries
- Tourism
- Petrochemicals and related industries
- IT-based services

for the government to invest in capacity creation and network expansion. Money is now relatively easier to obtain. The implementation of the package announced by the Prime Minister will give a big thrust to the region's economy. The continuous monitoring of the various measures in a transparent manner where the progress report can be tracked on a website updated every three months offers hope that these measures will be implemented. Thus the stage is set for Assam to take off.

The government has an important role to play in the development of Assam — in

social services, infrastructure and good governance. To do so, it will have to put its fiscal house in order. Downsizing of the government is the most pressing imperative for faster development. It is critical to develop institutional mechanism, particularly to provide accountability and a good governing system. Decentralisation and devolution of financial resources to local panchayats should be done as soon as possible. People should be given the right to information, so that local bodies... have more chances of succeeding and the young men and women get a clear perception of the the promise the future holds for them. Such decentralised development is less likely to be a victim of extortion.

Apart from the obvious and well-known factors that have impeded the development of these sectors, we have focused on what should we do now to achieve better results?

Growth Prospects: A Macro View

The country's economic growth picked up (by about 6 per cent) after the initiation of economic reforms in the early 1990s. But Assam didn't witness any radical change. All evidences point towards the stagnancy in growth rate in gross state domestic product (which is around 3.5 per cent a year). This stagnancy is a worrisome feature not only for the state but also for the nation's overall development. While the overall growth rate is slow, Assam still has a more egalitarian distribution of its wealth than other states. Despite this Assam is the only state where poverty did not decline over a long period. Higher growth then becomes a necessary condition for poverty alleviation in a situation where scope for inequality reduction is limited. Quicker

economic progress would also help contain insurgency, for economic scarcity generates social tension and fuels insurgency.

To eliminate the current disparity Assam would have to adopt —

- * A growth rate equal to that of the national level in about five years;
- * A 2-3 per cent higher rate than the national thereafter for about two decades.

The above steps would arrest further widening of the current disparity in the average level of living between Assam and the rest of India in the next five years and then gradually reduce the disparity over a period of 20 years. The current shortfall is the result of over 40 years, and it would not be possible to remove it within a decade or so.

Admittedly, it is not an easy task. But it is not an impossible task either. Assam has the required natural and human resources. Generation of the required financial resources would involve the following —

- * A steady pick-up in investment rate in relation to the state's income;
- * Attracting private investment in a big way. This in turn requires a quick solution of the insurgency problem;
- * Maintaining the public sector's important role in areas such as irrigation, infrastructure and social sectors where private investment may not be forthcoming;
- * Priority should be given to those sectors, which have comparative advantage and high linkage with other sectors. Among them are sectors such as agriculture, fishery, wood products, textiles, petroleum, fertilizers, edible oil, paper products and information technology.

The task would call for synchronised efforts by various Central and state government agencies, private entrepreneurs, international financial agencies and non-government organisations. In the era of liberalisation, the key words are "competition" and "efficiency". Assam must improve efficiency by concentrating on sectors which are comparatively more at an advantage to withstand global competition. Assam's development has to be based on its natural resources and on a participatory basis. The sectors that offer much scope for development include agriculture, horticulture, agro-processing, silviculture, handicrafts, fishery, forestry and related industries, tourism, petrochemicals and related industries and IT-based services.

Meeting reviews security

Delhi to fortify N-E border in six months

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, Feb. 14: The Centre today announced a series of steps to seal the porous Indo-Bangladesh border in Assam, but the All-Assam Students' Union (AASU) said the NDA government had yet to display the level of seriousness required to stop infiltration.

The steps, unveiled at a tripartite meeting here on implementation of the 1985 Assam Accord, include deployment of more BSF companies and installation of floodlights along the border within the next six months. Representatives of the Centre, the Assam government and the All-Assam Students' Union (AASU) attended the meeting.

AASU general secretary Amiyo Kumar Bhuyan said after the meeting that the Centre had agreed to engage a new agency in the border-fencing project. The students' organisation believes that the state public works department has been "too slow" in fencing the border.

After reviewing implementation of the Assam Accord, the tripartite meeting reached a consensus on the issue of joint patrolling of the border. The AASU leadership and officials agreed that the BSF and Assam police should start implementing the decision taken at a previous tripartite meeting and endorsed thereafter, Bhuyan said.

The AASU leaders reiterated their demand to set a timeframe

for implementation of the accord, to which the secretary of border management in the Union home ministry, R.C.A. Jain, agreed.

On the BJP's proposed *rathyaatra* on March 23 to campaign for repeal of the IM(DT) Act, Bhuyan said his organisation would not support anything that could spark communal tension. Vowing to resist any attempt which could fuel communal tension, the AASU leader said the saffron party's proposed *rathyaatra* was uncalled for because the people of Assam were already aware about the loopholes in the legislation.

"If the BJP really wants to build public opinion in favour of scrapping the IM(DT) Act, then let it undertake such a drive in Delhi and other states. A *rathyaatra* is not required in Assam to mobilise opinion on the issue," Bhuyan said.

Samujjal Kumar Bhattacharyya, adviser to the students' organisation, accused the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance government of never having taken the problem of infiltration from Bangladesh seriously.

Both Bhuyan and Bhattacharyya said while the Centre had raised a furore over 213 Bangladesh nationals transgressing into the Cooch Behar sector of the international border, it had remained a silent spectator to the influx of lakhs of illegal migrants through the Indo-Bangladesh border in Assam.

THE TELEGRAPH

15 FEB 2003

Assam bandh peaceful

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Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, Feb. 14. — Barring stray incidents of arson, the 36-hour Assam bandh called by the Sanmilita Janagoshthiya Sangram Samity (SJSS) from 5 pm yesterday remained largely peaceful till this evening.

The call for the bandh evoked partial response in lower Assam areas with little or no impact in the proposed Bodoland Territorial Council area. The bandh was called in protest against creation of the BTC.

The Northeast Frontier Railway ran its trains without a hitch but vehicular traffic was disrupted.

The SJSS convenor, Mr Brajen Mahanta, however claimed that the bandh in lower Assam was "total and spontaneous." He said that this was enough proof that majority of the people were against the BTC.

He also warned that efforts to implement the latest Bodo accord would meet with "dangerous consequences" and called upon the political parties to review their stand on creation of the BTC.

The opponents of the BTC apprehend breach of their rights if the BTC is created under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

The chief minister, Mr Tarun Gogoi, has assured though that non-Bodos living in the BTC area had nothing to fear as care has been taken to protect their rights.

15 FEB 2003

THE STATESMAN

No bonhomie

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Bodo pact unlikely to restore peace

The Bodos are convinced they can govern themselves. The Memorandum of Settlement the militant Bodo Liberation Tigers signed on Monday with Delhi and Dispur on the creation of a Bodo Territorial Council is welcome if it helps accelerate the development process, but it would be naive to think of peace in the region in the immediate future. The deal is the culmination of several rounds of talks over three years. At one point the BLT threatened to pull out over the non-inclusion of 93 villages but better sense prevailed. That the dispute has not been sorted out suggests the MoS is also towing a similar trailer of uncertainties that ultimately derailed the February 1993 Bodo Accord signed by the All Bodo Students' Union and the Bodo Movement Action Committee. It is not clear whether the BLT has accepted the Assam cabinet sub-committee's recommendation of not giving away villages with a less than 50 per cent Bodo population. If there is insistence, the pact will probably go the 1993 way.

There is not much to choose between the two accords save for the fact that the BLT will be under the Sixth Schedule. If anything, the accord has sharply polarised Bodos and non-tribals who form the majority in the proposed set-up and who were not even consulted on their future. This explains the absence of any camaraderie that followed the 1993 accord. Although Dispur has assured that the interests of non-Bodos will be protected by amendments to the Constitution, the latter are not convinced. The Centre has made up with just one section of militants. The one with the greater firing power — the National Democratic Front of Bodoland — is watching in the wings. Since Delhi is following a policy of piecemeal settlement it will be interesting to watch its next step vis-a-vis the NDFB.

1 3 FEB 2003

THE STATESMAN

971658- THE BODO SETTLEMENT 1312

AFTER SEVERAL YEARS of struggle, marked by periodic eruptions of violence that was crippling normal life, a solution to the problem in those regions of Assam with a dominant Bodo population seems to be in sight with the signing of an accord to set up a Territorial Council to function as an autonomous administrative body within the State. The tripartite Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) entered into by the Union Home Ministry and the Assam Government with the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), could indeed be the basis for a lasting settlement of the crisis that has been affecting the region for over a decade now. While the details of the settlement and its implementation thereof would require the players — the political leadership in Assam and more importantly the leadership of the BLT — to act with a sense of purpose, the broad lines on which it has been drawn up are indeed encouraging. The BLT would serve its own cause and the interests of the tribals in the region by drawing lessons from the experience with the District Administration Council in the Darjeeling hill tracts and the manner in which the concept of autonomy was put into practice. The contours of the Bodo settlement (despite differences in detail), after all, are on lines similar to that of the accord the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) leader, Subash Ghising, agreed to within the framework of the Constitution. It is for this reason that the BLT would do well to draw the initial lessons on working the autonomous council from the experience of the Darjeeling Hill Council. It is another matter that the Council proposed in the Bodo accord falls within the scope of the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution while the accord with the GNLF was not the same.

Another fact that needs to be taken into account is that there are several players involved in the Bodo agitation unlike in the Gorkhaland case. The BLT, for instance, cannot be seen as representing the aspirations of the region as a whole. It is a fact that the BLT is a platform that

emerged (at least as a major player) only after the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) had entered into an agreement with the Union and the Assam Governments a few years ago. The terms on which the ABSU had settled have hardly been put into effect. The ABSU representatives, incidentally, are reported to have been present during the signing of the MoS but it has not been explained clearly as to whether the outfit too is party to this agreement. Apart from all these, there is the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), an outfit that has not only been engaged in an armed conflict with the state but also held on to the demand for a separate Bodoland, with its leaders speaking at various points of time of a solution outside the framework of the Constitution and its members are said to have links with the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) too. True, the NDFB in recent times has climbed down to demand a separate State and in this sense sought a bifurcation of Assam. The fact that the tripartite agreement arrived at does not address any of these concerns is ground for some apprehension over the prospects of the settlement.

However, experience with similar movements in the past, whether it is in the Northeast or in other parts of the country, testifies that whenever there is a genuine commitment to autonomy on the part of New Delhi and the State capitals that helps restore the confidence of the people in such backward regions. The MoS in the case of the Bodo-dominated regions in Assam too will achieve its purpose only if the political leadership at all levels displays a sense of purpose and includes the people of the region in the democratic space. Similarly, the BLT leaders too will have to strive to involve at least the influential sections within the NDFB as well as in the ABSU in the Bodoland Territorial Council that will be set up soon, rather than reduce the 46-member body into an instrument for the self-preservation of its own leaders.

13 FEB 2003

Bodo breakthrough

With this accord, prospects of peace in Assam brighten but watch out for saboteurs

IT has been a good season for peace prospects in the Northeast. We use the term 'prospects' advisedly because, ultimately, talks and accords amount only to intentions and must await their transformation into political practice to be really tested. But every process of change begins with good intentions and it is in that spirit that we welcome the tripartite agreement, signed on Monday, between the Bodo Liberation Tigers, the Centre and the government of Assam, creating an autonomous, self-governing Bodoland Territorial Council.

The Bodos, as a major tribe in the region, have long lived with the feeling that they have been cheated by history. Despite being among the earliest settlers in Assam — it is believed that they once ruled the region between Cooch Behar and the Naga Hills — they have generally been dealt the thick end of the stick, not just in terms of development initiatives but in terms of land lost to settlers from across the national border. The Assam Accord, when it came in 1985, benefitted the Assamese to the exclusion of the indigenous groups.

It is this palpable deprivation that fuelled popular anger, which in turn kept alive several groups fighting for causes ranging from Bodo autonomy to Bodo independence. Apart from engineering massacres of those they regarded as 'outsiders' — the 1994 incident at Bansberia allegedly to liberate 'Bodoland' from Assam is a case in point — some of these outfits quickly descended to extortion, gun-running and drug-dealing.

Any initiative, then, to end such activity needs to be encouraged and, as we said, the Bodo accord is a step in the right direction. However, we must also remember that an earlier accord signed between the All Bodo Students' Union, the Bodo Peoples' Action Committee and the Assam government in 1993, came unstuck because it was not inclusive enough. The present one involves the Bodo Liberation Tigers, but not entities like the underground National Democratic Front of Bodoland, which are bound to stir up trouble. This is something that both the state and Central governments must anticipate if they want to protect the early prospects of peace in the state.

1 2 FEB 2003

INDIAN EXPRESS

Mixed response to accord, non-Bodos protest

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
GUWAHATI, FEBRUARY 11

WITHIN hours of the Centre signing a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) with the Bodoland Liberation Tigers (BLT) for creation of a Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), simultaneous celebrations swept the Bodo dominated areas of Assam while a pall of gloom descended over the non-Bodo pockets.

Since last night, processions, bursting of fire crackers, drum beating and night vigil was reported from all over the proposed BTC areas. In Guwahati, a small victory procession was taken out by the resident Bodos.

On the other hand, an eerie calm prevailed over Pathasala, Tihu, Bongaigaon and Dhubri towns, non-Bodo dominated areas on the fringes of the proposed BTC map. Non-Bodos are a strong force in lower Assam and they are opposing the BTC tooth and nail. The Samilita Janagathiya Sangram Samiti (SJSS), an umbrella body of 16



non-Bodo organisations, has called for a 100-hour bandh which completed 36 hours today.

There is no impact of the bandh on the Bodo dominated areas but vehicular traffic has been badly affected in lower Assam. The SJSS executive com-

mittee which met at Rangya near here today called the MoS unfounded and signed without ensuring the safety and security of the non-Bodo population of the areas which would come under jurisdiction of the new Council. It also announced an economic blockade in

Lower Assam districts which would be affected by the BTC creation.

Threatening to jeopardise creation of the BTC, the SJSS claimed that the accord was aimed at appeasing the Bodos who, according to it, were not in a majority in the proposed Council territory.

"We will oppose tooth and nail the imposition of BTC on the people without taking into consideration the genuine grievances and fears of the non-tribal population," said Phani Medhi, a spokesman of the SJSS. Security has been intensified in the area fearing violent clashes between the two camps. The authorities are not taking any chances with the Bodo leadership re-turning from New Delhi after signing the accord.

Officials said a special BSF flight will bring the leaders here and then they would be flown by an Indian Air Force (IAF) helicopter to Kokrajhar to avoid any skirmishes on the road, which passes through largely non-Bodo areas.

Bodo accord: Another step towards statehood?

Dipankar Roy in Guwahati

Feb. 11. — The signing of the Bodo accord in Delhi could well be yet another stepping stone to the Bodos' "aspiration" for a separate state for themselves. The accord would lead to creation of the Bodoland Territorial Council under the Constitution's Sixth Schedule.

The first step was the Bodo accord of 1993, which had led to the creation of the Bodoland Autonomous Council under a state legislation. The All Bodo Students' Union, which had been spearheading the movement for a separate state for the Bodos since 1987, was one of the signatories to that accord. But the Absu soon denounced the pact saying that the BAC had failed to fulfil the as-

pirations of the Bodos and a separate state was the only answer. They then revived the movement for a separate state.

The Bodoland Liberation Tigers was also in the meantime engaged in a violent movement for a separate state.

In early 1999, when the BLT and the Central government sat down and smoked the peace pipe and began negotiations, the Absu decided to play second fiddle; the Absu was anyway perceived to be hand in glove with the BLT. The Absu allowed the BLT to do the talking, perhaps realizing that those with guns, even if those were not firing for the moment, had a bigger chance to clinch a better deal than those who were involved in a democratic movement to ach-

ieve the same goal. ^{S. C. B.} A senior Assam bureaucrat, who has been closely associated with Bodo affairs, had told this correspondent once that signing of the 1993 Bodo accord was the

'Bodo accord was the biggest mistake... It was done in a hurry, but now there is no stopping them (those seeking a separate state) from seeking more and more'

biggest mistake. "It was done in a hurry but now there is no stopping them (those seeking a separate state) from seeking more and more," he said. He had pointed at the progress of Meghalaya from being a part of Assam to a full-

fledged state via the Sixth Schedule, the privileges of which it still enjoys. "The Absu-BLT are following the same route," he said.

The pointers to such a possible scenario are found in the demand for an area that is compact in its geographical boundaries, including an international boundary (with Bhutan), the demand for a university, a medical college and institutions to impart technical knowledge. "These are the minimum infrastructure that are required for a state," the official had said.

Be that as it may, the fact remains that the non-Bodos living in the BTC area, irrespective of the constitutional protection that may have been provided to them while creating the BTC, would have to

be taken care of by the government. If the past is anything to go by then ethnic conflagration in these areas cannot be ruled out completely. More so because the National Democratic Front of Bodoland, an armed outfit seeking a sovereign Bodoland, is not a party to the accord signed yesterday.

The NDFB would like nothing better than creating a situation that would not be to the liking of the BLT and its supporting groups. The NDFB, importantly, also enjoys the support of the Uj-fa, which has not been supportive of the idea of creating the BTC.

The accord has been signed but it remains to be seen whether it brings peace to the Bodoland area.

Sovereignty and the Naga issue

By Sanjay K. Pandey

g. M. S. S. S.

10-10 12/2

TALKING TO the media, the NSCN (IM) leader, T. Muivah, asserted "The question whether Nagaland's sovereignty is negotiable or not doesn't arise. The destiny of Nagas should be left to Nagas themselves. Sovereignty of Nagaland belongs to the people of Nagaland". The statement has created doubts and misgivings in the minds of many people. To grasp the real intent and import of this assertion one has to first examine the concept of sovereignty.

Sovereignty in simple words is the principle of absolute and unlimited power. It is generally considered an essential attribute of the 'state', which distinguishes it from other organisations and groups. The concept arose in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when the emerging national monarchies in England, France, Spain and elsewhere were trying to assert their authority over rival claimants, such as the Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire, and the feudal vassals.

The traditional concept of sovereignty is considered no longer applicable to modern systems of government, which operate according to the principle of checks and balances and distribution of power among a number of institutions, none of which can meaningfully claim to be sovereign. This is particularly evident in the case of federalism — one combining a central government and a number of constituent regional governments each having exclusive jurisdiction over some matters — which is based upon the paradoxical notion of shared sovereignty.

But, the concept of sovereignty retains its appeal, especially among groups and regions fighting for self-determination and independence. However, a distinction should be made between claims of sovereignty and demands for independence. During its last years the former Soviet Union witnessed what has been described as the "Parade of Sovereignities", when 41 constituent units declared themselves to be sovereign states. But only 16 of these actually aspired to independence beyond sovereignty. Fifteen seceded without war and with relatively little blood-

'Special status' is one of the strategies adopted by federal systems to satisfy the demand of national groups for political and cultural autonomy.

shed while Chechnya is still fighting for independence from Russia. The other units, which are now part of Russian Federation or the other successor states of the dissolved Soviet Union, did not aspire for independence but for more autonomy.

What the Nagas led by the NSCN (IM) are demanding is not outright independence, which they seem to have realised is unachievable. Mr. Muivah's statement "A better understanding of the reality of Nagas by Indian Government would enable the Nagas to understand the reality of India ten times more" in fact points to this realisation. What they demand is recognition of their "uniqueness" which they define in terms of their distinct tribal identity, culture, way of life and their faith — Christianity. More than this, they insist "Nagaland was never part of India and that is the uniqueness of our history". Before the coming of the British, the only contact they had with the outside world was in the form of salt trade with Assam.

Though the British brought the Nagas and the other tribal areas in the Northeast under political control, they were declared "excluded areas" and "backward tracts". The British adopted a policy of non-interference in local tribal affairs. The Naga leaders claim that when the Simon Commission came to India in 1927 some Nagas met it and asked that they may be "left alone". They point out that the Nagas under the aegis of the Naga National Council led by Angami Zapu Phizo declared their independence on August 14, 1947, a day before India's independence. This was ratified by a 99 per cent affirmative vote in a referendum held in May 1951, according to them. They believe that these two actions provide firm legal and ethical basis for their claim of separateness. At present, the majority of the Nagas and their leaders realise that outright independence is unachievable. But they still insist on recognition and respect for their uniqueness and honour, for which

thousands of Nagas sacrificed their lives. In fact, the present breakthrough in the talks was achieved only after a Joint Communique was signed by K. Padmanabiah, representative of the Centre, and Mr. Muivah stating "The Government of India recognises the unique history and situation of Nagas".

'Special status' is one of the strategies adopted by federal systems to satisfy the demand of national groups for political and cultural autonomy. It arises when a constituent unit contains a population, which is in a majority in that unit but otherwise a minority in the entire federation. The arrangement is also referred to as "asymmetrical federalism". It is important to remember that the demand for 'special status' by national minorities is not just a demand for additional powers but also for national recognition — a symbolic declaration of their "distinct identity" and "uniqueness". These arrangements vary from country to country and each case has some lesson for us.

Canada was perhaps the first modern federation to take recourse to a 'special status' arrangement to accommodate the aspirations of the French-speaking majority in Quebec province. To assuage the feelings of the embittered people of the province two attempts were made in 1987 and 1992 to restore some of the privileges and to provide recognition to Quebec's distinct status within the federation. But both the attempts failed because of the strong opposition of the English-speaking majority in the country. Thus the demand for 'special status' by some units (inhabited by national minorities) in a federation is resisted by people of other units, who either feel discriminated against or are apprehensive that such demands may lead to secession. When this division becomes a platform for political mobilisation and electoral politics the problem gets compounded.

Spain was a unitary state till the

constitution of 1978 gave 'special status' to Catalonia, the Basque country and Galicia as a price for holding together the multinational country. Taking advantage of some provisions in the Constitution, the other units also demanded and got these special powers. But the Catalan leaders who demand special treatment and recognition as nations within a "multinational Spain" have resented this "levelling up" or the "coffee for everyone" approach. In fact they speak of a special "co-sovereignty" status within Spain that they, and not other autonomies (units) would have.

The Malaysian system is one of the best illustrations of this approach. Although it has a highly centralised system of government, Malaysia has given the states of Sabah and Sarawak powers that normally fall under the central jurisdiction. These Bornean States have considerably more autonomy than the 11 other States in areas such as taxation (in particular customs and excise), immigration and citizenship, trade transportation and communication, fisheries and several social affairs sectors. The purpose is to protect the distinctive characteristics and interests of the two states.

The Indian Constitution also contains "special provisions" for certain States and regions. Article 371(A) ensures that "religious or social practices of the Nagas", "Naga customary law and procedure" and "ownership and transfer of land and its resources" is protected. There are reports suggesting that the NSCN (IM) leaders want special arrangements for a separate flag, citizenship, defence, trade and currency for their proposed territory. These are symbols of sovereignty and as the above discussion shows symbols play important role in such matters. Hence, some of these demands need serious consideration. Indeed, recognition of the principle of "divided sovereignty" and genuine operationalisation of state (province) level sovereignty will provide ample protection to national minorities' identity and scope for their language and culture to flourish. This will give them the much-needed sense of security.

(The writer is Assistant Professor, School of International Studies, JNU.)

12 FEB 2003

TUESDAY, MARCH 11, 2003

THE ASSAM ATTACKS

Q. N. S. S. 119-10

THE COORDINATED ATTACK on oil installations in far-flung places in upper and lower Assam is a reminder that the serious threat posed by the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) has far from receded. The massive attack, carried out in some places with rocket-propelled grenades, has taken place after something of a lull in such militant activity. In recent months, incidents involving the ULFA have been of a relatively minor, or at least less serious, nature. Against this background, the coordinated attack on oil installations, which resulted in a fuel tank in the Digboi refinery going up in flames — an attack that could have caused incalculable damage had it spread to neighbouring tanks — is something of a surprise. Those in the security establishment may not be totally off the mark suggesting that the attacks, promptly acknowledged by the ULFA as its own doing, were partly an attempt by the militant organisation to mark its presence, send a reminder about its existence to the Governments in the State and at the Centre. The Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi, who described the attacks as a “desperate” attempt by the ULFA to make its presence felt in an environment in which public support is fast eroding, has provided a similar explanation.

At the same time, the record of the ULFA's terrorist activity reveals that the organisation has returned to step up violent activity after periods of relative calm time and again in the past. Given this, it will be important to keep an especially close watch to determine whether the attacks signify the beginning of a new phase of militancy following a degree of regrouping or consolidation within the ranks of the ULFA, which continues to receive fresh recruits from various parts of the State. The attacks on the oil installations were preceded by some events that suggested that a fresh spurt of militant activity might be on the cards. The fires at the Digboi refinery have been extinguished and supplies of petroleum products have continued

uninterrupted. But the loss due to the single fuel tank catching fire is estimated to be almost Rs. 20 crores — a figure that reflects the enormous financial damage that terrorist strikes on oil installations can cause. Aware of this, oil installations have been targets of the ULFA's strikes. It was only last month that the organisation claimed responsibility for a blast at an underground pipeline in the Upper Mamoroni area of Tinsukhia.

The recent round of strikes stresses the importance in augmenting security to oil installations all over the State. In the age of rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and improvised explosive devices (IEDs), providing fool-proof security to large installations and lengthy oil pipelines is no easy matter. Even as the Union Petroleum Ministry engages in discussions with Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) officials about beefing up security, one of the things the Centre may do well to consider constitutes an exclusive security force to protect vital oil installations all over Assam. Such a force already exists for the tea industry in Assam — a direct result of ULFA's strategy in the mid-1990s to hold large and medium sized tea companies to ransom. The Assam Tea Plantation Security Force (ATPSF) was raised in 1995 and its services have been commissioned by almost a hundred tea gardens in the State. Although this experiment has had its share of problems in the tea industry (for instance, prohibitive costs on salary, food, clothing, weaponry and so on have lead many gardens to opt for cheaper and less effective private security agencies), the idea of having an exclusive security force for oil installations is not a bad one. Security requirements vary from industry to industry and a specialised group equipped to handle the particular challenges involved in protecting oil installations would be far more effective in carrying out this job. The recent ULFA strikes may have rattled the Centre enough into setting up such a force.

11 MAR 2003

THE HINDU

TERRITORIAL COUNCIL ON THE ANVIL

Bodos settle for autonomy

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 10. — After a decade of insurgency and sustained negotiations, the Bodo Liberation Tigers today signed an accord with the Centre and Assam government. The Bodos agreed to more autonomy in the form of a 46-member Bodoland Territorial Council, instead of a separate state.

A memorandum of settlement was signed in the presence of Mr LK Advani, chief minister Mr Tarun Gogoi and ministers of state for home Mr ID Swami and Mr Harin Pathak. It was signed by secretary (border management) in the home ministry Mr RCA Jain, Assam chief secretary Mr PK Dutta and BLT chairman Mr Hagrama Basumatary.

In the evening, representatives of all three sides celebrated the occasion at a hotel.

The Deputy Prime Minister said: "The issue was being discussed for quite a long time. This agreement today will speed up development in the North-east."

As per the accord, the existing Bodoland Autonomous Council will be abolished as soon as the autonomous self-governing BTC comes into existence.

Mr Jain later said the Centre would move a Constitution amendment Bill to include the BTC in the Sixth Schedule. In all, 3,082 villages have been identified to be included in the BTC, which will be divided into four contiguous districts after reorganisation of the state's districts within six months from today. The boundary demarcation, however, will be subject to the clearance by the Delimitation Commission.

Of the 46 seats in the BTC, 30 will be reserved for tribals, five for non-tribals and

another five for general category candidates. The Governor will nominate six members from communities that will otherwise not be represented.

A three-member committee will be set up comprising one representative each from the Centre, Assam government and the BLT, to decide on the inclusion of another 95 villages and areas within the BTC. "This will be decided by consensus on the basis of three criteria — of tribal population being not less than 50 per cent, contiguity or any other agreed relevant criteria, within a period of three months from today," the accord reads.

Though non-Bodos in Assam have come out on the streets protesting against the development, the agreement says that adequate safeguards have been taken to ensure protection of the rights of non-tribals in the BTC area as well as to remove any disadvantages in relation to their rights on land and

other privileges.

The agreement says that a centrally-funded Central Institute of Technology will be set up to impart education in various technological and vocational disciplines. The institute will be upgraded to a centrally-funded state university.

The Centre will also provide Rs 100 crore per annum over a period of five years for infrastructure development.

A statement on the accord says the government will sympathetically consider the demand of Bodo Kacharis living in the of Karbi Anglong district area for ST (Hills) status.

Flying high: The Centre is "seriously considering" the Bodo leaders' plea for a special plane to fly home.

HIGHLIGHTS

- BTC to be incorporated into the Sixth Schedule
- 3082 villages will make up the council
- A three-member committee comprising representatives of the Centre, Assam and BLT will decide on the demand for inclusion of additional 95 villages
- Bodo language will be included in the Eighth Schedule

Mixed reaction to Bodo accord, p 4

1 1 FEB 2003

Protests by non-Bodos mar euphoria in Assam over second accord in a decade, renewed ethnic cleansing feared

State within a state for Bodo tribe

R. VENKATARAMAN

New Delhi, Feb. 10: For the first time in the decade-long history of armed struggle of the Bodo tribes in Assam, the Centre, through a memorandum of settlement (MoS), today gave constitutional recognition to a virtual Bodo homeland in the north-eastern state.

This requires an amendment to the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution which will be done through an enactment in Parliament. Thus the Bodo Territorial Council (BTC) gains a constitutional recognition for the first time unlike its predecessor, the now defunct Bodo Autonomous Council (BAC) which was created by an enactment of the Assam Assembly. Now the only formality is that the state Assembly has to bring in a Bill to repeal the BAC Act.

With the constitutional recognition, the BTC can now even get direct Central assistance. For the time being, the Centre has decided to pump in a Rs 100-crore per annum assistance to the council through the Assam government for the next five years. According to the Union home ministry spokesman this would be reviewed after five years and depending on the development of the area a further amount would be fixed.

Under the Sixth Schedule, the autonomous council will have control over 10 major socio-political areas. These include land, any forest other than reserved forests, any canal or water course for purpose of agricul-

THE POWERS

The autonomous council will have control, administration and virtual governance over 10 socio-political areas

- The BTC will have almost complete superintendence and even law-making power on the use of land
- Management of any forest other than reserved forest. This will empower the BTC to even sanction contracts for wood-related industries
- Use of any canal or water course for the purpose of agriculture
- Power to regulate the practice of jhum or other forms of shifting cultivation
- Establishment of village and town committees to which BTC will delegate or sanction powers
- All matters relating to village and town administration, creating and maintaining village and town police force, public health and sanitation
- Appointment of chiefs or headmen (for villages and towns)
- Power to decide on inheritance of property
- Conducting marriage and divorce
- All other social customs

ture, any form of shifting cultivation, establishment of village and town committees, all matters relating to village and town administration, appointment of headmen for villages and towns, inheritance of property, conducting marriage and divorce and other social customs.

No enactment of Assam Assembly in respect of these 10 subjects would be valid. However, laws made by the Council in all these areas must have the assent of the Governor.

New Delhi, Feb. 10: After months of haggling over sundry issues, the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) today finally signed an accord with the Centre and the Assam government to pave the way for the creation of a Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) vested with substantial powers of local governance.

Through the transition from the defunct Bodoland Autonomous Council to a new administrative set-up could be difficult, the accord is expected to calm down the restive Bodo community after over a decade of violence.

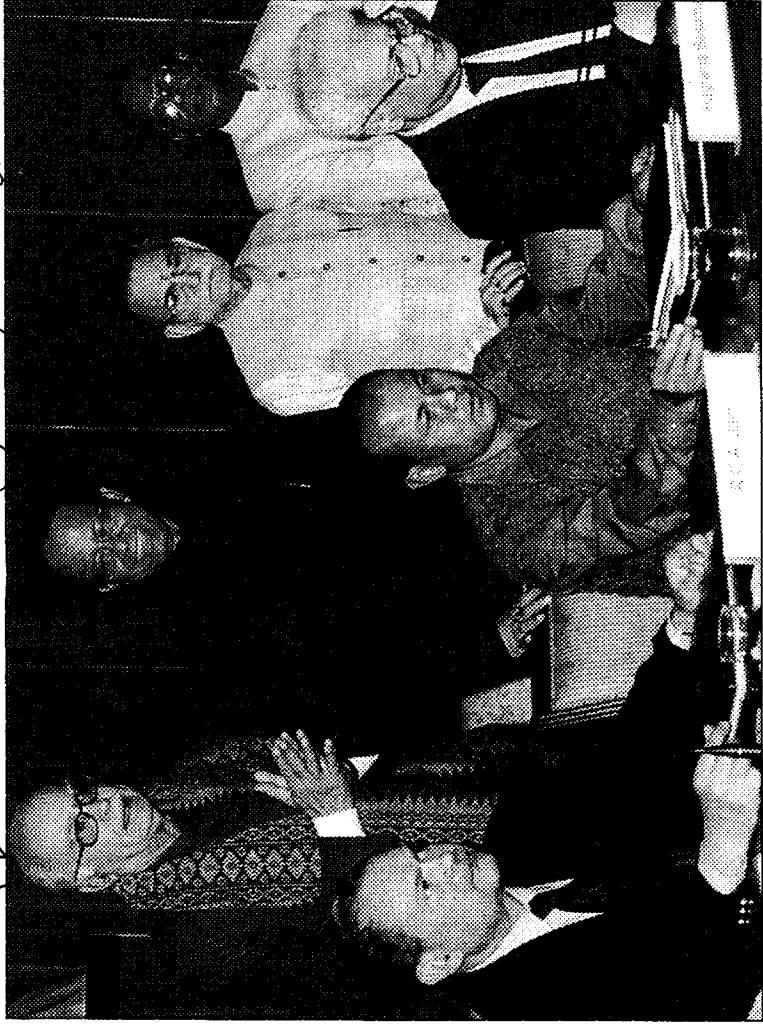
"This agreement will bring peace to the state and fulfil the aspirations of the Bodos. It will, hopefully, result in the uplift of the area," Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi said after the agreement was signed.

He mentioned that care had been taken in drafting the accord because it was imperative to safeguard the rights of the substantial non-Bodo population in the BTC territory.

Mainao Daimary, publicity secretary of the BLT, echoed Gogoi in hailing the accord as a new beginning for the Bodo community. "This settlement will provide socio-economic and educational benefits to the Bodos. The political aspirations of our people will be fulfilled, too. I would like to make it clear that we are committed to ensuring the welfare of the non-Bodos living in the area," he said.

Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani and senior Assam and Central government officials were present at the accord-signing ceremony. Apart from the chief minister, the state government was represented by chief secretary P.K. Dutta, commissioner and home secretary B.K. Gohain, commissioner

Promises galore in new pact



(Sitting from left to right): Secretary (border management) in the home ministry, RCA Jain, BLT chairman Hagrama Basumatary and Assam chief secretary PK Dutta and (standing from left to right) Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani, chief minister Tarun Gogoi, minister of state for home ID Swami and state health minister Bhumidhar Barman during the signing of the Bodo accord in New Delhi on Monday. Picture by Jagdish Yadav

K.D. Tripathi and inspector-general of police (special branch) Khagen Sarma.

The BLT team included its chairman Hagrama Basumatary, vice-chairman Kamal Mushahary and secretary-general Derhasat Basumatary.

The new 46-member council will have 30 seats reserved for tribals and five for non-tribals. Five seats will be open to representatives of all communities, while six members will be nominated by the Assam government.

The BTC will be constituted in accordance with the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution and initially comprise 3,082 vil-

lages where the Bodos are in the majority. The council will have four new contiguous districts after re-organisation of the existing ones within six months. The subject of law and order will, however, remain the preserve of the state government.

An officer of the rank of inspector general of police will be in charge of law-enforcement in the areas administered by the new council.

The executive council will not have more than 12 members, led by a chief councillor and a deputy. However, several technicalities have to be completed before the BLT is constituted. The

fashion. The Bodo community's main grouse against the state government is that it has always treated their area in a stepmotherly fashion.

Leaders learn from mistakes

OUR BUREAU

Feb. 10: Upbeat Bodo leaders today promised not to commit the "same mistakes" which led to the failure of the 1993 accord but sought the co-operation of their "Assamese brethren" for the success of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

"Let me assure you, there will be no repetition of what happened with the 1993 Accord, which was done in a hurried manner," BLT leader Mainao Daimary said after signing of the pact in New Delhi today between the outfit, the Centre and the Assam government.

However, the accord drew a sharp retort from the apex non-Bodo organisation — Sanmilita Janagosthiya Sangram Samiti — which termed it the "murder of democracy".

Aware of the resentment, Bodo leaders forcefully declared that the non-Bodos have nothing to fear in the new set-up.

"That we have accepted all the constitutional safeguards is enough indication of the fact that we do not have any intention of causing harm to the non-Bodos. But we should guard against some sections that have started spreading false rumours about us," cautioned Rajya Sabha MP and former Absu leader, Urkhao Gwra Brahma. The Bodo leaders hoped that the BTC would usher in a new chapter to the lives of the 23 lakh people.

Deputy chief convener of the SJSS, Brajen Mahanta, expressed apprehension that the accord would only pave the way for the militants to launch a fresh ethnic cleansing drive against non-Bodos.

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Centre eyes Bodo deal

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Feb. 8. — After having broken ground with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah), a major insurgent outfit in the North East, the government is hoping to cement a pact with the Bodo Liberation Tigers to gradually bring peace in the entire North East.

Expressing confidence that the ongoing peace talks with the BLT will yield a "positive agreement", Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee noted that the security situation in the North East has "improved significantly". The Prime Minister was speaking at the chief ministers' conference on internal security today.

"Negotiations are in progress with BLT. We are confident that our peace

talks with BLT will soon yield a positive agreement. We hope that these peace talks will reach a decisive phase in the coming months," Mr Vajpayee said.

Emphasising the government's policy of sustained talks and negotiations to bring about peace, the Prime Minister mentioned that its policy is already showing results. After several rounds of sustained talks abroad, the Government persuaded the NSCN(IM) leaders, Thuingaleng Muivah and Isak Chisi Swu, to visit India for talks.

Tripartite talks among the BLT, Centre and Assam Government were also held here last month which centred around demarcation of the boundaries of Bodo-dominated areas in Assam for formation of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

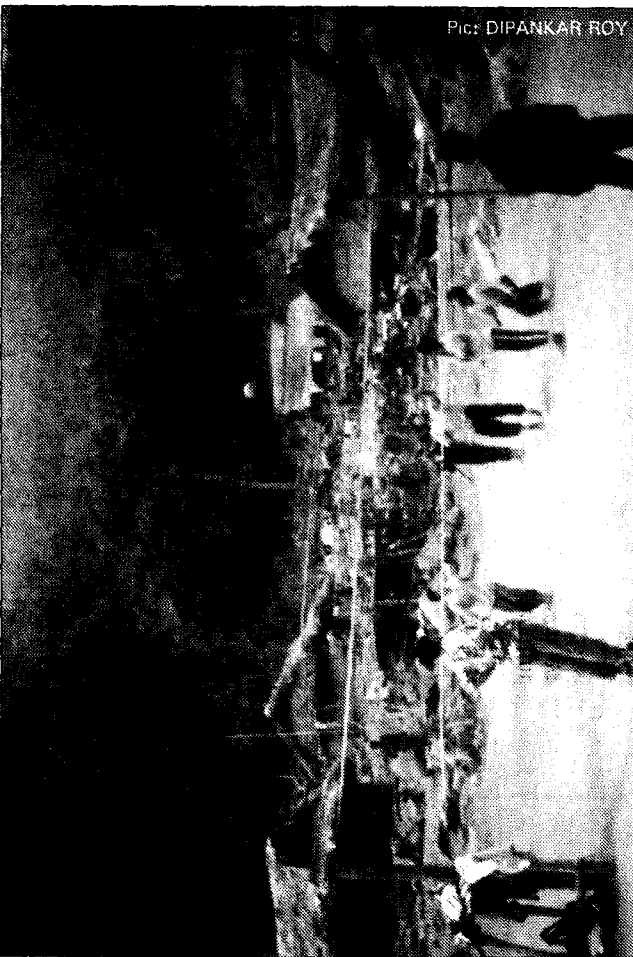
Ball now in Isak-Muivah court

By Dipankar Roy

He has interacted with media very infrequently. His image generally has been that of a recluse who is out of sync with the times, living as he does in the jungles of Myanmar where one can reach only after trekking over a harsh terrain. But that was till one met him. A clever man, the NSCN (K) supremo, Mr Shangnyu Shangwang Khaplang, has put the unification ball firmly in the NSCN (I-M)'s court.

The NSCN (I-M) leaders, Mr Isak Chisi Swu and Mr Thuingaleng Muivah, who visited India last month, would have to now come clean on whether they want to bulldoze the general opinion that all underground groups would have to unite in order to find an acceptable solution to the decades old Naga political problem and go ahead with their talks with the government of India or heed the call for unification.

Mr Khaplang told this correspondent in the organisation's council headquarters that he had already proposed a formula for reconciliation to the Naga Hoho, the apex tribal council of Nagas. The proposal envisages seeking forgiveness from God and the people for the mistakes that have been committed. The proposal also puts forth that all *kilousers* (ministers) would step down to accommodate the senior leaders from all the groups. As for the NSCN (K), its 'government' has already taken a cabinet



Pic: DIPANKAR ROY

NSCN (K) cadres enjoy a game of volleyball at the council headquarters

decision endorsing the proposal.

More significantly, Mr Khaplang has debunked his own organisation's theory — he said it was an emotional outburst from angry younger members — that Tangkhuls were not Nagas. Mr Muivah, incidentally, is a Tangkhul from Ukhrul district of Manipur. Tangkhuls, he emphasised, were as much Nagas as any other Naga tribe. In

fact, he went a step further to even appreciate Mr Muivah's manly qualities as opposed to the latter's "wavering and indecisive" colleague, Mr Swu.

The 'Tangkhul' question has so far been a thorn in the path of unification. This has now been removed by none other than Mr Khaplang himself and henceforth no matter what his organisation says it is his

word that would remain.

Indeed, the NSCN (I-M) has never said that it was not for unity. Its representatives, including the vice-chairman, Mr Khodao Yanthan, and a few other senior functionaries had even participated at the function to launch the Naga Hoho's reconciliation process in December 2001. But then, Mr Muivah later reportedly said that he would never sit with Mr Khaplang.

Now that Mr Khaplang has made it quite clear that he has no such reservations it is up to the NSCN (I-M) collective leadership to not only respond but, for the sake of peace, respond favourably.

In this regard it is a happy augury that the Naga Hoho has said that it would take up the Khaplang proposal once again with the NSCN (I-M) although two reminders to respond had been sent earlier. The Hoho would need the support of all sections of society in its efforts.

No one in Nagaland and those who have been watching the Naga issue closely from elsewhere believe that the NSCN (I-M) alone can resolve the imbroglio that has left hundreds dead. Unless, of course, as Mr Khaplang said they bring sovereignty for the Nagas. But for any other type of settlement consensus is a prerequisite that the NSCN (I-M) can deny only to the detriment of the Nagas.

(The author is a special representative of The Statesman based in Guwahati.)

410-10 The Northeast after the polls

By Wasbir Hussain

WITH LESS than a dozen poll-related deaths and a voter turnout of more than 70 per cent, the February 26 elections in three States in the Northeast — Tripura, Nagaland and Meghalaya — can well be described as an exercise that ended peacefully. While the mandates in Tripura and Nagaland clearly reflect the impact of intricate local politics, the lack of any issue with a Statewide appeal has once again resulted in a fractured verdict in Meghalaya.

The Left Front, led by the CPI(M), performed a hat-trick in Tripura, winning the elections three times in a row since 1993. With 41 seats in its kitty, the Left Front gave a drubbing to the opposition Congress and its tribal ally, the Indigenous Nationalist Party of Tripura (INPT), which together bagged just 19 seats in the 60-member State Assembly.

In Nagaland, the Congress that had been ruling the State for a decade, was voted out. Although it emerged as the single largest party with 21 seats, the Naga People's Front (NPF) with its individual tally of 19 and the backing of other parties, including seven BJP legislators, has managed to unseat the Congress heavyweight S.C. Jamir. In the absence of a clear majority for any party, a Congress-led coalition headed by D.D. Lapang assumed office in Meghalaya on Tuesday. The six-party Meghalaya Democratic Alliance has cobbled together a tally of 42 in the 60-member House, with the Congress having 22 members of its own.

The Left's sweep in Tripura clearly indicates that it was a vote against violence and terrorism. The Left's only opposition was the Congress. But, the Congress' tie-up with the INPT turned out to be a suicidal pact. This is because the INPT is accused of being directly backed by the outlawed National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), a charge that the former obviously seeks to deny. The CPI(M) told voters to imagine the situation that could emerge in the State if the Congress-INPT combine were to come to power. Since the poll sched-

ule was announced on January 11, as many as 45 CPI(M) cadres or supporters were killed in armed attacks most of which were said to have been carried out by the NLFT hit-squads.

A look at the INPT's background may not be out of place here. In May 2000, a rag-tag political party called the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) won the little-noticed elections to the 28-member Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District

managed to hijack the Naga issue. Leaders of the BJP and the NPF took credit for giving the much-needed push to the Naga peace efforts, saying that it was only due to the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's direct intervention that the NSCN(IM) leaders, Isak Chishi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah, could come over to New Delhi to carry the peace negotiations forward. That such a campaign worked was reflected in the BJP mak-

tion that a lasting solution to the Naga problem cannot be found by New Delhi by talking only to the NSCN (IM). The intra-group rivalry among the Naga rebel factions could well intensify in the days to come.

Meghalaya has a history of fractured verdicts. As many as six Governments, with four different Chief Ministers, ruled the State since the Assembly polls in 1998. Whether the veteran Congressman, D.D. Lapang, who is currently heading the six-party coalition, can reverse this trend remains to be seen.

Two important developments need to be noted: one is the winning of two seats by the Khun Hynniewtrep National Awakening Movement (KHNAM), a new political party with strong local aspirations, floated last year by the erstwhile leaders of the powerful Khasi Students' Union (KSU). The KHNAM's decision to join the Congress-led coalition is also significant. Its leader and former KSU chief, Paul Lyngdoh, has been given a cabinet berth by Mr. Lapang. The other notable feature of this election in Meghalaya has been the indications about the marginalisation of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader and former Lok Sabha Speaker, P.A. Sangma, in State politics. The NCP could manage to win just 14 seats, and, therefore, only put up a feeble bid for power.

If the February 26 polls in these three States had passed off rather peacefully, what with an estimated 150,000 security personnel standing guard, the impact of the verdict could well be turbulent. If the NSCN(IM) and the NSCN(K) decide to engage in a turf war, in the process supporting or opposing their favoured political groupings in Nagaland, in Tripura the NLFT could turn the heat on the Left Front. And, in Meghalaya, of course, Mr. Lapang cannot afford to sit tight. After all, no one can assure him that there will be no bid to topple the Government in his State this time round.

(The writer is Associate Fellow, Institute for Conflict Management, New Delhi)

The February 26 polls in Tripura, Nagaland and Meghalaya passed off rather peacefully... but the impact of the verdict could well be turbulent.

Council (TTAADC), an administrative structure established in 1982 to cater to the interests of the State's dwindling tribal population. The element of news here was that the IPFT, according to media and police reports, could oust the CPI(M) from the local tribal administrative body with the alleged backing of the NLFT, a dreaded tribal separatist group, fighting for an independent tribal homeland outside India. Late last year, the IPFT and another tribal party, the Tripura Upajati Juba Samity (TUJS), merged to form the INPT.

As the Tripura Chief Minister, Manik Sarkar, said after leading the Left Front to victory: "The results have been on expected lines. The Congress entered into a unholy alliance with the INPT, backed by an outlawed rebel group that operates from bases in Bangladesh with the assistance of Pakistan's ISI." Charges aside, the Left Front won largely because of fear amongst the State's majority non-tribal Bengali population of a rise in militancy if a non-Left combine with the backing of a party with tribal aspirations came to power. This is not to suggest that the Left Front has been able to contain the violent insurgency in Tripura.

In Nagaland, the Congress lost mainly because the BJP and its newly formed local allies, such as the NPF,

ing not just an entry in Nagaland politics, but doing so in style, winning as many as seven seats. The BJP's entry in a State where Christians constitute more than 90 per cent of the population is indeed significant.

The BJP would now be part of the NPF-led Democratic Alliance of Nagaland (DAN) Government in the State, but things may not be rosy for the new regime. The road to peace in Nagaland could now be more thorny than before. Mr. Jamir has accused the NSCN(IM) of threatening and intimidating Congress supporters during the polls, besides indulging in booth capturing on polling day. If the NSCN(IM) had indeed threatened Mr. Jamir or the Congress, the rival NSCN faction headed by S.S. Khapleng has dropped a bombshell after the election results were announced.

The rebel group said 17 legislators, 10 from the NPF and seven from the BJP, are already on their hit-list. "The 17 legislators would be our hot targets if they dare to enter areas dominated by us. We would like to make it clear to the NPF and BJP legislators not to create problems for us and not to go against the aspirations of the Naga people," K. Mulatonu, NSCN(K) publicity chief, has been quoted as saying in an interview. Mr. Jamir would like to deny that he is soft towards the NSCN(K), but he is firm in his convic-

AASU calls for unilateral truce with militant groups

SAMUDRA GUPTA
KASHYAP

GUWAHATI, FEBRUARY 5

TWO days after former Assam chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta suggested that the Centre initiate a dialogue with the ULFA by including even the sovereignty demand "if necessary", the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) has urged the Centre to declare a unilateral truce with all militant groups of the state for a month on an experimental basis.

"The AASU finds no reason why a unilateral truce cannot be declared by the Centre at least on an experimental basis as was done in the case of the Kashmir militants during Ramzan," AASU advisor Samujjal Kumar Bhattacharyya said here today.

He also recalled similar instances of unilateral ceasefire by the Government against the Naga groups during Christmas and said those gestures had indeed helped in moving towards "the right direction" in Nagaland. The en-

ding Rongali bihu (Assamese New Year festival) could be the best occasion to declare such a truce, he added.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi today ridiculed his predecessor and AGP leader Mahanta for suggesting that a dialogue could be opened with the ULFA by even including its demand for sovereignty on the agenda.

'No reason why Govt cannot do so on experimental basis as was done in J-K for Ramzan'

"Mahanta's is nothing but a gimmick to gain prominence," Gogoi said, adding that if Mahanta was so keen on a solution to the ULFA problem, why did he not do anything while he was in power.

"He was in power for two terms. Why didn't he take any such initiative to start a dialogue with the ULFA and NDFB?" the Chief Minister asked.

Bhattacharyya too has criticised Mahanta's statement. "He has no moral right to comment on the issue. He was in power for 10 years but hardly made any effort to bring the militant groups to the negotiating table," he said.

Meanwhile, AGP president and Opposition leader Brindaban Goswami has said that the Centre and ULFA should sit for talks without any preconditions.

"When the Naga leaders can come to the negotiating table without any precondition, why cannot the ULFA leaders also follow the same path?" he asked.

The only group that has by and large supported Mahanta's stand on the other hand is the Asom Jatiyabadi Yuva-Chatra Parishad (AJYCP). "We have been telling the Centre for years that the process for negotiations can start even with the issue of sovereignty on the agenda. Mahanta's statement is nothing new," said AJYCP president Apurba Bhattacharyya.

On a bumpy road to peace

By Wasbir Hussain

9-12-85
10-12
11-2

IT IS to New Delhi's credit that it was able to convince Isak Chishi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah, chairman and general secretary respectively of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah group), to come to India to carry the Naga peace process forward. The NSCN(I-M) leaders, too, began on the right note — visiting Raj Ghat first thing in the morning after their quiet touchdown shortly before midnight on January 8.

Viewed superficially, the NSCN(I-M) leaders coming to New Delhi on Indian travel documents, irrespective of whether the Indian stamp was affixed on their passports or on separate sheets of paper, is in itself a breakthrough of sorts. After all, the Nagas, or a dominant section of them, would still like to argue that they belong to the independent nation and groups such as the NSCN(I-M) were engaged in an armed struggle only to regain their lost sovereignty.

But, as the concluding remarks of Mr. Swu and Mr. Muivah show, the NSCN(I-M) is still maintaining a tough position insofar as its demand for unification of the Naga-inhabited areas in the Northeast is concerned. This was evident from their outright rejection of a Kashmir-type status through greater devolution of powers under Article 371 (A) of the Constitution.

Mr. Muivah, in fact, hardened his position while in New Delhi by saying the Nagas were never a part of India and that they must be left to deal with their destiny themselves. This suggests that New Delhi has a tough task ahead, despite the formal agreement between the two sides to continue the dialogue until a lasting settlement of the Naga problem is reached, and to maintain a peaceful and violence-free environment till then.

Five years after the NSCN(I-M) and the Government put a ceasefire in place in Nagaland, the two sides began by giving an impression that they had reached a stage to clinch a deal. After their 30-minute meeting

with the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, on January 9 and a 40-minute session with the Deputy Prime Minister, L. K. Advani, the next day, Mr. Swu and Mr. Muivah praised the Indian leaders for their sincerity and understanding of the complex Naga issue.

Things looked to be on the right track. Soon, however, the NSCN(I-M) leaders made one thing clear: they

areas outside Nagaland. Later, New Delhi bowed to the pressure from the Manipuris, who feared that extension of the truce outside Nagaland could be the first step before parts of their territory was ceded to the Nagas, and restricted the ceasefire to Nagaland.

The NSCN(I-M) leaders' remarks have united the otherwise warring political parties in Manipur, with

meeting with the Prime Minister in less than a fortnight, the NSCN(I-M) leaders sought to give the impression that New Delhi had denied Mr. Vajpayee giving any such assurance to Mr. Ibobi Singh.

Now, the Meitei uprising is only one part of the revolt that is brewing. Voices of dissent are emerging from among the Nagas themselves. The Naga National Council (NNC) — the premier Naga nationalist group that took shape under the legendary Angami Zapu Phizo before India attained Independence from the British — has opposed the ongoing peace talks. "The NSCN(I-M) is only a faction and thus does not constitute a properly mandated organisation which represents the views of the whole Naga populace," the NNC president, I. Panger Walling, and general secretary, Vizosielhou Nagi, said in a statement. According to the NNC, the Nagas had given it the necessary mandate on their future through a plebiscite way back in 1951 and that it was ready for peace talks with the Government if invited. This was also the argument put forward by the NSCN faction headed by S. S. Khaplang.

New Delhi would certainly not like to end a longstanding rebellion and open up newer fronts at the same time. It would have been prudent on New Delhi's part to have conducted a preliminary exercise to elicit the views of groups in Manipur as well as other Naga outfits before inviting the NSCN(I-M) leaders over for talks. To accomplish the task of holding peace talks with all the Naga rebel factions is indeed difficult, and could pose the biggest challenge in the days to come to both the Government of India as well as the Church and other NGOs engaged in brokering peace. All said and done, the NSCN(I-M) leaders deserve praise for undertaking a rather bold journey to New Delhi to carry forward the peace talks. One may ask groups such as the NNC why they had been silent for so long.

(The writer is an Associate Fellow, Institute for Conflict Management, New Delhi.)

It would have been prudent on New Delhi's part to have conducted a preliminary exercise to elicit the views of groups in Manipur as well as other Naga outfits before inviting the NSCN(I-M) leaders over for talks.

were not going to compromise on their demand for integration of the Naga-inhabited areas in the Northeast.

This was to trigger a fresh uprising in Manipur, and protests, as yet feeble, in neighbouring Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The majority Meiteis in Manipur were once again gripped by fears that New Delhi could slash off the Naga-inhabited areas in their State and merge them with Nagaland as part of a possible deal with the NSCN(I-M). At the call of the United Committee Manipur (UCM) — an apex group of political, social and student organisations — thousands of Meiteis carrying flaming bamboo torches came on to the streets in Imphal and other parts of the Manipur Valley on January 16, shouting slogans that they would launch an independence movement if the Government decided to dismember their State.

The scene was reminiscent of the June 2001 uprising in Manipur when 18 protesters were killed in police firing. On that occasion, the mob had set fire to the State Legislative Assembly and several other Government offices after New Delhi decided to extend the ceasefire with the NSCN(I-M) and the Government to

even the Meitei insurgent groups throwing their weight behind the opposition to the State's division. They, after all, have taken Mr. Muivah's comments very seriously. He had said: "I lived in Ukhrul (a Naga-dominated district town in Manipur). I was born there; my forefathers were born and lived there. This land belongs to us. We are not living in the land of Meiteis." The Manipur Chief Minister, Ibobi Singh, was made to head an all-party panel, constituted overnight, to pressure New Delhi not to take any hasty steps while forging a deal with the Naga rebels.

All the while, New Delhi did not do anything to defuse the crisis. In the prevailing situation, it could have done a lot to clear the air. But, it chose to keep mum. Disastrous consequences are likely to follow. On January 21, Mr. Ibobi Singh said after meeting Mr. Vajpayee that the latter had assured the all-party delegation that Manipur's territorial integrity would not be affected by any solution to the Naga conflict. Even on this occasion, there was no confirmation from the Prime Minister's Office or anyone in the Central Government on whether Mr. Vajpayee had actually given such an assurance. Later, after their second

10-12-85

1 FEB 2003

Agreed Ground Rules for Nagaland Ceasefire

(In the public interest, The Statesman, as part of its continuing effort to inform and educate readers about the issues involved in the complex Naga tangle, publishes the revised ground rules of the ceasefire between New Delhi and the NSCN (I-M), which came into effect two years ago. These ground rules are to be overseen by a Ceasefire Monitoring Group headed by Lt Gen (ret) RK Kulkarni and are intended to create conditions for peace and reduce confrontation between the two sides. Parts of these rules have only just begun being implemented and there are complaints about the cell's infirmity at the ground level. The clauses relating to cadres moving to specific camps have become functional recently. Similar ground rules cover the other major faction of the NSCN, the Khaplang group. — SH)

In pursuance of the ceasefire as originally agreed to on 25 July 1997, discussions were held between the representatives of the Government of India led by Mr K Padmanabhiiah and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland led by Mr VS Atem, to finalise the ground rules and modalities for the implementation of the ceasefire with a view to ensuring continuance of an effective ceasefire to pave the way for a peaceful and meaningful political dialogue. The Agreed Ground Rules were finalised on 12 December 1997.

With a view to make the ceasefire more effective and to create a proper and conducive atmosphere for a peaceful and meaningful political dialogue, further discussions were held between the representatives of the GoI led by Mr MB Kaushal and the NSCN led by Mr VS Atem in November, December 2000 and January 2001. Both sides noted that the current ceasefire between the GoI and the NSCN is valid up to 31.7.2001. It was mutually agreed that the revised text of Agreed Ground Rules for Ceasefire would be as follows:

(a) There would be no offensive operations like ambush, raid and attack leading to death/injury/damage or loss of property against the NSCN by the Indian Army, paramilitary forces and police. The Army and paramilitary forces would also act in a manner as not to cause harassment/damage or loss of property or injury to the civilian population.

(b) Patrolling by the Indian Army, paramilitary forces and the police would continue to prevent infiltration of militants and arms as

hithertofore. However, patrolling within one kilometre of NSCN designated Camps decided after due consultation in the Monitoring Mechanism, will be carried out with intimation to them. It is noted that no such camps are located/will be located in populated areas, and/or near highways, Indian Army/paramilitary forces posts, etc.

(c) Protection of convoys and patrolling of roads would continue to be undertaken by the Army, paramilitary forces and the police.

(d) The Indian Army, paramilitary forces and police would issue instructions to their formations, not to use masks to cover their faces, during the ceasefire.

(e) The NSCN would not undertake offensive operations like ambush, raid, sniping, or attack leading to death/injury/damage or loss of property. It would also act in a manner as not to cause harassment/damage or loss of property or injury to the civil population.

(f) The NSCN will notify to the CFMG the list of all their camps. These lists would be placed before the CFMG and, after due consultation, would be declared by the CFMG as designated camps. In the interest of prompting peace process, there would be no parading (either in group or individually) of NSCN cadres in uniform and/or with arms. For the present, this would cover all populated areas, public transport and highways. (Highways means National Highways, State Highways and roads connecting district headquarters to district headquarters and district headquarters to sub-divisional headquarters).

For the movement of NSCN armed cadres from one designated camp to another, the concerned army/paramilitary forces post would be given prior intimation. While proceeding through a village, the arms will be concealed. The modalities of this would be finalised in the CFMG.

NSCN persons requiring to move frequently will have photo identity cards, which will be issued in the format mutually agreed upon. These identity cards, not to exceed 60 at present, would be issued by the NSCN and countersigned by the chairman, CFMG.

The holder of these identity cards, would for their personal security, be entitled to have one NSCN armed cadre each to accompany them at all times. The weapons would be carried in a

concealed fashion.

(g) There would be no blockade of roads and communications, disruption of economic or developmental activities as well as essential services by the NSCN.

(g) It is mutually agreed that no safe haven or sanctuary or assistance to any armed group or elements would be

Document

provided by anyone. No new armed forces post would be set up within two kilometres of a designated camp;

(h) On the GoI side, a concern was expressed that any accidental encounter or violation should not be allowed to jeopardise the peace processes and the effect of any such incident should be localised through mutual consultations. All cases of the

that theirs being a people's organisation, they did not resort to such activities. However, in view of the concern expressed by the GoI and in the interest of prompting the peace process, NSCN representatives agreed that the above activities would be prevented.

(i) It was further agreed that implementation of these group rules and modalities will be monitored by a group constituted for this

purpose comprising of representatives of NSCN, NGOs and representatives nominated by the GoI. However, it was also agreed that any accidental encounter or violation should not be allowed to jeopardise the peace processes and the effect of any such incident should be localised through mutual consultations. All cases of the

Monitoring Group, so that the reasons for violation are identified and steps to be taken to prevent such violations in future are suggested. Notwithstanding the above, the Army, paramilitary forces and police will act in an impartial and unbiased manner against any group causing public disturbance or when there is imminent danger to public safety or peace.

(j) On the GoI side, a concern was expressed about reports of forced recruitment to armed cadres. The NSCN representatives stated that they have not and do not resort to forced recruitment. However, in the interest of promoting the peace process, it was agreed that if there are any reports of forced recruitment, they should be discussed in the Monitoring Group.

25 JAN 2003

MAC

Naga peace: No headway, but scope for talks open

Statesman News service 241

NEW DELHI, Jan. 23. — With NSCN(IM) leaders taking a hard line on "unification of all Naga-inhabited areas", the Centre today devised a compromise formula to keep the peace talks going. In a joint statement issued after two days of negotiations, the government said its stand on the "scope of negotiation" has not changed. Naga leaders are taking this as enough indication that the issue is not closed.

Manipur chief minister Mr O Ibobi Singh had recently said the Prime Minister had promised to keep the

boundaries of Manipur unaltered. The PMO had neither confirmed nor denied the statement. NSCN (IM) leaders today told a news agency that "the matter has been clarified to our satisfaction, as we understand that no assurances were given to anyone in respect to the substance of the negotiations."

Significantly, the Naga leaders, Mr Isak Swu and Mr Th. Muivah, today went to a meeting at the PMO. Sources said that they had gone to call on the Prime Minister's principal secretary, Mr Brajesh Mishra.

Officials familiar with the Naga negotiations said the government's emphasis on the scope of discussion

was the "only way to keep the talks from falling now". One interpretation of today's government statement is that since the Centre has always insisted that talks should be within the Constitution and since the Constitution allows for adjustment of state boundaries, the Naga leaders could "see that the door was not closed".

After the leaders came out of the PMO, Mr Swu was asked whether he was satisfied with the government's clarification on the issue. He referred to the joint statement.

The joint statement reads, inter alia: "The NSCN(IM) raised the issues relating to the distinct identity of the Nagas and their stand on the

unification of Naga areas. In this regard the Government of India representative clarified that there has been no change in its stand on the scope of negotiation". It further says that there was an "agreement to continue talks until a lasting settlement is reached".

The joint statement also says both sides are "pleased with the progress" made in course of the visit of the NSCN(IM) leaders. The statement was signed by the Centre's emissary for the talks, Mr K Padmanabhaiah, and Mr Muivah.

Later, speaking to journalists, Mr Muivah, however, appeared to take a more confrontationalist approach.

When asked about his assessment of talks held within the Constitution, he said the issue of holding the talks "within the Constitution of India does not arise".

He had the same response when asked about Naga insurgents laying down arms. Mr Muivah said he did not consider Nagaland a part of India: There is no "smaller" or "greater" Nagaland, but "only Nagaland". The NSCN (IM) has been demanding that Naga-inhabited areas of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh be included in Nagaland's territorial definition.

No schedule has been finalised for the next round of talks.

THE STATESMAN

24 JAN 2003

Talks cross Ibobi hurdle

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

Naga leaders seek clarification from Delhi on boundary

New Delhi, Jan. 22: The NSCN (I-M) today appeared peeved at Manipur chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh's claim that Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had assured him of not altering the state's boundary, seeking a clarification from New Delhi on the issue. However, the talks, which were extended by a day, remained unaffected.

The fact that the negotiations did not fall through was a breather for both sides, indicating that they were committed to a negotiated settlement. The NSCN (I-M) leaders, however, were not at all charitable to Ibobi Singh's claim on the Prime Min-

ister's assurance.

Realising the harm that Ibobi Singh's claim of a prime ministerial assurance to Manipur could cause to the Naga talks, officials went on a damage-control drive. Vajpayee's press adviser refused to say whether the Prime Minister had actually given the assurance to the Manipur delegation. An official, however, said: "This is what the chief minister is saying."

The Centre certainly is walking the tightrope, caught between the frying pan and the fire. A violent reaction in Manipur in

the initial stages of the Naga peace discussions could turn its applecart upside down. "It will upset the strategy evolved by the Centre which is to carry all sides along," an official said.

The two sides today discussed various issues from 11.30 am to nearly 1.30 pm, but were tight-lipped about what transpired across the negotiation table. The Centre's negotiator, K. Padmanabhaiah, refused to take calls, while Thuingaleng Muivah, generally willing to speak to reporters, did not go into the specifics.

23/1 9-11-82,
"The talks are progressing very well," was all Muivah said, as he came out of former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao's home where he met the Congress leader for 30 minutes.

"I will talk later," Muivah said, asked about Vajpayee's assurance, as he drove off in a bullet-proof Ambassador. Narasimha Rao is the first Indian leader who Muivah and Swu have met. He is credited with having given the initial push for peace talks with the NSCN (I-M).

Nagaland chief minister S.C. Jamir today arrived in the national capital. Though Jamir is here to discuss the state's elections with the Congress bosses, he has requested a meeting with the Prime Minister.

Peace with NSCN spells peace for N-E region

RAKESH SINHA

DIMAPUR/KOHIMA, JAN 22

IF THE Centre were to make peace with Isak Chishi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah, it would have dealt a body blow to insurgency in the region. Because the NSCN (I-M) is today the pivotal force behind insurgent groups operating in Assam, Manipur, Tripura and even those creeping into Meghalaya.

Officials engaged in counter-insurgency operations have reason to believe that the NSCN (I-M) has "contributed in good measure" to the activities of outfits in states across the N-E, training and arming them and drawing from an extortion pool to fill its coffers.

"Other ethnic groups have been encouraged to take up arms. It suits the NSCN (I-M) because counter-insurgency

operations get scattered, taking the heat off the dominant group. These are tactical moves since we get engaged elsewhere. It allows them to generate funds from areas where its writ doesn't run, still cornering the major share of the spoils. Smaller groups don't mind picking the responsibility tab because it keeps them in circulation, allowing them to grow and even carve out space," says a senior official with years of counter-insurgency operations behind him.

There was a time the NSCN trained under the Kachin Independent Army (KIA) in the Myanmar jungles. When the KIA switched off in the early '90s, the NSCN headed for Bangladesh. The timing was right. The Khmer Rouge had collapsed in Cambodia and a huge stockpile of modern weaponry was floating all over South East Asia, up for sale.



Manipur's all-party delegation talks to media after a meeting with Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee in New Delhi on Tuesday. PTI photo

Purchases were routed through Cox Bazaar in Bangladesh and NSCN cadres ferried their cache of arms into Nagaland through Bandarban — the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NILFT) maintains a regular arms

dump at its Alikadam camp — and then past Mizoram and Manipur. Officials say the NSCN also acquired arms turned in by Myanmar druglord Khun Sa when he made peace with the Yangon junta in the mid-90s.

"The NSCN (I-M) became the Big Brother. Sahpa in Myanmar, where Muivah's boys pitched tents years ago on their return from China, is the favourite destination of many insurgent groups," concedes an official in Kohima. Over

the years, the NSCN (I-M) has helped, at some stage or the other, outfits like the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) and National Democratic Front for Bodoland (NDFB) in Assam and the Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA) and the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) in Manipur.

In recent times, the NSCN (I-M) has forged links with the Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) and the AChik National Volunteers Council (ANVC) in Meghalaya. Officials point out that there's another reason why the NSCN (I-M) is constantly reaching out to newer groups — it helps them secure safe havens for its cadres. Yet they all agree the strain on counter-insurgency operations will be greatly reduced if the NSCN (I-M) were to promise Delhi a farewell to arms.

Sonia plays safe on Naga talks

K. SUBRAHMANYA

New Delhi, Jan. 20: Eleven days after their arrival in the capital, the NSCN (I-M) leaders today held a meeting with Congress president Sonia Gandhi to seek the principal Opposition party's support for peace talks to end Naga insurgency.

The meeting, held at Sonia Gandhi's 10 Janpath official residence late this evening, was symbolic of the Congress party's support to the Naga peace talks.

According to her political secretary Ambika Soni, Sonia Gandhi told the NSCN (I-M) leadership, "We also want that the Naga issue should be settled at the earliest."

However, Sonia Gandhi exercised extreme caution and echoed the apprehensions of Nagaland's neighbouring states, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam — all of which are under Congress rule, over "Greater Nagaland".

While the Congress is for an early settlement of the Naga issue, "the solution should not bring any other problem," Soni said, though she did not elaborate any further.

The NSCN (I-M) leadership, headed by its chairman Isak Chisi Swu and general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah, avoided the media before and after meeting Sonia Gandhi. The Congress kept the half-an-hour meeting a low-key affair. Senior Congress leader Manmohan Singh was present during the discussion.

Lest the meeting created any misgivings, the Congress president received a Manipur delegation immediately after the NSCN (I-M) leadership left her residence. The Congress president is believed to have assured the 10-member Manipur team, led by chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh, that the party will not support any deal that will put Manipur's territorial integrity in jeopardy.

Coinciding with the celebration of the 31st Statehood Day, the Manipur chief minister will lead an all-party delegation to the Prime Minister on Tuesday to put forth the state's case before the Centre.

Soni emphasised that while the party supported the Centre's peace talks, it should also involve the government in Kohima and the NSCN (Khaplang).

Militant blast derails Kamrup bogies

SAMIR K. PURKAYASTHA

Diphu, Jan. 20: The engine and three bogies of the Howrah-bound Kamrup Express derailed early today after suspected Karbi rebels triggered an improvised explosive device on the tracks between Diphu and Nailalung stations in Assam's Karbi Anglong district.

Though there were no casualties, the Assam government immediately sounded an alert throughout the state, fearing similar "terror tactics" by militants in the run-up to the Republic Day celebrations.

The tracks were restored and cleared for traffic at five this evening.

Karbi Anglong superintendent

said of police Ab dul Quddus pointed the finger of suspicion towards the hardline faction of the United People's Democratic Solidarity. One faction of the outfit has entered into a ceasefire agreement with the Centre. The Dima Haram Daoga, another militant outfit active in the district, is also adhering to a ceasefire.

In Guwahati, chief minister Tarun Gogoi said "frustrated militants are trying to create terror by going for soft targets" but claimed that the situation was under control and law and order was "improving".

The blast left a big hole between the tracks. "Had the blast occurred two to three seconds later, the entire engine would

have been completely blown off," Quddus said.

The blast site is two km from Nailalung, a nondescript township about nine km from Diphu. The bogies that derailed were a parcel van, a luggage van and a second-class general compartment.

Passengers, who were jolted out of their sleep by the explosion, criticised the "slow pace" at which the railway authorities made alternative travel arrangements. One of them, who identified himself only as Sharma,

of wait "without food and water".

said he walked a kilometre with his wife and child to reach the highway to hitch a ride, but had to return to Diphu station after several hours

of wait "without food and water".

Passengers of other trains, stranded at the nearby stations of Lumding and Rangshilhat, also complained of being "left to fend for ourselves".

Railway authorities, however, said passengers of the derailed train were transported by buses to Lumding and then

taken to Howrah by a special train from Guwahati in the evening.

A relief train from Lumding carrying medical personnel and other staff led by the divisional railway manager of Lumding arrived at the blast spot at 3.30 am. The additional general manager Northeast Frontier Railway, along with senior railway officials, are at the site, chief public relations officer of NF Railway Leena Sarma said.

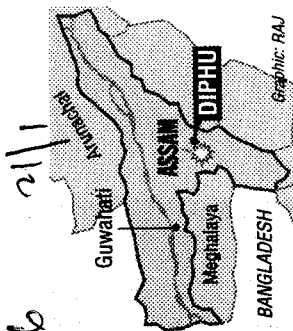
This is the third incident to rattle the NF Railway within two weeks, though there has been no casualties. Twelve bogies of the Kamrup Express derailed on January 10 in Barpeta district between Pathsala and Tihu stations. On January 6, a fire broke

out on the Guwahati-bound Dadar Express in Bijni.

The last bomb blast on railway tracks in the state was between Gossaingaon and Srirampur on April 5, 2002, on the Kanchenjunga Express. Two bombs exploded resulting in injuries to four persons.

Railway officials said the 5624 down North East Express, scheduled to leave Guwahati at 8.15 am tomorrow, has been cancelled due to the cancellation of the corresponding up train by Northern Railways from New Delhi.

The 5609 down Avadh Assam Express, which was scheduled to leave Guwahati at 8.30 pm today, has been rescheduled. It will leave Guwahati at 8.15 am tomorrow.



Graphic: RAJ

Bodo deal sinks in last lap

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Jan. 20: An expected Bodo agreement stumbled in the last stretch before breasting the tape, compelling the Centre to merely extend the ceasefire between the security forces and Bodo militants for a month from tonight.

The ceasefire, which had held the fragile peace in the Bodo region, was scheduled to expire tonight.

Expectations were high that an agreement would be wrapped up at the end of today's tripartite negotiations between the Assam government, the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) and Union home ministry officials. Even a memorandum of understanding

Accord hits snag with rebel outfit's demand for more seats in council

(MoU) had been prepared and was ready for release.

Home ministry officials were hoping that deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani would be able to announce the Bodo accord before his departure tonight for Paris and Qatar. But after two rounds of discussions, it became clear that the agreement had come unstuck.

An unexpected snag came up when the BLT team wanted a modification to the Assam government's proposal regarding elections to the proposed 40-member Bodoland Territorial Council. The original proposal

was to keep 30 of the 40 seats reserved for tribals in the council and 10 others kept aside for the large population of non-tribals living in Bodo territory.

The BLT now wants 25 of the seats exclusively for tribals, instead of 30. It also wants 10 of the seats to be kept in the general category, allowing both tribals and non-tribals to contest, while conceding that five could be reserved for non-tribals. The Assam government officials rejected the modified plan suggested by the Bodo team.

At today's meeting, the state government agreed to hand over

12 of the 93 disputed villages to the Bodoland Territorial Council. The total number of villages ceded by Assam is roughly 3,072. These areas are those where tribals outnumber non-tribals. But Assam wants a survey to be conducted in the rest of the disputed areas. Dispur is willing to concede these villages if the tribal population is above 50 per cent. A three-member team will complete the task in three months.

By setting the deadline for cessation of hostilities on February 21, the Union home ministry has given notice to both the Assam government and the BLT that they should resolve all outstanding differences within a month and wrap up a peace deal which North Block wants sealed by the end of the year.

THE TELEGRAPH

21 JAN 2003

Naga talks: Manipur CM rushes to Delhi

Rahul Karmakar
Guwahati, January 19

MANIPUR CHIEF Minister Okram Ibobi Singh and senior political party leaders from the State left for New Delhi on Sunday to lobby against the Greater Nagalim demands of the NSCN.

Greater Nagalim, comprising Naga-inhabited areas of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur, besides Nagaland, is being pursued by the Isak-Muivah faction of the NSCN in its ongoing talks with the Centre.

A Government spokesman told *Hindustan Times* from Imphal that the 18-member delegation headed by Ibobi Singh would call on the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and other

Central leaders for a definite stand by the Centre on the territorial integrity of Manipur.

Manipur is key to the NSCN(I-M)'s conditions for peace. The militant group is formed mostly of Tangkhuls from four hill districts of the State — Ukhrul, Senapati, Tamenglong and Churachandpur. They include none other than the outfit's general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah.

Maintaining that the situation in the State was calm since Thursday night's violence, the spokesman said normalcy could not be guaranteed if there "is any agreement with the NSCN on Greater Nagalim".

Other anti-Greater Nagalim organisations like the

United Committee of Manipur (UCM) said they were keenly following the Naga peace talks. "We expect the Centre to be transparent about the outcome of the talks," said a UCM leader.

The Congress Government and the UCM are apparently doubtful about the NDA Government's intentions. They are "aware of New Delhi's decision to extend the geographical area of the ceasefire with the NSCN in 2001 despite violent protests in the Imphal Valley leading to the death of 18 people.

Meanwhile, political, youth and social organisations in Manipur have begun an exercise to muster support from other States in the region against the Greater Nagalim concept.

20 JAN 2003

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Naga ice breaks at lunch

NEERJA CHOWDHURY
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 18

EMOTIONS' overtook politics when the NSCN(I-M) delegation, including its two senior leaders T. Muivah and Isaak Swu, met 27 MPs cutting across party lines at a lunch hosted by India International Centre here today.

Muivah is believed to have told the MPs after the interaction: "We did not know that you are prepared to hear us. We have not been heard for 55 years. But we have been heard today."

The lunch meeting was hosted by MP Swaraj Kaushal, who was the interlocutor between the Government and the NSCN(I-M), in 1998-99. It was during his period that the two-month ceasefire was extended to one year.

Swaraj had been the first to use the good offices of

Mizo leader Zoramthanga to break the ice with Naga leaders. Swaraj is learnt to have told the Naga leaders: "Even if there is no immediate breakthrough, do not blame each other. It only means you have not talked enough and need to talk more."

The Naga issue, he said, was not just a problem concerning only the Government and the Nagas, it was the problem of the whole nation and the turnout at the lunch "shows the country is keen to listen to you."

The MPs who were present included L.M. Singhvi, B.P. Singhal, S.P. Gautam, Anita Arya, C.P. Thakur and Muni Lal from the BJP; Santosh Bagrodia, Mabel Rebello, Rama Pilot and Ashwini Kumar from the Congress; Prem Gupta and Kanti Singh from the RJD; Shahid Siddiqui from the SP; Pritish Nandy from the

Shiv Sena; Ram Vilas Paswan from the Jan Lok Shakti; Sukhbir Singh Badal from the Akali Dal; and independent MPs Kuldeep Nayar and Ram Jethmalani. The Naga leaders assured the MPs that they won't fight any more. "We want peace now," they said.

While Nandy congratulated the Naga leaders for their bold step, L.M. Singhvi said the MPs present at the lunch represented a "mini Parliament".

Swaraj introduced Muivah as "my brother" and Swu as "my friend". He said Muivah was his brother because he used to fight with him all the time during the talks and Swu was a "friend" because they never fought. Swaraj also thanked the Naga leaders for agreeing to what was probably "their first vegetarian meal", comprising both Indian and Chinese delicacies.

NSCN talks to decide our course, says ULFA

SAMUDRA GUPTA KASHYAP
GUWAHATI | JANUARY 18

THE outlawed ULFA is ready to negotiate with the Indian Government provided the on-going talks between the government and the NSCN(IM) leaders produce a peaceful solution.

The latest issue of *Freedom*, the ULFA's mouthpiece, says: "ULFA hopes for a peaceful solution to this conflict. If this is possible, we will also definitely pursue the footsteps of the process."

ULFA vice-chairman Pradip Gogoi, lodged in Guwahati jail, has also welcomed the Naga talks in Delhi as a "most welcome development for the entire region", which would also encourage other militant groups of the region to come forward for negotiations.

Gogoi, however, warned that lasting peace cannot be arrived at unless all the Naga groups were involved. He however, did not mention the NSCN Khaplang faction, the group staying out of the talks and with which the ULFA has a direct link. The two outfits are believed to work together.

Immolation threat

IMPHAL: The Manipur Forward Youth Front said on Saturday that 10,000 of its members would immolate themselves at Kangla if the territorial integrity of Manipur is disturbed during the peace talks between the Centre and Nagas. —PTI

19 JAN 2003

Curfew imposed on Greater Imphal

5/4
18/1

Statesman News Service

IMPHAL, Jan. 17. — The government today imposed dusk-to-dawn curfew on Greater Imphal in Imphal West district and prohibitory orders under Section 144 CrPC in neighbouring Imphal East District to prevent any further violence centering around the peace talks between the Centre and NSCN(I-M).

The curfew will remain in force from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. daily till further orders. This evening police blew siren and blared warnings over loudspeakers to chase people indoor as the curfew deadline approached.

Last night, a torch rally and a demonstration, organised by the United Committee Manipur to warn the

Centre against any attempt to divide the state for accommodating NSCN(I-M)'s demands, turned violent. The protesters tried to enter the capital's high-security zone that houses Raj Bhavan and other important government establishments, including the Assembly secretariat.

Police had to burst tear gas shells and rubber bullets to disperse the crowd. Thirty protesters were injured. There were also reports that police fired live bullets in the air.

In Imphal East, orders against people carrying arms and assembly of more than five persons will remain in force from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily. The collector of Imphal West and East districts said there were re-

ports that some criminals may try to disrupt peace.

Delegation: Preparations are on to send an all-party delegation to New Delhi to urge the Prime Minister and his deputy not to divide Manipur to settle the Naga dispute. The delegation, to be lead by chief minster Mr Ibobi Singh, leaves for New Delhi on 19 January.

A special session of the Assembly has been called in the first week of February to discuss the situation arising out of the "negative signals" emanating from the Delhi talks. This Speaker, Mr TN Haokip, will lead a delegation of presiding officers' forum, comprising former Speakers and Deputy Speakers, to New Delhi to prevail upon the Centre not to break the state.

THE STATESMAN

18 JAN 2003

The following are excerpts from views, interviews and declarations by various leaders, non-government groups and conferences on the challenges and problems before the Nagas and their neighbours. They represent milestones and indicate the struggle of the Nagas to come to terms with themselves and the world around them, a painful and difficult journey. We have selected the period 1999-to-2003 because this has most relevance to the present situation of talks, consultations and negotiations among the Nagas and between the Nagas and the Government of India. They also reflect that many of the issues agitating especially the media have been addressed time and again over these years. — SH

June 1999, Niuland camp of the NSCN (I-M) (near Dimapur, Nagaland) during the first consultation between Naga civil society and NSCN leaders Isak Chisi Swu and Th Muivah.

Naga elder: If you bring full sovereignty... you perhaps don't need to bother about the other national workers. But if you will need to propose something else for negotiation with Delhi, the public will keep telling you the most obvious point that you have to first win all the other groups to a common, indisputable consensus before you proceed further... The public shares your belief in the good sense of our people after all these years of suffering. So they are convinced of a positive outcome if the national workers will come together and start to talk to one another. The public greatly appreciates this consultation. They are appealing to you to go far enough to reach the other factions... A settlement that recognises the Nationality of the Nagas without disturbing the territorial integrity of India should not be beyond the united genius of our leaders and the Indian negotiators. But to even to get to this stage, Nagas will have to reach out to the Indian people in a big way to help them understand why Nagas cannot settle for less on grounds of the historical and political fact of their struggle.

30 January 2000: A group of Nagas under the banner of the Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights visited Raj Ghat and shared this prayer (three years later, Mr Swu and Mr Muivah also paid their homage to the father of independent India)

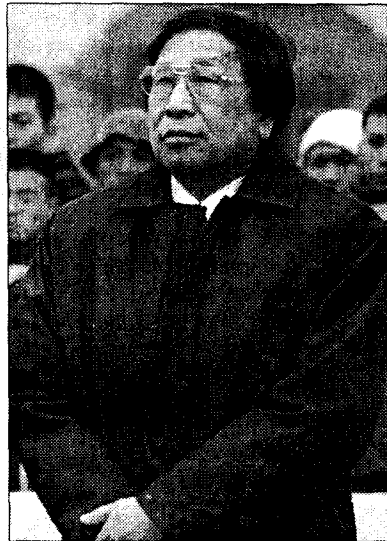
Fifty-three years ago, Naga leaders came to this city to meet Mahatma Gandhi... Our elders talked of our resolve to set up our own house. He said although he wanted Nagas to be part of his household and family, he could not force them to do so... This much larger group of Nagas has come to this sacred spot of remembrance to build on the imperishable relationship we have inherited from our elders... Firstly, let us pray in silence for all Nagas killed by non-Nagas because of the Naga struggle... Secondly, all Nagas killed by fellow Nagas because of our complicated crisis... Thirdly, with equal sorrow and regret, all Indians — soldiers, government officials and other citizens, killed by Nagas for diverse reasons linked to our struggle. Fourthly, for the families of all we have mentioned in our mourning, Nagas and Indians. May they find God's spirit, healing and guidance restored in their wounded, embittered lives. Finally, let us pray for all our leaders, underground and overground, and the Indian leaders, that they may be inspired to lead us wisely and truthfully.

September 2000, SC Jamir, chief minister of Nagaland (speaking at Kohima):

I, and many others, have also repeatedly suggested that all the killings must stop forthwith and in the spirit of reconciliation, we could all sit down together to thrash out the difficult issues facing our people and society... Soon after

Naga Voices - then and now

51-7 1811



Open forum

Clockwise from above:
NSCN chairman Isak Chisi Swu, general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah and Nagaland chief minister SC Jamir



the attempt on my life at Delhi, I decided to forgive those who wished ill for me... Like many of our people, I am also a victim of the violence that has been the bane of Naga society. My life... has been attempted upon on at least four occasions. Several of my bodyguards have died senseless deaths although, by divine grace, my own life was spared on each occasion. Naturally, as a human being, I have known anger and bitterness at being hunted like an animal... For the sake of the Naga people, I am prepared to forgive and forget the events of the past.

12 January 2002, Statement, Naga Consultative Meet, Bangkok, called by the NSCN and attended by 44 Nagas from different parts of the North East. The meeting took place between 7 and 11 January at Bangkok and was noted for the way many participants spoke their minds without fear or favour.

Excerpts:

The delegation reaffirmed the stand declared at the launching ceremony of the Naga Reconciliation Process of 20 December 2001 at Kohima, to bring about healing to the wounds and hurts Nagas have sustained at all levels so that, without being undermined by internal contradictions, a negotiated settlement of the Indo-Naga conflict may be achieved that will be honourable and acceptable to all sides.

The Consultation acknowledges... the statement of the NSCN leadership that in all stages of political negotiation the Naga people will be consulted and their

participation sought for better understanding, so that past mistakes may not be repeated and transparency ensured. The leadership also reaffirmed that no agreement would be entered into without the fullest understanding of the Naga people... We recognise that to create a conducive atmosphere for political negotiations and effective participation between the two entities that have entered into the ceasefire agreement, all draconian laws of the Indian state... must be repealed. The banning of Naga national movement organisations and the subsequent warrants of arrest against the leaders must be withdrawn.

(The ban was allowed to lapse in November and the case against Mr Muivah withdrawn in Nagaland earlier in the year although Manipur has refused to drop the case against him registered in that state)

The consultation foresees the need for Nagas to be accommodative in our thinking to our neighbours, not ignoring their legitimate interests and apprehensions.

May 2002, Nagaland — the Churches respond to an invitation for another consultation at Bangkok by declaring that all "national workers" or members of the different armed factions must be involved in the political talks on "an equal footing"; otherwise, it warned, there will be "no final political solution."

The church views all the Naga political groups — including those running the present Nagaland state — as participants in the attempt by the Nagas to go forward in the world as a people. The Church is

fully aware that the political strategies and plans followed by the various groups differ widely on certain immediate issues. This view may be controversial. But the Church cannot adopt a lesser perspective and vision of the Naga story, and the mind of the Church is clear, and at peace, in holding this position ...

...NBCC (Naga Baptist Christian Council) reiterates the following points for the NSCN (I-M) and for all the other groups:

1. National repentance
2. Declaration of complete stoppage of committing violence of all kinds, especially elimination of one another and media attacks of each other by all groups
3. Renouncing the doctrine of bloodshed and upholding the principle of truth, non-violence, justice and fraternity.
4. Reconciliation and unity among all national groups before any political negotiation with India
5. Formulating a common agreement on the national issues unitedly by all groups for negotiation with India, for a political solution that will be workable.

7 May 2002, Statement by Isak Swu, NSCN chairman, during the 6-10 May Consultation at Bangkok with 73 Naga participants which critically looked at issues relating to Naga unity, reconciliation and negotiations with India. Excerpts:

Past mistakes have sufficiently taught us that no political settlement can be reached without the will and consent of the Naga people... we affirm to the Naga people once again that we will enter into political settlement with the Indian State only after seeking the expressed opinion, will and consent of the people... The present peace process is rough sailing. In spite of tough opposition from many quarters, we are able to continue moving ahead. It is so because we are the deciding factor. The relations that we continue to develop with the "friends of the Nagas" can no longer be suppressed by any power that be... We have come to this stage at a very high price for which the credit must go to our fallen brothers and sisters. We owe our deepest gratitude to these fallen heroes.

(The Consultation meeting supported the political negotiations and urged Nagas to participate in the peace process while endorsing the efforts of the Naga Hoho, Churches and "mass-based organisations" to continue working for reconciliation, understanding and unity among the Nagas)

11 July 2002, Amsterdam, Joint Communique issued by Mr Muivah and Mr K Padmanabiah, representative of the Government of India. Excerpts:

The Government of India recognises the unique history and situation of Nagas. It is agreed that talks should proceed in an accommodative and forward-looking manner so that a lasting and honourable solution can be arrived at. The Government of India renewed the invitation of the Prime Minister to the chairman and general secretary of the NSCN to come to India at the earliest to carry forward and expedite the peace dialogue. The NSCN leadership expresses willingness to come to India after the procedural aspects are taken care of.

Ban on NSCN lapses on 26 November 2002; Mr Swu and Mr Muivah return to India on 8 January to a warm welcome and declare during their visit that the conflict with New Delhi was over and that Nagas and Indians will no longer fight each other.

15 January 2003, Ms Adinno Phizo, daughter of the legendary AZ Phizo, who launched the independence movement, and currently president of the rump Naga National Council criticises the talks in Delhi.

Assam joins tirade

Against Nagalim

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, Jan. 12: The voice of opposition to the NSCN (I-M)'s demand for a "Greater Nagaland" grew louder today, with Assam and Arunachal Pradesh supporting Manipur's stand that the Centre should not disturb other states while trying to find a solution to the Naga impasse.

The influential Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad today vowed not to yield "even one inch of our land" to "Nagalim". In a statement today, the parishad said it welcomed the talks between New Delhi and the insurgent organisation, but warned the Centre against any attempt to "divide the state to appease the outfit".

The NSCN (I-M) proposal of Nagalim or greater Nagaland includes all contiguous Naga-inhabited areas in the Northeast. In Assam, such areas include the districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills, besides parts of Sivasagar, Jorhat and Golaghat.

The parishad — which is backing Manipur's stand on the issue — demanded that the insurgent organisation drop its demand for Nagalim. "If the state is further divided in the name of the peace process, a thousand Muivahs will be born in Assam," the parishad's leader, Apurba Kumar Bhattacharyya, said.

The NSCN (I-M) has also staked claim to the four Manipur districts of Ukhrul, Chandel, Senapati and Tamenglong as well as Tirap and Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh.

The Congress government in Arunachal Pradesh, headed by chief minister Mukut Mithi, yesterday demanded that the Centre convince the Naga leaders to set aside their demand for a "Greater Nagaland". The state's PWD minister, Talo Mugli, said in Itanagar that the Nagalim demand was "not at all acceptable to the people of Arunachal Pradesh".

Slur on Muivah

NSCN (I-M) general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah's statement that Ukhrul in Manipur does not belong to Meiteis has evoked sharp reactions from student organisations and political parties in the state, reports our Imphal correspondent.

In a grim reminder of the many thorny issues that lay strewn on the path to peace, they have termed the statement as "communal", saying such utterances indicated that "Muivah's fight is against the Meiteis".

President of the Democratic People's Party Khaidem Mani today said the statement reeked of "communal hatred" and Muivah could be arrested under Section 153 of the IPC for a remark that might lead to a communal flare-up.

"We had initially welcomed the Naga peace talks. Now it is clear that Muivah's fight is against the Meiteis. Hence, the talks should be halted," he said.

13 JAN 2003

EGRAPH

Talking heads

Nagaland's chance for peace

They are called the Naga Vajpayee and Advani — the moderate Isaac Chisi Swu and the tough talking Thuingaleng Muivah. Their meetings with the real Vajpayee and Advani are doubtless an enormous opportunity for peace but as the Prime Minister and his deputy know only too well, the context for internecine Northeast battles will not easily go away. Swu and Muivah will first have to decide how and when they can give up claims to sovereignty — without that there can be no progress. This was realised by the Tamil Tigers, by Yasser Arafat recognising Israel's right to exist and as Kashmiri separatist politicians will realise someday, no matter the devil's advocacy from Pakistan. A condition that follows is that all insurgent Nagas must disarm. Given the Naga rhetoric over decades, Muivah and Swu will have to go through painful recantations. But that will be only the beginning; there are other Naga interlocutors — the Khaplang group, the Naga Hoho and the churches — all will have to be persuaded. The potential for violence remains — clashes between the Khaplang and Isaac-Muivah groups or between NCSN and the Kukis or both. Tribal clashes bring into focus the wholly unhelpful concept of greater Nagaland. Rioting following the extension of ceasefire to Naga-inhabited areas outside Nagaland in 2001 and the Centre's consequent volte face should be enough indicators that the 1963 born state boundaries of Nagaland must be the frame of reference in Naga-Centre talks.

If all these complex preliminaries are sorted out — a result that may take time — the issue of Nagaland's "autonomy" must not be divorced from the state's "development". Crores have vanished in the Northeast, a comprador elite has grown up on the diet of Delhi's project funds. If political normalisation can be achieved, any change in local administrative powers must be simultaneously undertaken with a sharper development strategy. In some cases, this will be reinventing the administration since Naga insurgents run extortion operations which may create roadblocks. Just as well therefore that Arun Shourie, probably the ablest of Union ministers, also has the Northeast portfolio. With Shourie, both fresh thinking and honesty of purpose can be expected. The rest will be up to Naga representatives. Shourie's name is being floated as the Centre's political negotiator, who, if appointed, will outrank the current pointsman, former home secretary K Padmanabhaiah. The dividend of a Naga settlement will be distributed all over the Northeast. Other insurgencies will accept the benefits of negotiation. Perhaps even Kashmir will not be immune if peace breaks out in Nagaland. Godspeed and good luck to both sets of Vajpayee and Advani.

13 JAN 2003

Naga vow to end fighting

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, Jan. 11: After an hour-long discussion with defence minister George Fernandes, the NSCN (I-M) leaders today said there would be no more fighting between "Indians and Nagas".

Though a ceasefire agreement has been in place in Nagaland since 1997 and today's reiteration by NSCN (I-M) chairman Isak Chisi Swu is largely symbolic, its significance cannot be overlooked.

For the Naga leaders who have relentlessly fought the Indian Army, the statement shows a complete shift in mood and direction of the outfit.

"I want to tell you that there will be no more fighting between Indians and Nagas. That is the understanding we have reached now," Swu told reporters outside the defence minister's office.

"People of Nagaland have been praying that the leaderships of India and the NSCN (I-M) successfully conclude their talks," he added. Swu looked happy and relaxed. For Swu, today was an auspicious day. It was his son's 25th birthday.

Though substantive discus-

sions between the NSCN (I-M) and the government have not formally started, the broad outlines have been explored.

Yesterday, secretary-general Thuingaleng Muivah had clearly said that one issue certainly was the assimilation of all Naga tribes into one administrative unit.

But this first meeting between the NSCN (I-M) and India's top political leadership has got off to a very good start.

Much of the baggage from the past tortuous history of conflict has been shed. The Naga leaders have publicly praised the maturity of India's current crop of leaders.

"Nagas have now a much better understanding with the people of India," Swu said.

Muivah said: "Talks were very cordial and the response of Fernandes was very warm."

Muivah and Swu have also been keen to send the right messages to the Indian people. Their first public engagement in India was to visit the *samadhi* of Mahatma Gandhi.

The signal was that the NSCN (I-M) has come in search of peace. The Naga leaders also called on Swaraj Kaushal this afternoon. Kaushal, a former

Governor of Mizoram and a former representative of the Prime Minister to the Naga talks, had played an important role in breaking the stalemate.

Manipur warning

Leaders of all political parties in Manipur have threatened to resign en masse from their parties if the Centre alters the state's existing territorial boundary while striking a deal with the NSCN (I-M).

The warning was issued at an emergency meeting of the political parties, presided over by chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh, in Imphal today.

The leaders of all parties vowed to jointly oppose any move to disintegrate the state to adhere to the NSCN (I-M) demand for a "Greater Nagalim", of Nagaland and Naga-inhabited areas of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur and certain parts of Myanmar.

THE TELEGRAPH

12 JAN 2003

Nagas bid farewell to arms

H BULA DEVI
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Jan. 11. — Both the Centre and the NSCN(I-M) made significant 'concessions' today to take the ongoing dialogue process ahead.

Mr Isak Chisi Swu today declared an end to the campaign against Indian security forces in Nagaland: "There will be no more fighting ... that is the understanding we have reached," he said, after an hour-long meeting with defence minister Mr George Fernandes. The Centre on the other hand expressed its willingness to consider appointing a political pointman to negotiate with the NSCN(I-M) leaders if they insist on upgrading the level of talks.

Leaders of the insurgent group had initially demanded talks at the "highest level", but subsequently toned down the demand to a political figure of Cabinet rank and not a bureaucrat. The government's willingness to consider a political face is being interpreted by observers as a "face-saver" for Naga leaders to address their constituencies.

A development on this front — being described as "too premature" — is expected only if Mr Swu and Mr Muivah insist. The present interlocutor for the Centre, Mr K Padmanabhaiah, is of Cabinet rank. He is expected to remain the "frontman" even if a political face is appointed.

The Centre already has a ceasefire agreement with the NSCN(I-M), but the government had insisted that unless its cadre respected the ceasefire in "letter and spirit" no "meaningful" dialogue can begin. Only one-third of the NSCN's cadre had confined themselves to the seven designated camps provided to the I-M group by the Ceasefire Monitoring Cell. Today's announcement may significantly alter this position.

"The Nagas now have now a much better understanding with the people of India," Mr Swu said today. Mr Mui-

Manipur bristles over plea for land

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

IMPHAL, Jan. 11. — An all-party 'peace-talks monitoring cell' was set up here today with chief minister Mr O Ibobi Singh as its convener following what is viewed here as disturbing signals regarding the territory of Manipur emanating from the NSCN (I-M)-Centre talks.

"I will even give up my chief ministership if it would save the territory of Manipur from being divided," Mr Ibobi Singh said. "We are ready to meet the eventuality at any cost," he added at the emergency meeting of all state political parties that was hastily convened at 10.30 a.m. at the CM's conference hall here. It was resolved by all attending political parties that the "people of Manipur will unitedly oppose any attempt to parcel the territory (of the state) on the basis of area occupied by different communities".

Representatives of national political parties also pledged that they would snap ties with their parent

See MANIPUR: p 10

ARMS:

(Continued from page 1)

-vah described the talks with Mr Fernandes as "very cordial and... very warm." Mr Swu and Mr Muivah have so far called on Mr Vajpayee and Mr Advani to exchange pleasantries and have reportedly sought an appointment with Mrs Sonia Gandhi.

Talks have not started on substantive issues yet, but the two leaders are likely to be stay in the Capital for about 10 more days, in all probability leaving before the Republic Day celebrations. But they may make a second trip in a couple of months. The Nagaland Assembly polls will be held on 26 February and they will certainly want to monitor the results.

MANIPUR:

(Continued from page 1)

parties if they tend to "work against the interests of the state". The parties also resolved to hold a special Assembly session if the need arises to avert a "break-up" of Manipur.

The CM, while reading out the resolution to the media, said Manipur within its present geographical confines has been in existence for over 2,000 years. It descended from the princely state that was inhabited by various communities, including the Meiteis, Tangkhuls (the tribe of NSCN(I-M) leader Mr Muivah), Maos, Kukis, Muslims and others, and was merged with the Indian Union in 1949. The state has always been home to different communities and thus cannot be parcelled, he said.

He said his government plans to take into confidence the chief ministers of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh on the issue.

In Itanagar, PWD minister Mr Talo Mugli welcomed the peacetalks with the rider that the demand for Greater Nagaland is "not at all acceptable to the people and the government of Arunachal".

THE STATESMAN

10 JAN 1963

Naga union chill under bonhomie

SEEMA GUHA

New Delhi, Jan. 10: The first meeting between deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani and the NSCN (I-M) brass was cordial, with the visitors again complimenting the sincerity of the Centre's efforts to understand and resolve the Naga problem.

"We were warmly welcomed by the deputy Prime Minister," NSCN (I-M) chairman Isak Chisi Swu said after calling on Advani in North Block along with secretary-general Thuingaleng Muivah.

Although both sides were tight-lipped on the issues discussed, the NSCN (I-M) leaders clearly indicated the broad framework on which the substantive talks would revolve. Swu again praised the maturity of the Indian leadership and said the vibes with Advani were "very positive". The meeting lasted 50 minutes.

Swu said the issue of bringing all Naga inhabited areas under one administrative unit would be "thrashed out across the table by the two sides when the actual nitty-gritty of the talks begin".

Muivah was more explicit and said traditional Naga inhabited areas also included the Ukhrul region of Manipur and certain areas in Assam. He clearly spelt out that the NSCN (I-M) claim to Ukhrul was a birthright and the Nagas were not claiming territory that was not traditionally theirs.

Ukhrul is the home of the Thangkul Nagas, who have been living there for generations. The Meiteis of Manipur are unwilling to give an inch of their territory to the Nagas. Two years ago, feelings ran high in Manipur, and the Meiteis burnt and looted the properties of Nagas living in the valley. "The Nagas have been living on territory belonging to Nagas. There is no question of forcefully living on land that does not belong to the Nagas," Muivah told reporters.

"I live in Ukhrul, I was born there, my forefathers were born and lived there. This land be-

longs to us. We are not living in the land of Meities."

In an obvious reference to the Manipur government's stand, he added: "This is our natural habitation, if others cannot accept this, there is nothing for us to do."

Muivah, however, clarified that this issue was not discussed with Advani today. But he conceded that getting all Nagas under one administrative unit was an important element of the negotiations with the Indian government.

The secretary-general's remarks could create ripples in Manipur and other north-eastern states with a sizeable Naga population. The challenge before the Centre is to find a solution that is not only within the Indian Constitution but is acceptable to other northeastern states as well.

For the NSCN (I-M), it will be difficult to sell a proposal to its cadre that does not include the assimilation of all Naga inhabited territories into the existing Nagaland.

Its leaders hope the Centre's acknowledgement of the "unique history and culture of the Nagas" is a good starting point for talks. "All other issues will stem from this central fact," Swu said.

Asked what the NSCN (I-M) meant by its "unique history and culture", Muivah said the Nagas had never really been a part of the Indian mainstream and had a distinct identity of their own.

"We have our own history and culture. Our history is very clear. We declared independence one day before India did in 1947. We were independent before India. Even the leader of India's freedom movement, Mahatma Gandhi, acknowledged our right to determine our own future," he said.

Muivah added that when the Union of India was declared in 1950, the Nagas had refused to join it. He made it clear that the sovereignty of the Nagas was not negotiable. The leaders ruled out any role in the Nagaland elections slated for February.

Parleys with Naga insurgents: a look back

ISA K Chisi Swu and Th Muivah, chairman and general secretary of the insurgent Naga group, National Socialist Council of Nagalim (I-M), have arrived in Delhi for talks with the Prime Minister. They are expected to meet other leaders of the National Democratic Alliance as well as the Bharatiya Janata Party President and possibly leaders of other political parties.

While the last meeting with the Prime Minister in New Delhi was held in 1967, the Naga leaders have been having informal talks with successive Prime Ministers during their visits abroad over the last decade and a half. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has met them twice earlier, in France (1998) and Japan (2001).

Among the avowed reasons for the Swu-Muivah group unleashing an incessant insurgency in Nagaland and adjoining areas is (i) its demand for "Greater Nagaland", i.e. the establishment of a singular administrative unit embracing the entire Naga dominated areas in the North East and (ii) grant of greater autonomy which matches and harmonises with the "unique" Naga entity in the national spectrum. The insurgent activities of this faction have included extortion, kidnapping for ransom, looting and killing.

Parallel activities by other Naga groups have, over the years, resulted in Nagaland and Manipur continually remaining "disturbed areas", with most serious consequences for the growth and socio-economic development of this entire region. The government of India's interlocutor, K Padmanabiah, has stated that the visiting leaders are now committed for a dialogue "without conditions".

However, the Khaplang group is categorically opposed to the talks; the Hoho (the supreme tribal council) is openly divided on the wisdom of any negotiations being held only with one of the dominant factions of the Naga movement and the Naga National Council (Phizo group) is also patently aggrieved on being left out.

In this context, and also remembering that the background of Naga-Kuki clashes and killings and the

By NN Vohra

ceasefire extension outside of Nagaland declared over a year ago and its subsequent roll back, has not led to any improvement of the serious disorder in Manipur, it is doubtful if a quick and easy solution can emerge only through talks with the I-M faction.

Till the time of the Gujral government (1997-98) the so-called secret parleys, all held in various foreign countries, were carried out by an emissary of the Prime Minister. In keeping with this practice I was called upon to meet Muivah in Bangkok, in July 1997. Arun Bhagat, then director, Intelligence Bureau, assisted me at this meeting. We met in a hotel in central Bangkok.

Open forum

Muivah, assisted by close aides, gave me his visiting card which said that he was the Prime Minister in exile of The People's Republic of Nagaland. The meeting virtually broke up when I informed him that my talks with him could only be in his capacity as a leader of the NSCN (I-M) faction and on no other basis.

After some time he sent a message that he was willing to talk on the suggested premise. We had a six-to-seven hour discussion which concluded by Mr Muivah undertaking to convey to us within the next two days the text of the proposed agreement on a "ceasefire". Mr Bhagat and I left for Delhi the same night. After the outcome of the talks was reported to Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral, I had his approval to fully brief the then Union home minister Indrajit Gupta.

Thereafter, the ceasefire proposal was discussed with the Governors and chief ministers of Nagaland and Manipur; Cabinet Secretary, Chief of Army Staff, heads of intelligence agencies, home defence and foreign secretaries. Consequently, the Cabinet Committee on Security and the Cabinet endorsed the proposal

before the Prime Minister made a statement on the government's decision in both Houses of Parliament, announcing the details and the date from which the ceasefire agreement would be effective.

The post-1997 developments, till now, do not call for any reiteration. I recall the aforesaid details to emphasise the extreme importance of this tangled issue, which has assumed complex and virtually intractable dimensions, being thoroughly discussed with all interested parties and factions not only in Nagaland but also with those in other States and areas who would be affected by any resolution of the demands made by the NSCN (I-M).

It is indeed most unfortunate that such consultations, initiated by Indrajit Gupta in 1997, did not make the envisaged headway because of the sudden threats to the Gujral government, leading to its subsequent fall and announcement of general elections in the country.

It would not be irrelevant to note that according to the Allocation of Business Rules of the government of India, it is the Union home ministry which is unambiguously mandated to deal with all issues relating to internal disorders, insurgencies and related demands.

The considerations on account of which it was decided that the principal secretary to the Prime Minister or any other person nominated by the Prime Minister would hold secret talks with NSCN (I-M) ongoing efforts would pave the way for lasting peace in trouble-torn Nagaland and Manipur, it would be necessary to ensure that, in the pursuit of the further required steps, the jurisdiction of the Union home ministry is not tinkered within any manner whatsoever.

Any dilution or dispersal of the ministry's complete responsibility in squarely dealing with all matters which fall within its realm could have disastrous consequences, as we have seen happen in the years past.

(The author is a former defence secretary, home secretary and principal secretary to the Prime Minister)

Mawsi

Peace warmth kept cold out

By Sanjoy Hazarika

WHEN Mr Isak Chisi Swu and Mr Thiungelang Muivah walked into the exit lounge at Indira Gandhi International Airport, they were greeted with banners and Naga supporters wearing the inimitable red-white-and-green Naga shawls (a good way of keeping Delhi's cold at bay), waving small Naga flags (a rainbow and stars on a blue background) and singing "We shall overcome...."

Dressed impeccably in suits and trench coats, the two men looked rested despite a delayed flight and happy, speaking briefly of the need to pursue peace, to talk to the Indian leaders and "to the people of India".

With the rangy Mr K Padmanabiah — the Indian interlocutor to the talks — by their side and also wearing a red Naga shawl, they were then taken to waiting cars, leaving the press suitably stranded as a vast fog swamped the airport and settled over Delhi enveloping the Naga leaders in its embrace, securing them and sheltering their thoughts from prying eyes and minds.

The Delhi Police as usual did their best to make the press and a group of increasingly frustrated photographers and TV camera crews as unhappy as possible, locking them out of the arrival lounge area until a burly Sikh officer al-



N SCN activists cheer Mr Muivah and Mr Isak Swu at Rajghat on Thursday. — AFP

lowed the camera chaps in on a promise of good conduct. "No *shor sharaha*," he warned.

All of us slipped in on the basis of our press accreditation cards. And a young TV reporter from Doordarshan said, wondering and gently listening to the singers, "I can get a sense of how deeply they must feel".

The singing Nagas would have moved anyone, especially as the words rang out, "We shall be free one day". But one policeman, when asked who was coming by a curious

praise Gandhiji, not because they adore him (they may), but because he is said to have told a Naga delegation before his death that they had a right to independence.

The Rajghat visit is a shrewd political move and both Mr Swu and Mr Muivah are veteran political figures with a sophisticated yet tough touch.

Mr Muivah is also frugal in his personal habits. He lives currently in Amsterdam where he cooks his own food and washes his own clothes. Both are deeply committed Christians; they neither smoke nor drink, a code which they seek to impose on their followers.

So where do the talks go beyond the present discussions? The meetings with the Prime Minister and others represent a major step forward for goodwill and peace. But don't forget that rallies in Imphal have opposed any settlement that divides Manipur.

Delhi is fine but the North-east is the real battleground for ideas and people and that is where one of the toughest tests awaits the most accomplished of the Naga leaders. Will they be able to get a mandate from all Naga groups, including those opposing them? This is more complex and tougher than is realised because of the history of bitterness and violent feuding. It's going to take time.

So, like at Delhi airport, be prepared to wait and listen. Drive carefully, there's a lot of fog out there.

Khaplang seeks passage to India

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Kohima, Jan. 8: Springing a surprise a few hours before Isak Chisi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah were to reach New Delhi, the Khaplang faction of the NSCN indicated that its top leaders, including chairman S.S. Khaplang, could return to India later in the year for "political negotiations" with the Centre.

Khughalu Mulatonu, a deputy *kilonser* (minister) in the NSCN (K) hierarchy, told **The Telegraph** over phone that his outfit had lined up "something very positive" for Nagaland. "Khaplang is keen to come to India and lay the stepping stone for a political process," he said.

Khaplang, a Hemi Naga and estranged comrade of the Swu-Muivah duo, is based in Myanmar. Sources said several other senior leaders of the NSCN (K)



Khaplang:
Missing out

had been staying in Myanmar for a couple of months now. The Centre and Khaplang group announced a ceasefire on April 29, 2000, but have yet to hold a single round of talks.

Mulatonu said the dialogue between the NSCN (I-M) and the Centre in Delhi would throw up nothing more than piecemeal solutions to various problems. "The outcome of the talks will merely be an understanding and not a political settlement. The government of India will not commit the mistake of starting a real political dialogue with the NSCN (I-M). At best, Delhi will come to an understanding and the talks will have no effect on Naga politics."

The NSCN was formed in 1980. It split eight years later, with Khaplang moving away to form his own group.

Nagaland chief minister S.C. Jamir has said on several occasions that the Centre should not make the mistake of ignoring the Khaplang faction in the euphoria of holding talks with Swu and Muivah in Delhi.

Echoing the chief minister, Mulatonu said the Centre would be making a big mistake if it tried to resolve the Naga issue through discussions with the "Thangkhus, Mians and Nepalis".

On unity among Naga groups, the NSCN (K) leader said his organisation was trying to find a meeting point with the Naga National Council (NNC), which was founded by A.Z. Phizo.

THE TELEGRAPH

9 JAN 2003

Centre can't afford to ignore Nagaland government

By Sanjoy Hazarika

THE NSCN-led insurgency is the mother of all insurgencies in the North-east, having patronised and trained insurgents from Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and even Manipur. The Delhi visit of Isak Chishi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah will have a bearing on the Assembly elections next month in Nagaland, although the NSCN is not participating. The group, however, is purportedly backing a number of candidates from Opposition parties in their campaign against their bete noire, the chief minister, Mr SC Jamir.

Mr Jamir is one of the most enduring politicians in India and has influenced

Naga politics for nearly four decades. Delhi too cannot ignore the state government and will have to associate it at some point with the dialogue.

Any forward movement in the dialogue will have an impact on other militant groups in the North-east, if not in Kashmir, which are watching the process. Also critical is the need for various Naga groups, divided by years of fighting, to come to a common understanding of their goals, eschewing rhetoric, such as sovereignty, and embracing reality. There are some things on which New Delhi can be flexible and on some that it can't — just as the Nagas. A thorny issue which may come up could be that of land and territory — they want a homeland where Nagas from the neighbouring

states can live under one administrative roof. This is opposed by these states and by the Centre.

Other major issues which are likely to come up during the talks include the following: a separate flag for the Nagas, control over natural resources, tax laws, a common defence mechanism and the right to open trade and investment missions abroad.

The Naga leaders are expected to consult with leaders of Indian public opinion, activists as well as scholars, and their own supporters from Nagaland and Manipur. They are not scheduled to travel outside the

Indian capital, even though their supporters have put up welcome arches in Dimapur, Nagaland.

Mr Muivah's openness was summed up in a conversation with this writer in Bangkok last year: "We will need to understand the

difficulties of the government of India." But then the government too needs to give the other side space and the Prime Minister is states-

man enough to acknowledge that New Delhi has made mistakes. It's time to bury the past, forgive if not forget and forge ahead. Mr Vaipayee must assure the Nagas and all of India that the

dignity and honour of both sides will be protected.

After all, they have come to India on his invitation, extended in Osaka, Japan, in 2001.

Mr K Padmanabhaiah, former home secretary and the Prime Minister's envoy to the talks, which have been held abroad so far since the ceasefire began in 1997, compares the discussions to an expedition on Mount Everest. Mr Padmanabhaiah has, along with his team, negotiated with patience and flexibility, and says he's brought to it to "base camp". "Each step upward will be tough and challenging and any slip could be dangerous."

Those associated with the talks also counsel caution against expecting too

much at this stage and define it as more in the nature of a consultation. "It's a breakthrough in so far as they have come to Delhi," said a senior Cabinet minister. "But it's one step in a long journey, others will have to be consulted and involved."

The government is making arrangements for the Naga leaders' safety and security and their stay in a safe location. They are to meet with a series of national leaders, including Opposition leader Mrs Sonia Gandhi, visit Raj Ghat to pay homage to Mahatma Gandhi and receive delegations from the Naga Hoho, human rights groups in Nagaland as well as scholars and members of civil society.

(Concluded)

'Each step upward will be tough and any slip could be dangerous'

9 JAN 2003

THE STATESMAN

Stage set for talks with Muivah, Swu

H. Bala Devi in New Delhi

Jan. 8. — Mr Isak Chisi Swu and Mr Th. Muivah arrived here late tonight for their much-anticipated peace talks with the Centre. Talks will start with the two calling on the Prime Minister tomorrow. The NSCN(I-M) leaders will meet Mr LK Advani the next day. Their first engagement tomorrow is a visit to Rajghat.

The flight, scheduled to arrive at 11.50 p.m., landed at IGI airport after much delay — apparently because of fog — at 1.10 a.m. amid tight security and a 250-odd cheering crowd comprising Naga students from Delhi University as well as from the North-east. As the two leaders came out of the airport along with the Centre's interlocutor for the talks, Mr Padmanabhaiah, their supporters sang: "We shall overcome".

Mr Swu said: "We have come

to India for a peaceful solution for Nagaland." Soon after they were frisked away into a Maruti esteem escorted by CISF commandos.

Mr Muivah and Mr Swu will have "intensive" talks with the Centre's pointman, Mr K Padmanabhaiah, and other officials. They'll also hold "several rounds of talks" with representatives from "Naga society" who've come to Delhi. These discussions are aimed at "formulating a common approach" to be presented to the government.

A senior official said: "The two leaders are free to move anywhere in the country, even down South, since the ban on the NSCN has lapsed." But it's still not clear if Mr Swu and Mr Muivah will visit any place outside Delhi. The leaders are expected to give a political statement only "if the government's mood is appropriate".

Another report on page 4

9 JAN 2003

THE STATESMAN

The long & winding road to peace talks

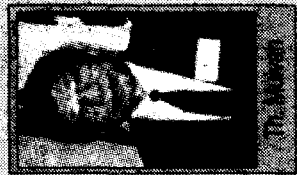
By Sanjoy Hazarika

When Isak Chishi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah step off the aircraft bringing them from Amsterdam to New Delhi on 8 January, they will walk into history. as the first Naga leaders in 36 years to come to New Delhi for official negotiations about the future of their people. It's taken them seven years to get here since the first secret meeting with then Prime Minister Mr PV Narasimha Rao in a Paris hotel in 1995. And as they begin with their official calls on the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and other leaders, their minds are bound to range over the difficult years on the long and winding road that they have chosen for themselves and their followers.

When Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, Mr LK Advani and others begin discussions with them, it will be worth their remembering that they are dealing with men who have fought for their ideals — however much their opponents disagree with these — for all their lives, and who opened channels to Pakistan and China to get support for their cause. Indeed the last time a Naga group finalised an agreement with the government of India at Shillong on 11 November 1975, Mr Swu and Mr Muivah were in China. They denounced that accord and, along with SS Khaplang — with whom they later fell out (see *chronology*) — launched the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (now Nagalim).

One thing is sure: both men are survivors, having lived through detention and attacks on their lives, battling through jungles and against Indian security forces and the Myanmar Army. They have been pledged to fight for the independence of their people, although in recent years they have lived in reasonable comfort in Bangkok and elsewhere

Turn to page 2



declares 'independence'

1629: Newly-formed Naga Club met the Simon Commission urging it that the Nagas wished to be left alone
 June 1947: Naga-Akbar Hydari proposed understanding; it was between various Naga tribes and Sir Akbar Hydari, the then Governor of Assam
 August 14 1947: Angami Zapu Phizo, the leader of the Naga National Council (NNC),

declares 'independence' and declares that 99 per cent of the Nagas have voted for 'independence'
 1952: Nagas boycott the first elections of the Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN)
 1958: Parliament passes the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act giving sweeping powers to the Armed Forces
 1968: Phizo left for the UK. He died in 1980 and was buried in Kohima
 December 1 1968: State of Nagaland born. President S Radhakrishnan inaugurates the State of Nagaland at Kohima
 1984: A ceasefire comes into effect as a fallout of a peace mission led by Jaiprakash Narayan

1975: Shillong Accord signed between the government of Assam and moderate Nagas
 1980: Hardliners among the NNC, including Th. Muivah, Isak Chishi Swu and Khaplang, forms National Socialist Council of Nagaland. Ban imposed on NSCN
 1988: Clash between supporters of Th. Muivah and Khaplang; NSCN consequently splits into two groups — NSCN (Isak-Muivah) and NSCN (Khaplang)
 1995: Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao meets NSCN (I-M) leaders in Paris
 Jul 1997: Ceasefire declared between the government of India and the NSCN (I-M) during the Prime Ministership of YK Gowda. Ceasefire restricted to Nagaland
 2001: Ceasefire between the government of India and NSCN (K)

June 14 2001: Government of India extends ceasefire with the NSCN (I-M) to beyond the territory of Nagaland
 June 18 2001: Uprising in Manipur due to extension of the ceasefire beyond Nagaland
 Government drops the clause
 December 2001: Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee meets NSCN (I-M) leaders in Osaka
 November 20 2002: Original ban on NSCN lapses



The main players in the Naga movement include: AZ Phizo (Angami from Nagaland), Th. Muivah (Thankul from Ukhrul district of Manipur), Isak Chishi Swu (a Sema from Nagaland), SC Jaiar (Aao from Nagaland), Khaplang (Heim from Myanmar)

Naga movement is the first underground movement in independent India and is one of the longest-running of its kind in Asia
 The most difficult issues to be sorted out between the visiting NSCN (I-M) leaders and the government of India are the issue of sovereignty, which the Centre has rejected outright, and the issue of territorial integrity of all Naga areas, which the Centre has turned down and Nagaland's neighbouring states have vehemently opposed

8 JAN 2003

Manipur's misgivings on eve of Naga talks

Statesman News Service

IMPHAL, Jan. 7. — Even as the NSCN-IM leaders get ready for peace talks, the mood in Manipur is one of apprehension. Almost everyone is asking what the outcome of the talks will be.

For the average Manipuri, the spectre of the 18 June 2001 "mass uprising" is still fresh in their minds. Eighteen people were killed in the series of incidents that followed the announcement of extension of the ceasefire area between the NSCN-IM and the Indian government to Manipur on 14 June 2001 at Bangkok. Imphal was rocked by a series of protests that forced the Union minister of state for home Mr ID Swami to fly here and force the Centre to do a U-turn on the issue, much to the dismay of NSCN-IM leaders.

A peace rally is being taken out tomorrow under the aegis of the Solidarity Committee on the Territorial Ethnic Integrity of Manipur in and around Imphal. The committee's convener, Mr MC Meitei, told reporters yesterday that the commit-

tee welcomed the talks but it was against any change in the boundary of Manipur. The committee warned that any attempt to muddle with the existing boundary will mean another "18 June uprising". The Kukis, a major ethnic group in the hills of Manipur, have shown similar fears. The Kuki Inpi, apex body of the Kukis, has written to the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and interlocutor for the talks, Mr Padmanabhaiah, demanding that the Kuki issue be settled first. The KIM claims that at least 900 Kuki villagers have been killed and 350 villages destroyed by the NSCN-IM. "How can a man whose organisation killed so many innocent people... be invited for talks... No judgment has ever been passed against him by a proper court in the country," Holkhollet Khongsai, president of KIM, wrote.

In Senapati, where the Naga apex body United Naga Council is headquartered, efforts are being made to send delegates of village bodies, church leaders and NGOs to New Delhi to meet the NSCN-IM chief.

Statesman News Service

AGARTALA, Jan. 7. — The peace talks with the Naga underground leaders is likely to have a demoralising impact on insurgency in the North-east. Mr Sukhbinder Singh, I-G (operations) of CRPF, said here that rebel groups are waiting for the outcome of the talks between the NSCN-IM and the Centre. Isak Swu and T Muivah, NSCN-IM leaders, arrive in New Delhi tomorrow. They are scheduled to meet Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr LK Advani on Thursday.

Mr Singh said the NSCN was the leading force among underground groups in the region. They were being supported, given training in arms and supplied sophisticated weapons by Naga groups. He said the National Liberation Front of Tripura and the All Tripura Tiger Force had been colluding with the NSCN and its members have participated in joint operations with local rebel groups on several occasions in this state.

He felt the NSCN's return to the

NSCN-K warns NSCN-IM

GUWAHATI, Jan. 7. — NSCN (Khaplang) has warned NSCN-IM against attempting to participate in the ensuing Assembly polls in Nagaland "either directly or indirectly" and said Thursday's peace talks in Delhi would fail unless other Naga insurgent groups were involved. "The talks will fail unless the entire Naga society as well as the Naga insurgent groups are involved in the peace talks... between the NSCN-IM top leadership and the Centre," Mr Zeluolie Angami, self-styled revenue minister of the People's Republic of Nagaland belonging to the Khaplang faction, said. — PTT

democratic mainstream would tell upon the morale of other rebel groups of the region "seriously". He said the rebellion in the North-east was rooted in poverty.

'A blow to insurgency'

But he was hopeful that other rebel groups would be drawn to the peace process and accept the need for talks.

The Election Commission has asked the Union home ministry to deploy additional Central forces in Tripura to ensure peaceful polls to the state Assembly scheduled for the third week of February. This follows intelligence reports that insurgents from across the border may disrupt the polls.

The Election Commission reviewed the situation in the state during a meeting with officials of the home ministry and the Tripura government in New Delhi on 4 January. The Tripura government urged the Centre to deploy over 200 companies of Central paramilitary forces in the state in addition to nine BSF battalions.

The EC reportedly asked the home ministry to make arrangements for sealing Tripura's border before and during elections. An official said the home ministry has communicated its readiness to the state authorities regarding deployment of additional Central forces.

Feeling of neglect began in Nehru's time: George

Statesman News Service

HYDERABAD, Jan. 7. — Mr George Fernandes said Jawaharlal Nehru's radio address when China was invading India in 1962, that his heart went out to the people of Assam, sparked off the feeling of neglect of the region.

"Till date Assam has not forgotten. Their perception was and is that India will do nothing for them... One has to be there to face their neglect," he said at the Partnership Summit.

"In the North-east and J&K, terrorism has emerged out of a sense of alienation built over the years. Terrorism in the North-east is the only place in India where men, women, boys and girls wearing military fatigues face the Indian Army," he said.

"No other area in India is as neglected as the North-east. Some say it's difficult to set up industry there. Others say it's difficult to find officials willing to work there. It is the most neglected part of the country," he said.

"In Nagaland, the Centre and the Army have begun the process of drawing away people from leading violent movements. We are now looking forward to the day and it's not far away when violence will end." "The present upsurge in Nagaland is about peace. We did all to see that talks are carried out (with the NSCN)."

Nagas likely to press for special status

By Bisheshwar Mishra
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The Isak Swu and Th Muivah-led National Socialist Council of Nagaland (ISM), which is beginning its peace talks with the Centre this week, is expected to press for the "enlargement" of the special status for Nagaland under Article 371-A of the constitution.

"This would provide an even better status to Nagaland than that enjoyed by Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370. This is because Article 370 is only a temporary provision while Article 371-A is a special

provision," a highly placed source in the government told TNN on Monday. The three-member NSCN (ISM) team, comprising Mr Swu, Mr Muivah and Rai Sing, which is arriving on Wednesday, will initially spend a few days meeting Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Deputy P.M.L.K. Advani and important opposition leaders.

Nagaland already enjoys special status under Article 371-A which ensures that "No Act of Parliament shall apply to Nagaland in relation to "religious or social practices of the Nagas, Naga customary law and procedure, administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions

according to the Naga Customary Law, ownership and transfer of land and its resources..."

The source said that the NSCN (ISM) leaders would press for enlarging the "scope of special status under this Article, of course, to mutual satisfaction". There was no demand for the creation of a "Greater Nagaland" in the NSCN (ISM) proposal, the source insisted. But the NSCN (ISM) had sought "a realistic re-assessment" of the boundaries of all the Naga people.

The government has been talking to various rebel groups in Nagaland for more

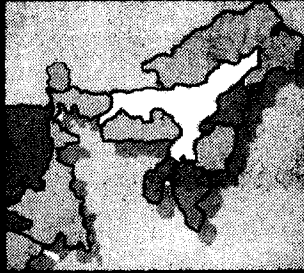
than three decades. But this is the first time that a sustained initiative, accompanied by a ceasefire agreement with the largest insurgent group, the NSCN (ISM), since August 1997, has succeeded in changing the venue of talks from outside the country to New Delhi.

It was noteworthy that the apex representative body, the Ho Ho, of all the Naga tribes like the Semas, Angamis and the Aos, had accepted that the NSCN (ISM) would be the main negotiating rebel group, the source said. Therefore, there was greater hope of arriving at some agreeable solution, the source added.

Reuters

7 JAN 2003

NORTH by NORTH EAST



SANJOY HAZARIKA

Welcome, Messrs Swu and Muivah

A FEW days after this column appears, the "collective leadership" of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (I-M) is scheduled to arrive in New Delhi for talks with the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and other leaders. Mr Isak Chisi Swu, chairman of the NSCN and Mr Th. Muivah, its general secretary, are coming to the Indian capital for the first time in 35 years for official negotiations to move forward in their efforts to settle the Naga imbroglio, a complex set of issues ranging from sovereignty to greater territory as well as special rights which have defied solution for over 50 years.

Most of the day-to-day official negotiations are to be conducted by Mr K Padmarabhiah, the Prime Minister's Representative to the talks, who has been meeting them abroad for over three years in efforts to keep the five-year-old peace process and ceasefire on track. But the Prime Minister, in his official remarks, and his deputy, are expected to lay out the framework for a negotiated settlement and certain guidelines which would need to be followed.

In addition, they are likely to call on opposition figures and also discuss the Naga issue with senior officials and scholars as well as leaders of civil society and the human rights movement.

Mr Swu was in the last Naga delegation to hold talks with then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1967. He is now 72; Mr Muivah, who has never negotiated with the Indian government in New Delhi but opened the Naga connection to China in 1964 and met with Chinese Premier Zhou en-lai, is 68. Both studied in Shillong before following a greater calling. They are now older, vastly more experienced and wiser. They will need all their negotiating skills in these coming weeks to secure at least part of the Naga dream, while understanding the realities of talking with India in India.

We welcome them - assuming they arrive on their scheduled dates - and wish them and the Government of India well in the formidable task to find a settlement which is inclusive of other groups as well as just and honourable to both sides. It is a path-breaking opportunity and both hope and fear, those inseparable twins, travel with the negotiators, with the Nagas and all who seek peace and development for the North East in the days and weeks to come.

The Constitutional position on the Nagas

In the third document which reflects on the efforts made by the Nagas and the Government of India at settling the long-festering problem, the North East Page publishes extracts from existing provisions in the Constitution of India which confer a unique status on the Nagas, not very different from what governs the state of Jammu and Kashmir. One of these relates to the fact that no law passed by Parliament shall apply to the state unless the state assembly approves of it. There are other constitutional provisos which protect communities in different hill states and communities in the North East and which, for example, also prevent non-locals from buying land or settling permanently in these areas. The article also gives the Governor of Nagaland state, which came into being in 1963, sweeping powers which exceed those of other governors because here the state's governor can take a decision on a major issue overriding the views of the cabinet. The question that arises from a look at these materials is what are the other provisions that the Government of India can provide in the quest for an enduring settlement. Indeed, some of the points being discussed between the Prime Minister's Representative to the talks, Mr K Padmanabiah, and the NSCN (I-M) leadership are covered by these existing clauses, including Naga control of natural resources. The sweeping powers of the governor and of the Centre are sought to be reviewed and reduced in the proposals by the Naga negotiators.

Document

resolution so decides

The Governor of Nagaland shall have special responsibility with respect to law and order in the state of Nagaland for so long as in his opinion internal disturbances occurring in the Naga Hills-Tuensang Area immediately before the formation of that State continue therein or in any part thereof and in the discharge of his functions in relation thereto the Governor shall, after consulting the Council of Ministers, exercise his individual judgement as to the action to be taken:

Provided that if any question arises whether any matter is or is not a matter as respects which the Governor is under this sub-clause required to act in the exercise of his individual judgement, the decision of the Governor in his discretion shall be final, and the validity of anything done by the Governor shall not be called in question on the ground that he ought or ought not to have acted in the exercise of his individual judgement:

Provided further that if the President on receipt of a report from the Governor or otherwise is satisfied that it is no longer necessary for the Governor to have special responsibility with regard to law and order in the State of Nagaland, he may by order direct that the Governor shall cease to have such responsibility with effect from such date as may be specified in the order."

371A. Special provision with respect to the state of Nagaland — (1) Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, no Act of Parliament in respect of

- (i) religious or social practices of the Nagas,
- (ii) Naga customary law and procedure
- (iii) administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Naga customary law
- (iv) ownership and transfer of land and its resources, shall apply to the State of Nagaland unless the Legislative Assembly of Nagaland by a

In addition, there are special clauses for Tuensang district which enable the governor to establish and make rules for a regional council to run the district. But if he so wishes, through a public notification and on the recommendation of the regional council, directly administer Tuensang. The bottom line on the Governor's powers is unambiguously stressed in clause 2 (f) of this Article: "notwithstanding anything in the foregoing provisions of this clause, the final decision on all matters relating to the Tuensang district shall be made by the Governor in his discretion."

THE STATESMAN

4 JAN 2013

Bodo militants held in Sikkim too

9-NBFR
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HT Correspondent
Gangtok, January 1

FOUR MILITANTS of the banned National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) were arrested on Wednesday from a house in Gangtok, where they had been staying on in the city for a year under false identities.

The arrests followed those of two Bodo militants from North Bengal a day earlier. The back-to-back arrests marked the first time that Bodo militants had been picked up from the two States. For Sikkim, in fact, it was the first time the State had witnessed any militant being arrested.

Dhiren Bodo (40), wife Protima, in mid-30s, Bablu Sargaeri (32) and Prabin Bodo (22) were picked up from a house near Sikkim Flour Mills that they had rented a year ago.

The house was raided after Dhiren's movements

over the past few days aroused the suspicion of the local police. He had reportedly been to Pokhra, Nepal, in April and also has links with the KLO. State police were alerted three days ago and officers have been keeping a watch on him since then.

Dhiren and his wife landed in the city a year ago and took up a house. Dhiren posed as a fruit merchant and stock broker and went by the name of Bipul Sonowal. Protima assumed the name of Maya. Prabin and Bablu joined the couple later and posed as family members. Protima gave birth to their son during the stay.

Seven officers raided the house on Wednesday. The militants did not put up any resistance. Dhiren's son and daughter were in the house at the time of the arrests. Plastic explosives, grenades and Nepali currency were found at the house. The

four have been booked under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002, and for possession of explosives.

Dhiren is the vice-president of the NDFB and was earlier in charge of the outfit's military operations. He was reportedly in Pokhra, Nepal, in April and is believed to have links with the KLO. He was last booked for a crime in 1993. He jumped bail and has been on the run for the past 10 years.

A computer and a cell phone were also found at the house. The cell phone has been seized. Dhiren had listed the email IDs of several NDFB militants, including the outfit's president, on the computer. The Criminal Investigation Department is interrogating him to explore his links with other militant outfits. The State police has also contacted Assam Police and Central authorities for further information on the militants.

HINDUSTAN TIMES

2 JAN 2003

Ibobi threatens Naga leader with arrest if he enters state

Manipur thorn in Muivah flesh

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OUR BUREAU

Imphal, Jan. 1: The Centre's eagerness to make the NSCN (I-M) leadership feel at home on their return to India has been counter-balanced by the belligerence of Manipur, which today declared that it would not hesitate to arrest the outfit's general secretary, Thuingaleng Muivah, if he visited the state.

Both Nagaland and Assam have withdrawn the arrest warrants against Muivah and NSCN (I-M) chairman Isak Chisi Swu to facilitate their return to the country for the next round of peace talks with the Centre.

Manipur chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh has, however, refused to make any such concession.

"The NSCN (I-M) general secretary still wears the tag of a 'wanted man'. Muivah will be

arrested if he tries to enter Manipur," he said.

Muivah and Swu are expected to reach New Delhi on January 8 and meet Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee the next evening.

Union minister of state for home, I.D. Swami, had said on Sunday that the remaining arrest warrant against Muivah would not be an impediment to his and Swu's stay in India. "We have assured them that even if the Manipur government does not withdraw the warrant, they won't have a problem staying in India," he told **The Telegraph** over phone from New Delhi.

Muivah hails from Ukhrul district of Manipur and officials here reckon he might make an attempt to enter the state.

Ibobi Singh said his government would not balk from taking any step that is required to safe-

guard the territorial integrity of Manipur. "We will not opt for a compromise on the issue under any circumstances. We have made it clear to the Centre on several occasions that Manipur's boundary should not be tampered with in a bid to clinch a deal with the Naga outfit."

The NSCN (I-M) wants contiguous Naga-inhabited areas of the Northeast to be brought under one administrative set-up. The Manipuris fear that the Centre might alter the state's boundary in an attempt to end five decades of insurgency in Nagaland.

The anti-ceasefire agitation of June 2001 was a manifestation of the concern of the Manipuri community over the Centre's stand on the Naga issue. So intense was the agitation that the NDA-led government was forced to annul the extension of its

truce with the NSCN (I-M) to all Naga-inhabited areas, including the hill districts of Manipur.

Dimasa shadow

As a six-month truce between the Dima Haram Daoga (DHD) and the Centre took effect today, speculation was rife about talks with the Dimasa outfit having an adverse impact on the already prolonged Naga peace process.

A source said the NSCN (I-M) could look at the DHD's claim to Dimapur, Nagaland's commercial capital, as a serious threat to its interests after the beginning of a dialogue between the Centre and the Dimasa outfit. The DHD wants Dimapur to be included in the proposed state of Dimaraji.

"Though the DHD's demand is not a new one, the ceasefire and the talks that are expected to follow will magnify the seriousness of the issue," he said.

2 Bodo militants held in Jalpaiguri

HT Correspondents
Kolkata/Siliguri, Dec 31

THE YEAR ended in a twin triumph for the police in North Bengal. Two Bodo militants were arrested from Shipra forest in Jalpaiguri on Tuesday afternoon while a wanted KLO activist was picked up from his house at Kumargram in Jalpaiguri district. This is the first time that Bodo militants have been arrested in the State

Amarendra Chandra Deb-mari (30), a corporal in a Bodo outfit's organisation unit, and Praneswar Najmeri (23) were arrested after the Samuktala police was tipped of their movements in the forest. The arrests followed a joint combing operation conducted by SP(Jalpaiguri), the CRPF and the EFR. The two are believed to have masterminded the landmine explosion at Bhutanghat and a camp explosion in Assam. They have confessed to the crimes.

Debmari's interrogation revealed that there is a third

militant still hiding in the forests. The police suspect that he is carrying an AK 47. A combing operation is on to nab him. The militants were on their way to buy arms and ammunition from Cox Bazar in Bangladesh when they lost their way and set up a camp at Shipra.

The police recovered an AK 47 rifle, 115 rounds of cartridge, Rs12 lakh in cash, a hand grenade and some other material that could be tell-tale evidence on their activities.

IG (Law and Order) Chayan Mukherjee described the arrests as big catch. Mukherjee said all three militants had been trained at the Peiping camp

in Bhutanghat, where the ISI gives military lessons. Uifa and KLO militants too are trained at these camps.

KLO activists Biswajit Das had been evading arrest since two years. Kumargram OC Basudev Sarkar said Das was wanted in connection with an attempt to murder case on Jiten Sarkar, a teacher, on December 11, 2000.

A former bloc president of Kamtapur People's Party in Kumargram, Das underwent arms training at an Uifa-run camp in Bhutan in 1999. After completing training, he allegedly got involved in extortion and worked as informer for the militants.

Bodo rebels 'ban' social evils

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, Dec. 31: Donning the mantle of moral guardians, the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) has embarked on a mission to cleanse Bodo society of "social evils".

The outfit has enforced a ban on pornography, liquor, eve-teasing, drug abuse and all forms of gambling, including lottery, in the Bodo-inhabited areas of Assam. Borosa Brahma, publicity secretary of the Kokrajhar unit of the BLT, said the ban would take effect tomorrow.

The BLT has warned of "strict action" against anyone who flouts its order. "The ban was necessitated by the threat to Bodo society from social evils that have crept into our society from outside," Brahma said.

The outfit is believed to have launched the drive against social evils in view of the spurt in crimes against women in the Bodo-inhabited areas, particularly in Kokrajhar district. Several organisations, including the

Bodo Sahitya Sabha and the Bodo Women's Welfare Society, have hailed the ban.

According to social activists, the BLT directive would go a long way in eradicating social evils. "Since the militants are quick and more harsh in meting out punishment, their directives are taken more seriously by the people," a Kokrajhar-based social activist said.

The number of crimes against women was the highest this year, police sources said. Minor girls and even pregnant women were reportedly raped and killed in the Bodo belt.

On November 23, Rijuli Basumatary of Padmabil village under Serfanguri police station was murdered after being raped. The victim was just 17 years old. Again, on December 4, a youth killed his lover, who had been pregnant for eight months.

Officials declined to comment on the BLT's crackdown on social evils, but most admitted that the incidence of crime had increased in recent times. The

outfit is engaged in talks with the Centre to create a new administrative set-up for the Bodo-inhabited areas of Lower Assam. However, the rival National Democratic Front of Boroland has yet to show any inclination to come to the negotiation table.

The trend of militant outfits turning conscience-keeper is not new to the Northeast. To keep their support base intact, several militants are engaged in a crusade against social evils. Militants have even executed people for violating their directives.

In Manipur, the outlawed Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL) recently abducted five

persons, including two government officials, for their alleged involvement in a scam in the school education department. The outfit had previously announced a crackdown on malpractice in school and college examinations. Apart from the five persons in its custody, the KYKL has threatened to execute minister of state for school education Maniruddin Sheikh.

The outfit has accused him of taking Rs 1.2 lakh each from 36 project officers who had been allegedly appointed in violation of rules.

In Nagaland, the NSCN (I-M) has killed people on charges of trafficking in contraband drugs.