

Naga Peace Accord: How Genuine Is It?

By Rameshwar Roy

Whatever may be the outcome down the line, to start with, the current government needs to be complimented for reaching out to the Nagas to sign this landmark peace accord. This has been the oldest insurgency in the country with its roots going back to pre-independence days; therefore, more often than not, this was always called the mother of all the insurgent groups operating in the North-East. This is not the first nor possibly the last time that the government has gone or will go in for such an accord. One can cite any number of such arrangements that have been worked out with various groups operating in the North Eastern states at one time or the other, ongoing accords with ULFA and Bodo groups (Assam) , Suspension of Operations with 18 Groups (Manipur) being examples.

So where is the flaw, which pushes such peace processes back into failure? It is simply those elements who are not part of the peace deal. One reason is that it provides leverage, as also an opportunity for the deal-makers, to fall back to this group, when convenient. The famous ULFA-SULFA (Surrendered ULFA)-ULFA circle is an example. When the going gets tough, ULFA becomes SULFA; elections are held, the situation eases out and after a brief period of good life the SULFA is back to ULFA.

The Accord is being widely reported as a great success for the Government and there is much speculation as to how this peace accord will help the Government's much-touted Look East policy as also fast-track the development of the entire North Eastern region. The current Naga Peace Accord has its origin when the peace accord between the Government and NSCN(K), the rival group of NSCN(IM), was not renewed and NSCN(K) chose to, instead, undertake violent action against the army causing very heavy casualties to our soldiers. And even though the group has now been side-lined, they still possess the initiative to cause trouble with renewed vigor and thus the potential to affect the Peace Accord. While the fact that the group operates out of Myanmar is well known, and inasmuch as the Myanmar government may desire to help the Indian government, their capability to translate that desire into action is questionable. More importantly, despite all the hype about the Accord, the very basic provisions of the Peace Accord have not been revealed and herein lies the nemesis of the issue. A discussion, of the likely fallouts in the light of this, is in order.

One is that, the NSCN (IM) leader Thuingaleng Muivah is a Tanagkhul, basically representing Nagas settled in Ukhrul district of Manipur. He was more than acceptable when dreams of 'Nagalim' (Greater Nagaland) were being nurtured by this group, which is no longer the case. So, this part of the credibility itself can be exploited by the rival group(s), who have ideological differences.

Next, is the status of large number of armed cadres of NSCN (IM), in well protected camps. Have they surrendered their weapons ? If not, when will they do that? And what will be the understanding on the large amount of tax collection and extortions that is resorted to by the cadres of NSCN (IM) to sustain their expenditure? Who will give them this amount? A rough dated estimate gave these figures as over Rs 400 Crores. There have always been allusions to nexus between elements of the ruling dispensation in the State and such armed groups. Even if there is some truth to this, the Accord has the capacity to lend legitimacy to any such linkages.

Whichever government was in power, there never appeared to be a strong policy. The biggest advantage the Centre had, though, was the availability of resources and time. They were able to wear out these groups when they all but got tired of their efforts and lost the cause in the bargain. The Naga groups too and in fact all other insurgent groups of North East are nearly at the end of their road. It is difficult to imagine better of 'peoples movements' which increasingly appear to be controlled and supported by extortionists who use pure fear and intimidation as tools.

The Government would do well to extract the terms of agreement and guarantees of peace from rival groups too, using the persuasive powers of current negotiating groups, to come on board as a show of unity, lest this Accord too goes down as one of the numerous peace process activities unable to deliver lasting peace. The Government needs to understand that if the rebels' intention for peace and concern for the people is genuine, then no window of doubt should be left in terms of their retaining any capability to create disturbances at will; the provisions should also preclude their option of their returning, at their will, to their non-peace talk groups after consolidating themselves in the most legitimate fashion.

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