



**ENCYCLOPAEDIA
OF**

Nagaland

LIMA SASAI AIER

Encyclopaedia
of
NAGALAND

सदस्य
REFERENCE

Volume 2



Lima Sasai Aier

ANMOL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.

NEW DELHI - 110 002 (INDIA)

CONTENTS

Preface

vii

(Vol. 1)

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 1. Introduction | .1 |
| 2. Facts about Nagaland | 25 |
| 3. Information Relating to Nagaland | 71 |
| 4. Nagaland—Land and the People | 101 |
| 5. The Enchanting Land of Nagaland | 133 |
| 6. Geography | 163 |
| 7. Nagaland Geographical Information System | 183 |
| 8. History | 237 |
| 9. Life in Nagaland before Baptists Arrived | 249 |

(Vol. 2)

- | | |
|--|-----|
| 10. Polity | 305 |
| 11. State Policies Nagaland Mission | 319 |
| 12. Culture | 335 |
| 13. Nagaland Festivals | 355 |
| 14. Education | 371 |
| 15. Economy | 381 |
| 16. Tourism | 409 |
| 17. Naga Insurgency—A Confusion of War or Peace! | 419 |
| 18. Crisis of Leadership in Naga Society | 457 |
| 19. Miscellaneous Arts and Crafts in Nagaland | 479 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| 20. RRL Jorhat Activities in Nagaland | 499 |
| 21. An Introduction to India's Northeast | 511 |
| 22. Nagaland Assessment in Recent Year | 521 |
| 23. Customary Laws and Practices of The Naga Tribes—Sumi | 561 |
| 24. The Space between : Women's Negotiations with Democracy | 573 |
| <i>Bibliography</i> | 583 |
| <i>Index</i> | 589 |

PREFACE

Nagaland, the 16th state of the Indian Union was born on 1st Dec. 1963. It is bounded by Assam in the west and north, Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh in the north east, and Manipur in the south. On the east it shares India's international boundary with Myanmar, Burma. The state is divided into seven districts : Kohima, Phek, Mokokchung, Wokha, Zunheloto, Twensang and Mon. The terrain is hilly, rugged and mountainous. The highest peak is Saramati in the Twensang district which is 3840 metres above sea-level. The average height of the peaks is between 900 and 1200 metres. The main rivers that flow through the state are Dhansiri, Doyang, Dikhu, Tizu and Melak. There is no waterfall in Nagaland. The only lake well known is Lacham to the east of Mehiri. The hill sides are covered with green forests. In the Angami region, the terraced fields are a feast to the eyes.

The population of Nagaland is entirely tribal. The Nagas belong to the Indo-Mongoloid family. The fourteen major Naga tribes are the Angami, Ao, Chakhesang, Chang, Khemungan, Konyak, Lotha, Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sangtam, Sema, Yimchunger and Zeliang. The Chakhesangs were earlier known as Eastern Angamis and are a combination of the Chakri, Khezha and Sangtam sub-tribes. Now the Chakhesang tribe is split further; Pochury's who were earlier a part of it now claim a distinct entity. Each tribe has their own languages and cultural features. Literacy is 61.30 %. The population has shown a steady upward trend. The Naga's have different stories about their origin. The Angamis, Semas, Rengams and the Lotha's subscribe to the Kheza-Kenoma legend. It is said that the village had a large stone slab having magical properties. Paddy spread on it to be dried doubled in quantity by evening. The three sons of the couple who owned the stone used it by rotation. One day there was a quarrel between the sons as to whose turn it was. The couple, fearing bloodshed, set fire to the stone which as a result cracked. It is believed that the spirit in the stone went to heaven and the stone lost its miraculous properties. The three sons thereafter left Kheza-Kenoma, went in different directions and became the forefathers of the Angami, Sema and the Lotha tribes. According to another legend, to which the western Angamis subscribe, the first man evolved from a lake called Themiakelku,zie near Khonoma. The Rengmas believe that until recently they

and Lothas formed one tribe. The Aos and the Phoms trace their origin to the Lungterok (six stones) on the Chongliemdi hill. Some people believe that these Indo-Mongoloids are 'kiratas' frequently mentioned in the old Sanskrit literature of whom 'Nagas' were a sub-tribe.

The hill tribes in the areas now known as Nagaland had no generic term applicable to the whole race. The word 'Naga' was given to these hill tribes by the plains people. This proved to be a great unifying force to the tribes now classified as Naga. Nagas are of sub-medium height, the facial index is very low, the nasal index corresponds to a medium nose, the hair is generally straight, the skin is brownish yellow. The eyes significantly do not show Mongolian form.

It could broadly be said that they are straight forward people, honest, hardworking, sturdy and with a high standard of integrity. They are lacking in humility and are inclined to equate a kind and sympathetic approach with weakness. The Nagas have a very strong sense of self respect and would not submit to anyone riding roughshod over their sentiments. The Angamis are politically the most conscious group. The Zeliang and Pochury tribes in Kohima district are comparatively simple and unsophisticated. The Tuensang tribes are un-spoilt children of nature. A striking characteristic of the Naga tribes is their hospitality and cheerfulness. To be greeted with a smiling face while travelling on the roads is a common experience. A visitor to Naga village is heartily received and entertained with a surfeit of rice-beer, which is generally served by the lady of the house or her young daughter with a warmth which is unforgettable.

The book is an asset for all scholars, researchers, teachers, students and ofcourse, the general readers.

— *Lima Sasai Aier*

POLITY

Administration

The Governor of Nagaland is the constitutional head of state, representative of the President of India. He possesses largely ceremonial responsibilities. A 60-member Vidhan Sabha is the state of ministers, led by a Chief minister - all elected members of legislature—forms the government executive. Unlike most Indian states, Nagaland has been granted a great degree of state autonomy, as well as special powers and autonomy for Naga tribes to conduct their own affairs. Each tribe has a hierarchy of councils - at the village, range and tribal levels dealing with local disputes. There is a special regional council for the Tuensang district, elected by the tribes of the area. The state is divided into eleven districts. Mokokchung District is Nagaland's Most Advanced District.

Politics

Naga Identity, Meitei Nationalism & Electoral Politics

Sub-Nationalism in Northeast India: India's North East could well be the country's backwaters, but it is one of South Asia's hottest trouble spots. The battle for power, riding on sub-national aspirations, is an ongoing phenomenon in the region. The seven States in the North East—a 2,55,000 square kilometre stretch wedged between China, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh - are witness to a continuous struggle by organizations for what has come to be conveniently called the 'right of self-determination.'

An armed insurgent group fighting for an independent homeland, an ethnic group fighting for a tribal council that could give it more autonomy, or a student organization pressing for Constitutional 'safeguards' to protect the interests of the community it represents, all fall under this one category - the fight for the 'right of self-determination.' Even mainstream political parties, which are otherwise players in the normal electoral

exercise, cannot help playing to the gallery by harping on sub-national themes during elections.

At times, the dividing line between this continuous battle for independence, maximum autonomy and even for legal safeguards for certain communities gets blurred. Often, these movements come to overlap - with groups trying to achieve more or less the same or comparable goals through different means. This leads to a more complex scenario when groups of different hues get engaged in a turf war that, more often than not, results in bloody internecine feuds.

Why is everybody agitating in the North East? Why are the insurgent outfits, student organizations, or ethnic groups clamouring for more and more concessions from the government? Why are sub-national aspirations so intense in the region? Simply speaking, the answer lies in the lack of opportunities in the region, which ironically is rich in natural resources, from tea to oil and forest wealth.

In the absence of industries, the youths look to the government for jobs. Now that government jobs have reached a saturation point, politics—irrespective of whether it is electoral politics, student politics or insurgent politics—has become the most sought-after profession for young and old alike in the North East. The result is a lack of space for these players and more clashes of interest.

Take the case of the Nagas—they have always considered themselves as belonging to an independent nationality. "We are Nagas by birth, Indians by accident," is a common refrain among the indigenous people in Nagaland. The more radical of them, the separatist rebels themselves or their die-hard supporters, would, of course, say that they are not Indians at all, and that they are only Nagas. Therefore, the Naga insurgent groups' fight for independence does not surprise anybody.

The Naga insurrection is as old as India's independence, and along the way, during the past 54 years, there have been several attempts to narrow down the differences and work out an acceptable solution. None have succeeded. As such, when New Delhi and a frontline Naga rebel group, the faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland headed by Isak Chishi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah (NSCN-IM), entered into a cease-fire agreement that came into effect on August 1, 1997, and began peace negotiations, watchers of Naga affairs were not too euphoric. But years of violence have made the common Naga people look towards a peaceful future. The mood in general among the Nagas, therefore, is one of peace. They would like to have both the Naga rebels and the Government of India see reason, relax their rigid postures and arrive at an acceptable solution through a give-and-take approach.

Will this latest peace effort succeed? To our mind, this is unlikely. However, the very fact that the NSCN-IM leadership has agreed and begun peace negotiations with

New Delhi indicates that the outfit is ready for a compromise on their key demand of a sovereign Naga homeland. Else, why enter into another phase of negotiations with the Indian government? After all, no one, the NSCN-IM included, is expecting New Delhi to let a part of the country's territory secede and declare independence. What then is the magic solution? A country within a country? Both the NSCN-IM and the frontline Naga organizations engaged in brokering peace seem to agree that a 'Greater Nagaland' created by merging the Naga-inhabited areas in adjoining Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, and if possible those in Myanmar, into the present Nagaland State could be an 'acceptable' solution.

This is easier said than done because neither Manipur, nor Assam, nor Arunachal Pradesh will agree to part with their territories. Myanmar's response is a different issue altogether. That is a different story, but it is this possible compromise formula - uniting the Nagas, in the community's own slogan, as 'one people to live under one political roof,' which is nothing but the 'Greater Nagaland' concept—that has had a tremendous impact on the identity movements in neighbouring Manipur and, to a lesser extent, in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

The Naga Reverie

The Nagas have always wanted to live as 'one people, under one administrative roof.' The concept has even found approval in mainstream Naga politics: there have been three resolutions in the Nagaland Legislative Assembly since 1993, supporting Greater Nagalim. The Naga rebel groups may have thought for long that they would be able to fulfil this dream by achieving their objective of an independent Naga homeland.

They would not admit it, but, of late, groups like the NSCN-IM may have realized that independence may not be possible after all, and that they should settle for something like a 'Greater Nagaland.' This, they think, can be formed by the merger of Naga-inhabited areas in adjoining Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, and if possible those in Myanmar, into the present Nagaland State.

The NSCN-IM has made it clear, through a careful play of words, that it has an expansionist aim. In a recent interview to BBC Television, NSCN-IM General Secretary T. Muivah said that his group is not campaigning for a greater Nagaland or a smaller Nagaland, but added that the "division drawn on the Naga territories had been done by the British colonialists and the government of India, not by the Nagas."

This means that the NSCN-IM does not recognize the territorial boundaries of the North Eastern States as they exist now. Besides, Muivah has said that the Nagas are not claiming land belonging to others and that the areas where the Nagas are living (in States like Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, apart from Nagaland)

belong to them. All this goes to reinforce the fact that the NSCN-IM is bent on uniting the Naga areas in the North East, transgressing the present State boundaries. And, there lies the problem.

The NSCN-IM and the Government of India agreed to enter into a political dialogue to evolve an acceptable solution to the Naga problem in January 1997 itself. This led to a cease-fire agreement between the two sides in July that year, and the truce on the ground in Nagaland came to be enforced from August 1, 1997 onwards. But, for the past four years, the NSCN-IM and New Delhi's interlocutors for the peace talks (K Padmanabhaiah and his predecessors) have been doing nothing other than debating the jurisdiction of the cease-fire - the rebel leadership wanting it extended to Naga-inhabited areas outside Nagaland, and the Centre expressing its reluctance to do so. Finally, after shuttling between New Delhi, Bangkok and Amsterdam umpteen times since 1997, Padmanabhaiah announced in the Thai capital on June 14, 2001 after a two-day meeting with NSCN-IM representatives headed by General Secretary Muivah—that the cease-fire had been extended for one more year, commencing August 1, 2001, and that, henceforth, the truce would have no 'territorial limits.' A joint statement issued in Bangkok, for instance, said the cease-fire agreement is between the "government of India and the NSCN as two entities without territorial limits."

That triggered off the biggest-ever mass uprising by the majority Meiteis in adjoining Manipur's Imphal Valley. Up to 50,000 Meiteis took to the streets in Imphal on June 18 - four days after the extension of the cease-fire limits outside Nagaland was announced - opposing the extension of the NSCN-IM-Government truce to territories in Manipur. Rampaging mobs burnt the Manipur Legislative Assembly building and a dozen other government offices. 18 protestors were killed that day when security forces eventually opened fire to quell the frenzied mob.

A massive civil disobedience movement followed, and Imphal was under curfew for nearly a month. Finally on July 24, 2001, after a meeting with the Chief Ministers of the North Eastern States in New Delhi, Prime Minister Vajpayee announced that the cease-fire would once again be restricted only to the State of Nagaland, as had been the case ever since the truce first came into force on August 1, 1997. That eased the situation in the Imphal Valley, where the Meiteis thought that extension of the cease-fire could well be the first step before parts of Manipur were sliced and merged into Nagaland in a possible settlement with the NSCN-IM.

The NSCN-IM did accuse New Delhi of retracting on its Bangkok agreement of June 14, 2001 and questioned the sincerity of the Indian government. But, contrary to speculations, the NSCN-IM did not call off the cease-fire and resume its bush war, although several of the group's top leaders, including V S Atem, the former military

chief, threatened to go underground if the jurisdiction of the truce did not cover all the Naga-inhabited areas in the region. Firstly, the NSCN-IM was under tremendous pressure from Naga Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) not to undertake any hasty step. Secondly, this could have been a tactical ploy on the part of the NSCN-IM not to overreact on the cease-fire jurisdiction issue, and instead pursue the Naga unification plan in a more systematic manner.

In fact, signs of a systematic campaign are already there for everyone to see. On October 26, 2001, the United Naga Council, Manipur (UNC), that represents the Naga opinion in Manipur, met Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee at his residence in New Delhi and submitted a memorandum demanding the integration of the Naga areas in Manipur with Nagaland.

"Historically, Nagas have been wanting to live as one people, under one political roof. Therefore, we want that all Naga inhabited areas in Manipur be merged with Nagaland as an immediate interim arrangement pending a final settlement of the Naga problem so that the community's distinct culture and identity can be protected," UNC president K S Paul Leo stated in an interview after their meeting with Vajpayee.

The UNC wants the four hill districts of Manipur- Chandel, Senapati, Tamenglong, and Ukhrul - to be merged with Nagaland, in addition to 26 villages in the district of Churachandpur inhabited by the Zeliangrong tribe.

In fact, the UNC has already resolved that the Nagas in Manipur would sever all ties with the Manipur government in the wake of the anti-cease-fire uprising that, it says had displaced more than 50,000 Nagas from the Imphal Valley.⁹ The UNC delegation had clearly told the Prime Minister about the decision of the Nagas in Manipur to snap all links with the Manipur government. "We have told Mr. Vajpayee about our decision that the Nagas would no longer pay the mandatory Hill House Tax to the Manipur government and would instead deposit the amount every year to the central government," Paul Leo said. The Nagas in Manipur are not required to pay land revenue, but pay an annual hill house tax of Rs. 10 per household.

The Nagas backed up their merger demand with loads of documents. The UNC quoted three documents to substantiate its claim that the cease-fire should be extended to all Naga-dominated areas in the Northeast: the Accord with former Assam Governor Akbar Hydari in 1947; the 16-point agreement between the Centre and the Naga National Council (NNC) in 1960; and the cease-fire agreement between the Centre and the NNC in 1964. One of the clauses of the nine-point agreement between Hydari and the NNC was that the present administrative boundaries should be modified to bring all Nagas under one administrative unit as far as possible. The 1960 agreement recorded the wish of the Naga delegates that the contiguous Naga areas should be consolidated within the new state then under consideration.

The UNC President noted, "These, and the fact that the 1964 agreement was extended to all Naga areas, strengthens our claim that this cease-fire, too, should not be confined only to Nagaland." In its October 26, 2001, memorandum to the Prime Minister, the UNC has cited Jawaharlal Nehru's letter dated May 13, 1956 to the then Assam Chief Minister Bishnu Ram Medhi (letter no 1116-PMH/56), which said: "...One of their (Nagas') grievances is that under our Constitution we split them up in different political areas. Whether it is possible or desirable to bring them together again is for us to consider. Also what measure of autonomy we should give them so that they can lead their own lives without any sensation of interference."

The decision by Naga bodies such as the UNC and the Naga People's Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR) to hoist flags at several Naga villages from July 4, 2001 to welcome the cease-fire added fresh fuel to the consternation. These organisations also planned to hold meetings in churches and other religious places from July 1, 2001 to thank the Central government for the cease-fire extension. They even took a decision to collect Rs. 10 per Naga household for two months. They also condemned what they called the 'confrontationist and belligerent approach of Meitei community' towards the cease-fire extension episode.

On June 14, 2001, the UNC and the All Naga Students' Association (ANSA) issued a statement saying, "The Centre's unilateral decision to backtrack on the Bangkok agreement would lead to violence and prove disastrous both for the Naga people as well as the Central government." The statement also threatened that any review of the agreement 'would be at the cost of hard-earned peace process.'

Similarly, the ANSA rally on July 21, 2001 alleged that 'unforeseen forces' were instigating the Meiteis to act violently to the cease-fire extension. ANSA President S Kho John said, "We see no reason why our Meitei brothers should act as how they are doing now unless they have been instigated by some unforeseen forces... there is a hidden agenda behind the protests."

The Meitei Nightmare

Even before the cease-fire was extended without territorial limits, the All Manipur Students' Union (AMSU) had submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister opposing such a move. The AMSU Secretary General, Premananda Yumnam, was categorical when he said "the Central government should know the sentiment of the Manipuris and if there was any move to extend the cease-fire to Manipur, the students' body would launch a series of agitation against it." This was perhaps treated not too seriously which led to an explosive situation later. The response to the cease-fire extension was total. Representatives of the AMSU, All Manipur United Clubs' Organisation (AMUCO), All Manipur Kanba Ima Lup (AMKIL), International Peace

and Solidarity Advancement (IPSA) and National Identity Protection Committee (NIPCO) reviewed the talks between the Centre and the State leaders and made it clear that they would not discuss anything else but cease-fire withdrawal from Manipur. The statements emerging from various leaders and important personalities underlined a common feeling, *i.e.*, the Union government's apparent contempt towards the Manipuri sentiments. It was but natural that such contempt met with equal impertinence towards every symbol of the Indian state.

Former Chief Minister Nipamacha Singh offered to quit his membership of the Legislative Assembly and said, "extension of the cease-fire to Manipur indicated that the Centre did not bother about Manipur, its history, its people and their sentiments." Volunteers of the Manipur Students' Federation (MSF) locked up the offices of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Samata Party, Congress Party and Manipur People's Party (MPP) to protest against the decision. The other frontline student group, the AMSU even threatened to launch a separatist movement if the cease-fire was not withdrawn from Manipur's territory.

Noted writer and recipient of the Padmashree award, Maharajkumari Binodini Devi remarked, "What a cruel joke is being played on the people by the Central Government. This is a very agonising moment and the issue calls for a public debate to find a way out of this mess." Historian and another Padmashree award winner, N Khelchandra pointed out that "the ceasefire extension showed lack of proper application of the Central leaders in understanding the history of Manipur. We cannot take this Machiavellian design of the Central Government lying down."

Fears were expressed that such a move would only divide the Manipuris. Kulabidhu Singh, a former Member of Parliament (MP) said, "Muivah's dreams will not be realised, but will only generate ill feeling between Nagas of Nagaland and other residents of neighbouring States." Similarly, Naorem Joykumar Singh, a professor in History, remarked that such a step would draw the State towards disintegration.

Effigies of the Prime Minister, Union Home Minister, Naga peace envoy K Padmanabhaiah and those of the NSCN-IM leadership were burnt at several places in the State. The AMSU also called upon all the Members of the State Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and Members of Parliament (MPs) representing Manipur to resign within 48 hours. On June 18, 2001 the protestors set fire to the State Legislative Assembly, the Speaker's bungalow, 15 official residences of MLAs, political party offices and destroyed over a hundred government vehicles. The rampaging mob made a mockery of the President's Rule that was in force in the State. Plainly speaking, sub-nationalism in the State received a tremendous boost on that day.

Symbolism ruled the day as 13 of those killed in police firing during the demonstrations were cremated en masse on the banks of the Imphal River. "Trucks

bearing posters that read, 'They sacrificed lives for Manipur Territory', 'We Salute you Martyrs', 'We will shed blood to protect Manipur' transported the bodies from the morgue to the cremation site." Similar sentiments persisted in the anti-ceasefire protests that followed. Sight of angry youth with messages like 'We fight NSCN-IM', 'Save Manipur', 'Know history of Manipur,' plastered on their chests, and with their heads tonsured, became the order of the day in protest rallies.

The Meitei Renaissance

The Meiteis had to bear the brunt of a perceived attack on their territorial integrity by the Union government's decision to extend the jurisdiction of the cease-fire beyond Nagaland. This was seen by the Meiteis as a victory for the Nagas in obtaining a sort of legitimacy from New Delhi to further their 'expansionist' dream. Although a section of the Nagas in Manipur did hold out against the sweeping current towards a Naga homeland, in the end they proved to be only stray shots.

During the unrest in Manipur, several Naga organisations did issue statements opposing the extension of the cease-fire to Manipur, describing it as an attempt to divide the people of the Hills and the Valley in the State. Two Naga organisations, the Kakhulong Youth Committee and Kakhulong Women's Society in a joint statement said that the cease-fire was an attempt to drive a wedge between the people in the Hills and the Valley.

Several other Naga organisations such as the Majorkhul Young Association, the Dimdimdajang Kabuikhul and the Khoupum Kabui Group issued separate statements saying that nobody could alter the relations between the plains and hill people in Manipur and demanded immediate withdrawal of cease-fire from the State. Hundreds of Nagas belonging to the Tangkhul community, to which NSCN-IM General Secretary Muivah belongs, joined the processions carrying placards with messages like 'we oppose cease-fire extension to Manipur.'

However, dominant Naga groups such as the UNC and the ANSA led a movement that ran parallel to that of the NSCN-IM. Their support for Naga homeland brought out the hidden insecurity prevailing among the Nagas in Manipur. ANSA President Kho John claimed that "the Nagas are never heard in the State and alleged that the Manipuri Press was biased as it is either run by the Meiteis or influenced by the majority community." He also lamented the lack of representation of the Nagas in the State Legislature as another reason for the plight of the community.

To make matters more complex, four Members of the suspended Legislative Assembly, including the former Deputy Speaker, K Raina, submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister expressing their support to the extension of cease-fire agreement to Naga-inhabited areas in the State. It was but natural that alienation of a different

variety dawned upon the Meiteis. It was based on the insecurity of losing their identity as well as territorial integrity to the machinations of the Nagas, ably aided by the incapacity of the national and state-level political parties. Time appeared to have arrived for the people to take up the mantle of leadership to protect their interests. It was symbolised in no small way when 5,000 rickshaw pullers took out a procession on the streets of Imphal and shouted slogans such as "Do not break Manipur" and "Withdraw Ceasefire." This sub-nationalism, arising primarily out of fear of losing their territory, based itself on two fundamentals.

- Distrust of the mainstream political parties
- Distrust towards the Nagas.

The distrust towards the mainstream political parties in the State, such as the Congress, the Samata Party and the BJP, showed enough potential to turn into a general distrust towards mainstream Indian politics as a whole. The political parties in the State were quick to judge the mood of the people and a major realignment of forces was underway within no time.

"Realising that no candidate of these parties will be elected, almost all the former ministers and MLAs joined local parties." In a desperate bid to change colour, former Chief Minister Nipamacha Singh formed the Manipur People's Conference (MPC) on October 5, 2001.³⁷ However, those who did not manage either to join the existing local parties or form parties of their own, desperately tried to prolong President's Rule in the State by arguing that the scenario was not conducive for holding elections, hoping to cash in on the short memory of the people at a later date. Thus, State BJP president M Bhorot Singh wrote to Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), J M Lyngdoh, saying that polls should not be held in February-March, 2002, as it is 'examination time' for students.

He also cited security reasons saying that until the repair of the burnt Legislative Assembly building was complete (it is unlikely to be complete before April 2002), the elections should not be held, as members transacting business from any other building could be 'exposed to a security risk.'

Contrast this with the stand taken by the UCM, which was of the view that, for a period of one year, there should be mourning in commemoration of the 18 men and women who had made the 'supreme sacrifice' for the protection of the territory of Manipur.

In another development that is likely to have a major implication on the State politics, the Democratic People's Party (DPP) was formed in November 2001. This was a little noticed event, but it, in a way, saw the coming together of forces and individuals that would make the voice of Meitei nationalism shriller.

The DPP promises to root out the traditional politicians representing both the national as well as regional parties from the State's political arena. It is headed by those leaders who were at the forefront of the mass movement against the extension of the cease-fire. The emergence of a party headed by these leaders is a clear indication that the forthcoming Legislative Assembly elections in Manipur will be fought on the highly emotive issue of protecting the State's territorial integrity, a subject that is sought to be linked with the Meitei identity itself.

"The DPP is a new party formed to build a new Manipur. Every other political party has been rejected by the masses because they are tainted. Therefore, during the spontaneous anti-cease-fire uprising in June, the people burnt the offices of these political parties. We have emerged on the scene to provide the people of Manipur an alternative," Khaidem Mani, President of the party said.

Besides Mani, who led the anti-truce stir under the banner of the United Committee, Manipur, the DPP has five general secretaries, two of whom, L C Somendra and Premananda, are former presidents of the powerful AMSU. Another general secretary is R K Anand, a lawyer, was also a protagonist in the anti-cease-fire agitation.

That the DPP is a serious threat to the veteran politicians in Manipur belonging to the national and regional parties is borne out by the fact that the AMSU, in course of the June agitation, had asked all Legislators of the State to get out of Manipur for their failure to raise their voice against the 'territorial extension' of the Naga truce.

Mani made it clear that the DPP would contest the forthcoming polls on three main issues: protecting the territorial integrity of Manipur, ensuring and improving the human rights situation in the State and solving the protracted insurgency problem.

Riding on the wave of popular support among the majority Meiteis, DPP leaders were keen that the elections be held in February-March, well before the term of President's Rule in the State expires on June 2, 2002. This was in contrast with the 'mainstream' parties, who wanted that, the elections to be deferred at least to April-May. Commenting on the BJP-Samata's demand for polls only by April-May, DPP chief Mani said: "Both the BJP and the Samata Party are parties without any roots in Manipur. Therefore, they want the polls to be delayed as far as possible."

The poll prospects of the DPP received a further boost with the recent discovery that the papers containing the four resolutions adopted in the Manipur Legislative Assembly on protection of the State's territorial integrity were not traceable. The Manipur Assembly, on four occasions (March 24, 1995; March 19, 1997; December 17, 1998 and March 22, 2001), had resolved to preserve the territorial integrity of the State 'at any cost'. One of the resolutions strongly opposed any move to extend the Naga cease-fire to Manipur.

On December 21, 2001, the State's Home department informed the Upendra Commission conducting a probe into the firing incident in June 2001, that it had no materials to show that the resolutions were despatched to the Centre. The DPP has demanded the immediate resignation of all those responsible for failing to make sure the resolutions adopted by the State Legislative Assembly reached the Union government. DPP President Khaidam Mani said the failure of the State administration to communicate to the Centre the resolutions passed by the Assembly was nothing short of an insult to the people of Manipur.

Larger Implications

In an interview during the agitation, AMUCO convenor R K Anand touched upon an important point. Underlining the danger of the Centre not reviewing the cease-fire extension decision, he said, unless this was done, "it would go to the advantage of the six-odd militant groups in the Valley who preach secession." In fact, the decision of the Centre, in a way, threatened to strengthen the forces of secession, or at least those groups who harp on the Meiteis' apparent sub-national aspirations.

Looking back, the way Manipur's merger with the Indian Union was effected still remains a matter of controversy among a section of left-nationalists. Journalist and author B G Verghese writes, "The merger is said to have been effected under duress whereas the people of the State desired and were entitled to seek 'maximum autonomy' within what ought to have been a 'true' Indian federation... the Maharaja's signature was obtained not without some pressure on September 21, 1949, and the State was formally merged with the Indian Union on October 15.

Critics argue that the Maharaja was held incommunicado in Shillong and that as a constitutional head (under the new Manipur State Constitution), he was not empowered to sign away the autonomy of the State without consulting his council of ministers. There was no subsequent ratification by the State Assembly or a plebiscite."

Insurgency had its beginning in the State as left-nationalists such as Irabot Singh initiated a movement by forming the Manipur Red Guard army to fight for an independent socialist republic of Manipur. This infant sub-nationalism was reinforced each passing day on a variety of grounds, starting from the inordinate delay in granting statehood, not including the Manipuri language in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution and denying the Meiteis the right to buy land in the tribal areas.

The United National Liberation Front (UNLF) was formed in 1964 with the objective of achieving independence and a 'socialist society.' The People's Liberation Army (PLA) was formed to organise a revolutionary front covering the entire North East and to unite all nationalities to liberate Manipur. The People's Revolutionary

Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) was formed in 1977, demanding the expulsion of outsiders. And the Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP) was formed in 1980 with a similar agenda.

Vergheese compiles the indicators of a thriving sub-nationalism in the State prior to the June 2001 mess up: An annual 'anti-merger month' has been held in Manipur over the past few years between September and October at the behest of the UNLF, PLA and other groups. In 1993, an eight-minute cable TV film was screened throughout the State 'rejecting' the merger. That same year, a two-day convention of leading academics, professionals and politicians at Imphal was of the opinion that the 1949 merger was 'null and void'. In 1992, the UNLF and PLA imposed a Janata (public) curfew on Republic Day to highlight the four-year-old agitation by the Manipuri Language Demand Coordinating Committee for inclusion of Manipuri in the Eighth Schedule which partly took an anti-Hindi turn. Unfortunately, recent events have only acted as force multipliers for these elements and their underlying ideas.

Vergheese writes, "Insurgency and revivalism are products of frustration, unemployment and uncertainty." The events in the later half of the year 2001 certainly added to the prevailing frustration and uncertainty, even as they provided the unemployed a basic reason to fight.

The formation of the DPP is likely to provide possibly a large section of the Meiteis a platform to channelise their energies and lend support to this new political formation in its work towards preserving Manipur's territorial integrity, and through it protecting the Meitei identity itself. However, fear and apprehension could well continue to dominate the average Meitei mind.

In the month of December 2001, the UCM submitted a memorandum to the State Governor urging him to closely monitor the ongoing peace process between the NSCN-IM and the Union government, so that any emerging solution to the Naga problem did not affect the territorial integrity of Manipur. It is indeed a pity that every move to forge unity among the Naga tribes would be seen as a newer threat to the territorial integrity of Manipur, and to the Meitei identity.

Need for a Response

A recent editorial asked a pertinent question during the Manipur impasse. "Is anyone in the Union government in control, or at least nominally in charge of the crisis-engulfed Northeast?" It went on to provide a befitting answer. "Given that its strategy for peace in the region changes almost daily, the answer perhaps is self-evident. It is obviously no-body's case that the problem's in the Northeast are only of this government's making or that they are easy to resolve, but that is hardly an excuse for the total lack of coherence in the Centre's handling of the situation."

Whether the scenario remains limited to the realm of 'conscientious objection' or snowballs into a full-fledged 'revolutionary dissent' would depend on the unfolding events in Nagaland and the Union government's response to them. As things stand now, the Naga rebels' movement has cast its shadow on student as well as the mainstream electoral politics in Manipur. As mentioned earlier, the DPP has emerged in Manipur's electoral arena with the prime objective of protecting the state's territorial integrity and the Meitei identity. A similar development has taken place among the Nagas in Manipur.

The last few months have seen the revamping of the Naga National Party (NNP), dormant since its formation on March 13, 1999. Like the DPP, the NNP has pledged to fight for the interests of the Nagas in Manipur. "We shall field candidates in 11 Assembly constituencies in the hill districts of Manipur in the forthcoming polls with the key slogan of an emotional integration of all Naga areas in the Northeast," said NNP president N G Hungyo.

The fact that the NNP is out to contest the upcoming Legislative Assembly elections in Manipur by riding on the emotive issue of a single Naga identity in the North East is underlined further by Hungyo: "The issue of Naga identity is the only relevant issue among the Nagas in Manipur today. All other political parties have lost their relevance because their stand on this very issue is not clear."

The government, policy analysts and NGOs engaged in brokering peace to bring about an acceptable solution to the 54-year-old Naga insurrection are faced with a tricky situation. While the sentiments of the Nagas must be respected and an acceptable solution worked out within the ambit of the Indian Constitution, the feelings of neighbouring ethnic groups like the Meiteis in Manipur, or the people of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, have to be taken into consideration before any deal is clinched.

Political Parties

Naga National Democratic Party

Naga National Democratic Party, a regional political party in Nagaland, India, founded in 1964.

Nagaland Democratic Party

Nagaland Democratic Party, a political party in the Indian state of Nagaland. NDP was founded in 1999. The convenor of the party was Roland Lotha.

In the 2003 state assembly elections NDP contested as a part of the NPF-led Democratic Alliance of Nagaland.

On March 22 2004 NDP merged into Nagaland Peoples Front.