

Mutual understanding only way forward towards honourable solution

***The Naga Rising* statement on a separate Naga flag and constitution**

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“Nagas must know what India wants and India must know what the Nagas want and make a settlement.”

This quote is from AZ Phizo’s letter to C. Rajagopalachari, the first Governor General of free India dated November 22, 1948 which was written from his prison cell at Presidency Jail, Calcutta where he had been lodged.

The Government of India and the NSCN (IM), engaged in a sustained dialogue process for the last more than 22 years and the 7 NNPGs since 2017, will agree with this insight that Phizo had given as far back as 1948.

Today we believe there is much better understanding between India and the Nagas.

Phizo’s words have indeed proved prophetic in that today none other than the present Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi described as unfortunate the fact that ***“the Naga problem has taken so long to resolve because we did not understand each other”***.

Prime Minister Modi said this during the signing of the Framework Agreement on August 3, 2015 where he added that both India and the Nagas had ***“continued to look at each other through the prism of false perceptions and old prejudices”***.

Modi went on to describe the Framework Agreement as ***“a shining example of what we can achieve when we deal with each other in a spirit of equality and respect, trust and confidence; when we seek to understand concerns and try to address aspirations...”***

At this very important juncture when all substantive issues are believed to have been resolved, barring the question of a separate flag and constitution, ***The Naga Rising*** is of the firm belief that ***India and the Nagas must look to understand each other’s needs and aspirations as the only way forward towards an honourable solution.***

Negotiations is about give and take and for mutual benefit

The apparent disagreement over recognizing a separate flag and constitution for the Nagas is delaying the finalization of the peace agreement.

However both sides in the negotiation cannot afford to simply throw away everything that has been gained in the last two decades. The Naga masses too have walked through thick and thin of the long drawn ceasefire and also invested their social capital and goodwill in the peace process.

Fighting is therefore no longer a viable option.

As Q. Tuccu, NSCN/GPRN Chairman said during the 73rd Naga Independence Day on Aug 14, 2019, ***“the two entities must exercise their best political wisdom and resource to emerge from the impasse over some of the core issues...that no problem is too big to solve through mutual respect.”***

In any negotiation, a give and take has to be there.

If Nagas have got some of the things they wanted from India, what can Nagas offer India in return? Similarly, what can India offer to the Nagas?

In a successful negotiation, both sides should feel contended. **We firmly believe that the objective of the present Indo-Naga peace process should be an AGREEMENT, not victory.**

The Naga Rising takes this public stand that **any solution has to be mutual and agreed by both sides and it cannot be forced upon the other.** India as the bigger entity cannot impose its will on the Nagas.

Lest we forget, the recognition of the unique history and situation of the Nagas by the Government of India and the wide-spectrum of political support to the Naga peace process through successive Indian Prime Ministers, all this should not be undermined.

The Naga Rising appeals to both the Government of India and the Naga negotiators to explore the full range of possibilities towards a peaceful agreement by exhibiting upmost flexibility and accommodation.

Diversity can coexist in a unified framework

The idea of India is unique in that, it has managed multiplicity of diversity to coexist within a unified framework provided by the constitution and the federal nature of its polity.

The Government of India's Interlocutor RN Ravi says that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's approach to the resolution of Naga political issue is based on the principle of equality and mutual respect with due regard to contemporary realities.

In other words, India is willing to think out of the box to resolve the Naga issue. In that case Delhi should not see the demand for a separate flag and constitution as outlandish. But rather India should **be able to demonstrate both ingenuity and innovation in addressing the special unique case of the Nagas thereby reconciling Naga aspiration with the larger vision of a strong India.**

Contemporary realities of one country two flags

The Indian government has allowed the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), also referred to as the Tibetan Government in Exile and a founding member of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), to undertake political advocacy within the country.

The CTA is headquartered in McLeod Ganj, Dharamshala, India with its own parliament and government headed by a Prime Minister and council of ministers. The Tibet flag, which is banned in mainland China is used by the Tibetan Government in Exile, based in Dharamshala, India.

Elsewhere in Europe too, examples are there of bigger countries giving recognition to small indigenous community to hold and use their symbols.

The Sámi flag received official status in Norway, the country with the largest Sámi population. It is now compulsory for municipalities in Norway to fly the flag on February 6, the Sámi National Day.

Even in New Zealand, **the Māori flag** is allowed to be used as a symbol, including at nationally significant sites like Parliament, the National War Memorial and other government buildings in New Zealand.

The Australian Aboriginal Flag represents Aboriginal Australians. It is one of the officially proclaimed flags of Australia, and holds special legal and political status. It is often flown together with the national flag.

The Naga flag as an expression of who we are

As is with the tri-colour, which is a symbol of unity among Indians, the Naga flag continues to invoke pride and resolve among its people.

The Naga flag is a powerful rallying point and has demonstrated its capacity to bring the Naga communities together. It is our identity and expression of who we are and it should be allowed to be used freely and willingly.

Nagas should be allowed to keep and use their flag.

Even a Rotary Club, Red Cross society or a political party in India fly their separate flags at functions they conduct. In fact, political parties in India fly their flags outside their party office especially during campaigning across the length and breadth of the country.

The Naga position or status is 'political' in nature and should not be compared to an NGO, registered society or a political party registered under the Election Commission of India.

Having negotiated 22 long years for a political settlement with the repeated assurance that it will be honorable, taking away the flag that gives identity and expression of who we are, will be a contradiction of the basis on which the Indo-Naga peace process was build.

Perhaps, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) will understand better the emotion behind the Naga case as it has hailed the use of its own saffron flag. It is no secret that the RSS was never in favour of the tricolor. It preferred the ochre or saffron flag, which it used to salute at their headquarters in Nagpur.

According to the RSS, the saffron flag represents *“history, tradition and the supreme sacrifices made for the nation”* and that it is the *“embodiment of all basic elements of our nationhood.”* The Nagas are also saying the same thing.

Principles and protocols to fly the Naga flag

Some kind of formulation can be arrived at to allow the peaceful co-existence of the Indian and Naga flags. The other thing that can be agreed upon is to have a list of flag days set aside to celebrate certain historical events important for the Nagas.

Likewise, certain principles and protocols can be mutually agreed upon such as the Naga flag being flown in a way that respects the status of India. And when there is a single flagpole, the Indian tri-colour should fly above the Naga flag to respect its status as the guardian power.

A separate Naga constitution will help define the peace accord

On the question of having a separate Naga constitution, there is already a provision in the Indian constitution for Nagaland State under Article 371 (A).

But since the upcoming peace accord is expected to go into more details involving sharing of sovereign powers, pan-Naga body, autonomy provisions etc. there is nothing wrong in allowing for a different document.

In fact a separate Naga constitution will define the new set of arrangement between India and the Nagas. This will help in providing clarity and purpose to implement the provision of the accord without any dispute and misunderstanding.

Even political parties like the ruling BJP and Indian National Congress have their own constitution but if India is so sensitive, the Nagas may opt for another term, Basic Law or Yehzabo.

However, this separate constitution or basic law or Yehzabo cannot be fully derived from the Indian constitution alone but a product of the proposed Indo-Naga peace accord.

If at all a peace accord is to be signed with the Naga representatives, it makes more sense to have it documented in a separate Naga constitution since bringing it under the Indian constitution may disturb some of its basic features.

Conclusion

Without a give and take approach, negotiations are bound to fail.

Both the Naga negotiating parties have painstakingly borne the aspirations of the Naga people through the Framework Agreement of August 3, 2015 and the 'Agreed Position' or 'Preamble' signed on November 17, 2017.

The Naga political groups have shown pragmatism in their approach with India.

As the bigger entity, India must show tolerance and open-mindedness to accommodate a solution that respects the uniqueness of Naga history and situation.

India's great power status will not in any way get diminished by giving recognition to the Naga flag or a separate constitution.

Rather it will send out the message that the Nagas are a valued and unique part of the fabric of India's geopolitical State.

The respective tricolor and Naga flag flying together will be a powerful **symbol of reconciliation** and a **commitment to a shared future**, which should be one of the outcomes of the peace accord between India and the Nagas.

A novel political arrangement that accommodates the aspiration of Nagas will not only demonstrate India's leadership role in Asia, but a successful Naga peace accord will add to further securing India's interests against external adversaries.

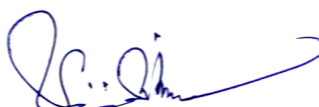
The Naga Rising

1. 
Along Longkumer

2. 
Vitho Zao

3. 
Hukavi T Yeputhomi

4. 
Amai Chingkh

5. 
Tsukti Longkumer

6. 
Moie Bonny Konyak

7. 
Ngukato K. Tsuipu

8. 
Mar Longkumer

9. 
Joel Naga

10. 
Khriezodilhou Yhome

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