



THE NSCN-K AND THE MYANMAR PEACE PROCESS

Now that an NLD Government is expected in February 2016, the role of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland – Khaplang (NSCN-K) in the country's peace process, and the future of the group as a whole needs to be reassessed.

On 16 September, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland – Khaplang (NSCN-K) met with the Government's Union Peace-making Working Committee (UPWC) to discuss the group's inclusion in the forthcoming ceasefire agreement. On the same day the Indian Government announced that it had banned the group for five years under the Country's Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.¹

Although, the NSCN-K is based in Myanmar's Sagaing division its primary dispute is with the Indian Government as it wants to create a united independent Nagaland based on a federal system² that is to include parts of Manipur, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh in India and parts of Sagaing Division.³

On 9 April 2012, representatives from the NSCN-K met with the Myanmar government's peace negotiators, and a five-point agreement was made, the terms were:

1. Cessation of armed conflict with the Myanmar army April 9, 2012
2. Opening of a liaison office by NSCN-K at Khamti to facilitate further talks
3. Coordination among both sides for carrying arms beyond their agreed jurisdiction
4. Freedom of movement of unarmed NSCN-K cadres within Myanmar
5. Holding of sustained negotiations.

The NSCN-K, which also had a peace agreement with the Indian Government, had largely remained inactive after the signing of the agreement with most conflict taking place between their own competing factions. However, on 4 June 2015, a coalition of separatist rebels, believed to be led by the NSCN-K, ambushed a convoy of Indian troops in the country's north-eastern state of Manipur killing at least 18 soldiers and seriously injuring twelve others.

Indian authorities were quick to ask the Myanmar government to assist them in apprehending those responsible for the attack. And although the Myanmar Government had said it would assist the Indian Army, in light of little support coming, on 9 June, the India Government allegedly launched



a cross-border attack into Myanmar territory targeting two militant camps.

The Myanmar Government was quick to deny that the attack took place on their soil, Zaw Htay, director of Myanmar's presidential office posted on Facebook:

*"According to the information sent by Tatmadaw battalions on the ground, we have learned that the military operation was performed on the Indian side at India-Myanmar border. . . Myanmar will not accept any foreigner who attacks neighbouring countries in the back and creates problems by using our own territory."*⁴

Former India army chief and junior foreign minister V K Singh also has denied that any attacks had taken place across the Border in Myanmar,

RELATIONS WITH INDIA

At the September meeting, attended by the UPWC's vice-chair Aung Min, Lower House MP Thein Zaw, army officers and the five-member Naga delegation led by leader Kyaw Wan Sein,⁶ talks focussed primarily on post-nationwide ceasefire measures, including participation in the writing of the political framework and political dialogue, the recognition of the Government of

stating that:

*"But our troops have not gone inside Myanmar, we just can't. The statement of the Additional Director General of Military Operation was that there were operations along the India-Myanmar border... Some people in their 'exuberance' claimed that the Indian troops had operated inside Myanmar. Those who had gone beyond their briefs must be questioned."*⁵

Singh was particularly singling out former colonel and junior information minister R S Rathore who, at the time, had claimed Indian military operations were 'deep inside Myanmar' and warned Pakistan to expect similar treatment if they continued the 'western disturbances'.

the People's Republic of Nagaland (GPRN) as a legal organisation and government protection of its land from *foreign intrusion*.

At the time U Thein Zaw, Union Peace-making Working Committee vice chairman, described the Naga Self-administered Zone as a strategic location for Myanmar.



According to Aung Naing Oo from the Myanmar Peace Centre:

*"The government side explained the facts about signing of the agreement and the holding of political talks afterwards. The Naga have two or three armed groups in India. The major group is the NSCN-N [sic]. In Myanmar, the NSCN-K is the biggest. Naga groups straddle the border. Other groups in India are holding peace talks with the Indian government. The NSCN-K has no friendly relations with the Indian government. So our discussion includes matters of international politics. The government explained the points to be followed by the NSCN-K if the ceasefire is signed. The main focus is on maintaining relations between the two countries."*⁷

U Kyaw Wan Sein, the head of the NSCN-K's peace committee stated:

*"The NSCN-K has not yet decided if we are signing the NCA or not... We will decide after sitting at a top-level meeting within our group."*⁸

Previously, the NSCN-K had stated that it would sign the ceasefire accord but would not engage in the resultant political dialogue. It is believed that the NSCN-K's position stems from the difficulty of reaching a consensus within the group, Kyaw Wan Sein noted:

"As we have observed the NCA process, we have noted that conditions are different than what we expected... We have our own problems in our group. So,

*the inability to reach a consensus for political dialogue means we would prefer not to be involved in political dialogue."*⁹

Although, the group already has a bilateral ceasefire with the Myanmar government the timing of India's banning of the group and the ceasefire meeting between it and the Government hardly seems coincidental. Although both Indian and Myanmar authorities have denied incursions into Myanmar territory there has been enough pressure applied on the Indian side of the border where the NSCN-K operates.

Recently, Delhi Police arrested Ngamsinlung Panmei, described as a top leader of the group and purportedly its "Health minister". Media reports suggested that Panmei was a key political advisor to Khaplang and heads the outfit's fund-raising and recruitment tasks.

In an attempt to further pressure the Myanmar government to act against the NSCN-K, India has asked it to arrest four top leaders of the NSCN-K including Khaplang, for their role in the ambush in Manipur's Chandel district. They also asked that chief of military operations Niki Sumi, its brigadier Kirichu, and Kilonser Asang be apprehended. The request was made at a meeting of the India-Myanmar Joint Consultative Committee, however, media reports stated that the Myanmar delegation 'chose to remain non-committal on the request.'¹⁰



On September 21, the NSCN-K held a conference at its headquarters. In attendance were Chairman S.S Khaplang and other central committee members.

According to U Kyaw Wan Sein speaking afterwards:

*"We already discussed the topic with our chairman. The chairman said we aren't ready to sign the NCA yet. And, there are some political issues in our group. We cannot find a solution for this by just signing the NCA. The government side also cannot solve this problem. So, we decided not to participate in the NCA inking."*¹¹

To clarify the reasoning behind the decision, he continued:

*"It is not that we won't sign the NCA because of not all ethnic armed groups are invited to NCA signing. But every group stands for its objectives. It is not that we will revolt against the Burmese government because we do not sign the NCA. The government itself cannot help solve our problem. So, we will not sign the NCA."*¹²

According to Kyaw Wan Sein the group had already been told at a 16 September meeting at the Myanmar Peace Centre that if they did not sign the NCA then they would be listed as an illegal organisation,¹³ yet despite this, there seems little likelihood that the Myanmar Government will arrest or extradite any of the NSCN-K leaders on its soil.

On 15 October, eight ethnic organisations signed a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). However, the NSCN-K made it quite clear it was not prepared to be a participant. Quite incorrectly, Indian media reports suggested that by not signing the NCA the previous NSCN-K agreement with the Myanmar Government was now no longer valid, and suggested that two Myanmar Army operations against two bases at Ponyu and Langhting which resulted in the burning of the bases, not long after the signing, were indicative of the future, a Senior Indian Intelligence officer was quoted as saying:

*"The next target could be another major establishment at Yanching and NSCN (K) headquarters in Taga"*¹⁴

The officer added:

*"That national security advisor Ajit Doval and Naga interlocutor R N Ravi travelled to Myanmar to witness the NCA signing ceremony indicates the importance India attaches to its neighbourhood and the peace process in Myanmar. [...] Also, NSCN (K)'s not signing NCA has created a legal framework for us to get Yangon to hit its bases in Myanmar. The modalities on whether this crackdown will be a joint one by Indian and Myanmar forces or involve just the Myanmar Army, only time will tell."*¹⁵

That said, however, such optimism has not been rewarded, whether this is primarily due to the fact that Myanmar has been going through its



election period is unclear. But it must be noted that the Myanmar Army has shown little interest in pursuing a cleaning out strategy of the NSCN-K.

When asked recently if an NLD government was prepared to allow military co-operation between India and Myanmar in fighting NSCN-K rebels, Aung San Suu Kyi replied:

"It is a big problem, not just for India but for Burma as well. They are people of the same ethnic group; the fact that they will cross the border when there are problems on one side is to be expected. What we need is to establish peace. You have to work to come to a peaceful settlement with your

*Nagas and we've got to work to come to a peaceful settlement with those who are on our border. Neighbouring governments must always work with each other in the name of peace."*¹⁶

It has been made abundantly clear that Aung San Suu Kyi will pull the strings of the NLD president which could suggest that there may be a chance of a policy shift in India's favour. However, it is a very slim chance. The fact remains that the military will continue to dictate policy in regards to the security of the country, and as far as that is concerned it would appear to be in their interest to allow the NSCN-K to continue as they are.



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Notes

- ¹ 'India bans NSCN (K)' Subir Bhaumik, Mizzima, 16 September. It must be noted that the group is not listed on the National Intelligence Agency's 'Banned Terrorist Organisations' list available [here](#), accessed 25 September.
 - ² Email correspondence with Rajeev Bhattacharyya, 25 September 2015
 - ³ See also The National Socialist Council of Nagaland - Khaplang (NSCN-K) - [EBO Background Paper No.1/2015](#) - June 2015 for further background.
 - ⁴ 'Myanmar denies India killed rebels inside its territory', AFP, 10 June 2015
 - ⁵ All operations were inside India says former army chief turned minister', India Correspondent, Mizzima, 17 September 2015
 - ⁶ Also spelt as Chowang Sing in some reports
 - ⁷ 'Govt meets Naga delegation', Eleven Media, 17 September, 2015
 - ⁸ 'NSCN (K) not yet decided on signing NCA with Myanmar', Lun Min Mang, Myanmar Times, 18 September
 - ⁹ Ibid
 - ¹⁰ India asks Myanmar to hand over 4 top NSCN (K) rebels', Indian Express, 19 August 2015
 - ¹¹ 'NSCN-K will not sign NCA', Aik Sai, Independent Mon News Agency, 24 September
 - ¹² Ibid.
 - ¹³ Ibid.
 - ¹⁴ 'India feels Myanmar army will go after NSCN (K)'s headquarters', Times of India, 19 October
 - ¹⁵ Ibid.
 - ¹⁶ 'To The point' TV Interview, 7 October, 2015
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<http://www.euro-burma.eu/activities/research-policy/ebo-papers/>