

NSCN(I-M) rigid as Centre pushes for solution

Outfit says Naga national flag symbolising the community's political identity and its constitution are non-negotiable

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Amid a renewed push for a solution to the “Naga political issue”, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah), or the NSCN(I-M), has said it will not settle for the “Naga national flag” as a cultural flag as indicated by New Delhi.

“It is unthinkable for NSCN to accept Naga national flag as a cultural flag as hinted by Government of India. Naga national flag that symbolises Naga political identity is not negotiable,” the extremist group said in the editorial of *Nagalm Voice*, its news bulletin issued on Thursday.

Framework Agreement

The Centre and the NSCN(I-M) signed the Framework Agreement in August 2015, which was said to have paved the way for the final solution to the vexed issue. But the peace process stagnated over



Close watch: Soldiers stand guard on a street in Kohima, Nagaland, during a time of protest. ■ FILE PHOTO

er the outfit's insistence on a separate flag and the *Yehzabo*, or Naga constitution, as part of the deal.

There have been reports from Nagaland that the Centre would agree to the use of the Naga national flag

for cultural purposes and incorporating a mutually acceptable part of the Naga constitution in the Constitution of India.

The NSCN(I-M) said Prime Minister Narendra Modi had claimed to have solved the

longest-running insurgency movement in southern and south-eastern Asia after the Framework Agreement was signed.

“Today, the NSCN is watching how the same PM of India is going to handle Framework Agreement with NSCN and Naga people that he himself took so much pride and credit,” the editorial said.

“Such was the depravity on the part of Government of India that every good thing gained during the 25 years of the Indo-Naga political talks is facing the risk of going down the drain,” it stated.

‘Political blackmail’

The NSCN(I-M) said the “unfortunate development” was tantamount to political blackmail that it would not succumb to it.

Separate meetings with Naga leaders in New Delhi over the past few days have triggered speculation that

the much-anticipated Naga settlement was not far off. Central leaders had met Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, his predecessor S.C. Jamir and NSCN(I-M) leaders.

The meetings followed senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader and Nagaland Deputy Chief Minister Yanthungo Patton's statement that some senior insurgent leaders do not want a settlement of the issue so that they can continue to enjoy the comforts of life at the people's cost.

Warning of ‘earthquake’

After returning from New Delhi, Mr. Jamir warned of an impending “earthquake” in the State with its epicentre in Delhi. MLA Kuzholuzo Neinu said the NSCN(I-M) should now “take it or leave it”.

On Wednesday, the Core Committee on Naga Political Issue comprising all 60 MLAs

of Nagaland, met at the Chief Minister's residence to decide on meeting the NSCN(I-M) leadership either in the State capital Kohima or commercial hub Dimapur by May 29. The NSCN(I-M) has convened a meeting of all its top bodies from across the “Naga region” on May 31.

Apart from Nagaland, Nagas are scattered across Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur and Myanmar.

The NSCN(I-M) signed a ceasefire agreement with the government in 1997. The rival NSCN(Khaplang) followed suit in 2001 but reneged in March 2015.

Various factions of the latter and some older outfits got together in 2016 to form the Naga National Political Groups (NNGPs), which signed the Agreed Position with the Centre in 2017.

The Naga National Political Groups are not insistent on a separate Naga flag and constitution.