

## Chapter 7

### Nagaland

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#### 1. Land and people

Part of Assam at the time of Indian Independence in 1947, Nagaland became a full fledged State on December 1, 1963, as a result of a political settlement with special constitutional guarantees (under Article 371A) and placed under the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

If North East represents the richest ethnic region of the world, and meeting point of four major races (Aryan, Mongoloid, Austric, Tibeto-Burman) of the world, Nagaland and Nagas are known for the myriad tribes and rich culture and traditional systems ranging from the autocratic to “pure democracy”. It is believed that there are 64 Naga tribes living in four States (Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh) occupying the north easternmost parts of India as well as the North Western parts of Myanmar. In Nagaland State itself, there are 16 major Naga tribes.

Nagaland is located between 25<sup>0</sup>60' and 27<sup>0</sup>40' N Latitude and 93<sup>0</sup>20' and 95<sup>0</sup>15' E Longitude. The State has an area of 16,579 square kms (0.5% of India's geographical area). Its population is 19,88,636 (0.2% of India's population) as per 2001 census. As per 1991 figures, the State has 2.17 lakh households but 82.26% of the population live in rural areas. The State has 11 administrative districts, 52 blocks and 9 census towns, covering 1286 villages.

Nagaland has often been called 'The land of festivals' because with its 16 major tribes, one or the other tribe would be celebrating its festival every month of the calendar year. To these have now been added the State Government sponsored Hornbill Festival every first week of December (in order to promote tourism) where all the tribes in the State make their cultural presentations and sale of all kinds of food, cultural mementos, produce of Nagaland etc.

The 16 major tribes, in alphabetical order, are Angami, Ao, Chakhesang, Chang, Kachari, Khiamniungam, Konyak, Kuki, Lotha, Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sumi,

**Table 1**

<u>Statistical figures of Nagaland</u>	
Area	16,579 sq kms
State Capital	Kohima (1,444.12 m above sea level)
Boundaries	E/NE – Myanmar/Arunachal Pradesh
	W -- Assam
	N -- Arunachal Pradesh
	S -- Manipur
Population	19,88,636 (2001 census)
Density	120 per sq km
Sex ratio	909:1000 (Female:Male, 2001 census)
Literacy	67.11% (Male: 71.77% Female: 61.92%)
No of villages	1286
Census towns	9
Official language	English
Average rainfall	2500 mm
Forest cover	13,345 sq kms (80.49%)
Airport and railway head	Dimapur
<u>Source : Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Govt. of Nagaland</u>	

Sangtam, Yimchungrü, and Zelianrong. Each tribe is distinct in terms of language, customs, culture and traditions, system of governance etc. Quite often people mistakenly describe the Naga tribe languages as “dialects” but they are not. Even within the same tribe language, the dialects are often so different as to render communication impossible! It is because of such difficulties that English has been made the official language and medium of instruction while “Nagamese” (a kind of pidgin Assamese) has evolved into the common lingua of the tribes. But each of the tribe languages continue to be spoken and used, even on All India Radio (AIR) where specific timings have been worked out for each of the major tribes.

The cultures, values, and systems of governance among the tribes are so different. What is interesting is that all kinds of governance systems are found within such a small geographical area! Just to have a taste of the cultural pot-pourri one could mention the autocracy of the Konyak tribe, where “commoners” may not even stand straight before his Chief. Slightly lower in scale we have the chiefship of the Sumi (Sema) tribe where the chief’s word was still considered law. Then we

have a kind of Republican system, with elections, among the Ao tribe. And, finally, there is the “pure democracy” of the Angami tribe where the search for consensus was the norm and election through majority decision was unknown.

All these differences provide wide cultural colours. The rich music, ballads, art and crafts, and other knowledge systems also indicate times of leisure and possibility that at least some of the tribes may have belonged to or were part of some ancient civilization at one time. Unfortunately, what is common among the Naga tribes is that the entire history of the tribes was oral and no documentation of any kind was available. This was where there was not only a very thin dividing line between legends and history but, very frequently, legends were the only history available.

## **2. Religion**

Traditionally, all Naga tribes were Animists. In Animism the basic tenets of belief and faith were (i) one supreme, omnipotent God, who was well disposed towards man. Although this God was generally understood in the singular male gender, sometimes, the feminine terminology, or even neutral plural form, were also used, in some tribe languages, when referring to God. (ii) An unspecified number of evil spirits who were ill disposed towards man and they were responsible for all kinds of sickness, ill fortune, etc. And they had to be propitiated whenever there was misfortune, such as a sickness, strikes you. (iii) Belief in life after death. There was even the equivalent of St Peter who stood guard over the gates to the next life but who, unlike St Peter, was a less pleasant fellow. It is said that those who led good lives on earth were, in the next life, transformed into stars and moons to shine forever in the skies.

But, to day, with the coming of Christianity the vast majority of Nagas have been converted to the Christian faith. All kinds of Christian denominations are found, but the Baptist and Catholic denominations are the main ones.

## **3. Political History**

Available documented history about the Naga tribes is very sketchy. Ancient Indian literature, at the time the Veda Books were being compiled, makes

mention of “Kiratas”, golden skinned people who lived in the East. And Ptolemy, in his *Geographia*, around 150 A.D. make mention of “the realm of the Naked”. The Royal Chronicles of Manipur also make mention of a Kabui Naga village around 33-150 A.D. But there is nothing definite till date. Even the origin of the word “Naga” is still shrouded in mystery and conjecture. What all Naga tribes believe though is that they came from the East (three routes are indicated by some authors) and settled in their present location. The only thing definite appears to be that Naga tribes were already settled in the area before the arrival of the Ahoms, around 1228, under King Sukhapa. A long period of “blow-hot-blow-cold” Naga-Ahom relations followed.

The next significant period involved the advent of the British who entered the region in a major way after the Treaty of Yandabo between Britain and Burma in 1826, under which the latter agreed to cede all claims to Assam, Manipur and the Jaintia Hills. But from all appearances, the British had not only set their eyes on the region but they were also already in the region much before that. A map drawn by one Rennel, around 1664, showed some Naga villages.

The first Naga encounter with the British took place in 1832 when Captains Jenkins and Pemberton were ordered to trace a land route from Imphal to the British Headquarters in Assam – Britain had retained the Manipuri Kingdom through the Treaty of Yandabo. Just like the earlier resistance to Ahom and Burmese attempts to cross Naga country, the British attempt was also fiercely resisted by the Naga tribes, living along the route, and the British party was attacked all the way to Dimapur.

There followed a long period of British “expeditions” against Naga villages. The British also kept changing policies between ‘controlling’ Naga tribes and pursuing non-interference into Naga affairs – these policy decisions were being taken at the Vice-roy level and higher. Finally, a decisive policy action was taken in 1866 when the British decided to set up a district headquarter at Samaguting (present Chümukedima near Dimapur) to look after Naga affairs. But Captain Butler, who was appointed to this new post could take charge only in 1869, three years later. This district headquarters, after much consideration, and study of alternate sites, was shifted to Kohima in 1878<sup>1</sup>.

The shifting of the British headquarters to Kohima also proved decisive in controlling and containing Naga resistance to British rule because the last

organized resistance to colonial authority took place during the next winter of 1879-80, at Khonoma Village. With the fall of Khonoma, organized resistance to the British collapsed within British administrated areas. There were, naturally, other tribes in the eastern Naga areas who never came under British rule. They were referred to, by the British, as the “Free Nagas” in the “Un-administered Areas”<sup>2</sup> The tribes in Mon Tuensang, Longleng and Kiphire districts did not come under the British.

Before the advent of the British, Naga tribes (even villages!) were living “independent” of each other. British administration brought many tribes “together” and provided them with the opportunity to work together<sup>3</sup>. Christianity further cemented the bond among intra- and inter- tribe “faithful”.

The bringing together of disparate Naga tribes by the British Administration had a kind of “culmination” when about 5,000 Nagas, from different tribes (cutting across present-day State boundaries) went to France during World War I, as part of the Allied Labour Corps. On return, these “veterans” organized themselves into a “club”. Later, when the Simon Commission arrived, the Naga Club members, feeling responsible for the future of the Naga tribes, presented their now famous Memorandum to the Commission in 1929. Basically, two points were raised:-

- (i) to keep Nagas outside the Reformed Scheme of India and under the British
- (ii) If this was not possible, then to leave the Nagas “as they were before the British arrived”.

Neither of these two requests was fulfilled although the Nagas were placed under the “Naga Hills Excluded Area” and directly placed under the Crown’s Representative, as per British Government of India Act 1935 which actually took effect in 1937. As a result, as the date for Indian Independence drew closer, the Naga tribes, who still helped the British and Allied Forces during the World War II, began to organize themselves into a political body, demanding complete independence from India.

The Naga National Council (NNC), formed out of the earlier Naga Hills District Tribal Council, in 1945, soon became the umbrella organization for the fight for Naga independence. After a lull, during the World War II – when at least two war time world records were created – the Naga issue was taken up again. It led to the Nine-Point Agreement of June 1947<sup>4</sup> which basically only asked for autonomy with provision for a review of the Agreement after 10 years. With differing views

around interpretation of the “review” another impasse was created.<sup>5</sup> This unresolved impasse led to the Naga National Council (NNC) declaring Naga Independence on August 14, 1947, one day before India was to become Independent.

While there were efforts from Naga side, as well as assurances from Indian leaders, to resolve the impasse surrounding the 9-Point Agreement of June 1947, the “conflict”, nevertheless, continued. Gradually, as usually happens in situations of controversy and potential conflict, provocations led to actual physical and armed conflict in the early 1950s. After nearly a decade of violence, the 16-Point Agreement was arrived at in 1960 with the Government of India through instrumentation of the Naga Peoples Convention (NPC)<sup>6</sup>. Unfortunately, those still underground – the NNC leaders and cadres -- did not participate. Violence continued. In the meantime, moved by conditions of violence and human suffering, the Naga Baptist Church took the lead under the banner of the Peace Mission, which involved Bimala Prasad Chaliha, chief minister of Assam, the Gandhian leader, Jayaprakash Narayan, and the well-know British Church figure, Rev. Michael Scott. The Peace Mission started negotiations for peace. This led to the Cease-fire Agreement of 1964. Several rounds of talks also followed including at the prime ministerial level. But entrenched positions did not allow the impasse to be broken. The ceasefire was effectively over by 1972 but the Peace Mission was aborted by May 1966 with the resignations of Chaliha and Narayan and the expulsion of Scott from India for allegedly taking a pro-Naga position. Further efforts by the Baptist Church resulted in the November 1975 Shillong Accord<sup>7</sup> But it ended in controversy. After this, slowly, the Naga Movement splintered into four factions. And the impasse continues to this day despite the fact that new ceasefire Agreements were arrived at in 1997 and 2001 with two factions of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, the dominant groups of the Naga Nationalist movement. Peace talks with the most powerful group (NSCN I-M) lead by Isak Swu, the chairman, and Th. Muivah, the general secretary, have been continuing since 1997, including an intense series of discussions at New Delhi in December 2004-early 2005.

So, the scenario at this time, is that

- (i) A final political settlement of the Naga Issue is still to be found
- (ii) Nagas are still living in four states of India and in Myanmar
- (iii) Four splinter groups of the Naga nationalist movement who are opposed

to Indian and Myanmarese occupation of Naga country who, nevertheless, are fighting one another and trying to prove that their group represent the Naga people.

- (iv) Government of India (GoI) has signed ceasefire agreements with two factions and talks with one group is continuing.
- (v) A full-fledged Nagaland State under the Indian Union, with 16 major Naga tribes, and with several political has been in existence since 1963. In this state, political parties have participated in parliamentary democratic elections and practices. (Other Naga tribes also participate in state politics in the states they live). The present study is being carried out in the context of the state of Nagaland, with Kohima as the capital, and its relations with neighbouring states and Myanmar.

#### **4. Nagaland State**

Nagaland State came into existence on December 1, 1963, as the 16<sup>th</sup> State of the Indian Union. In 40 years of Statehood the State has witnessed 10 state general elections. During this period it has had 17 chief ministers and only three governments were able to complete their terms – the last two in the last decade, hopefully, showing the beginnings of some stability.

Nagaland's democratic experience has been complex, difficult and painful, among others, because of the disparate nature of the tribes, described above, and the unresolved Naga Political Issue, with simultaneous "insurgency" operating during the entire period. The Naga society was also caught in transition from the traditional to modernity. In less than a century, Naga society has had to shift from nomadism, and headhunting, to settled agriculture, from barter system to money and war economies, to attempts to organize the different complex tribes into a people, to cyber age and globalism. And all these took place under the shadow of the gun! The changes were always too many, too fast. Some of the changes left behind long after-effect tremors or had the impact of black-holes into which everything was sucked.

Nevertheless, and in spite of such difficulties, some proposes has been made. And they, more than anything else, reflect the tremendous vitality of Naga tribe cultures. The administrative arm of the State now reaches every nook and corner of the State and the benefits of planned development have begun to trickle down

to the villages. In the last few years attempts are also being made successfully to draw on the inherent rich social capital of the Naga tribe communities and start a “bubbling-up” effect of development. Such attempts are seen in the Nagaland Communitization Act, 2002, through essential services like education, health, power, tourism etc are being turned over, in phases, to the village communities to manage and run the facilities and infra-structure provided by the State Government. New non-traditional governance systems and linkages have been created. This is best seen in the 1049 Village Councils and Village Development Boards that govern the State in partnership with the Government. Several of these initiatives are unique and have been emulated elsewhere. For instance, the system of Panchayat Raj in the rest of India was built on the model of the Village Councils and Village Development Boards in Nagaland.

During the last 40 years of Statehood also, 9,860 km of road length have been laid (837 km in 1962-63), providing connectivity to 89.14% of officially recognized villages; 1010 villages (82.45%) have been provided water supply; 29 MW of electricity are produced and 1216 villages have been electrified (only 6 villages had electricity in 1962-63); and the literacy percentage has climbed from 7-91% in 1962-63 to 67.11% in 2001, above the national average. The health scenario is also good and life expectancy today stands at 73.4 years, approaching that of developed countries.

## **5. The Economy**

Nagaland missed out on the benefits of the first three Five Year Plans. The State also suffered the consequences of continued insurgency, frequently having to commit its scarce resources on establishment costs. Because of these, despite the tremendous strides made in the last 40 years, Naga economy is still confronted by many developmental challenges. Foremost among these are the inaccessibility, hilly and landlocked nature of the State and lack of infra-structure. There is also continued insurgency, high labour costs, lack of industrial culture etc. During 1999, the Eleventh Finance Commission ranked Nagaland (with an index of 76.14) as the 7th most remote State in the country – but there was only a difference of about 7 points with Arunachal Pradesh which was ranked the most remote with an index of 69.71. One of the areas where this remoteness has affected the people of the State in a real way is in the poor Credit-Deposit ratio.



The Net State Domestic Product of Nagaland during 2001 was recorded at Rs 2,23,042 lakhs, up from Rs 10,547 lakhs during 1980-81. These may be divided into the following:

Primary sector share --	33.7% with 70% workforce
Secondary sector --	14.1%
Tertiary sector --	52.2% (down from 61.9% during 1993-94)

The above figures clearly show need for holistic planning and adequate strategizing of development priorities. This means, first and foremost, identification of the inherent and natural strengths, as well as weaknesses, of Nagaland – for instance, it is clear that Nagaland cannot compete with others in traditional agriculture (“bulk production” of food) or in the secondary sector. This need is all the more so in the context of a small, “fragile”, yet strategic, state like Nagaland.

The percentage of total workers to total population was 42.74% during 2001. What is of concern is that there is a rising trend in marginal workers, underemployment and unemployment. This is not surprising when the hilly terrain of the State still provides employment to 72.65% of total labour force through agriculture and its share to the State Domestic Product is only 33.7%.

Happily, efforts are now being made to diversify the economy so as to make it more robust. This is reflected in the high contribution of the Tertiary sector to the State Domestic Product. However, what needs to be kept in mind here is that the public administration share to the Tertiary sector is about 17% which delivers a big dent in the total share!

As per State Employment Exchange figures of educated unemployed in Nagaland, the live register (March 2000) showed a total of 35,242 which included 8583 females. The figures would be much higher now as pass percentage at HSLC level has been recording much better results in the last few years.

The communitization process of essential services, including their restructuring to suit community strengths, as well as recent initiatives to promote tourism and the Chief Minister’s Corpus Fund to assist employment generating private initiatives will, hopefully, give much needed relief by providing employment to those without jobs.

## 6. Strengths

Having discussed so much about the inadequacies, perhaps, a look at the strengths of Nagaland would balance the picture! The following are some of the strengths:

- i) As a small State, good new initiatives can immediately be experimented with or carried out at the State level. (This was one of the strengths of the Communitization initiative – that while others were still talking about it, Nagaland formulated it and started the process. Likewise with the Village Councils and VDBs which Government of India later emulated through its Panchayati Raj. )
- ii) Community spirit and social capital of the people are tremendous if these can be tapped in the right way.
- iii) The fact that English is the State Language, and used as the medium of instruction in all educational institutions, give the State an immediate obvious advantage. This provides Nagas with the opportunity to enter any field anywhere. Obvious sectors are the fast growing IT and the services sectors. The high literacy rate is an added advantage.
- iv) It is one of the richest ethnic/cultural states anywhere, given the size of the state and number and complex nature of the tribes. It is a sociological and anthropological gold mine, still waiting to be discovered! (Very little serious study has been made on the Naga tribes)
- v) Nagaland falls within the Indo-Burma Bio-diversity Hotspot and it is one of the richest bio-diversity areas, despite its small size. Even without any systematic scientific study, two items have been entered in the Guinness Book of World Records. (It may be mentioned that Naga people also gave the world its tea and it is part of the region that gave the world its rice). What must be kept in mind, however, is that the bio-diversity of Nagaland is very fragile due to small size, hilly terrain, development imperatives, lack of awareness among the people, lack of proper investment, lack of technical know-how and the fact that the lands belong to the various village communities etc. But a wise and prudent bio-technology policy, with adequate and right funding, could propel the State into prominence in one of the Sunshine sectors in the world.
- vi) Nagaland has 80.49% Forest Cover and 56.7% Forest Area, which is way above the recommended 33% for good ecological balance. What is even more unique is that 88.3% of the Forest Areas are owned by the various

tribe communities and not by the government. This also creates problems, sometimes, because holistic planning becomes difficult. This may be part of the reason why although the State has rich mineral deposits – including petroleum, lime stone, marble and decorative stones, nickel cobalt, chromium, basalt, spilite etc – the entire forest and mineral contribution to the State Domestic Product has been negligible so far (around 4%).

- vii) With their Christian faith and Mongoloid ethnic stock, Nagas have natural links with both East and West.
- viii) The power potential of the State is far in excess of its requirements, both now and in the future. This is a vital advantage from developmental and economic perspectives.
- ix) In the last 5-6 years, the State government has become a little more responsive to public demands and needs than some of their predecessors. The state has also been fortunate enough to have had, in succession, two chief secretaries who were also `visionaries`. This resulted in some progressive, even unique, initiatives by the State. These have resulted in some tangible partnership between government and the people.

## **7. Summary**

Nagaland has reasonably high literacy rate, with knowledge of English as an added advantage. The new Communitization initiative has already begun to show good impacts in terms of enrolment and examination results at the primary level of education besides tapping to the social capital of the community and commitment of the concerned teachers.

The health scenario is also reasonably good. The Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR), and Crude Death rate (CDR) are all below the national average while the Crude Birth Rate and children receiving immunization figures are above the national average. And life expectancy stands at 73.4 years. There are some worrisome areas but efforts going on to tap into traditional knowledge and practices of indigenous medicines will further spread the health coverage in the State.

The employment scenario is of concern. But what is encouraging is that the state government seems seized of the matter. Efforts to diversify the state economy

(through promotion of tourism, bamboo mission, organic farming, horticulture etc.), Communitization of essential services, the CM (Chief Minister's) Corpus Fund for generating employment etc. are some healthy indications.

Naturally, there are many areas of need. Infrastructure in all areas is required but especially in transport and communication fields. The power position in the State needs to be improved urgently by tapping into its potentials. Capacity building and HRD, quality education and R & D as well as strengthening of democratic structures in society are required. Over and above these, there are three other imperatives that will have to, at least initially, issue directly from the political leadership of the State. They are:-

- i) Holistic and strategised planning for Naga economy building on inherent strengths with needed support from the centre
- ii) Continued partnership between Government and people. (In great part this means not only continuing but consolidating and building on the communitization process. In so doing, there would be a "bubbling effect" from the grassroots with CBOs in the forefront).
- iii) Early settlement of the Naga Political Problem in an inclusive manner so it would be lasting.

The Naga mindset at the moment is mentally and psychologically prepared for "action". The efforts of the State Government, in the last few years, to break through the "fatigue mentality" in society, especially among its servants, have had their impact. The plethora of initiatives and their visible success, at least in the short term, have shown the people that things can be done despite hurdles. And the new taste of "success" has made people want more of it! The entry of UNICEF, UNDP, WTO (World Tourism Organization) etc. into the State have also played a role in widening the horizon of some. The Naga are becoming aware of the many regional and sub-regional initiatives such as BIMST-EC, the Kunming Initiative, the South Asian Growth Quadrangle, and especially about the Trans Asian Railway and Highway, which will pass through Dimapur and Kohima. The implementation of these initiatives will mean important break-through from the physical and psychological isolation and remoteness from which the people here have suffered for so long. At the same time, the people are fed up of the violence that has brought so much suffering and division in society. As a result of all these, the Naga society is perhaps prepared, now as never before, to launch out and play a role in a wider context.

## 8. Relations with Assam, Manipur and Myanmar

India's North East is one of the richest ethnic and bio-diversity regions of the world, with more natural affinities to the East than to its west. It was also, at one time, one of the main economic trade centres of the world providing the Southern Silk Route to China and other trade routes to East and South East Asia. Tragically, the region has had a history of being vitally and decisively affected by the actions of people from beyond the region, perhaps, because of its geo-political and strategic location. For instance, consider the following:-

- (i) Assam is not only an integral part of North East; it is the biggest State and most influential – indeed, all the other six Sister States of the region grew out of it. But, historically, the advent of the Tai Ahoms in the region, in 1228, and internal divisions within the Ahom kingdom, led to arrival of the Burmese on the scene. This later led to the first vivisection of the region in 1826.
- (ii) The forays of the Mughal Empire to try to enter the region did not succeed because of the strength of the Ahom kingdom, supported by the tribes living in the hills, during actual fighting. But their attempts brought the region to the notice of the British much sooner than may have happened.
- (iii) The above events, and their natural consequences, as well as the strategic location of the region and its economic potentials, especially in the plains areas of today's Assam, attracted the British (who “took over” the ruling of India from the Mughals) into the region. For instance, the 1826 Treaty of Yandaboo demarcated the boundaries between British India and Burma, decisively giving new and different identities to peoples who had so far been part of the same family and clan. Nearly 180 years later, we still find today, families and clans in Tuensang and Mon districts of Nagaland, and elsewhere, living on both sides of the international boundary, with little hope that they might be “reunited” again.
- (iv) The Partition of India in 1947 completed the total isolation of the once vibrant economic growth centre that the North East was by cutting off all its “outlets”. And, today, 98% of the borders of the North East are international boundaries leaving only the Siliguri “chicken neck” to connect it to mainland India. The “suffocation”, due to such “strangulation”, may have played more of a role in the “insurgency-affected” scenario than have been accepted so far. It must

also be remembered that the entire North East became completely “enveloped” by very highly developed cultural societies while most of those within the NE had only their oral histories and legends to depend on.

How had such above history effected the peoples of the region mentally, emotionally and psychologically? This may be a factor that needs to be further studied to gain right perspectives before the problems in the region could be “solved”.

North East India has often been referred to as a problem area. But if the potentials of the region are studied, the North East could not only become one of the richest areas but it could also give “answers” to most of the problems in the world – minority-majority relations, race and ethnic relations, religious toleration, democratic and consensual values, right use of resources and sustainable development, protection of environment and eco systems etc.

But before all these can happen, the North East must settle its problems. For nearly 60 years, starting with the “Naga Problem”, Indian leadership has been trying to “solve” the problems of the region. Mostly one has observed bankruptcy of ideas which get translated into policies of containment and control. On the other hand, the peoples of the region must realize that (i) they must not leave “solution” of their problems to others by playing blame-games; (ii) the actual “battlefields” are their own lands and people; (iii) the future of their peoples are more important than what any of them may want to achieve for themselves or their groups. What also needs to be appreciated here is that in spite of all her faults and weaknesses India, by and large, has remained true to her heritage as an ancient civilization, and is still willing to be accommodative and understanding.

Nevertheless, in trying to find answers to the problems plaguing the region, a wholesome strategy is required that is understanding and “feeling” and which is willing to keep in mind the history and uniqueness of each problem. In any attempts to “solve” the problems of North East, two broad areas normally emerge – Economic and Political. And efforts are usually made to use the one to further the attempts in the other. This is where things usually go wrong and neither objective is achieved. Where the insurgency issue is concerned, especially in the Naga case, it is clear that while economic wants may have aggravated the problem, the issue has remained political and a political settlement had to be

arrived at. Using economic means to further political goals only makes people addicted to the carrot by showing them that violence pays. The fall-outs from this are general perception of society (not just `insurgents') about "insincerity" towards developmental assistance and people's loss of heed for the Stick. Sincere regard for society on developmental issues, through agencies that are transparent and accountable, will give the government, both state and central, to speak more forcefully on the political front with the people's support – at least in most states of the North East. Separation of issues will help in addressing the problems of the region because doubts and confusions now created by overlapping of issues will be removed.

Because the problems have been left inadequately addressed for too long, the issues have tended to become entrenched and complex. In most case, it has also become difficult to address them individually because each problem has "spread out" like ripples and affected surrounding areas where more "unique problems" were added. In such a scenario, while needing to deal with each problem separately, a more holistic and strategic planning may be needed. For instance, in trying to provide answers to problems plaguing the region, which are the key States? This is a painful question because there are "burning problems" facing each State. But without, in any way, wanting to give less importance to the other states in the region, Assam, Manipur and Nagaland seem key to finding answers in the region. Consider the following:-

- (i) Assam is not only the biggest and most influential State but all other states in the region "grew" out of it. Assam is also the State where intellectuals of the region are not only concentrated but also recognized and given due respect by society. This allows for healthy debate and clear concepts to emerge. All communications to the other States in the region are through Assam. Assam has also shown magnanimity through difficult times, sometimes even to her cost. So, Assam not only has the ability but also the moral authority to speak to the neighbours, who were once part of her.
- (ii) Manipur (specific to Meitei Community) is the oldest recorded/documentated "civilization" in the region, going back 2000 years. But theirs is a small community, concentrated in the Imphal Valley. And while highly capable, it appears the above "suffocation" and "strangulation" *theory* may have played, or still playing, a role which may ultimately "destroy" this highly able and respected community in

the region. The “outbursts” in the last few years are “symptoms” of cries from the heart. They need to be “listened” to. Through religion, the Meitei community also holds out a painful dilemma in the conscience of Hindu India. But, apart from the civilisational and capability points of view, Manipur too holds an important “doorway” to South East Asia through Moreh – in history, the present problems of extortion, violence etc, are but mere water bubbles in a summer monsoon!

Further, through Kuki and Naga tribes, Manipur also can play a great and helpful influence across the boundary in Myanmar as their kith and kin live across the border.

- (iii) Nagas have, sometimes, been accused of exporting violence in the region. The “Naga Issue” is also the oldest in the region – and, maybe, the oldest unresolved conflict situation (pre-dating the Palestinian-Israeli conflict) in the world today. Whatever it may be, and whatever the shortcomings of the Naga Movement, the following are obvious:-
- a) It presents India, from India’s perspective (because most Nagas can only talk about “military occupation by India”), with the challenge of how it deals with its dissenting minorities.
  - b) Recent Naga political history is no longer questioned by New Delhi – it has also been “proved” that no amount of economic measures will solve the problem.
  - c) “Naga Insurgency” has adversely effected the entire North Eastern region. The “mischief ability” of Naga factions in the region seem an accepted fact – earlier there was only the Naga Movement; today, there is no State in NE that is not affected by violence and militant groups and most of them are “aligned” to one or other Naga group. The ability of Naga violent groups is further made easier through Naga populations in the various States of the region.
  - d) Naga populations also live across the border over a sizeable area in Myanmar (Nagaland State alone has about 215 km of porous boundary with Myanmar) and this provides both sanctuary and “mischief potential”.

Two counter questions could be posed. These are:



- (i) Would “insurgency” in North East continue, or remain “unsolvable”, if the problems in the above three States were adequately addressed?
- (ii) Could the same problems be adequately addressed in the other states if the issues faced in these three states remain un-addressed?

What seems clear is that without early adequate answers to the issues facing the region,

- (i) The NE will keep missing the “bus of history”
- (ii) The NE will not only fail to play its role to its full potential but it could create hurdles for India from doing so
- (iii) India may jeopardize its spiritual heritage (‘soul’?!) in the “killing fields” of the North East!

While these are the “gloomy” scenarios, there are also many bright sparks which are more than “silver linings” because they are “concrete”. India’s declared “Look East” policy in recent years is, once more, bringing North East into playing the pivotal role of a bridge between South Asia and South East and East Asia. The policy has also resulted in several initiatives like the BIMST-EC and the Trans Asian Railway and Highway etc. Even at Track II level, very important efforts like the BCIM/Kunming Initiative are moving forcefully forward and may soon translate into Track I. All these efforts, and the imperatives for their realization, will, hopefully, begin to provide answers to the dilemmas posed above. One, of course, has to see how these ideas actually develop and grow.

## **9. Nagaland – Assam**

### ***Historical Background***

The history of Naga-Ahom relations date back to 1228 when the Ahoms, of the same region of South Eastern Burmese under King Sukhapa, arrived in the region. Before this, little is known about the people living in the plains or the relations of the Naga tribes with them. This is so because there were no written record on the Naga side. In most probability, the Naga tribes, who depended on oral history, were illiterate – one legend said that Nagas had a script of their own but ‘man’s best friend’ made short work of the skin on which it was written. And oral history, handed down through the generations by word of mouth, get obscure and confused after a certain period. It was only after the arrival of the Ahoms that we

have some recorded history of the region.

During this early period, Naga-Ahom relations seemed to have been dictated by imperatives of need, either for trade or for security. For instance, there were items like salt and medicinal herbs which those living in the plains needed from the Naga tribes. In return the tribes purchased rice and other foodstuff, beads, cloths etc from the plains. Special bazaars called “Nagakhats” were established for trade with Naga tribes. And these bazaar privileges were often used to prevent Naga tribesmen from raiding the plains. Apart from plunder, it appeared that the Naga tribes also did not seem to have any interest in extending their territories. Finally, as late comers, the Ahoms felt the need to protect and guard whatever areas they had managed to bring under their control. Nevertheless, the Ahom kings also looked at the Naga tribes as “buffer” against attack from Burma and the East. All these considerations led to the building of a complex and interesting relationship between the Ahoms and the Naga tribes. As Dr Anungla Aier said, “...Ahom-Naga relationship presents a chequered course of war, peace, friendship and enmity up to the period when the region was annexed by the British”.

As time went by, the nature of the relationship also changed. And there were moving stories of social intercourse and friendship as well. For instance, there was the story of an Ahom king, Supatpha (he assumed the Hindu name Gogadhar Singh), who married a Naga princess and two of their children, Lai and Lechai, were raised in a Naga village.. A Konyak Chief (Angh) was also said to have married the daughter of an Ahom king at one time and Naga-Ahom inter-marriages seemed to have been quite prevalent over the centuries. Some Naga disputes were also settled at the court of Ahom kings.

There were many pointers from history about Naga-Ahom history. These may be briefly enumerated here without, as far as possible, repeating what has already been said above.

- (i) The Nagas were already settled in the region when the Ahoms arrived in 1228.
- (ii) Much of the relationship was with tribes along the newly established Ahom kingdom. It was also true that there was no known central command of the Naga tribes. Even within tribes, whether for war or peace, the relations were usually with individual Naga villages.
- (iii) Naga raids were for plunder and not for territory. They were loathe to

leave their hill fortresses. But on occasions, when their territory seemed under threat, they fought with ferocious fervour. For instance, on one occasion, when the Ahoms, on their way to invade the Kachari capital, crossed Naga territory, the Nagas fought and defeated them. On another occasion, during 1765-67, when the Ahom army tried to help the Manipur Raja, they were unable to cross the jungles of Naga country. As Sir Edward Gaith, author of Assam History, said, "... Nagas had never been subjugated by the Ahoms and it was no part of British policy to absorb it".

- (iv) On the other hand, there is record of Nagas serving in the Ahom Army, especially under Lachit Barphukan, the great Ahom General, who defeated the Mughal Army. A British army officer commented at the time, "The Assamese army appears at this time (1660) to have been largely recruited from Nagas and Miris, and it is evident that they were quite able to hold their own against the well-trained armies of Hindusthan".
- (v) There was also, in later years, the practice of paying "posa" to Naga tribes. This was a kind of protection money to guarantee that no raids would be carried out against those who made the payment (Sukanya Sharma 2004). And in a publication by Angami Public Organization (APO) titled "The Traditional Angami Area", it has been mentioned that "as late as 1869, 37 years after the British set in Angami country in 1832, the Angamis collected annual tributes from Bokolia and Mohendejoa, now Manga, in Karbi Anglong".

The "modern" period of 'Nagaland-Assam' relations begins in the immediate Indian pre-independence period up to now. The beginning of this period was when the Nagas and the Ahoms seemed to have gone separate ways, or at least, became *hard of hearing* to one another's pleas. The Assamese society, under leaders moved by Gandhian influences, became involved in the Indian Independence Struggle. On the other hand, Naga leaders had much earlier (1929) sensed the time was opportune to re-assert the freedom they loved so much and which they had lost to the British. Both became wrapped up in their own *obsessions* and the path to which they were committed. The tragedy was, as time went by, the ability and willingness to listen and understand became lost.

As Indian Independence dawned and the Naga Hills was made a district under Assam State, despite declaration of Naga Independence on August 14, 1947, one

day before India herself became Independent, the tearing of historical and emotional bonds that bound the two peoples, over centuries, seemed to have become complete. To the Nagas, who were just on the thresh-hold of building their `peoplehood`, the attitudes of Assamese leaders, and their police in Naga Hills, at the time, only seemed to confirm the final rupture. It seemed to them the Assamese community had forgotten not only the history of Naga-Assamese relations but had also decided to forget their neighbours and the region. It was also under such circumstances that the `hawks` within the Naga National Movement were enabled to oust the `doves` and take over. And Nagaland descended into the “Night of the Guerillas”.

Happily, centuries-old ties between the two peoples did not die altogether. And the strength of historical bonds and warmth between the two peoples kept breaking to the surface despite heavy odds. For instance, as efforts for understanding and peace seemed to be leading nowhere at the official level, a Naga Goodwill Mission to Assam, made up of prominent Naga citizens, visited Assam in 1953. Their chief hosts were members of the Prajya Socialist Party but all political parties of Assam and non-political groups joined in and gave them a rousing welcome. They were also taken to all parts of Assam to meet the people. Another sign of the close bond between Nagas and Assamese was the participation of Bimala Prasad Chaliha who, despite being Chief Minister of Assam, and perhaps risking his position, became a member of the Nagaland Peace Mission along with Jayaprakash Narayan and Rev Michael Scott. There were others like the first singer Bhupen Hazarika who, unknown and unrecorded, came to the Naga Hills with his songs of peace and love.

The traditional bonds between Assam and Nagaland continued even to the present day. For instance, in September 2001, another high level Naga delegation, led by the Naga Hoho went to Guwahati as guests of the Assam Sahitya Sabha, the largest non-governmental community based organization not only in Assam but throughout the NE. Among others, the Naga delegation was received by the surviving spouses (the two grand ladies of Assam) of Gopinath Bordoloi, the first chief minister of Assam and Bimala Prasad Chaliha, another early Assam chief minister of great stature. The present chief minister, Mr Tarun Gogoi himself, cancelled his own personal election engagement in his constituency in Upper Assam and stayed in Guwahati to receive and host the Naga delegation. And Assam Government made sure that its home minister was present at all major functions/events to add dignity and importance to the occasion. The warmth with

which the Naga delegation was received, was “simply overwhelming” as one of the Naga delegates put it.

According to Shimmi, “If political relations may lead two peoples either to amity or to hostility, cultural relations most generally do promote only friendship and understanding. Political relations change but cultural ones persist”.

In Nagaland-Assam relations, the best of both leaders and led have been witnessed:

- (i) Statesmanship of political leadership inspiring the people to come closer
- (ii) People-to-people relationship positively effecting the political atmosphere between the two states.

What needs to be further encouraged is the cultural relations and social interaction between the two peoples. This level has languished for sometime now. It needs to pick up again not only for the sake of the relations between Nagaland and Assam but for the region as well.

## **10. Nagaland – Manipur**

Nagaland and Manipur are two states that cannot do without one another. They have also had a longer relationship from all accounts and they have important affinities.

Manipur (specifically Meitei Community) claims 2000 years of civilization and recorded history. This categorizes them as the community in the region with the longest recorded history. From such records it also appears that Naga tribes were either already there when the Meiteis arrived or they both arrived at about the same time because the Royal Chronicles of Manipur, recorded by king Meidingu Nongda Lairen Phakhamba, during 35-150 A.D., has made mention of Haochong Naga-Kabui Village. Culturally too, the Meiteis talk about the community’s close affinity with the Nagas and that at least in one of their important socio-cultural functions the presence of a Naga man is required for the ceremony.

The Manipur kingdom also had a glorious military past and many Nagas still talk

about Manipuri soldiers coming as far as Kohima. Nevertheless, there was also friendly relations and many from present day Nagaland used to go to the Imphal Valley for trade and commerce. Among them, food and food products, especially fried fish and local liquor were well-known trade and items.

All these seemed quite normal in olden times, and the relations were not troubled, so long each neighbouring village, especially Naga villages which did not have chiefship system, was “an independent sovereign country” and mostly fought individually. Wars and battles, and victories and defeats, were taken as “normal” by both sides and social intercourse resumed soon after. The problem arose in post independence era when states were formed.

A look at the map of Manipur today, the total geographical area of the Valley, where the majority Meitei community is concentrated, and the surrounding areas, which are in multiple terms compared with the Valley area, do not “balance” In deed the Meitei community, with the oldest recorded history in the region, and at one time the kingdom that commanded the surrounding areas, today, has become totally locked in by the periphery! (For instance, right from Dimapur, on Nagaland-Assam border, up to Senapati, just before descending into the Imphal Valley, deep inside Manipur, the chain of Naga villages continue unbroken). It is understandable that the Meitei community should find such a situation difficult to accept. The community has further become confused and riven from within. The Naga and Kuki tribes in Manipur too have been wrapped up in their own issues/problems and there has been little space for understanding. This was made worse by real and perceived wrongs, by non-Meitei populations of Manipur, that the Meitei community was trying to grab the entire cake of the State for itself.

After formation of the two States, there appears to have been very little interaction between Nagaland and Manipur as States. Even the people to people Naga-Meitei relations have been mostly through the Naga tribes of Manipur and are affected by the ups and downs in current relations. The main characteristics may be put down as follows:

- (i) There is much resentment among Naga tribes of Manipur towards Meitei community and their alleged attitudes. Such feelings are transferred to Naga tribes of Nagaland who feel they have a duty to stand with fellow Naga tribes. The result has often been bandhs, blockades of highways and agitations, even violent ones, by the two

communities targeted at one another.

- (ii) Both communities, at state political leadership and community levels, give more store to playing up to Delhi and influencing it than listening to one another and heeding each other's pleas. This aggravates the divide between the two communities. For instance, the Meitei community, in the name of Manipur, are strident about maintaining the territorial boundary of Manipur. And they have received sympathetic hearing from the rest of India. But what must be understood is that the demand for Naga integration is also from within Manipur. The Nagas claim that they are not asking for Meitei population or lands to be integrated with Naga areas. These are areas both communities may need to address before solutions can be found. If the Meitei community can rise up together and bring understanding among the different communities inside Manipur State, they would not only greatly solve their internal problems but make a tremendous contribution to the region and promote India's relations with Myanmar.
- (iii) At the moment, Murphy's Laws, that whatever is bound to go wrong will go wrong, seems to be operating in Naga-Meitei relations. There was an earthquake-like agitation by the Meitei community of Manipur in 2001, when the Naga Cease fire was extended to Manipur and other parts of the North East. It had to be finally withdrawn by GoI. But its after-shocks continue to this day in the resentment of both communities towards one another. However, this was not the first time the Naga cease fire was extended to Naga areas of Manipur. There was a precedent in the 1964 ceasefire when Naga inhabited areas of Manipur were, for the first time, officially brought within the ambit of the Naga political issue – and Naga tribes of Manipur began to enlist in the Naga movement. The other well-known agitation going on in Manipur is against the infamous Armed Forces Special Powers Act. Everyone supports the demand to have it removed. But the level of support the Meitei community deserves, on this issue, has not been forthcoming within Manipur itself and they have been carrying on the agitation by themselves. Two possible reasons for the lukewarm support. (a) The other communities within Manipur look on present agitation with suspicion and consider it as Meitei community seizing advantage of an incident, however justified, to garner support and sympathy and to maintain media attention. And the Meitei community has not done itself justice because it is perceived as showing little inclination to reach out

to the other communities in the State and sharing the platform with them. (b) There could even be resentment from communities like the Naga in view of the fact that ever since the promulgation of this Act, which was initially specifically targeted at “Naga insurgency”, 45 years ago, the Nagas had been fighting a lone battle against it.

- (iv) Happily, trade and commerce between the two States have not been affected by these “weighty” political considerations. Textiles (including blankets), garments and many other consumer goods coming from/through Myanmar, via Manipur, have continued to have a smooth flow. Foodstuff from Manipur, especially dry/fermented fish, is very popular in Nagaland. And many persons from Meitei community do business in places like Kohima and Dimapur in complete safety, even support. Meitei food restaurants are especially popular in Nagaland, particularly along the National Highway 39. Vegetables and other items come to Kohima, from Naga areas of Manipur, for sale on a daily basis and there is even a Mao Market in Kohima.

What is most unfortunate is the poor interaction between the two communities and states. In many ways, Nagaland and Manipur are more interdependent and have similar problems, more so because of lack of “space” (physical and otherwise). Both communities must find ways to meet, inter-act, and understand one another. There is no other way out if the two communities are sincerely committed to securing the future of their coming generations.

It is in this context that the proposed economic land routes (railways/roadways), to East and South East Asia, through the two states are most crucial for them (efforts must also be made for economic growth so that they do not remain mere transit points for goods coming from elsewhere) to help them to find the necessary space and to broaden their horizons. One hopes that New Delhi’s political “space” will find accommodation for such considerations.

## **11. Nagaland – Myanmar**

Ever since the 1826 Treaty of Yandabo, and vivisection of Naga country and population of the tribes, and sheer inability of all concerned to do something about it, the Nagas were fated to have a peculiar and proximate relationship with



Burma (Myanmar). Depending on the perspective of the individual, the relationship between Nagaland and Myanmar can be termed either as “intimate” or “hostile”. This is so because Naga populations, frequently members of the same family/clan, live on both sides of the international boundary – for instance Khiamniumgan, a recognized tribe in Nagaland has, at least, 86 villages inside Myanmar. This is not surprising, given the recent Naga political history and, when the international boundary line, mindlessly and without feeling, runs through the middle of villages, even individual homes. And when most of the population, living along the borders, have only witnessed the wrong end of the gun and have not tasted the benefits of “development” while they are aware of what others are others enjoying. At the official level too the “spectre of insurgency” hangs heavy.

Because of the peculiar nature of the ground situation, Nagaland’s ‘feelings’ with Myanmar has been at the “family level” and, because of these strong feelings of the people, any Nagaland Government will find difficult to adopt an “official position”. Almost the entire international border with Myanmar, through Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, and Manipur, is along Naga inhabited areas. Nagaland State alone has about 215 km of border with Myanmar. For most Nagas, especially in the border areas, Yangon and Delhi are too far away while they continue to live their daily lives, frequently “interrupted” by security forces of both sides – the only “representatives” of Yangon and Delhi many of them have come to know. They also live through the tragedy of witnessing Nagas fighting and killing Nagas, and very often they get caught in the cross-fires of intra-Naga, and Naga factions fighting the security forces of Myanmar and India. To many of them, it would seem that the purpose of their lives was to be “victim of circumstances”.

No doubt, there were other such cases of the same people proximately living across international boundaries. A case in point is the Sami people in Scandinavia. However, there are also striking differences and complexities in the Naga situation:

- (i) The Nagas are a heterogeneous group made up of different tribes unlike the Samis who are more homogenous.
- (ii) In the Naga case, recent Naga political history and struggle against “foreign occupation” pre-dated the independence of the countries in which they live.

- (iii) Modern governance systems, development, education, and modern technology are yet to reach some of the Naga areas in question which are still inaccessible while the Samis live in some of the most developed and progressive European countries.
- (iv) Part of the Naga region lies within the Golden Triangle, characterized by armed struggle, violence and smuggling. Such activities are made easier because members of the same families and clans, tribes etc. live on both sides of the international boundary and there is no way to effectively police the border. The question also, in this case, is how does a government police an area when the policing need is perceived to be “against” the entire population instead of a few errant members?
- (v) Armed struggle continues for Naga independence, with the Naga factions simultaneously fighting the Myanmar and Indian government forces. The Naga issue, today, may also be the oldest unresolved conflict situation left in the world although it has not gained the visibility it might otherwise have had.

All these, understandably, may have made the Burmese/Myanmar and Indian Governments have second thoughts about opening up the area. Moreover, for a long time, while India remained basically ‘inward-looking’, Myanmar was a fairly closed society. But these are fast being overcome especially in the post Cold War World and the crisis that confronted the Asian Tiger Economies. In many quarters, economic prosperity of the people is also being seen as a way of addressing security issues.

In recent years, India has adopted a “Look East” policy. Several regional and sub-regional initiatives have also come up in which both India and Myanmar are playing prominent roles. One example is the BIMST-EC or Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral ‘Technical and Economic Cooperation’, initially consisting of India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Thailand. Nepal and Bhutan have also joined the grouping now. Other efforts both at official, semi-official, and unofficial levels are being carried on. One of these unofficial/semi-official efforts is the BCIM or Kunming Initiative for economic cooperation. It involves Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar with the North East placed plump in the centre of the proposed quadrangle. The initiative is working towards reaching Track I level. There have also been bilateral agreements and collaborative efforts on various projects even if the bilateral volume of trade is still to reach desirable levels. But bilateral cooperation is being

accelerated.

Before returning to Nagaland-Myanmar relations, a few more words may be said, in summary, about India's recent policy initiatives that will necessitate the North East playing important roles in relation with Myanmar.

- (i) India's "Look East" policy aims at better relations with neighbouring countries to promote regional/sub-regional trade and economic relations. In this scheme of things, NE will play the role of bridgehead. This will also restore North East to its pre-eminent historical position.
- (ii) India's relationship with Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) forms the key element to India's "Look East" policy. In 1996, India became a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum and annual summit has been started from 2002. In 2003, India signed a Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation, including a Free Trade Area (FTA) in goods, services and investment. The FTA is expected to come into operation between 2006 and 2016. The annual trade turnover, in the short term, is expected to reach \$30b by 2007 from the present \$13-14b.
- (iii) In connectivity, several measures are promoted/envisaged<sup>8</sup>:
- (iv) BIMST-EC to play important bridge between countries of South and South East Asia "with Northeast Region ensconced firmly in the centre of this bridge". FTA, to come into effect between 2006 and 2017, lies at the core of BIMST-EC activities.
- (v) At the first BIMST-EC Summit, in Bangkok, 2004, India's thrust was to concentrate on regional projects. India offered to host Conference of Energy Ministers in 2005. Proposal also made for Round Table Workshop of Tourism Ministers during 2005 to draw up specific action-oriented programme of cooperation to double tourist flow in five years. India offered Centre for Weather and Climate and GIS. Herbal and traditional systems of medicine, culture, Intellectual Property Rights to protect bio-diversity/traditional knowledge, poverty alleviation and women's empowerment, health care etc. were other components for cooperation.
- (vi) Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) – involving India, Myanmar,

Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam – for cooperation in education, culture, tourism, transport and communications etc. BIMST-EC and MGC will supplement and complement each other.

- (vii) India's policy framework looks at NE and Myanmar as providing the geographical and fast-growing relationship between India and ASEAN. Because of this several infrastructure projects in Myanmar are being supported/financed by India. It is hoped that NE will become an economic "thriving centre"<sup>9</sup>.

## **12. Trade with Myanmar**

Having outlined Government of India's outlook, it would be incomplete without a few words on the current economic relationship as well as a comment on the possibilities of opportunities and dangers of creating "false hopes".

The human and economic situation in Myanmar seems quite dismal. While life-expectancy at birth stands at 57.2 years, the Gross Domestic Product per capita purchasing power parity in dollars was only about 40% of India's, and stands even lower than those prevailing in North East India<sup>10</sup>. 60% of Myanmar's GDP still comes from agriculture and forestry and the share of manufacturing is only 9%. The volume of trade (both exports and imports) is even lower at 2% of GDP. And with US led sanctions, Myanmar has been compelled to reach out to neighbouring countries for border trade.

India is an important destination for export of goods – both formal and informal – from Myanmar. Following the bilateral trade agreement of 1994, the official border trade picked up between the two countries. During 2001, trade with India represented 13% of total exports of Myanmar<sup>11</sup>. The bilateral balance of trade is heavily tilted in favour of Myanmar but, from India's perspective, the volume of trade is insignificant at the moment.

There is also active informal trade going on all across the porous borders with North eastern states, especially through Manipur and Mizoram. During 2000-01, the value of this informal trade was calculated at Rs 224.59 crores<sup>12</sup>. It is estimated that the volume of this informal trade is many times more than the formal trade and may exceed 5% of the total GDP of all NE States combined. Most of the goods travel from Myanmar to India. Most of the manufactured and

consumer goods are also products from China, Korea, Japan, and ASEAN countries. Table 2 (reference year, 1996) gives an interesting composition of the informal imports to North Eastern States.

**Table 2**

<b>Items</b>	<b>% of total value</b>
Textiles (including blankets and garments)	19.87
Food & Beverages (including alcohol)	19.02
Animals (pigs to Mizoram)	2.40
Electronic Goods	9.79
Precious Stones and Gold	43.09
Miscellaneous	5.83
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Baruah, Srinath. 2000. *Certain Observations on Informal Border Trade with Neighbouring Countries and Economic Prospect of North Eastern Region*, New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House; and M P Bezbaruah. *Seminar Papers*. 2004.

It may be mentioned here that the above figures are:

- (i) estimates of studies from the more known routes of trade across the North East.
- (ii) narcotics and small arms etc. have not been taken into account although these are known to be traded across the border.

### **13. Does Present Trade Help NE Economy?**

According to Bezbaruah, the present scenario only presents “hypothetical gains” for the North Eastern region because most of the goods being traded across the border are not produced in the region and they only satisfy the consumption demands of the region. There are hardly any production and income-generating effects in the region. This is true even on the Burmese side as they only serve as a route for goods from third countries.

Bezbaruah cautions on two other fronts. For the proposed FTA to come into operation certain conditions will have to be fulfilled first – such as elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers, harmonizing domestic economic policies, especially

in the area of tax structure, problem of third country import, despite agreement on rule of origin etc.

Secondly, giving in to the temptation (easier and favoured?) of moving the goods traffic through the Sea Route would make the NE a “dead-end market” for goods coming from newly industrialized countries of Asia. In other words, NE will become a “dumping ground” for goods from other countries – back to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Colonial Period?

For the NE to benefit, a functional FTA, to which all concerned countries are committed, must first be in place. Secondly, not only a good proportion of the goods traffic must flow through the North East but efforts must also be made to encourage production and income generation within the region. But these two conditions will depend on other factors such as

- (i) Comparative cost of “movement of goods from origins to destinations”;
- (ii) General security considerations along the routes;
- (iii) Minimal delays due to official red tape along the routes;
- (iv) Internal ground situations in both India and Myanmar and their security concerns.

The prospects for the region will improve, to a great extent, once the proposed Trans Asian Highway and the regional Railway networking are in place.

#### **14. Nagaland Initiatives**

##### ***International Trade Centres<sup>13</sup>***

Nagaland’s border with Myanmar is entirely porous as families, clans and tribesmen continue to live on both sides of an international boundary that makes no sense to them and one that they do not recognize. Naturally, the people on both sides also do not consider each other as having different identities and they resent anyone who would make such a suggestion. Nagaland Government has also become more forward looking and progressive in the last few years as witnessed by the number of new initiatives that have been started.

Such circumstances have led to the opening of International Trade Centers (ITC) along the State's border with Myanmar. So far, the Nagaland Government has launched two such ITCs – one at Longwa (Mon District) and another at Pangsha (Tuensang District). These ITCs, at the moment, are little more than sheds and the goods traded are mostly surplus primary produce of farmers but they provide the necessary platform to facilitate the people living in the border areas to officially carry on trade with one another. The volume of trade, currently, is hardly anything to talk about. And the operation of the ITCs largely depends on people's surplus. But the potentials, and other socio-political considerations, far outweigh the value of the present volume of trade. The entire border, of course, is porous and there are many access routes. Formalizing the exchange of goods, and giving it legal status, only help in identifying each other's requirements/complementarities, encourages production in bigger quantities, and creates better relations across the border.

#### *The 'X' Road Proposal<sup>14</sup>*

In the above context, a project proposal of the Nagaland Government, called "the X Road" may be mentioned. This could help synergize Nagaland's economy, especially in the context of the complex nature of the tribes, and it would prepare the State to play its role when the North East "corridor" is finally opened to East and South East Asia. Simply stated, the concept proposes two roads in Nagaland, in the shape of an X, linking the food producing areas with the mineral producing areas of the State, as well as with the neighbouring States in India, and both roads ending up on the border with Myanmar. This proposal is yet to be accepted by New Delhi but the proposal deserves serious consideration.

Even from the purely economic perspective of bilateral trade this has much potential on two counts: (i) Goods from Nagaland, and neighbouring States, can be exported to Myanmar. Besides helping the economy of Nagaland by generating production and employment, this will also help in the balance of trade which is currently heavily tilted in favour of Myanmar. (ii) Once the road and river systems are properly developed the volume of trade will really rise up. Already Myanmar and China seem to favour developing the Irrawady River system for transport. If such a system can be linked with the Salween and the Chindwin, the

potentials become immense.

In the meantime, there has been high awareness, in Nagaland about India's "Look East" policy and the North East becoming the "corridor" to East and South East Asia. The maps (original and revised) about the proposed Trans Asian Highway are being regularly circulated. And there is a palpable sense of excitement whenever the topic is raised. Whether the excitement is a result of a sense of breaking out of prolonged "isolation" (also psychological and emotional) or because of a sense of being part of "history" about to be made, it is both worthy and justified.

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<sup>1</sup> The wisdom of choosing Kohima as the district headquarters would prove decisive in World War II

<sup>2</sup> Nagas who had not been under direct control of the administration

<sup>3</sup> this was especially true in the background of headhunting and cultural differences

<sup>4</sup> in June 1947, a nine-point agreement was signed by Sir Akbar Hydari, Governor of Assam (under whose jurisdiction the Naga Hills fell) and representatives of the Nagas which covered nine points including the formation of a Naga Council under which judicial, executive, legislative and taxation powers and control of weapons while land would not be alienated to a non-Naga and that boundaries must be adjusted to bring back forests transferred under British rule to Assam and to bring the Nagas under one administrative unit "as far as possible." The Chin Hills Regulations and Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations were to apply in the Naga Hills too. But the ninth clause was the most critical and lent itself to the widest of interpretations including that of the Nagas who said it indicated they were free to opt out of India and the accord: "The Governor of Assam as the Agent of the Government of the Indian Union will have a special responsibility for a period of 10 years to ensure the due observance of this agreement; at the end of this period the Naga Council will be asked whether they require the above agreement to be extended for a further period or a new agreement regarding the future of the Naga people arrived at."

<sup>5</sup> Even a retired British civil servant's proposal for a Crown Colony, carving out parts of Burma and the Naga Hills, did not find acceptance.

<sup>6</sup> There were a number of meetings leading to the final discussion with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in New Delhi on 26 July 1960 which declared that Naga Hills would become a state of the Indian Union and 15 other points ranging over legislative, executive and representation (to parliament) powers and that no Act of Parliament would apply to the proposed state unless approved by the state legislature. Other points included control of other Indians to the state by way of an Inner Line Permit system. There was no agreement from Nehru's side on the most sensitive demands to merge other "Naga-inhabited areas" or transfer of reserve forests from Assam to Nagaland as was proposed in the Hydari

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Agreement of 1947 (The World of Nagas, Murkot Ramunny, Northern Book Centre, New Delhi, 1988)

<sup>7</sup> This was a three-point agreement involving representatives of the Naga underground and LP Singh, Governor of Assam and Nagaland on behalf of New Delhi. The third clause was the most important and said that the underground representatives had accepted unconditionally the Indian Constitution; that arms would be deposited at appointed places and that the underground representatives should “have reasonable time to formulate other issues for discussions for final settlement.”

<sup>8</sup> a) In 2003, announcement made for ASEAN airlines to have unlimited flights to Guwahati.

b) India-Myanmar-Thailand Highway project (Moreh to Mae Sot) being discussed. Indian-ASEAN Car Rally from November, 2004, -- Guwahati (India) to Batam (Indonesia) to promote “geographical contiguity”.

c) Feasibility Study started for rail links from Jiribam (Manipur, India) to Kalay (Myanmar) to build “missing links” of about 200 km. Objective is to have Delhi-Hanoi link.

d) To develop coastal shipping services among Bay of Bengal countries during next 5-10 years to have operational infrastructure in place by the time India-ASEAN FTA comes into operation.

e) India-ASEAN “Vision 2020” as roadmap of cooperation during next 15 years.

<sup>9</sup> Rajiv Sikri, Secretary (East) Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), New Delhi, ‘Northeast India and India’s “Look East” Policy’, CENISEAS Forum: “Towards A New Asia: Trans-nationalism and Northeast India”, September 10-11, 2004, Guwahati.

<sup>10</sup> Bezbaruah, M.P., *Indo-Myanmar Border Trade: A Road to Prosperity or a False Hope for India’s North Eastern Region*, CENISEAS Forum: “Towards A New Asia : Trans-nationalism and Northeast India”, September 10-11, 2004). Seminar Papers, Guwahati.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*

<sup>12</sup> Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship, 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Govt of Nagaland, Home Department, Kohima.

<sup>14</sup> Govt. of Nagaland, Planning Department, Kohima.