

# Editorial

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## Political Rumors

Writer - Sh.Ajit

Except for NSCN-IM leaders, NNPGs leaders and interlocutor RN Ravi, people across the country know nothing about what actually had been agreed between them to settle the vex Naga issues. Yet, there are numbers of reports carried by different media houses based on their source. As reports appeared differs from one media houses to another, the best thing that people should rely is the announcement made by the government authority.

As per released by the Government of India, PIB reports said that no final settlement between the Gol, NSCN-IM and NNPGs had been signed and it will only be done after consultation with the Government of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

Being a good law abiding citizen of India, people should be aware and should not let them instigated by political rumors. Chief Minister of Manipur also expressed similar ideas and made an impression that nothing is finalized till date.

On the other hand, many political leaders of Nagaland including those of negotiating parties openly said that final agreement is ready and about to sign the agreement soon. The decisions on Question of flag, nature of constitution, and establishment of Naga Territorial councils in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur are revealed by NSCN (R) leader in an interview yesterday. What the leader said may be right or wrong. PIB Release might be right or wrong. The Government of India does not categorically refute such claims of finalizing the questions of flag, constitution and territorial council. This is the right breeding ground for rumors.

All the peoples of three affected States are in a state of puzzle. They are panicky because there will be divisions - administrative as well as social - in the name of Naga Peace by establishing territorial councils. This panic in collective mind of the people generates many possible answers and escape routes from the fear of being deceived. Thus rumors are generated and transmit these political possibilities. To fight rumor is not telling people not to believe them. The only means to control rumor is to reveal the truth. What is there in the Framework Agreement and what were the things Government of India were talking about with NSCN - IM on the fateful evening of 31 October 2019.

Government of Manipur has sincere commitment to safeguard the interest of Manipur. We should, now, think that all the stakeholders should not act as copy readers of the agreement arrived without them or their knowledge. For a meaningful engagement in the consultative meetings, the people of Manipur in general and Government of Manipur in particular should know the content of the Agreement and do some homework on it.

COCOMI's demand for the content of the Agreement is nothing but to understand the spirit and principles underlying the Agreement. Without knowing these things, there cannot be any realistic and pragmatic approach to any settlement. If the people of Manipur do not know the reality, there will be various rumors circulated in the system. Empower the people by revealing the truth, people will form their own opinion. Moreover, there is another fear among the people - Government of India agreed something that the people of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur will not agree. Will there be enemy swap in the Naga politics?

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## Thursday Meeting Between Centre, NSCN-IM Could Be Crucial to Naga Peace Talks

NSCN (I-M)'s demand for a separate flag and constitution, however, has met with stolid refusal.

Courtesy The Wire  
By: Sangeta Barooah Pisharoty

Representatives of the Centre and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) - the signatories of the framework agreement signed in 2015 to help facilitate a Naga peace deal - will sit for a crucial meeting in New Delhi on October 24.

The meeting holds immense importance considering that it could end the recent stand-off between the two negotiating parties over the issue of a separate flag and constitution for the Naga people, as part of a peace accord.

According to reliable sources in the Nagaland government, the peace deal with the NSCN (I-M) "is in a make or break situation" over the hardening of positions around the issue.

"R.N. Ravi, the government's interlocutor and the state governor, has already announced that a deal with or without the NSCN (I-M) will be sealed by October 31. So we can call tomorrow's meeting the conclusive one with the I-M group. It can go either way," the sources claimed.

On October 10, Ravi held a meeting with Thuingaleng Muivah in New Delhi on the issue. The interlocutor-governor has also met Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently to apprise him of developments.

Aside from stating that Modi had asked him to close the peace negotiations by October, Ravi had also recently accused the I-M group of "mischievously" dragging the talks, adding that they could not go on "endlessly" "under the shadow



of guns".

In a statement issued on October 18 after a meeting in Kohima between various stakeholders, including the seven Naga Nationalist Political Groups (NNPGs), church leaders, United Naga Council, the apex body of the Nagas from Manipur, and non-Naga tribes among others, Ravi reportedly said that a mutually agreed draft comprehensive settlement had already been readied for signatures with them.

"Unfortunately, at this auspicious juncture, the NSCN (I-M) has adopted a procrastinating attitude to delay the settlement raising the contentious symbolic issues of a separate Naga national flag and constitution on which they are fully aware of the government of India's position," the statement said.

In the statement, the governor-cum-interlocutor ruled out the possibility of the Centre acceding to a separate flag and constitution for the Nagas, as demanded by NSCN (I-M).

On categorically being asked about the status of talks over the flag and

the constitution, NSCN (I-M)'s chief of army, Anthony Shimray told *The Wire*, "The flag and the constitution are the legitimate rights of the Nagas because the government of India, through the framework agreement signed with us in August 2015, recognised the unique history of the Nagas and its shared sovereignty with India. It is in the interpretation of these words that we should look at the call for the flag and the constitution; it is for peaceful co-existence. Without it, we don't think Nagas will get an honourable solution."

Shimray, who is part of the ongoing negotiations with the Centre, said, "The framework agreement had raised a lot of hope among the Nagas. Now, you can't call it just a piece of paper, set aside the signatories and bring in some others to roll out a peace accord. The solution must be based on the framework agreement."

The framework agreement remains an undisclosed and secret

document. The Ministry of Home Affairs, in 2017, had refused to share the details of the agreement in reply to an RTI filed by Venkatesh Nayak of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative in New Delhi citing "confidentiality in public interest". The government's decision was later upheld by the Central Information Commission.

Significantly, the NSCN (I-M) top leader said that he was "a part of a meeting with the government of India where we had raised the issue of a separate flag and constitution. The government's side said they will see how best to address it. However, after the reading down of Article 370 in Kashmir, suddenly it is off the table. But Kashmir and Naga issues are two separate issues."

He added, "There has been an effort to bring peace for the last 22 years. This opportunity for peace may not come again and therefore it may be unfortunate if it breaks at this point." Meanwhile, reports say various church leaders have given "a clarion call to the Nagas to begin a fasting prayer for the Naga nation".

The Naga HoHo, the mother body of all the 14 Naga tribes and considered by some to be close to the NSCN (I-M), in a statement issued on October 13, said that an "imposed settlement" would be unacceptable to the Nagas particularly when "core issues" which had led the peace process to reach a deadlock many a times have not been solved "amicably".

Among others, the Nagaland chief minister Neiphu Rio is in New Delhi for the meeting on Thursday.

## BJP's Biggest Challengers Right Now Are the Dominant Agrarian Castes

Courtesy The Wire  
By: Vikas Pathak

This can be seen in the assembly elections results from Haryana and Maharashtra.

The Haryana and Maharashtra assembly election results suggest that the Bharatiya Janata Party's dominance over India, established in May 2019, is already under challenge.

Also, this challenge is likely to follow a pattern: it is dominant agrarian castes that are likely to see themselves as the vanguard of anti-BJP politics. This thread ties the Haryana and Maharashtra election results, and pieces together why pollsters and observers went wrong while reading the verdict.

In Haryana, the Congress under Bhupinder Singh Hooda and the Jannayak Janata Party under Dushyant Chautala performed well above expectations. In Maharashtra, the Nationalist Congress Party did well in pockets. Even the by-polls had similar stories to tell, be it in the Rashtriya Janata Dal's resurgence in Bihar or the NCP's victory in the Lok Sabha by-poll in Satara, Maharashtra.

Haryana has shown clear signs of a Jat backlash against the BJP after the party's absolute dominance over the state in May 2019. Not only did the Congress cross 30 seats out of 90 - denying the BJP a clear majority - but Chautala's JJP, a splinter group of the Indian National Lok Dal, took everyone by surprise by touching double figures.

If the Congress had given charge to Jat leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda, the JJP is primarily a party of the Jat caste. The showing of both the parties suggests that the Jats - a numerically significant dominant caste in the state - have rallied behind these parties and against the Manohar Lal Khattar-led BJP.

This isn't surprising, because the BJP had subtly tried to weave a social coalition of non-Jat Hindu castes in the state. The Jats have been acutely aware that the party's rule is denying them

their dominant status in the state's politics.

What is significant is that not even the reading down of Article 370 of the Indian constitution - Haryana is significantly represented in the Indian armed forces - could ensure a BJP sweep. The Jats, who are present in the army in large numbers, did not take the election as a referendum on Article 370 and voted strategically, with local politics in mind.

While the BJP fared better in Maharashtra, there were signs that the Marathas were backing the NCP in significant numbers.

The most telling example is that of Udayan Rajee Bhonsle, a direct descendant of Shivaji, who quit the NCP after the 2019 Lok Sabha polls to join the BJP. He contested again for the by-poll thus held, this time on a BJP ticket, from his family seat of Satara. The voters in this Maratha stronghold preferred the NCP, and Bhonsle met with defeat. Marathas, a dominant caste in Maharashtra, seem to have chosen their leader Sharad Pawar's party over a leader who claims the legacy of the legendary Maratha king, Shivaji.

The BJP's model in Maharashtra had been the same as that in Haryana: it made a Brahmin, Devendra Fadnis, the chief minister, thus denying the dominant Marathas the political heft they were used to. It also tried to weave together a larger Hindu social coalition while virtually excluding Marathas.

The two states that have gone to the polls are part of a larger pattern. The BJP under Amit Shah had begun a unique social engineering experiment after 2014: Muslims as the primary Other, and the locally dominant Hindu caste as an unstated, secondary, Other. This, it hoped, would make it win votes from across the Hindu social spectrum: from the upper castes, the more backward among the OBCs and sections of Dalits too.

In Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, the Yadavs served as the secondary Other and in Gujarat, the Patidars occupied this status. Initially, the experiment worked well and the BJP swept Haryana, Jharkhand (installing a non-tribal chief minister), Maharashtra and Gujarat. This strategy would combine the anti-Muslim undercurrents in society with anti-dominant caste feelings and offer large sections of Hindus the hope that their cultural and social concerns would be simultaneously addressed by the saffron party.

But this created unease in the minds of members of the dominant castes and they have increasingly begun to see themselves as the social vanguard against the BJP.

It is this undercurrent that has become visible in the fractured Haryana verdict and is also to be seen in the muted success of the BJP in Maharashtra.

The RJD's resurgence in Bihar also suggests a strong Yadav-Muslim effort to defeat the BJP-Janata Dal (United) alliance.

The dominant castes - which are also agrarian communities - are becoming the face of both caste assertion and farmers' consolidation, which will most likely pose the next challenge to the BJP.

Indeed, Hindutva - at its core a Brahmin-Thakur-Bania project that is making gestures to lower OBCs and sections of Dalits - stands in contrast with the interests of dominant intermediate castes like Jats, Yadavs, Marathas, Patidars, etc.

Hindutva could make gains with this social engineering experiment in the last few years - it could attract lower OBCs who despised the dominant castes by offering them more representation, given that it could afford not to field a single Muslim and had a surplus of seats - but this project isn't a guarantee for success. As the economy falters and farm crisis gets deeper, the intermediate dominant

castes can try to assume leadership of rural caste groups and target the BJP politically.

This, in other words, is likely to be the political fault line of the coming years. Hindutva and dominant intermediate castes haven't got along well since the late 1980s, when the BJP was on the rise. Socially, this has meant that the upper castes and dominant middle castes have not seen eye to eye politically from the very beginning in north India. Even when the Congress was the party of the upper castes in UP and Bihar, till the 1980s, it never accommodated rising OBC groups. Later, when the upper castes shifted to the BJP by 1990, the dominant OBCs became its fiercest critics, putting together an OBC-Muslim alliance to defeat the BJP.

However, OBC politics gradually became identified with castes like the Yadavs, and the BJP was able to wean away lower OBCs as Narendra Modi came to power, thus splitting the Mandal constituency down the middle and deepening its own social base.

The dominant agrarian castes are now trying to hit back at Hindutva. If they widen their appeal to win back some of the lower OBCs that are now voting for the BJP, they will be in a position to stem Hindutva's tide.

But, even before that, they will be its fiercest challengers.

Many among the Left and liberals thought that a Dalit-Muslim alliance would take on Hindutva. But this was wishful thinking, more akin to university-level politics. Dalits lack the resources and muscle power to become the vanguard of anti-BJP politics and Muslims will follow whoever can challenge the BJP.

The dominant agrarian castes in different parts of India are the only ones with the resources and the drive to challenge the BJP. The Haryana and Maharashtra elections represent the beginning of this challenge.

Vikas Pathak is a senior political journalist who teaches at the Asian College of Journalism, Chennai.