

The Naga Peace Process: Breakdown, Factionalism, and the Way Forward

I. Contextual Overview

- The Naga peace process began formally in 1997 with the ceasefire between GoI and NSCN(IM), culminating in the 2015 Framework Agreement.
 - However, the process is now at a strategic crossroads, with rising internal dissent, tribal factionalism, and external pressures from Myanmar-based militant splinter groups.
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II. Key Issue: Defection of Ikato Chishi Swu

- Symbolic Impact: Being the son of NSCN(IM) founder Isak Chishi Swu, his defection undermines the legitimacy and cohesion of NSCN(IM).
 - Allegations:
 - Leadership corruption and intelligence agency manipulation.
 - Marginalization of non-Tangkhul tribes (e.g., Semas).
 - Consequences:
 - Tribes may realign loyalties.
 - NSCN(IM)'s dominance over the narrative of the Naga struggle weakens.
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III. Role of the Myanmar-Based Faction

- Leaders: Absalom Raman and Hangshi Tangkhul.
- Activities: Mining, syndicates, alleged collaboration with the Myanmar junta.
- Security Risk: Possibility of increased militant activity, narco-trafficking, and undermining of the peace process.

IV. The 2015 Framework Agreement: A Stillborn Accord?

- Ambiguity: The terms such as “shared sovereignty” are undefined, leading to conflicting interpretations.
 - NSCN(IM)’s Core Demands:
 - Separate flag, constitution, and a Greater Nagalim.
 - Post-Article 370 Stance: Centre unwilling to accept symbolic concessions.
 - Parallel Track with NNPGs: Weakens NSCN(IM)’s claim to singular representation of Naga interests.
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V. Structural Factors Undermining Peace

- Factionalism:
 - From the NNC-NSCN split post-1975 Shillong Accord to NSCN(IM)-NSCN(K) in 1988.
 - History of India and Myanmar leveraging factions for strategic advantage.
 - Tribal Politics:
 - Tangkhul (Manipur-based) dominance is resented by other tribes (e.g., Semas, Aos, Lothas).
 - May provoke a realignment of tribal loyalties across factions.
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VI. Strategic and Security Implications

- National Security: Myanmar faction’s militarization threatens the ceasefire architecture.
- Act East Policy: Stability in Nagaland and border areas is critical for projects like the Kaladan Corridor, India-Myanmar-Thailand Highway, etc.
- International Law Dimension: Myanmar-based insurgents operating across borders raise questions about transnational militancy, non-state actors, and refugee crises.

VII. Recommendations for Course Correction

Domain	Recommendations
Political Dialogue	Restart trilateral talks (NSCN-IM, NNPGs, GoI) with third-party facilitation from Naga civil society and churches. Publish a white paper clarifying the Framework Agreement.
Internal NSCN Reforms	Encourage tribal rotation in leadership roles, establish independent ombudsman mechanisms, and reduce personalism in decision-making.
Border Security	India-Myanmar joint monitoring mechanism to tackle militant camps and mining syndicates in Sumra tract.
Developmental Strategy	Special package for employment, connectivity, education, and infrastructure in hill districts under a Naga-specific version of the Aspirational Districts Programme.
Symbolic Autonomy	Cultural autonomy under Article 371(A) could be expanded via new legal instruments—e.g., a ‘Naga Cultural and Autonomy Council’ without political secession.

VIII. Conclusion

The peace process is at a critical juncture where symbolism, sovereignty, and internal legitimacy collide with geopolitical pragmatism. If unresolved, factionalism could unravel not just the Naga talks but also threaten India’s stability in the Northeast. A transparent, inclusive, and time-bound approach, guided by trust and accountability, is the only path forward.

UPSC Linkages

- GS Paper II: Federalism, India's internal security challenges, North-East insurgencies, Role of civil society.
- GS Paper III: Border security, organized crime, external state and non-state actors.
- GS Paper IV: Ethical dilemmas in conflict resolution; leadership and integrity in public life.
- Essay Paper: "Peace without justice is a truce, not a resolution."