

Chapter 4

United Naga Council (UNC)

Introduction

The reorganization of United Naga Council (UNC) with an objective to work as an apex organization of all the Nagas inside the territorial boundary of Manipur took place in 1992. With it UNC took a formal resolution that UNC shall thenceforth be the only custodian to organize and celebrate 'Lui-Ngai-Ni'¹. Mr. RK. Theko, ex-Naga MLA was the President of the UNC in its initial

period from the year 1992 -1995. It claimed as an apex Naga tribal 'Hoho, in Manipur. Anal, Chiru, Chothe, Kharam, Koireng, Lamkang, Mao, Maram, Maring, Monsang, Moyon, Poumai, Puimei, Tangkhul, Tarao, Thangal and Zeliangrong have been classified by the UNC as tribes in the Naga identity.² It further claimed itself as the highest institutions of the Nagas settling in Manipur based on the oldest form of democracy and Naga village republics where all the Naga tribes are equally represented and the heads of the respective tribal Hohos are democratically elected for a specified period of years to hold the office by the august house. The UNC asserted that the Nagas in Manipur occupy contiguous areas and have lived their lives, with their own culture and values.³

UNC vis-à-vis Kuki-Naga Clash

UNC was also alleged as the over-ground wing of NSCN (IM) by the Government of India when the Kuki-Naga clash was at its height.⁴ More recently also United Naga People Council (UNPC) Secretary General Lansa mentioned that UNC worked

as the frontal organization of the NSCN (IM).⁵ The Kuki-Naga clash had led to serious casualties both in terms of human lives and material loss. This had created a situation of humanitarian crisis. For the first time, UNC came together with the apex body of the Kuki, Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM) and formed the Committee for Restoration of Normalcy (CRN) with equal number of representatives from the KIM and the UNC. For sometime UNC and KIM under the banner, CRN organized and rendered services towards bringing normalcy in the state by organizing series of joint meetings, seminars, combined tour programmes in affected areas, joint Christmas feasts, peace feasts, pulpit exchange programmes, etc. On 27 July 1996, President of the UNC, G. Gaingam and the President of Kuki Inpi, Holkhomang Haokip along with Rishang Keishing, Chief Minister of Manipur and Ngamthang Haokip, Minister of Excise and Taxation issued a signed statement addressing as "Beloved Kuki and Naga Brethren" appealing for cooperation and support in the earnest effort for restoration of peace and normalcy

amongst the members of Kuki and Naga tribes in the state. It states-

"... The Kukis and Nagas believe in one god only who is their creator and in whose images they are created.

The Kukis and Nagas are Christians, believers in and followers of Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of god

The Kukis and Nagas belong to Mongoloid race and thus they are racially and religiously one only.

That Kukis and Nagas for generations have been living together in the hill areas of the state in most friendly and neighbourly manner sharing joys and griefs of social, economic and political life.

The Kukis and Nagas have to continue to live together now and in future also as they did in the past. The two tribes can never be separated now or in future.

... Passengers have been pulled down from buses and butchered, innocent people including women and children have been tortured and killed. So many villages have been senselessly burnt and destroyed.

These are inhuman, barbaric, unreligious and senseless acts and are totally uncalled for. Enough is enough and it must be stopped here and now.

Beloved Kuki and Naga Brethren, for the sake of our race, our state, our humanity and above all for the sake of our dear Lord Jesus Christ, we call upon those involved directly or indirectly in Kuki-Naga ethnic clashes to stop forthwith all such acts and never more to return to the cult of violence. Forgive and forget the past happenings as our Lord has forgiven guilts/sins of each one of us. Let us start altogether a new life of peace and amity among the Kuki and the Nagas...."

However, CRN did not last long. It goes to oblivion without any significant achievement as KIM withdrew from it in the later middle part of 1997. KIM's withdrawal was impelled by the welcoming of GoI-NSCN-IM Ceasefire by the UNC and its expressed desire to extend it to Manipur. KIM termed it as the second quit notice to the Kukis.⁶ At two separate instances, first in 27 May 1996 and second in 12 February 1997, some non Thadou Kukis got killed and injured in the attack by Naga

assailants. In it the UNC representing the Naga communities immediately bought peace by paying adequate compensation and also by expressing unqualified apology to the apex bodies of the tribal groups concerned to which the victims belonged. UNC on the other hand show no such urgency in the case of the Thadou Kukis.⁷

After the eruption of Kuki - Naga clashes in the middle part of 1992, UNC issued 'quit notice' signed by the President, RK Theko to the Kukis on 22 November, 1992 to leave their villages. UNC during the Presidentship of Mr. RK Theko, ex-Naga MLA seriously felt the need of the formation of an apex Naga social organization by encompassing of all the Naga tribes by transcending the existing artificial boundaries, though it could not be materialized due to various factors. UNC with the assumption of Mr. G. Gaingam as its President, the issue was forcefully tabled before the house whenever the delegates of UNC have the opportunity to any joint sessions with the Naga Hoho of Nagaland state and other organizations. Prior to the

formation of Naga Hoho, the Nagas of Nagaland state have also been initiating to institute such an organization for all Naga Hohos to facilitate taking decisions on all matters of the Nagas. But the Wokha Summit of 1994 and Kohima Summit of 1995 have adopted a formal resolution to confine such a social body to the Nagaland state only. It was only in the Phek Summit that the Naga Hoho approved the participation of only two representatives from the UNC in the Liaison Committee. The Liaison Committee held on 30/1/1995 formally agreed to induct four more representatives from four Naga districts of Manipur. Since then UNC persistently advocated for the issue of immediate formation of an apex Naga social body at different levels. UNC became a part of the Joint Liaison Committee with the joint formal announcement by UNC and Naga Hoho on 17 September 1996. It further agreed to have 14 representatives from the state of Nagaland and 15 representatives from UNC on the basis of the existing number of tribes in both the states. In the Zuhneboto Session (March 10-12, 1998) which finally shaped the

formation of the apex Naga body, Naga Hoho. It was during the said session that constitution of the Naga Hoho was adopted on 11 March 1998. In the said session 56 delegates from UNC attended it.

UNC on Killing of Tangkhuls in Nagaland

Enraged by the assassination of Mr. Povezo Soho by NSCN-IM in 1995 the Chakhesang in Phek District of Nagaland issued quit notice on Tangkhuls in Phek and the NSCN-IM responded with a death sentence on those who signed the Quit Notice. As a follow on, 21 Tangkhuls were killed in Kohima and Dimapur by unidentified gunmen during the period from 8 May 1995 to 6 June 1992.⁸ UNC called an emergency crisis on 17 October 1995 and resolved to depute a high delegation of UNC comprising of UNC executives, church workers, All Naga Students' Association Manipur (ANSAM) Executives, Naga Womens Union Manipur (NWUM) executives to Nagaland to study the causes, motives and help in defusing the volatile

situation by contacting various organisations, individuals and the Government of Nagaland. Accordingly UNC met the functionaries of Naga Students Federation (NSF), Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR) - Nagaland sector, Chairman of Kohima Bara Basti, Executive members of Northern Angami Public Organisation, Chairman and Advisor of Tenemya Union, Elders of Khonoma village, Dimapur Citizen Forum, Mr. Vero, (ex MP), Mr. Vamuzo, MLA and Opposition Leader and ex Chief Minister⁹.

UNC for Naga Unification

The GoI-NSCN (IM) Ceasefire came into effect on 01 August 1997. The United Naga Council in the 'Emergency Meeting held at Ukhrul on 22 August 1997 resolved to welcome, appreciate and endorse the Cease-fire Agreement of 25th July 1997 entered between the GoI and the NSCN. It also expressed its whole hearted support to the dialogue between the GoI and the NSCN and also appeals both the parties to honestly attempt

and reach a lasting solution to the "long drawn Indo-Naga political issue". It also resolved to insist that the four districts, namely, Ukhrul, Chandel, Tamenglong should necessarily be included in within the purview of the Cease-fire. A nine member delegation of UNC under the leadership of Mr. G. Gaingam stationed at Delhi from 17 October to 20 November 1997 to meet the Indian authorities to press the demand of extension of ceasefire in all the Naga areas of Manipur and to include "Manipur Naga and their land in the purview of the political dialogue." The said team met Prof. Meijinglung Kamson, (then) Member of Parliament; Mr. Rajesh Pilot, Former Union Minister of Internal Security (State); Mr. Sitaram Keshri, President, Indian National Congress (INC); PV Narashima Rao, Former Prime Minister of India; Mr. Oscar Fernandes, General Secretary, All India Congress Committee(AICC) and in-charge Northeast Affairs; Mr. George Fernandes, President Samata Party; Mr. Indrajit Gupta, Union Minister of Home Affairs; Mr. Arun Bhagat, Director, Intelligence Bureau; Mr. GK Pillai, Joint

secretary (Home), Northeast; Mr. Ashok Kumar, special secretary (Home); M. Padmanabhaiah, Officer on Special Duty, Cabinet Secretariat; and Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, etc.¹⁰ In the wake of the violent agitation in Manipur following the extension of Indo-Naga Cease-fire area coverage beyond territorial limits on 14th June 2001, the United Naga Council (UNC) took the initiative and under its aegis held the special session of Naga Peoples Convention (NPC), which claimed to be the apex decision making platform of the Nagas of Manipur on 8th and 9th August 2001 at Tahamzan (Senapati) and declared "that our identity and history have to be defended and preserved at all cost, and the firm political stand of the Nagas of Manipur is to uphold the resolution of the Naga people for integration of all Naga areas under one administration".¹¹ The 9th August 2001 Session of the Naga Peoples Convention, Manipur held at Senapati reiterated the desire for the integration of all contiguous Naga areas under one administrative unit and directed the United Naga Council to single mindedly work towards that goal.¹²

The Chief Minister of Manipur in the year 2005 declared 18 June, the day 18 people laid down their lives in Imphal in protest against the extension of GOI-NSCN-IM Cease fire "*without territorial limits*" on the day in 2001, a state holiday calling it "*Integrity Day*".¹³ In protest and in renewed call for Naga Unification, the UNC with the support of other Naga Organisations organized a Rally on 16 June in four hill districts and subsequently called a bandh on 21 June and thereafter followed by an economic blockade of the state on National Highway (NH)-39 and NH-53.

UNC convened another session on the 4th of November 2005 at Taphou village, Tahamzan (Senapati), which reiterated the 8-9 August Declaration. To further the realization of this declaration, the NPC also declared the launching of Non-Cooperation and Civil disobedience Movement against the Government of Manipur. In pursuance of the 4th November 2005 declaration, Hill house Tax of the year 2006 of all the Naga households in Manipur have not been paid to the Government

of Manipur but have instead been collected under the aegis of the UNC for onwards payment to Delhi/Kohima.

UNC in Mainstream Politics

UNC as members of Action Committee of Naga Hoho/NGOs for enforcing ban in the election held under Indian constitution took part in ensuring that the Naga public refrained from participating in the assembly and general election at the Naga inhabited areas of Manipur and Nagaland in the year 2008. The strictures in the Indian held election was carried out under the banner, "Nagas want solution not election." In fact, what prompted the UNC to enforce the strictures was that the Nagas had experienced peace after many years and that UNC had the apprehension that the exercise of democratic process of election might prove "disastrous and treacherous for the Nagas." What came as its consequence was that in Manipur Naga candidate failed to return from the outer parliamentary constituency and from the reserved assembly seats for scheduled tribes too many Naga MLAs failed to return from

their respective constituency. In fact only 9 Naga MLAs got elected whereas Kukis got elected in 11 assembly seats. In the process this discredited the mainstream Naga political leaders and led to the loss of their significance. At such situation Muivah, the leader of NSCN (IM) was to a large extent successful in resurrecting himself as the sole leader of the Naga community.¹⁴ With the 9th general assembly election in hand, the UNC, its constituent Tribe Councils/Hohos and the Naga civil societies have decided to define the objectives with which the Naga people must approach the same for securing representatives through whom the voice of the Naga people can be articulated loud, clear and consistently. They are outlined as follows:¹⁵

- To fulfill the inherent and democratic aspiration of the Naga people for unification of all homeland;
- To mobilize the peoples' fullest support of the ongoing Indo-Naga political dialogue for an honourable solution;
- To provide leadership to society in nation building; and

- To promote the common interest of all ethnic communities in the state.

As a democratic people, we have matured over the years because our practice of democracy is rooted in our culture and tradition. The compulsions which have been determined political participation in the past that have been defined by personal, economic and tribal considerations in the geo-political dynamics of what is the present state of Manipur are no longer relevant to the march of the Naga to their destiny

The UNC claimed themselves to be mandated by the Naga people through the NPC declaration of August 2001 to carry forward the declared objectives of the declaration. UNC consider the 9th Assembly Election in Manipur as the opportune moment to uphold and exercise the principles of the NPC declaration, so that every tribe through its villages while reiterating the NPC resolution from the grass root level develops the Naga perspective through which the Nagas will as a people negotiate the forthcoming said election. At this crucial

juncture, the UNC appeal to the Nagas of Manipur to choose /elect only those candidates who have no party affiliation whatsoever, who enjoys the confidence of their respective constituencies who are god fearing and who subscribes to the NPC declaration and the above 4 objectives to work unitedly with his/her other fellow Naga representatives elected in the same manner. The UNC appeals to the Naga people and all the tribal council /Hohos to value our inherent democratic where people are empowered to make decisions based on consensus which has always been for the larger interest. This election must reflect the wish of the Naga people to live together with their Naga brethren and not fall victim to propagandists, party politics or forces inimical to the Naga aspiration which is embodied in the NPC declaration, the UNC stated.

The UNC appeal to the Naga people of Manipur through their respective tribal council /Hohos, churches; intelligentsia; professionals; women, youth and student's organisations to rally behind the goal to mutually strengthen for the unification of the

Nagas. The Nagas of Manipur have to go beyond the immediate compulsions of personal gains; family, clan, village, and tribal interests and political opportunism to ensure the return of responsible candidates with clear visions who will represent the Nagas aspirations and carry forward our struggle for peace, justice, and freedom, the UNC reiterated.

On 3 August 2006, UNC took a resolution wherein Naga candidates had been instructed against contesting the 9th Manipur assembly Election under any national political parties and intimated to all the sitting Naga MLAs.¹⁶ With it a verbal spat erupted between the Congress MLA, RK Theko and UNC when a newspaper cited the former saying that the NSCN-IM is attempting to wipe out the Congress Organisation from the Naga areas through the UNC.¹⁷

A wave of resignation by Naga MLAs took place ahead of the 9th Manipur assembly Election in which five sitting legislatures namely Samuel Jendai, Henry Paotei, Danny Shaiza, BD Behring and Wungnaoshang Keishing resigned from the

Manipur State assembly in support of the ongoing GOI - NSCN-IM peace process and 'to fulfill the inherent and democratic aspirations of Naga people' for "*unification of all Naga Homeland*".¹⁸

In the UNC sponsored Meeting of the all the intending Naga candidates for the Manipur Assembly Election 2007, 60 Naga intending candidates signed the Eight Point Declaration. The Declaration states:

"I willfully support the ongoing Indo-Naga Peace talks for a negotiated and honourable Solution. On being elected I will steadfastly defend the interest of the Naga people for the integration/Unification of the Naga Areas; That I will resign from the Manipur Legislative Assembly if called upon to do so by the Naga people represented by the UNC; ... I declare that I will accept without any reservation whatsoever, the candidature of the particular person who is determined by the Naga people represented by the UNC to be the consensus candidate; ...I shall not defect/ split/ merge

to any political party without the approval of the Naga people represented by the UNC. Failing to fulfill the above Commitments and Declaration, I and my witness shall be made liable to any measures adopted by the Naga people."

If the past incidences of involving the Naga ethnic armies in changing the course and outcome of electoral politics is of any indication the putting up of 11 UNC sponsored Naga candidates poses a potential to devastate the prospects of all the political party (ies) in the Naga dominated areas of Manipur. United Naga Council (UNC) floated a common front which has been christened as the United Naga Democratic Front (UNDF) with Kho John as its convenor. The colour of the flag is blue and its symbol is candle. In its manifesto¹⁹, it pledges- to mobilize the people for fullest support to the on-going Indo-Naga political dialogue for an honourable solution; to provide leadership to society in nation building; to fulfill the inherent and democratic aspirations of the Naga people for the

unification of all the Naga Homeland; to promote common interest of all the ethnic communities in the state.

At the 9th Assembly Election held in 2009, UNC fielded their candidates in the assembly constituencies of four hill districts of Tamenglong, Ukhrul, Senapati and Chandel. UNC fielded their candidate in all the three ACs of Ukhrul District. They are Phungyar, Ukhrul and Chingai. In the six assembly constituencies of Senapati District, namely, Saikul, Karong, Mao, Tadubi, Kangpokpi and Saitu. UNC fielded its sponsored candidate in all the constituencies excepting the assembly constituencies in the "Sadar Hills" areas as the area is overwhelmingly dominated by the Kukis in terms of population size²⁰

In Karong Assembly Constituency of Senapati District, UNC sponsored candidate was defeated by D.D. Thaisii of Indian National Congress (INC) by securing 14655 votes. UNC\UNDF candidate K. Raina bagged the berth for Tadubi

assembly constituency. In Mao AC, UNC sponsored candidate, Kho John who is also former UNC President was among the unsuccessful candidate.

In Ukhrul District, UNC\UNDF sponsored candidate swept all the three seats. Victor Keishing an INC candidate was squeaked through by the independent (UNC\UNDF) sponsored candidate K. Wungnaoshang by a slender margin of only 123 votes as the later polled 10700 votes as against the 10577 votes polled by him in Phungyar AC. In 44 Ukhrul AC, Danny Shaiza with a vote poll of 10267 votes defeated his nearest rival AS Arthur of INC who is also the former Cabinet Minister secured 8399 votes. In Chingai former Minister Dr. Khasim Ruivah, got the better of sitting MLA and INC candidate A. Aza by securing 17796 votes as against 8399 polled by INC candidate.

In Tamenglong District, there are altogether three assembly constituencies, namely, Tamei, Nungba and Tamenglong. UNC fielded Awangbow Newmai as their candidate in Tamei

Assembly Constituency (AC). He got elected by defeating sitting MLA and INC candidate, Z. Mangaibou as Newmai got the better of the later by securing 7042 votes. In Nungba AC, UNC had earlier fielded former Technical and Higher Education Minister, Gangmumei Kamei but he was ditched in the last minute by the UNC by withdrawing the support. Subsequently MPCC President, G. Gaikhangam retained Nungba AC by securing 11595 votes as against 6012 votes polled by Gangmumei Kamei. In Tamenglong AC, UNC fielded Samuel Jendai, a self professed votary of Naga Integration. He was defeated by Khangthuanang Panmei by securing 8460 votes as against 6159 votes by Jendai in Tamenglong AC. His success is a direct blow to the NSCN-IM and the aspiration of its promised land 'Nagalim' as he was forced to announce retirements from the election by the outfit after he was abducted from his residence.

UNC fielded their candidates in both the constituencies of Chandel district too. They are Chandel AC, and Tengnoupal

AC. In Chandel AC, UNC fielded Francis Hutten. Along with him there are 10 candidates in the fray. It included L Benjamin,²¹ DN Haokip of CPI, M Sokhapao of Haokip of MPP, Ch Chandramani of SP, Chungjalén Haokip of LJSP, Thiangkholun Haokip of RJD, and D Ringo and PR Salanki Chothe, both independent candidates.²² In the Tengnoupal AC, UNC fielded Former Minister, Morung Makunga. Others in the fray include incumbent MLA DK Korungthang of INC, Onjamng Haokip of CPI, Haopu Haokip of MPP, Chungsei of BJP, Jangkholet Haokip of Samata Party.²³ UNC candidate Francis Hutten was defeated in Chandel AC by Thangkholen Haokip of RJD. He convincingly won the berth for the constituency by securing 17424 votes as former UNC President and his nearest rival L. Benjamin an independent candidate secured only 7563 votes. In Tengnoupal AC, UNC sponsored candidate, W. Morung Makunga defeated his nearest rival Chungsei of RJD by securing 21408 votes as against 19321 polled by the later.

Notes and References:

1. Lui-Ngai-Ni as a common festival of the Nagas in Manipur was reinvented in 1988 with state patronage during the Chief Ministership of Rishang Keishing who himself was a Naga.
2. UNC, Issues Relating to Territorial Integrity of Manipur - A Naga Perspective, 1996.
3. Ibid.
4. Does Violence get a Mandate, GoI publications, 1993, P.25.
5. UNPC is a Naga armed group splintered from the NSCN (IM). Its Secretary General Lansa's statement came as a reaction against the claim by the UNC that the formation of the UNPC was the handiwork of enemies of the Nagas and designed to create confusion in the minds of the Naga people.
6. Aheibam Koireng Singh, COFPAI- The Pathfinder, Paper presented in the IIAS, Shimla sponsored National seminar on Ethnic Values and Ideals of Egalitarian Society.
7. Aheibam Koireng Singh, Sub Nationalism and Displacement in North East India with special Reference to Manipur, Insight, Vol.1, Issue 1, Centre for Manipur Studies, Manipur University, Canchipur, 2006.
8. Aheibam Koireng Singh, Ethnicity and Inter Community Conflicts, Akansha, N. Delhi, 2007.
9. UNC, A Brief Report of the United Naga Council Manipur for the year 1995 - 1998, Imphal.

10. UNC, Declaration of Ceasefire and Naga Political dialogue Vs Territorial Integrity of Manipur, not dated.
11. Proceedings of the Special session of Naga Peoples Convention, 8-9 August 2001.
12. Ibid.
13. Those died in the 18th June were addressed as martyrs by the United Committee Manipur (UCM) a conglomerate of Civil society (ies) which spearheaded the agitation against the Ceasefire extension but those in the UNC and other Naga Bodies prefer to identify them in more derogatory terms such as arsonist.
14. Aheibam Koireng Singh, Some Reflections on Land Questions and Ethnic Crisis in Manipur, Paper presented in the National Seminar on Land questions and Ethnic Tension in Northeast India sponsored by MAKAIS, Kolkata.
15. UNC, Call for Democratic Expression of our Birth Right, Position paper on the 9th General Election 2007, Manipur, 2007.
16. UNC issues Clause for Polls, The Sangai Express, Popular English Daily, 03 November 2006.
17. It can be recollected that RK Theko was the President of UNC at a time when it issued Quit Notice to the Kukis in 1992.
18. Pou, John Bashou, Five Naga MLAs Quit, North East Sun, Delhi, 16-31 January 2007.

19. UNC Candidates Float Common Front, The Sangai Express, 7 February 2007.
20. 77 in the Fray for First Phase Poll, The Sangai Express, Popular English Daily, Imphal, 25 January 2007.
21. L Benjamin was formerly a President of United Naga Council (UNC).
22. Six other candidate including former BJP MLA, BD Behring and ST Kohring earlier withdrew their nomination papers. BD Behring had earlier resigned from the assembly of the polls.
23. 16 in Cdl, 15 in Tml Gear up for Poll Battles, The Sangai Express,
24. Popular English Daily, Imphal 17 February 2007.