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Naga Peace Talks

What is the issue?

- As the deadline set by the Centre for wrapping up the Naga peace talks is on October 31, 2019, it intends to meet the deadline soon.
- But some key issues remain unresolved with the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah), or NSCN (I-M).

What are the Naga Peace Talks?

- The talks seek to settle disputes that date back to colonial rule.
- The Nagas are an ethnic community that comprises several tribes who live in the state of Nagaland and its neighbourhood.
- One key demand of Naga groups has been a Greater Nagalim that would cover the state of Nagaland, parts of neighbouring states and Myanmar.
- The British had annexed Assam in 1826, in which they subsequently created the Naga Hills district and went on to extend its boundaries.
- The assertion of Naga nationalism, which began during British rule, has continued after Independence, and even after Nagaland became a state.
- Along the way, the unresolved issues gave rise to decades of insurgency that claimed thousands of lives, including of civilians.

How has the Naga assertion played out historically?

- The earliest sign of Naga resistance dates back to 1918, with the formation of the **Naga Club**.
- In 1929, the Club told the Simon Commission to leave them alone to determine for themselves as in ancient times.
- In 1946, A Z Phizo formed the **Naga National Council (NNC)**, which declared Naga independence on August 14, 1947.
- In 1951, it claimed to have conducted a referendum in which an overwhelming majority supported an independent Naga state.
- By the early 1950s, the NNC had taken up arms and gone underground.

How has the peace talks played out in recent years?

- Before the ongoing talks, which followed a framework agreement in 2015, there were **two other agreements** between Naga groups and the Centre.
- **1975** - A peace accord was signed in Shillong in which the NNC leadership agreed to give up arms.
- Several NNC leaders including Isak, Muivah and Khaplang refused to accept the agreement and broke away to form the NSCN.
- **1988** - Khaplang broke away to form the NSCN (K) while Isak and Muivah headed the NSCN (I-M).
- **1997** - Preceded by rounds of talks since 1995, NSCN (I-M) signed a ceasefire agreement with the government.
- The key agreement was that there would be no counter-insurgency offensive against the NSCN (I-M), who in turn would not attack Indian forces.
- **2015** - The Centre signed a framework agreement with the NSCN (I-M) which set the stage for the ongoing peace talks.
- **2017** - Six other Naga armed outfits under the banner of the Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) joined the talks.

What was in the framework agreement?

- The Government of India has not yet spelt out the details in public.
- Following the agreement, the government recognised the unique history, culture and position of the Nagas and their sentiments and aspirations.
- The NSCN understood and appreciated the Indian political system and governance.
- In 2019, the NSCN (I-M) issued a statement that said Nagaland State does not and will not represent the national decision of the Naga people.
- The statement was in opposition the proposal for a Register of Indigenous Inhabitants of Nagaland (RIIN) in the state of Nagaland.

Where does the territorial demand currently stand?

- In 2018, the official sources had said that the accord being finalised,
 1. Does not change the boundary of states;
 2. Provides autonomous Naga territorial councils for Arunachal and Manipur;
 3. A common cultural body for Nagas across states;
 4. Specific institutions for state's development, integration and rehabilitation of non-state Naga militia
 5. The removal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act.
- The map of Greater Nagalim in the NSCN (IM) vision covers a 1,20,000 sq km sprawl across the Northeast and Myanmar - the area of Nagaland state itself is only 16,527 sq km, a fraction of this vision.
- Amid the anxiety this has caused among citizens in neighbouring states,

state governments have assured them that their respective states' territorial integrity would not be compromised.

- Before the framework agreement, the Nagaland Assembly had endorsed the demand for “integration of all Naga-inhabited areas” as many as five times - in 1964, 1970, 1994, 2003 and 2015.

What are the other issues?

- The government and the NSCN (I-M) have failed to agree on issues relating to a separate Naga flag and a constitution.
- The NSCN (I-M) is not willing to budge from this demand and is looking for a lasting solution.
- But, they are fully aware of the Government of India's position with this.
- A recent statement from Governor's office said the government is determined to “honourably conclude” the peace talks and it is reaching a conclusion stage.
- They have mischievously dragged in the Framework Agreement and began imputing imaginary contents to it.

Where could the disagreement lead to?

- The statement from the Governor's office has given rise to speculation that the government is ready to sign a final peace agreement with other groups without the NSCN (I-M).
- Civil society groups in Nagaland are divided in their opinion.
- Some have said the talks should be wrapped up with whatever is offered now and keep other issues open for later negotiations.
- Others believe all issues should be settled and the NSCN (I-M) should be on board, even if it takes longer than the deadline.

Source: The Indian Express



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