

The Revolutionary Government of Nagaland Joins the National Mainstream

Brigadier N Bahri, VSM (Retd)*

Background

This narration relates to events in Nagaland in August 1973. After years of good work by the army and the civil administration, insurgency was at a low key with the final solution awaiting political initiatives. The insurgents were divided between the Naga Federal Government (NFG) and the Revolutionary Government of Nagaland (RGN); the latter consisted solely of the Semas. While the NFG was still active, resorting to violence and sending gangs to China for training and arms, the RGN was living peacefully in their camps, retaining their arms and awaiting a final settlement with the Government of India. The author had frequently met the self styled Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) of RGN Zuheto Sema and some of their other leaders.

The author was posted as the Brigade Major (BM) of 56 Mountain Brigade – located at Mokokchung, it had the operational responsibility for the district consisting of Mokokchung, Zuneboto and Wokha Sub Divisions. Headquarters 8 Mountain Division was located at Zakhama with Major General AR Dutt as the General Officer Commanding (GOC). The Brigade did not have Brigade Commander since May 1973. Those days there were no Deputy Brigade Commanders, therefore, the responsibility for coordinating operation rested on the BM. Colonel VN Channa was commanding 15 Assam Rifles (15 AR) responsible for Zuneboto Sub Division where the RGN was located. Read on.....

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One day in mid August 1973, I was ordered to report at the Division HQ at Zakhama for briefing. The same afternoon, I left on a six hour road journey in our civil painted jeep in civil clothes. We resorted to this mode of moving around frequently to avoid elaborate armed escorts. The next morning, at about 0800 hrs, the General Staff Officer Grade 2 (GSO2), Major Anand of Engineers, briefed me. Thereafter, I was directed to report to Mr Rammuny, the Adviser to the Governor, Shri BK Nehru at Kohima at 1000hrs. I was to collect an individual and safely produce him at Zuneboto on the third day. On arrival there, Colonel Channa, Commandant 15 AR, would give a detailed briefing about the arrangements for an event to be organised on the appointed day at Zuneboto. At Kohima, Mr Rammuny introduced me to Mr Scatu Swu the self styled Prime Minister of the RGN and I was directed to escort him to Zuneboto by road and produce him for the proposed event.

I had no soldiers except the driver and no arms. I requested Mr Scatu Swu to sit between me and the driver in the front seat of the jeep. I decided to take the longer route via Dimapur and Mariani. We spent a night together at Mariani and a second night at Mokokchung sharing a room to ensure 'togetherness' and consequent safety. While at Mokokchung, I had spoken to Colonel Channa who briefly told me about the parade he was organising for the RGN in his unit area.

We reached Zuneboto and I delivered Mr Scatu Swu to Colonel Channa, CO 15 AR. At that time, the situation became clear to me as under : –

- (a) The RGN had decided to merge with the mainstream and had been promised to be absorbed into the Border Security Force (BSF) as two new battalions.
- (b) The RGN strength of about 1000 personnel were formed up for a Ceremonial Parade with Shri Zuheto as the parade commander. On both wings stood contingents of 15 AR personnel facing inwards.
- (c) The Governor, Shri BK Nehru was to land shortly to accept all RGN weapons as 'gifts'. He in turn would gift an air rifle to Zuheto Sema, the self styled RGN C-in-C. The word 'surrender' was taboo.

(d) One RGN cadre named Shri Zekiye, who had the reputation of being '*master of the ambush*' and had twice been decorated with the underground equivalent of the Param Vir Chakra (PVC), refused to join the parade. He stood about 15 metres to the left of the rostrum with his sten machine carbine fully loaded, in hand. Just behind him and on his sides stood two specially briefed men of 15 AR for instant reaction, if needed.

Having read the situation, I went and stood three feet behind Shri Zekiye and the two 15 AR personnel. Zekiye could easily swivel to the right and empty his carbine in a matter of seconds.

Soon we heard a helicopter which revealed the arrival of Shri Rampal Singh, Deputy Inspector General (DIG), BSF. Shri Rampal was from my Regiment, the Brigade of Guards. He was seated amongst the VIPs. The Governor arrived by a second helicopter. He was escorted to the rostrum. Mr Scatu Swu delivered a speech, followed by the Governor. Mr Zuheto Sema, thereafter, marched up to the Governor and gifted his 'open' revolver to him. The Governor gifted him an air rifle in return. Mr Zuheto Sema then returned to his spot in front of the parade. At a pre-arranged signal, all 1000 personnel of the RGN on parade bent forward and laid down their respective weapons to their right side on the ground. Immediately after that, 15 AR contingents on the two wings marched up, equally ceremonially, and picked up all the weapons and deposited them in two secure enclosures on the two wings.

I marvelled at the effort put in by 15 AR in convincing and drilling the RGN personnel and their own ad hoc drill in securing all weapons with utmost efficiency.

Mr Zekiye still stood his ground. Some last minute cajoling of Mr Zekiye led him to loudly pronounce that he would fire his weapon in the air and then gift it. The Governor was briefed, we stood on our toes, witnessed the firing of Zekiye's carbine and its gifting thereafter. Everyone heaved a sigh of relief.

The Governor left by helicopter, soon thereafter, followed by the DIG, BSF in the second helicopter. I thought the show was over and I could now drive back to Mokokchung. But the real fun was yet to begin.

Within an hour or so, I was informed of a great deal of unrest amongst the RGN personnel. I rushed to where they had gathered. I also got hold of our District Collector (DC), Shri Neheve Jakhalu, himself a Sema. The RGN leaders asked me: Where were their new weapons? *Where were their Olive Green uniforms? Where were their barracks and their rations?* They had been promised all these and enrolment into the BSF. There was, however, not a soul from the BSF anywhere within a hundred miles to either clarify or meet the commitments made to them. The DIG, BSF had made his entry for the parade and had disappeared. Neither, the DC nor I, had any prior notice of this. A thousand men who had lived and survived by the force of their arms for 25-30 years, now had not a single weapon between them and felt quite naked and insecure.

I ordered the 15 AR to allow the newly absorbed (prospective) BSF personnel to take twenty weapons of their choice, along with 100 rounds of ammunition with each weapon from those just 'gifted' by them that morning. The DC ordered both the boys and girls school hostels closed and children to go to their homes. This became the BSF accommodation. The business representatives from the market were summoned by the DC, and details of rations and various other administrative arrangements were also tied up.

I rang up the GOC, Major General Dutt and briefed him on the situation. At my suggestion, the entire stock of all Olive Green (OG) uniforms held with the Ordnance unit at Dimapur was moved overnight to reach Zuneboto the next morning. All civil tailors in town were lined-up for outfitting of individual uniforms. The DC and I stayed back at Zuneboto for two days to oversee the BSF (RGN) affairs.

The 15 AR continued to do a marvelous job, till the BSF officers started to arrive a week later to commence the formal raising of two new BSF battalions – Number 112 and 113. This was indeed a unique experience, which I have cherished since those momentous days of counter-insurgency operations in the early 1970s.

Letter to the Editor

1971 – An Excursion in Sindh : Notings from a Soldier's Diary

(Reference Vol CXLII, No 590, Oct-Dec 2012)

Dear Editor

It has been very interesting reading of the dedication with which young Captain Shekhar Dutt had maintained his Note Book wherein he kept a note of events of the time from 21st October to 18th December 1971. Having known Shekhar Dutt for a very long period, I felt very proud of the fact that he had not only kept a note of these events but also kept his Note Book in his safe custody which provided us an opportunity to share a young officers' adventure and the enthusiasm for combat and the sense of team spirit.

Hope today's young officers will have something to learn from such experiences of yesteryear officers.

Yours Sincerely

*Ms Somi Tandon
IDAS (Retd)*

Dr Gautam Sen, an Associate Member, has written through an e-mail to Deputy Director (Administration), "I wish the rest of India would act with the efficiency and courtesy the USI seems to take for granted in its operations; but then it is run by former members of India's Armed Forces, who have so far managed to escape the many calamities that have undermined its civil society."

*(Dr Gautam Sen is a former Professor of
London School of Economics)*

India and the Allied Occupation of Japan 1945-1952*

Lieutenant Colonel AK Sharma (Retd)**

The title of this book under review is slightly off mark. This is because the author has gone beyond his pale. Whilst he has dealt with the occupation of Japan per se, he has gone on to enlarge the envelope to encompass the entire gamut of Indo-Japanese relations, since 1945. All the same it is very readable.

The Allied occupation of Japan after Victory over Japan (VJ) Day was a major landmark in the history of the Nippon. The Indian contingent was sent as a part of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF). This consisted of two brigades—one of the British troops and the other of the Indian. These two were under Major General DT Cowan, who had served with great distinction in the Burma campaign, especially on the Sittang River during the first Burma Campaign. The nominated Indian 268 Infantry Brigade had 1 Punjab, a Battalion of the Maratha Light Infantry and 2/5 Royal Gurkha Rifles. The British Brigade consisted of Welsh, English, and Scottish Battalions.

The Indian soldiers had had the bad first-hand experience of racial discrimination when they were earlier under the Australians. In the BCOF, for the first time, they stood shoulder to shoulder alongside British troops, on equal footing and status, in a combined force, according to Dr Sareen. This is not entirely true. The British Military Police were openly partial and discriminatory. The *gurkha* soldiers did not appreciate this. Even as the Tommies were let-off by the MPs, the *gurkhas* always got hauled up especially whilst trying to fraternise with the local females. One thing led to another...and, when the *gurkhas could not take it any more*, they almost openly mutinied.

The issue was hushed up. The *paltan* moved to Ikado, Tokyo. Once again the problem of female-company surfaced. This time

* **India and the Allied Occupation of Japan 1945-1952.** By Tilak Raj Sareen, (New Delhi, Life Span Publishers and Distributors, 2013), pp. 258, ₹ 900/-, ISBN 9789381709092.

****Lieutenant Colonel AK Sharma (Retd)** was commissioned into 4/3 Gorkha Rifles on 9 February 1964. In 1965, as a young officer he was awarded the Chief of the Army Staff's Commendation Card for 'galantry in action'. He retired in 1997.

the British officers did what the White MPs had done in Kure. The *gurkhas* felt deeply humiliated, after all they had two living Victoria Cross winners serving alongside, in their *paltan*! They had their self respect, pride and honour; and also the reputation of their valour, loyalty and selfless service to the British Crown at stake. Therefore, one fine morning the *paltan* refused to come on parade. Instead, they staged a 'sit down'. They had to be finally placated and pacified by the Indian Brigade Commander Thimayya. The British Commanding Officer (CO), Lieutenant Colonel Townsend, initially kept his *gurkhas* away from him on one pretext or the other, in tune with the British colonial practice and policy of the times! When the situation did not just go away, he reported to the Brigade HQ. It was only after many attempts that he relented and let the Commander hold a *darbar*.

The BCOF, particularly the Indians, made a lasting favourable impression on the Japanese by their sincere and humane conduct. They never looked down upon them as the vanquished, but instead only as fellow Asians. Besides, they were also appreciative of the way in which the Imperial Japanese government had rendered assistance to the great Indian Nationalist Subhash Chandra Bose and his Indian National Army (INA)—*Azad Hind Fauj*—, during its march ("*Dilli Chalo*"), as a part of the Imperial Japanese Army to Delhi. Equally, the Japanese people impressed the Indian troops very much, especially with their dignified demeanour whilst dealing with the occupation force. A trifle sad perhaps; therefore, that despite all the good work of the Indian brigade, it was soon forgotten in Japan, and mostly ignored in India.

After the Peace Treaty was signed, India was the first country to sign a fresh and independent Friendship Treaty with Japan in 1952, on the termination of occupation by the American troops. It was a simple bilateral treaty officially designated as a 'Treaty of Perpetual Peace and Unity', with hardly any diplomatic undertones. It has endured the vagaries of time and tumult to this day.

Dr Sareen has referred to unimpeachable sources and studies in India and elsewhere abroad in coming up with this rare book on a subject which is even more rare.

A worthwhile read for the research scholar, it is good at least, for a browse, by the layman.