

“Naga Magna Carta Day”
10th Jan 2024 at Longkhum, Mokokchung Nagaland
Presidential Address
By KuolachalieSeyie, President, Naga Club

I on behalf of Naga Club convey our warmest welcome to you all. We greatly appreciate your presence and hosting this occasion when we are commemorating the "Naga Magna Carta Day". As I see it, I believe Naga Club will play its rightful role for our Naga society if on this day every year it becomes known for its factual review of the past, truthful and bold assessment of the present, with the conclusion and lessons thus understood together, the Club contributes its thinking and vision for our people with humble, authoritative confidence.

At the outset, as we today start our review of the progress we have made, we remember with enduring respect, Imkongmeren Ao, our legendary Vice President of Naga National Council (NNC), for the exemplary role he played to establish the roadmap, the Nagas has to walk on the vastly changed times, inwhich we Nagas find ourselves today. He fulfilled his responsibilities with knowledge of the facts of the unchallengeable history of the independent Nagas. We have come to Longkhum today to pay homage to our towering leader, beloved and respected by all Nagas for his clarity and vision on the Naga political position and his unflinching love for the Naga country. We celebrate his life and remember with deep affection all that he gave so sacrificially for the posterity of the younger generations.

And with equal gratitude the steadfast role of our distinguished – all Ao villages in Ao region, for the ways in which they have kept the story of the Naga Movement alive through the chaotic decades of our Naga struggles for the defence of its independence. We thank them for passing on the baton to those who have stepped forward to be responsible for the Naga story.

Our visionary forefathers submitted a historic memorandum to the British Statutory Commission headed by Sir John Simon on 10th Jan. 1929, declaring as “Leave us Alone to Determine for Ourselves as in Ancient Time”, which became the first written Magna Carta of the Naga National Politics and laid down the rock solid foundation of the Naga people’s Rights that gave the legitimacy and the mandate to self- determination. This 10th January every year is a Red-Letter Day for all of us and on this day we look back at our staunch patriotic Naga National pioneers and legend leaders like ImkongmerenAo.

A background to Longkhum Village.

It is leant that during ancient days, Ao people would often asked, *“What is Longkhum saying”*. Mary Mead, wife of Dr.E. W. Clark in her book, *A corner in India*, quotes Mrs. Dowd, *“After many years of siege and storming, the chief fort has been taken to Christianity, Longkhum, the largest village in Ao tribe, and one which has longest withstood our battering rams”*. The smaller villages have been saying, *“When Lungkhum becomes Christian, then we will.”* Such was the authority and influence of Longkhum Village.

Grouping 1957-1958 in Longkhum. Mangmetong their immediate neighbour village was grouped with Longkhum. Mangmetong village was burned a record 18 times by the Indian Army during this grouping.

A brief bio-sketch of Imkongmeren Ao 1900-16th Jan, 1979

Born to father's name Moyaluin and mother Sakulemla . His father served as a Dobashi with the British. Imkongmeren was studying in Jorhat when along with some friends they founded the Ao Students' Conference in Longkhum in Dec. 1929 after the submission of Naga Memorandum to Simon Commission. Accordingly, the first Conference was held on 27th - 29th Dec, 1929 under the theme – *“For the Nation”*. In the Conference a “three stone –fire” was symbolically made to launch the Naga Struggle for Self-Defence in Ao region. One fire stone was planted by LongriAo (Changki) representing religion, another by Nokdenlemba (Waromung) representing art, song and literature; the third by Imkongmeren signifying the Naga political rights and political pillar.

In 1930 Imkongmeren passed class IX from Jorhat. He return to Mokokchung Town and started his business enterprise. In 1933 he bought a shop from a Marwari and named his shop “General Merchant Mokokchung”. He ran the shop till 1953, and was considered the richest man of Mokokchung. Simultaneously, he earnestly, started his political initiative for the Nagapolitical rights in Ao region. Accordingly in 1938, the Ao Tribal Council (ATC, now renamed as AoSenden) was formed with him playing an active role. When NNC was founded in 1946 all NNC activities were carried out by ATC. Consequently when NNC in its 1946 June meeting resolved to form NNC Tribal Council and Tribal Council in each region, the NNC Ao Tribal Council was formed at the end of 1946.

Supongnüklu was made the President, Imkongmeren was the Vice-President. In 1949 he became the President of ATC and held the position for over 10 years. He held the position of ATC Presidentship and NNC Vice-Presidentship simultaneously. And in his jeep he and his team had toured the whole Naga Regions. During those early days he also spoke

about how to preserve and wisely use our mineral resources like coal, oil, natural gas, nickel, limestone, zinc and mica in Naga- land.

When Naga Independence was declared on 14th Aug, 1947 in Kohima; Ao region also, led by P. Shilukaba (Longjang) declared the Naga Independence Day in Mokokchung Town giving out slogans- *Long live – NNC; Long live- Naga Independence; Long live- Naga Nation*. The 14th Aug. celebration concluded at ATC Office. On 15th Aug, the Indian flag that was hoisted outside Mokokchung Post Office was said to be removed by Naga nationalists. The historical Plebiscite was taken under the leadership of NNC President A Z Phizo and NNC Vice President Imkongmeren.

The political situation in Naga Hills deteriorated. Zasibito, the first martyr was killed in Oct, 18th 1952 in Kohima. Soon Govt of India issued arrest warrants against A.Z.Phizo and Imkongmeren. He was forced to go underground in April 1953. With him Imkongmeren took all the family saving of Rs 70,000 for the Naga struggle for its defence. The Indian Army struck the family. Men in uniform with an order from the SDO Dt. 25/5/53 showed up at the doorstep of his family. They ransacked and confiscated his two shops, “General Merchant Mokokchung” and another extended outlet. They also took his jeep and all the essentials in the two shops. It is said that they chased the wife and children out of their house with nothing but the clothes on their bodies. The Govt confiscated their house in May, 1953. The family moved from a relative’s house to another, running from the harassment and threat of the Indian Army.

In 1956 his second and third son – Tiatemjen and Imimatong aged 18 and 16 respectively while studying in Impur Mission School were taken to Mokokchung Jail. His wife, Takotula was often heard saying: “This is not a state of slavery, this is just the beginning in our duty, to secure the Naga freedom.” In Jan. 4, 1974, Imkongmeren was arrested, when he was 71. From 2nd NAP Alichen Commandant he was taken to Mokokchung Army camp. He was again brought by Chopper to the 8th Mountain Division HQ Jakhama, then was taken to Rangapahar Army Camp. Finally he was incarcerated in Nowgaon Jail, not as a political prisoner but as a criminal man.

Each time he was ask to appear before the court, he refused. He would say, “I am not an Indian so my case cannot be taken at an Indian Court.” He was released unconditionally from Nowgaon Jail in 1976. But said that he was given an injection before he was released. As such, his health deteriorated in 1977. While he was in hospital in Mokokchung, he was kept under “House Arrest.” and “Handcuffed” in his almost death bed then heavily guarded him. No one except his son Matong was allowed to

meet him. When his physical condition became medically impossible, the “handcuffed” was only removed on demand in Mokokchung.

Sometime in 1978, the family decided to take him to Calcutta for treatment. His youngest son Imtiyanger along with an ambulance driven by Dr. Sakhrie from Kohima reached Mokokchung to take him to Jorhat airport, he refused. No amount of persuasion could change his mind. Later T. Aliba Imti, the then UDF Party President said, “My Govt will help you, for your treatment.” Imkongmeren told his son, “It is better to die than take Govt’s help.” After that he had never went to any Hospital. He breathed his last on Jan.16, 1979, at the age of 79.

He was married in 1934 to Takotula. They had 4 sons. His wife was jailed in Ghaspani because of her husband’s position as a staunch patriot Naga political leader. While in Jail in 1960, she was diagnosed with cancer. She died on May 29, 1967, at the age of 49. From a very comfortable life, their family was thrown to one of constant hardship and struggle all because of their commitment to the Naga freedom struggle and its defence and defiance to the Govt of India’s tyranny. His wife Takotula took all these, along with the sympathy, support and the radical on her side with quiet dignity and strength. Their second son Tiatemjen joined the Naga Army in 1963, later he became a Captain, however, was killed in Chindwin River Valley, in Burma en-route to China in 1968. His bone was brought from Chindwin Valley in 2008 and buried in his ancestral village, Longkhum, alongside his parents and elder brother. Imkongmeren was a simple man yet erudite, honest, righteous, with utmost courage, commitment, patriotic philanthropist and a teetotaler after becoming a Christian when he went to Impur Mission Centre to study in 1919.

Because of imperishable legacy and heritage of our pioneer thinkers and staunch patriotic leaders like Imkongmeren Ao who deeply loved their people, land and gave their best and their all sacrificially, the Naga unquestionable political history shall never die.