

The Chakma Voice

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Newsletter of MCDF

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BIZU SPECIAL

Happy Bizu 2011

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Happy Bizu 2011

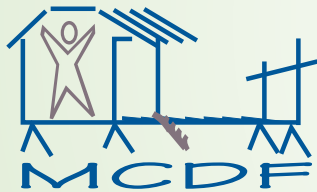
Benyeh photteh gaang-ot je-ney,
Gaadi gudoy suddo oney,
Buddo re baatti jaale nei
Aak baarebong Bizu Utsob.

Phul-loi sazey bong dorozaa jaanaalaa,
Huzi aa baaledir aabaah, goror cero
hunot somi paare paraaah.

Borjon ot tun sebbottaa lobong,
Guro jonoreh degei bong hojpaanaa
Bekkundo i aazir uzir gury milibong
Changmaar doye meye aazi no jai
paraaah.

Haalaa pinon raangaa haadi,
Pen silum pini bong aami.
Aadaameh aadaameh bere bong aami.
Bizur geet gehbong aami.

Hojche hol no baazeh bong
Doi pheley bong monor haali
Nuo Bozor bo aani bo nuo nuo huzi
Ezoh Bizu maanei, Mili jhuli.



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Cover Photo: A Chakma girl in traditional dress

Editorial

A Mexican proverb goes as follows, “*The right to eat is: for a rich man when he is hungry, for a poor man when he has something to eat*”. This sums up the predicament of the impoverished villagers of Parva areas in Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) in Lawngtlai district of Mizoram, who had to starve several weeks due to non-supply of food grain under the Public Distribution System (PDS) during October-December 2010. Food supply was restored in January 2011 only after the intervention of the Supreme Court Food Commissioners following a complaint from MCDF.

In a historic order, the Supreme Court Food Commissioners directed the Mizoram government to immediately feed the starving people, investigate the failure of the PDS, and ensure that all the food and livelihood related schemes like NREGS, Mid Day Meal, ICDS, Old Age Pension etc are properly implemented in Lawngtlai district. The report of the District Civil Supplies Officer (DCSO), Lawngtlai itself-explanatory to what ails the PDS system. In the words of Mr K T Mathew, DCSO Lawngtlai, “One [Damdep] is being looked after by a drunken store keeper and another [Vaseikai Supply Godown] is being looked after by the least experienced store keeper”.

MCDF’s fact finding visit to Parva and other areas from 28 February 2011 and 12 March 2011 uncovered systemic failure of the PDS, Mid Day Meal, and other welfare schemes in these areas. This was the first ever fact finding mission to Parva areas by any NGO. The significance of Parva lies in the fact that it is a tri-junction of India, Myanmar and Bangladesh. One of the oldest of villages, it is extremely remote, remains inaccessible for 6 months of the year during the monsoon and cut off from the outside world as there is no telephone connectivity.

In this area, people have lost count of their deaths. Every year, people die of malaria, water borne diseases and other unknown diseases. Epidemic hits during monsoon each year; yet the health sub centre at Parva I village is only a dilapidated empty house. It was not operationalized ever since it was constructed several years ago. There is no Anganwadi Centre for 1,359 people of Parva I village. The only High School in this area catering to over 7 villages has been lying defunct since 1998. A Food Godown was also set up in 1997 only to be abandoned immediately. The empty health centre building, the lifeless High School, the defunct Godown and the broken roads symbolize the utter neglect of the administration towards the Parva area.

MCDF’s successful intervention in the case of Parva (inhabited by Chakmas, Bawms and Brus) shows how NGOs can effectively campaign for the rights of the marginalized people. We believe that MCDF’s actions will bring some hopes and cheers in the lives of these otherwise totally beleaguered villagers. ■

Historic order from Commissioners of Supreme Court on the right to food in Mizoram

In a historic order to safeguard the right to food of thousands of tribals in Mizoram, the Commissioners of the Supreme Court in the “Right to Food Case” (CWP 196/2001, PUCL v. UOI and others) on 5th January 2011 directed the state government of Mizoram to feed the starving Chakmas of Parva I, Parva II, Parva III and Kamtuli villages under Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) in Lawngtlai district.

MCDF’s intervention:

These directions came following a complaint filed by Mizoram Chakma Development Forum (MCDF) before the Commissioners of the Supreme Court on 28th December 2010. The Commissioners took strong cognizance of MCDF’s complaint that over 4,000 villagers, mostly Chakmas, were starving for several weeks in four villages namely Parva I, Parva II, Parva III and Kamtuli under CADC in Lawngtlai district and yet the authorities did nothing about it. MCDF stated that no food grain under the Public Distribution System had been distributed to the poorest of the poor families in these four villages since October 2010 and yet the authorities of CADC and the state government of Mizoram failed to act when the matter was brought to their attention. These affected villages are located in far flung areas near to the Indo-Myanmar border and they do not have access to food grain even in the open market.

Parva I predominantly inhabited by Chakmas is the largest of these villages. Parva II is inhabited mostly by Bawms while Parva III is dominated by Brus.

On 23 December 2010, MCDF sent petitions, by fax, to the Deputy Commissioner of Lawngtlai district and the Chief Secretary of Mizoram requesting for urgent action to provide food to 800 hungry families comprising of 4,000 men, women and children in the four villages in CADC who were facing starvation for several weeks. There are 332 families in Parva I, 165 families in Parva II, 103 families in Parva III and 208 families in Kamtuli village.

As Mizoram government failed to act, MCDF moved to the Commissioners of the Supreme Court (appointed in the Right to Food case) seeking immediate relief.

Orders of the Supreme Court Commissioners:

In their letter dated 5th January 2011 sent to Vanhela Pachuau, Chief Secretary of Mizoram, Dr N.C. Saxena, Commissioner and Harsh Mander, Special Commissioner of the Supreme Court (appointed in the case: PUCL v. UOI & Ors., CWP No. 196 of 2001) asked the Chief Secretary to “investigate these reports, and share the reasons for non-supply of grain” to the villagers.

Further, the Supreme Court Commissioners directed the State Government of Mizoram to ensure immediately adequate food grain supply to the food godown, ensure that all Below Poverty Line (BPL) and Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) card holder families should be provided their quota of grain for the present month and backlog from the month of October 2010, ensure that all persons who don’t have ration cards should be provided ration cards at the earliest.

The Supreme Court Commissioners also directed the Mizoram government to “undertake a survey in all these villages and identify the families who suffer from acute malnutrition, identify starvation & hunger related deaths (if any) and share information on the full coverage of all these residents of all food and livelihood schemes such as ICDS [Integrated Child Development Scheme], MDM [Mid Day Meal scheme], NREGA [National Rural Employment Act] and pensions in the district Lawngtlai. Please also send us a copy of instructions that would be issued in this direction and an action taken report within one month.”

MCDF considers the Supreme Court Commissioners’ order as historic. “This is a historic order from the Supreme Court Food Commissioners as this goes beyond food security. MCDF is well aware that many Chakma families in Mizoram have been denied welfare schemes including PDS food grain, old age pension, maternity benefit scheme, nutrition etc. MCDF will monitor the implementation of the Supreme Court Commissioners’ order by the Mizoram government very closely.” – stated MCDF in a press statement on 6 January 2011.

Action taken by the State Government:

Immediately after receiving the Supreme Court Commissioners' letter, the State Government of Mizoram swung into action. On 25 January 2011, Mizoram government submitted its response to the Supreme Court Commissioners. Mizoram government stated that it took the complaint received from MCDF very seriously and District Civil Supplies Officer (DCSO) Lawngtlai KT Mathew visited Parva on 25th December 2010, three days after receiving MCDF's complaint. The findings of the DCSO corroborated the allegations of MCDF.

Again on 19th January 2011, the DCSO Lawngtlai visited Parva with the newly appointed Store Keeper of Damdep Food Godown, Mr K Vannawla and called a meeting with the Village Council leaders. The DCSO told the villagers that all the facilities including regular supply of ration, ration cards, etc will be provided in compliance with the Supreme Court orders.

Further, the Deputy Commissioner of Lawngtlai, Mr Thlamuana visited Parva along with the DCSO, Mr KT Mathew on 11th February 2011.

As per the reply of Mizoram government to the Supreme Court Commissioners, the state government took the following actions, among others:

- The Lawngtlai DC and the DCSO were instructed to immediately dispatch food grain to Damdep Godown from where Parva and surrounding villagers draw their ration, and also distribute APL, BPL and AAY rice to the villagers immediately;
- S. Zoramsanga, Store Keeper of Damdep Godown was suspended and departmental investigation initiated against him
- T.C. Lalsiammawii, Store Keeper of Vaseikai Supply Godown was transferred and departmental enquiry initiated against her
- Retailership of Pradip Kumar Chakma, retailer of Parva I was terminated, and
- The Under Secretaries of four departments namely Social Welfare Department, Rural Development Department, School Education Department and Health & Family Welfare Department have been asked to investigate and submit reports relating to implementation of schemes like Mid Day Meal, Integrated Child Development Scheme, Old Age Pension, NREGS etc

The report of the District Civil Supplies Officer (DCSO), Lawngtlai is self-explanatory as to what ails the PDS system. In the words of Mr K T Mathew, DCSO

Lawngtlai, "One [Damdep] is being looked after by a drunken store keeper and another [Vaseikai Supply Godown] is being looked after by the least experienced store keeper".

MCDF's Fact Finding Mission

This was enough to drive the MCDF to undertake a fact finding visit to Parva and other areas. The visit from 28 February 2011 and 12 March 2011 which covered Lawngtlai and Lunglei districts uncovered systemic failure of the PDS, Mid Day Meal, and other welfare schemes in these areas. This is the first ever Fact Finding Investigation done by any NGO in Parva areas with regard to implementation of food and livelihood related schemes.

The report will be submitted to the Supreme Court Commissioners. Hence, the findings cannot be made public now.

Media coverage:

MCDF's campaign for Parva received unprecedented media coverage. The order of the Supreme Court Commissioners directing the Mizoram government to feed the starving Chakmas was the main front page story in **Vanglaini**, the top Mizo language daily of Mizoram, and **Newslink** and **Mizoram Post**, two most widely read English dailies of Mizoram. The news was also aired by news channels and local cable networks.

The mainstream respected daily, **The Telegraph**, Kolkata, carried the story: "Chakma villagers starve- SC commissioners asks Mizoram govt to supply food" on 10th January 2011.

Other papers which carried the story are: **The Shillong Times**, **The Sentinel**, **Echo of Arunachal**, etc.

The suspension of the Store Keeper of Damdep Godown was reported prominently by **Vanglaini** and **The Zozam Times**, among others. ■

NCPCR orders Mizoram to establish schools in all Chakma Villages

On 29 December 2010, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) directed the Mizoram government to investigate the denial of access to elementary education to Chakma tribal children and establish schools in “all Chakma inhabited villages in Mizoram” under the Right to Education Act.

The full order of the NCPCR may be accessed at MCDF website :
<http://mcdf.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/ncpcr-letter-to-mizoram-govt.pdf>

This order was passed on the basis of a complaint filed by the Mizoram Chakma Development Forum (MCDF) on 22 October 2010 alleging “denial of access to education to the Chakma tribal children in Mizoram due to lack of schools. Although the right to education is both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realizing other human rights, this right has been systematically denied to the Chakma minority Children in Mizoram”.

MCDF in its petition pointed out the State of India has the obligation to make education “available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable” without discrimination of any kind.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education has opined that “The lack of access to primary school may conform to the internationally prohibited grounds of discrimination when the excluded children share the same feature, be it sex, or language, or religion” (E/CN.4/1999/49). Importantly, in the case of Mizoram, the majority of the children who are out of schools belong to Buddhist Chakma and Bru ethnic minority communities, according to the figures released by the state government. In September 2009, the Mizoram government had admitted that over 15,000 children mainly Chakmas and Brus were out of schools in the state.

In Mizoram the most serious issue is the non-availability of schools in the rural areas which means lack of access to basic education. According to an independent survey conducted by Mizoram Chakma Development Forum in 2009, out of total 111 Chakma villages in three districts of Lawngtlai, Lunglei and Mamit, only 31 villages have Middle Schools, and 5 villages have High Schools. That is, 80 villages (72%) do not have Middle Schools and 106 villages (over 96%) do not have High Schools. The failure of the state government to set up Middle and High Schools tantamount to denial of education to the Chakma children.

Further, MCDF pointed out that the absence of Middle School in 80 villages is responsible for high rate of dropout at primary level and absence of High Schools in 106 out of 111 Chakma inhabited villages has led to high rate of dropout at Middle School level in the Chakma areas. A “neighbourhood Middle school” in hilly areas like Mizoram can be as far as 15 kilometres or more. The villages are separated by hilly terrains without road connectivity. Hence, basic secondary education is out of reach for thousands of Chakma children while higher education is beyond their dreams.

The order of 29 December 2010 of NCPCR is historic and has the potential to change the future of the Chakma community. The Mizoram government was asked to submit a report by 29 January 2011 but it failed to submit any report to the Commission. On 10 February 2011, the NCPCR sent a reminder to the Mizoram Chief Secretary asking him to submit report within 20 days.

MCDF will closely monitor this case. ■

As of today, 72% Chakma villages do not have Middle Schools and over 96% do not have any High School. The failure of the state government to set up Middle and High Schools tantamount to denial of education to the Chakma children.

Mizoram: DTR displaces 227 Chakma families

The Dampa Tiger Reserve in Mamit district of Mizoram will displace a total of 227 Chakma families consisting of 1,165 persons from Andermanik village. This village was set up after the villagers had been evicted by the same Dampa Tiger Reserve (DTR) two decades ago. The villagers will be resettled.

Location of the resettlement village

On 18 January 2010, Mr L R Thanga, Chief Wildlife Warden of Mizoram submitted "Relocation Plan" to the National Tiger Conservation Authority, Ministry of Environment and Forests. As per the Relocation Plan, a copy of which is available with the MCDF, the proposed site for relocation of the Andermanik village is at Thaidor-II in Mamit district which is about 23 km away from the existing Andermanik village. The nearest village will be Rajiv Nagar which is 6 kms away. The total area of the proposed resettlement site is 15 sq km.

The issue of compensation

Compensation is being paid under Option II of "Revised Guidelines for the Ongoing Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Project Tiger" (February 2008) of the Ministry of Environment & Forests, Government of India. The villagers rejected Option I because in this case the government is not responsible for any rehabilitation / relocation of the evicted villagers.

Under Option II, each family shall get Rs 10 lakh. Initially the state government agreed to provide only 20% of the total package i.e. Rs 2 lakhs. But after a series of negotiations, the villagers agreed at Rs 5 lakhs. The rest amount will be utilized by the state govt to develop their lands, built roads and provide facilities at the resettlement site.

In the Relocation Plan of Andermanik village submitted by the state government of Mizoram it has been stated that "Since the area proposed for relocation falls within the Revenue land Question of settlement of rights does not arise. The only legal action required is to notify the village boundary in the Mizoram Gazette by the Local Administration Department...". Importantly, the component of "Settlement of rights" under Option II of the Revised Guidelines for the Ongoing Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Project Tiger has 30% of total package.

On 1 October 2010, the notification of the proposed

Andermanik Resettlement area was published in the Mizoram Gazette.

Lack of transparency and clarity about the relocation process

There is total lack of transparency and clarity about the relocation process. The secrecy is to such an extent that the villagers even do not know whether the present jobs like government teachers will stay or not after relocation. The villagers do not want disintegration or annulment of their Village Council after relocation. Due to lack of transparency and clarity, the villagers are worried about their fate in the new resettlement village.

Unofficial ban on jhum cultivation

The villagers of Andermanik are leading a very hard life. For the last one year, there has been an unofficial ban on jhum cultivation, which is the only means of livelihood for almost all the families in the village. Early this year the forest officials persuaded the villagers against cultivation of Jhums although the villagers had already cleared the forest land for jhumming purpose. The villagers finally decided not to cultivate fearing the law of the land as, according to the forest department, Andermanik village falls under Dampa Tiger Reserve.

As Jhum is the only means of survival of the villagers, they are without any means of livelihood. Several families have taken loans from individual money ■

MCDF's Take:

Protection of endangered tigers is very important. However, the government can avoid unnecessary eviction of its citizens on the pretext of tiger protection or environment conservation. As per the latest Tiger Census 2010, there are only five tigers (maximum) in Dampa Tiger Reserve which has an area of 500 sq km. An area of 500 sq km is enough for about 30 tigers to survive and multiply. So, Mizoram government should focus on care and protection of the tigers within the existing area instead of trying to evict poor villagers by luring them with money. No government should be in the business of snatching away people's land through allurements. Rather, the State has constitutional obligation to safeguard the rights of its people, not destroy them.

Bangladesh: Fresh communal attack against Chakmas

On 17 February 2011 around 5.30 pm, hundreds of Bengali settlers attacked two Chakma villages of Gulshakhali and Rangī Para under Longadu upazila in Rangamati district of Bangladesh. The soldiers of Border Guard of Bangladesh (formerly known as BDR) allegedly supported the Bengali settlers during the arson attack against the Chakmas. In all, 22 houses belong to Chakmas and one school were burnt to ashes.

Origin of the attack:

This attack originated when on 15 February 2011, a Bengali settler named Md. Saber Ali (33 years), son of Nehat Ali went missing from jungle near Gulshakhali. On 16 February 2011, police recovered his dead body from Rangī Para area. The Bengali settlers suspected that the Jummas had killed Saber Ali which the Jummas denied. In the evening time around 5.30pm, Bengali settlers took out processions chanting anti-Jumma slogans.



A destitute Chakma family whose house was burnt to ashes

In the morning of 17 February 2011, the Bengali settlers again took out another anti-Jumma procession at Longadu. The local administration did nothing to stop such processions and sloganeering which created communal tension in the area. At about 1 pm, two Chakma students namely Apolo Chakma, s/o Mono Ranjan Chakma and Mangal Moy Chakma, s/o Daya Mohan Chakma were attacked and seriously injured by the Bengali settlers at Tintilyaghat at Longadu. The injured students were admitted at Rangamati General Hospital.

The communal attacks:

In the evening of 17 February 2011, a group of Bengali settlers began to attack Chakmas at Rangī Para village. One group of Border Guard of Bangladesh came down to Rangī Para village from Rangipara Tematha camp led by Habildar Jahangir but did nothing. The Bengali settlers then proceeded to Gulshakhali village. A total of 22 houses of Chakmas and one school were burnt down in these two villages.



A Chakma woman: This is all she has now!



A Chakma house completely gutted

Bizu Festival of the Chakmas

By L.B.Chakma

Bizu is the main festival of the Chakmas which is celebrated with pomp, charms and gaiety. It is celebrated at the end and beginning of the year to bid farewell of the old year and to welcome the new year, with new hopes and aspirations. It is the greatest of all festivals celebrated by the Chakmas and it falls on the last two days of CHOT (CHAITRA/13th and 14th April) and first day of BOIJHAK (VAISHAKA/15th April).

The word 'BIZU' might have come from the Sanskrit word 'BISHUVA' (meaning the day on which the sun enters the Aries zodiac) since the Chakmas pronounce the words with middle and last 'sa', 'sha' as 'za', 'jha' (e.g. Voijhak(VAISHAKHA), Pojhak (POSHAK), Pojhu (posu) etc. It is an agriculture based festival for the Chakmas. Around this time people remain at home with stock of crops they harvested and no new work has also started. The climate is also moderate and favorable for celebration. It is the pre-summer time when monsoon rain has not started. At the beginning of rain sowing of crops starts in a Jhum culture. Rain starts pouring from the month of Vaishakha. Bizu is comparable with 'Vasant Utsav', 'Vasant Panchami', 'Vaishakhi', Pongal etc. for its gaiety and pomp. Around this time of the end of Spring, festivals are celebrated around the world under different names. Let us take some names like Bihu, Bishu, Boishuk, Sangrai, which are celebrated around us. Assamese Bihu is world famous for its colourfulness and Bihu Dance.

Chakmas' Bizu is a cultural festival and non religious in nature. However, now-a- days, some Buddhist religious rites are also stuffed in.

It is said that, earlier Bizu was celebrated for fifteen days. But with the passage of time it has shrunk to three-four days in the form of PHOOL BIZU, MUL BIZU AND GOJCHE-POJCHE BIZU. However, preparation for the festival begins ten to fifteen days earlier. People start collection of dresses, weaving of clothes by the women, collection of honey and GEELE from the jungle, hunting and preserving dry meat, fishing and preserving dry fish for the Bizu. The youths will also make NAADENG (wooden tops) to play at during the Bizu. MOT (rice wine), DOYE PUJEE (edible fermented rice made of sticky rice), JOGORHAA (rice beer of sticky rice), HAANJI (rice beer of common rice) are also prepared in advance

for the Bizu.

PHOOL BIZU: On the day of PHOOL BIZU, in the rural area, people get up early. The youths (male and female) with rice packet in hand go out for the jungle and river bank for collection of vegetable and flowers especially the NAAKSO PHOOL. This Naakso Phool is the most revered flower by the Chakmas and it is also related with the legendary hero RADHA MOHN and his beloved DHANPUDI (whose ballads are sung by the GEINGHULEE till date). From the jungle and river banks they will collect palm shoots and cane shoots like HORODI AAGAA, TAAL AAGAA, BE-DAAGI AAGAA, HEREDO AAGAA, SAW AAGAA, vegetables like HOLATTHUR, TAARAA, DHIME TIDE, GAANGHULI SAAK, TODEGO JEEL SAAK and of course GEELE and NAAKSO PHOOL. At home, the women folk will wash all the clothes, clean the house and the utensils and also purify the house with GEELE = HOJOI PAANI (water where kernel of Geela, a round shaped jungle fruit from a creeper and HOJOI, a tamarind like fruit, raw turmeric, rice are dipped is regarded as sacred purifying agent by the Chakmas). Cattles and poultry are kept free on the Phool Bizu day.

On return from the jungle with HAALLWONG full (basketful) of vegetable and flowers, they will first go to the river for bath. After bath, they will offer SERAAK (oil lamps /candle) and flowers to GONGA MA (river goddess) with prayer for fulfillment of their wish and welfare of self, family members and relatives. At home also SE RAAK and flowers will be offered to GONGHEI (God) and MAA LOKKHI MAA (goddess of wealth) for fulfillment of wish, welfare and abundance of food grain. Afterward, flowers and SERAAK will be offered at the Buddhist Temple with the prayer for fulfillment of wish and welfare of self , family members and friends. They will also light SERAAK at the front door step and keep one pot of water and a stick. The stick is to welcome the good spirits and the stick is to drive away the bad spirits. After dinner, some will go to PIDYE DUBO (to pound rice flour) and some will keep ready the vegetables ready to cook in the early morning.

MUL BIZU: On the MUL BIZU day, the women will get up early in the morning . They will bake cakes and prepare sweet meats, jiggery and other items. They will also cook rice, sticky rice, vegetables especially PAAJON (mixed vegetable) and TIDE (bitter items) . It is believed that whoever takes PAAJON

and TIDE from at least seven houses in a Bizu day, one gets relief even from chronic diseases. All the other family members also wake up early on the Bizu day and go to the river for bath. The children are especially lured with supposed BIZUGULO (fruit or ball of Bizu) which are supposedly following down the river and if they get late, they will not get it. The children are also encouraged to dip and search for BIZU GULO. After the bathing is over, all put on new dress and offer SERAAK at the river. At home also one of the family members will offer SERAAK to the GONGI. In the mean time all the items like cakes, sweetmeats, vegetable are ready. Portion of these are kept separately for SYONG (offering to God/Buddha) and offered at home and sent to the Buddhist temple. Ma Lokkhi is also offered the items along with one boiled egg. After return from the river, the children go out with grains like rice paddy to be offered to free roaming chicken and ducks. Afterward, the family members taste the home made items specially Paajon and Tida and go out by rotation to taste in neighbours houses. ON THE DAY OF BIZU, NO INVITATION IS NECESSARY ! EVERYBODY ARE WELCOME . It is customary that if any guest enters a house, the host must offer him available items. The children take cakes like BINI PIDYE, SAANNYE PIDYE, HOGHAA PIDYE, HOLAA PIDYE, HOI, MODU, PAAYOCH, MAAREI PIDHYE etc.. Apart from foregoing items, some grown up take MOT, JOGORAA, HAANJI etc. Tasting of Paajon and Tide is almost compulsory. The teenagers start tasting of alcoholic items during Bizu day. No one is forbidden to take any items on the Bizu day. The whole day goes with eating, drinking and merry making.

On the Bizu day, some youths give bath the old people, who could not go to river and bow them for blessings. Some boys, girls and children play traditional games like BODAA BODI (wrestling), GUDU HAARAA (ha doo doo), GEELE HAARAA (game with wheel like seed), NAADENG HAARAA (game with wooden tops), POTTI HAARAA, POHR HAARAA and other games in groups. At night, they make torches called BOMBA in a bamboo tube where stale rice is poured with juice of GORSONG tree. With the light of Bomba some play gheela Khar, some play traditional musical instruments like HENGGRONG (harp made of bamboo chip), DHUDHUK, BAAZEE (flute). Some stage competition on traditional songs and dance. Some listen to GEINGHULI (ballad sung by traditional singers). These merry making goes on sometime till the next morning.

The Buddhistic rites, which observed now a days on the Bizu are observation of UPOSATH (eight pre-

cepts) at the temple by the old folks and offering of Buddha Puja, Atta Parikkara Dana, Sangha Dana etc. Every household also offer SYONG (offering from all prepared items except the alcoholic items). In the evening, burning of candles and incensed sticks. Some time releasing of papermade hot balloon called PHAANAACH. Offering of money and other useful items to the monks are also made on the day as DAAN.

GOJCHE-POJCHE BIZU: It is the new year day. All the household perform the rite called GIRITTI SUMULONG or try to invite the monks at their home to listen to Buddhist discourses called MANGAL SUTTRO or PHAAREKH (PARITTAS). The Giritti Sumulang is nothing but worship of the family deities called KALEYA, PARAMESWARI and OCHSYA or SODAGOCHYA. Some identify these deities HARA (Siva), PARVATI (Durga) and GANESHA. They are offered animal sacrifice. Cock for Kaleyia, hen for Parameswari and cock for Ochsyia. They are worshipped for the welfare of the family and it is conducted by an OJHA (exorcist). Before worshipping the Sumulang deities, Gongga must be worshipped at the river ghat with the sacrifice of chicken or goat for the purification of whole the family members. It is customary that one must prepare good items especially non-veg items on the Gojche-pojche day. It is with the belief that one who takes good food on the first day of the year will get good food whole the year. This Sumulong and listening to Buddhist discourses goes on for days till every family get their chance. It is also customary that all the household will change their salt from the container and pour POJCHE NUN (Mantra chanted) a new. This mantra chanted salt is with the belief of protection from chronic skin diseases like leprosy and other ailment. It is also customary to invite relatives and old people in the lunch on Gojche-Pojche day. The young folk bathe the old folks on this day and seek their blessings.

(Lokkhi Bhusan Chakma is Court President and Recorder of District Council Court, Chakma ■ Autonomous District Council (CADC), Mizoram. He has been in public service for a long time. He had joined CADC services on 21.4.87 as Historical Research Officer, which designation was later renamed as Art & Culture Officer (ACO) which he held till 2003. During his tenure as ACO, he was instrumental in the introduction of Changmha script in the CADC schools. He was editor of AALAAM magazine (not in publication now). He has written several articles, poems and about fifty songs)

Health crisis in Thanzamasora village: 6 Chakmas die

Since 4 March 2011, six Chakmas died due to unidentified diseases at Thanzamasora village in Lunglei district in south Mizoram. They have been identified as Mrs Doyal Lota Chakma (40), w/o of Denga Chakma; Malay Chand Chakma (20), s/o Oguro Send Chakma; Punyo Lota Chakma (45), w/o Amar Chakma; Prapha Ranjan Chakma (27), S/o Shanti Lal Chakma; Sumiron Chakma (27), s/o Shanti Lal Chakma, and Mrs Chittiso Chakma (22), w/o Pulin Chakma. All of them reportedly suffered vomiting, high fever and headache before their deaths and their bodies turned blue-black after the death which caused panic among superstitious villagers. The villagers believed that the deaths occurred after they were cursed with black magic by a witch from another village.

Official sources said at least 13 families have fled the village which has 66 families. Some others hid in the nearby forests due to fear of black magic.

There is total absence of health care facilities in Thanzamasora. There is no road connectivity.

On 25 March 2011, MCDF discussed the issue with Ad-



Doctors distributing free medicines at Thanzamasora, 26 March 2011 (Photo: DIPR, Mizoram)

ditional Deputy Commissioner of Lunglei, T. Lalduhawma; Chief Medical Officer (CMO) in neighbouring Lawngtlai district, Dr R B Dey (Thanzamasora comes under Lawngtlai CMO); among others, over the phone. On the same day, MCDF submitted a petition by fax to Pi M. Zohmingthangi, Deputy Commissioner, Lunglei; Vanhela Pachuau, Chief Secretary, Mizoram; Director, Health & Family Welfare, Mizoram; and Dr RB Dey, Chief Medical Officer, Lawngtlai seeking immediate intervention to prevent epidemic-like health crisis currently prevailing at Thanzamasora village.



A view of Thanzamasora village (Photo: DIPR, Mizoram)

Thanzamasora village is under Lunglei district but medical facilities come under neighbouring Lawngtlai Chief Medical Officer. Hence, there is a need for better coordination amongst officials to

control the health crisis. Any unnecessary delay might result in more deaths and displacement. MCDF further warned that “More and more families are likely to flee if the situation is not brought under control immediately.”

MCDF made the following demands: Send a team of medical experts with all the necessary equipments and medical facilities; Establish a makeshift health camp at the Thanzamasora village as temporary basis and patients can be treated at the village; Make the necessary arrangements to shift the critical patients to hospitals in Lunglei or Aizawl for treatment; Immediately carry out awareness campaign in the area with the help of local NGOs like Young Chakma Association; Take measures to bring back all the families which have fled the village; Undertake a visit by senior officials from the District Administration; and Establish a Health SubCentre with adequate number of staff and medical facilities at Thanzamasora village as long term solution.

In a welcome development, on 26 March 2011, three top political leaders, Minister of State Nihar Kanti Chakma, Parliamentary Secretary, S Laldingliana and Chief Executive Member of Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC), Kali Kumar Tongchangya visited Thanzamasora village. As Thanzamasora village is inaccessible by roads, they along with a team of doctors had to track down the hills from Lalnuntui, nearest village having road connectivity which is 8 km from Thanzamasora village.

Earlier, Kali Kumar Tongchangya, CEM, CADC, met all the patients from Thanzamasora undergoing treatment at Kamala Nagar hospital. As per Dr. Arun Singh of Kamala Nagar hospital, two were confirmed case of malaria, one of chicken pox, one of diarrhea and the fifth was diagnosed Septicemia.

The leaders also provided some immediate relief assistance. Minister of State N K Chakma provided Rs. 2,000 to families of each of the deceased and five quintals of rice and assured that Thanzamasora village would be linked with PMGSY funds. Kali Kumar Tongchangya, CEM of CADC provided Rs.20,000 to the villagers being the cost of quota of ration for two weeks. Parliamentary Secretary, S Laldingliana also announced that a Health Sub Centre would be established soon at Thanzamasora village. ■



Dangu Nihar Kanti Chakma, Minister of State, and Dangu Kali Kumar Tongchangya, Chief Executive Member, CADC being greeted by the villagers of Thanzamasora on their arrival after traveling 8 km on foot, 26 March 2011 (Photo: CADC)



Dangu Kali Kumar Tongchangya, Chief Executive Member, CADC addressing the villagers of Thanzamasora in the presence of other dignitaries of Mizoram government, 26 March 2011 (Photo CADC).

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News in Brief

Mizoram News

NREGS wage hike

The Ministry of Rural Development has increased the daily NREGS wage rate from Rs 110 to Rs 129 in Mizoram from January 2011.

IGNOU Centre at Demagiri

On 20 January 2011, Minister of State Nihar Kanti Chakma inaugurated IGNOU Special Study Centre at Demagiri in Lunglei district. 65 students were reportedly enrolled on the opening day itself.

35th YCA Annual Conference

The 35th Annual Conference of Young Chakma Association (YCA) was held at Rajiv Nagar (Amsury) in Mamit district from 12-14 January 2011. The main theme was "Eradication of Social Evils". The conference was graced by MLA Nirupam Chakma, Mizoram State Assembly Speaker R. Romawia and Deputy Speaker John Rotluangliana.

Tripura News

Chakma film

Chakma Movie Centre of Nabinchara, Tripura, will release its first Chakma film "SAJANYA POROR SAMARI"

Chakma girl wins Gold in National Yoga competition

Miss Dipsikha Dewan, d/o Chayan Dewan of Silachari, Sabroom, South Tripura won Gold Medal for her individual performance at the recently concluded 29th National Yoga Championship held on 27 February 2011 in Tamil Nadu. Earlier this year, she had also won Bronze Medal in personal event and a Silver medal in group event at the 56th National School Yoga Championship held in Gujarat. Her previous medals are as follows: Bronze Medal (personal event) at 28th National Yoga Championship Competition (2010) held in West Bengal; Bronze Medal (group event) at 54th National School Yoga Championship (2008) in Delhi; Bronze Medal (personal event) at 27th National Yoga Championship Competition (2008) in Chandigarh; among others. Dipsikhais a Class VI student of Maharani Tulsibati School, Agartala.

MCDF congratulates her, and wishes her all the best in life.

ADCs demand direct finding

On 5 February 2011, three Autonomous District Councils in southern Mizoram resolved to pursue their demand for Direct Funding from the Centre at a joint meeting held in the office of the Chief Executive Member of Lai Autonomous District Council. The meeting was attended by all the three CEMs – Dangu C. Ngunlianchunga of LADC, Dangu S. Khipo of MADC and Dangu Kali Kumar Tongchongya of CADC. Three members Dangu Hiphei, Dangu Nirupam Chakma, MLA and Dangu Hmunhre were reportedly selected to pursue the matter at the Centre on behalf of the three ADCs.



Chakma girls performing at YCA Conference at Amsury, Mamit district



Chakmas' pride: Miss Dipsikha Dewan