



The Chakma Voice

A bi-monthly newsletter

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C3/441, Second Floor, Janakpuri, New Delhi-58, INDIA

www.mcdf.wordpress.com ; Email: chakmavoiced@gmail.com

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Editor: Mr Paritosh Chakma

Asst. Editor: Miss Nalori Dhammei Chakma

Asst. Editor: Mr Victor Chakma

Asst. Editor: Mr Hemanta Chakma

For suggestions/ feedback write to us at: chakmavoiced@gmail.com

Website: www.mcdf.wordpress.com

Border Fencing: MCDF demands compensation and rehabilitation of victims

The livelihood of nearly half of the population of Mizoram's Chakma tribe has been adversely affected by the India-Bangladesh border fencing in Mizoram. Yet, the governments—both the Centre and the State of Mizoram—have not been doing their best to provide solace to the victims. The million dollar question is "Will the victims get rehabilitation inside the fence?" There is little answer as of now. The Mizoram home department in July 2008 had stated that "those families placed on the other side of the Fencing Line may not be called 'displaced' since the Fencing Line is not the boundary of Indo-Bangla Border" and hence, they may not be rehabilitated.

No Chakma or Mizo who has fallen outside the fence wants to live in "no man's lands". By erecting the fence 150 yards from the zero line (according to the Indira -Mujib Accord of 1974), India has pushed thousands of Indians in the border states into the "no man's land" zone and virtually disowned these villagers. Such people in Karimganj district of Assam are now suffering a lot after being denied resettlement inside the fence (Read "*Border Fencing: Affected Chakmas must be resettled*" at P.10) . Chakmas and Mizos too will be denied basic needs and there will be humanitarian crisis which has long term implications for Mizoram.

The unwillingness to provide compensation to all the victims is another issue. MCDF has learned that till date several villages have not been provided compensation in the affected areas. Some have not even been recognized as fencing victims. On 1 August 2009 such people formed "Unassessed Affected Compensation Demand Committee" (UACDC) to demand their rights. UACDC petitioned the Prime Minister of India on 17 February 2010 but to no avail. MCDF has a list of 73 persons from five villages who claim their properties have not been assessed.

MCDF demands that all grievances of all the border fencing victims must be addressed with priority, with all fairness and transparency. The Resettlement and Rehabilitation Scheme should go beyond monetary benefits to improve the living conditions of the border people.

Exclusive interview with CADC Chief: MCDF is the first and only organization to have formally interviewed any Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) in Mizoram. In an exclusive interview in New Delhi on 22 March 2010, Dangu K K Tongchangya, CADC CEM told MCDF: "*I would like to see the people of CADC are morally built up and are indiscriminately participating in building the CADC into a prosperous nation*". He spoke on a range of issues from education to NLUP to rural roads to BADP to culture. MCDF believes that the public will be highly benefited from understanding the works, achievements and dreams of Mr Tongchangya and his government in CADC.

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MCDF Exclusive: Interview with CADC CEM

Dangu (Mr) Kali Kumar Tongchangya is the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Chakma Autonomous District Council in Mizoram. CADC was established on 29th April, 1972 under the 6th Schedule to the Constitution of India. *Dangu* Tongchangya is CADC's 14th CEM. He is a very dynamic leader and has been elected Member of District Council for the 3rd term from Phooltuli Constituency. As a result of his popularity, he was unanimously elected the leader after the Congress party won a decisive mandate in the CADC elections in 2008.

In a special interview arranged by Mizoram Chakma Development Forum (MCDF) in New Delhi on 22 March 2010, he spoke on a wide range of issues. He freely spoke about his dreams. Excerpts.

MCDF: *MCDF welcomes you to Delhi and thank you for giving your valuable time for this exclusive interaction.*

Kali Kumar Tongchangya (KKT): Thank you. Its my pleasure to have the chance to interact with MCDF. I thank the Forum as well.

MCDF: *MCDF believes you are one of the most accessible and charismatic Chakma leaders that we have today. What are your dreams for CADC and its people?*

KKT: Is it? Thanks any way. Dreams sometimes do not come true. I would rather aspire for Amendment of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, incorporating provisions for direct funding to the Autonomous District Councils so that the people of CADC get more powers, more financial scope for bringing an all round development for the Council. Besides, I would also like to see the people of CADC are morally built up and are indiscriminately participating in building the CADC into a prosperous nation.

MCDF: *According to 2001 Census, Chakmas are the most illiterate community in Mizoram. Why according to you the Chakmas come last in Literacy Rate? What are the main problems of the govt. of Mizoram to educate the Chakmas?*

KKT: Reasons for low literacy rate of Chakma community in the State are of many folds:

(i). Majority Chakmas are poor and engaged in Jhum cultivation where production is low. Jhum cultivation also forces them to stay away from villages for months which deprive their children education.

(ii). Lack of literacy awareness campaign programs, specially in remote areas, is another problem

(iii). Lack of participation of the local NGOs in the field (of education), and so on.

Besides the above reasons, in my opinion, lack of a common medium of instructions and lack a of common syllabi for the Schools located in the Chakma inhabited areas in the State, have been the main problems for the Govt. of Mizoram in educating the Chakmas.

MCDF: *How do you think the Chakmas' educational problems can be solved?*

KKT: The solutions to the educational problems for the Chakma Community in Mizoram have been discussed earlier. However, to attract the guardians and more students in the fields of education, the government should launch innovative schemes like supply of text books & school stationeries, school uniforms, teaching learning materials and distribution of scholarship specially to girls students and other meritorious students.



Dangu Kali Kumar Tongchangya, CEM, CADC addressing the people of Kamalanagar at Bharat Nirman Campaign on 4 March 2010 (photo courtesy: <http://www.pibaizawl.nic.in>)

When asked on his commitment to fighting corruption the CADC chief has said - "We have adopted the Right to Information Bill in our Council. And any one can use the Act (to fight corruption)."

MCDF: *Do you support the Chakma mother tongue and script should be introduced in primary schools in Chakama dominated areas outside the CADC?*

KKT: Yes, I do support.

MCDF: *The Lal Thanhawla Government is all set to launch the NLUP-II. Almost 90% Chakmas are engaged in Jhum cultivation. Can NLUP help Chakmas end Jhum life & how?*

KKT: The main aim of launching NLUP program by the Govt. of Mizoram is to control deforestation and to check the global warming at large by introducing public benefit schemes in different trades other than jhum cultivation. Clear cut guidelines are prepared for each and every trade. If the beneficiaries follow these guidelines properly, the schemes are bound to be fruitful for substantial development of the beneficiaries.

MCDF: *Coming to infrastructure, is there any initiative taken by you and the Congress Govt. to complete the almost defunct Barapansury- Kamalanagar Road? What is the completion date?*

KKT: The CADC Executive Committee and the Govt. of Mizoram is very keen to complete the construction of Barapansury-Kamalanagar Road. The construction work is likely to be completed within 6 months.

MCDF: *The Barapansury Govt. Hospital was constructed during the Congress Govt. Rule in the 1990's though it has never been operationalised. According to MCDF assessment several repair works and re-construction of quarters took place even during the MNF Govt., however at present there is neither any existence of Hospitals nor any doctors, possibly crores of public money has been wasted in the process and depriving most needed Health Care Facilities to the people of entire Thega Valley. What is the present status of the Barapansury Govt. Hospital? What initiatives are you going to take to provide a much needed Hospital to the entire Thega Valley who have trusted and voted the Congress to power.*

KKT: A number of initiatives are being taken to make the Barapansury PHC operationalised. Building up of required infrastructure for the Hospital is under consideration out of National Rural Health Mission (NHRM). Besides, provision for construction of a number of quarters is being taken up under Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF). The trust of the people for voting back the Congress in power won't go in vain.

MCDF: *If you were to list three most important things you have done as CEM so far for the welfare for CADC, what would they be?*

KKT: (i) Debated and achieved an increase of 81% of the Annual Plan Fund for CADC during 2009-10. First of its kind in CADC.

(ii) Started construction of Road from Longpuighat to Kukurduleya under NLCPR.

(iii) Got approval from the Govt. of India for Modernisation of Kamalanagar Town Project under NLCPR.

MCDF: *We believe corruption must be completely uprooted in order to make a Govt. efficient and for inclusive growth? How committed are you and what initiatives have your Govt. in CADC taken to achieve these?*

KKT: We have adopted the Right to Information Bill in our Council. And any one can use the RTI Act for any doubt or whatsoever.

MCDF: *What steps are being taken to ensure proper implementation of BADP fund as per the Revised Guidelines of 2009, in the India-Bangladesh border areas of your constituency?*

KKT: The three ADCs of Mizoram submitted a joint representation to the Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India to ensure proper implementation of the BADP. Accordingly the Govt. of India has issued a revised guideline' 2009 to the Govt. of Mizoram for implementing the BADP. I hope everything will go in the right track.

MCDF: *MCDF wants that the CADC should conduct a Cultural Show at Vannapa Hall at Aizawl to showcase Chakma's rich and unique Culture. Do you support this initiative? What is your personal assurance to achieve this?*

KKT: I welcome the proposal. Every year we keep funds to organize cultural programs. I would rather prefer to conduct such cultural shows in wider platforms.

MCDF: *Thank you, sir.*

Devastating cyclone in Mizoram

A devastating cyclone hit Mizoram in late March and April 2010 which left a trail of destruction all over. According to sources, about 4,826 houses have been destroyed displacing about 20,000 people across the state. This included several Chakma houses. At least one Chakma was also killed.

Mamit district

In the cyclone on 30 March 2010 Silsury village was totally devastated. According to the information received by Mizoram Chakma Development Forum from the villagers, out of 615 total houses, 558 houses were damaged including 393 fully damaged and 165 partly damaged. A total of 14 government infrastructure suffered the brunt. With all the village's schools (primary school and middle school and the SSA schools) damaged, education came to a standstill.

The village's only health sub centre has been blown away, severely affecting healthcare services given that a number of the villagers have been injured. Even the Buddhist temple, the community hall and the Bazaar shed have been blown away. A personnel of Border Security Force (BSF) was killed in the cyclone. Several Chakma villagers were also injured. In neighbouring Hnahva village, at least 67 houses were fully damaged.

The Young Chakma Association (YCA) volunteers from Marpara Zone immediately rushed to Silsury village and carried out relief works.



The Inter-Ministerial Central Team visiting a Mizo village affected by the cyclone, in June 2010. (Pic: <http://dipr.mizoram.gov.in>)

Lunglei district

On 21 April 2010 at around 3 AM, when every one was sleeping, another cyclone struck several villages in Lunglei district. Among them, the worst affected was Digilibagh where 236 houses were destroyed including 138 fully and 98 partially.

According to information received by the Mizoram Chakma Development Forum (MCDF) from the villagers, one Chakma identified as Chandra Kanta Chakma (53 years), son of Udongya Chakma died on the spot after he was hit by flying CGI sheets during the cyclone. Three persons have been seriously injured and hospitalized at nearby Demagiri (Tlabung) hospital. They have been identified as:

1. Lokki Loda Chakma (52 years), wife of Porok Dhan Chakma; 2. Porok Dhan Chakma (55 years), son of Muni Chakma, and 3. Lokki Math (50 years), son of Jedhera Chakma.

In addition, at least three others suffered minor injuries. They have been identified as Daya Devi Chakma (5 years), d/o Atul Chandro Chakma, Prisha Chakma (7 years), d/o Lalmalswami Chakma and Nakki Chakma (22 years), d/o Dharak Chandro Chakma.

A number of government buildings have been damaged at Digilibagh village. These include Delbachhua Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) School, Health Sub Centre and the Community Hall.

In addition, Sugurobasora and Ugudosury villages under Digilibagh Village Council had also been badly hit by the cyclone on 21 April 2010. While 11 houses were damaged in Sugurobasora sub-village, 15 houses were damaged in Ugudosury sub-village. However, fortunately, no casualty has been reported.

A five-member team of Central YCA visited Digilibagh village to take stock of the situation.

In Nunsury village, 5 houses were fully destroyed and 22 others were partially damaged. There has also been report that some houses were damaged by the strong velocity wind in Kalapani and Bindimisor villages.

MCDF's Activities Report, Jan-April 2010

The President of MCDF is happy to present this Activities Report for January –April 2010. Since the formation of MCDF on 11 October 2010, this organization has been actively involved in different useful activities. During October to December 2009, MCDF undertook the following activities: education tour to Indian Parliament, Audience with Chairperson of Mizoram Education Reforms Commission and submission of a Memorandum, and publication of two issues of *The Chakma Voice* newsletter. For details kindly refer to <http://mcdf.wordpress.com/activities/>

The MCDF's activities during January to April 2010 are as follows:

1. Publication of *The Chakma Voice*, Third Issue

MCDF published *The Chakma Voice*, Vol. II, Issue No. 1 on time. This was the third issue in a row. *The Chakma Voice* has been able to substantially contribute to the public thought and discussion. This remains the only printed magazine (English) dealing exclusively on the Chakmas issues in Mizoram. It is also available online.

2. Unique initiative: "MCDF Pogodang"

In spite of lack of funds, MCDF has expanded its activities and services. An unique initiative called "*MCDF Pogodang*" (popularly known as MCDF News Updates) has been started. Through this initiative MCDF regularly sends important news updates on education, admission into educational institutions, employment, politics, economics and various schemes & policies of the Central and Mizoram governments through SMS to its subscribers, FREE of cost. It has also been found useful in times of medical emergency. MCDF has communicated with Chakmas in particular the youths to attend accident victims/ patients admitted in hospital and arrange blood etc. *MCDF Pogodang* reaches to the remotest corners of Mizoram wherever mobile network is available. Thanks to rural mobile revolution in India, the Chakma villagers are benefitted even through they do not have access to newspapers or televisions or internet. *MCDF Pogodang* has rightly seized the opportunity of mobile revolution for the benefit of the Chakmas. It has immediately become a hit among the people and emerged as a potential tool of dissemination of information and create public opinion. Needless to say, *MCDF Pogodang* programme is probably the first of its kind in India and Mizoram.

The way the number of subscriber is increasing every day, MCDF will need funds to continue this project in large scale.

3. Helping students to know their results

Through MCDF Pogodang, MCDF helped hundreds of students in the remote villages to instantly know their examination results. Through its "*MCDF Pogodang*" service MCDF instantly made available the results announced by various Boards like Mizoram Board of School Education (MBSE), Meghalaya Board of School Education, Mizoram University and Navodayala Vidyalaya etc. Students were asked to send in their names and roll number and the MCDF volunteers provided their results. As a result, students from remote areas were able to get their results including subject wise marks through MCDF.

4. Social work

MCDF conducted three social work programmes in cooperation with Arunachal Pradesh Chakma Students Union and Chakma Buddhist Society, Delhi at Ashok Buddha Vihar, Rajghat, New Delhi. The three social work programmes were held on 28 March 2010 (Sunday), 4 April 2010 (Sunday) and 11 April 2010 (Sunday). Each time, between 50-70 youths participated.

(Continued at page 9)



Lack of safe drinking water in Chakma villages

Access to safe drinking water is an acute problem throughout the hilly tribal state of Mizoram in the North East India.

Chakma tribal villagers do not have access to safe drinking water. The most common sources of water are the rivers. But the rivers are often polluted by bathing and washing of clothes and dirty utensils by the entire village population, by bathing of cattle and more importantly, by cremation of the deaths (Chakmas cremate the corpses on the river banks) thereby rendering the river water not fit for consumption.

As an art handed down over generations, the Chakma women build temporary tiny shallow “ponds” on the sandy river banks from where they usually collect the drinking water. It is not known how clean and germs-free the water is that is collected into the “sand ponds” after filtration from the river body.

The villagers have to find alternatives in the rivulets and small springs. It is here that traditional knowledge comes handy.

The Chakma women carve tiny shallow “ponds” [Chakmas call them “Ho”] in stony surface at specific locations near tiny rivulet (as shown in the pictures on the right).

Central grants for safe drinking water

The Central government released grant-in-aid worth Rs. 495,93,00000/- to Mizoram government under National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP) during 2009-2010. This grant is meant to provide safe drinking water facilities to rural habitations and rural schools under Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission. NRDWP, a component of Bharat Nirman programme, is one of the flagship programmes of Government of India with the objective to provide safe drinking water to all households in rural areas.

The state government of Mizoram must ensure that a part of these funds are allocated and used in some Chakma inhabited areas, where people do not have access to safe drinking water, as shown in this article and pictures.

Although clean water is believed to sieve from the bottom of the rocks or from the tiny rivulets, it is certainly not germs free. Fungi (and what not) grow around the pond surface.

The problem is majority villagers do not have water-filter to purify the water. They also do not have a habit to boil the water before drinking either that would kill the germs. As a result, water-borne diseases are common in the remote areas.

During rainy season, it is difficult to get drinking water as it is impossible to collect drinking water from the rivers or the “ponds”. People usually harvest rain water in rainy days.

Interestingly, because the villagers care less about clean and safe drinking water, they suffer from different diseases as a result of consumption of unsafe water. Civil society organizations such as Young Chakma Association and Mahila Samiti must step in to create awareness and build partnership with the government to provide safe drinking water in rural areas. □



IS THIS WATER SAFE?: Drinking water source in Marpara village, Lunglei district. These kind of shallow water “ponds” are common sight in Chakma inhabited areas in Mizoram where villagers do not have access to safe drinking water

Mizoram CM praises Chakma culture, promises development

It has been thirty eight years since the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) was created for the Chakma ethnic minority community in southern Mizoram in April 1972. This year (2010) it was a proud moment for the Chakmas when Chief Minister *Dangu* (Mr) Lal Thanhawla agreed to be the Chief Guest on the occasion of 39th "CADC Day" celebrated in Kamalanagar, the headquarter of Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) on 29 April 2010.



Chief Minister Lal Thanhawla

Speaking as Chief Guest, Mizoram Chief Minister *Dangu* Lal Thanhawla highly appreciated the unique culture of the Chakmas and promised rapid development of the CADC and other Chakma-inhabited areas. Chief Minister Lal Thanhawla was accompanied from Aizawl by his wife, *Dangubi* (Mrs) Lalriliansi, Deputy Speaker of Mizoram state assembly *Dangu* John Rotluangliana, Minister of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary *Dangu* Nihar Kanti Chakma, and Deputy Commissioner of Lawngtlai district, *Dangu* C Ralkapa, among others.

Promises rapid development

Pointing out that it was the Congress government at the Centre which created the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) way back in 1972, *Dangu* Lal Thanhawla stated that the CADC can't be dissolved. Three Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) respectively for Chakma, Lai and Mara were created in 1972, but some Mizo political parties have opposed the Chakma ADC and even introduced resolutions in the Mizoram assembly demanding its dissolution.

Having separate autonomous legislature, executive and judiciary, the Chakmas administer their autonomous region in accordance with the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.

The Chief Minister promised rapid development of the Chakma inhabited areas – both the CADC and non-CADC areas. He said development in Mizoram was mainly taking place from the North, but now development should begin from the South, and provided examples of proposed trade centre with Bangladesh to be established near Demagiri in Lunglei district.

Spelling out his development plan for the CADC, *Dangu* Lal Thanhawla informed that the Backward Region Grant Fund to the tune of Rs 57 crore will be implemented in six installments and the CADC authority will be empowered to directly implement the programme. To improve road connectivity, Routlang (Chhumkhum)-Kamalanagar road will be upgraded to state highway within one or two years and Kamalanagar-Boroponsury road will be completed with priority.

Kamalanagar Greater Water Supply Scheme will be introduced soon to solve the water woes. The Kawlchaw Hydro Project that is being constructed over the Chhintuipui River will generate 460 MW of electricity to help solve CADC electricity woes, he stated. He further stated that he would like to see the CADC as the rice bowl of Mizoram and a technical team led by state Agriculture Minister will soon undertake a visit to carry out a study on agriculture prospects in the CADC area.

Beguiled by Chakmas' culture

In particular, Chief Minister *Dangu* Lal Thanhawla and his wife appreciated the beautiful culture of the Chakmas that was presented as part of the CADC Day celebration. So beguiled they were that they even performed a dance on the stage to the tune of a Chakma song. *Dangu* Lal Thanhawla stated that he found the Chakmas' culture and tradition very rich and would invite Chakma cultural troupe to perform at state level cultural programmes. Mindful of the fact that not many Chakmas can speak the Mizo language, he appealed to them to learn the Mizo language which he said would bring them closer to the Mizos and help them grab more opportunities in the state. However, he was quick to add that no one should be forced to learn Mizo language.

Chakma community celebrated Bizu 2010 in Delhi

On 13th April 2010, Mizoram Chakma Development Forum (MCDF) in cooperation with Chakma Welfare Society, Noida and Arunachal Pradesh Chakma Students' Union organized "Bizu 2010" celebration at Ashok Buddha Vihar, Rajghat, New Delhi. About 400 Chakmas participated. It was first of its kind in Delhi. That the Chakma community takes immense pride in their past and present was evidently on display during the "Bizu 2010".

All the girls/women were dressed in traditional phinon-hadi (Chakma ladies' traditional attire). The Chakma songs provided solace to the ears and instilled immediate pride to the heart.

After the conduct of Buddha Puja the celebration formally began with the welcome song "Oh aisyee aamaa Bizu din/ Aisyee aamaa Bizu" (oh, today is our Bizu). It was followed by speeches by leaders from the civil society organizations and student body. They exhorted the audience to do what is good for the society and enjoy the Bizu in the right spirit.

A brief note on the Bizu celebration is given below:

Cultural programmes:

Four spectacular dances were performed by boys and girls. Each time the audience erupted in thunderous applause, laughter and gaiety.



Chakma girls from Mizoram performing a Bizu dance (Above); a section of the gathering during Buddhist prayers.



A girl aims her 'gile' during a game against boys

Gile Haaraa:

The cultural programmes were followed by "Gile Haaraa", a traditional game of Chakmas played during Bizu. Four teams were formed – two of boys and two of girls. The decision was taken the girls will challenge the boys. Hence, two games. Two umpires were quickly nominated. It was extremely entertaining to see both boys and girls trying their hands at the game that is fast fading away from Chakma society. And behold, these girls were surprisingly not that bad in the game! However, despite spectacular show by the girl teams, they lost to the boys.

Prize distribution:

Another round of refreshments followed by award ceremony. The prizes and certificates were awarded to all those who have participated in the cultural events and Gile Haaraa.

The Phul Bizu celebration ended with a delicious meal.

The Mul Bizu (main Bizu) was celebrated the next day.



During lunch after the Bizu programme

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5. “Bizu 2010” organized for the first time in Delhi

MCDF in cooperation with other Chakma social organizations organized “Bizu 2010” at Ashok Buddha Vihar, Rajghat, New Delhi on the occasion of Phul Bizu on 13 April 2010. About 400 Chakmas participated in this “first-of-its-kind” affair. Read the report at Page 8.

6. Interventions by MCDF to provide relief to the cyclone victims

In the month of March and April 2010, a strong cyclone hit Mizoram and badly affected several villages inhabited by poverty-stricken Chakmas. Responding to its obligations towards the victims, MCDF submitted two petitions to Mr Nihar Kanti Chakma, Hon’ble Minister of State, Disaster Management & Rehabilitation, Government of Mizoram requesting for his personal intervention to take measures to provide immediate relief and compensation to the victims.

On 30 May 2010 the cyclone struck Silsury and Hnahva villages, leaving trail of destruction. After collecting factual information on 7 April 2010 MCDF sent an urgent petition by fax to Minister of Disaster Management & Rehabilitation. MCDF also followed up with the Minister through telephonic conversations, and the Minister assured the MCDF to closely look into the matter.

Again on 27 April 2010, MCDF sent a fax to Nihar Kanti Chakma, Hon’ble Minister of State, Disaster Management & Rehabilitation with regard to the destruction of private and public properties by the cyclone in Digilibagh, Sugurobasora and Ugudosury villages under Digilibagh Village Council in Lunglei district. During telephonic conversation with MCDF President, Minister NK Chakma assured that he would visit the affected areas in Lunglei district to take stock of the damages. He did start visiting the affected areas under Lunglei district from April 30 onwards.

Awareness through Media:

As the cyclone also affected the mobile/telephone towers, information was hard to obtain from the Chakma areas. The media no doubt reported about the damaged suffered by the people of Mizoram but did not report anything about the condition of the Chakmas. MCDF played a crucial role to create awareness about the Chakma cyclone victims.

The Chakma Voice editor filed two stories in the popular news website, www.merineews.com. The articles are:

“*Mizoram villages devastated by cyclone*”, Merineews.com, 7 April 2010, available at <http://www.merineews.com/article/mizoram-villages-devastated-by-cyclone/15803372.shtml>

“*Cyclone hits Mizoram, 1 killed, hundreds left homeless*”, Merineews.com, 26 April 2010, available at <http://www.merineews.com/article/cyclone-hits-mizoram-1-killed-hundreds-left-homeless/15805214.shtml>

MCDF’s press release was also covered by *The Shillong Times*, one of the leading dailies in the North East: “*Chakma body seeks relief for storm-hit in Mizoram*”, The Shillong Times, 8 April 2010

“The Chakma Voice” in National Law School

Copies of *The Chakma Voice* are available in the library of Hidayatullah National Law University, Raipur, Chhattisgarh. The Hidayatullah National Law University (<http://www.hnlu.ac.in>) is one of the top law universities in India. MCDF hopes that the budding lawyers from HNLU will understand better the problems of the Chakmas from the newsletter.

Border Fencing: Affected Chakmas must be resettled

By - MCDF Research Group

On 5 April 2010, the Indo-Bangladesh Border Fencing Affected Families Resettlement Demand Committee headed by Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) Nirupam Chakma called an “indefinite” *bandh* (strike) in the affected border villages in Lunglei district demanding swift compensation and rehabilitation for the victims. Along the Mizoram-Bangladesh border, nearly 36,000 Chakmas in 49 villages (i.e. half of Mizoram’s Chakma population) will be displaced by the ongoing construction of the barbed wire border fence.

A queer situation has besieged the fencing victims. While they are yet to come to terms with the new security structure, they are also spending sleepless nights, totally unsure of their future.

Lackluster attitude

The uncertain future of the victims emerges from the lackluster attitude of the Mizoram state government as well as the Centre. While the Mizoram’s home department stated in July 2008 that it did not recognize the fenced out victims as displaced, the Ministry of Home Affairs (Border Management) in its RTI reply dated 16 December 2009 clarified that *“Neither this Ministry has prepared any plan for rehabilitation nor any proposal has been received in this Ministry from Govt. of Mizoram”* to rehabilitate the fencing victims. Chakmas have had to resort to protests to get the basic due, i.e. compensation.

The reasons are not difficult to find. Despite being the largest minority community (they constitute over 8% of Mizoram’s total population), the successive governments in Mizoram have ignored them, neglected them and deprived them. By and large the Chakmas are still viewed as “outsiders” although they have their own Autonomous District Council established in 1972 under the 6th Schedule of the Indian Constitution in southern Mizoram. The Chakmas by themselves are too weak to make the state government realize its obligations. And, for the administrators and policy makers in New Delhi there seems to be issues more important than the survival of a critically endangered, microscopic, harmless tribal community in far away hinterland called the Mizoram borders with Bangladesh.

Don’t Chakmas need security, better life?

The fundamental question is don’t the Chakmas and Mizos too need security like any other citizens of this country? For whom is this fence being erected?

The stiff resistance offered by Chakmas, their lobbying and sustained campaigning have helped a little to turn the table in their favour. Now, the state government officials are undertaking field visits in the affected villages to prepare the Resettlement Plan which they should have done long ago. MCDF is one of the few organizations which have been highlighting the plight of the fencing victims in Mizoram.

What MCDF fears is the total lack of transparency. The villagers are never told properly about the process of verification, how the rehabilitation grant (the amount) will be decided, whether they will get any rehabilitation grant, and if yes, then when. These questions linger in the minds of the simple villagers who want answers.

A serious threat for Chakmas

The Indo-Bangladesh border fence is posing the most serious threat to the existence of the Chakmas in Mizoram since the tragic Partition of India in 1947 when their homeland was “gifted away”, much against their will, to Pakistan although the CHT (now in Bangladesh) consisted of 98% non-Muslims at that time.



India-Bangladesh border fencing (Photo courtesy: Border Roads Organization)

By erecting the fence 150 yards from the zero line (according to the Indira-Mujib Accord of 1974), India has pushed thousands of Indians into the “no man’s land” zone and virtually disowned these villagers in other states. To give an example, in Karimganj district of Assam, the villagers are not allowed to move freely into the Indian side. They can cross the check gates only for 4 times a day, timings being 6-7 am, 9-10 am, 1-2 pm and 4-5 pm. They *allegedly* cannot bring more than 10 kilo of rice at a time without being questioned by the BSF personnel and every time they have to prove that they are Indians. These villagers do not have access to basic facilities and government schemes like NREGS.

Whether or not proper and adequate compensation and rehabilitation will be given by the government will decide the future of the Chakma community in Mizoram as a whole. Never forget, half of the Chakma population will be uprooted. If not resettled, they would well become “foreigners” in their own country, suffer enormously—both economically and politically, and will be neglected more than ever before. Hence, our future is at our hands now. □



Letters to the Editor

Readers may send their letters to the editor by email at chakmavoiced@gmail.com. Kindly note that your letters may be edited for the sake of brevity and clarity.

SIR, The last issue of The Chakma Voice was very enriching in terms of the contents of information. I am very glad to read the spirited and energetic publication. I thank you very much and wish for your success.

However, the article of Mr. Victor Chakma "Try writing in chaklish" (i.e. appeal to write Chakma using English alphabets) made me disappointed. When I was in Bodhicariya Hostel, Kolkata, I remember Bimal Bhnate said at the end of our morning prayer that "if we want to survive in this world, we should love and practice the Buddhist religion which we are practising since time long". He did not urge us to practice and discover a new alternative Buddhist religion. I also believe that if we want to be known as Chakma and if we want to lead our identity with originality and pride, i would say that the struggle and fight to promote, to revive and to develop our Chakma script is the right and appropriate means of communication rather than encouraging the so called discovery of Chaklish.

In this world the scripts are countable but may not the language and dialects as there are millions of group of people in this world. I believe we don't need Chaklish as do the Mizo. The Mizo people did not have any script; that's why it was their need to adopt the English alphabets.

Yours sincerely,

Shyamal Bikash Chakma *from Australia*

SIR, I could not properly understand why the term "JUMMA" has been used in the last issue although the problems like arson, torture and harassment etc. were meted out against the Chakmas.

More than 100 Chakma houses and many 'BUDDHA VIHARAS' were burnt to ashes in Chittagong Hill Tracts as reported in Bangladesh last few months for which protests have erupted in several cities in different countries.

Though Chakmas come under the same category 'JUMMA' but it is important to preserve our identity.

Please make a deep look into the matter and correct me if I am wrong.

Yours sincerely,

Suman Chakma,

Shillong, Meghalaya, India

The Editor replies: The term "Jumma" was used in relation to the attacks in CHT, Bangladesh where the tribal communities are known collectively as Jumma. Apart from Chakmas, other tribal groups were also targeted (including arrest by the Bangladeshi security forces) during and after the communal attacks.

In India, indigenous peoples are officially known as "Scheduled Tribes" or tribals. However, in Bangladesh they love to call themselves as "Jummas".

All are first class citizens in Mizoram: HT Sangliana

On 23 March 2010, minority community leaders from Bru, Chakma and Hmar tribes met National Commission for Minorities (NCM) Vice-Chairman H T Sangliana at Aizawl, Mizoram. Bru leaders wanted implementation of the "Special Development Project" as soon as possible. Chakma delegation led by MLA Nirupam Chakma apprised Mr Sangliana of the problems of the Chakma families affected by the Indo-Bangladesh border fencing. The leaders from the Hmar community expressed concern over the four proposed hydel projects in Sinlung Hills Development Council area that would displace hundreds of Hmar families. Mr Sangliana stated that every citizen of Mizoram should consider himself as "first class citizen" and there should not be any discrimination.

Mizoram News in Brief

Central government considering direct funding to ADCs: DoNER Minister tells Lok Sabha

In a written reply in the Lok Sabha on 4 May 2010, the Minister of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) B.K. Handique stated that the proposals for direct funding to Mara, Lai and Chakma Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) of Mizoram and Bodo Territorial Council of Assam are being considered by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj as the matter relates to the Sixth Schedule Areas. He also said at present funding is done under Non Lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR) scheme to all the ADCs through the respective State Governments.

The DoNER Minister stated this while replying to the question raised by Bodo MP from Assam, Mr Sansuma Khunggur Bwiswmuthiary as to “whether the Government proposes to provide direct central funding to all the Autonomous District Councils of the North-Eastern region”.

Bangladesh High Commissioner visits proposed border trade centre near Demagiri

Soon Mizoram is going to have direct trade links with Bangladesh through the Thegador (Kawrupichuah-Thegamukh) check post in Lunglei district. On 19 April 2010, Bangladesh High Commissioner to India, Tariq A Karim and Mizoram Parliamentary Secretary, S. Laldingliana jointly inspected the proposed site. The visit by Bangladeshi officials is expected to expedite the border trade between Mizoram and Bangladesh.

CADC budget for 2010-11

On 7 April 2010, the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) in Mizoram passed the budget for 2010 - 11. Mizoram Chakma Development Forum (MCDF) has been informed that the Plan budget is 11.5 Crore and the Non-Plan is 19 Crore. The total outlay shows an increase of 5.48 Cr from last year's budget.

Border fencing to be completed by March 2012

On 3 March 2010, Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Shri Mullappally Ramachandran in a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha stated that efforts are being made for early completion of the Indo-Bangladesh border fencing. The Indo-Bangladesh fencing is expected to be completed by March 2012, he said.



Chief Executive Member (CEM) CADC Dangu K K Tongchangya (third from left), his wife *Dangubi* (Mrs) Mulga Banu Tongchangya, CEM of Mara ADC Dangu S Khipo (third from right), and former Rajya Sabha MP Dangu Hiphei (second from right) with MCDF members in New Delhi, 22 March 2010

NLUP to be implemented in Mizoram

On 17 March 2010, Mizoram Governor M.M. Lakhera stated in the State Assembly budget session opening speech that his government will introduce New Land Use Policy (NLUP) to help farmers move away from the traditional Jhum cultivation. Rs.2,527-crore NLUP aims to support 120,000 families in the first five years. The Governor said the departments of agriculture, horticulture, veterinary, industries, forest, fisheries, sericulture and soil and water conservation would be involved in the scheme. About 80 percent of farmers in Mizoram still depend on Jhum.

In the meeting held on 4 May 2010, the NLUP Implementing Board decided to issue the final notification on NLUP by 9 July 2010. The survey report will be released by the Deputy Commissioners of all the districts for inviting complaints and suggestions up to 31 May and the same will be examined and disposed of between 1-20 June.