



The Chakma Voice

A bi-monthly Newsletter

Mizoram Chakma Development Forum

C3/441, Second Floor, Janakpuri, New Delhi-58, INDIA
www.mcdf.wordpress.com; Email: chakmavoiced@gmail.com

New Delhi, Vol. II, Issue No. 3, August-September 2010

Contributory Price Rs 30/-

INSIDE

- >Exclusive Interview with
R M Chakma.....2
- >The task of making RTE Act work in
Mizoram.....7
- >Indian Home Minister's visit.....9
- >Human Rights.....10
- >Mizoram News in Brief.....11
- >Other News.....12

Editorial: School is a Fundamental Right

With the enforcement of the "Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009" with effect from 1st April 2010, education up to Class VIII has become a Fundamental Right and will be obtained "free and compulsory" across India. This Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009 is quite significant, for the chief reason that the Chakmas are the most illiterate community in Mizoram (2001 Census) and children in nearly 72% Chakma villages lack access to education beyond primary level. This sounds odd for Mizoram which is ranked second in literacy; but, it is nothing but the truth.

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) aims at universalisation of primary education. All children attending schools are provided Mid-Day Meal in the schools so that the poorest of the poor do not miss school because they can't afford food. The RTE Act, 2009 has made "elementary education" "compulsory" for all children of 6-14 years. In addition, Mizoram state is preparing for implementation of the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) which aims at universalization of secondary education. Over 96% Chakma villages in Mizoram still do not have any High School.

Under RTE Act, the state government of Mizoram is legally bound to set up schools upto Class VIII - within 3 years - wherever there isn't any. However, law itself is not adequate. It is the civil society that must guard this legislation to ensure that it is implemented in letter and spirit to the benefit of all sections, in particular the minorities.

Based on the ground work which the MCDF has been doing for the last three months, it is now preparing to file a complaint before the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), which is mandated under the RTE Act, 2009 to look after the implementation of the RTE Act, against denial of elementary education to Chakma minorities. If MCDF wins the case, it will be a decisive and historic moment for the Chakmas of Mizoram, and will have multiplier effects in other states too.

Editorial Board

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

Spectacular results by Chakma students in JNV Selection Test

This year the Chakma students of Mizoram have shown outstanding results in the 2010 Selection Test for Class VI for admission to the Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV) schools. According to the result announced by the JNV, 16 out of 17 candidates selected in Lawngtlai district are Chakmas. In Mamit district, out of 26 candidates selected, 25 are Chakmas. And out of 31 selected candidates in Lunglei district, 8 are Chakmas. Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas are Central schools with residential facilities aimed at providing the best quality education to students at free of cost.

It is important to note that MCDF was the first one to announce the result when it was declared in the website of the Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti.

This publication is for Private
Circulation only

Exclusive interview with RM Chakma

Dangu (Mr) Rashik Mohan Chakma is a former Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) in Mizoram and president of opposition Mizo National Front (MNF), CADC. He is one of the best known faces among Chakmas in Mizoram.

In an email interview with MCDF on 24 September 2010, he has spoken out his heart on the number of contentious issues. MCDF provides the full interview below.

MCDF: MCDF thanks you for giving your valuable time for this exclusive interview.

RM CHAKMA: Thank you and most welcome.

MCDF: To begin with, you have been Chief Executive Member of CADC for two terms. How far do you think you have succeeded to work for the welfare of the people?

RM CHAKMA: The achievement made during the two term rule of MNF Government are manifold which are:-

(i) Our first endeavour was to improve the work culture of the CADC employees and we made stringent administration on punctuality in attending office and working in the office diligently. We took every care so that officers follow the official procedure and maintain proper record. It is well known that before MNF rule there had been hardly any punctuality in attending office and records were maintained very haphazardly. For which there had been numerous audit objections every year. And officers and staffs used to work day and night on arrival of Audit team. However, with great satisfaction I can claim that we could succeed in the endeavour. I recall in the Audit Report of 2006 there was only one audit objection which was that almost 80% percent of Council fund are used against administrative cost i.e salary etc. After the two years of MNF rule in the Council no officers and staffs needed to work day and night to face the audit. And for the points of uplift the public morals in course of our administration we tried to instill/ inculcate in the peoples' mind the attitude to ask themselves what they can do for the Council instead of hovering on what the Council did for them. All public works were monitored and managed properly and strictly. No contractor or work agency were paid final bills of any works until it was executed properly. The village councils and other civil body were given responsibility for proper maintenance and looking after of community assets in their respective areas.

(ii) Our second priority was to frame and enact rules, regulations and Acts on the subjects as envisaged in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India. Before my becoming CEM, I remember there were only three rules mainly , the CADC (Agriculture Land) Act, the CADC (Forest) Act, the CADC (management) & Control of Primary School) Regulation, 1993. And there were Governor made rules such as The Mizoram (Autonomous District Council Constitution of Conduct and Business) Rules 1974, the Mizoram (Autonomous District Council Fund (Rules and the Mizoram (Autonomous District Council Grant-in-aid) Rules. But during our rules of eight years I remember we framed and enacted as many as fifteen (15) Rules, Regulations, Acts etc. And we have drafted Rules, Regulations and Acts in almost all subjects in which the council has power to make rules etc. But within our tenure the Governor didn't give approval to two such drafted Rules for which it could not be passed in the council session. Had there not been undue delay in according approval of the Governor the CADC would have been equipped with all Rules and Regulations and Act as vested in the Sixth Schedule. So it is a great achievement.



Dangu R M Chakma

“We brought punctuality in attending office and working in the office diligently”

(iii) We were also successful in the field of staff welfare. We introduced Group Insurance scheme (GSLI) in collaboration with LIC. We have also made financial Security of our employees after retirement by introducing Pension Contribution Fund in the council. Almost all the staffs were provided housing loan under HUDCO and bank loan from SBI, Chawngte. There had never been favouratism or nepotism in matter of promotion of Officers and Staffs in the Council. All the employees were paid medical re-inbursement allowance. We have even introduced Chakma Language Allowance for the teachers.

(iv) If we talk of the infrastructural development during the period of my CEMship those are massive in compare to 27 years rule of others. The CADC, for the first time connected with truckable road with construction of truckable bridges at Longpuighat and Kamalanagar over river Tuichawng and Chawngte rivers, Kamalanagar town road was widened and black topped and other road for connecting upstream villages of Tuichawng river, Chawngte to Barapansury road, Chawngte to Diltlang road were almost completed, Longpuighat to Vaseitlang to Kukurduleya road, Parva to Siminasura road were also constructed. A branch of State Bank of India was opened, the Kamalanagar College was upgraded into the deficit status, the Chawngte Primary Health Centre upgraded into Community Health Centre with construction of Hospital building. Provisions were also made for construction and establishment of Primary Health Centre at Borapansury and Longpuighat, a huge Bazar building was constructed at Kamalanagar.

(v) In the field of education we have completed construction of school buildings almost all but leaving only 8 School buildings. RCC building for all Secondary School in the area were also constructed. Others school infrastructure such as furniture, teaching and learning aid, play way materials also supplied in all School. Students were provided with full set of text books every year free of cost and to encourage female education in the community, all girls students were provided financial assistance. To improve efficiency of the teachers and to widen the horizon of their knowledge all teachers were made compulsory to undergo teachers' training at DIET.

(vi) In the field of youth welfare and promotion of sports, we initiated unique and commendable programmes. We conducted Zonal Sports Meet not only covering the CADC area but also whole Chakma inhabited areas in the state. We even imparted coaching in various discipline of sports such as football, volleyball etc. We encouraged the local youth body such as YCA, MCSU, etc. to organise such event connected with youth affairs and provided financial and materials support.

Our greatest achievement I consider was organisation of Zonal and District Council Cultural Meet including all Chakma inhabited villages. The Chakma inhabited areas in Mizoram were left to their fate during the previous government thus there was created a wide gap of communication and aloofness between the Council Chakma and Chakma living outside CADC area. Through the above said programme we could create closeness and a sense of community feeling, social binding, amongst ourselves. Thus, in true sense Chakma Nationalism began to spurt in all section of the community

(vii) The last but not the least our success was in the field of preservation and promotion of Chakma culture, literature, language and script. It is during our tenure the Chakma script font was designed. As such Chakma language can be written with its own script through the most modern technique - computer. Imparting of education in elementary stage to the Chakma boys and girls in their mother tongue was launched with new vigour. The font designing of Chakma scripts in fact was an epoch making event. The production of three Chakma audio-cassettes were masterpiece toward bringing unity among the Chakmas and bringing forth Chakma Nationalism.

“(Discriminatory) Recruitment Rules can be challenged in a court of Law by any directly affected person or a PIL can be lodged against such unconstitutional provision in the Recruitment Rules of the Mizoram government. For this MCDF may be the fit body.”

MCDF: Some of your party men blame your so-called autocratic style of functioning and decision making for the defeat of MNF in the last MDC election. Why do you think your party lost the last CADC election in 2008?

RM CHAKMA: I don't remember any single instance where any major decision was taken either in government or in party without discussion and resolution in the appropriate forum. However, if any member either in government or in party does not put opinion during such meeting I think there can no one to blame but the very person himself. On the other hand in democratic process of decision making once resolve with the consent of majority members if any individual member differs opinion from that of the majority members decision, sometimes it became difficult to take such member's opinion into consideration. It may be pertinent to mention here that any responsible Government or party generally works with certain principles and vision as well. To uphold such principle and to work towards materializing the vision, generally the leader holds prime responsibility. And in doing so if any individual member's vested interest is not fulfilled, I don't know how far it will be right to term such decisions as autocratic.

“Criticisms are always welcome” - RM Chakma

In matter of defeat of MNF party in the last CADC General Election several factors worked. First of all, as I have already stated my government tried to introduce good Governance for the first time in CADC history. There was transparency, a sense of responsibility and a definite vision and also an all inclusive developmental process. In fact it was a major shift and bold endeavor. As the people including a few of so called intellectuals in Kamalanagar have not taken such step kindly as it hampers their vested interests. We hardly took any decision with the sole motive to derive political gain.

Any seasoned politician or person dealing with politics will agree that the achievement made by a particular party government does not always attribute to wining election. Just same thing happened in the last MDC election. Several local factors such as the peoples' intense will to vote for the candidates belonging to their locality and in some constituencies people wanted to change a particular individual candidate. In such cases people hardly judge the quality of the candidates or the party to which the candidate they want to vote belongs. Further, during last MDC election criminalization of politics was introduced by our opponent parties. For which the MNF party was not prepared at all. It is very unfortunate that even some of the NGOs were used by the opponent of MNF Party.

MCDF: You have been the most praised and criticized Chakma leader in CADC. What's your take?

RM CHAKMA: I am very happy for the remark. An indolent is hardly praised or criticized by anybody.

MCDF: The MNF party and you as opposition leader have raised allegations of corruption against the ruling party leaders in the Congress. How far are your allegations true?

RM CHAKMA: I want to ascertain to all my people that I am not amongst those politicians who make politics dirty. Any allegation we may raise against the opponent party leaders will be always based on truth. I don't make allegation against my opponent for the sake of politics or for mere opposing them. And I am brave enough to praise my opponent if they do something good for the welfare of our people.

MCDF: Several corruption charges/cases are also against you. Your comments on this?

RM CHAKMA: First of all the main reason behind backwardness of CADC and the Chakmas in general is that high dose of politics is being fed to us. The so-called corruption charges made against me are baseless. As there was nothing dis-honesty and dishonest misappropriation of government money for personal benefit. All actions committed for which corruption charges were made were done with sole intention of public benefit and thus people had been benefited and will be benefited from those actions of the executive committee under my leadership. It is the action of the coward politicians who are not brave enough to appreciate the noble action of their opponent.

MCDF: What according to you are the shortcomings of the present congress Govt. in CADC ?

RM CHAKMA: The main shortcoming of the present congress government is the ill intention of its members and their naiveness. Presently there is hardly any good governance in the Council (CADC).

MCDF: How have you contributed as a responsible leader of Opposition and what are the measures you and your party have taken to check corruption in CADC ?

RM CHAKMA: I am playing the role of an ideal opposition leader both in Council House and public as well. I always do constructive criticism on their policies and programme and make the public aware on the corrupt practices, and anti-people activities of the government. I also appreciate the present government for any good action both in the House and in public. But I often find the truth in the popular saying, "a thief hardly gives any heed to religious discourses"

MCDF: The Central government has approved more than Rs. 2800 crores for NLUP in Mizoram. Do you think NLUP will be able to uplift the economic conditions of the Chakmas in the state? Why do you think it will be successful or failure?

RM CHAKMA: The very concept of the NLUP was born to deceive the people of Mizoram as during election campaign they have promised the people to pay Rs. 1 lakh (each family) at one go. Just after forming the government but in practice it did not happen. As such negative attitude towards the NLUP has already been created in the people's mind. In matter of Chakmas, adequate awareness are not given pertaining to the process of implementation. So I don't think the NLUP will be of any use to uplift the economic condition of the Chakmas in the state.

MCDF: The Chakmas are today the most backward community in terms of education as well as in terms of economic stability. How do you think this situation can improve?

RM CHAKMA: To improve the situation initiative should be taken by the leaders. The management of schools should be free from favouritism, nepotism and corruption. For economic stability the traditional knowledge of the Chakma should be utilized which is wet rice cultivation (WRC). Instead of providing financial help to land owners the government should launch massive programme to develop land by machine. As a traditionally poor family will never be able to develop his land unless government does it for him. Once self-sufficiency in food is attained other economic activities will automatically follow.

MCDF: Employment is necessary for livelihood and economic stability is necessary for development. In Mizoram, various Recruitment Rules of the Mizoram government have made certificate in Mizo subject up to class VII a pre-requisite for state government jobs. In MCDF's opinion this discriminates against minorities like Chakmas who do not study Mizo subject in schools. Shouldn't CADC do something to remove or amend the discriminatory Recruitment Rules? What steps will you and your MNF party take to remove such discriminatory rules?

RM CHAKMA: In this matter mere submission of representation or prayer to wipe out or delete the provision of pre-requisition of knowledge in Mizo up to elementary standard from such Recruitment Rules has never and will never work. For solution of this problem we have to manage legal action from the court of Law. The provision can be challenged in a court of Law by any directly affected person or a PIL can be lodged against such unconstitutional provision in the recruitment rules of the Mizoram government. For this MCDF may be the fit body.

MCDF: What do you think about "The Chakma Voice" and other MCDF activities? Do you have any suggestions?

RM CHAKMA: Frankly, I am not a regular reader of "The Chakma Voice". MCDF activities are commendable and the magazine is a good job. I suggest that it should be published regularly without any break.

MCDF: It is a public perception that you had become an arrogant, over confident and undemocratic leader as CEM. What do you have to say to your critics?

RM CHAKMA: These are really serious allegations. But unfortunately I have never been confronted with such allegation or criticism. It would have been better if it could be known from where the MCDF has gathered the so-called public perception. However, I agree that once I'm convinced that anything is good for the people I try hard to push it through which many selfish politicians hardly do. Criticisms are always welcome.

MCDF: Except you, all the elected MDCs of MNF party in CADC quit the party. You are the lone elected member of your party now. To re-organize your party to the level of winner will be a huge challenge. Would you like share with our readers what you intend to do it?

RM CHAKMA: Hardly any primary member or voter has left MNF party till date and as the party's grass root level is strong and stable it itself is a quite strong force to defeat congress which is infested with corruption. The people has already started realising the good works done by the MNF Party and I hope it will not be a difficult job to defeat the congress party in the next CADC election.

MCDF: In the upcoming MDC bye election for Kamalanagar constituency on what credentials are you going to select the MNF candidate and why should people vote for the MNF candidate?

RM CHAKMA: Personally I always believe in strong and selfless dedication towards preservation of Chakma identity and welfare of the people in general. And I always want to have such like minded persons as my colleague. For selecting candidate for the up-coming bye election such credentials shall be considered. However, popularity of the candidate shall also be a criteria for selecting the candidate.

MCDF: If voted back to power again in CADC, what will be your top 5 priorities? Please be specific.

RM CHAKMA: Top 5 priorities will be: 1) Self-Sufficiency in food grains, 2) Imparting of quality education, 3) Administrative Reform, 4) Unity and better understanding in the Chakmas living at different parts of the world, and 5) Preservation and promotion of Chakma Culture and Tradition.

MCDF: Final question: if somehow some of your party (MNF) policies go against the interest of the Chakma community what comes first to you - your party or your people?

RM CHAKMA: If it is to the extent of assimilation of the Chakmas and also to the extent of destroying the Autonomy it will always be my people.

NOTICE

MCDF will publish a special edition of THE CHAKMA VOICE, on the occasion of its 1st Anniversary, in December 2010. The special edition will capture "the sufferings, hopes, achievements and aspirations" of the global Chakma community in the 21st century.

Therefore, MCDF requests every one to extend his/her contributions which may be in the form of financial support or writing articles, or distribution, among others.

Also, ensure that you do not miss the December 2010 special issue of THE CHAKMA VOICE !

The task of making the RTE Act 2009 work in Mizoram

By—MCDF Research Group

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (in short, RTE Act) came into force from 1st April 2010 making education for all children of 6-14 years “free and compulsory”. The RTE Act 2009 was enacted to give effect to the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act (2002) that made education a “Fundamental Right”.

Across India, there are nearly 92 lakhs children out of school. In Mizoram, a conservative estimate of the state education officials stated that there are over 15,000 children who do not attend school and more importantly, majority of these are minority Chakma and Bru children. This apart, the RTE Act 2009 is significant as it not only makes education a Fundamental Right but also guarantees quality education which is critically lacking in Mizoram.

I. The problems in Mizoram

In terms of literacy, Mizoram is second highest (88.8%), only next to Kerala. But Mizoram has its unique problems with the minority communities so much so that it can be safely stated that it is because of the high incidence of illiteracy among the minority communities that Mizoram cannot achieve the No. 1 rank.

Just take the case of the Chakmas. With over 8% of the total population of Mizoram the Chakmas are the largest minority group. But only 45.3% Chakmas are literate, as per 2001 census figures which also confirmed that Chakmas are the “most illiterate” community in the state. This is against Mizos’ staggering 95.6% literacy rate. Although the literacy rate of the Brus (also known as Reangs) is not known, it is popularly believed that the Brus are far behind to Chakmas in terms of development and education. This itself should be enough to indict the state government of Mizoram for not taking enough care of its minorities.

Now, consider the repatriation, in near future, of over 35,000 Mizoram Brus from the Tripura relief camps who have been denied development and education for over a decade. For the last 13 years, the Bru children in the Tripura relief camps have been deprived of education. Hence, an army of illiterate minorities will be a bigger challenge which the Mizoram government must be prepared to meet in near future. The significance of the RTE Act 2009 cannot be stressed more.

The Mizoram government must shift its focus on the minorities. So far, the education officials are happy to blame the “nomadic nature” of the minorities for the inability to reach to them and educate them. But in the age of Right to Education Act 2009 and the Right to Information Act 2005 these strategies won’t work anymore. In September 2009, the Mizoram government admitted that there were over 15,000 children out of schools in the state and majority of these children belong to Chakma and Bru minority communities (The Hindu, 29 September 2009). 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). Therefore, according to United Nations’ established norms, the fact that the vast majority of the “excluded children share the same feature” (i.e. ethnic Chakma and Bru) this is clearly a case of “discrimination”.



A Chakma boy shouldering his sibling: A burden too heavy? Hello parents, he needs to go to school

II. The status of schools in Chakma areas:

Another glaring example of denial of education is through lack of access of schools, as emerged from a recent survey in Chakma inhabited areas. 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 Chakma villagers have been demanding Middle Schools and High Schools in their villages but their demands have gone unheeded for years. The failure of the state government to set up Middle and High Schools tantamount to denial of education to the Chakma children. 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.

III. The way forward:

a. Proper implementation of the RTE Act, 2009

On 1st April 2010 while launching the RTE Act, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh stated, *“To realise the Right to Education the government at the Centre, in the states and Union Territories, and at the district and village level must work together as part of a common national endeavour. I call upon all the state governments to join in this national effort with full resolve and determination. Our government, in partnership with the state governments, will ensure that financial constraints do not hamper the implementation of the Right to Education Act.”* (The Indian Express, 2 April 2010)

The Mizoram government must make every possible sincere effort to implement the RTE Act, 2009 in letter and spirit. In particular, the state government must concentrate on the minority concentrated areas given their acute underdevelopment and lack of access to education. In this connection, the state government must be reminded that under the RTE Rules, it is duty bound to establish primary schools (Class I-V) “within a walking distance of one km of the neighbourhood” and schools from Class VI-VIII “within a walking distance of 3 km of the neighbourhood” (Rule 6 of RTE Rules 2010).

b. Need to engage the civil society of the minorities

The officials openly accuse the minorities (in particular the Chakmas and Brus) of having “nomadic” way of life and say that due to their shifting habit the state government cannot educate them. If that is the case, the state government should have involved the civil society organizations of the minorities to implement the governmental policies and programmes, including Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The state government of Mizoram has signed education Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) with a number of Mizo NGOs namely, Young Mizo Association, Mizoram Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (apex body of Mizo women), Presbyterian Church, Baptist Church and Salvation Army. The Chakmas being the most illiterate community, the state government should shift its priority to educating the minorities.

As this publication goes to print, on 15 October 2010 the Mizoram Chakma Students Union (MCSU) Lunglei Zone started its Education Awareness Campaign sponsored by the SSA Mizoram. The MCSU members will go from village to village in remote areas to conduct education awareness camps. The Mizoram government and SSA authorities must take this line to educate the Chakmas.

Lastly, local authorities (Village Councils), teachers, parents and guardians have a critical role to play in educating the people. And, they should take their role seriously.

Indian Home Minister's tryst with minority leaders in Mizoram

On 25 May 2010, Union Home Minister *Dangu* (Mr) Palaniappan Chidambaram visited Aizawl, capital of Mizoram. The Home Minister discussed security related issues with Chief Minister Dangu Lal Thanhawla, his Council of Ministers and senior officials.

Dangu Chidambaram discussed with Lal Thanhawla the progress of India-Bangladesh border fencing, rehabilitation of people affected by the border fencing, Bru imbroglio and border trade with neighbouring Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Border Fencing:

On India-Bangladesh border fencing, Dangu Chidambaram urged the concerned agencies to complete the fencing work at the earliest. He also suggested that the State Government appoint a senior officer from the Secretariat to resolve all issues regarding claims for compensations and other related issues.

Bru repatriation issue:

He also urged the state government and tribal leaders to bring home about 35,000 Brus who have been languishing in relief camps in Tripura since 1997.



P. Chidambaram, Honb'le Home Minister of India giving a patient hearing to the delegates of three ADCs—Lai, Chakma and Mara in Aizawl, 25 May 2010



CADC CEM K K Tongchangya presenting a Chakma traditional wear to Honb'le Home Minister of India, P. Chidambaram during his visit to Mizoram, 25 May 2010 (Both the pictures courtesy: <http://www.pibaizawl.nic.in>)

A representation was also made by the Bru community leaders.

Meeting with minority community leaders:

Home Minister P. Chidambaram met Chief Executive Members (CEMs) of Chakma Autonomous District Council, Lai Autonomous District Council and Mara Autonomous District council at Raj Bhavan, Aizawl. The three CEMs submitted a Memorandum highlighting demands for their respective ADCs.

On the occasion, CADC CEM Dangu K K Tongchangya presented a Chakma traditional wear to the Home Minister of India which the later wore throughout the discussion with the representatives of the three ADCs—Chakma, Mara and Lai at Raj Bhavan (see the pictures).

MCDF has learnt that the Home Minister promised to sanction Rs. 28 Crore for Construction of Highways along the International Border Areas.

MCDF also learnt that the Home Minister's original schedule had included a visit to Borapansury, a Chakma village near India-Bangladesh border but it had to be cancelled due to bad weather.

Human Rights

Buddhist Monk attacked

A Chakma Buddhist monk was attacked by some unknown miscreants in Mizoram on the night of 19 May 2010. The incident took place at around 9-30 PM near Phuldungsei in Mamit district, 147 km from Aizawl. Ven. Kacchayana Bhikku was assaulted when he was carrying a Buddha statue in a hired vehicle from Guwahati (Assam). This Buddha statue from Thailand was donated by Mahabodhi Society Bangalore to the Marpara South Buddhist Temple.

It so happened that the vehicle hired by Ven. Kacchayana Bhikku slightly hit the rear view mirror of another vehicle (a 407 vehicle) where about a dozen Mizos were coming from the opposite direction while negotiating for side near Phuldungsei. They asked the driver, who was a Bengali, to get down. When the driver showed reluctance, they dragged him and started beating him. Seeing this Ven. Kacchayana Bhikku of Marpara South Buddhist Temple intervened and requested the attackers to spare his driver.

At this the accused began to interrogate Ven. Kacchayana Bhikku. The Buddhist monk showed them the Buddha statue and appealed them to let them go. But the accused brutally assaulted Ven. Kacchayana Bhikku. They punched him on the face and kicked him for several minutes. One of the assaulters even bit Ven. Kacchayana Bhikku on his bald head, leaving teeth imprints on the head.

The Mizoram Chakma Development Forum (MCDF) strongly condemned the attack on the Buddhist monk. In a statement, MCDF termed the attack as “unfortunate and unacceptable in a civilized society.”

What law says about Freedom of Religion

“All persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion” (Article 25 (1) of Constitution of India)

“Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.” (Article 18, The United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights or ICPCR)

“No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.” (Article 18, ICPCR)

Two more monks manhandled in MST bus

One day after the attack on Ven. Kacchayana Bhikku two more Buddhist monks were humiliated in Mamit district, Mizoram. On May 20, 2010, two Buddhist monks were physically manhandled, harassed and humiliated by two passengers while travelling in a government Mizoram State Transport (MST) bus from Aizawl to Marpara. The Buddhist monks identified as venerable Kabidananda Bhikku and venerable Gautamananda Bhikku from Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) were on their way to Marpara village in Lunglei district. When the MST bus reached Phuldungsei town in Mamit district, 147 km from Aizawl, two passengers (aged between 25 and 30 years) began to harass them. The accused pulled the ears of venerable Gautamananda Bhikku while the other monk was not allowed to sleep in his own seat.

The accused asked the monks, “Why are you wearing this kind of clothes,” referring to the saffron robe of the Buddhist monks and pulled the ears of venerable Gautamananda Bhikku in a very demeaning manner. None of the passengers in the bus intervened.

Mizoram told to set up SHRC

On 28 July 2010, Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Shri Ajay Maken told the Rajya Sabha that the Government of India and the National Human Rights Commission have been requesting to all those States which have not yet constituted their State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) to do so at the earliest. Mizoram is one of the nine states which have failed to set up SHRC.

Mizoram News in Brief

Mizoram's Rs.2873.13 crore NLUP scheme approved

On 15 July 2010, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (government of India) approved the "Comprehensive and Integrated Socio-Economic Development Project under the New Land Use Policy (NLUP) of Government of Mizoram" involving Rs.2873.13 crore. The NLUP will be implemented over a period of five years and will benefit 1,20,000 poor Jhummia families.

The livelihood activity would include land reclamation, agri-horticultural and plantation crops, medicinal plants, animal husbandry, fishery, sericulture, bamboo plantation and micro-enterprise. For management of the project there will be a 3-tier structure, namely, the State Level NLUP Apex Board (with a functional team as the NLUP Implementing Board), District Level NLUP Committees and Village Level NLUP committees.

The Village Level Committees would prepare land use plan, selection of beneficiaries, allotment of land to beneficiaries, preparation of village level project and action plan. This would get incorporated in the district plans and the State Plan which would be implemented by the line department concerned.

Malaria deaths decreased?

According to Mizoram Health Department, malaria deaths decreased in the state as only 7 deaths were reported during January to May 2010 against 47 deaths during the same period last year.

The officials said that those who died were mainly from malaria-prone areas in south and western parts of Mizoram. Incidentally, the western and southern Mizoram are inhabited predominantly by the Chakmas.

However, MCDF is unable to verify at the moment how many among the 7 deaths are Chakmas. MCDF will urgently take steps to encourage villagers to report any death due to disease including malaria to the health department, Mizoram as well as MCDF office in Delhi.

APPEAL: Kindly report any birth and death to Registrar, Birth & Death. In case of death of children or pregnant women inform MCDF

Funds for rural roads:

In a press release dated 2 July 2010, the Ministry of Rural Development stated that it released grant in aid worth Rs. 10,00,00,000/- (Rs. Ten crore) as part payment of 2nd installment of Phase V for construction of rural roads in Mizoram under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY). Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana is a 100 % centrally sponsored scheme to provide road connectivity in the rural areas of the country. PMGSY envisages connectivity to all habitations with a population of 500 persons and above in the rural areas and about 250 persons and above in respect of the hilly states, tribal areas and desert areas through good and all weather roads.

RMSA and SSA

On 16 July 2010, the Executive Committee of Rajya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhyan (RMSA) and Sarva Shiksha Abhyan (SSA) approved the schemes to be taken up during the current financial year 2010-11. In the meeting held under the chairmanship of the Chief Secretary, Mr. Vanhela Pachuau, Rs 127,00,95,000 was approved for the schemes under RMSA and Rs 84,00,92,000 was also approved for implementation of schemes under SSA.

Chief Minister Lal Thanhawla stated in May 2010 that 177 High Schools (new construction and renovation) have been approved under RMSA in Mizoram to the tune of Rs 3,000 Lakhs.

Funds for BAPD:

The Ministry of Home Affairs sanctioned Rs 2535 Lakhs during 2008-09, Rs 2494.42 Lakhs during 2009-10 and Rs 2506 Lakhs during 2010-11 to Mizoram to implement the Border Area Development Programme (BAPD).

Infant mortality increasing:

The rate of infant mortality is on the rise in Mizoram. As per a latest survey released on 29 June 2010 by the Mizoram Economics and Statistics department, it has been found that the rate of infant mortality (1 child dying out of 1000 before attaining one year) has increased from 16.19% in 2003 to 26% in 2005 to 29.73% in 2007 to 38.34 in 2008.

News in Brief

“Convention on Chakma Language” organized in Tripura

A “Convention on Chakma Language” was organized by Sahitya Akademi at Nazrul Kalakshetra in Agartala in Tripura on 10-11 July 2010. Tripura Chief Minister Mr Manik Sarkar inaugurated the convention. Speakers expressed great concern that smaller ethnic languages are facing extinction threat.

Speaking at the function as Chief Guest, Chief Minister Manik Sarkar stated that all languages in the state are given equal status. He stressed on the importance of sustained research work for improvement and preservation of the languages of smaller communities. “We should encourage our next generations to love and maintain the tradition of our regional and tribal languages”, he is reported to have said.

Arunachal Pradesh: 2,000 Chakmas not included in Census

In Arunachal Pradesh Chakmas inhabiting in Modakha Nala, Sukha Nala and Shillongpahar villages under Diyun Circle in Changlang district have not been included in the Census 2011. They comprise about 450 families of 2,000 people. On 9 May 2010 the villagers of Shillongpahar lodged a complaint with the Extra-Assistant Commissioner (EAC) of Diyun Circle who is also the Census Charge Officer (CCO). But the CCO wrote on their complaint in his own hand—“*Under no circumstances people residing in RF/ARF area shall be included in the ongoing Census work. Enumerators have already been briefed about the matter.*”

The Chakma villagers have been living there since 1966.

Bangladesh: 5 Chakmas tortured by Army

On the night of 30 June 2010, Army personnel led by Major Zaman from Rangamati Brigade raided Samira Jurachari village in Rangamati district and beat up three Chakma villagers identified as Bon Chandra Chakma (55 years), his son Purna Kumar Chakma (25 years) and Karma Dhan Chakma (45 years). Karma Dhan Chakma sustained serious injury in one of his eyes and he could lose his eyesight in that eye.

In another incident, on 4 July 2010, two innocent Chakmas were tortured in Kudukchari bazar in Rangamati district by the Army. The victims were identified as Joy Kamal Chakma (28 years), son of Udonyo Chakma and Kanon Kushum Chakma (35 years), son of Ratto Ram Chakma. They were beaten up without any reason.

Two Chakmas appointed NHRC members in Bangladesh

In a historic decision, two Chakmas have been appointed Honorary Members of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of Bangladesh. They are Nirupa Dewan, a retired headmaster of Rangamati Government High School, and Prof Niru Kumar Chakma, a retired Dhaka University professor.



Chakma Raja (King) Devasish Roy addressing Oxfam’s Community Guide on Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) programme as the chief guest in Melbourne, Australia, 24 June 2010. Raja Roy is an Advocate in the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. Recently he has been elected as to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (from Asia) for 2011-2013

Readers can submit News at
chakmavoice@gmail.com