

Suggested contribution: Rs 30/-

Vol. IV, Issue No. 1
July, 2012

The Chakma Voice

A Newsletter of MCDF



For Private Circulation Only

Published by:



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The Living Legend: Baneswar Chakma

An unknown hero at our backwards



Photo by MCDF, Dec 2011

There is a very simple old man living in an ordinary village Nalbanya, on the outskirts of Kamala Nagar, the headquarters of the Chakma Autonomous District Council in Lawngtlai district in southern Mizoram. He is now over 81 years; his body is frail with a weak and shaky voice that is quite inaudible. He is unknown to the world, even to the Chakmas in the neighbourhood.

But he is no ordinary

man. He is Dangu Baneswar Chakma who has fought for India's freedom, to make CHT a part of India during 1947, and for an Autonomous District Council for Chakmas in Mizoram.

Even the Mizoram Chakma Development Forum (MCDF) was pleasantly surprised to know that he is still alive. Immediately, MCDF sent a team of volunteers to his resi-

dence to learn more of this extraordinary man. MCDF's volunteers found out his house and tried to interview him. His voice is too shaky and frail to be properly understood. He has also lost much of the memories. However, luckily, they discovered some notes in a dairy written by Dangu Baneswar Chakma himself. The dairy contained some of events of his life.

Dangu Baneswar Chakma, son of Phaireia Chakma was born on 12th June 1929 at a village called Kakparyya under police station Longudu in CHT in then undivided India (now in Bangladesh). He passed the 9th class but could not complete his 10th class. In those days, majority Chakmas used to be illiterate and people who studied upto Class III were considered to be qualified enough to grab lucrative government jobs.

But Dangu Baneswar Chakma instead chose the service of his country and Chakmas in particular by leading from the front. He took active part, at local levels, in the freedom movement of India. He worked with freedom fighters like Smt Kalpana Dutta (who is famous for her active role in armed resistance movement led by Surya Sen which carried out the Chitragong armoury raid in 1930) and Loke Nath. Baneswar Chakma was one of the jewels who fought to bring the Chitragong Hill Tracts under the territory of India.

In 1947, he represented along with Sneha Kumar Chakma (in Tripura) and Ganeshyam Dewan (in Bangladesh) demanding inclusion of CHT into India. Unfortunately, the Bengal Boundary Commission headed by Sir Cyril Redcliff gave away CHT, the Chakma kingdom, to Pakistan. Chakma leaders continued to fight for CHT's inclusion into India. In 1957, Baneswar Chakma was the Secretary of the Tribal Union (Regional Party) which de-

manded CHT's inclusion in India. In 1967, he was one of the representatives which met Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in Delhi on the CHT issue.

In 1959, Dangu Baneswar Chakma taught as a teacher at the Primary School at Ugudasury (near Haulong Sora), Mizoram.

He had a long and luminous leadership. The first political delegation to Shillong, then capital of Assam, demanding Chakma Regional Council in Mizoram was made by the Chakmas in 1952. The first delegation to Shillong was led by Kristo Mohan Chakma, and the other member was Gura Nitai Chakma. They met Assam Chief Minister Bishnu Ram Medhi in Shillong, which was then under Assam in 1952. That was when Mizo District Council (1952) and the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council (1953) were being created. Subsequently, three other delegations to Shillong were made by Kristo Mohan Chakma who was accompanied by Hari Kristo Chakma, Satya Priya Dewan and Baneswar Chakma in the second, third and fourth delegation respectively. They demanded Chakma Regional Council with headquarters at Demagiri. Baneswar Chakma was appointed as Presiding Officer in Tablabagh Village Council Election in 1963; served as the General Secretary, Block Congress Committee, Demagiri in 1967-1972 at the time of Lushai Hill District Council; as President, Chakma District Congress Committee in 1983; and as Senior Adviser, BJP, CADC in 1999.

He served as Senior Judicial Officer in CADC during 1974-1977. He was Secretary to the Honorary Organiser, Chakma Affairs, Demagiri in 1970-1997.

As a community leader, Dangu Baneswar Chakma tirelessly fought for the rights of the Chakmas and against injustice. He was part of the delegation that met Rajiv Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India demanding adequate compensation for the Chakma families evicted from the Dampa Wildlife Sanctuary in Mamit district of Mizoram in 1989-90.



A lonely hero: Dangu Baneswar Chakma in front of his house at Nalbanya, CADC

Photo by MCDF, Dec 2011

It is undeniable that Dangu Baneswar Chakma has done so much for us, but what have we done for him in return? Today, he remains unknown, unsung and uncared for. He lives not very far away from the political capital of CADC, but no leader has ever visited to take stock of his situation.

Perhaps, he is the only Chakma who has fought for the freedom of India to be alive today. Yet, it is apparent that we Chakmas have deserted him and are not willing to give due recognition to this great leader. Today, it is tragic that he lives a forlorn life.

MCDF takes this opportunity to salute this great leader who has devoted his life to translate the tears of the Chakmas into happiness. For the first time, some unseen pictures on the life of Dangu Baneswar Chakma are presented here.



In far above photo: Baneswar Chakma (extreme Right, sitting) with Prime Minister of India, Smt Indira Gandhi and Mizoram Chief Minister, Mr Lalthanhawla;

Above photo: Baneswar Chakma (extreme Right, sitting) with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Mizoram Chief Minister, Mr Lalthanhawla

Left photo: (L-R) Surat Kumar Chakma, Baneswar Chakma, Kristo Mohan Chakma and Hari Kisto Chakma

First Buddha Purnima in Mizoram's capital

The Buddha's birth, *nirvana* and *mahaparinirvana* took place on the same day of the year, i.e. purnima (the full moon day). Therefore, this day is celebrated by Buddhists across the world as "Buddha Purnima". In Mizoram, the Chakmas are the largest Buddhist community. With a population of nearly one lakh (out of which 98% practice Buddhism), the Chakmas are the largest minority community in the state. However, for some reasons or the other, Chakmas did not celebrate Buddha Purnima at Mizoram's capital city of Aizawl so far, until the 2012 Buddha Purnima.

On 6 May 2012, over one hundred Chakmas gathered at the *Chakma House* at Hunthar Veng, Aizawl and celebrated Buddha Purnima for the first time at Aizawl thereby creating a sort of history in the socio-cultural life of Chakmas of Mizoram.

The observation of Buddha Purnima was led jointly by Mizoram Chakma Students Union-Aizawl Zone and newly formed Aizawl Chakma Welfare Association (ACWA). The day began with a welcome speech by Nirupam Chakma, MLA and president of ACWA followed by a speech from Mizoram Minister of State Nihar Kanti Chakma. The day was marked with prayers, sermons on the life of



A Buddhist monk delivering sermon to the devotees during the first Buddha Purnima at Aizawl Chakma House on 6th May 2012 (top) and a group photo (below)

Gautam Buddha, religious discourses, continuous recitation of Buddhist scriptures and later at night, the Chakmas lit candles for world peace and communal harmony. The celebration of Buddha Purnima at Aizawl signals a change in which the reli-

gious minorities of Mizoram are finding themselves at ease to celebrate their religious festivals. Earlier in August 2011, the Mizoram government allotted the Assam Rifles Ground in Aizawl for Idd prayers for the Muslims.

NEWS IN BRIEF: MIZORAM

Chakma student ranked 17th in Mizoram technical exam

In a rare feat, a student from Marpara South village in Lunglei district of Mizoram, Jyoti Priyo Chakma, son of Dangu Nirmal Kanti Chakma has made the entire Chakma community proud by achieving 17th rank in the entire state of Mizoram in the Engineering entrance examination conducted by the Mizoram Board of School Education for entry into prestigious engineering institutes of India. Results were announced in May 2012.

Chopper service in Mizoram soon?

On 14 May 2012, the Mizoram government informed that helicopter service would take off by the end of August 2012 in Mizoram. At least ten helipads would become operational. The Finance Ministry has given the green signal to the helicopter service in Mizoram early this year, nearly a year after the Home Ministry gave a clearance for the same.

If the project is implemented, “The helicopter service will prove immensely beneficial for

Mizoram where landslides frequently cut off road connections during monsoon. It will be useful for carrying critical patients from the rural areas to the state capital”, according to experts.

Land grab by private company alleged

In May 2012, the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) directed the Mamit Deputy Commissioner to investigate an incident of alleged grabbing of land of one Chakma villager by a private company involved in India-Bangladesh fencing at Rajib Nagar (Amsury) village, Mamit district.

MCSU Aizawl donates blood



On 26 May 2012, the Mizoram Chakma Students' Union, Aizawl Zone, organised a voluntary blood donation camp at Civil Hospital, Aizawl, A total of 37 boys and 1 girl donated blood at the hospital under the leadership of their president Sujan Chakma and overall guidance of Dangu Nirupam Chakma, Hon'ble MLA.

Old age pension criteria may be relaxed

In May 2012, Rural Development Minister Jairam Ramesh stated that efforts would be made to remove the “BPL criteria” to be eligible for Old Age Pension and he suggested increase in the monthly pension amount provided under Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme. Presently, over 3 crore aged people over the age of 60 years benefit from this scheme across India. Presently, to be eligible, the senior citizen must belong to BPL household. Removal of this criteria will help hundreds of Chakmas who are denied BPL cards.

CADC completes 40 years

On 29 April 2012, the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) celebrated 40 years of its existence. On this occasion, it launched its own official website www.cadc.gov.in

Anti-corruption Awareness campaign in CADC



PRISM, sub headquarters Kamala Nagar, on 28 April 2012 conducted an Anti-corruption Awareness Campaign at Kamala Nagar Bazar Line, CADC. Due to bad weather condition, PRISM could not manage sitting arrangement for the public during the campaign. But the support for the campaign was reported to be as outpouring as was the rain.

MCDF's role

In Mizoram three officers were terminated and another 12 persons were suspended due to corruption. Of those suspended included S.Zoramsanga, a store keeper in the Food and Civil Supplies Department. Notably,

S Zoramsanga, store keeper of Damdep godown in CADC, was suspended following the intervention of the Mizoram Chakma Development Forum (MCDF) with the Supreme Court Food Commissioners. Read <http://mcdf.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/the-chakma-voice-7th-issue.pdf> (page 4) to know more on this.

Villagers demand new ICDS centres in Mamit

On 7 May 2012, the Rajib Nagar Village Council President reportedly submitted three separate applications demanding setting up of ICDS Centres under "Anganwadi Centre on Demand" scheme at remote and backward Borlui, Satalui and Bodalsuri sub villages/habitations under Rajib Nagar I village council in Mamit district. Prior to submission, survey of the children was conducted in each of these villages. The applications were submitted by hand to the Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) West Phaileng. The "Anganwadi on demand" scheme was launched by Central govt in 2009 and the Supreme Court directed that AWCs on demand be fulfilled within 3 months from date of application. It has been informed that Borlui, Satalui and Bodalsuri Chakma villages do not have ICDS/Anganwadi Centre and as a result, the children, pregnant women and lactating mothers do not get any nutrition and other benefits.

Arunachal: Chakmas' citizenship issue

On 8 May 2012, Shri Mullappally Ramachandran, Minister of State of Home Affairs, informed the Lok Sabha that the Government of India has constituted a Quadripartite Committee comprising of Government of India, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union and Chakma organisations to resolve the decade long pending issue of Chakma and Hajong. The Committee under the Chairmanship of the Joint Secretary (NE), MHA was constituted on the 10th August, 2010 with the objectives to examine various issues relating to settlement of Chakmas & Hajongs including the possibility of grant of Indian Citizenship to eligible Chakmas / Hajongs and to recommend measures to be taken by Central Govt. / State Govt. in the matter.

The first meeting of the Committee on Chakma-Hajongs was held on 9th January, 2012. It was decided in the meeting that the State Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh would consider grant of citizenship to eligible Chakmas and Hajongs who were settled in the State between 1964-69 after a joint field verification by All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU) & Committee for Citizenship Rights on Chakma & Hajongs of Arunachal Pradesh (CCRCHAP).

Tripura

Second Chakma to clear IES

Dangu Anuj Chakma from Tripura has cleared prestigious Indian Engineering Service examination conducted by the UPSC. IES is one of the toughest exams in Engineering field in the country. Danu Anuj Chakma is the second Chakma to clear this examination after Dangu Pijush Chakma (also from Tripura) who was selected long back.

Arunachal Pradesh

NCPCR to the rescue of Chakma students

During its visit to the state of Arunachal Pradesh in May 2012, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) led by its Chairperson Shantha Sinha raised strong concerns over “denial of admission” to 88 Chakma students in three schools in Changlang district. Prof Sinha told the media, “We have received complaints from civil societies that 88 students from Chakma community – all hailing from Miao and Kharasang areas in Changlang district – were denied of admission in Diyun middle school and Dharampur and Ratnapur

middle schools in July 2011 on the ground that the said schools had inadequate infrastructure facilities”. It is learnt that Asian Centre for Human Rights in New Delhi had filed a petition before the NCPCR. The Arunachal government assured the NCPCR team that it will upgrade those three schools to accommodate the Chakma students. The NCPCR also stated that it would take up the issue with the CBSE regional office at Guwahati where these schools have affiliation.

Assam

Chakma girl wins gold in karata championship

On 26 May 2012, Miss Enjeebe Chakma (10 years), daughter of Abhay Chakma of Guwahati, Assam, won two more Gold medals in All Assam Karate championships held at Guwahati. She will represent Assam in the All India Karate championship to be held at Thiruvantapuram, Kerala in August 2012.

This is not the first time. Earlier, Enjeebe Chakma won a “Gold Medal” in Inter District (six districts) Karate Championship held at Guwahati Nehru stadium on 19 May 2012 and on 6 May 2012 she had beaten all other competitors to win the “Gold Medal” in the category of age group 9-10 years in the All Gu-

wahati Karate Championship.



Enjeebe Chakma, 10 years, posing with her medals in Guwahati

Enjeebe Chakma has been taking Karate lessons since 2008 and already is an “Orange Belt” holder.

'MCDF Pogodang' started again

About MCDF Pogodang:

"MCDF Pogodang" (literally meaning, *breaking news* in Chakma language) is a daily news service through SMS started by the Mizoram Chakma Development Forum (MCDF) way back in 2009.

If you are a subscriber, 'MCDF Pogodang' is sent directly to your mobile phone. Thus, in the comfort of your room, or wherever you are, you can receive important news/information on varied range of subjects on your mobile phone, daily and, free of cost. Isn't this wonderful?

By 2011, MCDF had over 10,000 subscribers across India. But this has to be stopped due to restrictions imposed by Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), Govt of India, on bulk SMSes.

MCDF has sent 'MCDF Pogodang' on different issues such as: admission, career guidance, results, scholarships, job vacancies, politics, economics, religion, Border Fencing, various schemes/programmes like Border Area Development Programme (BADP), New Land Use Policy, etc besides MCDF's own activities. It has also been found extremely useful in times of medical and other emergencies.

Popularity and impacts:

The popularity of 'MCDF Pogodang' and its impacts have been unmatched. Apart from raising awareness on social and political issues, MCDF has successfully helped hundreds of students get their results instantly, information on admissions, colleges etc and connect to the people in the remotest areas and reporting about their conditions.

Due to its accuracies and timely information, 'MCDF Pogodang' emerged as a very effective tool in the social engineering of Chakma society. It is therefore taken seriously by serious people.

Such was the popularity that one of India's most respected magazines, TEHELKA (Hindi edition), in its 31 August 2011 issue carried a story titled



"Breaking news se badal rahi duniya" ('Pogodang' is changing the world).

'MCDF Pogodang' restarted!

Now, after a lull of several months, 'MCDF Pogodang' has once again started rolling from 26th June 2012. As MCDF does not have enough funds, the Pogodang was started with voluntary contributions made by the core members of MCDF who have kindly agreed to contribute some percentage of their salaries. MCDF has framed strict guidelines to avail this service. In order to be eligible, the subscriber will have to provide the following information (all mandatory):

1. Full Name:
2. Father's Name:
3. Original place of belonging (eg, Kamala Nagar, Mizoram)
4. Present residence: (eg, Kolkata)
5. Occupation: (eg Student, BSc (Physics) 2nd year at Presidency College)
6. One reference: (Name with mobile Number) Your identity will be verified with the reference person.

If anyone is interested, kindly send your details at 0-9899207652 (sms only); chakmavoic@gmail.com, or Chakma Voice facebook inbox.

Land scam: Mizoram governor orders probe



Source: *Seven Sisters Post*, 16 July 2012

Gautam Debroy, New Delhi (July 15): Alleging large-scale corruption in the ongoing India-Bangladesh border fencing project in areas under Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) in Mizoram, former chief minister and Mizo National Front (MNF) president Zoramthanga demanded for dissolution of the Council even as governor Vakkom Purushothaman ordered an inquiry into the matter.

The governor in his letter dated June 25 asked Lawngtlai deputy commissioner B Lalhmingthanga to submit the inquiry report by July 25.

According to the official documents in possession of Seven Sisters Post, the incumbent chief executive member of CADC Kali Kumar Tongchan-

gya ordered in 2009 to dispose of all the documents related to (land) passes issued during 1972-2005 for the border fencing project.

Taking note of the order, Zoramthanga in his letter alleged that the executive committee of the Chakma district council wanted to cover up their corruption by destroying all the evidence.

SEVEN SISTERS POST
THE NEWSPAPER OF THE NORTHEAST

“The government of India awarded compensation to the affected land owners for construction of the India-Bangladesh border fencing. Fake land passes were issued by the Chakma council authorities and more than Rs11 crore has been received by the district council leaders and their relatives illegally as compensation,” Zoramthanga stated in his letter. The charges of corruption

against the CADC are already under investigation by the CBI. In December 2010, CBI registered a case into the allegations of corruption in compensation for the construction of border fencing in Lawngtlai district under CADC.

Notably, the preliminary report of the CBI had also found that apart from fake claims by different persons, the family members of the executive members of the CADC received compensation against fake land pass certificates.

The CADC is one of the three autonomous district councils of Mizoram which was formed under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution on April 29, 1972.

The Council has executive powers over 27 departments including land revenue and settlement, legislative department, agriculture department among others.