

**COUNTER-INSURGENCY OPERATION AND HUMAN RIGHT  
VIOLATION: A CASE STUDY OF MNF MOVEMENT FOR  
INDEPENDENCE IN MIZORAM.**

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**1. Introduction.**

Mizoram, a tiny trans-Indo-Mayanmar border state of India, located in the extreme north-east corner of India, bordering Myanmar in the East, state of Tripura in the west, Cachar District of Assam and Churachandpur District of Manipur in the North and Sylhet District of Bangladesh in the South, witnessed one of the most devastating underground movements in India for 20 years from 1966 to 1986. The movement was launched by the Mizo National Front under the charismatic leadership of Laldenga, demanding sovereign state of Mizoram with a strong sense of will and determination to its goal of political independence from India. The MNA (Mizo National Army) the armed wing of MNF, composed of those young Mizos with high degree of morale for the cause they were for. The initial success of the movement in over-powering almost all security outposts in the District, except Assam Rifles Brigade Headquarters, Aizawl, could be attributed to the fighting zeal and high degree of morale of the MNA fighters to the cause of the Mizos and their independence. The MNF, after realizing the futility of armed struggle for achieving political sovereignty, decided to have negotiation with the Government of India in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which ultimately culminated into the signing of Peace Accord with Government of India in 1986 known as "The Mizo Peace Accord, 1986". The Mizo Peace Accord 1986, eventually becomes the most successful peace accord ever been signed by the Government of India with any insurgent groups in the north-east, and elsewhere.

While the 'Mautam' (famine) of the late 1950s and early 1960s and the apathy of government to the call of the people for relief supply was the immediate cause of the conflict, there are also a number of historical, political, economic, cultural, social and

religious factors which are collectively responsible for the outbreak of violent uprising in Mizoram in 1966.

2. **Historical and Political Factors:**

Historically, the Mizos lived an independent political life, independent of any foreign power. Each village was ruled over by a sovereign village chief who exercised absolute and indivisible power. He was the final authority within the village in all aspects of village life, and was the chief administrator as well as the chief justice of the village, having the power to give the severest form of punishment, including death penalty to those who violate the unwritten customary laws and traditional practices. However, the British invaded the Mizo/Lushai country and took control of the entire hills on the 6<sup>th</sup> September, 1895. Though the British took over the administration of the whole Lushai/Mizo Hills, the chiefs were left with much power regarding customary and traditional practices were concerned. The Lushai Hills District was, then put under a superintendent who, in consultation with the village chief, administered the District. The entire District was put under the Chin Hills Regulation act of 1892 and Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act of 1873, and was included in the Excluded Areas along with Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.

Sooner than expected, the time came for the British to hand over power to India. At this critical juncture, a critical question inevitably came up i.e. what should be the future status of the District (Mizo/Lushai Hills District), whether it should join Indian Union, Pakistan or Burma; choose to be a Crown Colony under the British or become an independent state. LL. Peter, the then Superintendent of the District called a joint meeting of representatives of different groups and organizations including political party (Mizo Union) Chiefs' Union, Freedom party (those against the chiefs), Ex-Servicemen, Mizo Hmeichhe Tangral Pawl (United Women Organization), Govt. employees etc. to decide the future of Mizo/Lushai Hills District on 14.8.1947. The meeting under the influence of Mizo Union unanimously passed the following three points of resolutions:-

In case, the Mizo Hills was merged with Indian Union,

1. "Mizos would have the right to decide their own future i.e. right to secede from India after ten years".
2. the traditional customary laws and practices should be preserved and protected.

3. Chin Hill Regulations Act, 1892 and Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act, 1873 should continue to be enforced in the District.

The Mizos interpreted these pre-conditions, though not a contractual agreement between the two parties (Mizos and India), as their rights. They asserted and re-asserted that they have the right to secede from Indian Union which finally culminated into armed rebellious movement for independent in 1966. The other factors responsible for the uprising was Assam Government's language policy. Under a strong pressure from dominant Assamese, Assamese language was made the official language of the state which was much resented to by non-Assamese speaking Districts. Khasis, Jaintias, Garos and the Mizos refused to accept the imposition of Assamese in their respective District and decided to demand a separate Hill State. A new political party, APHLC (All Party Hill Leaders Conference) was formed to spearhead the demand for separate Hill State. In Mizoram, the Mizo Union, instead of joining hand with APHLC for separate Hill State, was in favour of a separate State for the Mizos. The MNF (Mizo National Front), on the other hand, was not interested in demanding either the separate Hills for the Khasis, Garos and Mizos nor was it interested in a separate state for Mizos. It was in favour of demanding a separate independence sovereign state for the Mizos, not only outside Assam, but also outside India. The imposition of Assamese on the Mizos could, therefore, be seen as one of the contributing factors for the movement. The Mizos were not satisfied with the provision of Sixth Schedule of the constitution of India. They felt that the provision of Sixth schedule has not sufficiently protected their language, customs, traditions, religions etc. The imposition of Assamese language on the Mizos was much resented and there was growing apprehension that there would be cultural invasion by the dominant Assamese speaking Hindus. The Mizos were also frustrated with the Assam Government's lack of interest over various issues.

The Mizo Hills District was, then merged with the state of Assam and was given a special protection under the provision of Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The nomenclature of the District was also changed to from Lushai Hills District to Mizo Hills District on 19<sup>th</sup> April, 1954. Soon after Mizoram was merged with Indian Union, discontentment and dissatisfaction, both on the policies of Assam Government and Central government, grew on various issues. The conduct of public examination on Sunday and the

visit of Central dignitaries on Sunday were interpreted as a deliberate attempt to restrict the freedom of worship for those who were involved in such examinations. To testify this, the MNF cited the visit of JL Nehru on Sunday, 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 1953. The restriction of the entry of foreign missionaries into the District was also seen as an infringement on the religious right of the Mizos. The Mizos, in order to assert their ethnic and cultural identity under the dominant Assamese political set up, strived to have a separate states of their own. However, it was realized by a section of Mizo leadership that the assertion of Mizo identity would not be possible within the state of Assam or even under the Indian Union, insurgency was adopted as a better means for Mizo nation building. Another worth mentioning factor responsible for the Mizo uprising of 1966 was racial and ethnic distinctiveness of the Mizos. The Mizos belong to Mongolian ethnic and racial group with Mongolian physical feature whereas people of mainland India are having Aryan and Dravidian racial background, with quite a distinct physical feature from the Mizos. Majority of Mizos, therefore, feel that their Mongolian background could not support them to be Indians. They maintained, it is the will of nature that they are not Indians, but Mizos. Nature destined them to be Mizos of Mongolian racial stock. This feeling of natural alienation from mainland India is also partly responsible for the demand for independence by the Mizos (MNF).

Historical factors, language policy of the government of Assam, their apprehension of religious interference by dominant Hindu Indians, fear of cultural invasion, lack of development, neglect of Mizo District by government of Assam, assertion of the people that they have the right to decide their own future etc. have their own role in influencing the Mizos to fight for separate independent state. However, Mautam (Famine) which struck Mizo Hills and lack of government's response to the call of the people for assistance is the most immediate cause of insurgency in Mizoram.

### **3. The Mautam (Famine Factor) and Birth of MNF**

In the later part of 1950s, Mizoram witnessed mass-flowering of bamboo leading to multiplication of rodent in large number. It was the belief of the Mizos that when rodent eats bamboo flowers, its fertility increased many folds leading to the growth of its population in large number. True to their belief, the population of rat multiplied and standing crops in their jhum land were eaten up by rats causing an inevitable famine which

the Mizos called 'Mautam'. The famine was devastating so much so that people have to depend for their survivals on wild roots, which too was not available in abundance, but was scarcely available only in deep jungle. The entire length and breadth of the District was affected by the famine and the situation was so desperate that people have to call for help from the government of Assam. The famine affected some 90 % of the district population. Since the entire District was engulfed by the famine, a small quantity of supply from the government was far from sufficient and people were dying of hunger each day. The dissatisfaction of the people on government was growing each day and month. In the meantime, people felt that unless they do something by themselves, no one, even the government was not going to give them sufficient supply of food to the people. The Young Mizos, then organized themselves, and formed, the Mizo National Famine Front under the leadership of Laldenga, to provide relief supply to people who were most severely affected by the famine. Rallies were organized in Aizawl and other places shouting slogan like 'Who are we, we are Mizo; what do we want, we want, food etc.' The leaders of MNFF called public meeting at Dawrpui ME School and had threadbare discussion on the following points:

- (1) The Nagas launched insurgency movement for independent, yet they were given better treatment and were more developed. The Mizos, though were loyal citizens of India right from the time they joined Indian Union and abided by the provisions of the Indian constitution; not to mention development, were not given relief supply to the people who were starved to death in thousands. They maintained that the government of India was giving them step-motherly treatment.
- (2) The government of India was giving sufficient food and clothes to more than 7, 000 Tibetan refugee in Delhi while no sufficient food was provided to famine stricken Mizos who were loyal citizen of the country. Why?
- (3) The government of India, if it considers the Mizos as its citizens, should airdrop at least 4500 quintals of rice each month to help the famine stricken Mizo District or it should allow the Mizos to beg from UNO, UK or Burma for relief supply.

The famine and apathy of the government to the plight of the people, lack of sufficient supply, made people to feel that the government of India did not consider the

Mizo as true citizens of India. This feeling of alienation has greatly strengthened the hands of Mizo nationalists who wanted secession of Mizo district from India right from the time of the merger of the District with Indian Union. When the government of Assam was informed of the relief activities of MNFF, it sent Tribal Affairs Minister, Capt. W. Sangma to Aizawl. However, even after Capt. W. Sangma returned to state capital, no relief supply was coming in. People were totally disgusted and lost faith in the government which strengthened to great extent the hands of Mizo nationalists.

#### 4. Declaration of Independence

The famine has finally came to an end in the later part of 1961 and the MNFF was also disbanded. In its place, a new political organization, 'The Mizo National Front' was formed having clear-cut political, social and religious goals with the following Executive Members:

- (1) President : Laldenga
- (2) Secretary : R. Vanlawma
- (3) Joint Secretary : A Rohnuna
- (4) Treasurer : Vanlalliana

The newly formed political party, after series of meeting set the following points as its goals.

- (1) Re-unification of all Mizo ethnic groups living in Burma, India and Bangladesh (East-Pakistan) separated by manmade imaginary international and inter-state boundaries under one sovereign independent state of Mizoram outside India, Burma and East-Pakistan.
- (2) Preservation and promotion of Christianity throughout the length and breadth of the unified Mizoram.
- (3) Preservation and protection of Mizo ethnic identity, culture tradition and other social practices.

In pursuance of the above resolutions, the MNF submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India on 30<sup>th</sup> October, 1965. The memorandum mentioned a number of points in justification of their demand for independence which included among others,

‘The Mizo inhabited areas of Indo-Burma region was never apart of India, nor ever was a part Burma or East Pakistan. They were never ruled over by any foreign power, except the British. The system of government was similar to Geik city state as each village chief hold sovereign power over the village and the village land. When the British left, instead of giving the Mizos back the power they enjoyed before the British annexation, they were divided and were given to three powers – India, Burma and Pakistan. The memorandum, therefore, said, ‘the time has come now for the Mizos to decide their own future outside India and, it is the time for the Government of India to allow them to live as free and independent people outside India’. Hence, the demand for independence.

As there was no response to the memorandum from the Government of India. MNF party High command called an emergency meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> February, 1966 and unanimously decided to declare independence on 1<sup>st</sup> March, 1966. By 28<sup>th</sup> February, 1966, all the MNA and MNVC (The Mizo National Army and Mizo National Volunteered), armed wing of MNF were ordered to launch simultaneous attack on all military and paramilitary installations in Mizoram. The operation was codename – ‘Operation Jericho’. Exactly at 12 passed midnight on 28<sup>th</sup> February, 1966, the MNF declared independence and text of the declaration resembling the American declaration of independence reads:-

“In the course of human history, it becomes invariably necessary for mankind to assume their socio, economic and political status to which the Law of Nature and Nature’s God entitles them. We hold this truth to be self-evident that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed with inalienable fundamental human rights and dignity of human person; and to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men deriving their just power from the consent of governed, and whenever any form of government becomes destructive of this end, it is the right of the people to alter, change, modify and abolish it and institute a new government and laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its power in such forms as to them shall see such forms as to them shall see most likely to affect their rights and dignity. The Mizos, created and molded into a nation and nurtured as such by Nature’s God have been intolerably dominated by the people of India in contravention of the Law of Nature”. The declaration further stated that “The leaders of the Mizo nation had, many times, verbally and in writing, put forward to the Government of India their desire of self-determination for creation of free and independent Mizoram for



bringing about protection of Human Rights and Dignity, which the Mizos by nature, ought to have, but the Government of India, violating the charter of UN and its universal declaration of Human rights re-affirmed in Principles of Bandung Conference, have ignored the voice of the Mizo people and determined to continue domination and colonization ruling over us with tyranny and despotism by instituting self-designed administrative machinery with which they endeavor to mislead the world to win their confidence.

Our people are deposed, persecuted tortured manhandled and murdered without displaying justice while they preached and profess before us and throughout the world that they have instituted a separate administrative setup in conformity with the principle of Democracy to conceal their evil and selfish design, religious assimilation and Hindu indoctrination they preach to have established secularism which we cannot accept as it leads to suppression of Christianity.

To prove this, let facts be submitted to candid world:

1. They have instituted government to rule over us in our own country without any respect for Human Rights and Dignity even in the face of the present candid world which is committed to these rights and dignity.
2. They have been pursuing a policy of exploitative measures in their attempt to wipe out Christianity, the sole religion, and no consideration has ever been paid to our national way of life.
3. They have been preaching throughout the world as if they have instituted a separate administrative machinery in conformity with the principles of Democracy to conceal their policy of degeneration of our national morality and of assimilation while what and been instituted for us is a pattern of colonial administration.
4. They refuse not only to procure supply of food and arrange other forms of assistance in times of famine, but also prohibited us from seeking and receiving assistance from friendly countries, which resulted in the death of many people.
5. They have established a multitude of offices and sent swarm of India officers, who had an immoral life, cruelly appealing our womenfolk to commit immorality with them by taking advantage of their official capacity and of the position they occupy in the administrative machinery.
6. Taking the advantage of economic frustration of the people they subjected us to economic slavery and forced us to enter into the door of poverty.



7. Curbing freedom of expression, our patriots are arrested and kept in jails without displaying any form of justice.
8. The export facility which we used to enjoy before the pre-Indian domination has been totally closed.
9. Without exploring our country's economic resources in agriculture, industries and mining and giving no consideration for their development, they maintain suppressive measures against our economic right.
10. Realizing the importance of our country to India in its defense strategy, the Government of India is establishing military bases throughout our country and thereby creating an atmosphere of cold war while nothing is done for its economic and social development.
11. In spite of our repeated appeal for peaceful settlement of our rightful and legitimate demand for self-determination, the Government of India is bringing exploitative and suppressive means employing their military might and waging war against us as done in the case of the Nagas and Kashmiris.
12. Owing to absence of medical facilities in our countries, our people died without having no treatment and attention.

For these and all other innumerable causes, we declare to the candid world that India is unworthy to rule over the civilized Mizo people who are created and moulded into a nation and nurtured and endowed with territorial integrity by Nature and Nature's God.

We, therefore, the representatives of Mizo people, meeting on this day, the first of March, in the year of 1966, appealing to the supreme judge of the World for the rectitude of our intention. So, in the name and authority of the good people of this country, solemnly publish and declare, that Mizoram has the right to be, free and independent, that they are absolved from all allegiance to India and its Parliament and all people connections between them and Government of India is and ought to be dissolved and that as a free independent state, they have full power to declare war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish committee and to do all other Acts and things which independent state may. And for the support of the Declaration, we mutually pledge to each other with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence lives, our fortunes, and our sacred Honour. We appeal to all freedom loving nations and individuals to Human Rights and Dignity and to extend help to

the Mizo people for realization of our rightful and legitimate demand for self-determination. We appeal also to all independent countries to give recognition independence of Mizoram.

The declaration of independence was followed by simultaneous attacks on military and para-military installations and police outposts in all major towns and villages of the District. Except Aizawl Assam Rifles Brigade Headquarters, that too were surrounded by the MNA and MNV fighters, all military and para-military installations, police outposts, BRT camps were captured by the MNF. The MNF, then sieged civil administration too, and setup its own Government. In the meantime, intermittent firing was continuing in Aizawl, preventing personnel of the Assam Rifles to come out of their camp for food and water. They were in a desperate situation as they were out of water, ration ammunitions etc. Attempts were made to airdrop rations and ammunitions, but whatever were airdropped, they were collected by the MNF volunteers who were surrounding the camp. Re-enforcement from the ground was slow as road communication to the District from Silchar was blocked at many points by the MNF fighters. The camp was running out of food, water and ammunitions. SOS message was sent to Delhi for rescue mission, lest they would surrender to the MNF.

#### 5. State's response to the Declaration of Independence and Human Right Violations.

The Central Government, soon after receiving the desperate call of the Assam Rifles Brigade Headquarter, Aizawl, sent Air force to strike Aizawl, Hnahlan, etc. The India Air force, engaged a squadron of Toofan Jet fighters for a bombing mission to Aizawl, Hnahlan, Tlabung, Sangau, Khawzawl, Hmuntlang and Bunghmun villages causing large scale destructions, deaths and injuries to a number of civilians who had nothing to do with the MNF. Aizawl was inflame, houses gutted and residents had to flee to the nearby jungle. Sapkhumi narrates about the death of her sister 'Maruat' in the airstrike - thus "I asked my little sister who was only 7 years old, 'Maruat'; is it so painful and she turned her dim eyes towards me and said, 'my side really hurts, I cannot even breath properly, it's really painful. What wrong have we done to them they drop the bomb on us, they are really cruel, are not they?.....closing her eyes and clenching her fists with fear, blood was still flowing down from her wounds. Some people brought water and she thirstily drunk one cup in a single gulp, she reached out and held my hands; thank you so much, the planes are really bad, don't you think?', said she and then slowly closed her eyes never to open again. I

cried, Maruat, don't leave me, don't leave me, please stay, please live and I hold her in my arms. It was like a God's forsaken place. We all cried over our loss and cursed the wretched planes. Thangbawia, a resident of Aizawl narrated that he saw tiny planes climbing the Sky like a steady stream of droning beetles. Within minutes, they look bigger, seconds later, all of them drops "things" that now, exploded after hitting the ground. That was March 4, 1966. Narrating his emotional recollection of the bombing of Aizawl, Thangbawia said "Closing my eyes, the deafening claps in the wail of those hurt. The handful of local administrative officials told us that the planes belonged to the MNF allies. Later, we understood it was a bluff".

The air force attack of Aizawl and other major towns and villages came in three waves. In the first, the planes used machine guns 'before dropping the bomb on the second day i.e. 5<sup>th</sup> March, 1966, the bombing lasted for five hours" said Andrew Lallerliana. Lallhmingliana, a retired wing commander of IAF said, "It was the first time the Centre used its air power to quell a movement of any kind among its citizens. Goa was a different story- it was a move to drive away the Portuguese".

The Government of India, in its desperate attempt to deny the use of air power, issued several press statement saying that the air-craft were used only to drop men and supplies of ration to soldier trapped in their camps. This seems to be far from fact. To substantiate the bombing, DD Nichols Roys and Hoover Hynniewto, members of a team of Assam Legislative Assembly, sent to Aizawl on a fact finding mission, produced a photograph of un-explode bomb and said, "we touched it we measured it and we took photograph of it. We have fragments of bombs. We have the testimony of hundreds of people who have heard the sound of the explosion, the burning of houses etc. the movement the planes flew over Mizo Hills. If you were to suppress the MNF rebellion, ordinary bullets are sufficient from any point of view, military, physical or economic, these weapons should never have been used. In a written report submitted to Assam Legislative Assembly, the two legislators stated that bombardments claimed civilian lives as it was not possible to distinguish from the air who was loyal to the government or who was MNF rebel.

In the history of independent India, the use of airpower remains the only instance of the Government of India resorting to airstrikes in its own territory and on its own citizens.

The Mizos claimed that Rajesh pilot and Suresh Kalmadi were among the IAF Pilots who strike Aizawl and other place in Mizo Hills, Pu, Zoramthanga, the former Chief Minister of Mizoram, once said that he joins the MNF because of the relentless bombing of Aizawl in 1966. The Government of India, denying the use of airpower in Mizoram, stated that aircrafts had been sent to Mizoram to airdrop rations. However, this seems to be far from truth, and to substantiate this, and to testify the bombing incidents, the present writer was told by his village elders that, jet fighters flew over their village with thunderous sound after completing its bombing missions at Hnahlan village.

The contention of the Government of India about airdropping of ration was, indeed, a fabricated version of the incident, because fighter jet was never used to airdrop food and ration anywhere in the history of the world. The question, rather, is “Was the use of air power absolutely unavoidable? Had there been absolutely no option? The problem with resorting to airpower in any counter-insurgency operation is identification of target from the air. Same was the case of airstrike in Mizoram. It caused equal destructions to both MNF fighters and loyal citizens, and forced many loyal citizens to join the rank and file of the MNF. Moreover, the use of air power on one’s own people produced negative impact on the peoples’ feeling about India and Indians. Hatred against everything India was growing in Mizoram following the airstrikes.

In his book ‘Untold Atrocity’ C. Zama, a former MNA fighter said the army wielded almost unlimited power during counter insurgency operation in Mizoram. A non-commission Officer (Havildar) had more power than a Deputy Commissioner. If a soldier shot dead someone, he can simply say the person was an MNF supporter, and that was justification enough or if he raped someone, he just say, she is an MNF supporter and nobody could deny. There was no right or wrong in the eyes of the army. What the army said, right was right and what they said, wrong was wronged. “In those days, being a Mizo itself was a crime, as all Mizos, irrespective of loyalty was a suspect” said VL Hluna.

PuZamawia, a Commander of MNF volunteer force in March, 1966 says “The bombings were followed by large scale entry of Indian Troops into Lushai Hills. They ordered evacuation of hundreds of villages after which they burnt down. The villagers were resettled in new areas. Thousands were arrested arbitrarily and unspeakable atrocities

committed by them. C. Zama in his book on Mizo Insurgency mentioned that he saw the bombing since he was in the MNA and was fighting in Aizawl. He said, no such thing has happened anywhere in the country. Denghnuna, who also fled Aizawl on March 4, also witnessed the bombing. He was further quoted saying, “The Union Home Minister had said, India wanted to crush the Mizos and hence excessive force was used and civilian population punished; and we don’t want the people, what we wanted was the land”.

The basic principle followed by many countries is that one cannot resort to airstrike in one’s own territory against one’s own people. Airstrike against one’s own people is belief to have adverse impact on the situation as it naturally further alienated the people on whom it was used and more and more people were forced to join the rank and file of the insurgents. True was the case with the Mizos on whom IAF conducted relentless bombing. More and more people began to join the MNF as a result of airstrikes. Airstrikes in Mizoram are debatable indeed. While they succeeded in pushing back the guerillas, it left deep scars and probably further invigorate their will to fight for 20 long years. B. Raman, a former head of India’s Research and Analysis Wing writers, “Airstrike on one’s own nationals tend to aggravate an insurgency situation by causing casualties of civilians and driving more people to join the ranks of insurgents” It is not that states are restricted from using air power in counter-insurgency operation. Planes could be deployed for surveillance, supply of man and materials, but to use air power for bombing and striking mission is not advisable as it is bound to escalate the situation further. Moreover, to go for air power on those who have no air power is rather a sign of weakness. The wound inflicted on the Mizos during counter-insurgency operations, the excessive use of force and the untold suffering of the people is yet to be healed. Nothing has yet been done for the emotional rehabilitation of the Mizos. Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh has tendered his apology for operation Blue Star, but no word of apology has yet been offered to the Mizos who suffered much more in the hands of Indian Security Forces, even to the extent of using air power.

VL Hluna narrates, “on the night of February 28, MNF rebels attacked the district treasury at Aizawl and camps of Police and Security Forces at Lunglei and Champ-hai. These two places were captured by the MNF. The rebels attacked the Assam Rifles Battalion Headquarters at Aizawl and the Assam Rifles petrol was ambushed at Chanmari area of Aizawl on the night of March 3 in which 5 jawans were killed. And then, the bombing started

on March 5 & 6. We fled Aizawl on March 4 and took shelter at Zokhawsang Village, five km from Aizawl. I saw the fighter planes flying at about 10am on March 5 and bombing Aizawl. The fighters made about 8 sorties that day and many more sorties, the next day. From Zokhawsang, we heard huge explosion and saw huge flumes of smoke rising. We know, Aizawl was being destroyed. The feeling was terrible and we were paralysed by fear and shock.” Many government installations were destroyed including circuit house. Apart from Aizawl, the IAF jet fighters bombed Khawzawl on March 6, Hnahlan on 7, Sangau on 8, Tlabung on 9, Pukpui on 13, Bunglemun on 23, Mualthum and Tuipui on September 6 and Hmunthang on January 21, 1967.

Immediately after the MNF declared independence and overrun all major military and police installations in the District, the Government of Assam declared the whole District as a “Disturbed” Area under the Assam Disturbed Area Act, 1955 and the Extra-Ordinary Gazette Notification published on 6<sup>th</sup> March, 1996 declared the MNF as an unlawful organization. Though, martial law was not officially declared, the army was given an unrestrained power to deal with the MNF and its supporters by promulgating the most dreaded legal weapon of Armed Forces Special Power Act, 1958 and by Rule 32 of Defence of India Act, 1962. A part from these, with the aim to give a free hand to deal with the MNF, an Emergency under the provision of Article 352 of the Constitution was also declared in the District. The overall responsibility for a massive counter insurgency operation was given to Major General Sanghat Singh, GOC 101 Communication Zone with Headquarters at Shillong. The first army battalion, the 18<sup>th</sup> Sikh Regiment advanced from Silchar into the hills towards Aizawl on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1966 and with some minor skirmishes on the way, linked up with the besieged garrison at Aizawl. On March 8<sup>th</sup> 1966, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles moved towards Champhai and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bihar Regiment towards Lunglei. Lunglei was secured by the Indian army on March 14, and Champhai on March 15. On 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1966, the 5<sup>th</sup> Paratroopers were flown in by helicopters at Lunglei. The army secured Indo-East Pakistan border areas on 17<sup>th</sup> March.

Soon, the entire length and breadth of the District was swamped by India’s best army and para-military forces constituting nearly ¼ of the total population of the District. The MNF, being far outnumbered by better equipped India army, both in terms of weapon system



and training, had to withdraw to the jungle to start their hit and run tactic of guerrilla warfare. Being equipped with the most dreaded legal law of the jungle, “Armed Forces Special Act, 1958,” the army took over the administration of remote villages with iron hand. Giving an unrestraint power to the army, the Act. Provides-

“ Any Commissioned Officer, Warrant Officer or any other person of equivalent rank in the armed forces may, in a disturbed area:-

- (a) If he is of the opinion that it is necessary so to do for the maintenance of public orders, after giving such due warning as he may consider necessary, fire upon or otherwise, use force; even to causing death, against any person who is acting in contravention of any law or order for the time being enforced in the disturbed area, prohibiting the assembly of five or more person or carrying weapons or things capable of being used as weapons or fire arms, ammunitions or explosives.”
- (b) “If he is of the opinion that it is necessary so to do, destroy any arm dumps, prepared or fortified positions or shelters from which armed attacks are made or are likely to be made or are attempted to be made or any structure used as a training camp for armed volunteers or utilized as a hideout by armed gangs or absconders wanted for any offence”
- (c) “Arrest without warrant, any person who has committed a cognizable offence or against whom a reasonable suspicion exist that he has committed or is about to commit a cognizable offence and may use such force as may be necessary to effect arrest”.

The army, armed with this most sophisticated legal weapon conducted ruthless and most inhumane counter-insurgency operation in Mizoram from 1966 till the signing of peace Accord in 1986. Thousands of innocent civilians were killed and thousands more were made physically impaired for no fault of their own. To substantiate this, the writer of this article has to say that his own father has suffered permanent hearing impairment because of the assault by army. The army, while in operation, would make no distinction between loyal citizens and MNF loyalists. Random Human Right Violations, were perpetrated in the name of counter insurgency operation. Every Mizo was a suspect and subjected to physical torture and mental harassment. Referring to this, V L Hluna writes “in those days, being a Mizo itself was a



crime". Not to mention other rights, even right to life itself was denied to the people as even a petty army officers was holding the licence to shot and kill anyone who in his opinion, was MNF or MNF loyalist. Whenever there was an ambush, what the army would do was, instead of pursuing those who were responsible for it, would enter the nearest village, and hoard together the entire population in a school or church building or playground. Separate the women folk from the male; then rape the good looking women, on many occasions, in the full view of their husbands. Turning their wrath on the male members, give them third degree tortures, and shoot to death those who look a little bit wild, saying they were killing MNA. Then turned their wrath towards dwelling houses, loot and take whatever they want, and burn them down to ashes. There are some villages which were burned down by the army for as many as 17 times. Burning and looting of houses, today, is normally done by terrorists, in Mizoram in those days, it was being perpetrated not by the insurgents, but rather, by armed forces of the so called largest democracy, said to be professing democratic principle of liberty, equality, freedom etc. Security forces in those days in Mizoram were virtually acting as Forces of Insecurity. There was an instance in the living memory of the present writer that in a Pamchung village, all male members were confined in a school building at night. They were told that the MNF insurgents would come and fire upon them. By 8 to 12, they (army) shoot them indiscriminately from outside killing 9 innocent villagers and injuring the rest. The injured were airlifted to Aizawl for treatment. The army, it was said, reported the incident to their higher authority that they have killed 9 MNF insurgents. This particular incident is one of the many incidents in Mizoram in those days. On 13<sup>th</sup> January, 1967, the army committed mass killing at Buang Village, and on 9<sup>th</sup> June, 1967 another mass killing was committed at Chalkhawl village. Mass killing of the same and more magnitude were committed by the army in many other places. Heaven was a witness to this man made horrifying tragedy, said an elderly man from the village.

This extreme form of repressive counter-insurgency operation was counter-productive as there was a growing hatred for the Vais (Indians) and more and more young-men started joining the MNF, though many of them did not subscribe to the MNF ideology and principle of political freedom from India. People were further alienated by this ruthless military operations and they started developing the feeling that, even if they remain loyal citizens, the army would not spare them, anyway, and, therefore, it was better for them to join the insurgent and take revenge on the army at an opportune time and moment. The tragedies

befalling on the Mizos during counter insurgency operations were never highlighted to the outside world. There was no media, both print and electronic, in those days in Mizoram. Therefore, in the absence of media, there was practically no agency to highlight the plight and suffering of the people to the outside world. The only source of information that one could get from was the army who gave fabricated and biased reports they have given to their higher authority to hide the crime they had committed on the people of Mizoram.

With the failure of the army to effectively contain the MNF movement even after employing all kinds of suppressive and oppressive measures to subdue the MNF, another still more harsh measure, “Village Grouping “or what the effected Mizos, called “Concentration Camp”. The Scheme was introduced in 1967 with the aim to subdue the MNF by denying them of food and shelter. The Scheme was carried out in four phases and the first phase was carried under the scheme of ‘Protected and Progressive Villages ‘under the provision of the Defense of India Rule, 1962. The second phase of grouping was launched in 1969 under the scheme of ‘New Grouping Centre’s’. It was introduced under the provision of the Assam Maintenance of Public Order Act, 1953. The third phase of village grouping called, ‘Voluntary Grouping Centre’ under the same provision of the same Act was ordered in 1970. The fourth and the last grouping called, ‘Extended Loop Areas’ was ordered again in the same year i.e. 1970 under the same provision of the same Act.

The village Grouping or what the people referred to as ‘Concentration Camp’, directly affected 80% of the total population of the district or 5200 villages, causing immense human trauma to the villagers. The scheme was enforced not by civil authority as there was literally no civil administration, but by the ruthless army with zero sympathy for the affected people. The ruthless nature of the army during the operation resembled the Nazis concentration camp in which millions of Jews were killed and slaughtered without slightest mercy and humane consideration. The aim of the scheme was to physically eliminate the MNF volunteers and its supporters. While enforcing the scheme of village grouping, the army would move and surround the notified villages before dawn, issue quick notice to the villagers to take their belongings, and move to the new site. The old abandoned villages with their granaries were burnt down by the army. The conduct of the army involved in the operation was similar to the conduct of today’s terrorists who had no mercy for innocent civilians. Dr. Vumson, a Ziomi/Mizo scholar describes the situation, thus.....In many instances villagers were forced to move out of their old dwelling at gun-point because they

(villagers) were reluctant to leave where they had been living for generations. In most cases, the villagers had to leave on one day notice. There was no time to pack their belongings and it not possible to carry everything at one time. Animals had to be killed and food grains had to be hidden in the forest. If there was no time to hide their food grains they were “burnt down with the house “.This was done not by the insurgents or terrorists, but by the standing army of the world’s largest democracy who proclaimed democratic principle of individual liberty and freedom as its guiding principles. As soon as the people left there, the army personally ransacked the house, kept the valuables for themselves, and then burnt them down to ashes.

The forcible resettlement of villages greatly destroyed the traditional economic system having adverse effect on social structures of Mizo society. The Village groupings brought down the economy of the people to knees and the entire District faced man-made famine. No step was taken for rehabilitation of the affected people. The period between 1966 and 1970, therefore, was referred to as “the darkness period” in the history of Mizoram as most of atrocities and horrifying tragedies happened during this period.

#### 6. The Peace Making Process

The intensity of the MNF movement for independence was on a decline because of a number of reasons, including the split in MNF rank and file, Liberation of Bangladesh and the intervention of church leaders like Rev. Zairema, Rev. H.S. Luaiwa, Rev. Lalsawma and Rev. R.N. Ralte for urging the MNF to abandon the path of violence and start negotiation with the Government of India. Consequence upon this development, the Government of India also decided to significantly scale down military operation and decided to make structural changes aimed at changing the political framework. The structural changes that were brought about involved devolution of political authority by re-drawing the then existing map of Assam. On January 21, 1972 the Mizo Hills District was plugged-off from Assam and was made a Union Territory of Mizoram under the North-Eastern Areas (Re-organization) Act, 1971, and the Government of the Union Territories (amendment) act, 1971. The creation of Union Territory for the Mizo has, indeed, produced dividend. During 1972, a total of 500 MNF fighters surrendered to the Government, regular army were withdrawn from Mizoram. And were replaced by para-military. A number of grouped villages were allowed

to de-group and re-settle in their old deserted villages. Dusk to-dawn curfew was lifted and the movement of people by permit-system was also abolished.

However, Mizoram was once again back to the square in 1973 when a group of hardcore MNF infiltrated into Mizoram from their hideout in Arakan Hills. They were headed by their chief hit-man, Lalhleia. During 1973, there were 40 such killings and 19 ambushes against security-forces. On January 10, 1974, the MNF ambushed SP. Mukherjee, the Lt. Governor of Mizoram. Though the Lt. Governor survived the ambush, he suffered bullet injury. On January 13, 1975, the MNA Captain, Lalhleia, along with three associates carried out the most daring assassinations. They drove in a jeep into the police headquarters in broad daylight, shoot dead G.S. Arya, the inspector General of police, LB. Sewa, Deputy Inspector General of police and Panchanpagesan, superintendent of police. As demand by the worsening situation, army had to be redeployed in Mizoram. However, with electoral intervention liberal economic assistance under the duly elected government, the number of people supporting the government's initiatives has been steadily growing. In the meantime, Laldenga started sending feelers to the Government of India from his hideout in Pakistan for starting negotiation within the framework of Indian Constitution. The government of India, reciprocating the good gesture of Laldenga, suspended military operation by October, 1975. However, the government of India insisted that if he peace talk was to begin, Laldenga should have the confidence of the rank and file of the MNF. The Mizo Church leaders, along with Indian intelligence agencies, in the meantime, continued to work for peaceful resolution of the conflict. On January 24, 1976, Laldenga arrived in Delhi and a few days later, he and his negotiating team had five days of secret negotiation with the Home Secretary SL Khurana, Lt. Government of Mizoram, SK Chibher and joint Secretary (Home), ML Kampani. The MNF team led by Laldenga, acknowledged that Mizoram was an integral part of India, agreed to lay down arms and seek the solution of all problems within the framework of the Constitution of India. However, agreement could not be reached as Laldenga insisted that he would have to lead the provisional government before fresh election being held. Text of the proposed agreement was, nevertheless drafted in February, 1986 and signed in July the same year.

In March 1977, General Election to Lok Sabha was held and the Congress was defeated by Janta Party. The new government resumed talk with the MNF on May 18, 1976.

However there could not be any break through on Laldenga's demand for heading the interim government. The MNF team, then was asked to leave Delhi, and Laldenga was arrested and imprisoned on the persistent pressure of Brigadier. Thenphunga Sailo, the newly appointed Chief Minister of Mizoram by the newly formed Government of PC (Peoples 'Conference). General election was held in 1980 and the Congress once again came back to power. The leaders of the Congress in Mizoram requested Indira Gandhi to resume, once again the talk. Laldenga was released from prison and all charge against him were withdrawn on January 30, 1980. Counter-insurgency operation was also suspended. A veteran journalist, G. Parathasasthy was appointed as the Chief negotiator Of the Government. The talk, however, once again failed on the demand of MNF for the creation of Mizoram state on the model of Jammu and Kashmir, unification of the Mizo-Kuki areas in Manipur and Tripura and withdrawal of Mizoram from sixth Schedule of the Constitution, incorporation of Inner line per-unit system as a constitutional guarantee and ouster of T. Sailo as the chief Minister of Mizoram. With the break-down of the talk for peace, there was an up surge of violent activities by the MNF. To counter this, the Government once again inducted a huge and formidable forces-four brigades of army. The entire Mizoram was saturated with troops, and in 1982, under the unlawful activating Act, the MNF was once again declared as an unlawful organization. Laldenga was asked to leave India and accordingly, he left for London on April, 1982

The large concentration of military forces, renewal of restrictions on movement and dusk to dawn curfews were a grim reminder of the early days of the war. With many rounds of ceasefire and suspension of operation during the preceding years, people had become used to normal life. The renew restrictions and curtailment of liberties constituted a great psychological pressure from the population. People had no greater need and demand than normalcy and life without constant fear and insecurity. People were, therefore, clamoring for peace and development. The Church, in the meantime, played its own role by making daily appeals for peace and normalcy. T. Sailo, the then Chief minister was held entirely responsible for the failure of talk between the two negotiating parties. The Mizoram Pradesh Congress Committee embarked on the ouster of T. Sailo's Government. As expected the Congress come to power in Mizoram on the platform of peace with overwhelming majority. The Congress, as per its campaign, immediately took initiatives to re-start the failed negotiation and operation against the MNF was suspended. The talk was resumed on the

middle of 1985 and finally, the most enduring and the only successful ‘memorandum of Settlement’ was signed on June 30, 1986. The memorandum of settlement reads:-

#### Full Text of the Memorandum of Settlement

##### Preamble:

- (1) Government of India have all along been making earnest efforts to bring about an end to the disturbed conditions in Mizoram and to restore peace and harmony

Towards this end, initiative was taken by the late Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi on the acceptance by Shri Laldeng on behalf of the Mizo National Front (MNF) of the two conditions, namely cessation of violence by MNF and to hold talks within the framework of Indian Constitution. A series of discussions were held with Shri. Laldeng Settlement on various issues reached during the course of talks is incorporated in the following paragraphs.

##### Restoration of Normalcy:

1. With a view to restoring peace and normalcy in Mizoram, the MNF Party, in their part, undertake within the agreed timeframe, to bring all underground personnel of MNF with their arms, ammunitions, and equipments, to ensure their return to civil life, to abjure violence and generally, to help in the process of restoration of normalcy. The modalities of bringing out all under-ground personnel and the deposit of arms, ammunitions and equipments will be as workout. The implementation will be under the supervision of the Central Government.
2. The MNF party will take immediate step to amend its articles of Association so as to make them conform to the provisions of law.
3. The central Government will take steps for the settlement and rehabilitation of underground after considering the scheme proposed in this regard by the Government of Mizoram.
4. The MNF will not undertake to extend any support to the Tripura National Volunteers (TNV), people's Liberation Army of Manipur (PLA) and any other such group by way of training, supply of arms, providing protection or in any other matter.



**Legal, Administrative and other steps**

1. With a view to satisfying the desires and aspiration of all sections of the people of Mizoram, the government will take initiative measures to confer. Statehood on the Union Territory of Mizoram, subject to the other stipulation contained in this memorandum of settlement.
2. To give effect to the above, the necessary legislative and administrative measures will be undertaken, including those for the enactment of bills for the amendment of the Constitution and other laws for the conferment of statehood as aforesaid, to come into effect on a date to be notified by the Central Government.
3. The amendment aforesaid shall provide, among other things, for the following :
  - I. The territory of Mizoram shall consist of the territory specified in Section 6 of the North Eastern Areas (Reorganization) Act, 1971.
  - II. Notwithstanding anything contained in the Constitution, no act of Parliament in respect of (a) Religion or Social practices of the Mizos, (b) Mizo customary law or procedure, (c) Administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Mizo customary law, (d) Ownership and transfer of land, shall apply to the state of Mizoram unless the Legislative Assembly of Mizoram by a resolution so decides .

Provided that nothing in this clause shall apply to any Central Act in force in Mizoram immediately before the appointed day.
  - III. Article 170 Clause (1) shall, in relation to Legislative Assembly of Mizoram, have effect as if for the word sixty the word forty has been substituted

1. Soon after the Bill of Government of Statehood becomes law, and when the president is satisfied that normalcy has returned and that conditions are conducive to the holding of free and fair election, elections to the Legislative Assembly will be initiated.
2. (a) The Centre will transfer resources to the new Government keeping in view the change in Status from a Union Territory to a state and will include resources to cover the revenue gap for the year.



- (b) Central assistance for Plan will be fixed taking note of any residuary gap in resources so as to sustain the approved plan outlay and the pattern of assistance will be as in the case of Special category State.
3. Border trade in local produced or grown agriculture commodities could be allowed under a scheme to be formulated by the Central Government, subject to international arrangement with the neighboring Countries.
  4. The Innerline Regulation, as now in forces in Mizoram, will not be amended or repealed without consulting the State Government.

### **Other Matters**

5. The rights and privileges of the minorities in Mizoram as envisaged in the constitution, shall continue to be preserved and protected and their social and economic advancement shall be ensured.
6. Steps will be taken by the Government of Mizoram at the earlier to review and codify the existing customs, practices, law or other usage relating to the matters specified in Clauses (a) to (b) of para 4.3 (II) of the memorandum, keeping in view that an individual Mizo may prefer to be governed by Acts of Parliament dealing with such matters and which are of general application.
7. The question of Unification of Mizo inhabited areas of other States to form one administrative unit was raised by the MNF delegation. It was pointed out to them, on behalf of the Government of India, that Article 3 of the Constitution of India describes the procedure in this regard but that the Government cannot make any commitment in this respect.
8. It was also pointed out in behalf of the government that as soon as Mizoram becomes a State:
  - i. The provision of part XVII of the provision of the Constitution will apply and the State will be liberty to adopt any one or more language to be used for all or any of the official purpose of the State.
  - ii. It is open to the State to move the establishment of the separate University in the State in accordance with the prescribe procedure.

- iii. In the light of the prime minister's Statement at the Joint Conference of the Chief Justices, Chief Minister and Law Minister held at New Delhi on 31<sup>st</sup> August, 1985 Mizoram will be entitled to have a High Court of its own if it so wishes.
1. (a) It was noted that there is already a scheme in force for payment of exgratia amount to heirs/dependents of persons who were killed during disturbances in 1966 and thereafter in the Union Territory of Mizoram. Arrangement will be made to expeditiously disburse payment to those eligible persons who have already applied but who had not been made such payment so far.
- a. It was noted that consequence on verification done by a joint team of officers, the Government of India had already made arrangement for payment of compensation in respect of damage to crop: building destroyed/damaged during the action in Mizoram, and rented charges of building and land occupied by security force. There may, however, be some claim which were referred and verified by the above team but it is not yet settled expeditiously. Arrangement will also be made for payment of pending claim of rented charges or land/building occupied by the security forces.

Sd/-

Sd/

LALDENG A

R.D. PRADHAN

On behalf of  
Mizo National Front.

Home Secretary  
Government of India

Sd/-

LALKHAMA

Chief Secretary

Government of Mizoram

The MNF, as per the provision of the Memorandum of Settlement laid down arms, ammunitions' equipment etc. and abjured from violence activities from the day of signing the memorandum. It also did not extend any kind of help to any other underground organizations. The MNF was till date, faithful to its commitments, thereby making the memorandum of settlement, the most enduring and the only surviving peace settlement that has ever been signed by the Government of India with any underground organization in the region. The Mizo Peace Accord of 1986 created a peaceful atmosphere in which development works could be carried out without any interruption. Mizoram, now has become the most peaceful and the most developed state in North-East India.

The Government of India also, on its part, has given statehood with special status to Mizoram, suspended counter-insurgency operation and established a Central University after 20 years of signing the Accord. However, there are few areas in which the Central Government has not fully implemented certain provisions of the Accord which are -----

- There are still pending cases against some former MNF personal inspite of the inclusion in the Accord that "all pending cases against all MNF personal shall be withdrawn, irrespective of the nature of the crimes they committed during the period of insurgency".
- There are a number of former MNF who are not fully and adequately rehabilitated.
- Separated High Court for Mizoram, though agreed upon to be established is not yet established.

In view of the non-implementation of certain provisions of the Accord, the former MNA (Mizo National Army) has warned of a fresh Mizo uprising if the Government of India continued to avoid implementing the Mizo Accord in 1986. They have submitted a memorandum to President of India, Mukherjee, under the banners of Ex-Mizo National Army Association for his intervention for full implementation of the Accord signed in 1986. They demanded the establishment of High Court, withdrawal of pending criminal cases against three former MNF

personnel, Rupees 5 lakh rehabilitation for each Ex-MNA cadre or a government job to be given to the family of Ex-MNA cadres.

With the signing of peace Accord in 1986, peace and normalcy has returned and Mizoram has become the most peaceful state in North-East India, but people are yet to recover from psychological wound they suffered from countless atrocities and inhumane treatments meted out to them by ruthless security forces. It is, therefore, for policy makers in Delhi to start the healing process by giving rewards to the people of Mizoram in the form of liberal financial assistance and by implementing the Peace Accord of 1986 in totality. Efforts should be made to make them feel that they are true citizens of India and there is no discrimination against them on the ground of race, religion, customary practices etc., and for that matter, against people of North-East India as a whole. It is for the Government of India, to tender its apology to the people of Mizoram for resorting to air power and other atrocities committed by the army during 20 years of counter-insurgency operations.

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