



# A HISTORY OF THE MIZOS

Volume II

BRIGADIER C G VERGHESE V S M (Rtd)

&

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Mizoram rings but a distant bell. Part of the North-East, the young Indian state of Mizoram hardly finds place in the national mainstream. It suited the British administrative machine to insulate the entire tribal North-East region from the rest of the country and the cocoon remained undisturbed a long while after independence.

A great latent field to bring to light the exotic culture of the Mizos has remained untapped, notwithstanding stray attempts by the Christian missionaries to keep account of their efforts to 'civilise' the ethnic people of the area. There indeed has been a keenly felt need for an authentic and balanced presentation of the history of the Mizo people, their origin, migrations, settlement new habitants, their way of life, religious beliefs, inter-clan feuds, rule of the Chiefs, the influence of Christian missionaries, the British operations, post-independence developments, the insurgency and finally integration into the national life.

The authors have presented in the two volumes, a sequential unfoldment of Mizo life in all its facets from the hazy yore to the current scenario. They have succeeded admirably in their mission, placing in a historical perspective all the important social, cultural and political developments in and around the area which now forms the state of Mizoram.

While the first volume covers the life and times of the Mizos upto the second World War, the second volume brings out subsequent developments culminating in the formation of the 23rd state of the Union.

The book is slated to fill the gap in our knowledge about the geo-politics of the region, reveal the rich cultural heritage of its people and create a general awareness about the distantly placed Mizos.

**R. L. THANZAWNA**, son of the late Mr Lalmama, a well-known educationist, poet, and musician of Lunglei (Mizoram) was born in 1933 at Serkawn. He was educated at Serkawn, Aizawl and Serampore (West Bengal). After a short stint as a teacher he joined as Project Executive Officer in the Community Development Department of undivided Assam and later joined Mizoram Civil Service. He was responsible for setting up Mizoram's Directorate of Information, Public Relations and Tourism as also Department of Printing and Stationery. For a long time he headed the Directorate and witnessed developments and political changes in Mizoram from a very close range.

He authored many features and articles published in local as well as national papers and broadcasts through All India Radio. He retired as Deputy Commissioner, Lunglei and served for more than two years as Secretary to Chief Minister, Mizoram.

He is keenly interested in music, arts, agriculture, journalism and literature.

**BRIGADIER C.G. VERGHESE, V.S.M. (Retired)** was born in Central Travancore in 1926 and had his early education in Malabar. He was Commissioned in the Regiment of Artillery in July 1949, and after serving in various Regiments in the border areas during the 1962, 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pak and Sino-Indian wars, he was transferred to the Military Intelligence Corps. He took an active part in the 1971 Bangladesh war and was awarded the Visishta Seva Medal (VSM) in 1972.

During the 1974-1980 peak period of the insurgency in Mizoram he was the head of the Military Intelligence in Mizoram and Colonel Intelligence of Eastern Command at Calcutta. He was actively associated with Fraternisation Schemes for the welfare of the poor Mizo people. Brig. Verghese authored five papers detailing projects and schemes for adoption in Mizoram. He actively interacted with Mizos of various tribes and clans, taking part in their festivals and celebrations. He freely mixed with the friendly and hospitable Mizos and learnt a great deal from them about their traditions, history, customs and manners, festivals and ceremonies which in part contributed to the writing of the book.

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**BRIGADIER C.G. VERGHESE, V.S.M (Rtd.)**

**AND**

**R.L. THANZAWNA, M.C.S (Rtd.)**



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*This Book is dedicated  
to  
all those people  
who worked  
for  
peace, progress and prosperity of Mizoram*

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## *Chapter 1*

# **Post-Independence Scenario**

**T**he results of partition of India, as far as the Lushai Hills was concerned, were that the gateway of the Lushai District via Chittagong was sealed, and the (Mizos) Lushai people found themselves abruptly separated from their kinsmen in Chittagong Hill Tracts and also in Chin Hills of Burma.

### **Declaration of the Congress Working Committee**

During the transitional period of transfer of power in India, there was some confusion, owing to interaction of integrationist and secessionist forces. Even the Congress Working Committee had declared that “it has been made clear that the constitution framed by the Constituent Assembly will apply only to those areas which accept it. It must be understood that any province or part of the province, which accepts the Indian Constitution and desires to join the Indian Union cannot be prevented from doing so. Thus there must be no compulsion either way and the people themselves must decide their future”. (This announcement was made on March 8, 1947).

Some of the Mizos had misinterpreted this statement to mean that the door was open for them either to join Burma, remain in India or be independent.

### **Phizo’s Proposal for Independence**

When the Mizo Union had held its first general assembly in September 1946 (mentioned earlier) Sakhrie, Secretary of the “Naga National Council” had visited the Mizo Hills and stated that the Nagas were determined to be out of the Indian Union and would even fight for political independence. The Mizo Union leaders were not impressed by his arguments.

Once again late A.Z. Phizo and few other Naga leaders visited the Lushai (Mizo) Hills in April, 1947 invited the Mizos to join hands with the Nagas and fight against the Government of India for political independence. Phizo had even suggested that the Mizos language could become the lingua-franca of the proposed “Independent State of the Nagas and Lushais”. It was also rumoured that Phizo was instrumental in starting the “United Mizo Freedom Organisation (UNFO) on July 4, 1947. (One could clearly see the shadow of the “Protectorate of the tribal people in “Excluded Areas” proposed by Maj. McCall and the autonomous area proposed by MacDonald under the Crown of England).

However, the Mizo Union leaders politely told Phizo that his offer was not acceptable to the Mizo people. The demand for the merger with Burma was also subsequently dropped for the time being.

### **Bordoloi Sub-Committee**

On Jan 25, 1947, the Constituent Assembly of India appointed an Advisory Committee on minorities, tribal areas etc., under the chairmanship of Sardar Vallabhai Patel. This Committee appointed a Sub Committee under the chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi for north eastern tribal areas and Excluded and Partially Excluded areas.

According to an article titled "The new Naga Unit" in the *Assam Tribune* of February 16 and 23, 1958 R.K. Ramadhyani, ICS, Secretary of the Sub-Committee of the Constituent Assembly, referring to the move for an independent "Mizoram" observed, the idea of a "Mizoram", also on the same influence, fell on comparatively sterile soil. The Naga leaders including Phizo did their best to encourage the Mizo students at Shillong and had come to Aizawl when the Sub-Committee of the Constituent Assembly had visited the Mizo Hills.

The transfer of power led to the abolition of the special constitutional status of the tribal areas as the India (Provisional Constitution) order of August 15, 1947, altogether dropped all references to "tribal areas" discretionary powers of the Governor General, and Governors, and distinction between "India" and "British India". On August 27, 1947, the Governor General issued the Extra Provincial Jurisdiction Ordinance, with effect from August 15, 1947, calling the "Tribal Areas" on the frontiers of the province of Assam as "Assam Tribal Areas". Another notification was issued by the Government of India to the state government of Assam, delegating the executive powers of the Central Government to the state government. Before the end of the year, the Ordinance was turned into an Act.

According to R.K. Ramadhyani, "The Bardoloi sub-committee had found that Superintendent of the Mizo Hills was himself the President of the "Mizo Council," which again was a body elected under his supervision, with an equal number of Lushai (Mizo) chiefs and commoners. As mentioned earlier Pu Dengthuama had pointed out the objection of the Mizo Union in participating in the meetings of the "Mizo Council" or "the District Conference" under the chairmanship of the Superintendent.

### **Superintendent of Mizo Hills calls General Meeting**

A meeting, attended by 50 Mizos, including some of the leaders of the churches, representatives of the "Chiefs' Council", and ex-servicemen, was held on August 14, 1947, under the Chairmanship of L.L. Peters, the last British Superintendent of Lushai (Mizo) Hills district. They resolved "that owing to the unexpected acceleration of the date of transfer of powers by the British Government, and as the Mizos have not, as yet, been definitely informed in details as to what is to be the "proposed future constitution" and form of administration of the Lushai Hills District, and as Section (7) Sub-Section (2) of the Indian Independence Bill does not clarify the situation, it is accordingly thought necessary that His Excellency, the Governor of Assam, should kindly inform them in

writing as to what these are to be. Also whether Lushais are at this stage allowed the option of joining any other Dominion i.e. Pakistan or Burma.

The meeting also resolved that if the Lushais are to enter the Indian Union, their main demands are as under:

1. The existing safeguards of their customary laws and land tenure etc. should be maintained;
2. The Chin Hills Regulation of 1896 and Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873 should be retained, until such time as the Lushai themselves, through their "District Council or other parallel District Authority declared that this can be abrogated;
3. The Lushais then will be allowed to opt out of the Indian Union, when they wish to do so, subject to a minimum period of ten years.

(The above are the extracts from the proceedings of the meeting of Lushai Leaders held at Aijal on August 14, 1947).

### **Mizo District Council and the Pawi-Lakher Regional Councils**

On the recommendations of the Bordoloi Sub-Committee report, the dilemma of the Lushais during the constitution making stage was resolved with the provision for an autonomous existence under part 'A' of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. The keen desire (of the Lushais) to link up their political life with Assam on the one hand, and fear of being submerged, on the other, was reconciled by providing for a fair degree of self government, through the Autonomous District Council. As a result, the Mizo District Council and the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council for Pawi, Lakher and Chakma tribes were established with 24 members (of whom 3/4th were elected), in order to have an autonomous administration over the traditional ways and affairs of the tribes and make such changes as they themselves might like to introduce. The Mizo District Council was inaugurated on April 25, 1952 and the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council was inaugurated on April 23, 1952. With the introduction of these Councils, the post of high powered Superintendent was abolished and the whole area of Lushai Hills District was placed under a "Deputy Commissioner", with much curtailed powers, and the Chief Executive Members of the District and Regional Councils.

### **Position of the Chiefs in Lushai Hills**

The chiefs in Lushai Hills who enjoyed considerable powers and privileges were utilized by the British as their agents for holding and administering the area. The administrative apparatus under the British Superintendent was light in the extreme, and it was only in cases of murder or very serious matters that the Government would intervene in the internal affairs of a village. However, the fact that the chiefs were recognized and their authority upheld by the Government tended to render them negligent of the need to worry much about the support of the people. According to the practice which prevailed at the time of Independence in 1947, it was the chiefs who had the major say in allotting "jhum" lands each year to the villagers for cultivation. If the chief wished to rebuild his house, he could call upon his villagers to assist him and they were bound to obey. The

villagers were expected to surrender the forelegs of every animal they had shot or trapped to their chief as a tax and to give every year certain specified quantities of rice. While most of these practices had their origin in ancient custom, there were some chiefs who grossly abused their privileges and treated the villagers as personal servants who could be sent at will to distant bazars for carrying loads and making purchases.

The Mizo Union Party was formed by the educated youth of the Lushai Hills on April 9, 1946, with the following objectives:

- (a) To unite all the people in Lushai Hills and adjoining areas.
- (b) To abolish the chieftain system.
- (c) To join the Indian mainstream instead of being kept aloof as private property of the Viceroy of India or his representatives.

### **Mizo Civil Disobedience Movement of 1948**

The Lushai educated youth wanted to have their own elected representatives in the Government. The Mizo Union was originally constituted to check illegal extractions by the chiefs and protect the villagers from exploitation. The Chiefs' Council, consisting of, representatives of the chiefs and nominees of the Superintendent, set in process measures to counter the activities of the Mizo Union. The party retaliated by launching a movement to boycott the chiefs altogether. It started as a peaceful non-violent movement in 1948. The villagers were instructed by the Mizo Union workers not to carry out the orders of the chiefs or pay them any taxes. But very soon, violence broke out and Government also got involved on the ground that it was supporting the authority of the chiefs. The people were urged to defy the authority of the Government as well as the chiefs and join together in a full scale Civil Disobedience Movement.

The newly formed "United Mizo Freedom Organisation (UMFO), which was opposing the Mizo Union and championing the cause of the chiefs, was not looked upon with much favour by the Government, as there were indications that it was working for the break away of the Lushai Hills District from the Indian Union and for linking the district with the Chin Hills of Burma.

The Lushai Hills District, bordering both Burma and East Pakistan, was of great strategic importance. It was imperative that a solution should be found to avert a break down of law and order. The last Superintendent of the Lushai Hills appointed in 1947 was L.L. Peters, a staunch British officer with long experience of work in the hill areas but quite out of tune with the new generation of hill leaders then emerging. His prescription was "Bring out the troops, shoot to kill, and lock up the Mizo Union leaders". His wife, however, was said to be a very humane and understanding woman, who was greatly liked by the people. Superintendent Peters was strongly opposed to the idea of any talks at Government level with the Mizo Union leaders.

After independence, an Advisory Council was elected in Lushai Hills to advise the Superintendent, and the Mizo Union got all the seats in that Council except two won by the UMFD. The Mizo Union came into conflict with Supdt L. L. Peters who was openly siding with the chiefs.

The following extracts from the book *Enchanted Frontiers* by Nari Rustomji will give a better picture of the situation prevailing in Aijal and surrounding areas in those days.

“On arrival at Aijal, I found the atmosphere disturbingly tense. My staying as the Superintendent’s guest did not make things easier for me, as it gave the impression that I would be biased at the very outset against the Mizo Union. There was some justification in this apprehension, as the first interviews arranged by the Superintendent were with the members of the Lushai Chief’s Council. It was then that I met for the first time, Pu Lalsailova, Chief of Kelsih and President of the Chief’s Council. He was a charming man, ever smiling and kindly, the epitome of old world courtesy and we soon became friends. The Chiefs urged the most drastic measures against the Mizo Union leaders, a considerable number of whom had already been put in the lock up by the over-zealous Superintendent. The public, complained the Chiefs, were being misled by the Mizo Union. They were stoning the houses of Chiefs and threatening to murder. The administration in the district was on the verge of collapse and the authorities must at once intervene, to protect the lives and properties of the Chiefs, who had served for generations, as the bulwarks of the Government. I met, in due course, the Mizo Union leaders and held protracted discussion with them, both singly and as a body to thrash out a formula, to resolve their grievances against the Chiefs. The Mizo Union leaders were poles apart from the Chiefs and their old world ways. They stormed and ranted from morning till evening, threatening devastation if their demands were not fulfilled (Pu Vanthuama and Pu Thanhlira were the two leaders conspicuous in that meeting).” I (Nari Rustomji)

“set off valiantly with my naval escort, a gay band of youngmen with guitars slung across their shoulders and lustily singing all the way, as only Lushais know. We met, as we proceeded, parties of political prisoners, firmly handcuffed, who had been called up by the Superintendent from Lungleh, the southern division, to meet me at Aijal (Aizawl). Pu Dengthuama, among them I remember especially, as we have often reminisced in later days of our first strange meeting on a jungle track. When we reached our destination it was night and we camped in the finely preserved house of the old chief. It was rumoured that many of the villagers had left their homes and fled to the forest for fear that we had come to arrest them. I soon had messengers sent out, to reassure the villagers that I had come to hear their grievances and not to punish them, and that I should be happy to meet them at their convenience, next morning. In my party was young Pu Lallianzuala, an earnest Seventh Day Adventist Evangelist. He had brought with him a case full of Missionary literature, and no sooner had we reached the camp than he sped to the village in the night and set about enrolling new entrants to the faith. Also accompanying me was Rina Sailo, son of Pu Lalsailova, President of the Chiefs’ Council. Rina had been recently appointed to the newly formed frontier service and I had called him up from Naga Hills, where he was posted, to lend me a helping hand. We spent the evening, chatting with the chief and hearing from him of the heroic exploits of his grandfather, who after years of bitter fighting, had come to an honourable settlement with the British, in token of which they had presented him with a giant size silver cup, shaped like a sports trophy and handsomely inscribed, which the present chief displayed before us, with ancestral pride”.

“The next morning, we held meetings among the villagers and explained that the Government was determined to take all steps to ensure that the people were not exploited. Their problems could best be settled by peaceful discussions and not by acts of violence directed against the Chiefs. By the time we returned to Aijal, the tension had already considerably lessened, to the extent that even the fire eating Superintendent agreed to my proposal to release the Mizo Union leaders from jail and start off again on a clean slate. Everybody was happy and the sundry rival parties organised a grand joint farewell for me, as I left Aijal for Shillong”.

“My visit to the Mizo District gave me confidence in myself, as this was the first occasion on which I had been called upon to bear sole responsibility in a situation of extreme crisis in the tribal areas. I had broken all the rules, I had taken decisions against the advice of the experts in hill administration - and the experts themselves were surprised at the successful outcome. The Mizo civil disobedience movement of 1948 was called off, and a climate had been created for a happy settlement.”

Meanwhile insurgency had broken out in Nagaland and the Lushais were naturally affected by the events there. They saw the rapid developments in agriculture, communication, trade and education that were taking place in Nagaland and the Mizo leaders started comparing those developments with their own wretched plight.

### **Nehru's Visit to Mizo Hills**

In 1952, Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru had planned to visit Aizawl and the Mizo youth had made hectic preparations to receive him but, unfortunately, his visit was cancelled. However, he visited the Mizo Hills district in 1953.

### **Economic Commission**

A Commission, consisting of Sir B.N. Rau, Mr. J.J. M. Nichols Roy and Mr. Gopinath Bordoloi visited Mizo Hills district and submitted a report about the prevailing economic conditions in the Mizo Hills giving suggestions for their amelioration, but nothing was done, and the report was also forgotten.

### **United Mizo Freedom Organisation (UMFO)**

On July 5, 1947, few days prior to the actual date of Independence, Pu Lalmawia with the support of the Mizo chiefs and blessings of the Superintendent formed a new political party known as the “United Mizo Freedom Organisation”, to counter the activities of the Mizo Union Party, which had already become popular among the Lushais. Pu Lalmawia, who later became Parliamentary Secretary in the Assam Government had served in the Burmese Army as an Officer during the Second World War and had some contacts with AFPEL leaders, who had been working for making Lushai Hills, as part of the Burma Union when it becomes independent, was the President of the new party.

A three-member delegation comprising Pu K. Manliana (an ex-Havildar of the Burmese Rifles), Pu Vana and Pu R. Thanzauva visited Burma to meet the Burmese leaders.

The Mizo Civil Disobedience Movement of 1948, the move of the Mizo Union to get the hereditary chieftainship abolished and to have Village Council with members elected by the people of Mizo Hills themselves were considered more important by the people than the merger with the Chin Hills of Burma. The problem of forming Village Councils had eclipsed all the enthusiasm for bringing about union with Burma. The Mizo Union decided to remain with India. They wanted the Mizo Hills to remain as part of the Assam province and sent its assent to Assam Government.

The Mizo chiefs supported UMFO only because of their enmity towards the Mizo Union. The UMFO party could not last long because it lacked any constructive programmes and economic policy. The main cause of its failure was poor financial backing. After few years, UMFO had merged with the East India Tribal Union (EITU) under the Chairmanship of Capt. Williamson Sangma. While the Mizo Union Party which was a stronger party, stood for autonomous status for Mizos within India, the UMFO had stood for sovereignty outside the Indian Union without much noticeable support from the people.

### **Lushai Hills Election of 1952**

The first general elections in India were held in 1951. Things started moving fast after the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1948 and with promises given during the 1951 election. Mizo Union received unstinted support of the Lushais in the general election for the three seats of the Assam Legislative Assembly and the Autonomous Mizo District Council held in 1952. The Mizo Union's Parliamentary Level Association, with the Assam Pradesh Congress proceeded smoothly. The relationship of the Mizo Union with the Assam Pradesh Congress was so good at that time that the Mizo Union lent full support to the demand of the Assam Government for a "Greater Assam", before the State Reorganisation Commission of 1954-55. The States Reorganisation Act was passed in 1956.

### **East India Tribal Union (EITU)**

EITU was a political party of the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills, which wanted the carving out of a separate Hill State, within the Indian Union. EITU stood for a Hill State composed of all Hill Districts of Assam. So, the newly formed United Mizo Freedom Organisation (UMFO) under Pu Lalmawia, the opposition party at the Lushai District level, also merged with the EITU. The EITU had been formed in October 2nd, 1954, under the Chairmanship of Capt. Sangma in Khasi and Jaintia Hills, with the demand for a separate Hill State, comprising Six Hills District.

In 1957, EITU joined the Chaliha Cabinet of Assam and Pu Lalmawia of the UMFO was made Parliamentary Secretary. But even at that time, the Mizo Union held full powers at the district level and was busy with the local politics and problems of administration. Pu A. Thanglura who was the Mizo Union representative in the Assam Legislative Assembly was later appointed as Chief Parliamentary Secretary.

Demand of the UMFO for the merger of Lushai Hills with Burma could not get much support from the Lushais. So, after the merger with the EITU, Pu Lalmawia

advocated that the Lushai District should join Meghalaya. This move also had no backing from the people of Lushai Hills.

### **Government Acquires Chiefs' Rights**

In 1954, two important legislations were enacted, facilitated by the friendly atmosphere between the Mizo Union Party and the Congress Ministry in Assam. The first was the acquisition of the chiefs' rights, which came into force on April 1, 1954. The second one was Lushai Hills District (change of name) Act of 1954.

The "Assam Lushai Hills District (Acquisition of Chief's Rights) Act 1954, came into force from April 1, 1954 in the area under the jurisdiction of Lushai District Council and from April 15, 1954 in the Pawi-Lakher Region. The rights and interests of 259 Lushai chiefs and 50 Pawis-Lakher chiefs were now vested in the government. The administration of the land under these chiefs was also handed over to the District and Regional Councils respectively. This move was in line with the abolition of zamindari system in other states of India. The Mizo chiefs wrongly put the blame for it on the Mizo Union Party.

By an Act of the Parliament, called the "Lushai Hills District (change of name) Act No. 18 of 1954, the name of the "Lushai District" was changed to "Mizo District", with effect from April 29, 1954. The term "Lushai" gradually disappeared from Mizo District.

Since the name of the "Lushais" has been changed to "Mizos" from April 1954 onwards, the people of the district will henceforth be referred in this book as "Mizos" instead of "Lushais".

Aijal will also be spelt as "Aizawl," according to the wishes of the Mizos.

### **Important District Enactments**

Of the few legislations enacted by the District Council, the more important ones affecting the customary laws of the Mizos were:

- (a) The Lushai Hills Act No. 11 - Reduction "*Fathang*" - 1953.
- (b) The Mizo District (Inheritance of Property) Act No. 1 of 1956.

Under the first listed Act, the rate of "*Fathang*" was reduced and when the chieftainship was abolished in 1954, "*Fathang*" was paid to the Hills District Council and the Regional Council as "Land Revenue". Cesses, like *Sachhiah*, *Thirdengsa*, *Khua chhiah* and *Chi chhiah* were altogether abolished.

Under the second, Act, the law of inheritance was substantially changed, whereby the right of Mizo women to inheritance was ensured.

### **Mizo Cultural Society**

John F. Manliana and ex-havildar from the Chin Rifles, along with some Mizo District Council member formed a Mizo Cultural Society in 1955 in Mizo District.

### **Pu Laldenga as a Social Worker**

Pu Laldenga became the Secretary of the "Mizo Cultural Society" in 1955. Narrating the story of his long struggle to the pre SSC, Laldenga said that "after the Second World

War, I had joined the Lushai District Council as an accountant, but had to leave the government job, when the authorities asked me to resign from the Mizo Cultural Society, which took an active part in helping the starving people during 1959-60 Mautam famine in the area. As leader of the cultural organisation I daily used to stand bail for 40 to 45 people who were arrested for seizing grains from trucks (rice used to be brought to Mizo Hills by the Government of Assam for sale to the Mizos, as part of the famine relief)".

The name of the Mizo Cultural Society was changed to "*Mau Tam Front*" in March 1960 and Pu Laldenga continued as its secretary. The real aim of the Society was to disseminate among the Mizos the idea of independence under the cloak of culture. During the famine of 1959-60, this Society took a lead in demanding relief and managed to attract the attention of all sections of the people irrespective of party affiliations. In September 1969 the Society adopted the name of Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF) with the object of seeking relief for the famine stricken people of the district. The MNFF gained considerable popularity as a large number of Mizo Youth assisted in transporting rice and other essential commodities from Silchar to Kolasib and to interior villages, to ward off starvation and death. Those who had worked under Pu Laldenga were much impressed by the efficient and disciplined way in which he handled the operations and ensured continuous and systematic supply of relief materials to the villagers. "Mizoram for Mizos" was the catch slogan used by Pu Laldenga (like the slogan "*Chalo Dillhi*", by the INA people under Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose) in those days. His political guru was one Havildar Pillai from Kerala, while he was serving in the Ordinance Corps of the army. Laldenga used to tell the Mizo people that even the plantain leaves of the wild plantain growing wild along the sides of the rivers in Mizo Hills would fetch enough foreign exchange, for self-sufficiency.

### **Special Privilege of Chiefs Abolished**

After Independence, a new scheme of administration based on the recommendation of the "North East Frontier Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-Committee of the Constituent Assembly", known as the "Bordoloi Committee", was incorporated in Part 'A' of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. As a result, the Mizo Autonomous District Council and the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council for the Lakhers - Pawis and Chakmas were set up in 1952.

The post of the superintendent had been abolished and the whole area placed under the Deputy Commissioner and the Chief Executive Members of the District and Regional Council. As mentioned earlier, the Mizo Union, holding the reins of the District Council Administration, abolished the special privileges of the Lushai chiefs and their elders. However, all the chiefs were compensated in cash for the loss of their power and tribute. Since the voice of the people was very strong, the chiefs had no choice but to accept their fate calmly and be content with the compensation given to them. Some of the chiefs utilised the money received wisely, but majority of them squandered it and left a trail of misery for their dependents.

This was certainly a bold and socialistic step taken by the Mizo Union keeping with the provision of the Democratic Indian Constitution. But there was opposition to the decision for remain within the Indian Union.

### **Demand for Eastern Hill State**

In the Tura (Garo Hills) Conference of October, 1954, the demand for an "Eastern Hill State" was mooted. The Tura Conference had also highlighted the difference of language and culture, existing between the people of the hills and the plains. This demand for Hill State had assured the dimension of a mass movement, during the visit of the State Reorganisation Commission.

In the second general elections of 1957, the EITU spearheading their demand for a Hill State, swept the poll in most of the Hills Districts.

### **Demand for a Hill State Rejected**

The State Reorganisation Commission (SRC) rejected the demand of the EITU for a Hill State composed of all the Hill Districts of Assam. However, the SRC had underlined the "paramount importance" of establishing a stable administration in the north eastern region, based on the good-will of the tribal people. G.B. Pant, the then Home Minister of India, who visited Shillong, gave some thought to the problem of bringing about reapproachment between the hills and plains leaders, which resulted in the change of the ministry in Assam towards the end of 1954.

The new Chief Minister of Assam, B.P. Chaliha, included the President of EITU, Capt. W.A. Sangma, as a fullfledged Minister and some of his colleagues in the Hill block as Deputy ministers. Lalmawia who had joined the EITU from the UMFO was made Parliamentary Secretary and taken as Chief Parliamentary Secretary.

Satisfied by the representation given to the leaders of the EITU and the understanding of the Hills problems by the Chaliha Ministry, the demand for a separate Hill State by EITU was kept in abeyance.

### **All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC)**

On July 6 and 7, 1960 leaders of all the political organisations in the Hills Districts of Assam, including the Congress assembled at Shillong, under the auspices of the EITU and formed the "All Party Hill Leaders Conference".

The second conference of the APHLC held at Shillong on August 22 and 23, 1960, authorised its Council of Action "to prepare a plan or pattern of separation." On October 24, 1960 the Assam Language Bill was passed and on the same day, a mass demonstration of tribal people moved through the streets of Shillong to protest against the imposition of Assamese language.

In the wake of the Assam Official Language Bill, Capt. Sangma and all his colleagues, except Pu A. Thanglura resigned from the ministry.

Till the early sixties, the EITU and the Mizo Union were the only two active political parties in Mizo Hills District. The Mizo Union representative in the Assam Legislative Assembly was a member of the Assam Government as Chief Parliamentary Secretary.

Later when EITU joined the Chaliha Cabinet in 1957, Pu Lalmawia (EX-UMFO) had been made a Parliamentary Secretary.

All went well till 1959, when the whole area was gripped by the "Mautam Famine".

### **Mautam Famine of 1959-60**

A famine attributed (rightly or wrongly) to flowering of a type of bamboo, occurred in the Mizo Hills District in 1959. The word "*Mautam*" means the death of the bamboo. Details about the different types of bamboos and about "*Mautam*" and "*Thingtam*" are given elsewhere in the book. Various kinds of bamboos which grow in Mizo Hills are divided into two main types, the giant bamboos and the ordinary thin variety. When they flower, the bamboos produce seeds like grains of wheat, and that particular variety of bamboo, like ordinary grass, dries up. The seeds fall to the ground and before they sprout are eaten up by the jungle birds and rats. With the abundant supply of protein rich bamboo seeds, the rats grow and mature faster and produce a bigger litter than during the normal periods.

Thus the healthy rat population multiplies fast. Rats collect these seeds in their burrows and feed on it for the next few months, but when all the bamboo seeds are exhausted, they enter the "*jhums*" in large numbers and destroy the rice crop and become a plague to the villagers. They gradually lose their fear of the human beings and infest the huts and houses where the villagers keep their rice stock and finish the entire stock overnight. When the rats multiply, they invariably spread diseases.

Earlier, a famine of considerable magnitude had taken place in 1911-12. People saw the flowering of the bamboos all along the hill sides and realized its significance. So, as a precaution, extra strong storage bins for food stuffs were arranged and every one thought that the serious famine could be avoided. But, as the paddy started ripening in the "*jhums*", rats appeared in the fields overnight. The havoc created by the rats was terrible and very little of the grain was harvested. To sustain themselves, many Mizos had to collect edible roots and leaves from the jungles. Others moved out to far away places. Considerable numbers were said to have died of starvation. Children were always the last to suffer and parents often collapsed in their efforts to obtain food for their little ones. Many welfare organisations tried their best to help the starving villagers in the remote corners by head-loads.

There were no roads to facilitate supplies to the remote villages. There were no organised porters, animal transport or mule tracks to carry the air dropped food supplies.

In order to placate Pu Laldenga, who had been propagating "Mizoram for Mizos", the Government of Assam sought his help in the famine relief supply measures in 1959. This increased the prestige of Pu Laldenga. Mizo Youth were voluntarily involved in relief works in town and the remote villages. The Mizo villagers only saw the Mizo National Famine Front Volunteers delivering food stuffs in their villages and gave all the credit to Laldenga and his band of volunteers. Being in close contact with the MNFF volunteers, the poor villagers were bound to believe the words of the MNFF and take it as gospel truths that the Assam Government had neglected the Mizos and had not taken any

worthwhile remedial measures before and during the famine period. Somehow the famine months came to a close.

The MNFF under the leadership of Pu Laldenga, Pu Lalnunmawia, Pu Sainghaka and Pu Vanlalhruaia (known as Harry to his friends) got the praise and all the credit for the supply of food stuffs to the remote villages.

The bulk of the relief funds were believed to have been spent by way of subsidy on transport of grain, purchase of vehicles and petrol and construction of godowns for storage of rice. Whatever little food stuffs which reached the remote villages were the ones which had been carried by people as head loads. In the hilly terrain, it is difficult to carry more than 25 kgs. and that too to a maximum distance of 15 miles in a day. Due to defective packing unsuitable for air dropping, led to wastage. Due to bad weather, the Air Force had to unload rice meant for certain southern villages, in dropping zones of areas having clear weather and thus some villagers got sufficient or even excess quantity of rice when some did not get any rice at all.

In the absence of proper supply of food grains from Silchar, people in the interior villages got the wrong impression that the plains people were intentionally holding back the rice bags in Silchar. The MNFF aired it as an economic blockade staged by the Assam Government.

The Mizo Union blamed the administrators in Assam, while the MNFF blamed the Mizo Union for not taking adequate precautions when, as the bamboos started flowering, their educated leaders were warned in time about the impending "*Mautam*". The Mizo District Council started sending information about starvation deaths which the administrators took as another method of maligning the Congress Ministry in Assam and treated the information as false and cheap propaganda.

### **MNFF Demonstrations**

In 1959, prior to converting the Mizo Cultural Society into "Mizo National Famine Front," Laldenga had staged a demonstration and conducted a procession when Chief Minister of Assam, and the Tribal Affairs Minister Capt. Williamson Sangma visited Aizawl. The MNFF demanded food for the Mizo Hills District which led to the state government seeking the help of MNFF in distributing food supplied to remote villages, brought by vehicles and air dropped by the Air Force planes.

The initial indifference of the Assam Government to the distress of the Mizos and the inordinate delay in initiating relief measures caused serious discontentment among the Mizos. The fact that the Mizo Union, an associate of the ruling Congress in Assam, was at the helm of the affairs in the Mizo Hills District, gave Pu Laldenga and his MNFF an additional handle to direct their propaganda campaign against the Mizo Union. The part played by the Chaliha Ministry and by the District Council was purposely hidden by the MNFF, and they took all the credit for saving the lives of the Mizo villagers.

Cases of starvation deaths officially reported by the Mizo Hills District Council were denied by the Assam Government as grossly exaggerated and gradually the relationship between the Government and the Mizo Council controlled by the Mizo Union became

strained. The Mizo Union leaders, who were staunch supporters of the Assam Government, gradually drifted away and became more and more critical of the Chaliha Ministry. Discontentment grew in the minds of the Mizo people. The District Council was equally unhappy, as it was felt that the Assam Government did not attach importance to the Council, to the extent expected.

The first shock was experienced by the Mizo District Council authorities, when questions were raised as to whether the Mizo District Council was entitled to use "service stamps"; whether its members were entitled to use Inspection Bungalows etc. Such simple issues were allowed to remain undecided for long. The Government of Assam had been neglecting the development of the district, or providing financial support.

### **Chaliha Favours Pu Laldenga**

When the Mizo Union became anti-Chaliha and anti-Congress, it was stated in unofficial circles that the Chief Minister had been planning to win over Pu Laldenga by showing sympathy towards the grievances of the MNFF and treating them leniently. It was even rumoured that Laldenga had been given financial aid for organising a political party, to work against the Mizo Union which Shri B.P. Chaliha was considering as a thorn in his flesh. When Pu Laldenga was arrested, while returning from Pakistan in 1963, after arranging with the Pakistan Army Intelligence Authorities for supply of arms and ammunition from East Pakistan for the MNFF, Chief Minister Chaliha was said to have intervened and allowed his release, after getting a letter of apology signed by Pu Laldenga.

### **MNFF starts a Newspaper called "Mizo Aw"**

The Mizo National Famine Front started publishing a daily newspaper, named "Mizo Aw" (Mizo Voice). Pu Laldenga who had been working as a cashier in the Mizo District Council office at Aizawl took up the editorship of this one sheet newspaper.

### **Third General Election**

On the eve of the third general elections in 1962, the Mizo Union was affected by a major split. Dissidents set up their own candidates against the official nominees of the Mizo Union, both for the Assam State Legislative and the Autonomous Mizo District Council. The official candidates had succeeded in retaining the majority in the District Council, but had to concede two out of the three seats in the Assam Assembly to the dissidents.

### **Mizo Union Withdraws**

In 1960, the Mizo Union had withdrawn its support for the Congress in Assam State on the following grounds:

- (a) The Chaliha Government had not done enough to tackle the famine of 1959.
- (b) The Assam Pradesh Congress Committee had insisted that Assamese should be declared as the state language which would give undue benefits to the plains people of Assam, and would be disadvantageous to the Hill people.

### **MNFF becomes a Political Party**

When in 1960, the Mizo Union parted company with the Congress following the sharp differences on the famine relief operations and the issue of the state language was finalised, Pu Laldenga found it as the opportune moment to drop the word 'famine' from its appellation and transform MNFF itself into a new political party. From MNFF, it became MNF. The demand for "Sovereign Independence for Greater Mizoram" was raised.

In a speech delivered on August 6, 1961 as President of the MNFF, Pu Laldenga had openly declared that Mizos were "Mongolians" and not "Indians" and had appealed to the Mizo people to free themselves from "Indian colonialism and achieve complete independence". He had argued that the Mizos had been given a separate administration by the British, and Mizos have the right to be separate from India, specially as they had been completely neglected after Independence by the Government of India.

According to the information about the MNF given by Pu Demkshosheik to Fang Khui, the commander of Pauseng Army of China, on January 5, 1974 - "Before the revolution in Mizoram (March 1st, 1966) our leaders had sought the help from western countries in 1961 and 1962, especially from the British and the Americans. Ambassadors of these countries were approached several times. Their words were so sweet, but no action. After realising their attitude towards us, our leaders made a decision not to make further contacts with them".

While holding an official post in the District Council, Pu Laldenga developed great ambitions in life and was said to have channelised Government money for building up his political image. As the Editor of the MNFF daily paper "*Mizo Aw*", he had gained prominence as a social worker. By distributing money to prospective party workers and supporters who were then engaged as famine relief volunteers, he managed to have some ardent followers. Faced with disciplinary action he submitted his resignation and walked off. Now, as a full time politician, he utilised his energy in converting the MNFF into an active Regional Political Party. On October 22, 1961 Pu laldenga became the President and Pu S. Lianzuala became the General Secretary of the newly formed Mizo National Front (MNF).