

Report

Ramification of Conflicts in Tripura and Mizoram *

The greatest human migration in history, the Partition of the Indian Subcontinent into India and Pakistan, saw the movement of more than fifteen million people. This massive displacement resulted in extensive suffering and major socio-economic and political changes. Tripura, a princely state bordered on three sides by East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) felt the impact of the migration. Partition opened the floodgates to migrants who outnumbered the indigenous people of the state within a decade. It also permanently changed the demography of the state. This report points out how the tribes of the state were marginalized in terms of possession of land, profession and identity, culminating in a conflict between the Hindu Bengali migrants and the tribal groups of the state and the consequences of this process.

Tripura, once ruled by tribal kings of the Manikya dynasty, with tribals constituting the majority among their subjects merged with India officially on October 15 1949. According to the 1941 census, tribal people constituted 53.16% of the population; in just ten years that figure was down to 37.23%. The demographic change paved the way for the eventual conflict between the tribal population and the Bengali migrants which devastated the state for more than three decades. In addition, the independence of India led to Tripura's geographical isolation from the 'mainland' creating major hurdles to economic development, especially communications and transport since all goods and travellers had to move by a circuitous route bypassing East Pakistan to reach the "mainland."

During pre-Partition days, the king of Tripura had complete sway over his hilly domain (roughly the present geographical area of Tripura) and, in addition, had a Zamindari (or land tenure) in 'Chakla Roshanabad' comprising four districts of present-day Bangladesh, then East Bengal and later East Pakistan, such as Comilla, Noakhali, Chittagong and parts of Sylhet. Many Bengalis were thus subjects or tenants of successive Tripuri

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kings. The Tripura kings encouraged Bengali migration into the interior areas of the state in their own interests. As attested by the 'Rajmala', Tripura's royal chronicles, they had always placed educated and trained Bengalis in high positions to modernize the royal administration; they also encouraged settlement of Bengali peasants with incentives such as land grants. The reasons were two fold – augmentation of revenue and persuading the tribal people, who were mostly hum or 'shifting' cultivators, to take to settled cultivation. The first Imperial census, conducted by the British government in 1871, put the Bengali population in Tripura at 30%, a figure that grew slowly and steadily.

However, realization dawned on King Birr Bikram Kishore Manikya (1923-1947) that his tribal subjects would ultimately be swamped by the Bengali influx, prompting him to create a tribal reserve in 1943 encompassing 2050 sq miles of land, meant for the Tripuri, Rang Hal am, Noatak and Jamaica tribes. They were known as 'Panchen Tripuri' and his far-sightedness is reflected in the fact that this tribal reserve was the precursor of the present Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC). Within three decades of partition, the tribes people were reduced to less than 30 per cent of the state's population, thereby completely marginalizing them in politics, economy, and control of land. The influx intensified the process of land alienation from the tribal people and added to their collective sense of loss and marginalization (Bordoloi, B N (ed) *Alienation of Tribal Land and Indebtedness*, Tribal Research Institute, Assam, 1986)

With the merger of the princely state of Tripura with the Indian Union, land alienation of the tribal population emerged as a major problem. Between 1947 and 1971, altogether 6,09,998 Bengalis, displaced from East Pakistan, came to Tripura for rehabilitation and resettlement. Since the total population of the state in 1951 was 6,45,707, it is not difficult to imagine the impact of the tectonic population shift on the tiny state. In this period, the state government settled the refugees on land under different schemes, enabling them either to get financial assistance or helping them to buy land. The implementation of these schemes speeded up the process of large-scale loss of tribal lands. The tribals continued to be impoverished, reflected in the number of tribal agricultural labourers in the three decades since partition. In 1951, cultivators constituted 62.94 per cent of the total tribal workforce in the state, while only 8.93 per cent were in the category of agricultural labourers. But in 1981, the percentage of farmers in the tribal workforce had fallen to 43.57 per cent while the number of agricultural laborers had risen to 23.91 per cent.

Growing land alienation has remained a recurrent theme in tribal militancy since it first surfaced with the 'Sengkrak' (Clenched Fist) movement in the mid-1960s. The opening up of much of the Tribal Reserve Area for refugee settlement by the Congress government of post-princely Tripura added to the existential problems of the tribal community. In 1952, the legendary Communist leader Dasarath Deb, a member of the Tripuri

tribe, the largest tribal group of Tripura and then a Member of Parliament, had drawn the attention of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to the continuous influx from East Pakistan, suggesting reservation of more areas of Tripura for tribals. In 1955, Indian Home Affairs Minister Govind Ballabh Pant expressed a similar opinion, favouring new tribal land reserves. In 1960, the Chief Commissioner of Tripura, N. M. Patnaik, represented before the U. N. Dhebar Commission that specific areas of the state should be declared as reserves for the tribals under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution. But the Dhebar Commission suggested that special tribal development blocks in tribal compact areas be created first and the Fifth Schedule could be tried if the experiment on tribal development blocks failed.¹

However, little was done to protect tribal rights on lands. In order to consolidate its refugee vote bank, the Congress government continued to encourage the settlement of migrants from East Pakistan. In some areas of Tripura, the refugees formed co-operatives like the *Swasti Samity* and took to extensive land grabbing in tribal compact areas, undermining and ensuring the failure of the Dhebar Commission's proposal. Before Tripura became a state, the Communists had won both Parliament seats in the state. They advocated limited autonomy and the creation of a tribal reserve to protect tribal lands. But the state unit of the Congress, dominated by Bengali refugees, was determined to take advantage of Tripura's changing demography and ride to power on the strength of its newly acquired refugee vote banks. In 1967, the Communist Party lost both Parliament seats to the Congress for the first time in Tripura. That year, an exclusively tribal-based political party 'Tripura Upajaty Juba Samity' (Tripura Tribal Youth League) or the TUJS was formed. The very same year, the first tribal insurgent group, Sengkrak, surfaced in North Tripura.

Four years later, Tripura became a full-fledged state (until then it was a Union Territory) along with Manipur as part of the process of the second reorganization of the Northeastern region. The movement for tribal autonomy continued to gain momentum and three primary reasons fuelled the campaign

* since 1967, ethnicity began to shape Tripura's politics in a more pronounced manner than ever before as the TUJS and the Sengkrak began to focus on the marginalization of the tribals in their homeland as their major political theme,

* the Communists, challenged by the TUJS in their tribal base and accused of failing to protect the interests of the indigenous people, lent their support to the ethno-centric political demands for tribal autonomy,

* The Central government saw the grant of autonomy as a way out to curb growing tribal militancy in Tripura and also in other parts of the Northeast.

The Congress was voted out in 1978, following a nationwide trend that reflected a public backlash after the authoritarian state of Internal Emergency (1975-to1977) and the Communists, now more acceptable amongst Bengalis than amongst the tribes, came to power in the state

assembly for the first time with a thumping majority. Strangely, in December 1978, the remnants of the now-defunct Sengkrak and the militant elements of the TUJS combined to form the underground Tribal National Volunteers (TNV) to fight for "Swadhin Tripura" (independent Tripura). The extremist challenge and the growing pressure of the TUJS prompted the Communists to push for tribal autonomy with backing from the new anti-Congress dispensation in Delhi.

The Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council was created by an Act of Parliament in 1979, and brought under the Sixth Schedule. A Leftist juggernaut steamrolled all political opposition and ruled the state virtually unchallenged, except for a brief period in the late 1980s. However, in June 1980, Tripura was rocked by unprecedented ethnic riots, disrupting the whole process of implementing the autonomy provisions. It was only in January 1982, that the elections to the newly formed Council could be held and the Council constituted. Underground politics also plays an important role with one group claiming greater rights of representation over others, divided by tribal barriers and mobilization. Thus, after the TNV surrendered, two other insurgent groups were formed, each with a different agenda -- the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) and National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT). While the NLFT gave slogans for 'Free Tripura' the ATTF raised the demand of deportation of Bengalis whose names did not figure in the electoral rolls of 1952.

The demographic imbalance in Tripura spawned by the influx of Bengali Hindu settlers from the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) carried the seeds of ethnic conflict. The state witnessed the Mandai massacre on June 8, 1980 in which nearly 350 settlers were butchered within a span of four hours, their houses burnt and belongings looted. This massacre was followed by severe riots in which more than 1,000 people including tribals died. The tribals and Bengalis had lived in the state for long time in peace and tranquility, but the riots and growing ethnic division broke the bond of mutual trust. More than 6000 Bengalis died in violence unleashed by different rebel groups over the last 25 years, more than 1000 kidnapped (many were released after payment of large ransoms that pauperized the families of the victims).

Repeated, ruthless attacks by armed insurgents on the Bengali settlers, mostly living in the tribal council areas or at the fringe of the council areas, led to huge displacement. Revenue Minister Keshab Majumder in a statement to the State Assembly said that during the last five years at least 1, 24,000 people, mostly Bengali farmers were displaced in insurgency related violence (Statement of the Revenue Minister in the Assembly on January 13, 2006) The opposition Congress argued that this is an under-estimate and that in the last 12 years alone more than three lakh non-tribal people were displaced. The US Committee for Refugees estimates the displacement of Bengalis in Tripura at more than 200,000 (The US Committee for Refugees, *Special Report on North-East India*, compiled by Hiram Ruiz, 2000)

A large number of tribals living in hilly and interior areas, mostly in district council areas were also displaced due to insurgency, on one-third of the state's land. They faced extortion and threats, including selective killing depending on their political loyalties. Since the NLFT targeted the activists and supporters of the ruling CPI-M, the state government rehabilitated them in cluster villages near the main roads, provided security cover, distributed doles, constructed makeshift houses, gave healthcare, drinking water facilities, education etc. But their displacement led to a growth of alienation from their traditional social systems. Thus, during the years of violence, schools, primary health centers and most government offices were closed; teachers and doctors did not go to their work places out of fear. This in turn led to an increase in the rate of school dropouts and near total collapse of the health care system.

The tribal people also faced the problems of insurgency partly because the Bengalis living in the tribal council areas were targeted by the insurgents, who had bases in neighbouring Bangladesh. The rebels attacked the densely inhabited Bengali villages near the Indo-Bangla international border because of the advantage of easy transborder crossings. The ultras made the council areas their bastion and operated there. They could easily sneak into the neighbouring Bangladesh, which has 856 km long borders with Tripura. There were at least 30 camps in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Sylhet and Moulavi Bazar districts. So, it was not possible to contain the insurgency merely by augmenting forces, intensifying patrolling and launching major offensive against the guerrillas, who were expert in bush wars. They forced people to pay taxes, abducted them for ransom and killed innocents to instill fear sharpen the ethnic divide.

The Bengalis abandoned many of the villages on the border and took shelter in less vulnerable areas in other parts of the state. The security forces also harassed the tribals on the suspicion that they sheltered insurgents. But in most of the cases the ultras forced the tribal inhabitants at gun point to give them shelter and arrange food and drinks for them. The tribal people were thus sandwiched by the conflict between two armed groups – insurgents and security forces.

A Success Story

Yet, over recent years, the state has witnessed massive changes, from conflict to relative peace. The riots, ethnic conflicts and massacres appear to be a thing of the past. The schools in the hills are full of children again, vacated by the security forces. The doors of Government offices and banks are open to the public. The Primary Health Centers (PHC) which had not seen doctors for years are manned once again. Although the old relationship has not been re-established, return of the displaced people begun to change with a combination of political firmness, stringent security measures and development efforts. The key has been the state government's pro-activeness.

The Autonomous District Council (ADC) for tribal population constitute two third of the state's territory and is the home to the tribes people who form one-third of the population. A multi-pronged strategy was worked out. First, the security forces and their anti-insurgency operations, especially local police, benefited from a massive modernization drive, with officers and lower ranks being provided modern weapons, equipment for swift communications, advanced training in jungle warfare and deployment in strategic locations to prevent movement of the militants. Second, the Central government, in association with the state government, developed a rehabilitation package for surrendered insurgents; this helped to bring back what local politicians called “misguided youths to the mainstream” Under the rehabilitation package the surrendered insurgent would be lodged in Rehabilitation Camps where they would be imparted vocational training for a period of 36 months with a stipend of Rs.2000/- per month and an immediate grant of Rs.1.5 Lakh. Minor crime cases against successfully rehabilitated insurgents would be withdrawn.

The graph of insurgency-related violence has dropped rapidly. In 2009-10 225 insurgents surrendered and during this period, the number of insurgency related incidents fell to 24 in which nine persons died. The number of insurgency related incidents in 2007 was 113 which came down to 80 in 2008.

A major reason for the sudden drop in violence is credited to the Bangladesh government which has taken action against the insurgents located there, breaking up the camps and handing over the rebels to Indian authorities. Even as raids started since 2009 by the security forces in the neighboring country no major insurgent leader of Tripura was handed over to the government of India so far. The Director General of Police of Tripura, Pranay Sahaya in a Press Conference at Agartala on October 11, 2010 said: Now it is clear those two Chiefs of two insurgent outfits – Ranjit Debbarma of All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) and Biswamohan Debbarma of National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) is in Bangladesh. The process for handing them over to the security force is on.” However, he said that large number of insurgents had surrendered to the Indian Security forces due to pressure in the country.

The Chief Minister noted in a speech to the Assembly on 13 June 2010 that with the Awami League Government (of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheik Hasina) coming back to power, the situation started changing. Harboring of the insurgents stopped and the ultras were either being handed over to Indian authority or pushed back (Interview with the Chief Minister of Tripura, Mr Manik Sarkar, Oct.2009). Surrender of the huge number of ultras from their base camps was the fallout of the proactive measures taken by the Bangladesh government. Sheikh Hasina’s visit to Delhi last January was a significant milestone in paving the ways for restoring the spirit of brotherhood and close co-operation between the two countries. In addition, connectivity with Bangladesh has improved with new

road and railway lines being opened up and access to Chittagong Port, a long-standing Indian demand, also being provided. Under the terms of an agreement, India has to develop the rail and road connections to the port from Tripura and also re-develop and dredge Chittagong, one of the best sea ports of South Asia.

In brief, the conflict in Tripura is basically over the loss of tribal lands, sharing of powers and subsequent pauperization of the tribals. The government decided that the challenge of land alienation could be reduced by giving land holdings to the tribal in forest areas, which constitute 60% of the state's territory. More than 1, 17,000 tribal families (roughly about 5, 85,000 tribe's people) have been rehabilitated under the Schedule Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers Act, 2006. (Speech of C.M, Manik Sarkar in the 59th meeting of the North Eastern Council on Sept.28, 2010)

That good implementation and good governance is good politics is seen in the results of the elections for the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) which were held on May 3, 2010. The Left Front made a clean sweep of all 28 elective seat, further consolidating its traditional base among the indigenous people, with 63.80 per cent of the votes, brushing aside the Congress and its former poll ally, the Indigenous Nationalist Party of Tripura (NLFIT), headed by Bijoy Hrankhawl, an insurgent-turned political leader.

Conflict in Mizoram

Another example of the different aspects of conflict resonates from the neighboring state of Mizoram, where insurgency began with the infamous Mautam Famine² of the 1960s and ended with the Mizo Peace Accord of 1986. In the latter, the former insurgent leaders were absorbed into the politics of the State, and following that, the State has remained largely peaceful, barring peripheral conflicts. It is these conflicts that we wish to review here briefly for they reflect a large discord – that while “making” insurgencies are accommodated by the Indian State, there are many “smaller” problems which are overlooked in the rush for settlement with the larger group. In time, these issues fester and break out into little rebellions and insurgencies of their own, frustrated by the lack of response from the larger community and the lack of interest in New Delhi.

Prominent among them have been the Brus or Reangs, who were forced out of the State into neighboring Tripura in 1997, following alleged atrocities. Nearly 17,000 of them, whose number steadily grew to about 35,000 by early 2000, were housed in six relief camps in the Kanchanpur sub-division of North district in Tripura. As the Mizoram government dithered over the repatriation of the Reangs, citing reasons like an inflated number of refugees, militant groups like the Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF) and subsequently, Bru Liberation Front of Mizoram (BLFM), emerged out of the camps and indulged in intermittent violence inside Mizoram. Other organizations like the Hmar People's Convention-

Democracy (HPC-D), however, continue to carry out its activities beyond the borders of Mizoram, mostly inside Assam and Manipur.

In May 2007, a new armed group, the Singlung Tiger Force was formed, which later became the Singlung People's Liberation Army (SPLA). It is an armed group whose cadres are drawn from the Hmar community having its bases in the border areas of Manipur-Mizoram-Myanmar. The ideology behind the formation of the outfit was to defend the rights of the indigenous Singlung people affected by the proposed construction of Tuirial and Tipaimukh multi-purpose hydel project in their area including the adjoining border areas of Manipur and Mizoram. However, on July 17, 2009, 64 cadres of SPLA laid down their arms and surrendered to the Mizoram Government. But the other members are still continuing their bush war.

The Displaced Reangs

As mentioned earlier, some 37,000 people violently displaced in ethnic clashes in Mizoram have lived in miserable conditions in six makeshift camps in neighboring Tripura for over a decade. The Reangs, also called Brus, live in Mizoram, Tripura and Assam. In Mizoram they are settled in the valleys along the banks of Longai and Teirei rivers in Aizawl and Mamit district and the Karnafuli river in Lunglei and Chhimtuipei districts. These areas are predominantly hilly and surrounded by deep forests. The Reangs took shelter in evacuee camps in Tripura's Kanchanpur sub-division of North Tripura district since 1997 following ethnic conflicts with the Mizos.

The exodus began following violence against them after the Bru National Union (BNU) (a political organization of the Reangs /Brus formed in the 1990s) passed a resolution in September 1997 demanding an Autonomous District Council in Mizoram under the Sixth Schedule. This demand sparked off a controversy. The Mizo Zillai Pall (MZP), the powerful Mizo student organization sharply reacted: "If the Reangs wanted to divide or disintegrate Mizoram further, it would be better that they go away. The resolution demanding Autonomous District Council (ADC) could not be accepted by MZP. If the Reangs go ahead with their plan, the MZP was ready to fight against such a demand. Mizoram is the only land Mizos have and it could not be lost to foreigners or other communities." (*The Statesman*, Dec 20, 1999)

The Reangs were attacked by Mizo groups, alleged with police connivance: houses were torched, people were killed, belongings and livestock were looted. There were allegations of rape. When the victims lodged complaints, police officials advised them to vacate their houses otherwise their homes could be attacked again. Those who fled to Tripura told a group of visiting journalists that at least 44 villages in Aizawl and Mammit districts were attacked, forcing them to leave their ancestral homes. (*Infochange News and Feature*, July 2009)

The conditions in the evacuee camps remain pathetic. Inmates suffer malnutrition and diseases like malaria and gastroenteritis claims about two hundred people in a year. There are acute drinking water problems as most of the tube wells do not function properly. "Before the monsoon, all natural sources of potable water like streams and wells at the foot of the hills dry up. Our children are forced to climb down 2-3 km to dig pits in the stream beds to collect water. They then trek up the steep hills with their water containers. It is not an easy task," said Bruno Mesha, the Assistant General Secretary of Mizo Bru Displaced People's Forum (MBDPF). Official allotment for one adult inmate is 600 grams of rice and Rs.5 per day, minors get half this amount. Clothes are distributed to everyone once a year. They collect wild potatoes, different types of fruits and edible stems from local forests to supplement this meager diet. Sanitation in the camps is poor. There are no bathrooms or toilets. Inmates "bathe in cherras (rivulets), and the open forest is our toilet." Mesha told a group of visiting journalists including the author in June 25, 2009.

Although there has been a baby boom in the camps, the new borns face an uncertain future. There are no schools in the camps. The state government had engaged 72 teachers from among the camp residents at the rate of Rs.1,000 per month, under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. But, since there is no school building, the teachers cannot function, so they do not go to school and the students also do not turn up there. The President of the Mizo Bru Displaced Peoples Forum (MBDPF), Elvis Chorkhy, says, however, that everyone at the camps, except newborn babies, belongs to Mizoram and that all have official proof in the form of citizenship certificates, bank passbooks, ration cards and birth certificates (Interview with Elvis Chorkhy in Kanchanpur camp in June, 2009). Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar has also stated that the refugees are from Mizoram and that the Mizo government should take them all back.

The present Mizoram Chief Minister, Lalthanhawla says repatriation will begin only after the identity issue is settled. NGOs are to be engaged to help in the identification process. It has been decided that Rs 30,000 per family will be provided as housing assistance, Rs 50,000 in cash grants, and one year's ration after repatriation. Also that special development projects will be launched in Mamit, Kolashib, Lunglei and Aizawl districts in Mizoram. Chorkhy argues that if the Lais, Maras and Chakmas living in Mizoram have the benefits of tribal district councils, why shouldn't the Brus also be recognized? The repatriation of displaced people hangs in the balance as successive governments have given no clear assurances of taking them back and resettling them properly. Former Chief Minister Zoramthanga said on several occasions that only 16,000 of the refugees were from Mizoram and only this figure would be rehabilitated if they are willing to return.

Last year Mizoram government has apparently agreed to take back Bru/Reang refugees sheltered in the camps. The decision was taken at a

meeting in Aizawl, on April 31, 2009, between representatives of the Mizoram government, headed by Chief Minister Lalthanhawla, and members of the Mizo Bru Displaced Peoples Forum (MBDPF). Chorkhy claims that the names of a number of Reangs were struck off the voter lists before the assembly elections of May 2009 to prove that the Reangs were not original inhabitants of Mizoram. According to him, the two extremist groups -- the Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF) and the Bru Liberation Front of Mizoram (BLFM) have even come 'over ground', following the signing of an agreement with the government five years ago. But even they have not been rehabilitated properly.

The refugees' repatriation from Tripura to Mizoram has been stalled by a series of incidents: it was supposed to have started in November 2009 but stopped when a mob in western Mizoram burnt down around 700 tribal houses after an 18-year-old Mizo youth was shot dead by unidentified assailants. Following the arson and violence, about 5,500 displaced Reang tribals took shelter afresh in adjacent north Tripura. However, this entire group returned to Mizoram in May 2010 following official assurances. During a visit that month, Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram had asked the Mizoram government and tribal leaders to help repatriate all 37,000 Reang tribal refugees to their ancestral villages. But till today the whole process has been stymied by the Mizoram government despite four meetings at senior level in New Delhi since 1997 to break the logjam. The Centre also has not pushed Mizoram too strongly on this although in the past months it has increased its pressure, having dilly-dallied for nearly 13 years. At the last meeting on September 23, 2009 Union Home Secretary, G. K. Pillai, Secretary, Binoy Kumar, Joint Secretary, Nabin Verma, and the Chief Secretaries of the concerned states were present. They decided that the camp inmates would be taken back and rehabilitated properly and the entire process would be completed by February 2010.

However, the entire process received a jolt when the November attack on the Reang inhabited areas took place, although this has been resolved. But the larger issue of the peripheral minorities remains unsolved as 37,000 languish in relief camps in abysmal conditions in Tripura. The impact of this conflict in Mizoram is to be seen on a small neighbouring state, far from Delhi, although that state (Tripura) has virtually come to terms with its own insurgency-related issues.

Notes

¹ U N Dhebar Commission: U N Dhebar was president of the first commission constituted to study the problems of tribals in the country in 1961. He was the former Chief Minister of Saurashtra and became MP in 1962. He observed – “the problem of problems is not to disturb the harmony of the tribal life & simultaneously work for its advancement, not to impose anything upon the tribals & simultaneously work for their integration as member & part of the Indian family.

Source: Prakash Chandra Mehta, *Ethnographic Atlas of Indian Tribes*.

² Bamboo forests account for a large portion of the forested area of Mizoram. When bamboo plants flower after every fifty years in what is locally known as the Mautam, they produce a large volume of seeds, which are rich with protein and used as food by rats. Consuming the protein-rich seeds, the rats proliferate and armies of these marauding rodents destroy agricultural crops and stored grain. The Mizo insurgency can be attributed substantially to the inept handling of the famine by the then Assam Government. The present Mizoram was the Lushai Hills district under Assam at the time. The famine is estimated to have claimed 10,000 to 15,000 lives. In February, 1966, an ethnic separatist organization called the Mizo National Front (MNF) almost overran the entire district in a series of simultaneous surprise attacks and captured even much of Aizawl, its capital. The MNF was earlier known as the Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF) but the group dropped the word famine and a new political organization was formed on October 22, under the leadership of Laldenga with the specific goal of achieving independence from India. With the active support of neighbouring Pakistan the MNF formed a trained army and attacked the Indian installations with sophisticated weapons on February 28, 1966. They attacked Government offices and Assam Rifles camps, looted Aizawl, Lunglei Chawngte and other places. The Government of India sent columns of troops while jet fighters bombed Aizawl, the first time the Central Government had ever used air power against its own people to quell a movement. The Indian government declared MNF as an outlawed organization in 1967 and the bush war continued. A Mizo District Council delegation met then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in May 1971 and demanded statehood for Mizos separating from Assam. The Centre converted the Mizo hills into a Union Territory (U.T) in July 1971 with an assurance that it would be elevated to the status of state later. A MNF delegation led by Laldenga met Prime Rajiv Gandhi on February 15, 1985. The MNF used the opportunity to come over ground; Statehood was pledged and a peace accord was signed on June 30, 1986. The state of Mizoram was formed on February 20, 1987.

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