

# Mizoram

**Chair: Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyar**

**Mr. Chairman:** We are very honoured that we have present here today some of the principal participants in the events that led to the Mizoram Accord of 1986 and all that has happened subsequently in regard to the implementation of that Accord.

Our prime focus of attention is on Rajiv Gandhi and Mizoram during the period that he was Prime Minister of India from October 1984 till November 1989. And we are also interested in seeing the story brought up from 1989 to 1994 to examine particularly how the last five years have been in the light of the Accord that was signed in 1986. Of course, all of you are more than free to make references to events dating back to 1966 or even before the events of 1966 or to the insurgency which was brought to an end by the Accord of 1986.

May I suggest that we begin by asking Mr. Lalkhama who was the Chief Secretary of Mizoram at the time that the Mizoram Accord was signed and who continued to be the Chief Secretary through the crucial period of the implementation, i.e., initial implementation of the Accord, to take the floor first. I should clarify that he is, at the moment, no longer a civil servant. He is a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Mizoram.

**Mr. Lalkhama:** I make no claim to personal intimacy with Shri Rajiv Gandhi when he was the Prime Minister; nor to mastery of events in Mizoram at that time. Nor do I have any intention to dignify myself when I say that I happened to be Chief Secretary in Mizoram when Shri Rajiv Gandhi was the Prime Minister of India.

It is my view that a nation should not flatter its hero, but the truth about such a hero must be told. One thing I would like to say at the outset is: Shri Rajiv Gandhi was hailed and is remembered as a man of understanding, a maker of peace, as the Prime Minister who brought 20 long years of armed conflict and resultant sufferings to an end in Mizoram.

Mizoram had been outside the Indian cultural influence till the land was annexed to British India at the close of the nineteenth century. The

Mizos are of Mongoloid stock and their language is Tibeto-Burman. Mizoram remained excluded from all the Constitutional Reforms Acts. Hence, it was an "excluded area". Some special laws like the Inner Line Regulation put certain reasonable restrictions on entry to Mizoram and ownership of land there for other British India subjects outside it. The hostile terrain, and the total lack of road and rail communication, also kept Mizoram isolated.

Through the work of Christian missionaries from Great Britain, almost all the Mizos had become Christians by 1940. These missionaries required of their converts a total break with certain traditional practices. The process of Westernisation and Sanskritisation has been going on simultaneously since we became part of India.

At the time when India was to get Independence from British rule, Mizos had very strong apprehensions that independent India would establish Hindu domination and the religious and cultural interests of the Mizos would not be safe. There was also a fear of exploitation and assimilation. In the early part of 1947, the Mizo Union Party, and also the gathering of prominent citizens of Aizawl town, separately, and *suo moto*, passed resolutions stating that the question whether or not Mizoram was to remain part of the Indian Union should be subject to review in ten years. In their innocence they believed that they were free to opt for Burma, Pakistan, India or Crown Colony status or be independent when the British would leave this subcontinent. The Mizo National Front, organised as a political party in 1960, was, in a way, a hangover from the earlier political perception.

The MNF movement had racial and religious overtones: its declared aim was secession of Mizoram from the Indian Union. Then came the armed uprising in 1966. Ethnic tribals in North-East India would often wonder if they would ever get a fair deal from the traditional host society, if I may use the term "host". In this vast country we feel, at times, the pain of being an ethnic minority, and often wonder if ever we shall find the answer to the strains that come from human diversity. I often advise Mizo boys and girls going out of Mizoram not to react to some odd behaviour of certain people, even when they look upon the Mizos as anthropological curiosities.

To some historians, Mizoram was just a semi-nomadic confederation without nationhood, with several Lusei (mostly Sailo) chiefs in control of their respective geographical areas. But the fact is that these Lusei chiefs made a remarkable contribution to the making of Mizoram and to Mizo unity. A Lusei ruler would invariably pick up persons from minority clans such as Ralte, Pawi, and Paihte, as members of his council, thus giving them a sense of belonging. It was the sagacity of these Lusei chiefs which integrated the different clans. These rulers knew that the most effective means to integration, i.e., the best way to interest minority clans in the common good of the village State, was to make them partakers in the Government of such a State. Society is often affected, and even moulded, by the Government, where people in power at various levels of administration are members of certain castes, or the products of certain cultural backgrounds

only. Conflict is in-built in such a society. Here, there is something to learn even from Mizoram.

Gradual but constant changes in the population structure in the country in general, and in North-East India in particular, are also viewed with concern. Indeed, the root causes of political turmoil in that area, including the Assam Valley, are the fear of being swamped by others, the fear of losing economic interests, and finally political power, as "number is power" in a democracy. There are no new frontiers to be conquered in this shrinking globe, and the ethnic groups are sensitive to any demographic change in their geographical areas.

All these transformations alarm some of us though in different ways. Some of us now hold a very strong view that without cultural unity, political unity alone will not work. This view has religious overtones. To some others, these transformations encourage separatist tendencies out of the fear of being submerged. Let us realise, however, that as a nation we have got no other choice, but to coexist, in the spirit of live and let live.

Nation building is a continuous process. It is not that people like Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had done it, and the future generations can rest. Our present-day situation particularly demands that we reason together, among ethnic groups, among religious groups and among cultural groups, trying to understand the viewpoints of others.

It is my belief that Shri Rajiv Gandhi, as Prime Minister, knew the complexity of our nationhood. He was all for technological advance and modernisation, yet he never lost sight of the traditional value system because he loved India so dearly, giving the least of us the feeling of brotherhood with him. He knew the art of healing our deep wounds; not just putting a plaster outside, but touching our deeper feelings, winning our hearts.

During three days of July 1986 (i.e., 10, 11 and 12), he asked me to interpret into Mizo his speeches to admiring crowds in several villages. No, it was not merely speeches, it was love and understanding enacted; and as he was driving along the Aizawl-Lunglei road, the road ceremoniously opened by his illustrious grandfather in 1953, he appeared to enjoy every bend of it. He would stop and drink from a stream by the roadside, cupping the palms of his hands; he would walk freely inside humble huts, eat a banana, or bite a pear. He appeared to relish those eatables given by those poor villagers because he knew they were symbols of love and affection, and not of casual hospitality. And guess what those kind gestures meant to those bewildered village folks. Never would Rajiv Gandhi be anywhere beyond the reach of their hearts. Sweet memories are made of the comradeship of food and drink.

In Shri Rajiv Gandhi there were certain characteristics by which he could be known, and certain qualities bestowed upon him which marked him out. One such quality was an understanding mind, born of love and innate goodwill, which made him delighted to stoop down to lift up the poor and the ethnic tribals from the dunghill, from their turmoil, and set them among princes as equals. Such is the quality which wins hearts; such is the

quality that removes ethnic defensiveness; and such is the quality that weakens the arrogance of minorities. And their in-group militancy tends to dissolve into vapour in the face of such a personality. It was that gift in Rajivji which made us come out from our jungle hideouts.

I would like to touch upon the Peace Accord, i.e., the "Memorandum of Settlement", signed by the representatives of the Government of India, the Mizo National Front (MNF) and the Mizoram Government on 30 June 1986.

In response to the crying demand by the Mizo people, the MNF leadership indicated its readiness for a political settlement within the framework of the Indian Constitution. Those officers in the Intelligence Bureau who laid the foundation of peace negotiations, those who worked so hard to create a conducive climate for its successful conclusion, come back to mind. Negotiations started in 1976, but were called off; they were restarted in 1980, but called off again. These negotiations were not between two equal protagonists; they were not carried on by two plenipotentiaries. Some of the bureaucrats who played their part had their own honest view that rebellion should carry no premium.

Things had to be different when Shri Rajiv Gandhi became Prime Minister. I remember my first personal encounter with him when we were called to his office in the afternoon of 30 June 1986. His magnanimity, understanding, quick grasp of issues and courage to take decisions ended the hitherto official and protracted negotiations with the MNF within half an hour of the meeting. And in the same evening of 30 June, the "Memorandum of Settlement" was signed. And let us never forget that this was made possible by Chief Minister Lalthanhawla and his Ministers who sacrificed their position of power in the interest of peace and in deference to the wishes and vision of Shri Rajiv Gandhi that national interest should be placed above the interest of a political party.

Every clause in this Accord had the approval of Shri Rajiv Gandhi as Prime Minister. It was not like the Treaty of Versailles drawn up to humiliate the vanquished. It was in the nature of give-and-take. Under the terms of this settlement both parties had to fulfil certain duties and certain responsibilities. These commitments have been fulfilled by the MNF in letter and spirit. But what of the other side's promises? What of an university, a high court, border trade with Burma and Bangladesh, payment of compensation to thousands of villagers who lost their houses, their crops, due to grouping of villages and military action, which find an important place in the Accord? What of those who had come overground, handing over arms and ammunitions, giving up violence to lead normal life as citizens? The stark fact is, Mr. Chairman, whoever among them, yet not dead due to malnutrition, is leading a life of mere existence, a life so dejected, so degraded, so devoid of hope, and a life so poor and so desperate. And what of this clause which reads: "The Inner Line Regulation, as now in force in Mizoram, will not be amended or repealed without consulting the State Government." Why was normal life disrupted in Mizoram on 5 August 1994? Why was

there a special session of the Mizoram Legislative Assembly on 26 August? All because some highly responsible people in the Government of India made statements that the Mizoram Inner Line Regulation will be removed, in total disregard of the terms of the settlement. What signal is being sent to our young generation through such statements? To the Mizo people in general, and the MNF in particular, the Memorandum of Settlement was not achieved in a minute. It was a serious business to enter into negotiations. It was a solemn business to sign and affirm an agreement. The agreement binds both the parties, however unequal they may be. For the MNF, every clause in the settlement has sanctity, has solemnity, because it was brought about by the sweat and the blood of young Mizo men and women.

Let no one take the matter lightly. We may belong to different political parties, but let us all join together to rekindle the vision, ethos and spirit that Shri Rajiv Gandhi embodied in the Mizoram Accord so that we may hasten the prosperity and well-being of the people and check the recurrence of the earlier dreadful events.

I have explained the peculiar background of the Mizo people in the hope that their situation will be better understood. None of us was born a Mizo, a Telugu or Bengali as a result of our own choice. But once we become such, each ethnic group has its respective characteristics and certain angularities. Let us hope no Hilters arise in this country, seeing other races as if they were stray branches to be lopped off.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very very much Mr. Lalkhama. I would now like to ask Dr. C. Silvera (Union Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare) to please take the floor. Dr. Silvera would be speaking on behalf of Mr. Lalthanhawla, the Chief Minister of Mizoram, who, unfortunately, at the last moment, has been prevented by illness from being in our midst.

**Dr. C. Silvera:** I would like to begin by paying homage to the hallowed memory of a great leader who gave so much to the nation in so short a period. Pandit Jawaharlal once said: "There is no magic in the world except the occasional magic of the human personality and the human mind." And in the mid-1980s it was his grandson who appeared on the national political horizon as such a magical personality and a magical mind. To the people of Mizoram, Rajiv Gandhi was much more than a Prime Minister or a national leader. He totally identified himself with the tribal people. The Mizos came closer to the national mainstream through him. Rajivji's most precious and lasting gift to Mizoram, for which he would ever be remembered by my people, was the Peace Accord of 30 June 1986 which brought back peace to the violence-torn State. It was a very bold and imaginative step towards conflict resolution in the most democratic and human way. His commitment to peace and national unity was total. I wonder if political history has recorded another instance of a national party leader voluntarily giving up governance of a State just to ensure return of peace. Rajiv Gandhi did it in Mizoram for the cause of peace and national unity.

The Mizoram Peace Accord prominently brings out three fundamental principles which formed the cornerstone of Rajiv Gandhi's national policy:

- (a) Acceptance of ethnic diversity and the urge of the ethnic minorities to assert their politico-cultural identity and, at the same time, weaving them into the fabric of national unity through a participatory process. (This was what his slogan "power to the people" really meant. He did not bother about the political colour of the recipient of such power. Notice how gracefully he passed on "power" to the people in Mizoram through the Accord.)
- (b) Restoration of peace and harmony in the society so essential for peace and unity at the national level. (This is embodied in the preamble to the Accord.)
- (c) Safeguarding the interests of the minorities. (This is evident in Clause 9 of the Accord.)

I would not like to go into other details of the Accord — implementation of the provisions, etc. The creator of the Accord was evidently as serious about its signing as in regard to its full implementation. It is for us, both at the Centre as well as in the State, to see all follow-up measures are taken.

In Rajiv's India, each State, big or small, and each community, majority or minority, had a pride of place. He wanted that every constituent unit, particularly the backward tribal States, should develop socially and economically so that each one could become a proud partner in nation-building efforts. That urge prompted him to depute two high-level teams from the Centre to Mizoram, one consisting of senior Ministers and the other of senior officers, to assess the State's genuine development needs and suggest appropriate schemes for sustainable progress. The Mizo people were moved by this unique sincerity of purpose and intention of Rajiv Gandhi. The results of such efforts are there for any objective observer to see. The annual Plan allocations for Mizoram more than doubled from 1986-87 to 1990-91 — from Rs. 58 crores to Rs. 125 crore. Rajiv Gandhi appreciated the fact that backward tribal hill States did need a much higher dose of investment to enable them to make up the huge backlog. The impact of this policy has been tremendous. As illustrations, let me give a few statistics. The number of educational institutions at different levels has gone up from about 900 in 1987 to nearly 2000 in 1992-93 and the literacy percentage from about 78 to about 83. Power generation went up to more than 23 MW and the road density from about 10 km to 24 km per 100 km area. The same measure of development was noticeable in other important sectors too. Mizoram has today come to a take-off stage.

Let me backtrack a little. Rajiv Gandhi saw India as a plural society: ethnically, linguistically, and in terms of faith. But he considered such diversity as the nation's strength and not inherently incompatible with national integration. Plurality was nothing repugnant to India's culture; it was (and is) a historical reality. To the extent that people of different ethnicity, language and religion live within a geographical entity, their fates are interlinked. The divergent interests at the regional or State level get merged with the larger national interest. Rajiv Gandhi attempted to strengthen

unity at the national level through a process of combining tradition with modernity. His constant efforts were to effectively unite India's pluralistic society through a policy of participation and accommodation. This is evident in his approach to the problems of Mizoram as also those of other States. In this context I am reminded of his speech at Aizawl on 9 July 1986, when he visited Mizoram soon after the Peace Accord. He said: "The different cultures, social systems, religions and languages give us strength.... We are one, we are Indians." He wanted the Mizo culture to get mingled with, and form part of, the great Indian culture. This is what he said: "Do not keep your culture, your language, your songs and your dances only to yourselves. Preserve these. But allow these to strengthen the national culture."

Getting back to the statistics, nearly 19 per cent of the total divisible Plan fund during 1993-94 was allocated to the three District Councils, although in terms of population these councils account for only 13.5 per cent of the State's total population and in terms of area only one-fifth.

**Mr. Chairman:** May I interrupt you here? For our record, it would be useful if you could just tell us where these three District Councils are and the nature of the fact that they are autonomous. If you give us the relevant data, the others will get a clearer picture. They are not as familiar with Mizoram as you are.

**Dr. C. Silvera:** There are three districts in Mizoram — Aizawl district, Lunglei district and Chhimituipui district. The Chhimituipui district is the southernmost part of Mizoram and there are three District Councils — Chakma District Council, Lai District Council and Mara District Council.

**Mr. C.L. Ruala:** May I just make one point? In Manipur, we have District Councils without autonomy, but the District Councils in Mizoram have autonomy.

**Mr. Chairman:** I think it was a very important clarification that needed to be made for those people not familiar with Mizoram.

**Dr. C. Silvera:** The aforementioned Plan fund was in addition to the normal development programmes, the benefit of which has been available to them as well. A very important step has been taken recently by the State Government in regard to meeting the aspirations of another micro-minority — the Hmars. On 27 July 1986 an Accord was signed with the Hmar People's Convention which provided, among other things, for abjuration of violence by HPC extremists and setting up of a council to ensure speedy economic development of the Hmar-inhabited areas. Similarly, we have been trying to have the Páihtes, another micro-minority of Mizoram, notified as a Scheduled Tribe of Mizoram.

While on this subject of smaller ethnic minorities, I would like to pose a question. Is it or is it not desirable to encourage the recently growing urge on the part of smaller groups to establish individual ethnic identities beyond a certain point? If taken to the extreme, one may argue, it may unleash centrifugal forces that might strain the national fabric. It may also be argued that unless the legitimate aspirations of these micro-level minority groups

are adequately met, and their socio-political-economic status raised to the level of the other fortunate groups, they may act as a drag on the nation's economic advancement and nation-building. I personally feel that to avoid the snowballing effect of giving autonomy to numerous micro-minorities, adequate steps should be taken to make the feeble voice of these groups in the politico-administrative system heard adequately and a special policy initiative taken simultaneously to bring them up socially and economically. This will give them a sense of security and reduce areas of conflict. The first step towards this direction is to identify the micro-minorities, their needs and aspirations and to associate them in the policy formulation process followed by concrete programmes.

**Mr. Chairman:** May I ask a question here? Do you think the introduction of Panchayati Raj in Mizoram could be a contribution to this process?

**Dr. C. Silvera:** My feeling always has been that the Panchayati Raj system should be studied carefully with regard to Mizoram, because, at the moment, we have what is called a "village council". Nevertheless, the Panchayati Raj system is worth studying and may be appropriate for Mizoram.

Let me get back to my topic. The State leadership has been trying to break Mizoram's geographical isolation and to facilitate a two-way flow of men and ideas so that, with material advancement, a bridge of emotional understanding with the rest of the nation can be built. This was precisely the wish of Rajiv Gandhi who wanted not only Mizoram's culture, but also its economy, to get integrated with the national mainstream.

I would conclude with the call Shri Rajiv Gandhi gave to nation in his broadcast on 12 November 1984: "Together we will build an India of the twenty-first century. Together we will transform what needs transformation. Together we will face challenges and obstacles to progress. Together we will create an India that is strong, wise and great ...."

**Brigadier T. Sailo:** During his short span of office as Prime Minister of India, Shri Rajiv Gandhi displayed dynamism of the highest degree, unprecedented energy, push and drive, and determination in leading the country to all-round progress. And coming to my own State, Mizoram, within a short time after assuming the PM's office, he brought about the end of insurgency in Mizoram and concluded the Peace Accord with the Mizo National Front, thereby opening a new opportunity for the development of Mizoram.

Friends, I did not have the fortune of knowing Rajiv Gandhi very intimately and from close quarters. But soon after signing this Peace Accord, the PM and his family, accompanied by officials, came to Aizawl. I had a brief meeting with him in the Raj Bhavan. We just talked about this Peace Accord. I said: "You have signed this Accord, it is so beautiful." He said: "I have a dream for the rapid development for Mizoram." That struck me. I was so delighted and I replied: "Rapid development on the basis of the five-point formula enunciated by your grandfather Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in



dealing with the tribals of the North-East." And Rajiv Gandhi very rightly nodded. I was happy.

Let me now focus on the basic needs of Mizoram and the priorities thereof:

- (1) Mizoram needs to be self-sufficient in its staple food, namely, rice. To achieve this objective, all the flat areas, mostly along the principal rivers, need to be turned into wet rice cultivation (WRC) areas, with a view to having two harvests of rice in a year. This would be possible only through a good network of agriculture, link roads and through lift irrigation, for which an abundant supply of electric power is essential. (We have only 3 MW and are importing more than 23 MW.)
- (2) All the towns and most of the villages in Mizoram face an acute water problem. In order to solve this problem, water which is available in the rivers/streams much below the level of the towns/villages has to be pumped up by using electric power. Diesel oil pumping is very unsatisfactory. Hence the need for having abundant power supply.
- (3) The programmes of cash crop cultivation like horticulture, coffee plantation, cardamom plantation, rubber plantation and the economic exploitation of such cash crops to benefit the individual growers and the State as a whole can be fully implemented only if there is a good network of communication and power supply.
- (4) The immense forest wealth of Mizoram can be turned into small, medium and large industries if there is a good network of communication, and a reliable and abundant supply of electric power.

In order to achieve the basic needs, two basic infrastructures need to be built up, namely, communication (road, rail and air) and abundant supply of power from the rivers of Mizoram, which are plenty.

I will briefly refer to the recent insurgency in Mizoram. It lasted for about two decades. Needless to mention, development suffered tremendously. Now that insurgency has come to an end, i.e., in June 1986, the people by and large realised the futility of insurgency. However, seven years after the Peace Accord was signed in June 1986, no worthwhile infrastructural development has taken place. The major hydel power project launched during the period 1982-84 under the guidance of the then Prime Minister, the late Shrimati Indira Gandhi, and the then Union Power Minister, Shri Ghani Khan Choudhury, had not been pursued in any meaningful manner. The National Highway No. 54, designed to run through the State of Mizoram from north to south, which ought to have been completed by now, is half complete.

The projected airport at Lengpui, west of Aizawi, the capital of Mizoram, needs to be pursued fast. In 1981, a step was taken towards the construction of a modern aerodrome. Shri Khurshid Alam Khan, the then Minister in charge of Civil Aviation, played a leading role in initiating this project upon our request. The Survey of India and other agencies were also involved.

Preliminary work started. Unfortunately, from 1984 onwards this very important project was not pursued in real earnest. The present air service involving Dornier aircraft carrying 14 passengers from or to the Tuirial airstrip is only a stop-gap arrangement. This air service is at best a mini-air service. Thus, the economics of Mizoram remain the same as it was ten years ago in transport infrastructural development. Thus, the dream of Rajiv Gandhi has not been realised. Meanwhile, the number of educated unemployed is increasing by hundreds every year. The gap between the rich and the vast majority who are poor is getting wider and wider. The ground is fertile for a repeat of insurgency, which must be held in check at all costs. But, I know for certain mere rhetoric will not help, unless it is backed up by a realisation of the ground reality.

Lastly, I want to draw your attention to the by-now-almost-forgotten guidelines enunciated by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, i.e., what is known as "Nehru's Panchsheel". Pandit Nehru was accepted by all the tribesmen of North-East India as their genuine well-wisher, because of the enunciation of this five-point programme. I shall read out these five points one by one. I request you to listen to them very carefully:

- (1) People should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture.
- (2) Tribal rights in land and forests should be respected.
- (3) We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will, no doubt, be needed, especially in the beginning. But we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory.
- (4) We should not overadminister these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through, and not in rivalry to, their own social and cultural institutions.
- (5) The last and the most important point is: we should judge results not by statistics or the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved.

May I take the liberty of using "national character" for "human character"? Finally, the spirit of Nehruvian thought on tribal development was re-enlivened by Rajiv Gandhi.

**Dr. (Mrs.) I.K. Barthakur:** I would like to add a little bit of information because Brigadier Sailo referred to the problem of water supply. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi was very much alive to this problem and he had asked us to ensure in those days that Mizoram was given the maximum support for this water supply scheme. In fact, the Aizwal water supply scheme itself, which was languishing for years, got a boost and now the town has a fairly good water supply. Similarly, at Lunglei too, the water supply scheme was not taking off. Then another effort he made was for providing water tanks. He said

that 25 per cent subsidy should be given by the Government for individual tanks, and if it was a village storage tank, it should be 75 per cent. He did attend to this problem.

**Mr. Chairman:** I would now like to ask Mr. Zoramthanga (an MLA and the President of the MNF) to intervene.

**Mr. Zoramthanga:** You might perhaps be surprised to know that I was in MNF underground for 20 years between 1966 and 1986. When the Peace Accord was signed in 1986, we [members of the MNF] came overground and joined the mainstream of life. In some ways, we felt like Rip Van Winkle, returning after 20 years of sleeping. However, piece by piece, we caught up with life and stand quite firm and honest in our Peace Accord commitment.

Mizoram is a small and compact area with a very small population. As it comprises one ethnic group and has more or less the same culture, everybody knows who is who. Whenever Rajiv Gandhi's name comes to our ear, it is automatically connected with the Mizoram Peace Accord. It was he who turned the dark troubled atmosphere of Mizoram into the light of peace. It was Rajiv Gandhi who made the Mizoram Peace Accord the most successful ever signed by the Central Government. Therefore, we, the Mizos, are proud of it and I would like to stress more on this Accord than anything else.

I believe I have seen how difficult it is to make peace. I was sent by my late Founder-President, Mr. Laldenga, to pave the way for peace several times. We started the peace-making process as early as 1971, that is, before the birth of Bangladesh. I made contact with Indian Government representatives a number of times. We had secret meetings in Bangkok, Kabul, Geneva, Rome, Cologne and other diverse places. We could finally bring open peace talks to Delhi in 1976. Yet, from there on, it still took another 10 years to conclude the real peace settlement.

Of all the Accords signed by the Government of India, I believe the Mizoram Accord is the only successful Accord worth mentioning. It was Mrs. Gandhi who laid the foundation and yet could not have the honour of concluding it. Rajiv Gandhi enthusiastically finished the task. It is the only successful legacy of peace left to us by Rajiv Gandhi. We are, therefore, sure that it is a shining star in the crown of Mr. Gandhi's political history. Yet the remaining task of implementation of the Peace Accord lies untouched. This is the saddest part which we the Mizo people have now inherited.

As the then Vice-President of the MNF, who held the fort in the underground headquarters, it was my duty to bring out all our boys with their arms and ammunitions and hand them over at the nearest security forces' outpost. To many of our simple boys, a pair of trousers was much more valuable than a Constitutional safeguard promised in the Accord. You all can imagine how gigantic the task would be – that is to give a feeling of security to those boys for whom rifles had become part of their body for 20 long years. Yet somehow, we could miraculously convince them and brought out all our men with arms and ammunitions. Since then, there has not been an iota of the clause of agreement which we have not fulfilled on our part.

We have shown to the world, and to the late Mr Rajiv Gandhi, that we have stood firm in our commitment to the Accord. We are proud of this and we would like it to be an example to all others who are involved in it.

However, Mr Gandhi passed away so soon, and eight years have passed since the Accord was signed. About 70 per cent of the implementation of the Accord on the part of the Central Government remained untouched. We look at the Peace Accord in Punjab; we look at the Peace Accord in Assam; and we look at Peace Accords signed in other places. Certainly, they cannot bring real peace as in Mizoram. Yet the Central Government easily fulfilled all its obligations in the other States. In Mizoram, we have been waiting for eight long years.

**Mr. Chairman:** May I interrupt to say that in the previous working sessions that we have had, we have been told by the others how even those have not been fulfilled. Before I let you go, I have a question to ask. In 1986, you were not prepared to sign the Accord until Mr. Laldenga would be made the Chief Minister of Mizoram. Then in January 1987, there was an election held in which your party, Mr. Laldenga's party, won the majority and formed the Government entirely in accordance with the Constitution, as the elected authority. However, your party lost its majority in the House owing to defections during the course of next 18 or 24 months. There was, therefore, another election held in January 1989. Between the time that Mr. Laldenga lost his majority, some time in 1988, and the elections of 1989, did Mr. Laldenga or you yourself or any other elements in your party contemplate returning to the underground or had the democratic forces become so strong that you decided to stay in the democratic process whether you won the elections or not?

**Mr. Zoramthanga:** We were really surprised by that 1988 decision of the Central Government to impose President's rule in Mizoram. At that time, one-third of our legislators consisted of nine members. They [the other side] could muster only eight members. So the Speaker opened the court and he was about to decide and three days were still left. And, by that time, we did not know why, we received a telephone call from the Governor, Mr. Saikia, that President's rule had been imposed in Mizoram. So we took down our flags and went home. Even now I have no idea why it was put under President's rule. If the Speaker has made a decision, he was to make it within three days. This was the greatest blow because we were partners to the Peace Accord. We felt betrayed.

**Mr. Chairman:** And now?

**Mr. Zoramthanga:** Now I still have a lingering hope that some sensible Government will be established there.

**Mr. Chairman:** Could you tell us how you reacted to the results of the January 1989 and November 1993 elections?

**Mr. Zoramthanga:** Regarding the elections of 1989, we have made a very strong protest that they were rigged. The 1993 elections were fair; we accept the results.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very very much. May I now ask Mr. R.D. Pradhan, who was the one bureaucrat who apparently succeeded in winning the confidence of the underground and was instrumental in negotiating the Accord of 30 June 1986, to please take the floor?

**Mr. R.D. Pradhan:** Immediately after the Assam Accord was announced on 15 August 1985, I remember, on 19 August, it was a Monday, the Prime Minister rang me up and asked: "Can you come over?" (I was then the Home Secretary.) I went to 7, Race Course Road. He was working on some papers and he was very, very angry. He said: "Mr. Pradhan, I will not accept this; I cannot agree to this." I did not know what was in front of him. He handed me the papers and said: "These are papers on Mizoram and I have marked in red what I will not accept, and what I have marked in yellow you will have to renegotiate." I was never involved in Mizoram, so I did not know what he was talking about. I collected the papers and, as I had a good rapport with him, I cooled him down and said: "Let me have a look at what you are talking about and I will come back and talk to you." That was my introduction to the affairs of Mizoram. And I remember it was 19 August 1985. The point was that Mizoram had had a long history of insurgence, 20-25 years almost, and talks were going on for 10 years at different places, all around the world and ultimately they had landed in Delhi. Actually, on 31 October 1984, Mr. Laldenga was scheduled to meet Mrs. Gandhi. More or less everything had been worked out by the Prime Minister's Policy Planning Advisor, Mr. G. Parthasarathy. Unfortunately, Mr. Laldenga could not meet Mrs. Gandhi [who was assassinated on that very day] and history took another turn. I do not know now whether Mrs. Gandhi had approved the draft or not. But when Rajiv Gandhi became the Prime Minister, obviously something was going on. One of my Joint Secretaries (who used to go to Mr. Parthasarathy's office and attend the meetings) and I were partly busy with Punjab and Assam at that time. The document which was before the Prime Minister was the one which had been agreed upon between Mr. Parthasarathy and Mr. Laldenga. And the Prime Minister wanted me to get rid of certain clauses and to renegotiate certain clauses. I am mentioning this since this was something quite different because, in the case of Assam, it was building another bridge, collecting various elements and trying to put them in place. But here everything had been put in place. It is not so easy at that stage to get rid of something and put in something else in its place. But, anyway, he had his own reasons, very good reasons, as to why he reacted that way. And that was the mandate given to me. I am telling you how the negotiations were handed over to the Home Secretary at that stage.

Now, Mr. Laldenga at that time was in Delhi and I had to start somewhere. So I asked him to come over as also Mr. Zoramthanga. The latter never came for negotiations. He remained in the jungle; I think he was the Vice-President of the MNF. But we knew he was one of the most important elements who would finally come when the negotiations had to

be concluded. I came to know his name only when I read the history of negotiations. Now I will tell you how the negotiations started. When I invited Mr. Laldenga for a cup of tea he came with the Commander-in-Chief of the MNF and, naturally, he came with the expectation that everything had been settled and now it was a courtesy call on the Home Secretary before meeting the Home Minister and then the Prime Minister. And I had been saddled with the difficult job of telling him that what was agreed between him and Mr. G. Parthasarathy was not acceptable; we would have to restart the negotiations. Now, Mr. Chairman, you would know it is not an easy task when you are facing an individual who has been known as a leader of a very strong insurgency movement for a long period. I won't go into details. But it was a very delicate moment: whether we should start or not. I offered him a cup of tea and then I wanted a message to go out that Mr. G. Parthasarathy was not only the Policy Planning Advisor but also he was a Cabinet level Minister and Mr. Laldenga had come to the office of a Home Secretary. I had to tell him in my own way that although some kind of Accord had been reached with Mr. Parthasarathy, that would not be acceptable *in toto*. There were certain elements which would have to be looked into again; I did not say "renegotiated" but I said there were certain parts which may not be acceptable, acceptable to whom I did not spell out at that stage. And, as expected, Mr. Laldenga reacted very strongly: "Mr. Home Secretary, these negotiations, as far as I am concerned, are complete. If the Government of India doesn't wish to sign this (he did not use the word "Accord") document which has been now agreed upon, there is no alternative for me but to go back to the jungle and you will be responsible for the bloodshed." He was a very powerful personality. I could sense the tension in the room building up. There were only myself and my Joint Secretary. When he used the word "bloodshed" I stopped him. I told Mr. Laldenga: "Now I want to tell you, you are in the room of the Union Home Secretary. I am responsible for not only law and order but also for making sure that law is observed. And I am afraid if you are using that kind of language in my room, I will have to initiate certain actions which under the law, I must take." For a moment, the tension in the room was palpable. And suddenly he threw up his arms. He laughed and said: "Mr. Home Secretary, I think you are a pretty straightforward person, I can do business with you. Let us find out what is not agreeable to you." And that is how negotiations started. Now negotiations went through various phases and they were long-drawn-out. But the fact was we had to start building up again, brick by brick, on many elements, on important elements, because my mandate from the Prime Minister was very clear: "Those portions in red are not acceptable to me, those in yellow you must renegotiate." There were certain platitudes. Then Christmas came, and Mr. Laldenga wanted to go back.

Then we became busy with something else. When the month of May (1986) started approaching, I told the PM: "If you want the negotiations to

be wrapped up, there are hardly two months." He asked "Why?" I said: "I am retiring at the end of June. If you want negotiations to be completed, I think, we can do that, we should proceed further." And this is the time, I want to ask a question because I find two gentlemen in this room who were very much involved in the delay of the negotiations, I want their confirmation. You [Mr. B.K. Hrangkhawl] were there in Tripura and Mr. Zoramthanga was in the jungles and we had received reports to that effect. During the discussions, I could sense that we could find an agreeable solution, although, on a couple of points, Laldenga would not agree. I knew that, and I kept them aside for the last moment. One thing which was causing us concern was that if the MNF cadres were to come out, would they do so with all their arms or not?

All kinds of reports were there: they [the MNF cadres] would hide their arms somewhere; or they would bring in their arms; or they would come without their arms. Moreover, there was speculation as to what kind of arms were there. However, there was one particular report, about which I am asking the Chairman for confirmation because it was a historic occasion. According to this report, some kind of deal was likely to be struck [between the MNF and the Tripura National Volunteers (TNV)] for the transfer of arms. This information, coupled with the fact that the TNV had also started some operations in early 1986, was causing us concern and undue worry. Once we learnt that arms were likely to be transferred, we, naturally, slowed down the negotiations. This was because the whole objective of the negotiations was to restore real place to Mizoram, which meant that the MNF cadres gave up their arms and participated in the political process.

The PM was very clear that the peace process must be real, and not just cosmetic. And real peace would come only if the MNF cadres deposited all their arms and ammunition. I am not using the word "surrender" because we avoided it then. Mr. Chairman, you can seek confirmation whether or not there was a real danger of arms transfer.

**Mr. Chairman:** Can I interrupt you to depose here? Could you both — Mr. Hrangkhawl and Mr. Zoramthanga — give an answer which will begin with either the word "yes" or "no" and then you can add any further words?

**Mr. Zoramthanga:** Yes, regarding the transfer of arms, Mr. B.K. Hrangkhawl was in our jungle headquarters. He was my guest for quite a long time. At that time, the Peace Accord had already been signed, I believe. Anyhow, it was clear that it was going to be signed. Peace negotiations had not yet started yet with the TNV. Actually, Mr. Hrangkhawl asked: "Could you transfer some of your arms to us because in any case you are going to give it to the Indian authorities?" Then I said: "Look here, we have signed a Peace Accord, we have to be honest and truthful to it. And, at the same time, if I give you one rifle, I know during my 20 years of experience that even our most secret dealing with ISI people came to light, even in the dark night. So it would not be possible to hide it if I give even one piece of ammunition." On the other hand, it was best to have an agreement with the

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Government of India. So we came out and handed over our arms and ammunition to the Government of India. I told him later: "It is best that you should also start negotiations with the Government of India." So, I did not give him even one rifle or one piece of ammunition.

**Mr. Chairman:** Mr. Hrangkhawl please?

**Mr. B.K. Hrangkhawl:** I think it was at the time of the Mizoram Accord. So, what Mr. Zoramthanga has said may be accepted.

**Mr. R.D. Pradhan:** Your point is also right that the Mizo Accord was likely to be signed. Right from August, if you notice, Mr. Laldenga had conveyed you his impression — and he was right in his impression — that everything had been left out, because he had reached an agreement with Mr. G. Parthasarathy and the whole document was there with all the articles. So when he said that the Accord has been reached and conveyed that information to you, he was right. But we came to know at the end of the year 1985 and at the beginning of 1986 that there were some activities being started in Tripura. Even before the formal approach was made, we knew what was happening in Tripura.

Now coming to Mizoram, you got a feeling that negotiations were being dragged on. There was one reason. We wanted to make sure that all the arms came out. Secondly, I was personally very keen that the political Accord would succeed only if we were able to get the MNF cadres overground in a very proper way without hurting their sentiments in any way because people who have spent 20-25 years, the best years of their lives, in the jungle, have fought for a cause.

And looking at the point when a soldier will come out with his weapon: he should come out and he should not appear to be surrendering. That was the point. And, therefore, we worked out a complete case. And then we worked out, when he came out, what would happen to him? And many of them were there with their families. What happens to the women, what happens to the children, what happens to the aged people? We worked out the whole thing. That took time. At the same time, we also wanted Mr. Laldenga to appreciate that political Accord could be reached only after he also agreed to certain conditions.

Around the beginning of June 1986 I told the PM that, perhaps, we might be able to conclude a political agreement. But now he would have to handle the political part in which Mr. Laldenga was interested. As you know, previously, three times an agreement had almost been reached with the Government of India, but the final agreement could not come about because one of Mr. Laldenga's conditions was that he should get into political office somehow or the other. That was the impression I got. His point was that, if he were in power, the MNF would feel emboldened enough to come out, reassured that there wouldn't be any unfairness in the Government's dealing with it. He wanted power. He made that much clear to me. And I must say that the Prime Minister had to take some time to apply this criterion in the case of Mizoram because, in the case of Punjab and in the case of Assam, the

Prime Minister had been much criticised within the Congress Party for having sacrificed power. By that time, it became a real political problem for Mr. Rajiv Gandhi. It was a very difficult decision for three States to be given up one after another. And, at that time, various other circumstances had cropped up. Later, some other personalities had come on the scene and there was strong pressure on the Prime Minister that, in the case of Mizoram, he should not give up power. At that stage, if you remember, I had visited Mizoram. I was a guest of the Lieutenant-Governor and I had an occasion to meet several of you at that time during lunch with the Chief Minister. I was asked to find out what would be the reaction if the Chief Minister were asked not to step down but share power with the MNF? In a very oblique way, I raised this question with the CM, Mr. Lalthanhawla, and I formed my own impression. I could find one thing that what the Mizos wanted was peace. They were not interested, at that stage, as to who was in power. I told the Prime Minister that this was my impression and asked him to handle his Chief Minister.

Then Mr. Arjun Singh was brought into the picture. He was the Vice-President of the Congress at that time. And Mr. Lalthanhawla himself wrote a letter, I remember — he could sense what was happening — offering to step down or share power in the interest of peace for Mizoram. And, of course, that made the task easier. I think, the whole Cabinet was invited here. Mr. Laldenga was also invited. And another political Accord was signed between the Congress Party and Mr. Laldenga, in which I was involved as a negotiator. But I was behind the scenes because the Accord was between the Congress Party and him. But Mr. Arjun Singh and myself were working out the party Accord — between the MNF and the Congress — in which an arrangement was made by which Mr. Laldenga and Mr. Lalthanhawla would have a joint responsibility of advising the Governor and forming the Cabinet. Now, again, in this negotiation on Mizoram, Rajiv Gandhi adopted the same technique which I mentioned for Assam: that meant, first, having only one negotiator, with no one else cutting across the line; secondly, working closely with the PM and the Home Minister so that confidences were kept; and thirdly, not putting down much on paper till the agreement itself was formulated and could be clinched because, sometimes, putting many things on paper too soon created its own problems. And, in my case, the thing was, already too many things had been put on paper and, as you know, that document had been leaked to the press by Mr. Laldenga himself in November 1985. So everybody knew at the end what had been withdrawn from that. That was his difficulty. This was, I think, the Congress Party agreement which was signed on 24 or 25 June. Two days before the Accord was signed, I had my last meeting with Mr. Laldenga. We had become good friends. We were talking frankly, and we had established a good rapport. I said: "Now Mr. Laldenga, unless you want to or are ready to reach an Accord, you might think about what you want to do because I am retiring." Surprisingly, he

did not react. But on 30 June in the afternoon, around 3 o'clock, he came alone. He sought an appointment. I thought he had come to say farewell to me because I was retiring. In fact, there was a farewell party arranged for me in the ministry. He looked at me and asked: "What do we do?" I said: "Nothing can be done. In one and a half hours' time, I am saying goodbye to my service career." I added: "Mr. Laldenga you may have to deal with the next Home Secretary and I do not know for how many years. You have already spent ten years negotiating; you may have to spend another couple of years before you get any Accord." So, he asked: "What should I do?" Suddenly, something came to my mind. I said: "If you are interested in doing something I will give you two hours; you make up your mind on the two or three matters which are pending. If you tell me yes, the Accord can be signed even now." He said: "All right, I am coming back in one hour."

I asked my ministry to cancel the farewell party. I went to the PM and told him: "Rajivji, something is coming up." He said: "Very good." Suddenly, he remembered and said: "You are going to retire." I said: "Yes." He asked: "Must you retire today?" I said: "The date of retirement is not determined by the civil servant; it is determined by his date of birth." He asked: "Is that so?" He added: "All right. You carry on with what you have to do." Now, Mr. Laldenga came back to me and said: "Yes, Mr. Pradhan, I agree." I immediately sat down with him and prepared the document in about an hour. I had some paragraphs already put together and some work had already been done. I said: "If this is acceptable to you, I am ready to go to the Prime Minister." Can you believe that I went to see the Prime Minister at around 7 p.m. after doing all the homework. He looked at every paragraph and said: "All right, I want my CCPA [Cabinet Committee for Political Affairs] to be called immediately." The CCPA was duly called. The members approved the document. And as the CCPA approved, I was about to go out. Suddenly he asked me to stop. He said: "Pradhanji, you have to sign the document." I said: "I am not sure whether I am competent to sign because perhaps, under the civil service rules, I already stand retired. I do not know the rules; they may say that after office hours, you stand retired." He said: "I will give you an extension." I said: "You can't give me an extension. I stand retired." You know what he did? He said: "You ring up the Law Secretary, in my presence." I did so. He was fortunately there and I posed the question. The Law Secretary said: "No, if you have not handed over charge till now, you stand retired at midnight." Now this conversation with the Prime Minister took place around 8.30 p.m. He said: "You must go and sign. I want you to sign now, I want to see you on Doordarshan at 9.30." Mr. Laldenga went running. I think all his colleagues were there; Mr. Lalthanhawla was there; the whole Cabinet was there. They were invited to my room. The Prime Minister himself rang up somebody and said: "Send in the Doordarshan team." Everything was arranged. The Home Minister was expecting something to happen. Such was the interest that the PM took in

every step and, in the end, he wanted to see real peace. Therefore, he made sure that the Accord was signed. At the last moment, I signed the Accord and I walked out of North Block saying goodbye to my service and farewell to the nation for having given me an opportunity to serve the country and the Prime Minister.

**Mr. Hiphei:** First, I would like to associate myself with Mr. Zoramthanga's viewpoints. But, at the same time, our economic, cultural and political plans are so young and tender that we dare not open the door fully yet. The retention of the Inner Line permit is misconceived and sometimes misunderstood. The other day, I met one youngster. He asked me: "Mizoram is my house; why should I get permission to enter my own house?" I told him: "Mizoram is not your house. The whole of India is your house. Mizoram is one of the rooms in a very big house. There in that particular room a newly married couple is sleeping (that is, this Accord was signed in 1986 only). So, you please knock on the door of the room before you enter." The Inner Line permit is like knocking at the door. At the same time, we have the Restricted Area permit. This permit is very different from the Inner Line permit. The Restricted Area permit is issued to foreigners coming to Mizoram, particularly from Western countries, who are not willing to stay in India or in any part of the North-Eastern States. So the issue of Restricted Area permits is quite different. The Inner Line permit is issued in order to safeguard the separate identities of the minorities. So this is one point I would like to make.

Now, let us talk about 1988. Elections took place that year and Mr. Laldenga, who was in the Opposition, won. After 15 months or so, I don't exactly remember the period, there was a split in the ruling MNF party. Nine members of the ruling party left the Government (and the party) and were trying to set up a coalition Government under the leadership of Mr. Lalthanhawla as the Chief Minister. We all came down to Delhi and awaited the formation of such a coalition Government. However, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi did not allow the formation of a coalition Government. We applied a lot of pressure. Ultimately, he told us to go back to Mizoram, and we would reach an Accord, and we may be able to form a Government. So, we hurriedly flew back to Mizoram. However, when we reached there, President's rule had been announced. At that time, we were unhappy. Nevertheless, we realised that Mr. Rajiv Gandhi did not want us to form a coalition Government with the aid of defectors.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you for that clarification. We won't attempt to resolve this problem here. We have Mr. Zoramthanga's statement on record and we have your statement on record. Let us leave it to future historians to decide the truth. For the moment, if there is something else you want to mention, you are welcome to speak.

**Mr. Hiphei:** The only point I would like to emphasise is that Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, though he was a Congress leader, knowing that his own Government was in Mizoram, did not allow us to form the coalition Government under

the leadership of Mr. Lalthanhawla, who is also a leader of the Congress party. So this shows how democratic he was.

**Mr. C.L. Ruala:** I have to make one clarification. There are two seemingly contradictory statements. Dr. Silvera said that our power generation went up to more than 23 MW. And Brigadier Sailo said we have only 3 MW and we are "importing" 23 MW. It is a fact that our power generation went up by more than 23 MW. And it is also a fact that we received more than 3 MW from minihydel and microhydel projects. But we have 22 diesel generation stations from which we get about 20 MW.

Also, we are "importing" about 17 MW from the power grid. So, there is no real contradictory statement.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much indeed. I have one final question to ask to Dr. Silvera in particular, but anyone else is free to answer this question. In the rest of India, one of the consequences, with implications for other parts of India, of the elections of January 1989 was that the Congress manifesto in Mizoram referred to the State being run on the principles of the Church. And this was seized upon in other parts of the country for the argument to be put forward that if the Congress Party believes that the Church and the State should be mixed up in Mizoram politics then what can be the objection to mixing religion with politics in the rest of the country? I would, therefore, like today to bring here on record the origins of that remark on the Congress election manifesto and the present position in that regard. Dr. Silvera?

**Dr. C. Silvera:** In this context, the case went to the High Court and judgement has come recently that there was no truth in the allegations made by the Opposition party. As almost 100 per cent population in Mizoram comprises Christians, the Congress desired that the Government run according to the good teachings of Christianity. That was the idea given to the Christians during the time of elections.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much. We could have easily continued this discussion for, I think, several hours. And I am increasingly coming to the conclusion that we haven't even begun to understand how important an experiment the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation has started and, perhaps, as we go along, we will have to give ourselves very much more time to go into some of these issues in greater detail.