

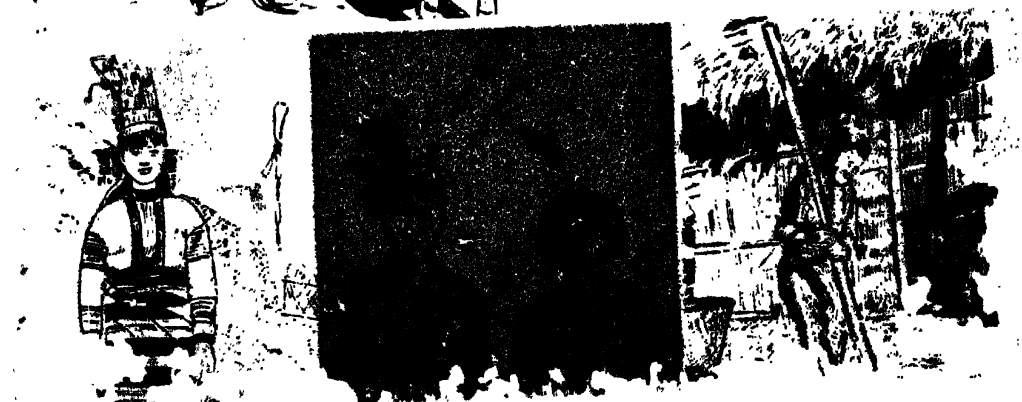
States of Our Union

MIZORAM

A. C. RAY

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MIZORAM



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ABOUT THE SERIES

This is the fourteenth book in the series "States of Our Union". The thirteen books already released are on Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Assam, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Laccadive, Minicoy and Aminidivi Islands. The object of the series is to promote greater awareness and understanding of different regions of the country.

The books seek to provide a factual account of the life, culture and economic development of our States and Union Territories and the contribution of each of them to India as a whole. They are addressed to the general reader and would thus serve as an introduction of a State or Territory to other parts of the country.

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1. THE LAND

THE Union Territory of Mizoram is situated in the north-eastern corner of India. It is flanked by Bangladesh and Tripura in the west and Burma (Chin Hills) in the east and south. In the north it has boundary with Manipur and Cachar district of Assam. It has an area of 23,980 square kilometres.

The Mizo Hills have ranges running from north to south, which tend to be higher in the middle of the Territory and tapering in the north and the south. The average height of the hills is about 900 metres. The highest peak in the Mizo Hills is the Blue Mountain (Phawngpui) with a height of 2,165 metres in the southern part of the Territory.

Mizoram has the most hilly terrain in the eastern part of India. The hills are steep and are separated by rivers which flow either to the north or to the south, creating deep gorges in between the north-south hill ranges. There are innumerable rivers, streams and brooks in the Territory. In the north, the Tlawng (Dhaleswari), the Tuirail (Sonai) and the Tuivawl start from the middle of Mizoram and running north fall in the Barak river in Cachar district. In the south the Karnafuli flows north from the southern tip of the Territory and near about the middle it flows to Bangladesh where it has been tapped for a huge hydel project. The Koladyne enters Mizoram from Burma and flowing south it enters Burma again.

The terrain in the Territory is entirely hilly excepting for small stretches of plain surface where wet cultivation is practised. There are also a few lakes, biggest of which is Palak Lake, situated in the southern part of the Territory.

Mizoram has a pleasant climate. It is generally cool in the summer and not very cold in the winter. In the winter the temperature varies from 11°C to 24°C and in the summer it is between 18°C to 29°C. As the climate on the hill tops is much better than that in the valleys which are humid and hot, the Mizos prefer to have their villages on top of the hills. The area is under the

direct influence of the monsoon. It rains heavily from May to September and the average rainfall is 254 cm. per year. The south is more rainy. Aijal's average annual rainfall is 208 cm. and Lungleh's 350 cm.

The winter is very pleasant. It is rain-free. The skies are wonderfully blue and in the morning the mist forming between the hills gives an excellent view of white stretches resembling vast lakes.

The vegetation growth in Mizoram is abundant. It is full of trees, plants, bushes and grass. Bamboos grow abundantly everywhere. The hills are marvellously green. But the Territory lacks decorative plants. Recently plantation of pine is being tried at Champhai and North Vanlaiphai areas where it thrives. The vegetation and the climate of Mizoram offer ideal sanctuary to wild animals. But, because of large number of guns issued to the people, the number of wild animals and birds decreased very sharply. With strict restriction on guns imposed now, wild animals and birds have again appeared in plenty all over the hills. Elephants, tigers, leopards, bears, wild dogs, mithuns, deer, wild pigs, etc., are now numerous. Some of these animals cause wide-spread damage to the crops.

Mizoram was formerly known as Mizo Hills district. Still earlier it was known as Lushai Hills. In local language the area is called Mizoram or the Land of Mizos which has now become its official name. In 1954 by an Act of the Parliament the name of the district was changed from Lushai Hills district to Mizo Hills district. It continued to be a part of Assam till January 1972, when it was made a Union Territory with the name of 'Mizoram'.



A typical group centre in Mizoram. Nearly three-fourths of the population have been resettled in over a hundred group centres since 1966.

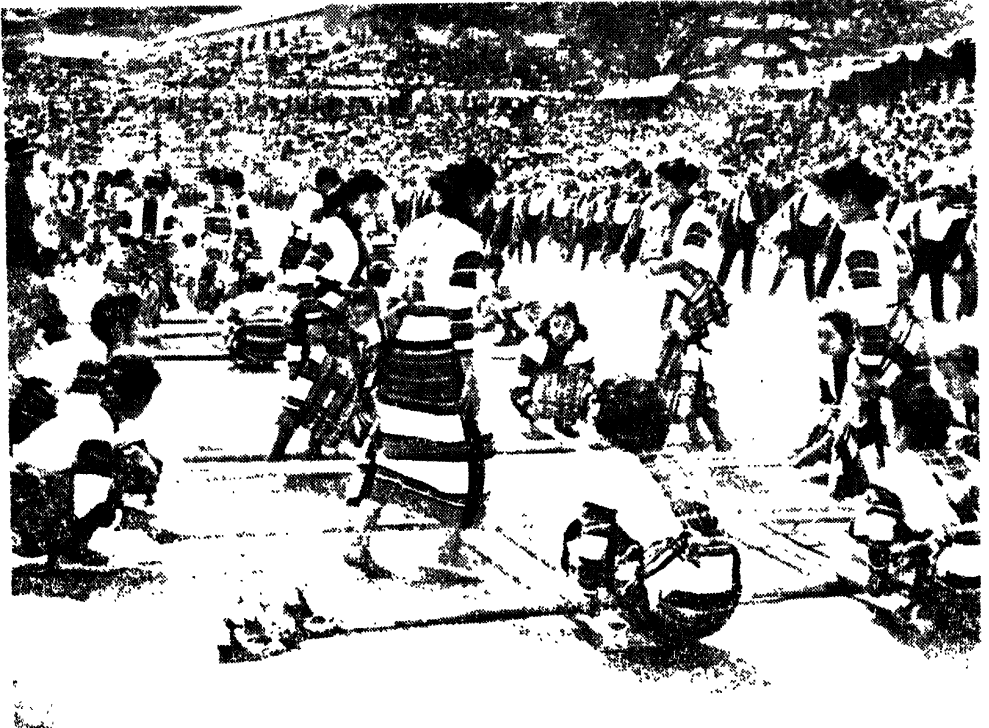
A busy market scene, Aijal





*Khuollam dance. The Mizo boys dancing
in tune with gongs and drum beats*

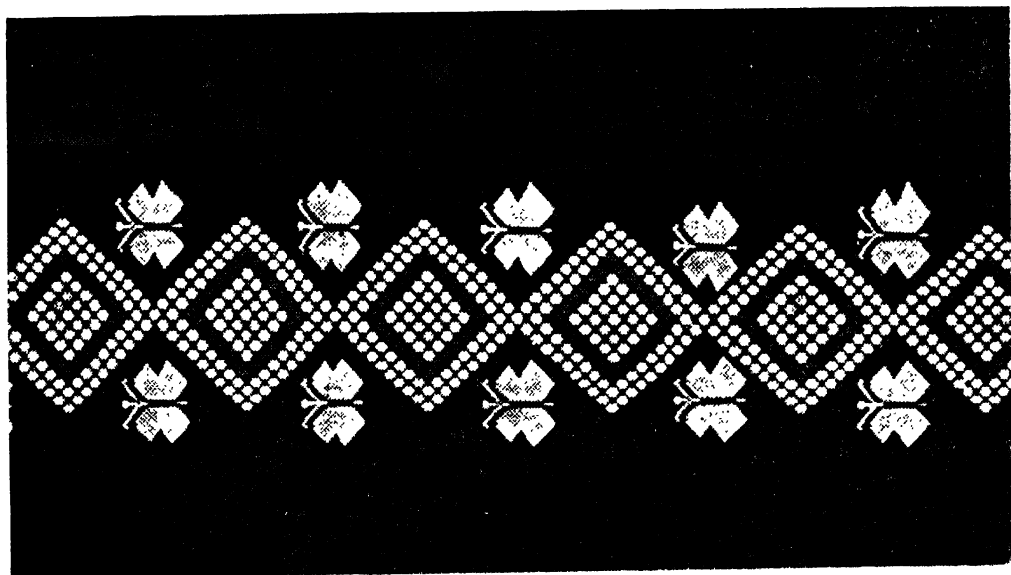
*The most popular among the traditional
Mizo dances is the Cherow or Bamboo dance.*

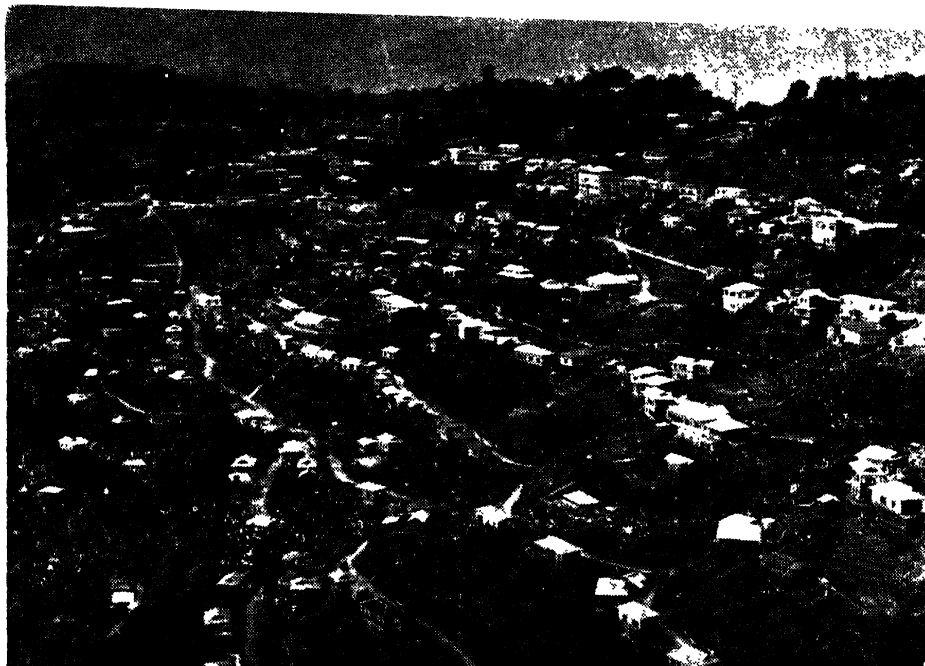


*The Mizo women
weave beautiful cloth.*



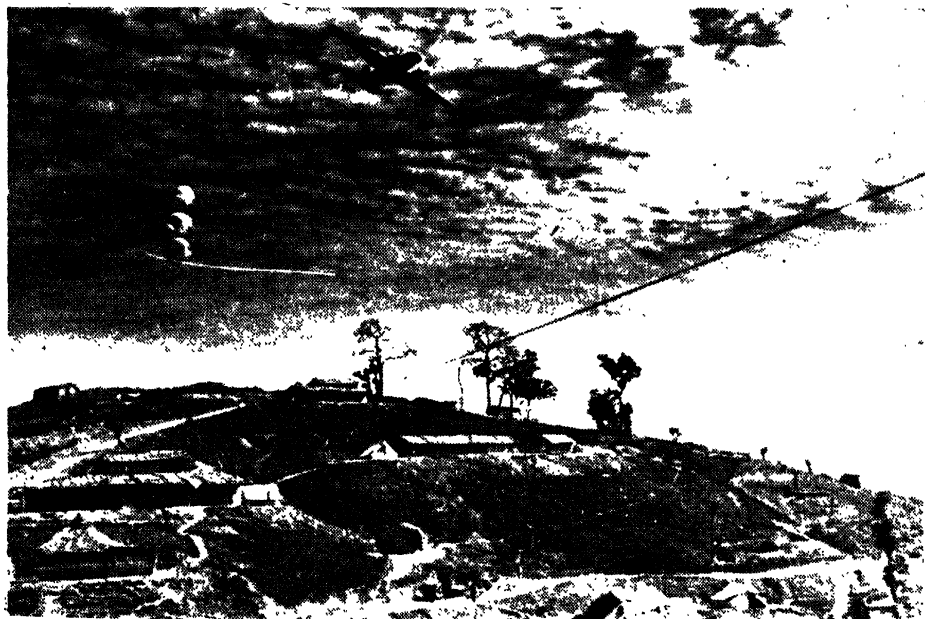
*A beautiful Puan design. Puan is the tradi-
tional wrap cloth woven by the women.*





Aijal—the biggest town and the administrative headquarters of Mizoram

Food supplies for a village being air-dropped in the interior of the Territory



2. THE PEOPLE

ACCORDING to the 1971 census the total population of Mizoram is 3,21,686. The women have a little edge over the men, being 1,018 per 1,000 men. The density of population is one of the lowest in India—it is only 15 per square kilometre against the all-India figure of 182. The rate of growth of population is very high. In the period 1951-1961 the growth rate was 35.61 per cent; but in the period 1961-1971 it was only 20.91. The reason is that during the disturbances, which started in 1966, many Mizos left the Mizo Hills and settled elsewhere. Actually quite a few thousand Mizos are now settled in Shillong and other places in Meghalaya. Similarly, large number of Mizos have migrated to Manipur, the North Cachar Hills and the Mikir Hills.

The percentage of urban population in Mizoram is very high. The two towns of Aijal (31,436) and Lungleh (5,730) account for 11.55 per cent of the total population of the Territory. The population in the towns, specially at Aijal, increased more than 160 per cent mainly because of influx of villagers from the interior during the disturbances. Many of those who took temporary shelter in the towns preferred to stay on. This has brought about quick urbanisation and Aijal has become a very congested town. The problem of unemployment is very acute. Sanitation, traffic, water supply, etc., have also become difficult. In spite of all these problems the Mizos like urban life. As a result the towns are growing very fast. Many of the villages in Mizoram have population of more than 5,000 each; but the employment pattern being agricultural, all these places are classed as villages. With the growth of industries and other non-agricultural occupations at least about a dozen of such villages may become towns within a decade or so.

HIGH LITERACY

The people in Mizoram have a very high literacy rate. The Territory has a literacy percentage of 50.9. Amongst men the

percentage is 59.5, amongst women 41.5. All the children of school-going age go to schools. Along with the church, a primary school is a must in a Mizo village.

Mizos are a hard working people. Most of them are cultivators. The pattern of employment has not changed much in the last ten years. In 1961, 87.1 per cent of the total population were cultivators and 12.9 per cent other workers; according to the 1971 census, 87.6 per cent are cultivators and 12.4 per cent are other workers. Of the total population, 46.4 per cent are workers. Women workers number very high; 40.3 per cent of the women are workers. All women in the villages are equal work partners with their menfolk in *jhum* (shifting cultivation).

The Territory has three types of population. The majority belong to the tribes like Lushai, Hmar, Fanais, Tlanglaus, Pangs, Pawis and Lakheres, who came to the area from the east and the north. There are other tribes like Riangs and Chakmas, who came from the west—viz. Chittagong Hill Tracts and Tripura. There are also other people like Nepalis and Bengalis who have recently settled in the Territory. The population is predominantly tribal. According to the 1961 census, of the total population of 2,66,063, Mizo-speaking population was 2,10,776. Number of people speaking other languages were as follows : Chakma 17,497, Lakher 9,522, Pawi 6,865, Hmar 2,912, Nepali 2,042 and Bengali 1,156. The population break-up now is more or less proportionate to these figures.

Mizo' in Lushai language means 'man of the hills' or 'highlander'. Now the word 'Mizo' embraces all the Lushai and akin tribes. It also includes such Pawis who have taken up Lushai as their language. Chakmas, Riangs, Lakheres and some Pawis identify themselves as separate from the Mizos. Mizos speak Lushai language. Many other clans and sub-tribes like Hmars, Raltes, etc., have given up their languages and taken up Lushai language, now known as Mizo language. The Mizo tribes consist mainly of the following clans—Lushai, Ralte, Khiangte, Chawngthu, Hmar and Paite. The north and the middle parts of Mizoram are inhabited by the Mizos. The Pawis are concentrated in the south-eastern part bordering Burma. Further south are the Lakheres who call themselves Maras. Pawis and Lakheres have their own languages. Mizo, Pawi and Lakher

THE PEOPLE

languages are written in Roman script. All these belong to the Tibeto-Burman group of languages. The Chakmas live in the south-west and the western part of the Territory. They now speak a dialect of Bengali. Riangs are akin to the Chakmas and inhabit the western part.

HABITATION

The Mizos build their villages on top of the hills and ridges. Traditionally the villages were located strategically on hill tops, mainly on consideration of the defence of the villages, as the chiefs would, at the slightest opportunity, attack one another's village. The villagers would also have log stockades and timber gate houses. The location of the villages on hill tops continues even now, as the steep valleys are too hot, humid and unhealthy. The houses are generally built with bamboo walls, bamboo floors and thatch roofs. The well-to-do use C.I. sheets. A Mizo hut is raised from the ground on a *machan*. It has two sections. The first is the approach to the main hall. It is a place where skulls and horns of animals killed are displayed. The main hall has the hearth where cooking is done and sleeping platforms are located. In earlier times the villages spread out radially from a central open spot facing the chief's house. Now with the 'grouping system', the layout of the villages has changed. In the grouped villages the houses are on rows running parallel to the main street. Like log stockades of olden days, now there is bamboo fencing with bamboo spikes to protect the villages from raids by hostile elements. Every grouped village has also a security post manned by the security forces. It has also an administrative officer and other officers to look after the administration, welfare and development of the village. From the old, small and primitive villages which existed even a few years back, the shift to the present group centres is a very fast progress and this transition is catalytic in the development of Mizoram.

3. HISTORY

AS THERE is no record regarding any contact of the tribes residing in the Mizo Hills and the Chin Hills with the people in other areas, it is extremely difficult to trace the history of the Mizo tribes. But it is now accepted that the Mizos came to the Mizo Hills from the Chin Hills of Burma in the eighteenth century. The area now known as the Mizoram was inhabited by tribes which were driven out to other areas or were later absorbed into Mizo tribes.

Mizos belong to the Mongolian race. They are a part of the great waves of the Mongolian race which fanned out to the east and the south of Asia in the past. Folklores of the Hmars say that they were inhabitants of the Shan state in Burma and they left their home because of a great famine. Legends say that the Mizos came from Chhinlung, *i.e.*, a hole under a rock. After a great darkness and catastrophe the ancestors of the Mizos are said to have come out of this hole. The history of the Mizos can be traced to their settlement in Burma. The Mizos were in the Chin Hills in Burma from 1400 A.D. to 1700 A.D. There were ten such tribes in Burma and one of these tribes moved further west. This was the Lushai tribe. In Burmese language 'Lu' means tribe and 'Se' means ten. Mizos acquired the institution of chieftainship while they were moving towards west. As feuds between clans became very common the chiefs came up to lead the people. The first chief is known to be a Lushai called Zahmuaka, and through his six sons, six ruling Lushai clans came into existence. A chief called Sailova set the tradition of Sailo chiefs who came to rule in the northern part of the hills. The Hmars and the Lushais had long-standing feuds between them. Similar inter-tribal and inter-clan feuds existed between the Pawis and the Lushais. The Chiefs were constantly having feuds with one another. In 1850 a war broke out between the north and the south which continued for a few years. Similarly there was a war between the east and the west. Because of this constant state of war between different clans and different chiefs

the villages were always situated in the most strategic position on hill tops and were stockaded by logs.

BRITISH PERIOD

The Mizos had also been raiding the adjoining areas in Chittagong Hill Tracts, Sylhet and Cachar. After a daring raid of the Mizos on a tea garden in Cachar, killing some people and kidnapping a small British girl, in 1871-72 two British punitive columns entered the Mizo Hills, one from Chittagong and the other from Cachar. Although this pacified the Mizos for the time being, sporadic raids by them continued. In 1890 the Mizos attacked the British fortified positions in Aijal and Changsil and again columns had to be brought from outside to quell the rebellion. In 1891 the area was annexed by the British and two districts—North Lushai Hills under Assam and South Lushai Hills under Bengal—were formed.

In 1892 again there were rebellions all over the district. Punitive expeditions and columns were sent to the interior and peace was enforced, and it was not disturbed any further during the British period. In 1898 the north and the south Lushai Hills districts were amalgamated and brought under Assam. A superintendent was placed in charge of the district with headquarters at Aijal. In 1936 the southernmost part of the Mizo Hills, inhabited by the Lakhers, was brought within this district. The district had two sub-divisions, viz., Aijal and Lungleh, and it was further divided into twelve circles each under an interpreter who would work as liaison between the chiefs and the superintendent. But the real administration was left to the chiefs, called *Lal* in Mizo language. They were supreme in their own villages. A chief would settle all disputes in the village, allocate to the villagers land for *jhum*, feed the poor and give shelter to ones seeking it. He would be assisted by a council of village elders called *Upas*, appointed by him. He would also appoint a number of village officials to help him. His rule was authoritarian but it could not be malevolent as the people could always migrate to a village within jurisdiction of some other chief. He would have a number of wives and slaves. The chief would get the best *jhum* site, would get revenue in paddy from the villagers and a share of the hunts and of fines levied for offences. The chieftainship was hereditary, passing

through the eldest son. The Government had the right to dismiss a chief and elevate a commoner to that office.

The district was declared an Excluded Area under the Government of India Act 1935 and was placed directly under the Governor. The Acts of the provincial legislature would not apply to the district unless specifically extended by the Governor. The Inner Line separating the district from the rest of India restricted the entry of people other than tribes of the district into it. To preserve the culture and customs of the local people and to develop them according to their own genius this system of protection was introduced and it continues till now.

FAMINE AND REBELLION

In the post-Independence period there were two major occurrences in the Mizo Hills. One was a famine and the other was a rebellion. The two were also connected. In 1959 there was a great famine all over the district. At the interval of 50 years, bamboos in the Mizo Hills flower and at that time the rodent population multiplies at incredibly high rate. Thousands of rats swarm the *jhums* and devour all the crops. This causes wide-spread famine which the Mizos call *Mautam*. The Government supplied free food in the district and many voluntary organisations were formed to alleviate the distress of the people. One such organisation, called the Mizo National Famine Front, continued to function even after the famine was over and changed its name to Mizo National Front in 1961 with the objective of attaining 'independence and sovereignty' for the Mizo Hills. On the 28th February 1966 this organisation rose in armed rebellion and attacked the Government treasury at Aijal and the Government offices in the interior. A column of the security forces reached Aijal on the 6th and Lungleh on the 13th March 1966. Sporadic disturbances continued in the district till the end of 1968. The district was declared a disturbed area and the security forces were inducted in aid of the civil authorities for the maintenance of law and order. This position is continuing even now. The situation has been fast improving and it is now near normal all over the area.

4. RELIGION AND CULTURE

IN THEIR old religious tenets the Mizos believe in one supreme God called the Pathian who is the overlord of men, and in Ramhuais (demons) who inhabit the streams, the hills and the trees. The Ramhuais are the evil spirits who are responsible for all the ills in this world. They have to be propitiated for health, good harvest and general well-being. The magic doctors or the sorcerers in the villages, called Puithiam, offer sacrifices to these Ramhuais according to a certain scale. After death the soul goes to Pialral or Mitthi-Khua. In Pialral all good things are available in plenty. Rice is abundant and the life is luxurious. The people who had hunted a number of dangerous animals and had given a number of feasts would go to Pialral where they would live in comfort and happiness. Those who had not earned enough merit will live in Mitthi-Khua which is a place of sorrow and is supposed to be located in the Rih lake in Burma near Champhai, a border village of Mizoram. After staying in these places for some time, the spirits would be reborn in this world.

About 95 per cent of the Mizos are now Christians. Most of them are Protestants; some are Catholics. There are many denominations, the main ones being Presbyterian, Baptist, United Pentecostal, Roman Catholic, Salvation Army, and Seventh Day Adventist. The first missionary entered the Mizo Hills in 1891, almost immediately with the setting up of administrative and military headquarters at Aijal. Christian Missions also started working in the south at Lungleh and at Serkawr in the Lakher area. The missionaries learnt the local languages and set up primary schools and hospitals. The primary school teachers were also evangelists, and education and Christianity spread almost simultaneously.

In Mizoram there are four different cultures. The Mizos, the Pawis and the Lakhers, although all are Christians, have their own distinct customs and culture. The Chakmas are different from the others in language, religion and culture.

The Mizos are fast giving up their old customs and adopting the

western mode of life. Many of their present customs are mixtures of their old traditions and the western pattern of life.

MIZOS AND MODERNISM

The boys and the girls mix freely. In the evenings the bachelors would go round courting the maidens. This system of dating is called '*nula rim*.' The boys get married between the ages of 18 and 23 and the girls between the ages of 16 and 22. The groom has to pay bride-price to the relations of the bride. In earlier times bride price was paid in the form of mithuns, pigs and guns. Now this is paid in cash. But mostly the payment remains in arrears and in many cases the sons have to pay the undischarged obligation of the father. Although there are marriages celebrated outside the church according to the old custom and traditions, most of the marriages now are solemnised in the church. After the marriage ceremony in the church, there is a feast in the bride's house. At night the bride is taken in procession to the groom's house where the celebrations generally include singsongs. Divorce is quite common among the Mizos. The husband merely says that he divorces his wife or the wife just pays back the bride price, and the divorce is effected. There may be divorce on mutual consent also. The church does not recognise divorce but it accepts it as a matter of fact. After separation for five years one can remarry in church.

According to the Mizo custom the youngest son inherits all moveable and immoveable properties. The elder sons generally move out of the parents' house after they get married. The youngest son is expected to stay on and look after the parents during their old age. Old Mizo custom did not recognise testament. Under the Inheritance Act passed in 1956 by the Mizo District Council, anyone can now make a will. Although this is not customary, it has now been accepted by the Mizo society. When one dies, he is buried in the common burial ground and the relatives erect memorial stones. Relations and friends gather in the house of bereavement and hymns are sung for about a week.

In Mizo social customs there are some very good principles of self-help and cooperation. Under a system called *hnatlang*, the villagers are expected to contribute labour for the welfare of the com-

munity. Inter-village paths, community halls, water points, etc., are constructed and maintained by *hnatlang*. Under another custom called *tlawmngaihna* services are rendered to the people in distress as a social obligation. When anyone is missing, customary search parties from the village will go out for seven days. When one dies at a village not his own, his dead body is carried to his home village. Signals in case of distress are passed from village to village. All these voluntary services are rendered by the villagers under this useful custom of *tlawmngaihna* which is continuing till now in the Mizo society.

One important Mizo institution which has recently died out is the *zawlbuk* or the bachelors' dormitories. Every village would have a *zawlbuk*, a big hall-like house where the bachelors of the village would sleep at night. It was also the guest house of the village. Women were not allowed inside the hall. In the *zawlbuk* the young men would get training in wrestling, manly behaviour and the Mizo way of life.

Mizos are now very much westernised in their dress habits. Most of the men wear trousers and shirts even in the interior villages. They also sport hats made of bamboo and cane, which look like cricket caps. The villagers invariably carry an artistically designed and hand-woven side bag in which they carry tobacco pipe and other useful items. The women wear blouses and frocks. Over the frocks they usually put on the traditional wrap cloth called *puan*. The colourful and costly *puan* is called *puanchei* and the similar artistic blouse is called *kawrchei*; both are exquisitely beautiful and are worn on ceremonial occasions.

The Mizos are inveterate smokers. They have been growing tobacco in *jhums* for a long time. The men, the women and the children all smoke. The pipes of the men and the women are different, in the latter the smoke passes through water and in the former it is sucked directly. The nicotine mixed water from the pipes of the women is preserved and used in mouthfuls by the men as substitute for tobacco smoke, specially when travelling. Now-a-days most of the Mizos prefer to smoke cigarettes made by themselves rolling the home-grown tobacco with small cut-pieces of newspapers.

Mizos brew alcohol from rice which is called *zu*. Before the

spread of Christianity *zu drinking* was very common and was connected with all the religious rites. Sometimes for days together there would be orgies in the village when the entire population would get drunk. The drinking habit of the Mizos has become almost moderate now but even then it is fairly common amongst them.

THE PAWIS AND LAKHERS

Amongst the Pawis the most common clans are Chinzah, Hlawnchhing, Bawitlung, Zathang, Hnialum, Khenglawt, Satheng, Mualching, etc. The sub-tribes are Tlanglau, Bawm and Pang. The Pawis call themselves Lai which is a tribe commonly known as Chins in the Chin Hills district of Burma. The Pawis speak the Lai language at home and amongst themselves and they have accepted Mizo as their language in the schools and for use with outsiders. Marriages between Pawis and Lakhers and between Pawis and Mizos are quite common. The Pawis and the Mizos have similar customs and ways of life. But the Pawis are less sophisticated and more conservative than the Mizos. The menfolk have long hair tied in a knot on the head. They generally wear hand-women loin wrapper. The women wear a lot of beads. The Pawis in the north who are in constant touch with the Mizos are fast adopting the Mizo language and the Mizo culture.

The Lakhers have a distinct pattern of customs and traditions. The Lakhers call themselves Maras and say that the Lushais gave them the name of Lakher as a Lushai saw the first Mara woman plucking cotton (*la*—cotton, *kher*—to pluck). The Mara language is different from the Mizo language. Most of the Lakhers, like the Mizos, are Christians. The common dress for a Lakher man is a shirt and a loin cloth and for a woman, a short blouse and a red and black striped cloth (*puan*). The Lakher man prefers to keep the hair long and tied in a knot above the forehead. He also wears a turban on the head. The women keep the hair long and have hairdos fixing long hairpins. They use ornaments made of shells and old coins.

There are three principal clans amongst the lakhers viz., the ruling clan (Hlychho, Choza), the higher clan (Khaila, Nohro) and the commoner (Azyu, Tlapi). Inter-marriage between the clans is

allowed. But the ruling clans have marriage only amongst themselves or with higher clans. The bride price varies according to clan, from about Rs. 60 to Rs. 10,000.

Amongst the Lakhers, the eldest son inherits the property. Although the Regional Council has allowed making of will of property, the Lakhers have not accepted this departure from the custom and stick to their age-old system of inheritance.

Marriage is generally arranged by the parents. When a son is about 15 the parents would get him engaged to a suitable girl. Child marriage is prevalent. Divorce is very rare. As the bride price is very high and the arrears have to be paid in case of divorce, it acts as a deterrent to divorce. The Lakher society is conservative and is retaining many of its old customs and traditions.

DANCES

The Mizos, the Pawis and the Lakhers have the traditional dances in common. Most popular of these dances is the *cheraw* or the bamboo dance. Six girls squat on the ground holding bamboo poles which are rhythmically shifted and struck against one another. Six other girls dance moving between the shifting bamboos. The dance has a fast rhythm and symbolises the pulsating youth. *Khual Lam* is a very popular dance of the Mizos. A group of boys in *puandum* (a special Mizo shawl) dance, keeping tune with gongs and drum beats. In *solakia*, originally a Lakher dance, but now adopted by the Mizos and the Pawis, men and women dance round in a big circle to the accompaniment of drum beats. This dance is associated with hunting. On completion of a hunt the villagers would gather together and dance around the hunt while a feast would be prepared. In *chheih lam*, the zu-drinking adults sit in a circle and with the singing of anecdotes and drum beats each takes a turn to dance in the middle of the circle. All these dances are shown when a dignitary pays a visit to a village or there is a special ceremony. The young Mizo men and women now prefer the western music and dances for which they have a natural flair. In all the villages groups of young men and women gather in the evening and sing and dance, sometimes the whole night. Of the instruments, they use only the Spanish guitar which can be seen even in the remotest village. Like the

Mizos, the Pawis also have taken to western tunes and dances, but the Lakhers in general stick to their old forms of entertainment.

The food habits of all these tribes are common. The staple food is rice which is taken with boiled vegetable and liberal helping of chilies. Tea is very popular and so also are cakes and sweets. There is practically no taboo on any food. Beef and pork are very much relished. The workers eat rice thrice—the first at sunrise, the second at noontime and the third at sunset. After the early dinner in the evening the people have enough time for amusements, gossips and social and political meets.

THE BUDDHIST CHAKMAS

The Chakmas are culturally entirely different from the Mizos, the Pawis and the Lakhers. The Chakmas are Buddhists. They worship the Buddha and also some of the Hindu gods and goddesses like Malakshminima (mother Lakshmi), Gangamana (mother river) and their own traditional deities like Sugolong, the deity of prosperity. Like their religious rites, the social customs of the Chakmas are also mixtures of Buddhist, Hindu and old tribal customs.

Marriages are arranged by the parents. Free mixing amongst boys and girls is not allowed. Bride price in cash and kind is to be paid by the groom's father to the bride's father. Cash is retained by the bride's father but the articles like ornaments, utensils, etc., are given to the bride. In marriage ceremony, first a feast is given in the bride's house. Next day she is taken in a procession to the groom's place where a Buddhist monk or an *ojha* (sorcerer) recites mantras and solemnises the marriage. Divorce is allowed in case the husband and the wife cannot pull together. The divorce is always in the form of the husband writing a document divorcing the wife; remarriage is allowed.

After death the body is cremated. The Buddhist monk recites mantras at the time of cremation. The ashes are immersed in a river. The sons shave off their hair and perform purification (*sradha*) ceremony after seven days. The eldest son inherits the property.

The Chakmas have the *karbari* system of social and village administration. A *karbari* is elected unanimously by the villagers. He is the honorary head of the village and settles all social disputes and

tries minor criminal offences in the Panchayat or conference of the old and wise men of the village. In case of major offences the offender is externed from the village. In case of minor offences, fine is levied and the proceeds are shared amongst the *karhari* and the village elders.

There is some sort of a caste system among the Chakmas, called *gaja*. There are about 15 *gajas* like Tunya, Bangsa, Dame, Mulimia, Borbo *gaja*, etc. This distinction is perpetuated through the sons. But there is no marriage restriction or professional distinction among the different *gajas*.

The Chakmas are semi-nomadic. They prefer to have their villages by the river side. Hence unlike the Mizos they settle in the valleys. The Chakmas move from one village to another rather frequently. Recently this habit has been checked to some extent by the grouping of villages.

The Chakma men wear very short loin cloth (*gamcha*) and vest or shirt; the women wear two pieces of hand-woven cloth. Tobacco smoking with bamboo pipe is very common among both men and women. Distilled alcohol, called *mad*, is popular among the men. The women generally do not drink. The most popular entertainment is the open air theatrical performance (*jatra*) by the village drama parties.

5. ADMINISTRATION

DURING THE British days the administration in the Mizo Hills district was run by the superintendent (now known as the deputy commissioner) and his assistants through the chiefs and the circle interpreters. The chieftainship was abolished in 1955 by an Act of the Government of Assam. After the Constitution of India came into force in 1950 the administration of Lushai Hills was brought under the purview of the Assam Council of Ministers. But many of the Acts of the State legislature did not apply to this district. The district has been administered through certain brief and simple rules called Rules for Administration of Justice in Lushai Hills. Under these rules, the deputy commissioner was the head of criminal and civil justice. He also exercised the powers of the district civil and sessions judge. The Criminal Procedure Code applied to the district only in spirit and in so far as it was applicable to the circumstances of Lushai Hills. The administration of justice is always to be conducted in the most expeditious and the most simple manner.

LOCAL AUTONOMY

Under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India the Mizo District Council was set up in 1952. The main functions of the District Council, legislative and executive, were on the following subjects :— (1) allotment, occupation and use of lands, (2) forests, (3) regulation of *jhums*, (4) establishment of village councils and town committees, (5) inheritance of property, (6) marriage and social customs. The District Council could establish primary schools, dispensaries, markets, cattle pounds, ferries, fisheries, roads and waterways and could prescribe the language of primary education. The District Council could levy taxes on professions, trades and employment, on animals, vehicles and boats, and on entry and sale of goods, etc. It also controlled money lending and trading by non-tribals. The Pawi-Lakher area was given autonomous administration when the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council was set up in 1953. The functions of

this Regional Council are more or less the same as those of the District Council excepting that it does not control primary education.

Both the District and the Regional Councils have their own courts for trial of civil suits and criminal cases between the parties all of whom belong to the scheduled tribes of the area. They have set up village councils in all the villages for local administration in the subjects assigned to the District/Regional Council by the Constitution. The village councils also function as village courts for trial of minor offences. The District/Regional Council and the village councils are elected on the basis of adult suffrage.

The District/Regional Council had a Chief Executive Member and a few Executive Members who were collectively responsible to the council which functioned as a legislature. These councils had been set up to safeguard the customs and traditions of the tribes, to protect them from exploitation and to allow them to have autonomous administration in matters special to their way of life.

With Mizoram becoming a Union Territory the administration has been suitably changed and has become fully autonomous.

GROUP CENTRES

Under the civil administration there are now three sub-divisions *viz.*, Aijal Sadar, Lungleh and Pawi-Lakher with headquarters at Saiha. There is a very significant change in the pattern of civil administration in the villages after the disturbances of 1966. To facilitate operation of the security forces, to afford protection to the villages and to give opportunities for better extension services, small villages were brought together and grouped in as one village, generally by the roadside. These grouped villages are called Group Centres. The average population in a centre is 2,500 although there are centres having population of over 7,000. Each centre is under an administrative officer who is assisted by extension officers for various development activities. There is a pharmacy in the centre, generally with a pharmacist in charge and an auxiliary nurse midwife to assist him. A group of centres has a doctor to supervise. Service cooperatives are being organised in all the centres. Each centre has also a civil supplies godown. The entire Lungleh sub-division, the western part of the Pawi-Lakher sub-division and most of the Aijal sub-division

have been grouped. During the time of shifting the affected people were given rehabilitation grant of Rs. 400 to Rs. 500. They were also given free rations.

WELFARE MEASURES

At present there are 102 Group Centres which have a population of about 2,40,000. Of the balance, 45,000 live in Aijal, Lungleh and Saiha and 36,000 live in ungrouped villages. To facilitate civil supplies and extension work the grouped villages have now been brought under a central village and an administrative officer has been placed in charge of a group of villages. The civil administration headed by the deputy commissioner is geared to welfare activities like civil supplies and development work through the village administrative structure now set up all over the Territory, including the remotest southern tip. In the villages the village councils headed by the president of the village council help the administration in all matters including maintenance of law and order, implementation of relief measures and development activities.

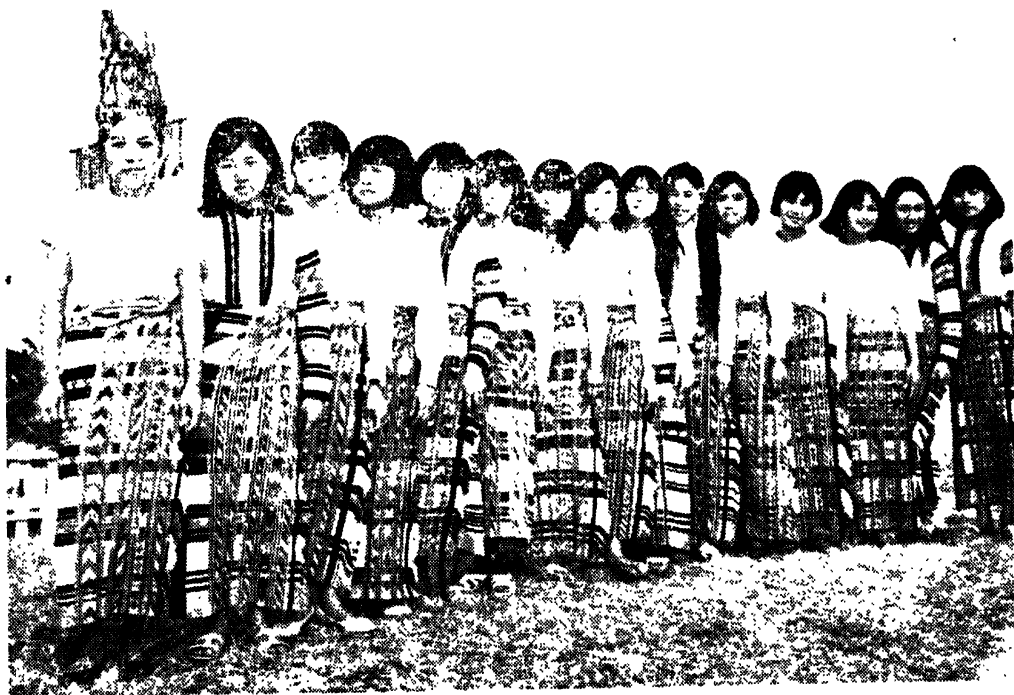
Civil supplies is one of the main functions of the administration in Mizoram now. The Territory produces only about half of its food requirements. Cereals and almost all other essential commodities like salt, sugar, pulses, mustard oil and kerosene oil have to be brought from outside. There is a huge transport fleet of 300 trucks and jeeps under the deputy commissioner which transport these commodities from Silchar to the interior centres. As many interior centres are far from the roads, these commodities are airdropped in more than 50 centres in the interior of the Territory. Since the disturbances of 1966, every year the Government brings in about 15,000 tonnes of food and other commodities. As the people do not have the necessary purchasing power, bulk of these commodities are issued free to the people or against work done under Test Relief or Employment Generation Schemes. Unless there is a sharp change in the economy of the Territory the main concern of the administration will continue to be the civil supplies and the relief operation.

The people in Mizoram pay house tax to the administration. The Government has not levied any other tax. Income tax does not apply to the scheduled tribes. Sales tax is also not levied in Mizoram. The Territory gets financial grants from the Union Government.

Two Mizo chiefs



*A group of Mizo girls in
their traditional costumes*





*A modern Mizo girl. The
Mizos are fast adopting
the western mode of life.*



*A Mizo belle in
her festive dress*



A Lakher couple. Lakhers have their own distinct customs, culture and language.



An old Mizo woman with her pipe. Mizos—men and women alike—are inveterate smokers.



Paddy being husked. Rice is the principal crop and staple food of the people.

6. DEVELOPMENT

THE CONDITIONS in Mizoram offer great scope and opportunity for economic development. The people are educated and advanced. They are liberal and accept the new modes and categories of development. But it is also a challenge because of the almost complete lack of infrastructure of development. Terrains are extremely difficult, communication is primitive and resources are yet unsurveyed. In the British days, the administration was mainly involved in the maintenance of law and order. Welfare and development activities were only marginal. With the implementation of the Five Year Plans after Independence, development programmes in all spheres were taken up in the area. During the First Plan Rs. 63.02 lakhs, during the Second Plan Rs. 210.83 lakhs and during the Third Plan Rs. 411.42 lakhs, making a total of Rs. 685.27 under the three Plans, were spent in the former Mizo Hills district.

In view of the backward condition of the area, the Planning Commission took up a Special Development Plan in 1963. Under this Plan to accelerate the process of development during the last three years of the Third Plan an additional amount of Rs. 150.32 lakhs was spent in all the spheres of development activities.

There are 9 Community Development Blocks in Mizoram with headquarters at Aijal, Kolasib, Mamit, Serchhip, Saitual, Champhai, Lungleh, Hnahthial and Lawngtlai. An additional Block is functioning at Saiha to look after the more backward areas in the Pawi-Lakher region.

The development process suffered two serious setbacks. The famine of 1959 caused serious damage to the economy of the district. By the time it could recover from the shock of the famine, the large-scale disturbances in 1966 brought all the development activities to a standstill. The C.D. Blocks in the interior stopped functioning and the staff of different development departments were withdrawn from the interior to the headquarters. By 1970 the climate of development returned with gradual restoration of normalcy in the area. Now the

grouped villages have become the centres of development. Agriculture, soil conservation, education, cooperation, communication, medical and other development departments are concentrating on all-round development of the Group Centres. The ungrouped villages are being looked after from some central locations in the ungrouped areas.

AGRICULTURE

Jhum or shifting cultivation is the principal method of cultivation in Mizoram. In January every year the village council selects a suitable area of jungle for cultivation during the year. Following the principles adopted during the chieftainship, the president and the members of the village council get the *jhum* plots of their choice. The others get their plots by ballot. Once the *jhum* has been selected, the cultivators will cut the trees and clear the jungles with *dao* and axe. By May the jungles will be cleared and the felled trees, plants and grasses will be dry. These are then burned and the ashes soak in by first rains to provide manure for the field. In later part of May the cultivators sow the seeds digging with the *dao* shallow holes in a row. Mixed cropping of maize, rice, vegetables like pumpkins, beans, cucumber, brinjals, arum, chillies, etc., cotton and tobacco is practised. During the monsoon the main task of the cultivator is weeding. Just after the monsoon the maize is harvested. Rice, the principal crop, is harvested in November in most of the areas of the Territory. In the west an early variety of rice is grown which is harvested in August.

The *jhum* cycle, i.e., the period by which time the villagers return to the same location for cultivation, has decreased from 10 years to 4 years, in the last four decades. The thicker the jungle, the better is the prospect of harvest. Hence with the shortening of the *jhum* cycle the produce has become correspondingly less.

For improvement of agriculture several steps have been taken. In every Group Centre terracing has been introduced to bring the hilly terrain under permanent cultivation. All the available flat stretches are being put under cultivation. A 2,000-hectare Central State Farm has been set up at Lokhicherra. A 405-hectare Integrated Agriculture and Veterinary Farm under the C.D. programme was established in 1970 at Thingwl. Cooperative agricultural farms

have been organised in all available lands in the south and the south-west. At Puankhai, Demagiri, Borapansuri, New Jagnasuri, Bedsuri—all along the western borders, such cooperative farms are being organised. In the south, the Palak Lake area is being exploited for such organised group farming. Improved seeds of hill paddy are distributed liberally every year. Improved implements, fertilizers and pesticides are also distributed throughout the Territory. The cultivators in Mizoram are eager to practise improved methods and are utilising fully all the available inputs. Special attention is being given to horticulture and cash crops like sugarcane. The cultivators are also encouraged to give up shifting cultivation in favour of settled agriculture and facilities are given to establish permanent farms.

Soil conservation measures are of special significance in Mizoram where the hills are being denuded by *jhuming*. Soil conservation schemes include cash crop plantation and afforestation. Cash crops like coffee, cocoa, rubber, cardamom and cashew nut have been planted in selected areas by the department. The cultivators are also encouraged to take up such plantations individually. Coffee has shown good potentials of success in the Mizo Hills.

The Mizos used to keep mithuns, pigs, goats and dogs. Now the livestock consists mainly of pigs and fowls. Under the development programme, Yorkshire breed of pigs was introduced in the area. Within a few years this breed has become very popular; it has replaced the indigenous breed almost completely. Similarly better exotic varieties of birds have been introduced to replace the fowls of local breed. Veterinary dispensaries have been set up in the interior centres. Some private cattle farms have also come up which are being assisted by the Government. Animal husbandry has great scope of development in the Territory.

COOPERATION

The cooperative movement was launched in the Mizo Hills in 1959. Since then service, industrial, handloom weaving, consumers' and farming cooperatives have been organised all over the Territory. As the Mizo society inculcates cooperative spirit, the development of cooperatives in the economic field has achieved easy success in the area.

INDUSTRY

There is no major industry in Mizoram. Raw materials are available for paper mill and fruit processing industries. A paper mill is being set up under the public sector in Cachar district and it will involve utilisation of bamboos from Mizoram. The agriculture department is setting up a fruit processing plant at Vairengte.

The Mizos are good artisans. The women weave beautiful clothes. The men are very good blacksmiths and carpenters. Basket and hat-making is also very popular in the Territory. In 1963 a Rural Industries Project was started in Aijal. Under this project, schemes for training in carpentry, blacksmithy, tailoring, knitting, etc., have been taken up. Peripatetic handloom units also impart training in weaving in the interior villages. For sericulture, mulberry gardens were started in several places. During the disturbances these gardens could not be properly cared for; attempts are now being made to revive them.

COMMUNICATION

The public works department has been in existence in this Territory for a long time. But much headway could not be made in road construction because of the huge cost involved in making roads in such hilly terrain and because the monsoon makes it very difficult to maintain the roads. The Border Roads Organisation started building roads in the area in 1963. So far, they have made the main north-south road from Silchar to Lungleh, running 430 km. from the plains of Cachar to Lungleh through Aijal and 19 major Group Centres. This is an all-weather black-topped road on which cars can ply. From this road, two east-west radial fair-weather roads have been constructed, one connecting Champhai on the Burma border, and another connecting Demagiri on the Bangladesh border. More roads are under construction by the Border Roads Task Forces, connecting Tuipuibari in the west and Tipaimukh in the north with Aijal and connecting Tuipang in south-east with Lungleh. The PWD is constructing roads between Aijal and Thenzawl (103 km.) in the middle of the Territory and Kanmun and Demagiri (240 km.) on the western border. Apart from BRTF and PWD, a massive road construction programme has been taken up by the administration under the Employment Generation Scheme. Under this scheme, the villagers take up the construc-

tion works during the lean agricultural season and work under the supervision of the administrative officers of the respective Group Centres. During the two years of the scheme, 644 km. of jeepable roads have been constructed, providing employment to the people and reducing the cost of civil supplies to the interior where they had otherwise to be airdropped.

Before the disturbances the area was well covered by post offices. Now post offices are being reopened in the interior. There are two telephone exchanges, one at Aijal and the other at Lungleh. A programme of connecting all the interior centres by civil wireless system will be implemented soon.

POWER

At present there are five diesel power stations in the Territory to generate electricity mainly for local domestic consumption. These are at Aijal, Lungleh, Kolasib, Serchhip and Hnahthial. The main high voltage line is expected to reach Aijal from the hydel power station at Barapani within two years. It is also possible to tap the water power of the fast hilly streams to have mini hydel projects in the Territory.

HEALTH

The Mizo people are well-built and healthy. In the western part, however, there are incidents of malaria in the lower valleys. In 1947 there were only 24 hospital beds in the area, now there are 400 beds in seven hospitals. In addition to expanding the present hospitals at Aijal and Lungleh, medium-size hospitals are being set up by the Government at Demagiri, Champhai and Saiha. In each of the Group Centres there is a pharmacy. Doctors, pharmacists, nurses and midwives are posted in the interior to cover the entire Territory. Special programmes like National Malaria Eradication Programme, Small Pox Eradication Programme, etc., have also been taken up. Recently six mobile dispensaries have been put into use.

Scarcity of water is acutely felt all over Mizoram because of the situation of the villages on the hill tops and the drainage through fast flowing rivers which drain out the water very quickly to the plains. In Aijal town there are two schemes of water supply. The emergency

water supply scheme to supply water to about 12,000 people has already been implemented. The permanent scheme which involves drawing water from the Dhaleswari river, 24 km. away from the town, through seven pumping stages, is nearing completion. Similar schemes for supply of water by gravity or pumps have been taken up in 15 Group Centres. A crash scheme to provide drinking water in 30 Group Centres has also been taken up. Now the people have to depend mostly on rain water collected during the monsoon from the roofs of the houses and also on sources like springs which often dry out. It will be a long time before water supply can be arranged in all the villages in the Territory. In the meantime small *ad hoc* schemes like cementing the water points, crection of small reservoirs at the collection points in the streams or springs and some improvised way of bringing the water as near as possible to the villages are being implemented.

EDUCATION

Education has spread very fast in Mizoram after Independence. The number of students in primary schools now stands at 53,000 as against 16,000 in 1947. In 1947 there were 22 middle schools and 2 high schools; now there are 143 middle schools and 38 high schools. The enrolment in middle schools is six times and that in the high schools ten times more than what they were in 1947. During the disturbances a number of schools had been closed down in the interior. These have been opened again. Three colleges, of which one is a Government-run degree college, have been established in the Territory. The Government gives liberal grants to the schools for maintenance and for *ad hoc* purposes like furniture, text books, equipment, playground, etc. Many of the students get scholarships under the scheme for scholarships to tribal students. The medium of instruction in the primary and middle stages is Mizo but in the high schools it is English, although Mizo as a language is taught up to the degree classes in the colleges.

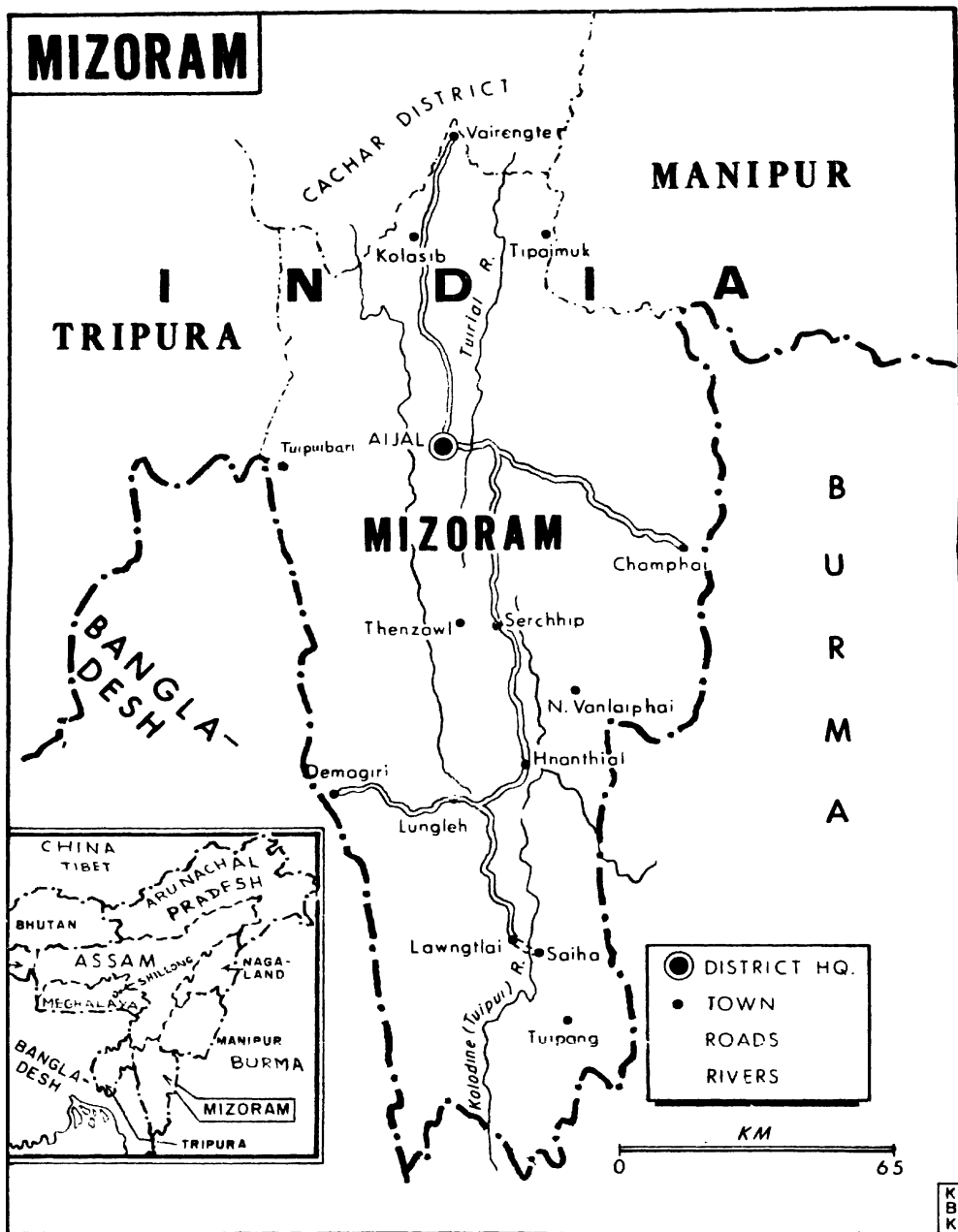
Two weekly newspapers are published by the Government for dissemination of information and news. The *Tunlai Chanchin* is published from Aijal and the *Khawvel* is published from Lungleh. There is an All India Radio station at Aijal which broadcasts programmes

in Mizo. The local publicity department and the Field Publicity unit of the Government of India arrange publicity for the plans and programmes of the Government. Community radio sets have been distributed. Film shows are organised in the interior of the Territory showing the important events and trends in development.

TRADE AND COMMERCE

Before Independence the villages in the southern and the western areas of Mizoram had trade and commerce with Bengal which would get rubber, cane, bamboo, timber, cotton and tobacco from the Mizo Hills. After Partition the only channel of trade and commerce was through Cachar district. Mizoram has to get from outside most of the consumer articles including rice. The Territory has marketable surplus of orange, pineapple, banana and other fruits, chillies, ginger and cotton. The present deficit economy of the Territory can be put right if more horticultural and cash crops are produced and storage, processing, transportation and marketing are facilitated.

With the integrated approach to an accelerated process of development, it is expected that Mizoram will soon have a self-sufficient economy. The Mizo people are eager for development, extension agencies are at work and new opportunities are being opened up. The climate for social and economic development has been created and these remote and enchanting hills are alive with new expectations and a bright hope for the future.



Based upon Survey of India map with the permission of the Surveyor General of India.

Government of India 1972

The territorial waters of India extend into the sea to a distance of twelve nautical miles (22.224 Kilometres) measured from the appropriate base line.

The boundary of Meghalaya shown in this map is as interpreted from the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act, 1969, but yet to be verified.

Mizoram or the Land of the Highlanders, which is strategically situated in the north-eastern corner of the country, first hit the head lines in 1966 with the revolt of the tribal people caused by famine, misguided leadership and foreign instigation. The Government has been adopting a dual policy of curbing violence and bettering the lot of the people. The area, which was formerly a district of Assam, was made a Union Territory in January 1972, so as to ensure its more autonomous growth. Mizoram presents a complex picture of difficult terrain, backward economy and a population noted for its high literacy, westernized outlook, hard work and a lust for life. A C Ray, IAS, who is working in the Territory, writes here about the colourful land and its charming tribes with intimate knowledge and sympathy.

PUBLICATIONS DIVISION
Ministry of Information And Broadcasting
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