

END OF HMAR AUTONOMY MOVEMENT IN MIZORAM

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Abstract: The question of autonomy movement under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India has a long history in Mizoram. The demand for autonomy by the Hmar, otherwise called as Manipur-based Hmar by the Mizo, is not the lone one. Earlier, autonomy under the Sixth Schedule had been granted to the Chakma, Lai and Mara communities inhabiting the southern region of the State. The autonomy demand of the Hmar people in Mizoram has been over 30 years. Following the signing of the Mizo Peace Accord in 1986, the Hmar tribes spearheaded their movement demanding creation of Autonomous District Council (ADC) for them in the north-eastern fringes of Mizoram State. For a long time, the demand for an ADC by the HPC (D) militant group is not yet settled. However, of late, the HPC (D) faction led by H. Zosangbera dropped its demand for ADC leading to the signing of the Memorandum of Settlement with the Mizoram Government. It seemed that the Hmar problem ended with the peace pact. This Paper intends to analyse the course of Hmar autonomy movement in Mizoram leading to the signing of the peace pact along with concluding remarks.

Key Words - Discontentment, Ethnic unrest, Ethnic identity, Sixth Schedule, Autonomy movement, Autonomous District Council, Memorandum of Settlement.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Mizoram, the *twenty-third* full-fledged State of the Indian Union, constitutes a part of *north-east India* comprising eight States and is the abode of several ethnic groups of people. Over 95 per cent of the population is of diverse tribal origins. The *Mizo* constitutes the majority community. Besides *Mizo*, the southern parts have *Chakma, Lai, Mara* and *Pang*, the eastern parts with *Hmar* and *Paite* and the western fringes with *Bru*. However, in the 1961 Census, “Population of all tribes of Mizoram was grouped under *Mizo (Lushai)* tribe excepting *Hmar, Pawi, Lakher, Thado* and *Chakma*”.¹ As such, “There are ethnic groups in Mizoram who do not call themselves *Mizo*”.² The *Bru (Reang)* and the *Chakma (Takam)* in particular would like to distinguish themselves from the dominant *Mizo*.

II. AUTONOMY DEMAND IN MIZORAM:

The *Sixth Schedule* has been in force in the tribal/hills areas of the present *north-eastern States* since when the *Constitution* of India came into effect in 1950. Under the *Sixth Schedule* provisions, the *Autonomous District Councils* and *Regional Councils* can be established to fulfil the aspirations of the tribal people to a great extent. This special scheme of separate *Administrative set up* or *Autonomous Body* build up in the hills areas for the tribals was incorporated in the *Constitution* in order to meet their demands for *regional autonomy* in all matters that may allow them continue to follow their traditional way of life.³

Past experiences testified that demand for “*Autonomous District Council*” by non-dominant tribal groups is a “*common feature in the hill districts of north-eastern states*”.⁴ As such, Mizoram, being a part of the region, is also not an exception to it.

Studies have shown that at different times Mizoram's southern, north-eastern and of late western areas have been under ethnic unrest as some of the ethnic tribes are with certain demands. Some sections of the *Chakma, Hmar, Mara, Pawi, Pang* and *Paite* had asserted their distinct identity while the *Bru* problem sparked off recently. *J.K. Patnaik* observes that "There are numerous small groups...and were engaged in insurgency... There are around nine such groups which have been engaged in insurgent activities that have implications for the State of Mizoram."⁵

By the time when Mizoram became *Union Territory* in January 1972, the *Chakma*, the *Lakher*, and the *Pawi* were not fully satisfied with their existing *Pawi-Lakher Regional Council (PLRC)* political status under the provision of the *Sixth Schedule* but wanted the benefits of the emerging new political status. This ultimately compelled the leaders of the *PLRC* to demand for separate *political unit* of their own. Although their demand for creation of a separate *Union Territory* was rejected, the *Indian Government* accepted their next demand the creation of three *Regional Councils*⁶ for themselves.

Ultimately, the three *Regional Councils* were converted into three separate *ADCs* for the *Chakma*, the *Lakher* and the *Pawi* respectively in the then *Chhimituipui District* to cater the needs as well as to safeguard the interests of these minority tribes in the southern region of the State. They are *Chakma Autonomous District Council, Lakher Autonomous District Council* and *Pawi Autonomous District Council*. All the three *autonomous bodies* were constituted for their all-round socio-economic development. Today, the three ethnic groups are enjoying special status under the *Sixth Schedule* since 1972 by running their own *ADC* for governance but feel sidelined by the mainstream. Hence, there has been rising demand for *greater autonomy and powers*.

In fact, "The reaction of the mainstream *Mizo* people towards the formation of the three *District Councils* was not very happy. Because they feared that this would lead to 'petty' tribal feelings".⁷

Other minorities of the *Chhimituipui District* also felt that they were neglected by the *District Authorities* and the *Mizoram Government*.⁸ The *Pang* people, after having political consciousness for their future aspects, formed a political party called the *United Pang People's Party (UPPP)* on 10 January 1974. The same year, the *Pang* along with other smaller tribes like *Bawm, Reang* and *Tlangau* living in the south-western side of the erstwhile *Mizo Hills District* asserted for their rights by *Memoranda* demanding for *autonomy* to the tune of a *Region* or a *District*. The demand was made following the constitution of the three *ADCs* for the *Chakma, Lakher* and *Pawi* tribes by re-organizing the *PLRC* in the *Mizo Hills District* and particularly after seeing the *Chakma* people within Mizoram got such separate *autonomous political unit* despite strong opposition from the *Mizo*. But, the demand of the *Pang* people was not conceded at all.

The *Bru* people, however, then remained silent to claim any separate *political position* for their community. "Unfortunately, the *Bru* didn't have any voice at that time and did not express their needs or desires for a separate *political status*. This was mainly caused by lack of education and of consciousness about their ethno-political condition and place in their inhabited State".⁹

However, the real issues of discontentment are visible mainly in the two minority ethnic communities of *Bru* and *Hmar*. Though many considered Mizoram as the only *Island of Peace* in the burning north-east India, the *Bru* and the *Hmar* areas has been under unrest for several years. There have been armed rebellions in the western fringes by the *Bru* while in the eastern part by the *Hmar*.

The ethnic unrest might perhaps be fuelled by the economic deprivation of the areas as well as economic anonymity, each battling for ethnic identity under the *Sixth Schedule*. According to *J.K. Patnaik* "The reason for such occurrences is the nature of development ushered in, as well as due to the composition of the demography of the State. The issues pertaining to the *Bru, Chakma, Hmar* and other ramifications in the State cannot be pushed under the carpet. They may seem to be small in intensity and number. They may be confined to certain areas of the State. They need, however, to be attended to immediately without any rancor".¹⁰

III. THE HMARS:

The ethnic *Hmar* tribe scatters over a large area in the *north-east States* of India including *Chittagong Hill Tracts* and *Myanmar*. In the *north-east*, the *Hmar* community is found in *Barak Valley* of *Cachar* and *Karbi Anglong* and *Dima Hasao* of *North Cachar Hills Districts* of *Assam*. The population also resides in the *south Manipur's Churachandpur* district, newly created *Pherzawl* and *Jiribam* districts including a few

in *Tamenlong* district. The *Hmars* in Meghalaya State settled mostly in the districts of *East Khasi Hills (Shillong)* and *East Jaintia Hills*. In *Tripura*, they lived in *Darchawi*, a village on the Mizoram-Tripura border. In Mizoram, the *Hmars* concentrated mostly in the *north* and *north-eastern* part of the State. They live mostly in the *hills-borders* between these states. Although *Hmar areas* are in different administrative divisions, they are geographically well-connected. They are *Scheduled Tribes* recognised in 1956. Majority of the *Hmars* are now *Christians*.¹¹

Generally the *Hmar* community is often considered and clubbed under the broader *Chin-Kuki-Mizo* group of tribes. People often referred the *Hmars* as *Chin* in Myanmar, *Kuki* by the Bengali, *Old Kuki* by the British and *Mizo* during the *Mizo Union Movement* in Mizoram. But the so-called *Hmar* people do not consider themselves to fall under such umbrella terms.¹²

They claimed themselves to be the first settlers of the present Mizoram State and considered as the original inhabitants of the *northern portion* of the then *Mizo Hills District*¹³ as can be seen by the *Hmar* names of many villages and rivers in the *Champhai* area of the State, bordering Myanmar. With the arrival of other *Mizo* groups, the *Hmars* spread out to other parts of the region.¹⁴

In the case of Mizoram, the exact population of the *Hmars* is not known. One important reason is that many of them found not speaking the *Hmar* language. However, according to the first *Census of India* in 1901, there were 10411 *Hmar* populations in the State. Surprisingly after 60 years, in the 1961 Census, the population came down to 3118 only. As per the 1971 *Census Report*, there were 4524 *Hmars*, 13102 *Hmars* in 1981, 12535 *Hmars* in 1991, and 18155 *Hmars* in 2001 Census. In the last *Census Report* in 2011, the total *Hmar* population in Mizoram is 29587 while State's population is 10.91 lakhs.¹⁵

IV. THE HMAR AUTONOMY MOVEMENT:

The *Hmar* living in Mizoram are divided into *two*. One section of *Hmar* living in the *central part* of Mizoram have merged and identified themselves as *Mizo*. They often have forgotten their own language following *inter-tribal marriages* and *Christianity*. They do not appreciate their political alienation from the *Mizo* population. Many of them have been involved in the *Mizo National Front (MNF)* armed movement. The other group of *Hmar* who often demand for *Autonomous Hills District* refused to be identified themselves as *Mizo* and have been neutral to the *MNF* movement. However, bulk of the *Hmar* population is introduced themselves as *Mizo*.¹⁶

The *Hmars* had already made a cry for *homeland* way back in 1967 under the banner of *Hmar National Union (HNU)* and after a long interval; the call was renewed again in December 1986 with the launching of the *Hmar People's Convention (HPC)* within Mizoram.¹⁷

To recall here, till 1949, the *Hmar* wholeheartedly accepted the term *Mizo*. Initially, many *Hmars* supported the movements in Mizoram. They took active part in such integration demands led by *Mizo Union (MU)* and *MNF*. They supported and joined the *MU*, the first political party in Mizoram formed in 1946. Various units of the *MU* were set up outside the *Mizo Hills District*. They formed the *Manipur Mizo Union (MMU)* thinking that the *party* would look after the interest of the *Hmar* people of Manipur and press the case of the *Hmars* to get the *Hmar-inhabited* areas included in the erstwhile *Lushai Hills District*. However, the *Hmar* area of *Churachandpur District* of Manipur was excluded from the *Lushai Hills District*. This had its repercussion in Mizoram too. The *Hmar* people, out of frustration, withdrew their support in bulk from the *MU* and dissociated themselves from the *party*. In the 1950s, various *Hmar* political organisations were founded. In 1950, the *Hmar Mangolian Federation* was formed. The name was changed into *Hmar National Congress (HNC)* in its first *Convention* held in 1954 at *Parbung* village of Manipur, and again changed into *Hmar National Union (HNU)* in its second *Convention* held in 1956 after the *HNC* and *MMU* members merged to form the group. The *HNU* submitted a *Memorandum* to the *State's Organisation Commission* seeking the integration of all the *Hmar-inhabited areas* in Manipur with those in Assam and Mizoram into a *single administrative unit*. The *HNU* asked the *Government of India* to create an *Autonomous Hmar Hills District* for them by carving out portions of *North Mizoram*, adjoining *Churachandpurur area* of Manipur and *Southern belt of Cachar and North Cachar Hills District* of Assam.¹⁸

The demand for *Hmar District* gained momentum during 1965 and 1966. The *HNU* movement was supported by the *Hmar* people of *Mizo Hills District*. As advised by the *HNU* leaders of Manipur, many *HNU Units* were accordingly set up in the villages of *North Mizoram*. However, due to *MNF* insurgency,

those *HNU Units* had to stop functioning. The *MNF leaders* asserted that “*The MNF was the sole political party in which the rights and solidarity of all the Mizo and territorial integrity of all the Mizo-inhabited areas into one administrative unit could be achieved only through MNF movement. There would be no question of setting up of other political parties...invited the Hmar people not to organize any political party other than MNF*”. This *MNF statement* touched the hearts of the *Hmars*. The *Hmars*, in return with a hope to integrate all *Hmar* inhabited areas in *Assam, Manipur and Mizoram* under the umbrella of *Greater Mizoram*, joined the *MNF insurgency* movement in 1966. The *Hmars* had actively participated in the *MNF* uprising in the 1960s. Things had been going normal till 1978. However, soon the *Hmars* in *North Mizoram* felt that integration of all *Mizo* ethnic groups under one *Government* could never be achieved. The *Hmar* politics was revived and formed the *Hmar National Union, Mizoram* in 1979. This was also banned by the *MNF*. Thus, the feeble *Hmar politics* was ended again.¹⁹

Since then till the signing of the *Mizo Peace Accord*, the rise of self-assertion of various ethnic identities was found almost absent as different groups gave added importance to the agitation led by *MNF* guerrilla leader *Laldenga* for a separate *homeland* for the *Mizos*. During the period of *MNF disturbances* for almost 20 years, under the umbrella for a *greater identity for Mizos*, there was no scope for inter-ethnic dissatisfaction to the point of fighting for ethnic identity other than the integrated demand of *Independence* for *Mizoram*. But, in the *post-Accord* period, the giant *MNF* ceased to be an *insurgent group* and has ended its pivotal role.

When the *Mizo Peace Accord* was signed on 30 June 1986 between the *Government of India* and the *insurgent MNF* ending the two-decades of *MNF* rebellion, the *Hmars* thought that all their lands in *Assam* and *Manipur* too would be included in the newly created *Mizoram State*. However, this was not the case,²⁰ much to their discontentment. In fact; the hopes and aspirations of the *Hmars* were not incorporated at the time of the signing of the *Mizo Accord*.²¹ In the finally born *Mizoram State*, the *Hmars* found themselves marginalized and disappointed with the contents of the *Mizo Accord*, as the *Accord* failed to address their demand for the creation of a *Greater Mizoram* under a *single administrative unit* by integrating all *Mizo-inhabited* areas outside *Mizoram*,²² i.e. in *Assam* and *Manipur*.

After the *Mizo Accord*, the scattered *Hmars* in *north-east* realized that their long cherished hope, *the unification of Hmar-inhabited areas of other States with Mizoram to form one administrative unit*, was completely turned down for the second time, the first being during the time of *Mizo Union party's* regime²³ which had demanded the unification of all *Mizo-inhabited areas* into a *single administrative unit*, but remained unfulfilled. Neither of these movements addressed the hopes and aspirations of the *Hmars*. This sharply shattered the hopes of the *Hmars* resulting in their disappointment.

The *Hmars* said that they were “*politically, socially, economically and perennially exploited and oppressed in their own land*”. Since their *rich culture, tradition, custom and language* found no *Government patronage* for their development in *Mizoram*, it is on the verge of virtual extinction in their own homeland. They felt that the severe economic imbalance makes rampant poverty in the *Hmar* areas as the *Hmars* living in *Northern Mizoram* had little access to basic amenities like *health, communication and transport* facilities. They also felt that they were neglected and treated as *aliens* by their (*Mizo*) kindred tribes and the *Government of Mizoram*. The educationally and economically advanced mainstream *Mizo* society dominated over administration and other fields which created a fear psychosis in the minds of the *Hmar* lest their identity was wiped out. So, the *Hmar* leaders rejected the *ideology of assimilation* as propounded by the *Mizo* speaking leadership. They were fighting against the very concept of absorption of the various *Chin-Kuki* people under the common appellation of *Mizo*.²⁴

According to *Hmar activists*; the *Mizoram* government pursued a policy of *Mizo chauvinism* and *forced assimilation*. Demanding recognition of *Hmar* rights was considered to be an attempt to disturb and destabilize *Mizo* unity and the process of building *Mizo* ethnicity. Resentment among the *Hmars* in *Mizoram* increased due to the exclusion of *Hmar-inhabited* areas from the newly created *Mizoram State* as well as the discriminatory and neglectful attitude of the *Mizoram* government towards *Hmar* areas within the State.²⁵

The *Hmars* contended that the *Peace Accord* granted complete statehood to *Mizoram* by addressing only the aspirations of the majority *Mizo* tribe. The *Accord* failed to address their primary demand of forming “*Greater Mizoram*” by integrating *Hmar-inhabited* areas in *Mizoram, Assam and Manipur* under a *single*

administrative unit. The *Mizo Accord* did not take into account and gave none of the State's smaller tribes any *administrative autonomy*²⁶ including the *Hmar* wish for *autonomy*.

Out of frustration of being neglected by their kindred tribes in Mizoram and the growing feeling of deprivation, a few section of *Hmar* community in Mizoram, who were trying to maintain its distinct identity in terms of *language, culture, tradition and customs*²⁷ then formed a new *political party* on ethnic lines called *Mizoram Hmar Association (MHA)* in July 1986. Significantly, the *MHA* came into existence just after the signing of the historic *Mizo Peace Accord*. Later, the *MHA* was, on 18 December 1986, renamed as the *Hmar Peoples Convention (HPC)* which came into existence as a political party.

According to *Immanuel Varte*, a *Hmar* academic and author of "*Hmar at the Crossroads*", a political history of the *Hmar* tribe, the *Hmars* viewed the *Mizo Accord* as a betrayal by the *MNF* and its leader *Laldenga* who had allegedly promised them, during their (*Mizo*) struggle, that any settlement with the Indian government would include the integration of all *Hmar* areas. However, when the *Mizo Accord* was signed many *Hmars* felt cheated denying their political aspirations in Mizoram two times. It was this alleged betrayal that led to a resurgence of the feeling perpetrated upon them and the formation of the *HPC*.²⁸ The *HPC* felt that the *Hmars* were left out of the "*peace accord*" that saw three ethnic minorities in the State the *Lai, Mara and Chakma* already had *autonomous district council* of their own.²⁹

The *HPC* revived their political campaign and advocated for the rights of members of the *Hmar* people. The *outfit*, since its inception, spearheaded a political movement for *self-governance* for the *Hmar* community concentrating across the *north and north-east* of Mizoram adjoining Manipur. The initial demand of the *HPC* was *autonomy* for a separate *ADC* under the *Sixth Schedule* in line with the *ADCs* of the *Lai, Mara and Chakma* communities in Mizoram. With this primary demand, began the real *Hmar* problem in Mizoram and it has been continuing since then.³⁰

In the beginning, the *HPC* adopted constitutional methods like submitting *Memorandum, contesting State assembly elections* in *Hmar-dominated* constituencies, organizing *peaceful bandhs, etc.* to achieve their demand. During 1987-88, the *HPC* submitted *Memoranda* to the *Governor* and the *Chief Minister* of Mizoram and the *Prime Minister* of India demanding the creation of a *Hmar ADC* in Mizoram in order to safeguard the rights and privileges of the minorities as envisaged in the Constitution of India. Their *Memoranda* highlighted imbalances in the planning and execution of development projects in the area, as well as discrimination and threats to the existence of their *identity, culture, tradition and language*. They also argued that a new *ADC* for the *Hmars* would pave the way for better, more efficient administration and economic development.³¹

On 5 October 1987, the first *Memorandum* was submitted to the *Governor* of Mizoram and another *Memorandum* to the *Union Government* demanding *ADC* for the *Hmars* consisting of 44 *villages and sub-towns* in the *North Mizoram*. But this too was not realised and there was no sign of consideration of their demand from the side of the State Government. It seemed that their cause was neglected and not taken seriously by the Government. The Mizoram Government did not accept the *HPC* demand on the ground that "*all tribes of Mizoram were one. We are all Mizo. So, there was no question of separate ADC*". This was very much resented by the *HPC* and took it as a sign of negligence and deception to make their efforts futile.³² Although the *HPC* was originally conceived as a political organisation to advocate the rights of the *Hmar* tribe, this marked the turning point prompting the *Hmars* to take up arms to spark off violence.

Soon, the *HPC* took up arms and went underground against the establishment. A new insurgency led by *HPC* has been surfaced in this pocket since May 1989 leading to armed violent activities and carrying out abductions and extortions in *Hmar-dominated* areas of *Assam, Mizoram and Manipur* which erupted and disturbed the *post-Accord Peace* in Mizoram, demanding *autonomy/safeguard* for the *Hmars* under an *ADC*. Since then the *Hmar* militant outfit has been fighting for *autonomy* as well as the community has been disputing with the larger *Mizo* community.

To counter the *Mizoram Armed Police (MAP)* offensive, the *Hmar Volunteer Cell (HVC)*, an armed wing, was formed. The first armed confrontation between the *HVC* and *MAP* occurred on 16 May 1989 at *Moniarkhal* in *Cachar district* of *Assam* where two *HVC* cadres and one *MAP* sub-inspector died. The *HPC* armed struggle for *autonomy* touched extreme levels of violence towards 1991. The *HPC* cadres abducted *tea executives* and triggered off a spate of extortions in the *Hmar-inhabited* areas of the States of *Mizoram, Assam and Manipur*. And there have been many cases of bloodshed and violence since then. The armed confrontation continued until 1992.³³

However, a breakthrough came in 1992 when the *HPC* leadership heeded to the call of the Mizoram government for talks to end the *Hmar* problem. After seven years of insurgency activities in the region and consequent to nine rounds of “*ministerial level peace talks*” between the Mizoram government and the rebel *HPC*, the then Congress-led Mizoram government signed a *Memorandum of Settlement (MOS)* on 27 July 1994 at *Aizawl* with the underground *Hmar* outfit. The *HPC* Chairman *Hmingchungnung* signed the *MoS* on behalf of the rebel group while *Lalfakzuala*, State’s Chief Secretary, on behalf of the Mizoram government. Earlier an *Agreement* was concluded between the two parties on 29 September 1993 to end the *HPC* insurgency problem. Following the signing of the *peace agreement*, in accordance with the provisions of the *peace accord*, the Government of Mizoram established the *Sinlung Hills Development Council (SHDC)* officially on 27 August 1997 within the State with adequate *autonomy* but without any *Constitutional* protection or *political autonomy* for the *Hmar* community³⁴ to suit the interests of the *Hmar* tribal for their *social, economic, cultural* and *educational* advancement under its jurisdiction. Eventually, 308 *HPC* militants, agreeing to give up arms, surrendered along with their arms in October 1994 with the hope that their demands would met in totality. They also agreed to take part in democratic elections.³⁵

The signing of the *MOS* brought the *HPC* insurgency activities to a halt and thereby brought temporary peace and the *HPC* joined the political mainstream yet again, though the pact was not well received by a large section of the *Hmar* population.³⁶ At the time of the signing of the *MoS*, some of the *HPC* leaders and cadres rejected the proposed *deal* as a political blunder. Because the disgruntled section of the cadres in the *HPC* outfit felt unsatisfied and unhappy with the terms and implementation process of the *Agreement*. They did not accept the *SHDC* but took it as against the larger aspiration of the *Hmar* people.³⁷

It was agreed that the *SHDC* would comprise the areas where *Hmars* made up a majority of the population. However, the demarcation of the *SHDC* area has not been settled, nor has the *Hmar* language been introduced as a *medium of instruction* in the *SHDC* areas. Meanwhile, it was said that the State has used a *divide-and-rule policy* by exploiting the internal differences among the *HPC* leadership and interfering in *Council* elections. With no statutory powers and limited funding, the *Council* became largely defunct. No election to the *Council* was held nor were there any socio-economic development. The Mizoram government did not implement the *accord* in totality.³⁸ Unfortunately, the agreement soon ran into rough weather and the *accord* was failed.

But, unfortunately a year later in 1995, soon after the signing of the *peace accord* in 1994, a disgruntled faction of the *HPC* leadership once again re-grouped and a splinter group was born. Those cadres who apparently dissatisfied and unhappy with the *peace accord* and the non-implementation of the *MoS*, parted ways from the *over-ground HPC*, took up arms and went underground again by floating another rebel group in 1995 called *Hmar Peoples Convention (Democratic)*, *HPC(D)* a breakaway faction of the *HPC*. *Lalhmingthang Sanate*, former *General Secretary of the erstwhile HPC*, was the founder of the *HPC (D)*. He formed the *HPC (D)* immediately after the surrender of the underground *HPC* cadres and their weapons to the *Authorities*. Thus, the *HPC (D)*, an offshoot of the erstwhile *HPC*, came into existence as fallout of dissatisfaction over the *peace accord* inked in July 1994.

Initially, the stated goal of the *HPC (D)* is to work towards development of the *Hmar* community living in the region and demand *Sixth Schedule* status to the *Hmar* areas. The militant outfit had demanded creation for a separate *ADC* in Mizoram under the *Sixth Scheduled* to be created for the *Hmar* community by carving out the *Hmar* dominated areas in the *north* and *north-eastern* parts of Mizoram adjoining southern Manipur and southern Assam.³⁹

Later, over the years, the *HPC (D)* rebel group gained in support and strength and has changed its purported objective/demand from an *ADC* within Mizoram to setting up a *separate homeland* for the *Hmar* community called “*Hmar Ram*” or “*Independent Hmar State*” claiming *Hmar-inhabited* areas of *Assam, Manipur* and *Mizoram*. The *HPC (D)* whose stated goal is to work towards development of the *Hmar* community living in this region has been fighting for an *independent Hmar State* and for democratically held elections.⁴⁰

V. EFFORTS FOR PEACE TALK:

In the beginning of 2007, the Mizoram government initiated a series of steps to bring the *HPC (D)* to the negotiating table. *Chaltonlien Amo*, a *Hmar* politician from Manipur, was also *delegated* to broker peace talks with the *HPC (D)*. In response, the *armed group* demanded tripartite talks between the *Central*

government, the *HPC (D)* and the *Mizoram* government. In November 2009, the *HPC (D)* submitted a *Memorandum* to the Home Minister of India urging the Indian government to immediately initiate *tripartite talks*, address the long-cherished political aspirations of the *Hmar* people in Mizoram and create a *Hmar Territorial Council* in Mizoram within the framework of the Indian Constitution without compromising the territorial integrity of the State saying that it had no intention of breaking away from it. ⁴¹

In February 2010, under the initiative of the *SHDC*, a meeting of *Village Councils* within the *SHDC* area constituted a *Peace Committee* to broker talks between *Mizoram government* and the *HPC (D)*. In April 2010, the Committee representatives met the Mizoram Chief Minister urging him to initiate *peace talks* with the *HPC (D)*. In October 2010, the *HPC (D)* approached the Mizoram government which agreed to a negotiation. On 11 November 2010, the *HPC (D)* entered a *Suspension of Operations (SoO) Agreement* for an initial period of six months with the Mizoram government. The *ground rules* were mutually agreed upon to ensure an effective *SoO* in the common interest of finding a peaceful political solution in Mizoram. A *Joint Monitoring Group* with equal representation from the *HPC(D)* and the Government of Mizoram would be set up to enforce an effective implementation of the *SoO* ground rules. The *HPC (D)* had the liberty to appoint any respectable person(s) to assist them in their dialogue with the Government. However, the *peace dialogue*, scheduled in January 2011, could not be started due to a plethora of differences, as the Mizoram government, among other things, questioned the inclusion of non-Mizoram citizens as representatives of the *HPC (D)*. The *SoO* expired on 11 May 2011 as the Mizoram government refused to extend it on the allegations that the *HPC (D)* was violating the *SoO*. After the *SoO* agreement was expired and with the non-extension of the *SoO* period, without any proactive interest on the part of the Government of Mizoram in extending the *SoO* period and resuming the *peace dialogue*, the *HPC (D)* declared that the *SoO* no longer exists. ⁴²

At this point, in September 2011, *Lalhmingthang Sanate*, the *HPC (D)* founder *President*, frustrated with the progress of the movement, decided to merge the *outfit* with the *Kuki National Organisation (KNO)*, a Manipur-based militant group. *Lalhmingthang Sanate*, without consulting other top leaders, signed the *Suspension of Operation (SoO)* along with the *Kuki* armed group in Manipur. The move was opposed by some sections of the *HPC (D)* and they passed a motion to impeach *Lalhmingthang Sanate*. He was expelled from being a *President* of the *HPC (D)* for signing *SoO* agreement against the interest of the *Hmar* militant group and on being impeached, replaced him with *H. Zosangbera*. This engendered a major split in the *HPC (D)* outfit which resulted in the formation of two *HPC (D)* factions, one led by *H. Zosangbera* while the other by *Lalhmingthang Sanate*. Since then, *Lalhmingthang Sanate*, who led the original *HPC (D)*, has been heading one faction of the *HPC (D)*. The *HPC (D)* faction led by *H. Zosangbera* decided not to join the *KNO* but to continue the armed struggle and his faction have been generally accepted by majority of the *Hmar* tribes as the absolute and actual *Hmar*-ethnic-based rebel outfit. The *Hmar* terror group has been active primarily in the *Hmar-inhabited* areas of *Churachandpur* and *Pherzawl* (newly created) districts of Manipur, *Cachar* and *North Cachar Hills* districts of Assam and Mizoram. ⁴³

But, this *HPC (D)* is the only active rebel outfit in Mizoram, waging a militant struggle and has been triggering and indulging in violent intermittent activities in Mizoram to press their demands from across the Manipur border. ⁴⁴

Over the years, both the Mizoram government and the *HPC (D)* rebel groups did not give up hopes to find an amicable solution to the long standing *Hmar* political problem. And, efforts were also not in vain.

During 2013, the Mizoram government and the *HPC (D)* militant outfit led by its Chairman *H. Zosangbera* held inconclusive peace talks on four occasions. On 14 August 2013, the last talks were held to extend the period of *six-month Ceasefire* made between the two which was expired on 31 July 2013. But the talks ended in a deadlock due to disagreement on the issue of extension of the period of *Suspension of Operations (SoO)* against the *Hmar* terror group. ⁴⁵

The fallout of the failed peace negotiations over the *SoO*, resulted in the ambush of a *team of legislators' convoy* by the *HPC (D)* guerrillas on 28 March 2015 near *Zokhawthiang hamlet* in North Mizoram along the Mizoram-Manipur border in which three policemen were killed and six civilians seriously wounded. A month after the ambush, the Mizoram police gunned down the mastermind of the ambush and a host of leaders of the militant outfit involved in the ambush were also arrested. ⁴⁶

In the following years, efforts had been made from the *people* and the *civil societies* to meet the Mizoram government and the *HPC (D)* rebel outfit again at the negotiating table for a lasting solution. The people of

the north-eastern part of Mizoram adjoining Manipur, who have been reeling under insurgency for years, made a number of *appeals* to the State government to bring *peace* in the area. During the celebration function of the 30th anniversary of the signing of the historic *Mizo Peace Accord* in 1986, a *meeting* of the leaders of *Village Councils*, *NGOs* and *Political Parties* there at *Vanbawng* village also deliberated on the quest for *Peace* in the insurgency-hit *SHDC* area. The meeting adopted a *resolution* demanding immediate commencement of *peace talks* between the Mizoram government and the *HPC (D)* militants thereby to reach an amicable solution to the *Hmar* problem. The *YMA Groups* in North Mizoram also approached the *Central Committee* of the *Young Mizo Association (YMA)*, *Aizawl* to initiate for talks between the State government and the *Hmar* militants for establishment of *peace* in North Mizoram. The *Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA)* that acts as *Interlocutor* then informed the State government about the *peace* overture.⁴⁷

Mizoram Home Minister *R. Lalzirliana* said “Though the government is firm in its earlier standpoint, it welcomes the *peace* overtures on the demand of the people that they are sick of being under disturbed area due to insurgency. For over 20 years the people of North Mizoram are under threats from the *Hmar* militants. *R. Lalzirliana* also said that the Mizoram government has warmly welcomed the proposed *peace* parley of the Manipur-based *HPC (D)* militant outfit on the request of the *YMA Groups*. The Mizoram government is willing to hold talks and will think of holding talks with *HPC (D)* if they agree with and fulfil the conditions made by the government. The government will soon communicate with the *HPC (D)* leaders and expected that the militants would also come forward with open arms so that we can engage and begin in negotiations expeditiously with the militant outfit. However, the government, unlike the previous parleys, wanted sincere talks so as to solve the political problems with the *Hmar* tribe. The *peace talks* will be meaningless if the *Hmar* militants keep on nagging their demand for the creation of *ADC* in their demand area in North Mizoram where *Hmar* peoples dominated.⁴⁸

The stage for holding *peace* parleys between the two was set where the talks would be held at the *official level* at the initial stage. Earlier, a senior police officer said “we have received positive responses from the leaders of the *Hmar* militant outfit over the State government’s *peace* overtures”. Mizoram government’s willingness for initiating *peace talks* was formally conveyed to the *HPC (D)* outfit having camps in neighbouring Manipur.⁴⁹

The *analysts* considered the willingness of *H. Zosangbera-led Hmar* rebel group to engage in talks with the Mizoram government as a crucial development. They said so far the outfit is the biggest and strongest *Hmar* group with popular mandate as far as the struggle in Mizoram is concerned. If an amicable and mutually accepted final *peace agreement* could be reached, it will signal the end of *Hmar* insurgency in Mizoram.

Altogether five rounds of *peace* parleys at *official level* and one round at the *political level* had been held between the Mizoram government and *H. Zosangbera* faction *HPC (D)* to reach the final path and after which a *Memorandum of Settlement (MoS)* was inked.

VI. OFFICIAL LEVEL PEACE TALKS:

Under strong pressures from *Civil Societies*, *Village Councils*, *Political Parties*, etc., after a stalemate of three years since August 2013 which had ended in an impasse over extension of *SoO* period, the real *peace talks* between the Mizoram government and the *H. Zosangbera-led HPC (D)* outfit resumed on 10 August 2016 at *Chaltlang Tourist Lodge*, *Aizawl*.⁵⁰

In the first round of *official level* talks, the six-member delegation of the *HPC (D)* was led by *Lalthalien* while the four-member State government’s delegation was headed by Additional Secretary for State Home Department *Lalbiakzama*.

In the very first round of talks, the *HPC (D)* delegates reiterated its earlier demand for *ADC* under the *Sixth Schedule* to resolve the *Hmar* political problem in Mizoram. On the side of the State government delegation, it emphasized on strengthening and upgrading the provisions of the *MoS* signed in 1994 between Government of Mizoram and the erstwhile *HPC* and the *HPC (D)* delegates were asked to submit *Charter of Demands* or *Draft Proposals* to the State government within *August* month to be tabled in the next round of talks. It was also agreed that the State government shall also submit alternatives if provision of the *Draft Proposals* are beyond the mandated position. Both the parties also agreed that mutual trust and

understanding shall form the baseline to further the peace process in bringing amicable solution to the *HPC (D)* problems.⁵¹

However, the State government rejected the demand for an *ADC* under the *Sixth Schedule*. The government had succumbed to this proposal in the earlier talks. To recall here, the Mizoram government had on a number of occasions declared that granting *ADC* was technically impossible and put forth a pre-condition that the demand should be *dropped*.⁵² Mizoram Home Minister *R. Lalzirliana*, while addressing a function, said that the State government would not agree with the demand for a separate *ADC* comprising *Hmar* areas adjoining Manipur in the on-going talks and could not give *ADC* to the *Hmar* militant. *Peace talks* were initiated after the government made it clear its stand not to agree to *ADC*. Speaking to *Reporters* at Aizawl, *R. Lalzirliana* strongly reiterated that the on-going *peace dialogue* will be meaningless if the militant keeps on demanding *ADC*. The *Hmar* people should consider Mizoram as their own State and develop the feeling of ownership.⁵³

Meanwhile, the *HPC (D)* delegation, on 5 September 2016, has submitted their *five-point Charter of Demands* to the State government. The demands included up gradation and strengthening of the *MoS* signed between the State Government and the erstwhile *HPC* in 1994 to suit the interests of the *Hmar* people, according *higher autonomy* and *power* to the existing *Sinlung Hills Development Council (SHDC)*, creation of an *autonomous body* to be known as *Sinlung Hills Autonomous Council (SHAC)* which shall have *legislative, executive* and *financial* powers in respect to *subjects* transferred to it. The proposed *autonomous Council* shall comprise 12 elected and 2 nominated members preferably from minority communities to be headed by *Chief Executive Member (CEM)*. The *Council* shall have four other *Executive Members (EMs)*, a *Chairman* and a *Deputy Chairman*.⁵⁴

The second round of *peace talks* was held on 5-6 October 2016. *Lalthalien*, the *HPC (D)* delegation leader said the main agenda of the negotiation was on the *five-point Charter of Demands* submitted to the State government. *Lalbiakzama*, who headed the government delegation, said “we discussed several important issues, especially the functioning of the *SHDC*”. It was during this round that a *Framework of Agreement* was worked out, drafted and signed by both the *delegates* to be presented to both Mizoram government and *HPC (D)* leadership and to be discussed on the negotiating table in the third round of talks.⁵⁵ *Lalbiakzama* expressed the hope that the coming talks would finalise the *framework of agreement* already deliberated.⁵⁶

The third round of *peace talks* was held on 16 December 2016. The *HPC (D)* delegation was headed by outfit’s working Chairman *L.T. Hmar* alias *Lalthanglien*. On this day, the *HPC (D)* surrendered arms and ammunitions taken from Mizoram police.

This time, surprisingly, there was an abrupt change on the part of the *HPC (D)* outfit. The *Hmar* rebel group which had since 1995 revived the demand for *autonomy* for creation of separate *ADC*, has ultimately agreed and dropped the demand for *autonomy* paving the way for a final solution to the *Hmar* imbroglio.⁵⁷ The *HPC (D)* decided to bring an end to the armed struggle after the Mizoram government agreed to the formation of *Sinlung Hills Council (SHC)* with more administrative autonomy.⁵⁸ In fact, the *HPC (D)* led by *H. Zosangbera* came to the negotiating table after agreeing to abandon its demand for a *separate ADC* under the *sixth schedule*.⁵⁹

Lalthalien who headed the *HPC (D)* delegation in the first and second round of parleys said that the State government has agreed in principle to fulfil a *five-point Charter of Demands* put forth by *HPC (D)*. *Lalbiakzama*, who headed the government delegation, said that a wide range of issues especially *up gradation* and *functioning* of *SHDC* was widely deliberated during the talks. According *higher autonomy* and *power* to the existing *SHDC* was the main agenda of the *Framework of Agreement* as the *HPC (D)* has dropped its demand for creation of separate *ADC*. In the *Peace Talks*, the points of the *Framework of Agreement* were discussed in detail and a general agreement reached between the two parties. The *HPC (D)* delegation leader *Lalthanglien* said that the demand for *Hmar ADC* was no longer included in the talks. He said that the Mizoram government has agreed for the setting up of *Sinlung Hills Council (SHC)* as put forward by *HPC (D)* in its *Charter of Demands*. We widely discussed on the power and functioning of *SHC*. However, no concrete decision has been taken on this regard as the parleys would be resumed in February 2017.⁶⁰

The fourth round of peace talks was held on 28 April 2017 and ended in a peaceful note. During the peace talk, both sides also deliberated over *power* and *functions* to be accorded to SHC, its *budget* and many other important issues.⁶¹

In the meantime, the Mizoram government was trying and making efforts to bring the *Lalhmingshang Sanate* faction HPC (D) based in neighbouring Assam on board. On 31 July 2017, a senior Home Department Official said State government was looking for an opportunity to rein in the HPC (D) faction led by *Lalhmingshang Sanate* to find long lasting peace in the State. The government wants to ensure that the faction also come over ground and include when a *peace accord* is signed with the HPC (D) faction led by *H. Zosangbera* with which the State government has been currently engaging in a series of peace talks.⁶² The official said the State government had decided and proposed to hold peace talks with *Lalhmingshang Sanate's* HPC (D) faction in the last part of August 2017 to find amicable solution to the vexed Hmar imbroglio. As a result, the fifth, also the last round of *official level* peace parleys between Mizoram government and *H. Zosangbera* faction HPC (D) scheduled to be held during July 2017 was deferred.

However, the efforts to include the HPC (D) faction led by *Lalhmingshang Sanate*, based in Assam had not bore any results so far.⁶³ Because, the outfit reiterated its demand for ADC. The outfit set pre-conditions for the propose talks like creation of separate ADC under the *Sixth Schedule* for the *Hmar* community in the *Hmar* concentrated areas in Mizoram and insisted to hold a *tripartite talks* involving the militants, State government and a senior official/representative from the *Centre*.⁶⁴ But the State government turned down the pre-conditions put forward by the outfit. State government said that Mizoram is a small State and can't afford creation of another ADC as demanded by *Lalhmingshang Sanate's* faction".⁶⁵ As a result, the proposed *peace talks* with *Lalhmingshang Sanate* had fizzled out and has been cancelled after the militant outfit fails to withdraw its conditions and backtrack from its stand.

After a hiatus of five months, the fifth round, also the last round of *official level* peace talks was held on 21-22 September 2017, ended on a peaceful and positive note and after which it has been elevated to *political level talks*. Earlier, the fifth round of peace talks has been made schedule to resume in July and August 2017 but was delayed as the State government had decided to rein in HPC (D) faction led by *Lalhmingshang Sanate*. The peace overture of the State government was snubbed by the *Lalhmingshang Sanate* faction by setting conditions unacceptable to the government.

Lalbiakzama said that this round of talks would be the last *official level talks*. Both sides were hopeful of the outcome of the *peace talks*.⁶⁶ The HPC (D) spokesperson *Lalthalien* said that all issues that required to be resolved in the *official level talks* were discussed and settled during this fifth round of talks. Both sides of the delegations had widely deliberated and approved and agreed in principle the draft of *Memorandum of Settlement* and *Sinlung Hills Council Bills* and also resolved to put up the same for final approval by the State government and the *Hmar Inpui* (apex body of Hmar).⁶⁷

The HPC (D) Working Chairman *Lalthanglien* alias *L.T. Hmar* said the *rank and file* of the HPC (D) have endorsed the proposed *framework of agreement*. The *Hmar Supreme House* would convene a meeting of the *Hmar* community in Manipur to explain the proposed agreement between HPC (D) and Mizoram government. However, the creation of the *Sinlung Hills Council* with more autonomy compared to the existing SHDC was not their main goal. What we wanted is an ADC under the *sixth schedule*. But the Mizoram government rejected the demand. We were accepting the wishes of the government.⁶⁸

In the meantime, in November 2016, the HPC (D) leaders had travelled to SHDC area and held public meetings over the *Framework of Agreement*. And on 8 November 2017, a *Consultative Meeting* was convened at *Sakawrdai*, the proposed *headquarters* of *Sinlung Hills Council*, over the proposed *draft MoS* and the *SHC Bill* under the aegis of *Hmar Inpui*, (*supreme house*) of the *Hmar* tribes. The *Consultative Meeting*, chaired by *Joseph Lalrothang* President *Hmar Inpui* general headquarters, was attended by *Hmar* political parties, representatives of *Village Councils* from 19 villages under the proposed SHC area, volunteers of the erstwhile HPC, *Hmar Student's* body, *leaders of HPC (D)* outfit, *Hmar Inpui* leaders, SHDC Chairman *Hmingchungnung*, representatives of various *Hmar* ethnic based *civil society organisations/bodies*, and other important *delegates* of the *Hmar* community. The meeting was called so in accordance with the State government's directive to hold *Consultative Meeting* of *Hmar* leaders under the aegis of *Hmar Inpui* over the drafts *MoS*. The *Consultative Meeting*, after prolonged review and deliberations, endorsed and approved in principle the *drafts of MoS* and *Sinlung Hills Council Bill, 2017*. But the meeting unanimously agreed to make an appeal to the State government for rectification in some

clauses of the proposed *MoS drafts bills* based on some suggestions or changes made for improvement at the meeting over the proposed *draft Bills* which will be tabled by the HPC (D) delegates at the proposed political level talks.⁶⁹

VII. POLITICAL LEVEL PEACE TALKS:

After a series of five rounds of *official level talks* commencing from 10 August 2016, the *political level peace talks*, also the last round of *peace parley*, were held on 7-8 March 2018 at the State guest house in Aizawl under cordial atmosphere and mutual trust. Earlier, the resumption of the proposed *political level parley* was planned to be held before Christmas 2017 but was deferred. It was delayed as Mizoram Chief Minister constituted a three-member committee of legislators to examine the *draft legislation* on the formation of *Sinlung Hills Council*. Again, the proposed *political level talk* has also been postponed from initially scheduled for 5 March to 7 March 2018 as requested by HPC (D) delegates according to their convenience. The Mizoram government's 10-member delegation was led by legislator *Lalrinmawia Ralte*, the Political Adviser to the Chief Minister Lalthanhawla, while the 10-member HPC (D) delegation was headed by HPC (D) working chairman *L.T. Hmar* alias *Lalthanglien*.⁷⁰

Speaking to reporters, *Lalrinmawia Ralte* said "the two-day long *political level talks* were held in a very positive and cordial atmosphere and ended on a positive note. We have discussed a wide range of issues concerning the *Hmar* political problems. We have unanimously agreed on all terms without any deadlock. Both sides have unanimously agreed to sign *Memorandum of Settlement (MoS)* based on the *framework of agreement* made earlier. We are hopeful that the *peace accord* between the two sides would be signed very soon, this year 2018 itself and help bring lasting peace to Mizoram". The HPC (D) spokesperson *Lalthalien* said "we are happy for the positive outcome of the *peace parleys* as the government has acceded to our demands and the government has acted like parents to resolve the problem of its children".⁷¹

A landmark consensus was arrived at the *political level peace parley*, and both the delegates of Mizoram government and the HPC (D) rebel outfit agreed on the terms of the *draft MoS* based on the *framework of agreement* made earlier.⁷² Thus, after nearly one-and-a-half years of peace talks; a political agreement was finally reached between the two sides ending the *peace parley*.⁷³

However, since the HPC (D) entered a *SoO* in November 2010 with the Mizoram government, it took almost eight years to finalise the present *agreement* for a "settlement" between the two sides putting an end to the stalemate on *Hmar* political conflict.

VIII. PEACE AGREEMENT SIGNED:

On 2 April 2018, the Mizoram government and the *Hmar People's Convention (Democratic)* faction led by *H. Zosangbera*, Mizoram's only active rebel outfit, signed a *Memorandum of Settlement (MoS)*, what some have called it, a "historic peace agreement" at the State Guest House, in Chaltlang, Aizawl, in the presence of State government officials and the HPC (D) outfit's leaders. The *MoS* was signed by the *Chief Secretary* of Mizoram *Arvind Ray* on behalf of the Mizoram government while HPC (D) President *H. Zosangbera*, signing the agreement on behalf of the HPC (D). This is the second peace agreement signed with the HPC outfit and also second time the *Hmar* underground rebels have laid down their arms to join the mainstream. The first was in 1994. Earlier, it was said that the peace pact will be signed after the Mizoram government tables and passes a *Bill* in the State assembly for creation of the *Sinlung Hills Council*.⁷⁴

Earlier, Mizoram Home Minister *R Lalzirliana* told at the on-going Mizoram State legislative assembly session on 20 March 2018 that "The Mizoram government will sign a *Memorandum of Settlement* with the *Hmar People's Convention (Democratic)* faction, led by *H. Zosangbera* by next month, in April to end the three decades-old *Hmar* political imbroglio".⁷⁵

The landmark *peace pact* will bring an end to the vexed *Hmar* political problem in Mizoram. *Lalbiakzama* expressed hope that the signing of the *peace accord* would bring lasting peace in Mizoram.⁷⁶ State's Home Minister *R. Lalzirliana* said that "The terms of the agreement were discussed in detail and agreed upon by both sides. With the signing of the *MoS*, Mizoram hopes for long-lasting peace as lone

*active rebel outfit signs peace deal. We are confident that Monday's agreement would bring peace to Mizoram especially its north-eastern part".*⁷⁷

While appreciating the role of the *HPC (D)* in finally deciding to come over ground and to resume normal life, *Lalbiakzama*, speaking before signing the *peace accord*, said what we sign today is a *declaration* from the *HPC (D)* leaders before the people of Mizoram that they are ready to sacrifice their ideals for the sake of peace, and that they don't accept violence as the means of defending their ideas. He expressed hope that the signing of the *accord* would bring long-lasting peace in Mizoram, especially its *north-eastern* part. The *HPC (D)* Chairman, who was suffering from cancer and too weak to deliver a speech, read a statement, "*Nowhere have we seen a political dialogue between a government and an armed group without defining a proper ground rules and suspension of operation. This peace accord is an evidence and testimony of our shared interest and oneness. I cannot help but say that we are stepping into a new chapter where we can aspire to envision a new future together*". The *HPC (D)* spokesperson *Lalthalien*, who spoke on behalf of *HPC (D)* President *H. Zosangbera*, expressed happiness on the signing of the *peace accord*. Considering the *peace accord* a *historic milestone* not only for the *Hmar* people but also the entire *Mizo* people at large, he thanked the State government for extending "*parental concern and understanding to the plights and aspirations of the Hmar people*". *Lalthalien* expressed hope that the *Sinlung Hills Council* would work towards ushering development for the people.⁷⁸

*As per the provisions of the MoS, there were agreed seven-points in the deal. The existing SHDC would be re-christened as Sinlung Hills Council (SHC) by an Act of the State legislature. The SHC will be accorded administrative autonomy to enhance the Council within the terms/framework of the MoS agreed upon by both the parties. The Council would have powers to deal with the sphere of socio-economic, political and cultural development of the people residing within the jurisdiction of the SHC. The SHC shall comprise of 12 elected and two nominated members nominated by State government preferably from minority communities to be headed by the Chief Executive Member. The MoS stipulates that the State government would grant amnesty to all the surrendered HPC-D cadres, who have criminal cases pending against them in the State and also provide ex-gratia relief and rehabilitation when they come over ground to join the mainstream. According to the MoS, the HPC (D) rebel outfit cadres will surrender and hand over/lay down their arms as many as 48 sophisticated arms including AK 47, M16 rifles, 9mm pistols and several rounds of ammunitions during the arm-laying down or home-coming ceremony to be held at Mizoram Police's Central Training Institute, Sesawng, a place about 39 kilometres from the State capital Aizawl. The MoS states that the State government "shall consult and give due regard to the views of the Sinlung Hills Council before any law is made and implemented in the Council Area on the subjects, namely the religious and social practices of the people living in the Council Area and the customary laws and procedures of the Hmar Community." The Council will initially function as interim arrangement/term for not more than six months. The accord, however, envisages that the Mos signed between the Mizoram Government and erstwhile HPC in 1994 would stand superseded.*⁷⁹

IX. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS:

The peace deal which began on 10 August 2016 has culminated in an *Agreement* presumably to put an end to the more than three decades old *Hmar political problem* for autonomy in Mizoram since December 1986 and already 28 years old *Hmar insurgency* movement that had erupted following the erstwhile parent *HPC* went underground in May 1989.

With the *peace deal*, the 23 years long pending *HPC (D)* armed conflict also, let us taken for granted, ends up in Mizoram by according more autonomy to the existing *SHDC* by renaming it as *Sinlung Hills Council*. It seemed that the least the Mizoram government can do is to respect the wishes of their brethren in this way.

While the present *Agreement* does not confer any greater autonomy as demanded by both the *HPC (D)* factions and also did not really address the contentious issue of an *ADC* for the *Hmars* under the *Sixth Schedule*, however, the fact remains that it has been at least agreed to by *H. Zosangbera* faction *HPC (D)*, which was generally accepted by majority of the *Hmar* tribes as the absolute and actual *Hmar* ethnic based rebel group.

On the other side, many people also felt that though the Mizoram government denied this time granting *Sixth Schedule* status to the existing *SHDC*, it will be a clear step to upgrade the *Sinlung Hills Council* into the position of *District Council* in the near future. We have to see and wait that how far the Mizoram government is capable of not entertaining the *autonomy demand* of other ethnic tribes like *Hmar* in the State while such other similar voices of the bigger ethnic tribes had been incorporated in the past.

It was hoped that the signing of the *MoS* would bring long-lasting peace in *Mizoram*, especially its *north-eastern* part. Apart from it, the *peace pact* also expected to have its impact upon the on-going *Bru imbroglio* in the State too. The *agreement* also sets precedence in larger context and space for hopes to follow the suit by other insurgency-ravaged *north-eastern states* too in general infested so long by such demands and to help bring peace.

To remember, *Mizoram* is the first and only State in India which received Rs 182.45 crores from the *Central government* in 2000-2001 as "*Peace Bonus*" for keeping peace after decades of insurgency.

However, despite the jubilant atmosphere, there is still some apprehension as the *Lalhmingthang Sanate* faction of *HPC (D)* stayed away from the *peace talk* continuing its demand for an *ADC* status under *Sixth Schedule* and opposed to the creation of *Sinlung Hills Council*, though the State Home Minister R. Lalziriana said that *Lalhmingthang Sanate* faction is a *small group* and not much significant as well as strong enough to disrupt peace. People also believe that the *Hmar National Army (HNA)*, another *Hmar* rebel group across the border in Manipur with less than 20 members and *Lalhmingthang Sanate* faction *HPC (D)* are not a cause of concern.

However, there is every possibility that the peace in the area may again be disturbed. The signing of the 2 *April agreement* may not be the end of the movement as the initial demand of the *HPC* for a *Hmar State* at the tri-junction of Assam, Manipur and Mizoram may launch again. Again, while expressing satisfaction over the *MoS* signed on 2 April, the *HPC-D* faction of H. Zosangbera, surprisingly issued a press statement next day saying that the *MoS* was below our expectations. The accord in no way can compensate the tears and bloodshed of the *Hmars*. The *HPC (D)* has made a deal with Mizoram government only, and that Assam and Manipur chapters are very much alive and active. The *HPC (D)* operatives have to work as per the interests of *Hmars* settling in the three States. The *HPC (D)* outfit is still very much active in Assam and Manipur and the *Hmar* movement in *North Cachar Hills*, *Cachar Valley*, and *Dima Hasao district* (Assam) and Manipur would still continue. As such, their presence would not be erased until an agreement is reached on the '*unresolved issues*' of the *Hmars* settling there.

In fact, preventing the former militants from rising up with arms again and ensuring a lasting peace will require great care and effort. In the process, it will also be important for the Mizoram government to engage and initiate peace process with the *HPC (D)* faction of *Lalhmingthang Sanate*, who was arrested by Assam police at Tezpur on 21 February 2018 on charges of murder of *Nobar Sanate*, Finance Secretary of the *H. Zosangbera* faction of *HPC (D)* but now released, to guarantee total peace in the area.

A section of *Hmar* intellectuals felt that there is nothing new in the peace agreement, so sceptical about its successful implementation in totality. Critics also feared that the *MoS* could be short-lived. But it is still too early to comment on the *success or failure* of the just-concluded peace accord with the *HPC (D)*.

Let us also hope that under the *provisions of the Agreement*, the *Hmar people* would protect their *language, culture* and address their *demands* within a *Mizo State*. Time will tell us.

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