

Editorial

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PRI and the Mission - "Go to Village"

73rd Amendment of the Indian Constitution, which came into effect on 23 April, 1993, created a three-tier structure of Panchayati Raj. The Act provided for mandatory conduct of panchayat elections to the three tiers - district, intermediate and village - every five years, the setting up of a State Election Commission, a State Finance Commission and reservation of not less than one-third of the elective seats of members and chairpersons for women, and for SC and ST persons in each district in proportion to their population. The Constitution, moreover, provided for devolution of powers upon panchayats. Article 243 G of the Constitution. A 243 G powers, authority and responsibilities of panchayats - Subject to the provisions of the Constitution, the legislature of a State may, by law endow the panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self government and such law may contain provisions for the devolution of powers and responsibility upon panchayats, at the appropriate level, subject to such conditions as may be specified therein, with respect to (a) the preparation of plans for economic development and social justice, and (b) the implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice as may be entrusted to them, including those in relation to matters listed in the Eleventh Schedule."

According to the Expert Committee on Leveraging Panchayats for Efficient Delivery of Goods and Services, headed by Mani Shankar Aiyar, which gave its report in April 2013, Article 243 G "calls" for "Panchayats" to be endowed with the required power and authority function as "institutions of self government" for planning and execution of economic development and social justice, pertaining to the 29 subjects listed in schedule XI, whether in respect of devolution to PRIs through Central Government schemes, or through devolution to the PRIs through State Governments". The provision relating to grassroots planning contained in Article 243 ZD, is to be read with Article 243 G.

We Manipur follow a two tier system while running the PRI. This is as per the adaptation to the tradition of the state.

The enthusiastic 'Go to Village' mission is something which would not have been required had the PRI function properly.

The existence of PRI lost its significance until Chief Minister N. Biren Singh launched the Go to Village mission to fulfil the desires of the people and to address their grievances at grassroots. His assumption to reach out the citizens by visiting them at their door steps by the official concerns. His mission is to cover all the villagers and find out the problems of the citizens.

It is a real good initiative. But when one ponder upon why the chief Minister is starting then mission when there is a local body to take up what he had been doing so appears as his lack of understanding about the presence of local body like the Panchayat or the Gram Sabha.

There were also reports that some of the Panchayat members who were elected have not been invited at the launching function of the go to Village Mission at their places. This creates apprehension among the people if the "go to village mission" is strategy to skip the Panchayat body.

Well, words of appreciation pour from almost every section of people when Chief Minister N. Biren Singh announced his government mission "Go to Hill", which also pointed the failure of the Autonomous District Council.

Next comes the "Chief Minister Gi Haksheh Tengban" - an exclusively project to provide medical treatment to patient who cannot afford the medical cost due to poverty. Arranging specific days in a month to meet the people directly to listen to the grievances is also another laudable works of the chief minister. And now it is the "Go to Village" Mission begins.

So far, so good. But certain things that the Chief Minister has taken up need to be critically examine.

Twenty years down the line, many things have changed. The subject of Panchayati Raj was dealt with by a division in the Ministry of Rural Development till mid-2004. The earlier years saw focus on the implementation of certain provisions, such as conduct of elections under the 73rd Amendment as well as the Panchayat's Extension to Scheduled Areas Act, which was passed in December 1996. Even during those early years, the Central Government was mindful of the need for grassroots planning as well as devolution of powers and functions under Article 243 G. It was equally clear that the spirit of the law envisaged empowered panchayats and vibrant Gram Sabhas. It was also equally clear that empowerment would result not only from a generalised devolution from State governments, but that this devolution would work only if there was clarity of roles among the two tiers.

The "Go to Village" will serve its motto if the goal is to make PRI strengthens. Centralisation of power will not help in keeping the Democracy - a healthy one.

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The Kuki-Zomi Insurgency in Manipur Nearing Settlement

By- Aheibam Koireng

Introduction

Suspension of Operation (SoO) with the 'Kuki' and 'Zomi' armed groups in Manipur was preceded by 'Cessation of Operations' agreement with the union government which comes into effect from 01 August 2005. Later in July 2006, Shri Okram Ibobi, the incumbent Manipur Chief Minister (CM) on 15 July 2006 while clarifying that the state government was unaware had stated, "I am totally blind in this matter and more so on the conditions maintained between the concerned underground group and the army." ('CM unaware of another Ceasefire with UG group', *Imphal Free Press (IFP)*, Imphal, 15 July 2006.)

It mirrors the murky manner with which SoO began as the state government was being sidelined and not taken into confidence though law and order is a state subject. It was the army which initiated the move of suspending the operation against the Kuki and Zomi armed outfits. Previously Ceasefire under SoO was between the Indian army and central paramilitary forces and some armed groups belonging to Kuki and Zomi communities. The Ministry of Defense in a press release dated October 7, 2005, disclosed that eight 'Kuki' and one 'Zomi' militant group in Manipur had entered into an informal 'ceasefire' with the Union Government. 'Cessation of operations' agreements were concluded with these groups with effect from 01 August, 2005. ('Insurgency & Peace Efforts in Manipur', G:/CDPS, *Manipur Insurgency.htm*, accessed on 21 June 2010). In connection with it, the Manipur CM stated that the ceasefire between the "Indian security forces and some Non-Naga insurgents" was not acceptable as it lacks the state government's consent. Further he stated that the state government would form modalities and concrete ground rules for holding dialogues with insurgents groups operating in the state. ('Indian Army-UG Ceasefire without State Govt's consent', *IFP*, 25 February 2006).

Pursuit for State Recognition

Kuki National Front (KNF) had issued a threat that "if the ruling state government did not apply the SoO (Ceasefire) pact in the state between Kuki revolutionaries with Center there shall be no room for Congress (I) in the forthcoming state election (Ninth Manipur Assembly Election, 2007) in the Kuki dominated hills in the state". The outfit spelled out that it would ban any Congress (I) workers, candidate and campaign in the Kuki dominated areas. (KNF to ban Congress, *IFP*, Imphal, 12 August 2006). The Kuki Liberation Army (KLA) / Kuki Liberation Organization (KLO) also had stated that despite entering into SoO with the Indian army and the central security forces, the congress led state government refused to recognize and endorse the SoO agreement. KLO also alleged the state government for not taking any initiative of approaching the centre to start a peace talk. On these grounds, the KLO had imposed ban on the candidates of the ruling alliances who were contesting the elections. ('KLA na Congress ta athingbathamkhre', *Pokanjam*, Vernacular Manipuri Daily, 8 January 2007). The outfit also carried out bomb attacks at the residence of Minister, Ph. Parjait and the President of Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC), Mr. Gaikhangam. The Kuki and Zomi armed outfits which entered into the said informal ceasefire include Kuki National Organization (KNO) / Kuki National Army (KNA), Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA) / Zomi Revolutionary Organization (ZRO), KLA / KLO, Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA), Kuki National Front - Zogam (KNF-Z), Kuki National Front-Military Council (KNF-MC), etc.

Signing of SoO Agreement

The SoO between the conglomerate groups of KukindZomi outfits namely, the United Peoples' Front (UPF), and the KNO, State Government and the Central

Government was signed at Delhi on 22 August 2008. The State Cabinet presided over by the Chief Minister gave its approval to the said SoO agreement signed within the framework of Indian Constitution after the State Government rejected demand of the Kuki outfits for Kuki homeland or Zalemang to ensure the territorial integrity of Manipur. (Cabinet nod to SoO deal, *The Sangai Express*, 24 August 2008). Since the signing of the SoO, it continued to extend from time to time. The latest one being the signing for extension of another one year which came to effect from 31 August 2017.

Profile of the Armed Outfits

While the KNO represents 11 groups, the UPF represents eight outfits. After a series of turns and negotiations and brain storming sessions, the ground rules for the suspension of operations between the Government and Kuki armed groups were signed on 22 August 2008. Init. Joint Secretary in the Union Government in charge of Northeast appended his signature on behalf of the Government of India (GoI) while the state government of Manipur was represented by Principal Secretary (Home). Eight members each from the UPF and the KNO also signed the SoO.

KNO comprises of 11 different Kuki and Zomi armed ethnic outfit. They are Kuki National Army (KNA), Kuki National Front-Military Council (KNF-MC), Kuki National Front-Zogam (KNF-Z), United Socialist Revolutionary Army (USRA), ZouDefence Volunteer-KNO (ZDV-KNO), United Komrem Revolutionary Army (UKRA), Zomi Revolutionary Force (ZRF), Hmar National Army (HNA), Kuki Revolutionary Army (Unification), Kuki Liberation Army (KLA-KNO) and United All Kuki Liberation Army (State Govt authorized Principal Secy to sign SoO agreement with Kuki militants, *IFP*, Imphal, 4 Aug. 2008). While the UPF represents eight outfits which include Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA), Kuki National Front-P (KNF-P), United Kuki Liberation Front (UKLF), Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA), Hmar Peoples' Conference/ Democratic (HPC-D), Kuki Liberation Army (KLA/KLO), Kuki National Front-S (KNF-S), etc. (SoO with Kuki groups, *IFP*, Imphal, 6 September 2008).

The main objectives of the KNO/ KNA is to bring together all the Kuki-inhabited areas separated by 'artificial boundary' created in 1935, specifically in the Kabaw valley of Myanmar and the Kuki inhabited areas in the hill districts of Manipur under one administrative unit called 'Zalemang' (Land of freedom). In case of the eventualities of such integration not materializing, the KNA aims at the creation of two Kuki states: one within Burma i.e. 'Eastern Zalemang' and the other within India, 'Western Zalemang'. The KNA has an estimated strength of 600 cadres armed with an array of weapons like AK-Series, G-series, M-series and 60mm mortar (Kuki National Army, *www.safp.org*, accessed on 26 June 2010). ZouDefence Volunteer (ZDV) was said to be formed in 1997 however its existence came to be known in 2003. ZDV strives for maintaining their intermediary "Zou" identity without aligning to either the "Zomi" or the "Kuki". KNF was founded on 18 May 1988 with the objective of the demand for Kukiland which consisted of the districts of Churachandpur, Chandel, parts of Tamenglong and parts of Senapati to defend the Kukis from the atrocities and brutalities of the "anti-national Naga activists" (Aide-Memoir to the Prime Minister of India Shree Atal Behari Vajpayee for Immediate Creation of Kukiland, submitted by Kuki National Front on 8 April 1998). KNF split in 1995, with one unit identifying itself as the "presidential faction" and the other as the "military council". The former again split into Samuel faction (KNF-S) and Zougang faction (KNF-Z). The

total cadre strength of the outfit (inclusive of all factions) is estimated to be between 400 and 500 (Kuki National Front, *www.safp.org*, accessed on 26 June 2010). United Komrem Revolutionary Army (UKRA) was formed on 23 October 2004 to protect the interests of the Komrem community ('Manipur Outfit rears head', *The Telegraph*, Calcutta, 26 October 2006).

KRA was formed in December 2000 by a group of disgruntled cadres of the KNF-MC faction with purported objective of securing a "separate State" for the Kuki tribe within the Indian union. It has approximate cadre strength of 250. National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) was instrumental in training and arming the KRA cadres (*file:///G:/CDPS/%20Manipur%20insurgency.htm*, accessed on 20 June 2010). KLA was formally re-established in 1993 with the sole objective of safeguarding the political interest of the Kukis and their inhabited areas which purportedly claimed to have inherited from the Kuki ancestors ('KLA celebrates anniversary', *IFP*, 18 December 2007). Hmar People's Convention-Democratic (HPC-D) is an offshoot of the political party, HPC, which came into existence in 1986, spearheading a movement for self-government in the north and northeast of Mizoram. The Mizo Peace Accord of 1986, failed to address their demand of a 'Greater Mizoram' integrating all areas inhabited by Hmars in Mizoram, Assam and Manipur under a single administrative unit. Since April 1987, the HPC waged an armed struggle for autonomy. However in 1992, HPC representatives and the Government of Mizoram mutually agreed signed a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) at the Mizoram capital Aizawl on July 27, 1994, for establishing the 'Sinlung Development Council' and subsequently, 308 HPC militants surrendered along with their arms. HPC-D was formed by a section of the HPC cadres who were dissatisfied with the implementation process MoS. The purported objective of the outfit over the years has changed from an autonomous district covering the north and northeast Mizoram to an independent Hmar State (Hmar Ram) consisting of the Hmar inhabited areas of Mizoram, Manipur and Assam. The cadre strength of the outfit is estimated to be between 100 and 150 (*www.safp.org*).

ZRA was formed in 1997 as an armed wing of ZRO which was formed in 1993. The purported objective of the ZRO/ZRA is to protect the interests of the Paite community from the "onslaught of any community or group". It further attempts "to bring all the Zomipeople, divided by artificial State boundaries in various countries, specifically in Myanmar (Chin State), India (Manipur and Mizoram) and Bangladesh (Chittagong Hills Tracts), together under one administrative unit, a 'Zogam', which means 'land of the Zomi' under the Indian Union" (ZRA, *www.safp.org*, accessed on 26 June 2010). ZRF was formed by a group of Paites defected from ZRA. USRA was formed by Vaiphei cadres who defected from ZRA to uphold the dignity and identity of the Vaipheis. United Kuki Liberation Front (UKLF) was formed on March 29, 2000 with the purported objective of upholding the interests of the Kuki community and forming a separate Kuki state called 'Kukiland'.

The Negotiation Process

In the later part of December 2008, after the completion of four rounds of meetings on the SoO between the Kuki and Zomi ethnic outfits led by the KNO and the UPF, the JMG of the government finalized the process for issue of Identity Cards to around 1745 cadres out of a total of 2519. At a meeting held on 19 December 2008 a list of 500 cadres of KRA, 377 cadres of KNF-P, 419 cadres of UKLF, 111 cadres of KLA, 717 cadres of ZRA, 250 cadres of KNF-S, 110 cadres of

HPC and 45 cadres of ZDV have been proposed by the Kuki groups for official recognition. 23 numbers of designated camps operating under different Kuki militant groups have also been proposed for official identification. The said meeting between the JMG and the KNO and UPF was attended by the State Principal Secretary Home, Deputy Director of Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau (SIB), Colonel Sanjay Gupta of GS (HQ) Inspector General Assam Rifles (IGAR)-South; Mr. Rakesh Dhakarwal, Commandant, Central Reserved Police Force; Lieutenant Colonel D Mishra, GSD (Int), 57 Mountain Division; KMS Rao, Assistant Director, SIB; Major S Jung, HQIGAR (S) and seven other representatives from the KNO and UPF (1745 Kuki undergrounds to be given I-cards, 23 camps proposed for official recognition, *IFP*, 22 December 2008).

With the signing of the tripartite agreement, SoO came into force initially for a period of one year with the provision that it could be extendable on the basis of mutual agreement and understanding. The KNO spokesman, Dr. Sellen Haokip took SoO as a pre-requisite to political dialogue's commencement. ('Kuki solution should be within Indian Constitution', *NorthEast Sun*, October 15, 2008). While voicing on behalf of the KNO he stated that the tripartite agreement was a structural necessity. He exemplify by stating that the Joint Monitoring Group comprising representatives from GoI, KNO and the Government of Manipur will be dealing with issues related to the field or the ground rules. JMG are going to be responsible for monitoring the activities of KNO's cadres and the security forces. JMG is an administrative body, which will take decisions pertaining to the camps and ground issues; it is not going to be responsible for making political decisions. However this was not KNO's preferred model. Instead KNO would want GoI to engage in dialogue with them and referred to the Manipur state government any relevant issue as and when necessary. A Joint Monitoring Group headed by Principal Secretary (Home), with a representative each from the UPF and the KNO had also been formed. Issuing of identity cards to all the cadres of the two groups by the government, payment of Rs. 2000 to each cadre monthly for maintenance as well as identifying and building the designated camps. The cadres will not be allowed to move out of the designated camps with arms and all the designated camps will be located at a good distance from the national highways as well as international boundaries, and strict adherence to the rules so laid down are some significant points of the ground rules. As per the agreement, the enforcement of the ground rules would be the responsibility of the state government with the help and assistance of the central police organizations, Assam Rifles and Army deployed in the state of Manipur (SoO signed enforced, *IFP*, 23 August 2008). The agreed "Ground Rules" demands all the parties to stick to the conditions that admit them into the SoO group. Exercising any sort of military might, particularly by the armed groups, is bound to be seen as violation of the contract that they have mutually entered into. On the part of the armed groups, it appears that none would immediately choose to stand in the way of the peace process in their quest to walk the talk towards securing "political solution". In this connection the KNO spokesman stated that the main purpose of SoO was to engage in political dialogue to find a political settlement for the Kukis within the constitution of India. Calvin H, member of the UPF also asserted that "despite the stand of the Government of Manipur" for territorial integrity, "there is no binding clause in the constitution that says the boundary of the state cannot be changed" (Contd. on page 3)