



The Autonomous District Councils in Mizoram: Issues and Challenges¹

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Introduction

In the Constitution of India, there are 12 Schedules. The 'Schedule' of the Constitution of India are those tables that provide additional information that is not mentioned in the articles. Out of them, the Sixth Schedule deals with the 'Tribal Areas'¹ in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura. These Tribal Areas are administered as autonomous districts. These autonomous districts are not outside the executive authority of the State concerned but provision is made for the creation of District Councils and Regional Councils² for the exercise of certain legislative and judicial functions. These councils are primarily representative bodies and they have the power of law-making in certain fields such as management of forests other than reserved forests, inheritance of property, marriage, and social customs.³

Under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, there are ten Councils in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura. Out of ten Councils three Autonomous District Councils (ADC) are in Mizoram namely the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC), the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) and the Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC). The ADCs in Mizoram were set up in the two revenue districts—Lawngtlai and Siaha—located in the southern part of the state bordering Myanmar on the east and Bangladesh on the west. These ADCs were established on 29 April 1972 after the trifurcation of the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council. The main intention of the ADC is to protect cultural autonomy as well as to familiarize the tribal people with democratic practices and institutions. It functions as a miniature state and is entrusted with all the organs of Government: Legislative, Executive and Judiciary. The members of the District Councils are elected based on universal adult suffrage for a term of five years and they are responsible for legislative roles. Under paragraph 6 (1) of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India the ADCs are conferred power for the establishment and management of several departments. Besides, as per paragraph 6 (2) of the Sixth Schedule to the constitution of India, the state government entrusted several development departments to the ADC in 1986⁴ and in the latest notification (2011) 19 subjects have devoluted.⁵ Such subject(s) or department(s) is/are assigned to the Executive Member (EM) by the Chief Executive Member (CEM)⁶. The CEM and EM are responsible for the functioning of all departments. Unfortunately, ADCs have failed to live up to the expectations of the people. In the above context, the paper examines the issues and challenges faced by the ADCs in Mizoram.

Financial Issue

The financial powers of the ADC are mentioned in paragraphs 7 and 8 of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India. Paragraph 7 (1) of the Sixth Schedule deals with the inflows of money to the District Council and Paragraph 7 (2) deals with the legislative process by the Governor for the management and for the procedure to be followed in respect of payment of money into the said Fund. For this matter, the Governor has approved the Mizoram Autonomous District Council Fund Rules, 2018 and it has been applied.⁷

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Paragraph 8 of the Sixth Schedule deals with the allowance of the ADC to levy and collect local revenue. Sub Paragraph (2) of the said paragraph gives the power to levy and collect taxes on lands, buildings, and tolls on persons resident within such areas. And, sub-paragraph (3) of the same paragraph allows the ADC to levy and collect taxes on (a) taxes on professions, trades, callings and employments; (b) taxes on animals, vehicles and boats; (c) taxes on the entry of goods into a market for sale therein, and tolls on passengers and goods carried in ferries; and (d) taxes for the maintenance of schools, dispensaries or roads. Again, Paragraph 8 (4) provided that the ADC may make regulations to provide for the levy and collection of any of the taxes specified in Paragraphs 8 (2) and 8 (3). Based on this provision the ADCs have made several regulations and collected taxes. However, the ADC's local revenue collection is much less as compared to the powers conferred upon them, each ADC has made only around 200–300 lakhs from local revenue which contributes around 1% of the total budget.⁸

The main financial source of the ADC is the Grant-in-Aid (GIA) Fund from the state government that came from the Consolidated Fund of India. Article 275 (1) of the Indian Constitution provided the allocation of funds to the State Government as a grant-in-aid to carry on development works by the State as well as for the district council fund for the welfare and administration of the scheduled areas from the Consolidated Fund of India. It can also be mentioned here that there is no provision for channelization of money directly from the Union Government to the ADC. So, all the funds of the central government for the ADCs are transferred to the ADC through the state financial account.⁹ The GIA fund generally accounts for around 97% of the total budget of each ADC in the last few years.¹⁰ In other words, the ADCs are more or less funded by the central government. At the same time, there are allegations from the leaders of the ADC that the funds allocated for the ADCs are not released on time by the State Government.

The Mizoram government does not have suitable guidelines for the GIA fund like how to release, when to release, what is the proportion of funds for each ADC, etc. In other words, the state government did not have proper rules for the allocation of the fund to the ADC. Though the state government have 'The Mizoram Autonomous District Council Grants-in-Aid (GIA) Rules 2018' and 'the Mizoram Autonomous District Council Fund Rules 2018', these rules did not mention the proportion of funds for each ADC. Thus, the state government simply decided the amount of money (Fund) they thought would be adequate for the ADC.¹¹

It is important to mention here that the First Mizoram Finance Commission recommended in 2015 that local bodies including the ADC get funds from the devolution of taxes of the state Government. The local bodies will have a share of 15% out of which the ADC will get a share of 58.33%. This is to be shared among the three ADCs in such a manner that the LADC, MADC and CADC will get 41.97%, 34.07% and 23.96% respectively.

¹²During the First Mizoram Finance Commission, this recommendation was strictly followed by the state government for the fund allocation from the devolution of taxes. ¹³However, there were no rules for the allocation of the Grant in Aid fund which came from the Consolidated Fund of India under Article 275 (1) of the Indian Constitution. The state government disburses the fund according to their estimate and understanding; which they think will be appropriated for the ADCs. Besides, after the completion of the First Mizoram Finance Commission, there was no other guideline to be followed by the state about the devolution of taxes, so the state government merged the GIA fund and the devolution of taxes into one head i.e. GIA Fund and the whole district council fund depends on the generosity of the state government.¹⁴

The GIA Fund from the state is the financial lynchpin of the ADCs as around 97% of the annual budget comes from this fund. Every year the budget ceiling of the ADCs is assigned by the state as per the amount of GIA fund to be received. Accordingly, ADC budgets are formulated but this amount does not even meet the salary and wages of the employees and they have to ask for revised budget estimates every year.¹⁵

There is a discrepancy and uncertainty in the budget allotment. Every year the salary of the employees is increased because of the annual increment. But the budget did not increase proportionately. As a result, the budget allotment did not meet the increment for development, the budget for development projects has remained the same size for the past three years. This limited budget restricted the ADC from initiating effective development projects.¹⁶ Moreover, they got the non-salary funds in quarterly instalments, thus due to the meagre amount some departments had to wait until the last instalment to start development projects, which rendered the department inactive for nearly a full year. So, for the efficient functioning of the council the ADC are largely dependent on the generosity of the state while asking for a revised estimate. ¹⁷Besides, there is no deadline for which the ADC fund should be released, according to The Mizoram Autonomous District Council Grants-in-Aid (GIA) Rules, 2018. The non-salary fund should be disbursed quarterly and the salary fund monthly basis, but it doesn't mention the deadline for releasing the funds. So, the leaders in ADC argue that there has been a delay of funds from the state and it hampers the development works as well as uncertainty in the disbursement of the salary and wages of the employees.¹⁸

Besides the above mentioned problems and challenges, the council leaders lack the political will to make rules and regulations on all those powers conferred upon them to improve their financial condition, because the leaders knew well that they would be punished in the next election if they introduced new taxes and collected. As a result, they did not fully implement the powers conferred to them. This creates problems in revenue generation, so they can collect revenue only for about 1% of the total budget. Among the three ADCs, the LADC has the maximum sources for revenue collection. It collected taxes from seven sources namely Professional tax, Land revenue, Motor Vehicle Tax, Entertainment Tax, Entry Tax on Vehicles and Entry Tax on Goods. The MADC has collected taxes on Professional Tax, Land Revenue, Trade License, Entry Tax on

Vehicles and Animal Tax. The CADC has collected from four sources such as professional tax, Land Revenue, Trade License and Taxes on the Boat.¹⁹ Besides, the ADCs also made revenue from non-tax revenue sources like royalties from forest products, Court fees from the District Council Court, market fees, income from the Industry Department, sale proceeds of forms, etc. The revenue generated by the district councils however failed to meet the financial requirement for development in the ADCs. Thus, for the improvement of financial health, the ADC should generate more local revenue to meet the financial requirement and also to become more financially self-sufficient and independent.

Political Instability/Frequent change of government

Political Instability is becoming a distinctive feature of the Autonomous District Council in Mizoram. Here, in the paper, 'political instability' is defined as the high propensity for a change of government, which may be either by 'constitutional' or 'unconstitutional' means.²⁰ There is a frequent change of government in the district council. The instability is mainly due to the inter and intra-party conflicts in the ADC. In the past 51 years, people have experienced around 20 times changes of Chief Executive Member (CEM) in each ADC. It can be mentioned here that if the government in ADC lasted its normal tenure of five years then each of the ADC should have 10 governments or so during 1972-2023. The CEMs of CADC, LADC and MADC were changed 24, 24 and 19 times respectively from 1972 till October 2023 (See Table No 1). The chair of the CEM of Chakma ADC and Lai ADC was occupied by 14 different individuals. In the case of Mara ADC, 13 persons occupied the post of CEM to date. The average tenure of the ADCs government is around two years against the normal tenure of five years. Most of the government failed to complete its normal tenure. Only four governments completed their full tenure in CADC and MADC whereas LADC managed to complete its full tenure three times so far. Most of the ADC government failed to complete two years. For example, in both the CADC and LADC 16 governments out of 24 council governments formed (from 1972-2023) collapsed within two years. (See. Table No1)

Table No 1: Number of Government in the ADC of Mizoram from 1972-2023

Sl. No	Tenure completed by the ADC	Number of governments in ADC			Total
		CADC	LADC	MADC	
1	Full term	4	3	4	11
2	Between 4 – 5 years	Nil	Nil	2	2
3	Between 3 – 4 years	2	3	3	8
4	Between 2 – 3 years	1	2	Nil	3
5	Between 1 – 2 years	7	7	5	19
6	Below 1 year	9	9	5	23
7	Total	24	24	19	66

Sources: Prepared by the authors

The above table (Table No. 1) shows the number of governments formed in the ADC of Mizoram. It indicates that the government in the ADC is very unstable. The government

Mass Defection

Change of loyalty (leadership) and shifting of ideology (party) is not uncommon in Indian politics. Politicians changed their allegiance individually as well as in groups. Political defection can undermine the stability of the cabinet or the government, which is dependent on the support of elected legislators. So, the Government of India tries to control political defection through the Anti-defection Law that came into force in 1985 (amended through the 91st Amendment Act 2003) but failed to curb it totally. Political defection is still witnessed in Indian politics and more so in the autonomous district councils because ADCs are not under the purview of the anti-defection law. It can be mentioned here that mass defection (defection in a group) is one of the most unique characteristics of Mizoram ADC politics. We saw mass defection 7 times in ADCs in Mizoram. The CADC witnessed mass defections on three occasions namely in the third, sixth, and tenth terms. In the third term (1982–1988), there were 10 seats out of which INC won 9 and 1 seat was filled by an independent candidate. Despite the INC's overwhelming victory, the Executive Committee has changed three times during the term. Initially, Rumani Chakma was made CEM, but after two months a motion of no confidence was moved against him and Pulin Bayan Chakma was made CEM. But, after one year and 8 months, Nutun Kumar Chakma was made CEM for the third time in the third term of CADC. On 3rd February 1987, a new political party known as the Chakma Jana Parishad (CJP) was formed²¹ in Kamalanagar—the headquarters of the Chakma ADC. Within no time all the supporters of Nutun Kumar Chakma (7 INC MDC including 1 nominated member) joined the CJP and formed the CJP Government.

In the Sixth term (1998–2003) there were 13 seats, out of which the INC captured 10, BJP 1, and the independent candidate won 2 seats. So, the INC formed the Government under the leadership of Pulin Bayan Chakma as CEM. During the time, Congress (I) was in power in the state, but Congress (I) was defeated by MNF in the 4th state assembly election held in November 1998. As a result, the MNF formed the government on 3rd December 1998 under the leadership of *Pu Zoramthanga*. Within two weeks, more than half of the members of the CADC changed their loyalty from Congress to MNF. On 14th December 1999, 7 Congress (I) MDC joined the MNF²² and formed the MNF Government with Rashik Mohan Chakma as CEM by overthrowing Pulin Bayan's government.

In the tenth term (2018–2023) of the CADC, the instability of the Government was primarily caused due to the absence of a majority by a political party. There were 20 seats in the CADC. In the elections held in 2018, out of the 20 seats, the MNF secured 8 seats, Congress (I) won 7 and the remaining five seats went to the BJP. Since the MNF and BJP are allied with the North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA), the general public anticipated that they would form the government. However, to everyone's surprise, the two strongest and the traditional political rivals in India, the BJP and Congress (I) entered into an alliance called the United Legislature Party and formed the Government with Shanti Jiban Chakma (BJP) as CEM. However, in November 2018 there was a State Assembly election and MNF came into power in the state, so shortly after MNF took office in the state, four INC MDCs left Congress and joined MNF. After that, as the MNF satisfy the majority they form the Government. Shortly, after MNF ruled in CADC all the INC and BJP members joined the MNF party and formed a technically opposition less Government. But despite forming an opposition less government there was an internal power struggle. So, the Government was reorganized 5 times and 4 different people became CEM. As political stability can not be maintained on 15th December 2022 the Governor assume all the powers and functions of the CADC by placing it under the Governor's rule²³.

In LADC mass defection happens twice in the 8th term and 10th term. In the 8th term (2005 – 2010) there were 23 seats out of which MNF won nine seats, INC and Independent secured seven seats each. In other words, it was a hung council. As no party got an absolute majority, the MNF and Independent members of the council came together and formed the Government under the leadership of F. Manghnuna, an independent member of the council. F. Manghnuna became the CEM of the LADC with the support of the MNF. The coalition government in the LADC, however, did not last long. After some months intra-conflict cropped up within the alliance on the issue of portfolio among the Executive members. So, after one year he (F. Manghnuna) was replaced by C. Thanghluna but the government was still formed by the MNF + independent alliance. In November 2008 there was a state assembly election and INC came into power by defeating MNF. So, after a change of Government in the state, some MNF members and Independent defected to INC and formed the INC Government with C. Ngunlianchunga as CEM 13 January 2009²⁴.

In the 10th term (2015 - 2020) out of 25 seats INC won an absolute majority with 16 seats and formed a government led by VL. Hmuaka. However, after one year there was a struggle for leadership within the party and he was replaced by T. Zakunga. At the end of the 10th term T. Zakunga and his Executive Members joined the BJP and formed the BJP government for the first time in LADC²⁵.

In MADC mass defection happens twice in the 9th term and the 11th term. In the 9th (2007 – 2012) term no party won an absolute majority INC 8, MNF 7 and MDF 7. It was during the MNF rule in the state, but as no party won an absolute majority the post-poll alliance was made between INC and Mara Democratic Front (MDF) in MADC and S. Khipo from INC became CEM but, after one year M. Laikaw from MDF replaced him. In November 2008 there was a state assembly election and INC came into power by defeating MNF. So, just after the state election result was declared 4 MNF and 2 MDF MDC joined the INC and formed a stable INC government from 17th January 2009 till May 2012.

In the 11th term (2017 – 2022), INC won an overwhelming victory by securing 17 seats out of 25 seats and a stable government was formed with N. Zakhai as CEM. However, in June 2019 all the elected INC MDCs and 3 nominated MDCs joined the BJP and converted the INC Government into the BJP Government in MADC²⁶. Changing leadership loyalty and shifting of the party can cause instability of the cabinet or government. Such instability amounts to a betrayal of the people's mandate.

Causes of Government Instability in ADC

The Autonomous District Councils in Mizoram have their own regional politics. The ADC politics are mainly guided by family politics, clannish politics, and friendship politics rather than party politics. The candidate realized that their vote bank was not the party but the family and friendship. As a result, the politicians were not devoted to their political party. It appears that they would have been willing to abandon the party if they could have increased their level of influence.

No doubt party plays an important role in the demobilisation of voters during the election, but the party alone is not reliable enough for a permanent vote bank. Most of the politicians in ADC from the top to bottom lack commitment and full support to the party ideology or principles, so most of them have changed their political party at least once. The candidate too realized that their vote bank is not the party but the family and friendship. So, especially in CADC most of the politicians have a based constituency unlike the prominent politicians in state and central who contested randomly in a constituency, they rarely change their constituency unless there is a delimitation. For instance, Rashik Mohan Chakma contested only in

Borapansury I since 1993 and he was elected 5 times from this constituency, Pulin Bayan Chakma former CEM has been elected 5 times from Rajmandal Constituency and has never contested in another constituency, and Kali Kumar Tongchangya also got elected 5 times from the same constituency (four times from Bilosora Constituency and one time from Futuli after delimitation in 2018). This indicates that party politics played less role in the electoral politics of the ADCs in Mizoram. It created a tendency to leave a party without much consideration and worry whenever there is an opportunity to be on the ruling side. The members are always ready to join the "ruling party" if given an opportunity to leave the party that sponsored them during the election. In short, the ruling party of the state government played a significant role in ADC politics.

The politics of the ADC is largely influenced by the state government, so the candidate of the ruling party of the state government had an advantage. Even workers of the party (and candidates) used the "ruling party" as political propaganda during the election campaign. C. Lalsawmzuala Ex MDC LADC expressed his opinion that if voters believed that the candidate would sit on the ruling side when he is elected, that would earn him a lot of votes.²⁷ As a result, politicians are not loyal to the political party (they contested their elections) and even the public did not view those who frequently shift their party as dishonest because electorates continued to choose those politicians who change the colour of the party very often. For instance, C Thanghluna was elected seven times as MDC from four different political parties. Similarly, F Manghnuna was also elected five times from four different political parties. It means that the common people followed individual leaders rather than political parties. The electorates neither cared about the party nor political defection, they simply wanted their representative to be a part of the government.

Another reason for the instability of government is the tall promise made by the party and candidates during elections. Making promises is one of the most common strategies for election campaigns. The promise made during the elections in turn puts high pressure (sometimes) on the MDC and even leads to defection. During the election campaign, the candidate always made numerous promises including offering a job in the ADC government. Offering jobs is the most common promise in the ADC elections because there is no transparency in the recruitment of jobs for the ADC departments. Most of the job seekers (unemployed youth) in ADC depend on nepotism or political qualifications rather than competitive examinations based on the qualifications of the candidates. Many considered the members of the district council as "job givers". This led to the internal struggle for more power and looking for lucrative portfolios or holding important or big departments among the members. It created intra-conflict within the party and led to frequent changes of government, even when a party won the absolute majority. Sometimes, being on the governing side or becoming the EM is not enough, when the MDC or EM feels that he is not favoured by the CEM they always strive to make a new CEM who will favour him and give him more authority.

No doubt, there are devoted MDCs who work for the benefit of the public at the same time there are many politicians who are driven by individual interests rather than the public interest. Thereby, they lack loyalty, morality, and party spirit, whenever they get a chance for the higher position they turn their back on their alliance, group, party, etc. In an interview, Rumani Chakma and VL Piangenga revealed that sometimes in CADC, when they are about to form a government, the CEM candidate took his MDC to a Buddhist monastery to pledge loyalty to him before the Buddha. Still, this commitment did not last long and bound them together as one loyal team or alliance.²⁸

The members of the council always look out for a means to hold executive posts or at least be a member of the ruling party or alliance, even if he is elected with a ticket from the opposition party. Because the people he represents (or his supporters) always have high expectations from him, the expectation may be material or financial support or helping him or her to get a job in the district council government or contract works under the district council or maybe a combination of two or more of the above. Many people even expected direct benefits from their representatives and they are largely dependent on their MDC financially. This puts a lot of pressure on the MDC and makes them 'power-mad' politicians. Kali Kumar Tongchangya revealed that in CADC, each MDC hosts at least 20 guests from their constituency at any time.²⁹ Some of the visitors seek monetary assistance for medical treatments, some of them request money for the admission of their children, and others will ask for contract work or a job in the council. The member finds it difficult to satisfy every visitor, and at the same, he must take responsibility for looking after them somehow, if not they will not support him in the next election. Hosting and entertaining the guests every day involves lots of money, so to compensate for their expenses they use every means to hold power (and earn money) by hook or crook. As a result, every member of the council wants to be a member of the Executive Committee (or at least be a member of the ruling party or parties) but it is not possible so every member of the council struggles for power. In the power struggle, the instability of the government does happen in the district council.

Another factor for the instability of government in the council is the influence of state politics on the politics of the district council. The ruling party (parties) of the state government normally wants to form governments and control the local-level politics (maybe urban or rural) in the state. The result of the state assembly election largely influenced the government in the district council. At the same time, the MDC in the ADC also usually tries to join hands with the ruling party in the state. So, most of the time, the changes of government at the state brought changes in ADC. For instance, in the election for the Chakma ADC held in 2018, no party won an absolute majority so, Congress (I) joined hands with its strongest rival in Indian politics—the BJP—and entered an alliance and formed a government in CADC. After MNF won the state assembly elections and

formed the government on 18th December 2019, all the Congress (I) and BJP members of the district council joined the MNF and formed an opposition-less government in CADC. This type of change of government in the council due to political defection to the party in power at the state level happened in all the district councils. For example, the Lai ADC was ruled by MNF after the district council elections held in 2005. The state assembly elections were held in December 2008 and Congress (I) won the election and formed the government. Within one month after the formation of state government by the Congress, a Congress government was also installed in Lai ADC in January 2009.

Issues on Cultural Autonomy

One of the main intentions of the ADCs under the sixth schedule of the Constitution of India is to protect and promote the culture of the tribals. Culture is the way of life of a community. The cultural aspects of a community include food, dress, worshipping God, language, etc. The ADCs however put the least effort to protect their cultural autonomy, especially the language. It is important to mention here that language denotes the culture and traditions of a particular community. One could not understand a culture without knowing the language spoken by them, as language connects people to people and their culture.³⁰ In other words, language is an important component of the culture and is necessary to promote and protect it. It can be remembered here that *Duhlian* (Mizo language) is the lingua Franca of Mizoram. At the same, there are tribal dialects of the sub-tribes of the Mizo (Hmar, Ralte, Lai, Mara, Bawm, Bang, etc.) and other ethnic communities like the Brus and Chakma. Among them, Chakma, Lai and Mara have their district council so they can initiate necessary actions to protect and promote their dialect. Unfortunately, the Lai ADC failed to protect and promote their dialect. Many Lai people nowadays do not speak their tongues.

In many villages under the Lai ADC, *Duhlian* (Mizo) is the lingua franca instead of the Lai. Only eight villages (Sangau, Pangkhua, Thaltlang, Sentetfiang, Vawmbuk, Archhuang, Lungzarhtum and Tialdawngilung) in the eastern part of Lawngtlai district, beyond the Kolodyne River the Lai dialect is used as lingua franca.³¹ Surprisingly, in the headquarters of Lai ADC—Lawngtlai—the majority of people speak *Duhlian* as their first language. Even, in the District Council session most of the members of the council speak in *Duhlian*, not in their tongue—the Lai. In other words, many Lai people adopted *Duhlian* as their mother tongue rather than the tongue of their ethnic community. This is due to a lack of identity consciousness among the Lai for decades. As a result, they lost their cultural identity. Their language, tradition and cultural practices have been assimilated into the Lushai—the popular culture of the Mizo. The process of assimilation of different cultures of the sub-tribe of the Mizo into the popular culture (mainstream culture of the state of Mizoram) is popularly known as *Duhlianization* or Mizonization among the Mizo scholars. The force of *Duhlianization* or Mizonization is very strong so it is difficult to guard or protect themselves from it by smaller ethnic communities or sub-tribes like the Hmar, Ralte, Lai, etc. Moreover, the Lai are living next to the Lushai who promoted *Duhlianization*. In the last few decades, the Lai realized the importance of protecting and promoting their cultural identity so they started initiatives to revive their culture and traditions. The Young Lai Association (YLA)—the most popular civil society organization of the Lai—also expanded its influence by establishing new branches in several villages, especially in the south and western parts of the District. The district council also takes certain initiatives to inculcate ethnic feelings among its people such as the wearing of Lai dress for one day in a week for all the LADC staff. Moreover, a notification was issued in 2017 by the LADC to use Lai for official communication. But, as the majority of the officers and staff can not speak Lai, this notification can not be fully implemented. Presently, three languages (namely Lai, *Duhlian* and English) are used for official communication but *Duhlian* is commonly used. In August 2018 the LADC Government and the Association for Lai Language (ALL) signed a Memorandum for the promotion of the Lai language.³² Following the memorandum, a training programme was conducted for the LADC staff to learn the Lai dialect every Friday afternoon but it was voluntary, and not compulsory. The course was conducted for three months starting from September 2018.³³

Chakma

The Chakma belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group of Mongoloid race, but they speak a dialect belonging to Indo-Aryan Family popularly known as 'Chakma'. It is the lingua franca of the Chakmas. They believe that their original language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family. However, the Chakmas have been living in the adjacent areas of Arakan and Bengal since ancient times. So, their language has been heavily influenced by Bengali. Therefore, many linguists now consider the modern Chakma language a part of the Southeastern Bengali branch of the Eastern Indo-Aryan language. Apart from Bengali, the Chakma language has a strong resemblance to the Assamese and Oriya.³⁴

The Chakmas have their own script known as Ajhapath, which is akin to that of Burmese. They do not use it for decades. As a result, many Chakmas do not know the script nowadays. So, the CADC introduced the Chakma subject in elementary education in 1994 to promote and protect their culture, traditions and dialect. However, they rarely used their script for day-to-day written conversation. According to Mandira Chakma (an Academic Officer in the CADC), only a few Chakma adults know the Ajhapath. Surprisingly, the CADC used only English for official communication. Also, civil society organizations such as Central Young Chakma

Association (CYCA), Mizoram Chakma Students Union (MCSU), Chakma Mahila Samiti (CMA), etc. always used Roman script for official communication instead of the Ajhapath. She (Mandira Chakma) further said that certain schools under CADC are without Chakma subject teachers because there is a lack of teachers in the school who can teach Chakma. Besides, recruitment exclusively for the Chakma subject has never been conducted and it is just taught by a teacher who knows the Ajhapath.³⁵ It can be mentioned here that there are educated Chakma who cannot read and write their script thoroughly. As a result, certain steps have been taken to protect and promote the Chakma tongue. The Chakma Language and Script Development Committee of the CADC organized an International Seminar on the Chakma language in December 2013 at Kamalanagar (the headquarters of the CADC), and two workshops were also conducted in 2012 and 2019 at Kamalanagar and Tripura to promote the Chakma language.³⁶ Workshops, Seminars, Conferences and research to promote and protect their language (Chakma) are necessary but what is more important is providing training in reading and writing the script (Ajhapath) to all the Chakma people who do not know how to read and write it, particularly the youth. Once, the people know how to read and write the script, the CADC should use it in official communication. In other words, Ajhapath should be taught in all the CADC-administered schools (except the Mizo village inside the CADC). The CADC should also use it in their official communication apart from English. If the leaders of the Chakma community failed to take some positive actions, then their script (Ajhapath) may become a piece of the museum after a few decades. It can be noted that in all the Chakma villages in Mizoram, the Chakma language serves as the medium of communication. Being unique from their neighbouring community, who speak Tibeto-Burman, the Chakma language is less vulnerable to assimilation compared with the other minor tribes in Mizoram. In short, the Chakma tongue is safe, all the Chakmas in Mizoram speak the 'Chakma' as their first language. In short, all Chakma speak 'Chakma' however many people do not know how to read and write the Ajhapath.

Mara

The Maras are one of the most well-known tribes of their ethnicity among the Zo tribe in Mizoram. They maintain, preserve, and protect their language, culture, and tradition. The socio-ethnic consciousness of the Mara is very high and they protect and promote their tongue better than their neighbouring tribes. The Church and the Christian Missionaries played a vital role in promoting the tongue of the Mara. Unlike their brethren tribe—the Lai, the Mara got direct missionaries from Britain and they were given the alphabet by the British right after the introduction of Christianity. They speak and learn their dialect in school and also read the bible in their tongue. In other words, they got education in their own tongue. Besides, compared with the other Zo tribes, the Mara dialect had the least affinity to their brethren tribes. This uniqueness also prevents the Mara dialect from assimilation. As a result, the Mara dialect is well preserved and developed compared with the other Zo tribes. Mara language serves as the lingua franca in Siaha town and most of the villages in MADC areas. The MADC introduced *Marareih* (Mara language) in elementary education in 1984. Also, they have taught Mathematics and Science in Mara from the 2023–2024 academic session in all the MADC schools. Mara is used for official communication by MADC as well as by all the civil society organizations within MADC. Unlike the LADC, the session of MADC is conducted in *Marareih* and all the legislators speak in Mara. In short, in Mara district council areas the *lingua franca* is the Mara dialect and the influence of *Duhlian* is not very strong and affects the Mara inhabitant areas.

Politicisation of Development Scheme

In the autonomous area due to budget constraints, the district councils are unable to formulate and implement proper development policies and programmes. The socio-economic development policies initiated by the district councils are basically at the village or family level. For example, most of the development projects initiated by the CADC and LADC are at the family level. Many of the projects are family-oriented assistance schemes to help with finances or materials or both, to begin with, a family business or cottage industry. The schemes are merely symbolic, they do not help the people in the true sense of the term but serve it as a pork barrel. The intention of the scheme(s) is to please the voters' interest rather than aiming for real development because the assistance usually amounts to around Rs 5000–10000 which is too little and insufficient to start any type of business or farming. Moreover, the selection of the beneficiary is normally politicized as there are no proper criteria for the selection of beneficiaries in any scheme. Even though there is a Selection Committee in CADC which is headed by the Executive Member i/c of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary. However, in practice, the selection of the beneficiary for any scheme is always done by the executive members and members of the ruling party in the district councils usurping the Selection Committee. As a result, the monitoring of the schemes cannot be done properly due to the politicization of the scheme. In LADC, there is no Selection Committee, the executive members and members of the ruling party in the district council distribute the slots among themselves and make a recommendation to the concerned department. So, the department makes the final selection based on the recommendation of the political leaders. As the schemes are designed as a pork barrel, the selection is exclusively done by the ruling party members rather than giving to the needy and deserving farmers and workers.

Recruitment issue

According to Paragraph 3 of the Sixth Schedule, the ADCs are empowered to make rules regarding the recruitment of employees for the council. However, the three ADCs are weak in performing their legislative roles. As a result, among the three ADCs only LADC has its own recruitment rules i.e. The Lai Autonomous District Council (Group A, B, C and D Posts) Recruitment Rules, 2014. The CADC and MADC have been using The Lai, Chakma, and Mara Recruitment Rules 1992, enacted by the Government of Mizoram.

The ADC has the power to create or fill a vacant post in the Group B Non-Gazetted posts but for Group B Gazetted Officers and above posts they need the Governor's approval.³⁷ In ADCs there is no independent recruitment Commission like the Union Public Service Commission in the central government and the State Public Service Commission in the state, whenever a vacancy arises the Recruitment Committee is formed by the Executive Committee and all the recruitment processes are carried on by this Committee. The absence of an independent recruitment commission allows corruption, nepotism and politicizing the recruitment by the politicians. Most of the Council's staff are recruited based on the spoils system rather than merit. Despite holding competitive exams, a person with political qualifications is always recruited. The process corrupts the mindset of the educated youth and students. They have to rely on political qualifications rather than merits and educational qualifications for competitive exams to get a job in the councils. One Group A Officer serving in LADC who does not want to disclose his/her identity said that most of the posts in ADCs are filled by political qualifications rather than merit. In other words, there is corruption, nepotism and political interference in the process of recruitment of staff for the district council offices in Mizoram.

Conclusion

The Autonomous District Councils are given autonomy under the sixth schedule to the Constitution of India with the Legislative, Executive and Judiciary powers. The main intention of giving such power is to protect and promote their unique culture, and traditions including language. In other words, the ADCs are established to safeguard cultural autonomy and to provide socio-economic development in the autonomous areas. However, the ADC leaders are involved in petty politics rather than working for development and protecting their cultural autonomy. Consequently, political instability is becoming the norm in the ADCs in Mizoram rather than the exception. This political unrest has hampered the new initiatives for development in the social, cultural and economic programmes.

The political instability of the autonomous bodies in Mizoram is related to the parochial political culture. The perspectives and the outlook of the people toward their polity (ADC) are by and large narrow based on individual and clan. During autonomous bodies elections, the issues are dominated by freebies; not by developmental issues. As many of the voters expect direct benefits from the politicians or Government, most of the development policies initiated after the election are basically about distributing materials and money. Also, the recruitments of staff and officials of the autonomous bodies are based on political fitness. In other words, corruption is witnessed during the recruitment process of government staff and officials of the ADCs. This is an outcome of lust for power politics. Many people think that politicians are job providers and those who can recruit more people are considered good and powerful politicians. Hence, every politician tries to recruit as many as they can to strengthen their vote bank. However, they should try to stop this practice, and instead, they should downsize the number of employees, as more than 90% of their budgets are spent on salary, wages and other retirement benefits; so that they will have more budget for development works.

The central issue of the ADC lies with financial autonomy. It seems all the problems such as political instability, lack of socio-economic development, loss of cultural autonomy, etc were triggered by the lack of financial autonomy. So, without financial autonomy, it isn't easy to carry on development projects as well as the protection and development of cultural autonomy which is the main aim of the ADC. Cultural autonomy cannot be realized if political autonomy is insufficient to spur economic progress. There has been a blame game going on between the state and autonomous bodies over the issue of financial autonomy. To solve the financial tussle between the state and ADC; the best option would be following the pattern of the fiscal decentralization of the Fifteenth Finance Commission of India. The Grant-in-Aid Fund from the Consolidated Fund of India should be put in a separate heading (account) to the state treasury for the ADC and the state should formulate a proper guideline (formula) to distribute the money to the ADCs. According to the Operational Guidelines of the Fifteenth Finance Commission Fund (FC-XV), the state treasury just serves as an intermediary between the central and the rural local bodies (panchayat), it doesn't have the power to delay and manipulate. The state government on receipt of FC-XV grants from the Union Government shall transfer the same to the rural local bodies only within 10 working days. Any delay beyond the 10 working days will require the state governments to release the grants with interest for the period of delay as per the effective rate of interest on market borrowings/state development Loans (SDLs) for the previous year.³⁸ If the same guideline is applied in the ADC, it will somehow bring justice to the autonomous bodies financially and the issues of financial dependency on the state government on the ADC will be over. In other words, the financial control of the autonomous bodies by the state government will be no more and the autonomous bodies will become more autonomous financially. What is happening now is that the state government decides when and how much money will be released to the autonomous bodies. As a result, autonomous bodies do not have

autonomy financially which also ultimately affects the political autonomy. In short, the ADCs need financial autonomy to make the autonomous bodies truly autonomous.

References and End Notes:

- ¹ The Tribal Areas are those in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura as specified by the 6th Schedule under Article 244(2) of the Constitution of India.
- ² There is no Regional Council under the 6th Schedule of the Constitution of India at present. There was one Regional Council—The Pawi-Lakher Regional Council (PLRC)—under the provision of the 6th Schedule in Mizo District (the present Mizoram) of Assam. The PLRC was abolished when Mizo District of Assam was upgraded to the status of a Union Territory of Mizoram. It can be mentioned here that the PLRC was divided into three Regional Councils: the Chakma Regional Council, the Lakher Regional Council and the Pawi Regional Council on 2nd April 1972. Within one month, these Regional Councils were upgraded to district councils—the Chakma Autonomous District Council, the Lakher (Mara) Autonomous Council and the Pawi (Lai) Autonomous Council—on 29 April 1972. For details see. *Brief History of LADC*. <https://ladc.mizoram.gov.in/page/brief-history-of-ladc>
- ³ Durga Das Basu. (1994). *Introduction to the Constitution of India*. Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited: New Delhi, pp-271f
- ⁴ Notification: Entrustment of Functions of the State Government to the Autonomous District councils in Mizoram under sub-paragraph (2) of Paragraph 6 of the sixth schedule (No. DCA/E-212/83/52, the 20th August, 1986)
- ⁵ No.C.13016/3/2010-DCA, The August, 2011
- ⁶ Every ADC has an Executive Committee; it functions similarly to the Cabinet of the state government. The Chief Executive Member (CEM) is the Head of the Executive Committee and is elected by the members of District Councils (MDC) from amongst themselves. The CEM recommends certain MDCs for appointment as Executive Members (EM) to the Governor of Mizoram for his approval. The posts of CEM and EMs are similar to the Chief Minister and Cabinet Ministers of the state government respectively. See details. Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC). <https://ladc.mizoram.gov.in/page/brief-history-of-ladc>
- ⁷ No.C.31030/3/2005-DCA, the 6th December, 2018
- ⁸ 2020 – 2021, 2021 – 2022, 2022 - 2023 CADC, LADC and MADC Budget Book.
- ⁹ Jangkhongam Dounel. (2014). A Critical Analysis of Direct Funding Issue in Autonomous District Councils of Mizoram. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 75, No. 1. P. 47 – 48.
- ¹⁰ 2020 – 2021, 2021 – 2022, 2022 - 2023 CADC, LADC and MADC Budget Book.
- ¹¹ Interview with B. Lalthantluanga Sailo Superintendent, Finance Department, Govt of Mizoram on 07.06.2023.
- ¹² First Mizoram Finance Commission Report, P 176 – 178.
- ¹³ In an interview with Lalthantluanga Sailo, Additional Secretary Finance Department, Govt. of Mizoram on 07.06.2023.
- ¹⁴ B. Lalthantluanga Sailo, opt. cited
- ¹⁵ In an interview with Bhudangkur, Sr. Finance and Accounts Officer, CADC on 26.10.2022.
- ¹⁶ 2018 – 2019, 2019 – 2020, 2021 – 2022, and 2022 - 2023 budget book of CADC, LADC and MADC.
- ¹⁷ In an interview with Kalikumar Tongchangya, Chairman CADC, on 20.10.2022.
- ¹⁸ Kalikumar Tongchangya, opt cited.
- ¹⁹ James L.T Thanga, Ashley Lalremruati, Lianhmingthanga. (2023). Tax and Non-tax Revenues of the Autonomous district councils in Mizoram and their dependence on the state Government Fund Transfer. *A Journal of OKD Institute of Social Change and Development*, Vol. XX, No. 1. P. 49 – 52.
- ²⁰ Alberto Alesina, et al. (1992). Political Instability and Economic Growth. NBER Working Paper Series. Working Paper No. 4173. https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w4173/w4173.pdf
- ²¹ Jangkhongam Dounel. (2022). *Evolution of District Council Autonomy in Mizoram*. New Delhi: Balaji Publication. p. 159
- ²² Loisy Lalmuanpuui. (2021). *The Chakma Autonomous District Council: Origin, Growth and Development*. An unpublished M. Phil Dissertation submitted to Mizoram University.
- ²³ District Council and Minority Affairs department Notification, No.A.43016/3/2018-DC&MA(C)/232
- ²⁴ K. Sang chum. (2022). *Lairam*. P. 220
- ²⁵ K. Sang chum. (2022). *Lairam*. P. 250
- ²⁶ https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/cong-legislature-party-in-mizo-dist-council-merges-with-bjp-119062100936_1.html retrieved 15th July 2023.
- ²⁷ Interview with C. Lalsawmzuala Ex MDC LADC on 17th November 2022 by the author
- ²⁸ Interview with Rumani Chakma President Chakma, the District Congress President and Ex CEM CADC on 21st October 2022 and VL Piangenga EX MDC LADC on 24th November 2022.
- ²⁹ Interview with Kalikumar Tongchangya Chairman CADC on 21st October 2022.

³⁰ Why Language and Culture are Important? <https://hindustanitongue.com/why-language-and-culture-are-important/#:~:text=Languages%20denotes%20the%20culture%20and,the%20people%20and%20their%20culture.>

³¹ In an interview with LH Ramdinglana Assistant Art and Culture Officer LADC on 27.03.2023

³² <https://ladc.mizoram.gov.in/post/ladc-leh-association-for-lai-language-all-ten-mou-an-sign> Retrieved 25.07.2023

³³ LH Ramdinglana Op.cited

³⁴ SP Tallukdar. (1988). *The Chakmas Life and Struggle*. Delhi: Gian Publishing House. p. 111-112

³⁵ In an interview with Mandira Chakma Academic Officer CADC on 20.03.2023

³⁶ In an interview with Renu Chakma Secretary of District School Board Education CADC on 25.10.2023

³⁷ In an interview with Derrick Salai Solo, Editor of Debate Legislative Department, MADC on

³⁸ Department of Finance Notification, Govt. of India. No. 15(2) FC-XV/FCD/2020-2025 Government of India Ministry of Finance Department of Expenditure (Finance Commission division)