

Escaping from the Chin State of Burma

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There are countries that face the problem of overpopulation. Planners and decision-makers work hard to deal with it. - The Chin State in Burma on the contrary is losing her population day after day.

It is estimated that there are 2 million ethnic Chins in Burma. The term, Chin was popularly used since 1896 when the Chin Hills Regulation was written under the British administration. The Chin Hills became a part of Union of Burma in 1947 according to Panglong Agreement under the leadership of General Aung San, father of Aung San Su Kyi. The agreement signaled independence from British rule (1948). There was no logical assumption that signing the Panglong Agreement meant surrendering of the sovereignty of the Chin people to Burmese colonialism as was claimed by Lian Uk, the elected MP of the 1990 general election in Burma. Though the Union achieved independence, the hope of the Chin people to maintain their self-determination and to build a democracy faded.

The report also said there are 1 lakh Chin refugees in India; with the maximum number in the state of Mizoram. Out of this number, about 1000 refugees have applied to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Delhi to get protection. Less than 500 Chins have been recognised as political asylum seekers by UNHCR according to a Chin refugee in Delhi.

The Chins are also entering ten other countries of South East Asia. Some have left their land for Europe, Canada US, Mexico, Guam, Japan, Korea in Asia and other countries. The people in Chin State have also moved to Sagging, Rangoon, Mandalay divisions, Kaching, Arakan and Shan states. The population of the Chins in these states is yet to be surveyed. what are the push-factors that drive away the Chins from their land?

Geographically, the Chin State is located in the western part of Burma bordering Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur states of India. It's a beautiful mountainous region with orchids, rhododendrons, cherry trees, blooming roses and wild animals. The people practice shifting cultivation and agricultural land is not sufficient enough for the region to sustain an independent economic system. At the same time the demand for better standards of living have been increasing dramatically. Moreover, there are no efforts towards to support and develop the agricultural sector under the military regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) that rules the Burma.

There is little by way of transport and communication, which hinders opportunities and makes leading day-to-day lives extremely difficult. This hardship makes the livelihood of the Chins miserable. Moreover there are no proper markets for the home farm products like orange, apple, grapes, avocado, pineapple and fresh vegetables such as garlic, onion, mustards, tomato, soya bean, pulses, tobacco etc. The prices of such products are very unstable all over Burma and this affect the lives of the people in the Chin state. Who can speak against the regime in the case? No one. Forming of labor or farmer associations are banned and so their situation never changes.

The Chin state doesn't have even a single university or college. Besides, three to ten villages in the Chin state have to share one school without regular teachers. So, many young people move outside of the state or go the neighboring countries for their education. Some travel to Europe and America running after the promise of a better education. The worst part is that Chin youngsters can not study the Chin language, cultural observances, traditional practices and historical facts even in the Chin State. The SPDC only allows teaching of Burmese language, culture, history and religious beliefs that are beginning to have an impact in changing the behaviors, thoughts processes and mindset of the young Chin people. The intention of the SPDC is to make the Burmanization stronger while the Chins face ethnic cleansing in their own land. Rights activists relate how human rights violations continue to occurring all over Burma in different forms such as forced labor, imprisonment, extortion, systematic violence against women (particularly in ethnic areas), extra-judicial killings, and detention in military camps, religious persecution, military recruitment, looting, forced relocation and so on. The Chin state is also not spared.

Chin people continue to flee to neighboring countries/states like Mizoram (in India) to escape forced labor and religious persecution. Christian religious leaders in the Chin State are often targeted with persecution and imprisonment because of the influence they wield. Religious leaders are warned not to talk about political freedom and social justice. These leaders often are imprisoned to frighten the civilians. It's amply clear that the SPDC does not respect the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

Many families in the Chin state have lost their land because of forced relocation. The regime has relocated people without any compensation while their properties have been looted. Those who protest or show sympathies with armed groups of resistance are tortured or killed and there is no trial.

I found how many Chin women shed tears silently because they are sexually and mentally abused by Burmese soldiers. These women are still the targets of the SPDC soldiers to be their wives, concubines or pleasure-women. Soldiers are given money or awards if they can father a child with a Chin woman.

What does this all mean? Isn't it a nefarious design to blot out the Chin nation or ethnicity. These offences by the military junta does not only go against to the UDHR but are also totally against the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which the regime ratified in 22nd July, 1997 and made a reservation to article 29. The regime shrewdly did not ratify/sign to optional protocol, which allows the CEDAW committees investigate grave violations against women in all forms.

How can they continue with these atrocities? **Does escaping then mean surrender to these dictators?** By fleeing from our lands aren't we adding to the power of the regime? If the people keep running away to other places, what and where will be the next Chin State? Who will be the people living in the Chin State in the coming generations? Or, will it be a lonely national park? Whatsoever, my only feeling is that the land is waiting for her people to return who will treat her with care, love and sensitivity and thus sow the seeds for freedom, democracy and self-determination.

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