

THE VOICE OF FAMINE

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A traditional starvation, which occurs in every fiftieth year in all areas covered by Bamboos unfortunately happened in all Mizoram State (India) and in all Chinland (Chin State) in Myanmar this year 2007. It is the year of bamboo flowering period while many kinds of insects especially the rats eat up all paddy before harvest. Not a single paddy stalk has been harvested in all areas. As it is unnatural, but traditional, the people also realize the threat of the rats before hands and make various mousetraps for protection of rats. But it is very wonderful that many hectares of cultivated lands are seen finished up even in a night though the owners are watching. There has been traditional saying that the reproductive hormones of the rats come stronger active by eating fruits of bamboo which result to increase a huge numbers of rats. Naturally the rat gives birth twice in the year but during bamboo flowering time they can give birth dozen times in a year. They begin to eat anything they can find. Usually the rats begin with the rice fields. They also ate up every kind of crops, from brinjal to soya bean and even a bitter gourd. They have not only attacked these, but have been found nibbling on bamboo matted floors inside houses and destructed even home materials. Groups of rats while swimming across rivers and streams are usually found even at day time. This year in 2007, one of the Matus killed baskets of rats when he found the rats coming across the river from another bank. The banks of streams and rivers are full with bad smell of dead rats left by floods of rainy season. The fore-fathers said that this traditional disaster effects the people three to five years of starvation bringing along with it death, destruction and suffering. Five years is thought to be the life-time of rats.

In Mizoram State, the government has taken initiative to solve this food problem since last year (2006) under Central government scheme. The people in Mizoram are now working under BAFFACOS (Bamboo Flowering and Famine Combat Scheme), projects for satisfaction of this starvation. It is a Food-for-Work Programme where an individual can earn up to Rs. 100 a day. In Burma it is very far to have such schemes under Military government to earn money for satisfaction of this starvation. No rice to purchase where there is no communication. The people who live in towns such as Tidim, Falam, Haka, Thantlang, Matupi, Mindat and Paletwa only can enjoy government supplied rice in Chin State. The fortunes of people who are in rural area are really dark. The near-by villagers along the border came and asked some rice from their neighboring area in Mizoram where Supply centers are set up with the money they can afford. There is no enough stocked rice in Godown of every supply center. Even though godowns are to be stocked full, the government rule is lying again not to allow the rice to foreign allotment. Another misfortune is that total prohibition has been made to bring cattle and fowls into Mizoram from Myanmar due to Bird Flue protection. Actually the people of Chinland bought their necessities from their nearest towns of Mizoram by selling cattle and fowls before times. Now there is no way to get money even for a kilogram of rice in time of starvation for Chin People.

The Chin people always depend on their own crops by means of shifting cultivation every year. Maize and rice are their major food. This year, small or big family who used to reap 200 to 400 tins can only reap 20-40 tins of paddy for the whole year-life (two tins of paddy came out 15 kilogram of rice after grinding). There are also many families who totally lost

reaping from their fields. Besides, natural calamities such as long heavy rain-fall caused the maize rotten and cyclone in another hand destructed paddy fields along with rat's threat.

In addition to Christian love, the Chins traditionally used to share the things they have to those who do not have it. This is how the people of Chinland now can live sharing food for the day today. It is beyond thinking how most of the Chin people will continue to live on. Some of the Khumis in Paletwa Township are learnt leaving their respective villages with no aims of refuge. It is also learnt that the people from some villages along Indo-Burma border are intending to migrate into Mizoram, India. How heavy burden should it be for Mizoram to bear as for whose people are also facing the same starvation to satisfy the hunger and thirst of other people who will enter into its arm!

PHOTOS:



Dead rats in Paddy field



Rats inside Bucket



Bamboo



Bamboo Flowering-1



Bamboo Flowering-2



Bamboo fruit



Cutting a tree(Bakô/Tung)for food



Carrying home



Making into slices to dry



a kind of yam, dried in sunshine



grinded to make into powder to mix with a few rice



Enjoying together sparingly.



Searching roots of yams.



Digging yams into 5ft.depth



Clean and prepare yams to cook.



Taking out cooked yams from pot to serve.



Family enjoy yams as for Major food.

WAY OF LIFE TODAY:

Fifty years back, about in 1957 when the Chinland was strongly stroke by Bamboo Flowering Famine (Mautam), most of the people depended on yams as food. Couple of family set out to search for the main roots of yams. The yams are to be digged out into five to eight feet of depth. The deeper, the bigger of yams they were happy to find for hand to mouth feeding of the family. Another source of food on which they depended is a kind of tree in thick forest called Tung/Bakô. The stem of the tree inside is sweet in taste. They cut down and took it making slices to dry in sunshine. They grinded into powder after which the powder is mixed with few rice and cooked for food. This kind of tree is to be found only in thick forest that people had to spend a lot of time to take. Days and months were counted for the new babes and children who could not serve the rough food. Similarly today, the people of many villages in Chinland especially from Maraland and Khumi area have started searching for yams and trees (Tung/Bakô) for surviving of their daily life. The population today seems to increase double than that of fifty years back famine. The yams and trees might not be enough to feed the people for times. On 27th of December 2007, two Khumi women of Tuiking Along village (*on Daletmay River*) who searched for paddy to other village met the two robbers on their way home frightened them saying, 'If you love your life save, leave your tins of paddy there'. At the same time the two women ran off leaving the two tins of paddy which had been taken by the robbers. Mrs. Khothlei Ralcin, a nurse from Paletwa Civil Hospital who recently visited Mizoram said, "The robbers were said to be the men who also were searching for food. I believe this is the only beginning. There will be more and more robbery and stealing for the people those who do not have money at all."

In Myanmar, March is the month in which all stages of Educational Institutes hold annual examinations. Today the great famine turns the interest of both parents and students aside down. Various diseases are to be welcomed by deficiency of vitamin. How doom is the fortune of the people of Chinland those who are facing the invasion of strong famine now and tomorrow for at least three years!

Every aspect of development is especially based on communication. Chinland which is constituted by high mountains and deep valleys is one of the poorest communications of all other states in Myanmar. Under force labour of the Military junta, Jeepable-road upto Vuangtu village from Thantlang, upto Sabawngte village from Rezua have been constructed by the native people themselves. But the people of Vuangtu and Sabawngte never see motors till now. The road remained itself unused since there is no vehicle even for transportation of their military ration. The local people nowadays are still forced to improve these roads besides food starvation. It is hopeful if the roads might have been improved to take rice from plain area such as Kalemio and Kankaw if there is any source of money. There is also an effective waterway from Akyab to Paletwa to carry whatever goods necessary for Chin people of Khumi area. From Paletwa, some goods also are able to be carried up to Sinletwa by means of engine-boat to feed the people who live in Maraland.

The people of Chinland who are facing food starvation pray to God for His benevolent sustenance by any means.

On 6th.January, 2008 Chauzeipaw of Sabypi village arrived Saiha (Mizoram) bringing a baby-bear to change with rice. Instead, he sold it by Rs. 2000.00 and bought 1.5

quintals of rice for his family survival. He said, “The rice should not be consumed only by our family because there are many people who are empty handed and wandering for rice. It is impossible to reject the one who would come to ask for rice with tears. Children are mostly pitiful who only know their thirst and hunger and ask something to eat to their parents”.



Teddy Bear for Rice

On 16th.January 2008, a group of Locheita villagers led by a religious leader Rev. C.Sama (62 years) and a prominent leader Thlachei Zawtha (70 years) arrived Saiha bringing one buffalo to give to any church in Saiha town that could help them to solve their food problem hoping even for a month. Rev. C.Sama said, “We are restless, wondering for our people whom we leave at home having nothing to cook at all.” By the sympathy and humanitarian aid of College Veng Local Church of Evangelical Church of Maraland, Saiha, Mizoram State, India, the Locheita villagers are given 21.5 quintals (2150Kg.) of rice. Locheita village is about 150Km far from Saiha that for transportation of rice up to Chakhei village they still have to spend Rs.3500.00. They have to carry themselves on barefoot onwards.

The population of Locheita village is 710. One person can survive for a month with 18Kg of Rice. If 2150Kg of Rice is to be shared among all, each one of them will get 3Kg of Rice, which will be sufficient only for 5 days.



Thlachei Zawtha and Rev.C.Sama with their fowl,a buffalo.



The buffalo, an offering to any church for rice.



Sunday Local News flash about Locheita villagers' Famine.