

THE CIJW SCHOOL IN MIZORAM

(Friday, 08 September 2006) - Contributed by R.Satyanarayanan - Last Updated (Friday, 08 September 2006)

Mizoram is perhaps the only place on earth that has seen the worst of insurgency and the best that peace has to offer. For twenty long years, the Mizo land and people were dragged through unrest and violence when the Mizo National Front rose in rebellion against the Union of India. Mizoram at that time was badly hit by a famine caused by the flowering of bamboos which in turn led to an outbreak of rats who decimated all paddy crops. The people who then depended largely on domestic produce were hard hit as there was suddenly no food to fill their stomachs. Incessant cries for relief and help to the Central government were not received by sympathetic ears. The Mizo National Famine Front headed by Laldenga was formed, which later took on a more militant face and became the Mizo National Front. So the fight that started for food turned into a fight for independence. Atrocities were committed on both sides - the MNF and the Indian army- but the ones who bore the brunt of it all were, needless to say, the people. However, in 1986 with the public and churches demand for peace to return once again, the Mizoram Peace Accord was signed between the Government of India and the Mizo National Front. Since then, Mizoram and the Indian Army have shared a sort of love-hate relationship. The presence of armed forces in the state is contradictorily welcomed and at the same time abhorred by the Mizos. But memories of the nightmare that was insurgency have already started to fade and Mizos, especially the youth, are now quite happy to include themselves to a great extent as part of the Indian nation. Young Mizo men have and still are giving laudable service to their country by joining the army. The booming Indian economy which opened up the floodgates of opportunities and wealth is undoubtedly also a feel-good factor in deciding the Mizo mind to accept the 'Indian' identity. As elsewhere, the presence of the men in uniform in the midst of civilians has often resulted in mutual misunderstanding and skirmishes, the absolutely regimented life of the army being obviously in complete contrast to the liberal life led by civilians. This is true not only for Mizoram but everywhere one finds the two at close proximity. And whenever such conflict of interests arises, both sides react vehemently. However, today the army has seemingly learnt its lesson from its many operations within the country while combating insurgency and similar uprisings. It has learnt to be transparent and media-friendly. It has learnt to respect human rights and has even included relevant courses in its various trainings. It has understood for the better that most regional problems are people-centric and the usual army tactics and strategies can almost never be successfully applied. The best testimony to the dawn of peace in Mizoram is perhaps the presence of the The Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare (CIJW) School at Vairengte, the 'Gateway to Mizoram'. It is today considered as one of world's most prestigious anti-terrorist institution with trainees from several countries receiving counter insurgency and counter terrorist training. The School is perched on the hills of Mizoram approximately five kilometers all along the National Highway 54 hugging a tribal hamlet, wedged on the border between Mizoram and the state of Assam. Of late the school has been attracting trainees from all around the world because of the natural training areas and the quality training being provided by an expert training faculty. The motto of this institute is to 'Fight The Guerilla Like A Guerilla'. The idea to set up the Jungle Warfare School was conceived by former Indian Army Field Marshal SHFJ Manekshaw sometime in 1967, when the Indian soldiers suffered heavy casualties at the hands of northeastern rebels who were adept at hit-and-run guerilla strikes. The Army then was only trained in conventional warfare and this type of unconventional warfare by northeast rebels was unique in its kind. Therefore, a need was felt to establish an institution, which could train the Indian soldiers in this unconventional warfare. Accordingly, in 1967, Lt Col (later Lt Gen) Mathew Thomas, established an adhoc Jungle Training School at Mynkre near Jowai (Shillong). The school was shifted to its present location, Vairengte and was redesignated as CIJW School on 01 May 1970. But one year down the line, Indian soldiers undergoing training in the school were pushed to the battlefield. They took part in "Operation Jackpot," to help the then East Pakistan gain independence and become Bangladesh. But once the mission was accomplished, the CIJW reverted to its task of imparting serious counter insurgency lessons to Indian soldiers, for which the institute was established. And during the next three decades, the school at Vairengte has prepared troops to fight anti-India separatists engaged in low-intensity and unconventional guerilla warfare against the state forces in different parts of the country, particularly in the northeast and Jammu and Kashmir. Since its inception, the School has constantly evolved in stature and strength, in keeping with the changing dynamics of insurgency and terrorism in the country. Its relevance has grown manifolds with the mushrooming of small and big insurgent/terrorist groups in the country and worldwide. Terrorism is often dubbed as 'Today's War' and with its vast expertise in counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism training, it has truly come into its own as a centre of excellence in such operations. The School has continuously incorporated all the lessons learnt during such operations and has painstakingly kept its training curriculum contemporary. It presently trains over 7000 officers and soldiers every year. Its scope and mandate has increased with Para Military Forces, Police, Services and foreign component adding to the numbers and compositions. The CIJW School conducts counter insurgency and counter terrorist courses for officers and soldiers below 28 years of age, with expert instructors imparting rigorous training to the trainees. In addition to the above, it also conducts pre-induction training for the units being inducted into insurgency affected northeastern region. The training module is non-conventional and once a soldier undergoes training here, he can face all types of situations in an insurgency environment. The training focuses on the physical fitness, reflex firing techniques and tactical lessons. The module for training is practical oriented with number of lectures, discussions, case studies, sand model exercises & outdoor exercises. Live situations are painted during the outdoor exercises to judge the reaction of the soldiers at the spur of the moment. The troops are taught to live in difficult and hostile terrain, eat and sleep like the guerrillas and strike as silently as the guerrillas. The school boasts of excellent training areas, training facilities, with thirteen innovative firing ranges and an outstanding training staff who have first hand experience in fighting the insurgents and the terrorists within India. Today, the ultra is educated, uses the Internet for gathering information, disseminating propaganda, negotiating arms deal and is familiar with hi-tech explosives. At the same time he is replete with native skills and can devise deadly traps that can kill an elephant with nothing more than bamboos and vines. The inherent characteristic of insurgency in the NE

is its small scale, low profile activities, with the main insurgent bases located across the IB, in camps in Myanmar, Bangladesh, China and Bhutan. Terrorist units infiltrate into India through inhospitable terrain, strike fast and flee. Their ambushes – 72% of which are directed against the security forces – are meticulously planned and ruthlessly executed. Such hit and run tactics of small units force a large deployment of armed forces to counter them. But simply being on the killing ground pays no dividends. Learning to operate in small teams, studying the pattern of the militants, establishing an intelligence network, knowing their traditional sanctuaries, maintaining the element of surprise, selecting the site for counter ambush, observing the discipline of when exactly to open fire, knowing field craft and jungle craft well enough to remain undetected, and improvising within a given situation, is the kind of stuff that breaks an ambush. And it's this which is taught nowhere else better than at CIJW School.

Last year, contingents from the US, Mongolian and Uzbekistan Armies underwent training in the thick jungles of Mizoram. Even Israel and UK are eliciting interest in training their contingents in this school. Indeed, CIJW School has now found a place in the world map and has transformed the 'Gateway to Mizoram' into a much sought after place by the foreign armies. It is the professionalism demonstrated by the instructors and staff of the school that today the School is considered as one of the world's finest Counter Terrorist Institutes. Though there are several army training schools in other parts of India, it is through the CIJW School in Mizoram that the world community has come to recognize the experience of the Indian Army in fighting insurgency and terrorism. The training with foreign contingents, being interactive, adds value and enriches instructional component at the school. In short, the Counter Insurgency & Jungle Warfare School at Vairengte has in the long run become one of the jewels in Mizoram's crown.

Closer home, it has become a source of employment and income to many residents of Vairengte, the village it is situated at. The high school it runs also imparts good education to the village children, who are readily admitted as day scholars. The village cultural club is invited to display the rich tradition of the Mizos through their folk songs and dances whenever important dignitaries visit the School. There is now a growing acceptance and affinity between the people and the School, which can hopefully go a long way in creating a truly peaceful atmosphere for their co-existence.