

Mizoram - Fresh Faces Herald A New Dawn

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Abstract

Mizoram is a curious blend of historiography and demography. It branched off from a composite state of Assam, is populated by less than a million Mizo nationals, who are all Christians (Protestants), wedded to the Presbyterian church. It has a 40 members' legislative assembly whose election was held on November 7, 2023. The main contest was between Mizo National Front (MNF) and Zoram Peoples Movement (ZPM) with Congress and BJP pitched in as marginal players. It was an election without much noise and hyperbole because of church dictates to avoid high-octane publicity. The results were announced on December 4, 2023 and it gave ZPM a complete majority of 27 seats, and its leader Lalduhoma became the new Chief Minister, replacing Lalthanhawla of MNF. Earlier, the contest was between MNF and Congress but this time ZPM pitched in to form the government. The victory symbolised the ascendance of Zo people. A new party formed the government, defeating both MNF and Congress.

Keywords: MNF, ZPM, Zo People, Mizo and Kuki people.

Introduction

The state politics of Mizoram is a blend of both historiography as well as demography. The peculiar demographic traits of the state make it all the more interesting to study the nature and trends of the state politics of Mizoram. The research here focuses upon understanding and decoding the voting behaviour of the residents of Mizoram as well as the tactics that have been resorted to by the various political parties in the state to attract the maximum number of votes and to secure a decent vote share in the state elections of Mizoram. The caste target tactics here is a major way via which the political parties have been striving to maximize their respective vote shares and this indicates that the state politics of Mizoram majorly revolves around the caste- based politics.

The research work incorporated here is based upon secondary sources of data collection. The research manuscript encompasses various reputed newspapers,

journals, books and magazines to present the related relevant findings in a crystal clear and transparent manner.

Religion-based Politics: "The saga of Mizoram is a story in contrast, from tradition to modernity, animism to Christianity and insurgency to resurgence – in all a divided dream but the resulting pacification, after a nightmare of trouble and tribulations, craves a happy ending as if in a mega soap opera where in the end all sinners become saints. It is a metamorphosis (SHEKHAWAT, SINGH, & SINGH, (N.D.)) most devoutly to be wished for". It is a state with an absorbing historiography and demography. It branched off from the composite state of Assam. It is a tribal state, sparsely populated having less than a million people, mostly following Christianity. They are governed by the Presbyterian Church and are thus protestants. The role of church is reformist. Complete prohibition is clamped because of church dictates.

The state is no more a habitat of half-starved, half-clad tribals roaming in the jungles like wild animals. It is now an ultra-modern state, known for three Gs – guns, girls and guitar.

Election to 40 members Legislative Assembly was held on November 7, 2023. The main contest was amid Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) and Mizo National Front (MNF) with Congress as an important player and the saffron party pitching in between as yet another marginal player. The BJP has made its second inning into the government of Mizoram with Christian majority. The ZPM was expected to give the MNF a run for its money and became a top contender for power. Both MNF and ZPM, as also the Congress had put up 40 candidates each but BJP was satisfied with fielding 23 candidates only. Kiran Rijuju, the Union Minister of Earth Sciences was the state in-charge of BJP.

The BJP also contested the 2018 poll and put up 39 candidates but Buddha Dhan Chakma was the only winner from Twichawng where the Buddhist Chakmas are in a majority. The rest 38 candidates lost the election, 33 of them forfeiting their deposit. This time BJP was more hopeful as it had poached three turncoats –ex-Assembly Speaker Lalrinliana Sailo (Mamit Constituency), ex-minister K. Beichhua (Saiha) (KARMAKAR, 2003) and ex-party adviser T. Lalengthanga (West Tuipui), and had established itself in four districts where minority Bru, Chakma, Lai and Mara people rule the roost.

The BJP substituted Buddha Dhan Chakma, a medico who sought VRS from politics and hence his seat was given to another follow Chakma, Duriya Dhan Chakma. The party's state unit President Vanlalthmauka chose to fight from Dampa. This place is known as a tiger reserve, bordering Bangladesh. Pollsters and Pandits envisaged a close contest between two rival contenders – MNF and ZPM, because both are not only the followers of Christian faith but are also committed to Zo Unification, seeking ethnic integration of Mizo, Kuki and Chin communities.

The Congress at one time was a dominant player under the Chief Ministership of Lal Thanhawla. He was Chief Minister for a record five times but sought retirement and consequently the Congress was now pinning hopes on its new state chief Lalsawta. The change of guard did not mean much and the Congress was relegated to a back seat with only one winner.

The interesting aspect of electioneering in Mizoram is the dubious role of Chief Minister Zoramthanga, who stood on two horses. In Mizoram, he rode on MNF and kept a distance from BJP but at the central level, he retained his friendship with Modi government. However the events in Manipur estranged relations with Zoramthanga and Union government and when Prime Minister Modi declared his intention to visit Mizoram for electioneering, Zoramthanga refused to share the dias with him so as to express his resentment on the role of BJP in Manipur. The Prime Minister then cancelled his visit. But the BJP did not give up the hope for a coalition with ZPM. Said Kiran Rijuju "We have not had any discussion with ZPM who is fighting against the MNF and Congress. But if ZPM wins a good number of seats, they will need to work with the BJP". ZPM was a clear winner. Kiran Rijuju's hopes of a coalition were dashed to the ground.

Refugee Crisis: The election in Mizoram was a blander event because the church had directed the contestants to avoid noise and hyperbole. This denuded election of colour and gaiety but it was compensated by strong ethnic passions. The five elections since 1998, were known for a plea to disenfranchise the minority of Bru people who fled to Tripura following ethnic riots in 1997 in Mizoram. The issue was finally settled when Union government intervened and facilitated the settlement of about 35000 Bru people in Tripura. But this did not provide any comfort to Mizoram and events in Myanmar became violent in January 2020, after the military coup. It resulted in civil war which compelled thousands of Chin people to flee from Myanmar to Mizoram for safety of their lives. Side by side, in November 2022, a few hundred Kuki-Chin people also took refuge in Mizoram after undergoing religious persecution in Bangladesh. This created a refugee crisis in Mizoram because Kuki-Chin, the Chins and Kuki-zo are ethnically tied to Mizos and the Union government did nothing and remained indifferent to these events. Naturally, the government, on account of ethnic ties extended humanitarian aid to these refugees and made them feel at home in Mizoram. While the refugee crisis was at its peak, the ruling MNF began to experience the trouble caused by ZPM, which in the ensuing election in April, upset the applecart and inflicted heavy blows on MNF. It won 27 of 40 assembly seats in 2018 and got all 11 seats in Lunglei municipal corporation.

The ZPM successfully displaced Congress as the main opposition party in 2018 by winning all the eight seats and it became a source of great trouble for Chief Minister Zoramthanga by creeping into his constituency Aizwal East where it bagged six seats. As though, this was not enough, fresh trouble started

in Manipur owing to ethnic clashes between Christian Kukis and Hindu Meiteis in May, 2023 which led to a great displacement of Kukis, numbering 12500. But interestingly though, far from troubling Zoramthanga, the crisis offered a helpline to him. Zoramthanga converted the difficulty into a political opportunity by declaring his support to Kukis for a separate administration in Manipur. A former extremist and a hardened guerrilla fighter, Zoramthanga of MNF made good use of this ethnic crisis and expressed his angst against Manipur's alleged ethnic cleansing of Kukis.

Obviously it compelled ZPM to react violently. Its president Lalduhoma, a retired IPS, was quick to react. He said it was a strategy to garner voter by MNF. He accused the MNF of double speak. While remaining friendly with BJP led government at the centre, it was opposing saffron agenda in Mizoram for the sake of opportunistic politics.

The Congress contested the election without the tried, tested and experienced Lal Thanhawla and was thus obviously handicapped but it thought its new president Lalsawta would deliver the goods. He did not come under the pressure of powerful Mizo Students Union, which had demanded that the Congress drop its candidate Meriam L. Hrangchal from Lunglie South constituency because she was married to a non-Mizo. Yet he could not take Congress to victory.

Zo Unification: All refugees pray for Zo unification because the Mizos treated the refugees with extreme kindness and compassion. (KARMAKAR, R., 2003B) About 300 persons belonging to 50 Kuki-Zo families were displaced in ethnic riots in Manipur. They were sheltered in Mizoram in a residential block at Falkland. In fact, Falkland had the largest concentration of over 1250 Manipuri refugees. Falkland is in Aizwal East constituency which is put forth by ex-Chief Minister Zoramthanga, who is the president of MNF too.

The MNF manifesto laid special emphasis is on the amalgamation of Zo sects such as the dominant Mizos , Kukis of Manipur and Chins sects of Myanmar and Bangladesh. But the irony is that whereas in Mizoram, the chant of Zo unification is an integrating force, in Manipur it fans secessionism and Kukis remain insistent on a separate administration which would eventually divide and split Manipur into two separate states. This is the eventuality the Meiteis of Manipur dread and fear most and oppose because they fear that a Manipur divided on religio-ethnic lines would make it a tiny geographical spec in the map of India. They are still enamoured of the days when Manipur was a big Kingdom settling frequent scores with Myanmar.

Though well looked after in Mizoram, the refugees still pine for their own homeland and wish to return there. Says John Zo, a Manipuri refugee, "We are thankful to the Mizoram government, to mention the CM for giving us shelter and taking up our concern. We hope and pray that the following government by

whichever party or coalition is sympathetic to us and aids us go back to where we hail from”.

Zo issue has become a recurrent theme in this election among Chief Minister Zoramthanga, whose co-contenders from Aizwal East-I seat are Lalthansanga of Zoram Peoples’ (KARMAKAR, R., 2003C) Movement, Lalsanglura Ralte of Congress and Lalruatifeli Hlawndo – an independent.

The protection and care of Zo people is an issue that everyone champions, chiefly the Chief Minister Zoramthanga. This is criticised by ZPM President Lalduhoma, who maintains that Zo welfare is a convenient cover of government to cover its failure of five years misrule. He said, “All political parties have been equally sensitive about the displaced persons but are not trying to derive political mileage from their misery”. The leaders of Congress and BJP show equal commitment to the displaced refugees who are voters in Manipur. Along with these political parties, the Aam Admi party too has registered its presence by putting up four candidates, knowing fully well that they are unlikely to cut any ice with Mizo electorate. This is merely tokenism.

The displaced Manipuri refugees have become a fulcrum of Mizo politics and all parties are vying with each other to demonstrate their love for the refugees. For the first time in five decades, refugees have become the poll issue in Mizoram as the Bangladeshi Muslims are a core issue in Assam. Mizoram is currently hosting some 33000 Chin refugees from Myanmar and 800 Kuki-Chins from Bangladesh. The Myanmar Chins fled from their country owing to civil war there while the Bangladeshi Kuki-Chins came here because of sporadic battle between Bangladeshis armed forces and Kuki-Chin extremist groups in the Chittangong Hill Tracts.

T.J. Lalnutluanga, seeking re-election from Champhai South constituency sought votes in the name of humanitarian work that the MNF has done for the refugees. His re-election would be a guarantee of continuation of this work for refugees, whose number is 11919. They are Myanmar refugees according to District Disaster Management Authority, Champhai.

This is countered by Clement Lalhmingthanga, a retired Lieutenant Colonel of the army, who is contesting on ZPM ticket from Champhai South. Criticising the government for falsely taking credit for the plight of the refugees and their alleged services, he said, "They are attempting to cash in on the show of brotherhood when actually their government did nothing for the people of Myanmar. They are being looked after by the NGOs, church organisations and the persons”.

A similar view was expressed by Champhai South Congress candidate that MNF was attempting to copyright the issue of refugees when everybody cutting across party lines is helping them. P.S. Zatluanga of BJP too said “The people have got the information that Centre has assured material help”.

Despite a war of words, the election is genteel owing to church dictates to follow a model code of conduct. The MNF not only harps on Zo unification but also parades its welfare schemes through Socio-Economic Development Schemes (SFDF). This scheme provides a financial assistance of Rs 3 lakhs to beneficiaries who take up a business of their choice. Said the MNF spokesperson “Some 60,000 families were provided with assistance of Rs. 50,000 each and another 60,000 were given Rs. 25,000 each in the second phase. The third phase was suspended temporarily as its initiation coincided with the announcement of polls”.

State Congress president Lalsawta trashed the MNF claim and said, “They provided only Rs. 25,000 and only a handful party workers got the money, not the farmers and skilled workers who required it”.

The SEDF too came in for shelling by the Congress president who said that this was an propagandised version of the New Land Use Policy (NLUP) which was launched somewhere in January 2011 by the Congress government under Lal Thanhawla to offer financial aid of Rs. 1 lakh each to 1.2 lakh clans identified by agriculture and allied departments.

The BJP too criticised SEDP. It offered the Lotus expanding to Livelihood Opportunity Transformation and empowerment scheme to bail out these beneficiaries who were affected hard by “fallacious and corruption engulfing SEDP”.

Thus a host of leaders were involved in the process of mud-slinging which from all-India standards was indeed soft and polite owing to church dictates to keep the election a genteel affair and avoid boisterousness and hyperbole.

The End Product: The results were announced on December 4, 2023 and they gave ZPM the majority. The final outcome was ZPM – 27 seats MNF 10 seats, the BJP 2 and Congress 1 in a 40 members assembly. The leader of Zoram People’s Movement is Lalduhoma who as stated earlier, is an IPS retired man. He joined the Congress and became its M.P. in 1984 (KHAN & HAUSING, 2023). He has the unenviable distinction of being the first legislator to be disqualified under the anti-defection law in 1988. In 2018, he formed the ZPM and Election Commission recognised it in 2019. Before getting recognition, its candidates fought election in 2018 as Independents and eight of them won the election including Lalduhoma himself from two seats.

The present election of 2023 has many shocks to record. The MNF was ousted in the election and the Congress, which was a ruling party at some time with Lalthanwala as its Chief Minister, was reduced to just 1 seat, behind even BJP which annexed two seats. In 2018, the Congress party had four seats. Mizoram has an electorate of 8.5 lakh persons. For ZPM, it was a very happy moment. Four years back upto 2018, it was not even a registered party and now it is a ruling party.

While Lalduhoma, won from Sirchhip constituency, the outgoing Chief Minister Zoramthanga lost his Aizwal East-I seat. The state, thirty six years ago, had seen only two Chief Ministers viz, Lalthanhawla and Zoramthanga and now the state is well set to experiment with a new Chief Minister, Lalduhoma.

Soon after the announcement of results, the new leader announced that his party will remain neutral and independent and would not join any group such as National Democratic Alliance (NDA) of Narendra Modi or the opposition alliance INDIA. The new Chief Minister said, “We don’t want to be dictated from Delhi. Our relationship with central government will be issue-based”.

The ZPM’s governance would be based on the promise of Kalphungthar i.e. a new system of inclusive government based on tribal tradition of village elders presiding over and deciding matters that are of crucial concern to the community.

The party has an advisory committee consisting of retired bureaucrats and pastors, who are all elders in the 60-90 age bracket and they are authorised to nominate the Chief Minister and assist him in selecting his team of ministers. It will have moral strength and serve as the conscience-keeper of new dispensation. As stated earlier, the ZPM, prior to its recognition by the Election Commission used to put up Independent candidates. The new CM has declared that he will rule according to the wishes of people who have high expectations from him to give them an efficient and corruption free governments. The farmers too have high hopes from him. He said, “Farmers want us to buy their produce at fixed prices which we are committed to”.

The most important announcement which he made was with regard to CBI whom his new government has given blanket-consent to unearth all cases of graft and corruption during the last five years. He also referred to financial difficulties caused by the outgoing government said “We have inherited financial constraints from the outgoing government, but we will honour all our commitments. We will constitute an expert committee and put fiscal reforms in place”.

Change of Guards: Having lost the seats, the incumbent Chief Minister took no time in submitting his resignation to the state Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati in the best traditions of democracy. It is really heartening to note that a former guerrilla that Zoramthama was, he adhered to democratic norms in submitting his resignation. What is more, he admitted that the peoples verdict for ZPM was because of “people’s unhappiness over my government’s performance during the pandemics”. Very few Chief Ministers while facing adverse verdict are so frank and honest about the reasons of their party’s defeat.

Zoramthama also said that he would not leave the NDA. He said, “I am a founding member of NDA. I have no thoughts of leaving”.

Narendra Modi congratulated the new CM and those elected on BJP ticket. He said that “I would like to greet all those who advocated for BJP in Mizoram. Our party will rigorously work to ensure Mizoram scales novel benchmarks of progress. I appreciate the hard work of our party workers who reached out to the people of the state and highlighted our agenda of good governance”. He then congratulated the BJP winners and said, “I would also like to specially greet K. Beichhua and K. Hrahme from our party on being elected MLAs. My greetings for their future legislative journey”. BJP President J.P. Nadda said, “We humbly take the people’s mandate and will keep working for the empowerment of the state”.

Women’s Representation: It is heartening to note that even in a small 40 members assembly, the state of Mizoram elected three women. These are Lalrinpuii, and Barly Vanneihsang from ZPM and Pravo Chakma from MNF. Lalrinpuii won from Lunglei East, Vanneihsang from Aizwal South-3 and Baryl Pravo from West Tuipui.

It may be recalled that L. Thanmawii of People’s Conference was the first women to be elected to the Mizoram in 1972 when it was a Union Territory having a 30 members legislature. The second woman was P. Cskk Thansiemi of MNF in 1984, followed by Lahlimpuli. She was made the first woman minister of state in 1987 in the government headed by LM Laldenga. Another woman legislator was Vanlalawmpuii K Chawngtha who was elected in 2014 in a by-election and was made a junior minister in the then Congress ministry headed by Lal Thanhawla in 2017. Thus woman continued to be elected and inducted in ministry in Mizoram, a small state of 8 and a half lakh souls.

The present CM, the 74 years Lalduhoma was already a household name in Mizoram because he was a 1977 batch IPS officer. He had to suffer the ignominy of being disqualified as a first M.P. and then a MLA under the anti-defection law. This time after orchestrating the biggest stir in a Christian majority state, he realised that his right time has come only now and he said with an air of satisfaction “I have been struggling all these years for this moment”.

Lalduhoma was born in Tualpui village of Champhai district bordering Myanmar. From the very inception, he was a precocious child, given to academics, reading and writing. He caught the eye of union’s first CM C. Chhunga who was impressed by his academic learnings and appointed him as a principal assistant in his office in 1972.

He then went to the Gauhati university and graduated with distinction. Five years later, he cleared the civil service examination, became an IPS officer and joined service in Goa. He was a ruthless officer against drug mafia and in a short time built around him a refutation that was strong enough to reach the ears of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who got him transferred to New Delhi and put him in her security. At Indira’s behest, it was he who brought the insurgent

leader Lal Denga of MNF to the negotiating table. Rajiv Gandhi made him the Additional DC of Delhi police, where he served till 1984. In 1984, he joined Congress and was elected unopposed. He would resign from the party four years later and thus incurred the disqualification as M.P.

He returned home and brought into existence a new political formation Mizoram Congress for Peace which he later rechristened as Mizo National Union (MNU) in 1986. To begin with, this experiment of getting into politics proved disastrous as his party failed to get a single seat in the election.

The MNU merged with a small party to form a Democratic Party which did not last long and split eventually. He then joined MNF but this step too proved wrong and he had to quit this organisation in 1997 after losing to Zoramthama in the race for party president.

He then formed MNF (Nationalist) which metamorphosed into Zoram Nationalist Party. In 2018, he led a new formation Zoram Peoples Movement, fought the election and won 8-seats. That was the beginning of his rise to power. The rest is history.

It may be noted that ZPM is just now another political formation that opposed the strong anti-incumbency of MNF. It represents a new dawn in a state which had seen the Congress and MNF vying for honours since the state acquired statehood from a union territory in 1987. For six long years, the ZPM was actively involved in Mizo politics and buffering between these two political parties. It came as a new political reset which was destined to replace these established political formations and set a new trend. It entered Mizo politics as a new political reset, disillusioned by the performance of both Congress and MNF. It began its political journey as Zoram Exodus Movement and chose a new path. It began working on a template vastly different from power-tainted Congress and MNF. In this game of political chess, Lalduhoma deftly arranged his pieces on the chequerboard of Mizo politics.

As stated earlier, the ZPM, to establish itself had to chart a new course and it gave the clarion call to rid Mizoram of corruption if returned to power. Lalduhoma promised corruption free rule and inclusive government which he called Kalphungthar. The party did the home work on farmers which were the mainstay of rural economy. The first thing ZPM did was to promise remunerative prices of agricultural products such as ginger, turmeric, chilli and broomstick. Apart from the agricultural sector, the ZPM also put its focus on education and public healthcare outside the ambit of medical reimbursement by the government.

What set the ZPM apart and different from the other political players was its constant refrain to create a corruption free government. It reorganised its internal functioning mechanism which was vastly different from that of other political parties. Unlike the BJP and Congress which had high commands and communist who depended upon their party political bureau, the ZPM set to

create a council of elders who served as a decision-making caucus which was prevalent in Mizo-inhabited villages. According to a party functionary, “They decide who will be the CM and the Council of Ministers. Prior to the polls, the council of elders, called Val Upa council, nominated Lalduhoma as the party’s chief ministerial face”.

It may be noted that the Val Upa Council came into existence soon after the ZPM was floated on August 15, 2017. The independence day was deliberately chosen to provide ZPM an auspicious start on its political journey. This 12 member council consisted of retired IAS and IPS officers as well as pastors who were between the age group of 60 to 90 years of age to provide maturity to it. In selecting these people, care was taken to cherrypick only those persons who enjoyed high esteem in Mizo society. Currently, the retired IAS officer and former Chief Secretary of Mizoram government Lalfakzuala is serving as its chairperson. “The council will function as the watch dog”, he said.

Yet another important political player in Mizoram is Lalthansanga who was defeated in two successive elections in 2013 and 2018. He lost to Lal Thanhawla of Congress and Lal Chamliana of Mizo National Front respectively. The law of average said that he was due for victory and hence the committee of ZPM selected him to take on the MNF Chief and CM Zoramthanga in the coming election with the hope that this time luck might favour him. And luckily he did defeat Zoramthamba and became a giant killer and that too, on his home turf, the Aizwal East-1. He expressed happiness at the outcome of election and promised to create a better and vastly improved Mizoram. In this, he took into consideration what isolated Mizoram in India. It was the lack of knowledge and he decided to make Hindi teaching popular in Mizoram to Indianise the state and break its political isolation. He declared with an air of confidence that “The old era is gone. People want a better Mizoram. Whoever comes to Mizoram will feel the Indianness here like any other state. Tourists will be able to move around peacefully. Our faces may look like Chinese but we are Indians”. The last one is important. The people in northeast states are of Mongolian ethnicity and hence featurewise they look like Chinese and not like the Aryans of north India or the Dravidians of south India. Hence it is only necessary to teach them Hindi so that they can communicate easily with the people of Indian heartland and show their Indian credentials despite facial dissimilarity owing to their ethnic differentiation. This is a welcome step towards greater integration of people of northeastern region with mainstream India.

Parties of Hindi Heartland: Whereas Mizoram’s people in this election preferred a regional outfit to national parties, the latter too worked hard to impress the electorate. In this game, the Congress was the worst sufferer. It was a party that ruled Mizoram for 22 years and this time it won only one seat. As The Hindu reports “C. Ngunlianchunga proved to be a saving grace for

Congress which ruled Mizoram for more than 22 years, by winning the Lawngthai West seat. The party had won five seats in 2018, down from 34 in 2013”.

The BJP proved its class by sweeping across the southern Mizoram’s Siaha district by winning both the seats, but sadly enough, it drew a blank in the Buddihst Chackma dominated area where it had won its lone seat in 2018. Thus it is a step down for Congress and step up for BJP which upstaged the former by winning two seats. The biggest gainer, of course, was the ZPM which formed the government on December 8, 2023. The ZPM’s success is attributed to the fact that it introduced new faces. More than 82% of its candidates were newcomers including the India footballer Jeje Lalpekhlua who won from South Tuipui seat. Lieutenant Colonel Cleament Lalhoninghange won the Champhai South seat. K. Beichhua, a former minister who quit MNF, won Saiha seat on BJP ticket. Sports Minister Robert Romawia Royte, along with six others lost the election.

Party Revolving System: It may be remembered that for long the Congress and MNF perpetuated a revolving door system wherein an alternate party came to power in every one or two-elections, since 1987. But the impressive win by ZPM marks a break from the past. It was formed in 2017, and it won 27 seats and an over 37% vote share - is a spectacular improvement from of its tally of eight seats and a 22% vote share in 2018”, observes Professor Kham Khan Suan Hausing.

The predicament for Congress is apparent. It won only one seat and was a distant second in six constituency. The only exception is Thorang constituency where Zodintluanga Ralte, its candidate lost by a whisker of 62 votes against his M.N.F. rival R. Rohmingliona.

Mizoram being a small state, followed the “small state syndrome”, where a party in coalition with the party in power at the union level wins the election on account of it being financed by the centre. But this election defied the old system and the ZPM formed the government on its own resources, independent of any largess from the central party. Kham Khan Suan Hausing calls it “an interesting electoral puzzle”.

While the MNF was facing anti-incumbency, the emergence of ZPM is because of the space vacated by the Congress. The new party tried to put up experienced, educated and star packed candidates before the voters such as Jeje Lal Pekhlua (national football player), Barly Vanneihsang (radio jockey and municipal councillor) and Vanlalsailova (a gospel singer who lost by 292 votes). It sent the right political vibes to voters. Lalduhoma, himself was a decorated IPS officer and he made an impressive impact. The new Chief Minister effectively exposed the inefficiency and irregularities in the rural development programme of earlier government. Earlier, the New Land Use Policy was

launched by the Congress party and replicated by the MNF but without much success. The failure of previous parties and “the precarity of farmer’s economy in rural Mizoram was effectively used by the ZPM to galvanise a groundswell of support for its pet development project aimed at alleviating poverty and raising rural income”.

Apart from this “The ZPM subtle messaging to arraign the MNF for its alliance with Bhartiye Janata Party and the latter’s failure to protect Christian minorities and Zo (Kuki-Zomi) people in Manipur since the outbreak of violence from May 3 seem to have worked in its favour”, observes Kham Khan Suan Hausing. Indeed this was the trick that played well and it delivered. The MNF, till now boasted that it protected and rehabilitated 40000 Chin refugees who fled from the February 2021 military coup de etat in Myanmar and over 12000 Zo (Kuki-Zomi) internally displaced persons from Manipur’s violence since early May, was systematically countered by ZPM, by exposing the hypocrisy of MNF that talked of protecting and giving asylum to Christian refugees on the one hand and at the same time continue to maintain its link with the very party at the union level, whose regional counterpart in Manipur allegedly committed atrocities against the Christians.

The remarkable emergence of ZPM in Mizoram marks both continuity and change in Mizoram politics. It leverages continuity and yet marks a subtle but definite break with past. For MNF, the defeat is enormous as two of its top leaders Zoramthanga and Tawnlula lost the election but one cannot write it off because it garnered 35% of vote share and managed a second place in 28 constituencies. It shows that these parties still enjoy considerably wide electoral support and clout and much depends upon their ability to revive themselves and produce popular leaders beyond Lal Thanhawla and Zoramthanga. Till then, let the new government set a model new corruption free government and take Mizoram to new heights.

Government Formation - A New Dawn: December 8, 2023 was an auspicious day for Zoram Peoples Movement as on this day it formed its first government, pushing behind both MNF and Congress that had ruled Mizoram since it became a Union Territory / State. Lalduhoma was sworn in as the Chief Minister by the Governor of the state Hari Baby Kambhampati. Eleven other ministers took oath with him at a function held at the Raj Bhawan. Thus the total strength of the Ministers became twelve, including the Chief Minister.

ZPM Legislature Party deputy leader K. Sapdanga was made the Home Minister while Lalrinpuli from the Lunglei East constituency became the first woman cabinet minister in Mizoram. She would hold Health, Social welfare and Tribal Affairs, Women and Child Development and Tourism portfolios.

The new Chief Minister Lalduhoma, while addressing a press conference declared that his government would implement 12 programmes in the next 100

days. As was already stated the Lalduhoma government was pro-farmer, and the new CM said “Our government will buy four local products from farmers like ginger, turmeric, chilli and broomsticks by fixing minimum prices. Farmers will have the choice to sell their products on their own or to the government”.

As stated earlier, Lalduhoma, a IPS turned politician had served as the security-in-charge of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and is rated as an efficient and able person. He said that the state’s financial condition was in bad shape and hence the next financial year would be a year of consolidation. The “Budget will be oriented to ZPM policies and all ministers will monitor their departments by a road map”. Of interest was his declaration to form a committee of “Ministers, MLAs, officials, representatives of all political parties, NGOs, churches and Mizo People’s Forum, a poll watch dog, to monitor development projects across the State”.

Concluding Observation: By putting into power ZPM, the state of Mizoram added a new chapter in its history. Till now, since Mizoram attained statehood, power oscillated between two parties – MNF and Congress. The ZPM victory put a new credible alternative between the two. The ZPM was formed in 2017 as a coalition of six small parties – Mizoram Peoples Conference, Zoram Nationalist Party, Zoram Exodus Movement, Zoram Decentralisation Front, Zoram Reformation Front and Mizoram Peoples Party. Finally it became ZPM and got recognition of Election Commission in 2017.

The new government is committed to create a corruption free atmosphere and create more employment opportunities. "Skill development and push to entrepreneurship will be our government’s priorities. We will have flagship hand-holding policy through which we will provide financial support to youngsters. We will also help them exploit central government schemes”, declared Lalduhoma.

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