

Seminar on Challenges of Governance in the North-east, Sept. 14, 2010
Rabindranath Tagore Hall organized by Centre for North East Studies, ATWS

The Union Minister for Development of the Northeastern Region, Mr. BK Handique, Chief Minister of Mizoram, Mr. Lalthanhawla, and Ms. Jayati Chandra, Secretary of the Ministry, addressed a seminar on ‘Challenges of Governance in the North-east’ on 14 September 2010 at the Rabindranath Tagore Conference Room in Jamia Millia Islamia, organized by the Centre for North East Studies at the Academy of Third World Studies.

The Vice Chancellor of Jamia Millia, Mr. Najeeb Jung (IAS), delivered opening remarks welcoming the speakers and also stressed the importance of having such a Centre to bridge the gaps between the region and New Delhi and improve the quality of research, documentation and interaction on issues relating to the NER.

Prof Sanjoy Hazarika, Saifuddin Kitchlew Chair at ATWS who is developing and running the Northeastern programmes at Jamia, introduced the speakers, outlined the goals of the programme and added that he hoped that the Ministry and the Mizoram Government would support the activities of the Centre. He emphasized the need to focus on governance and development issues and also review policies that the Centre had tried to implement in the region to consider where they had fallen short.

In his keynote address, ‘History as a Window: Understanding the North-east’, Mr. Handique emphasized that understanding the history of the region was the key to understanding the North-east and its people. He said that the rest of India knew little of the deep involvement of Assam and others states in the independence movement and also in the First War of Independence. This he said needed to be remedied and he looked to the North East Centre at Jamia at helping to bridge this gap, noting that the Centre had already taken a first major step in this regard with a seminar the Role of Muslims in Assam in the Independence Movement in March 2010. (see speech).

“History may not be wrong but historians can be,” he added, underlining that a nuanced understanding of the problems of the North-east was possible only after considering its complex background.

Mr. Lalthanhawla, the Mizoram Chief Minister who made political history in 1986 by stepping down from that position as part of an accord with the then underground Mizo National Front, to close 20 years of fighting with the Indian State and bringing the underground elements into a Constitutional and democratic process. Focussing on “Governance, Development and Peace Processes,” the Chief Minister reflected on his own unique experiences of dealing with conflict, stressing that specific factors enabled the Mizoram experience to work in his state. (see speech) “Development and Peace” must go together, he said; one could not precede the other.

Ms. Jayati Chandra, Secretary in the Ministry of DoNER, said that she hoped that the NE Centre would help develop programmes and reviews of policies, based on rigorous research, which would help develop a clearer understanding of which policies were

working and well as those which needed change. “One size does not fit anything,” she remarked.

An interactive question and answer session. Participants who included diplomats and senior government officials, as well as JMI faculty and students as well as media and activists. The premier daily of the North-east, The Assam Tribune, front-paged Minister Handique’s speech, emphasizing his call for giving a rightful place to the region’s distinguished but unheralded and under-researched freedom fighters.