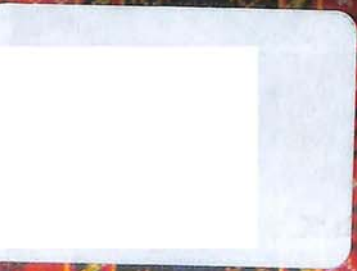




MIZORAM



MIZORAM



Prof. A. C. Sinha



DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION & PUBLIC RELATIONS, MIZORAM

Publisher's Note



It is difficult to portray an entire State in the pages of a book, no matter how intense the words or the impact of the pictures that accompany may be.

But then a book is always the best means of capturing the "essence" of a land and its people in all their myriad facets, for someone to enjoy at leisure, hundreds of miles away. It is also a powerful way to tell about a unique geographical area where natural scenic splendour lies in harmony with biodiversity and human culture, where festivals and music seem to echo the rhythm of life and nature.

This book on Mizoram is an attempt to portray a complete picture of the Mizos in all their settings, their historical evolution, customs, beliefs, occupation, crafts and to their current status. It is also an attempt to present the Mizos on the map of India as an integral part of the rich tapestry that holds India together. It is hoped that this book, with its rich verbal and visual content would help invite new interest in Mizoram and that more books on the close-ups of Mizo life and culture will follow this book which would help the world to know more about the Mizos and Mizoram.

23 February, 2004
Aizawl, Mizoram

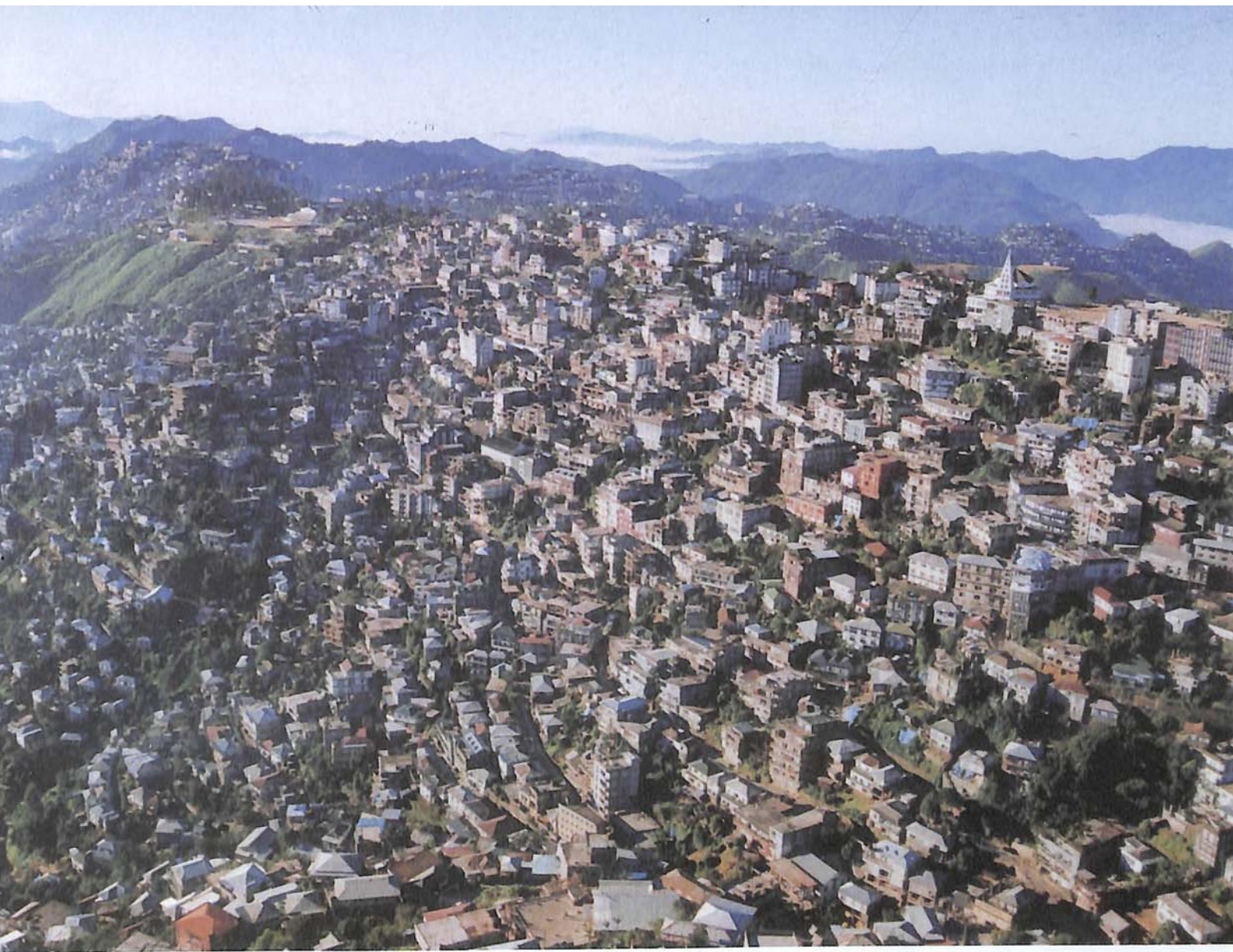
A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'H. V. Lalringa', with a stylized flourish at the end.

(H. V. Lalringa, IAS.)
Chief Secretary
Mizoram

CONTENTS

P. J. A. C. Sinha

THE LAND OF PEACE & PROGRESS	7	MIZOS THROUGH THE AGES	38
PHYSICAL FEATURES	10	BRITISH ADMINISTRATION	41
Hills	10	MIZO DISTRICT	41
Rivers	11	POLITICAL DISTURBANCE	43
Lakes	14	UNION TERRITORY	43
Climate	19	PEACE AND STATEHOOD	44
Fauna	22	CUSTOMS	46
Flora	24	BRIDE PRICE	46
Wildlife and Sanctuaries	25	WEDDING	48
FESTIVALS	28	INHERITANCE	49
DANCES	29	ZAWLBUK	50
Cheraw	29	TLAWMNGAIHNA	51
Khuallam	30	POPULATION	54
Chheih Lam	31	AGRICULTURE	55
Rallu Lam	33	HORTICULTURE	56
Solakia	33	HANDLOOM AND HANDICRAFTS	61
Sarlamkai	33	EDUCATION	69
Par Lam	33	COMMUNICATIONS	70
MUSIC	34		



Aizawl City – Capital of Mizoram

MIZORAM

The Land of Peace and Progress

Nestled in the gentle hill folds, Mizoram, one of the fabled *Seven Sisters* of the North-East, covers an overall area of 21,087 sq.km. The length of the state, stretching north to south, is 277 km. while the width, from east to west, is 121 km .

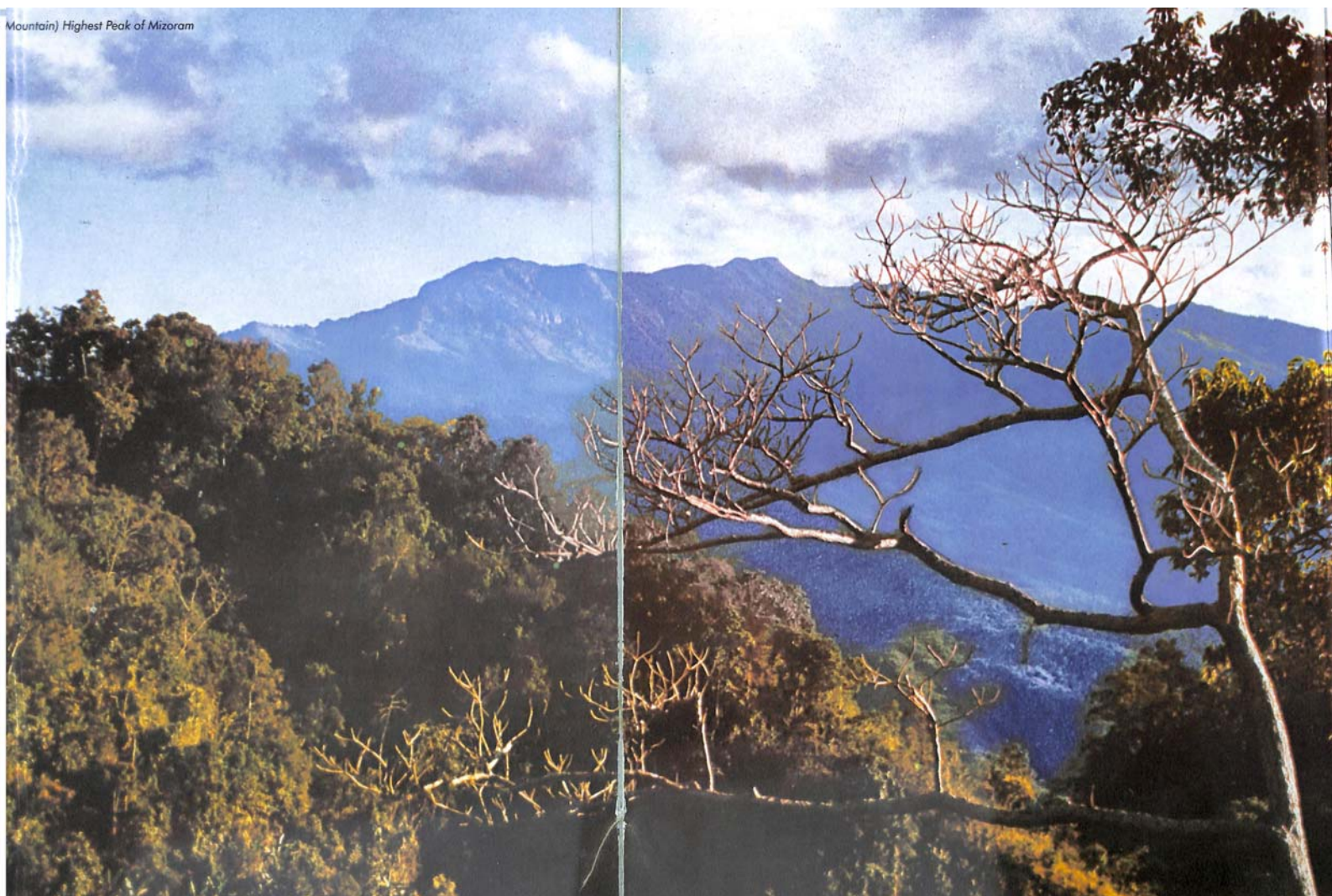
Mizoram shares its borders with three states – Assam, Tripura and Manipur. Its border with Manipur extends over 95 km. The state has also common borders with two foreign countries, Myanmar and Bangladesh. The

total length of Mizoram's international border adds up to 722 km.

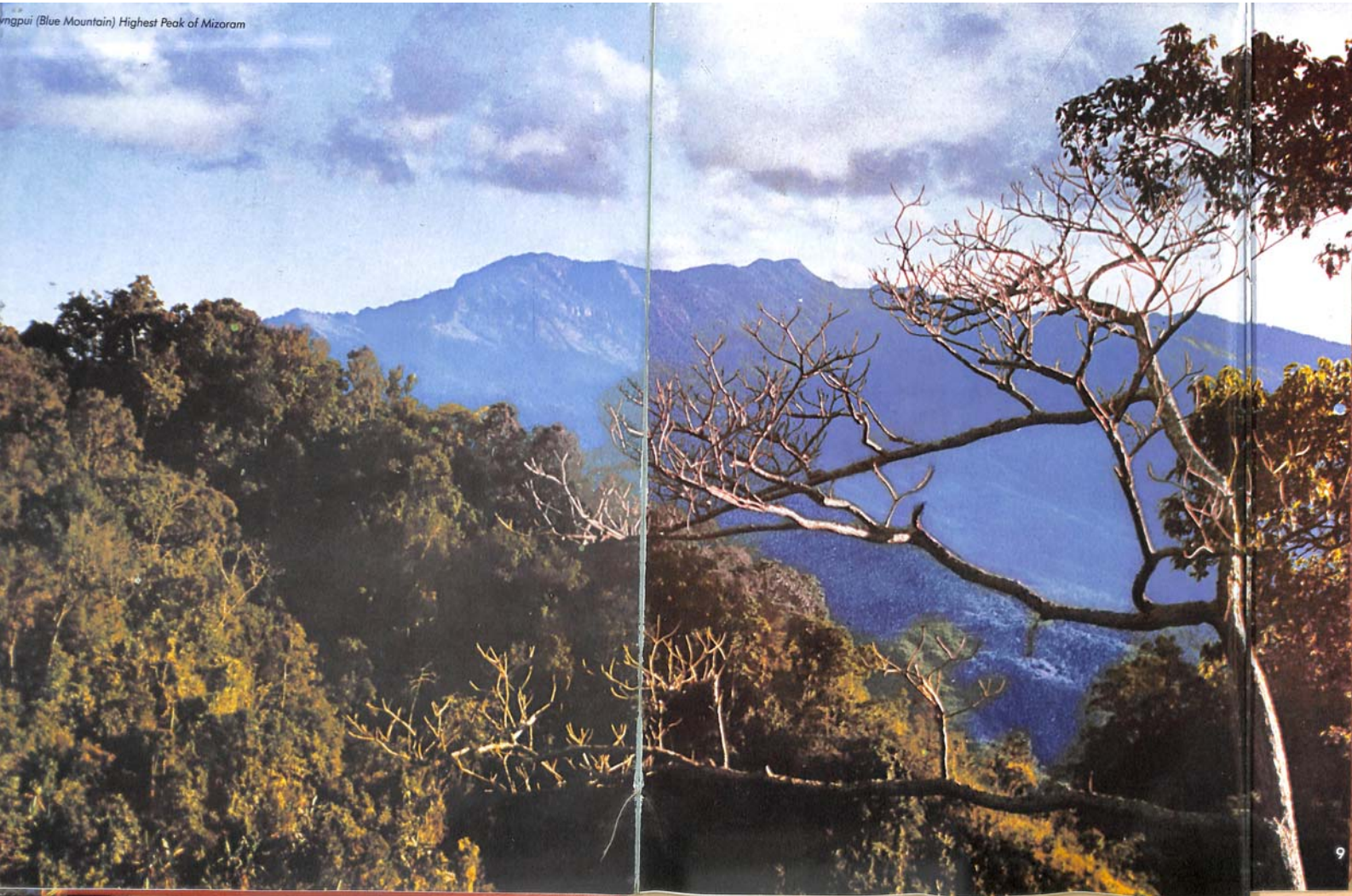
Situated between 21.58° north to 24.35° north latitude and 92.15° east to 93.29° east longitude, Mizoram is shaped like a narrow triangle. The line of the Tropic of Cancer passes near Aizawl, the capital. Mizoram is divided into eight districts namely, Aizawl, Champhai, Mamit, Lunglei, Saiha, Lawngtlai, Serchhip and Kolasib.

Prof. A. C. Sinha

Mountain) Highest Peak of Mizoram



ngpui (Blue Mountain) Highest Peak of Mizoram



PHYSICAL FEATURES

Hills

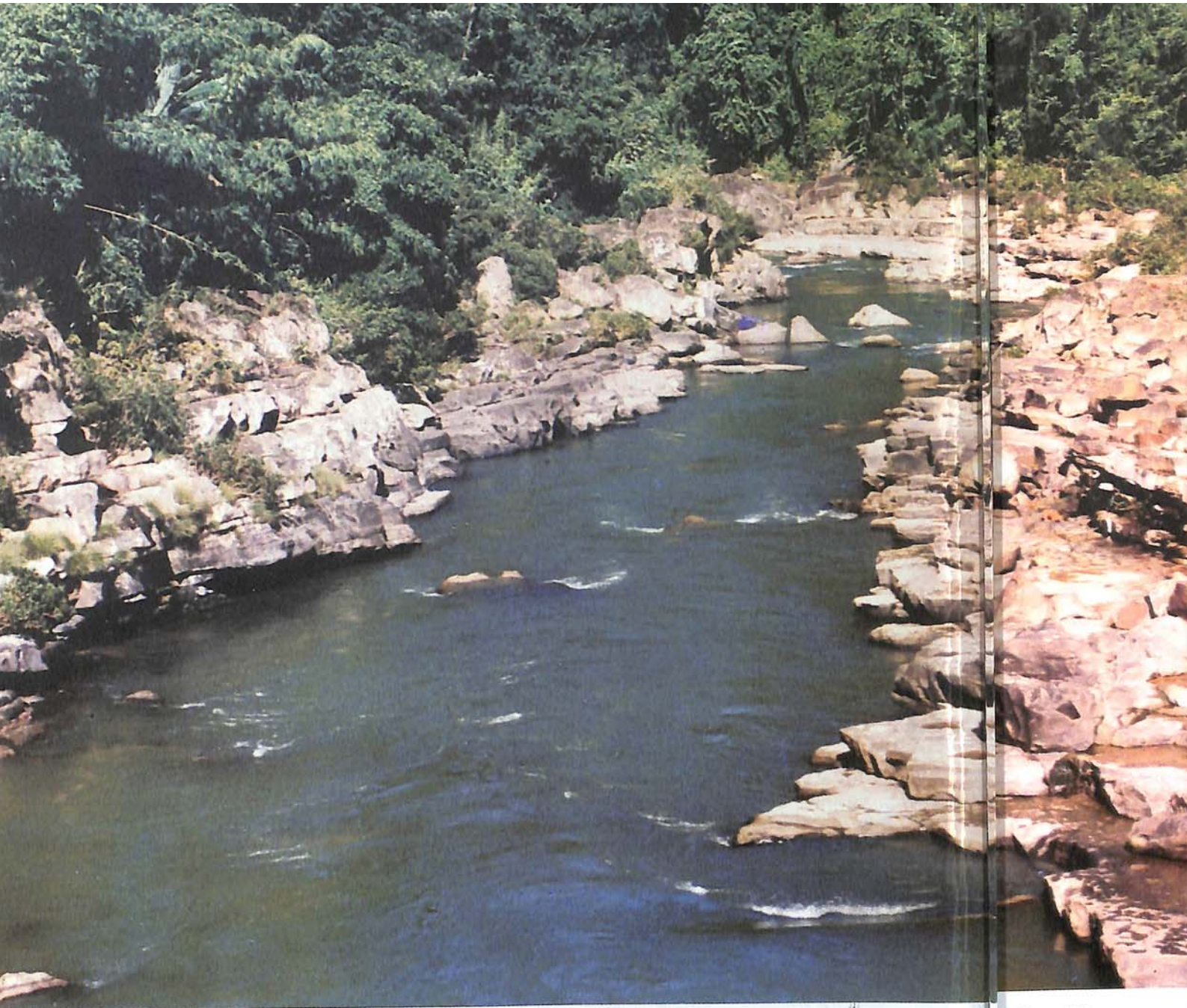
Mizoram is a land of hills, rivers and lakes. As many as 21 major hill ranges or peaks of various heights run through the length and breadth of the state, leaving of course, some plains scattered occasionally here and there.

The average height of the hill to the west

of the state is about 1,000 metres which gently rises to 1,300 metres to the east. Some areas, however, have higher ranges which go up to a height of over 2,000 metres. The *Blue Mountain*, situated in the south-eastern part of the state is the highest peak in Mizoram.

Rolling Hills





Tlawng – The Most Important River in Northern Mizoram

Rivers

There are plenty of rivers, both big and small, in Mizoram which make the difficult hilly terrain of the state all the more inaccessible during the rains. Besides, innumerable streams flow down the hills.

The *Tlawng (Dhaleshwari)*, which is considered the most important river in northern Mizoram, flows north to join the *Barak* in Assam's Cachar district.

The *Kolodyne (Chhimtuipui)*, which originates in Myanmar, is an important river in south Mizoram. Some rapids notwithstanding, it is navigable in patches. The *Kolodyne*, which has four tributaries, may be described as less a Mizo river than *Burmese* for it goes back to its land of origin after flowing westward and southward in the state.

Rungdil Lake





Tamdil Lake

are scattered all over the state, but the most important of them are *Palak*, *Rungdil* and *Rengdil*.

Tamdil Lake is situated in the Chhimtuipui area and covers an area of 30 hectares. Legend has it that the lake was created when a calamity, may be a flood or an earthquake, struck a big village. The local people believe the village which was

submerged still exists intact deep under the waters of the lake.

The *Tamdil* lake which means, a lake of mustard plants is situated about 110 km. from Aizawl. Legend has it that there was once a big mustard plant in place of the lake. When the plant was cut off, it started spraying jets of water which ultimately created the lake.

Vantawng Waterfall



The Rungdil Lake occupies an area of 2.5 hectares. It is actually two lakes lying side by side separated by a narrow strip of land.

The Rengdil Lake situated 150 km to the north-west of Aizawl town is not a natural lake, it is a man-made lake.



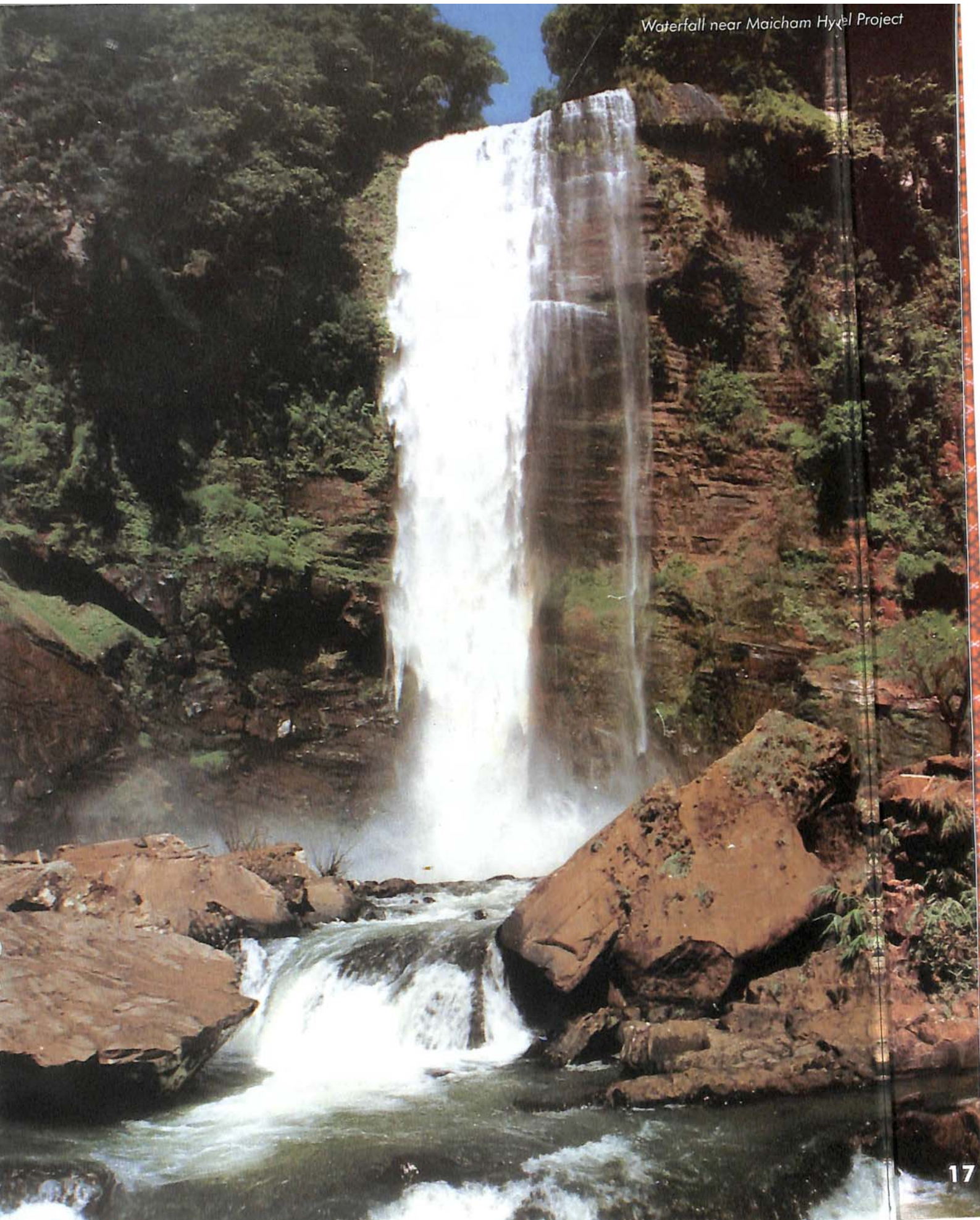
Champhai Tourist Lodge ▲

◀ Chaltlang Tourist Lodge

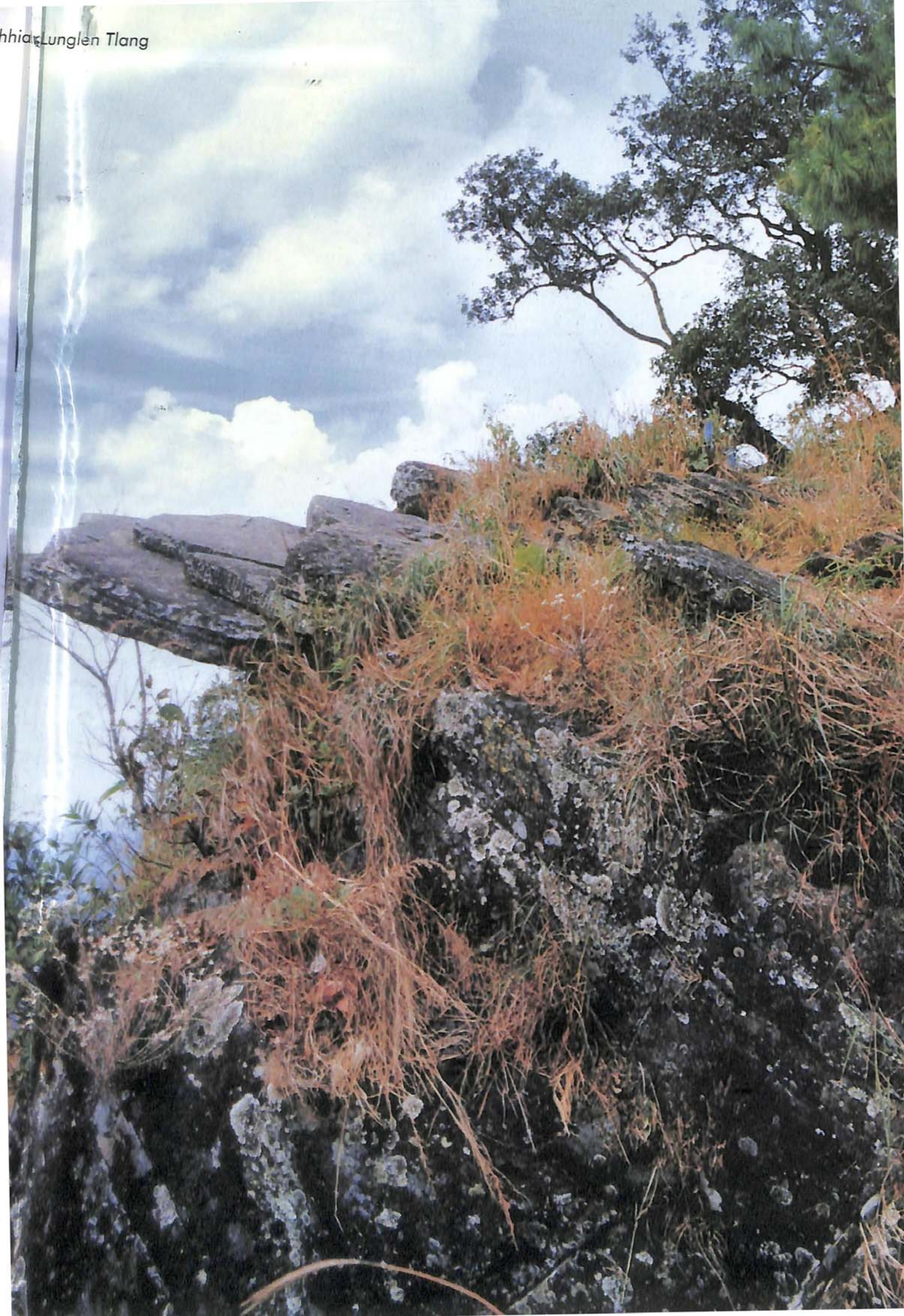
Rihdil Lake ▼



Waterfall near Maicham Hydel Project



hhiar Lunglen Tlang



Climate

The upper part of the hills are, predictably, cool during the summer, while the lower reaches are relatively warm and humid. Storms break out during March-April, just before or around the summer.

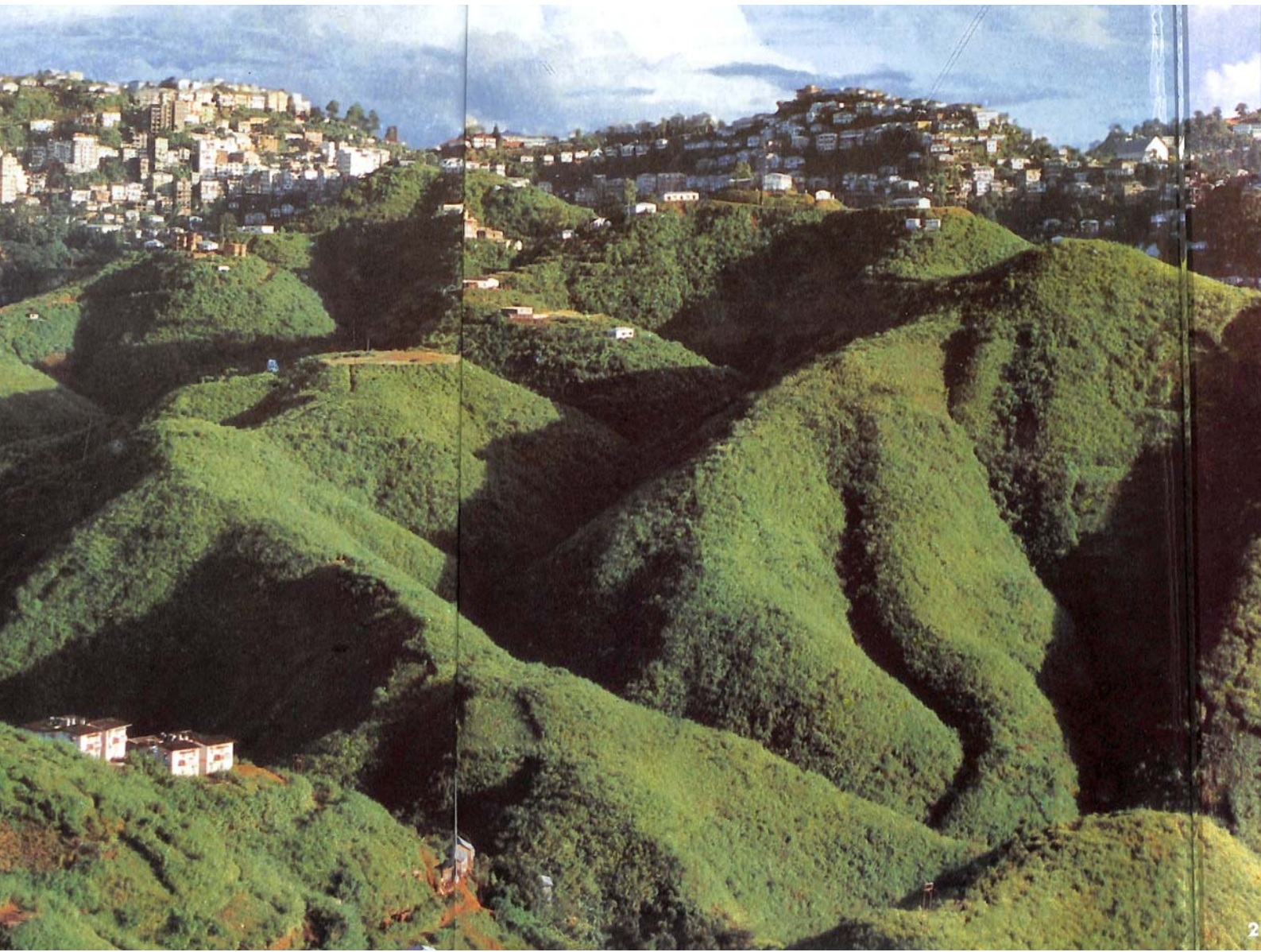
The maximum average temperature in the summer is 30°C, while in the winter the minimum average is around 11°C. The four months between November and February are winter time in Mizoram which is followed by the spring. The storms come in the middle of April to herald the beginning

of the summer. The mercury starts rising and the hills come under the cover of a haze. The three months from June to August are known as the rainy season. The climate is at its moderate best in the two autumnal months, September and October, when the temperature varies between 19°C to 25°C.

Taken all in all, Mizoram is made up of wooded hills, swift flowing rivers, quick-silver streams and still lakes, the combination of all these, is a rarity. And it is the combination of these physical features that has given Mizoram its own charm and fascination.

A Typical Mizo Household





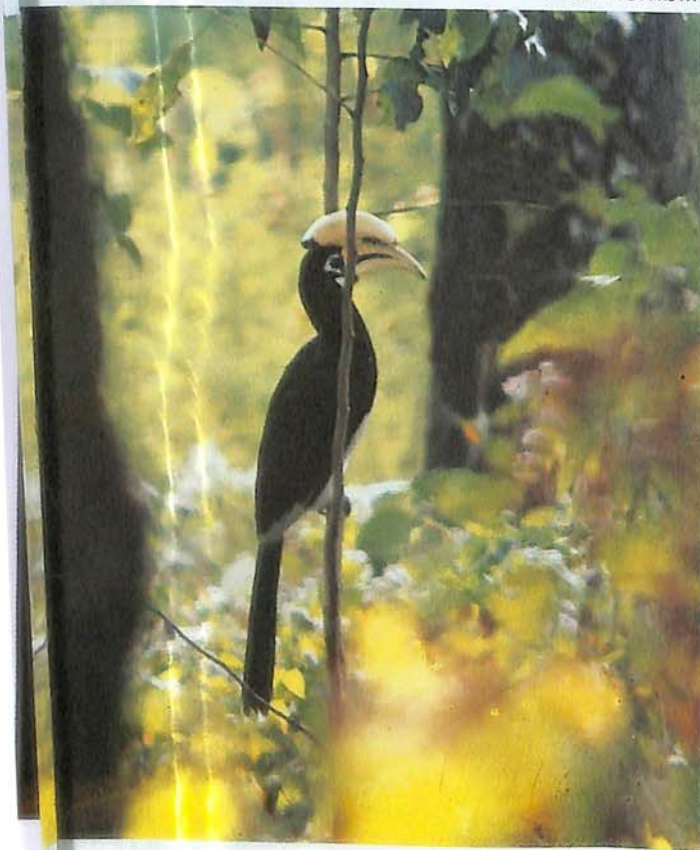


Hoolock Gibbon

Fauna

Important species of mammals found in Mizoram are Tigers, Leopards, Elephants, Malayan Sun Bear, Himalayan Black Bear, Small toothed Civet, Clawless Otter, Serow, Wild Boar, Slow Loris, Hoolock Gibbon, Assamese Macaque, Capped Langur, Chinese Pangolin, Brush-tailed Porcupine, Himalayan Crested Porcupine, Crab-eating Mongoose and Barking Deer. Some of these including the Capped Langur, have become scarce. Mizoram is home to a large family of birds and an even larger family of insects. Birds of some species — such as Hume's Bartailed Pheasant, Peacock Pheasant, Great Indian Hornbill, Indian Pied Hornbill, Rufus-necked Hornbill, Kalij Pheasant, Whistling Teal, Red breasted Parakeet, Indian Parakeet, Large Hawk, Cuckoo, Crow Pheasant and Forest Eagle – come under the endangered category.

Pied Hornbill



Assamese Macaque



Attempts are being made to save these from extinction. However, it may be said that Owl, Pheasant, Partridge, Hawk, Eagle, Egret, Heron, Cuckoo and Bulbul are the important birds of Mizoram. Moths and butterflies of various species are found in the hills of Mizoram of which the most common are : Indian Cabbage White, Common Sailor, Common Rose, Yellow Orange Tip, Yellow Jezebel, Red Spot Jezebel, Chocolate Albatross and Lemon Pansy.



Crested Serpent Eagle



Kalij Pheasant

Kalij Pheasant

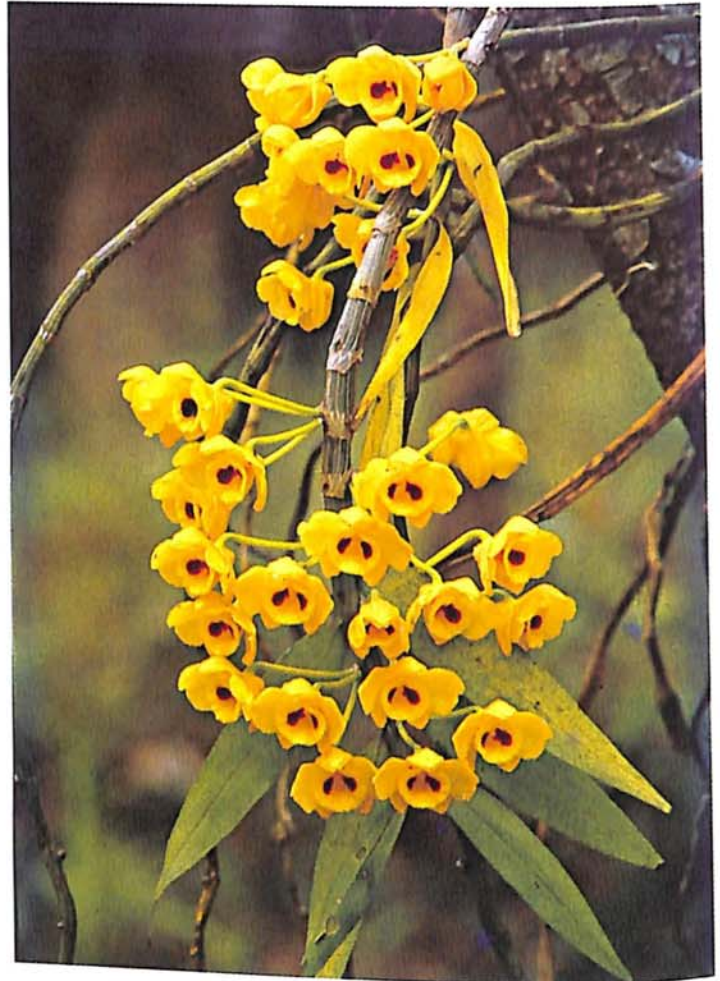


Flora

Mizoram, being a thickly wooded state, has a very wide range of floral species many of which still remain to be identified. As no systematic studies have yet been made, knowledge of the state's vast floral resources remain far from complete.

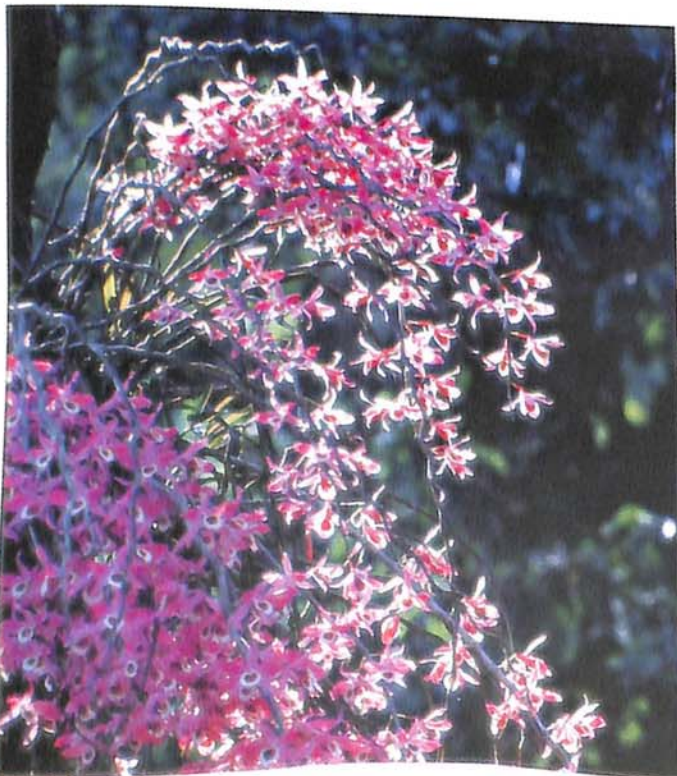
According to information gathered from occasional visits by botanists, the Himalayan Maple is one of the most important trees in Mizoram. Some of the other floral species common in Mizoram are : Salmali, Duabanga, Chalmoogra, Champa, Sal, Teak, Bel, Jackfruit, Carat, Banyan, Gamari, Jungle Neem, Rohini, Mulberry, Gila nut, Oak and Pine. Besides, the hills of Mizoram abound in various species of shrubs which grow in different 'ecological niches'. All said, bamboo is perhaps the most important floral group in Mizoram. The abundance of bamboo growing luxuriantly in the western and southern parts of the hills in particular

Dendrobium chrysanthem Orchid



has made Mizoram known as *the land where bamboos flower*. Several species of canes too are found in the state.

Dendrobium nobile Orchid



Vanda teres Orchid



Orchids

Orchids of various hues and shapes add a charming touch of colour to the landscape of Mizoram. The temperate evergreen forests are large storehouses of orchids, of which over 150 species have so far been identified. The orchids grow most abundantly on the trunks of tall trees as well as in steep ravines.

The beauty of many orchids of Mizoram is beyond compare. They are the *gardener's delight*. But the interference of human economic activities has put the existence of many of them under serious threat. The Botanical Survey of India as well as the state Forest Department, Govt. of Mizoram, have taken some steps to protect the rare and endangered orchids of Mizoram.

The orchids are of two kinds – *Epiphytic* and *Terrestrial*. The epiphytic orchids in Mizoram far exceeds in number the terrestrial type. 'Jewel orchid' (*Anoectochilus*)



Blue Vanda Orchid

Thunia marshilliana orchid

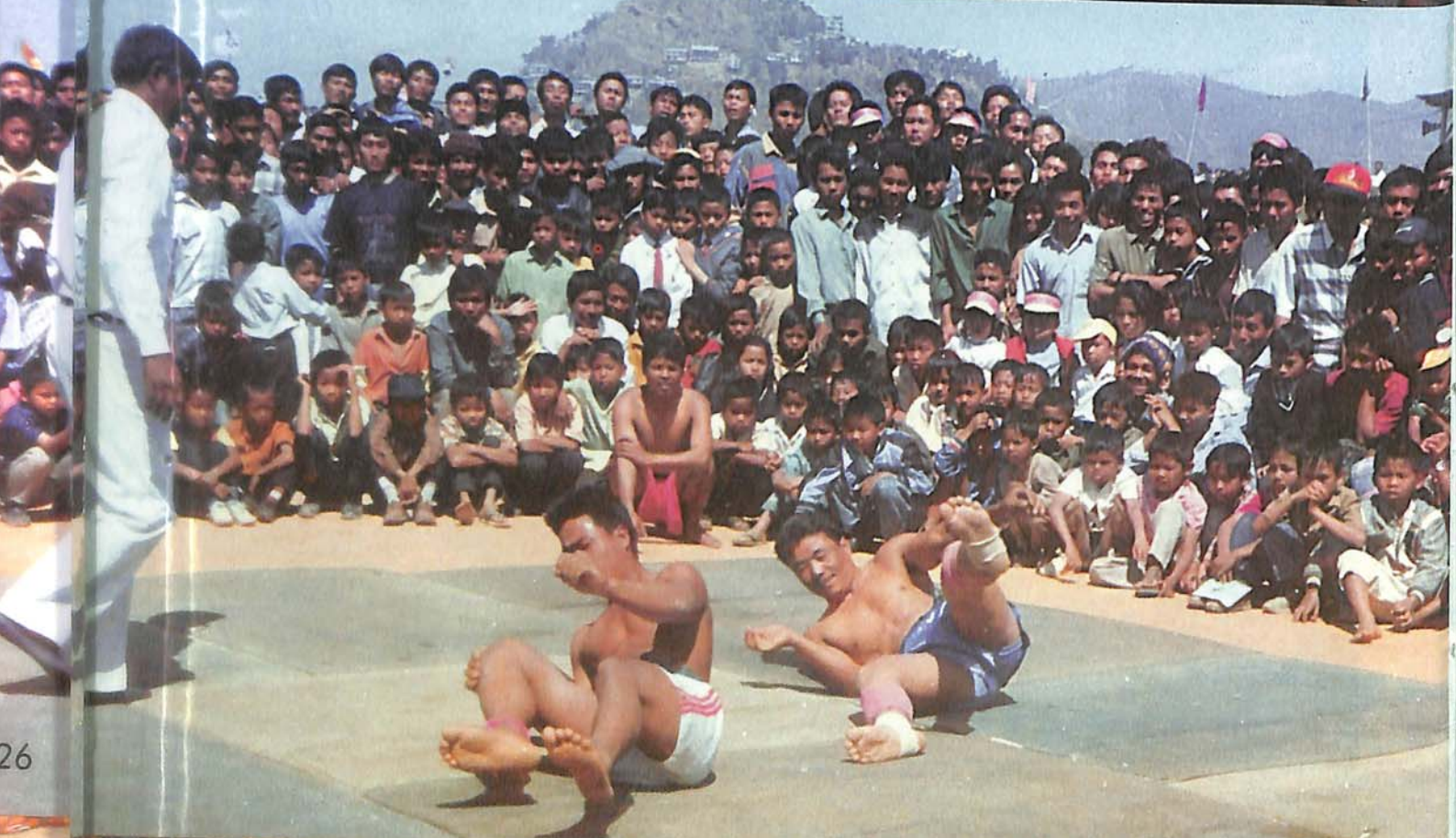
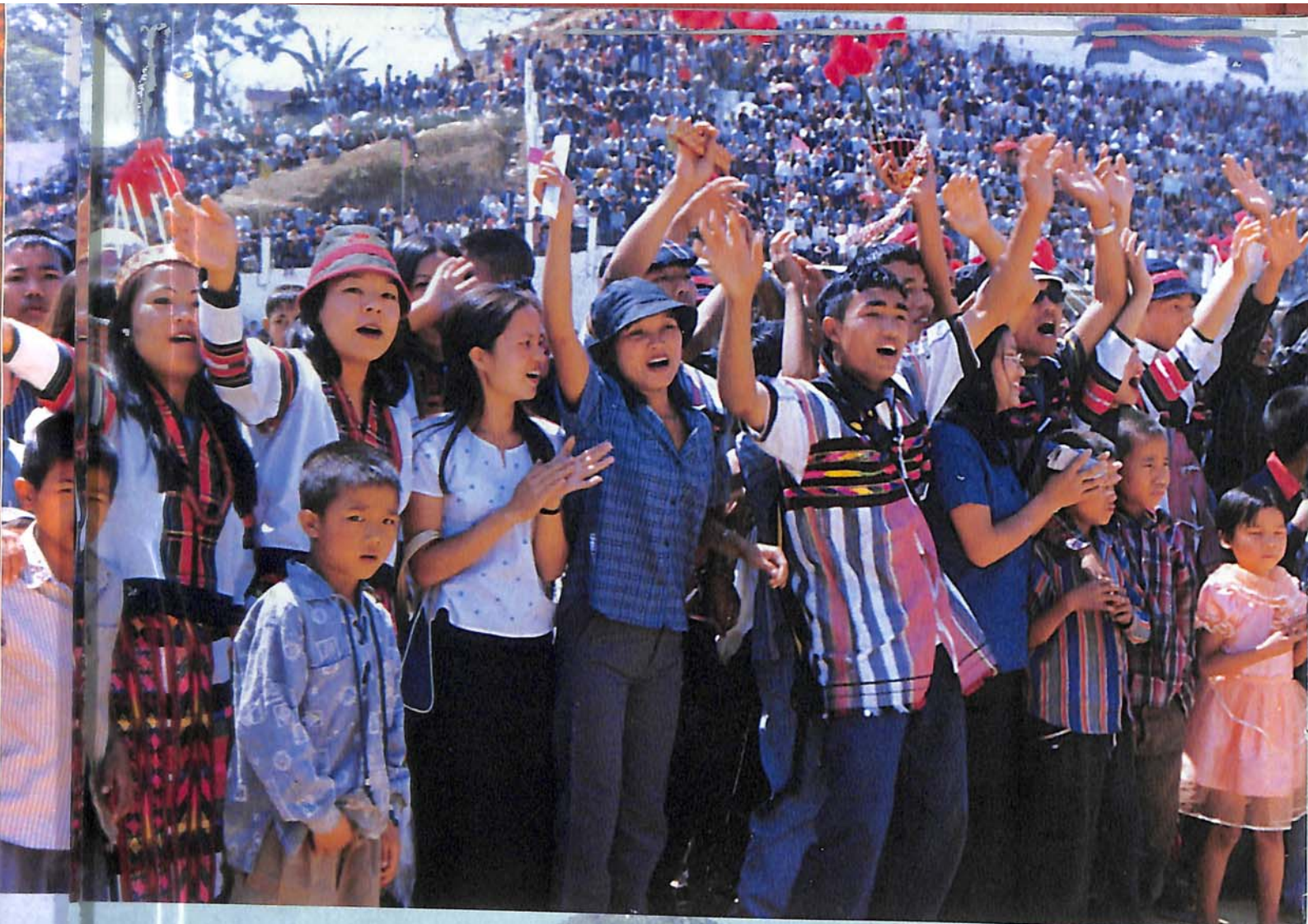


is one of the many orchids gradually becoming rare in the state. Some of the common orchids of Mizoram are *Bulbophyllum*, *Cymbidium*, *Dendrobium*, *Eria*, *Liparis*, *Pholidote*, *Saccolabium* and *Vanda* species.

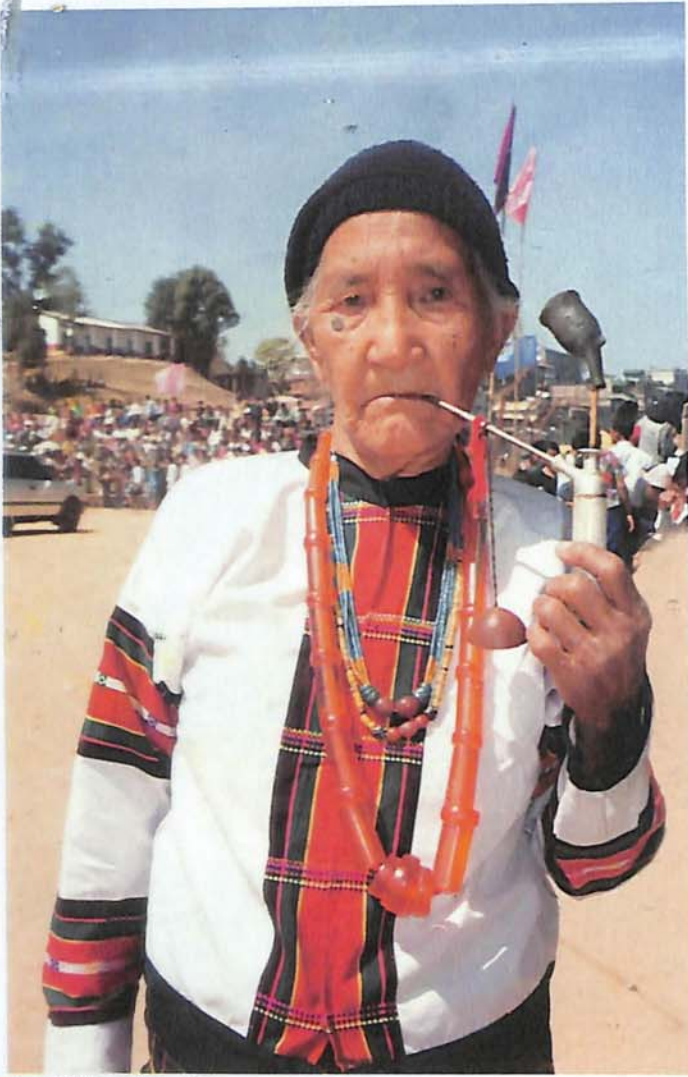
Wildlife and Sanctuaries

Conservation efforts have led the Mizoram Government to set up quite a few wildlife sanctuaries in the state, the oldest as well as the largest of them being the one at *Dampa* in Aizawl district. The *Dampa* Sanctuary, set up in 1976, covers an overall area of 681 sq.km. Quite a number of important varieties of wildlife like the Elephant, Tiger, Leopard, Bear, Deer, Sambar, Serow and Wild Pig are enjoying sanctuary protection at *Dampa*.

Three other smaller sanctuaries have been set up at *Ngengpui* (110 Sq.Km), *Phawngpui* (60 Sq.Km) and *Tawi* (60 Sq.Km.). *Murlen* and *Palak Lake* area in Chhimtuipui district have been selected for creating two more protected wildlife habitats. The *Palak Lake* area is popularly known as the heaven on earth not only for its natural beauty but also because it is home to a wide range of beautiful butterflies and moths.







An Old Lady in Festive Dress

FESTIVALS

Nearly all the Mizo festivals revolve round the tilling of the land. *Mim Kut*, *Chapchar Kut* and *Pawl Kut* are the three major festivals in Mizoram all of which are in some way or the other connected with agricultural activities.

Mim Kut, is celebrated in August-September in the wake of the harvesting of the maize crop. Dedicated to the memory of their dead relatives, the festival is underlined by a spirit of thanksgiving and remembrance of the years gone by. First harvest is placed as an offering on a raised platform built to the memory of the dead.

Chapchar Kut, which is celebrated during spring time after the *jhum* cutting is over, is perhaps, the most joyous of the Mizo festivals. The season is ideal. The winter bows out yielding place to the spring which reinvigorates nature and brings a freshness to human life. The Mizos, irrespective of age and gender distinction, participate in the festival. Decked in colourful dresses, boys and girls go on a dancing spree which sometimes last all through the night.

Pawl Kut, a post-harvesting festival, is celebrated during December-January. Again, a mood of thanksgiving is evident, because the difficult task of tilling and harvesting is over. Community feasts are organised and dances are performed. Mothers with their children sit on memorial platform and feed one another. This custom, which is also performed during *Chapchar Kut*, is known as *Chhawnghnawt*. Drinking of rice-beer is also part of the festival. These two days of festivities are followed by a day of complete rest when no one goes out to work.



Child in Traditional Dress

DANCES

The Mizos, blessed as they are with a beautiful environment and rich culture, are a vibrant and sociable people. They love to dance as much as they love to sing. They can boast of a number of folk and community dances which have been handed down from one generation to the other through the ages. The dances are expressions of the gay, carefree spirit of the Mizos. It should be mentioned here that these dances are not intended for stage performances. Rather, they have been evolved for community involvement and participation.

Cheraw

The most colourful Mizo dance. Bamboos are used in this dance. The dancers move by stepping alternately in and out from between and across a pair of horizontal bamboos, held against the ground by people sitting face to face at either sides. They tap

the bamboos open and close in rhythmic beats. The bamboos, placed horizontally, are supported by two bases, one at each end. The bamboos, when clapped, produce a sound which forms the rhythm of the dance. It indicates the timing of the dance as well. The dancers step in and out to the beats of the bamboos with ease and grace. The patterns and stepping of the dance have many variations. Sometimes the steppings are made in imitation of the movements of birds, sometimes the swaying of trees and so on.

Little is known about the origin of Cheraw. It may be possible that the forefathers of Mizos brought it with them when they left their homes in far-east Asia. Cheraw is performed on any occasion these days. But, so goes the legend, it used to be performed in earlier times only to ensure a safe passage for the soul of a mother who died at childbirth. Cheraw is, therefore, a dance of sanctification and redemption, performed with great care, precision and elegance.



Cheraw Dance



Khuallam Dance

Khuallam

Khual, in the Mizo language, means a guest, *lam* stands for dancing. So, *Khuallam* is the dance of the guest. As has been said earlier, the Mizos, in the pre-Christian days, believed that the soul, after death went either to *Pialral* or Paradise, or *Mithi Khua*, a land of sorrow and misery. To have a place in Paradise, one had to prove one's mettle either in war or in hunting or by being a man of distinction in society. To claim a distinguished place in society, one had to

perform various ceremonies which included offering community feasts and dances. These ceremonies taken together, were known as *Khuangchawi*. While performing *Khuangchawi*, one was obliged to invite relatives from nearby villages. The guests entered the arena of the *Khuangchawi* dancing *Khuallam*. The dance is normally performed by men dressed in *Puandum* (traditional Mizo clothes with red and green stripes) to the accompaniment of a set of gongs known as *Darbu*.

Chheih Lam

Joie de vivre would be the appropriate term to describe *Chheih lam*, a dance that embodies the spirit of joy and exhilaration. *Chheih lam* is performed to the accompaniment of a song called *Chheih hla*. The song is sung to the beats of a drum or bamboo tube or clapping of hands. People squat on the floor in a circle while the dancer stands in the middle reciting a song with various movements of limbs and body. An expert *Chheih* dancer performs his part in such a manner that the people around him leave their seats and join the dance. Any one can try this dance, for it has no specific choreography. All that one has to do is to get into the mood and live up to it. *Chheih lam* is performed on any

occasion normally in the evenings, when the day's work is over.

Chai

Chai is a festival dance. It is a community dance with men and women standing one after another in a circle, holding each other on the shoulder and the nape. The dancers sway to and fro and swing their feet to the tune of the song, sung in chorus by all of them, while a drummer and *gongman* beat their instruments. Horns of *Mithuns* are other important instruments used in the dance. *Chai* presents a grand show, but it is not exactly suitable for performing on the stage. In olden days, the *Chai* dancers used to consume *rice-beer* continuously while dancing, not knowing when to stop.

Chheih Lam Dance





Zangta Lam

Zotuithiang Lam



Rallu Lam

Strictly speaking, *Rallu lam* is not a dance as such. It is rather a celebration or a rite in honour of a victorious warrior. When a warrior comes back after a successful campaign, he is given a warm and colourful reception by the village Chief. The celebration consists of a re-enactment of the warrior's heroic exploits. The mode of celebration, however, varies from village to village.

Solakia

Originally, the dance used to be performed mainly by the people of the *Maras* and *Pawi* communities of Mizoram. They remain the best exponents of the dance to date. Like *Rallu lam*, *Solakia* was also performed in earlier times to celebrate a victory in war. Marked with five principal movements, the dance seeks to recapture the actions of a hero at war. Men and women stand in profile, while the hero, brandishing a sword and a shield, dances in the middle to the accompaniment of gong beats.

Sarlamkai

One of the most impressive Mizo community dances, *Sarlamkai* is a variation of *Solakia*. The two dances are almost identical. The only difference lies in the dress and tempo. No song is sung, only gongs or cymbals or drums are used to beat time. *Sarlamkai* has been taken up by most of the schools in Mizoram for cultural activities these days.

Par Lam

The land of enchanting hills has yet another dance to its credit — *Par Lam*. Girls attired in colourful dresses, with flowers tucked in their hair, dance to the tune of songs sung by themselves. The principal movement in the dance involves the waving of hands. A couple of boys lend musical accompaniment by playing guitars. This is comparatively a new dance. Nevertheless, it has become part of the Mizo culture. The most popular song sung for the dance is : *Far from the mountain the gay little stream, rippling along, rippling along.*

Solakia



MUSIC

Music has always been an integral part of the Mizo way of life. The young Mizos in towns and big villages have mostly taken to western pop music. The guitar has become the *musical symbol* of Mizoram whose hills and valleys reverberate with sweet lilting tunes.

The vast popularity of western music notwithstanding, the traditional Mizo songs and dances are still sung and performed in remote village areas. What's more, there has lately been a revival trend in evidence even among Mizo youngsters who have begun to evince a renewed interest in their traditional art and culture.

In other words, the songs, dances and festivals which evolved spontaneously out of the age-old Mizo society, seem on a

comeback trail. The influence from the west eclipsed them for a time, but could not bury them once and for all.

The drum and the gong are two traditional musical instruments of the Mizos. The flute is another, though it is no longer much in use. There was another musical instrument which was made by inserting hollow reeds into gourds. Blowing through one reed produced a tune. That instrument has fallen completely in disuse.

The usual Mizo drum, made of a hollowed tree trunk covered with the fine hides on either side is about a foot in diameter and two feet in length. The gongs, which come in various sizes mostly from Myanmar, are expensive brassware. Sometimes three gongs, each having a separate note, are beaten simultaneously to produce fine musical tunes.

A Mizo Vocalist Belting Out Popular Numbers

