

Tripartite meeting to resolve Reang repatriation to Mizoram

Officials of the Mizoram government and union home ministry will meet tribal leaders here Wednesday to resolve the longstanding deadlock on the repatriation of 35,000 Reang refugees from Tripura to Mizoram.

The tripartite meeting will see representatives try and hammer out a solution to the repatriation issue that has been hanging fire for 12 years following differences between the migrants and the state government over the rehabilitation package.

The Reang (locally called Bru) tribal refugees have been living in six north Tripura camps for 12 years after they fled Mizoram following ethnic clashes with the majority Mizos.

'The Mizoram government has been ignoring our demands and has unilaterally prepared a rehabilitation package for the Reang tribals, who are reluctant to return to their home land under this package,' said Elvis Chorkhy, president of the Mizoram Bru Displaced People's Forum (MBDPF).

'The Mizoram government package for the home-bound refugees suggested a Rs.20,000 cash grant instead of Rs.50,000 as promised earlier. The package also recommended a scattered resettlement of the 35,000 tribal refugees in three different districts - Mamit, Kolashib and Lunglei. We want compact rehabilitation of the tribals in two districts in southern Mizoram,' Elvis told IANS.

Disclosing that a six-member delegation would represent the Reang tribals at the meeting, he added: 'To avoid ethnic violence in the future, we want deployment of the Central Para Military Force (CPMF) in the proposed resettlement areas instead of state security force.'

According to Elvis, the state government was also yet to fulfil the assurances given to the surrendered Bru militants.

In April 2005, the Mizoram government and the Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF) signed an agreement after 13 rounds of talks to solve the decade-old ethnic crisis. This led to the surrender of almost all the 1,040 extremists of the BNLF and the Bru Liberation Front of Mizoram (BLFM).

Following the advice of the union home ministry, a Bru Coordination Committee (BCC) was formed recently with the leaders of the MBDPF, BNLF and BLFM.

Giving the government's point of view, Mizoram Home Minister R. Lalzirliana said: 'Preparations for repatriation of Bru refugees from six relief camps in neighbouring North Tripura district, are almost finalised.'

Lalzirliana told reporters last week that the road map for the repatriation had been submitted to the union home ministry. It included proposals for resettlement of the Brus as well as construction of health centres and educational institutions.

'We hope that the repatriation process can soon be done after centre provides financial assistance for the proposed expenditure of Rs.258 million for implementation of the repatriation and resettlement package,' the minister said.

He said the Reang tribals would be settled in different districts where they were living before migrating to Tripura in October 1997 and that they should not be concentrated in one assembly constituency or in a district.

Reacting to Mizoram's assertion that it would take back only 'genuine citizens' of that state, a Tripura minister said: 'Let the repatriation first start, then we would see how it can be solved.'

'Due to the long stay of the tribal refugees (since October 1997), Tripura is facing serious socio-economic problems,' the minister said on condition of anonymity. The central government has so far spent around Rs.1 billion for their upkeep.

Sujit Chakraborty (© IANS / India eNews)