

WHO ARE THE BRUS, AND WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF SETTLING THEM IN TRIPURA?

Relevant for: Geography | Topic: Indian Demography including Tribes

Bru children at a refugee camp in Tripura. File | Photo Credit: [Ritu Raj Konwar](#)

A quadripartite agreement in New Delhi on January 16 allowed some 35,000 Bru tribal people, who were displaced from Mizoram and are living in Tripura as refugees since 1997, to settle permanently in Tripura. The Centre, State governments of Tripura and Mizoram, and representatives of Bru organisations [signed the agreement](#) in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah. The “solution” has evoked mixed reactions with rights activists fearing it could “legitimise” the ejection of minority communities by ethnocentric states.

The Brus, aka Reangs, are spread across Tripura, Mizoram and southern Assam. In Mizoram, they are scattered in Kolasib, Lunglei and Mamit districts. While many Brus of Assam and Tripura are Hindu, the Brus of Mizoram converted to Christianity over the years. Clashes in 1995 with the majority Mizos led to the demand for the removal of the Brus, perceived to be non-indigenous, from Mizoram’s electoral rolls. This led to an armed movement by a Bru outfit, which killed a Mizo forest official in October 1997. The retaliatory ethnic violence saw more than 40,000 Brus fleeing to adjoining Tripura where they took shelter in six relief camps.

The Centre and the two State governments involved made nine attempts to resettle the Brus in Mizoram. The first was in November 2010 when 1,622 Bru families with 8,573 members went back. Protests by Mizo NGOs, primarily the Young Mizo Association, stalled the process in 2011, 2012 and 2015. Meanwhile, the Brus began demanding relief on a par with the relief given to Kashmiri Pandits and Sri Lankan Tamil refugees. The Centre spent close to 500 crore for relief and rehabilitation until the last peace deal was brokered over three years since 2015. A final package of 435 crore was arrived at in July 2018 and it involved Mizo NGOs besides the governments concerned.

The package covered 32,876 members of 5,407 Bru families, entailing a one-time assistance of 4 lakh as fixed deposit within a month of repatriation, monthly cash assistance of 5,000 through DBT, free rations for two years, and 1.5 lakh in three instalments as house-building assistance. The package also included Eklavya residential schools, permanent residential and ST certificates besides funds to the Mizoram government for improving security in Bru resettlement areas. The refugees were given a deadline, September 30, to move or face harder times at the relief camps. But most stayed back, demanding resettlement in close-knit clusters and an autonomous council for Brus in Mizoram.

The demand to rehabilitate the Brus in Tripura was first raised by Pradyot Manikya, the scion of the Tripura royal family. The BJP-led Tripura government agreed. Chief Minister Biplab Deb called the “solution” within Tripura historic, as did his Mizoram counterpart Zoramthanga. Guwahati-based researcher on social issues and conflicts, Walter Fernandes, said the decision was humanitarian from the point of view of the Brus, who were apprehensive about returning to Mizoram, but felt it could lead to conflicts with the locals of Tripura. Delhi-based rights activist Suhas Chakma said it could set a bad precedent, encouraging ethnocentric states to eject minorities of all hues besides making the Brus of Mizoram opt for the rehabilitation package in the relative safety of Tripura. The displaced Brus who returned to Mizoram have already begun demanding a package equivalent to the one those who stayed behind in the Tripura relief camps would be getting. And conflicts between the Brus and the local Bengali non-tribal people have

started taking place in Tripura.

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