

## Chakma-Hajong issue still open

Kiren Rijiju

Union Minister of State for Home Kiren Rijiju said here on Wednesday that as per the Supreme Court's order, the government would grant citizenship to over one lakh Chakma-Hajongs, Buddhists and Hindu refugees who came to India from the Chittagong Hill Area in undivided Pakistan in the 1960s.

However, Home Ministry spokesperson Ashok Prasad said the "matter is still under consideration".

Mr. Rijiju told *The Hindu* that as per the constitutional provisions and various regulations, the Chakma-Hajongs "cannot be equated with the indigenous people of Arunachal Pradesh". He blamed the Congress for committing a historical mistake.

The Chakma-Hajong refugee issue was discussed threadbare at a high-level meeting convened by Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh and attended by Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Mr. Rijiju.

Addressing presspersons after the hour-long meeting, Mr. Rijiju said a "middle ground" would be chosen so the 2015 Supreme Court order to grant citizenship could be honoured and the rights of the local population would not be diluted.

"The Supreme Court order has to be honoured. Chakmas are settled in Arunachal Pradesh since 1964. But ST status and indigenous people's rights won't be diluted," he said.

Several organisations and the civil society in Arunachal Pradesh have been opposing citizenship to the Chakma and Hajong refugees saying it would change the demography of the State.

### Workable solution

The Central government is trying to find a workable solution by proposing that the refugees will not be given rights, including land ownership, enjoyed by the Scheduled Tribes in Arunachal Pradesh, an official said.

However, they may be given Inner Line permits required for non-local people in Arunachal Pradesh to travel and work. "We are trying to find a middle ground so that the Supreme Court order is honoured, the local people's rights are not infringed and the human rights of the Chakmas and Hajongs are protected," he said.

The Minister said they have to file a reply on the issue in Supreme Court soon.

Chakmas and Hajongs were originally residents of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in erstwhile East Pakistan who left their homeland when it was submerged by the Kaptai dam project in the 1960s. The Chakmas, who are Buddhists, and Hajongs, who are Hindus, also allegedly faced religious persecution and entered India through the then Lushai Hills district of Assam (now Mizoram).

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