

Mizoram to begin fresh initiative to take back refugees

AGARTALA, Jan 9: The Mizoram Government will begin a fresh initiative to take back the 35,000 Reang tribal refugees from Tripura, refugee leaders said Friday after meeting the Mizoram chief minister in Tripura.



Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar recently held a meeting with Home Minister P. Chidambaram in New Delhi and discussed ways to resolve the deadlock. An inconclusive tripartite meeting was

Reang tribal refugees have been sheltered in six north Tripura camps since 1997 after they fled Mizoram following ethnic clashes with the majority Mizos.

"Mizoram Chief Minister Lal Thanhawla assured us that he would call a Congress Legislature Party (CLP) meeting immediately to discuss the refugees' repatriation issue," said Elvis Chorkhy, who led the three-member refugee delegation that met Lal Thanhawla in north Tripura.

"The chief minister told us that the State Government, before repatriation of refugees, would identify and demarcate the villages and lands to rehabilitate the tribals," Chorkhy told reporters. Lal Thanhawla visited north Tripura's Mizo-dominated areas on Thursday and participated in a Mizo cultural function. There are several thousand Mizos residing in north Tripura adjacent to Mizoram.

He told reporters: "It was not possible to constitute an autonomous council for the Reang tribals (locally called Bru) residing in Mizoram. The refugees came to Tripura voluntarily and they should go to their homeland willingly." "A 'road map' for the repatriation of tribal refugees from Tripura has been prepared and it was approved by the Union Home Ministry," he added.

Mizoram Bru Displaced People's Forum (MBDPF), led by its president Elvis Chorkhy, also submitted a memorandum to Lal Thanhawla, who left Tripura on Friday for Aizawl. The tribal refugees are unwilling to return to their homes in Mizoram until their demands for fool-proof security and sufficient financial assistance are accepted by the State Government.

A fact-finding team from the Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) in New Delhi visited Mizoram

and Tripura last month to facilitate a resolution to the ethnic conflict between Reang tribals and the majority of Mizos in Mizoram. The tribal refugees' repatriation from Tripura to Mizoram has recently become complicated with violent mobs in western Mizoram burning down around 700 houses of Reang tribals last month following the gunning down of an 18-year-old Mizo youth by unidentified miscreants.

Following the arson and violence, thousands of displaced Reang tribals have taken shelter afresh in adjacent southern Assam and northern Tripura. ACHR director and leader of the fact-finding team Suhas Chakma told reporters in Agartala that they would urge the central government to call a high-level meeting involving the chief ministers of Mizoram and Tripura and Reang tribal leaders to resolve the ethnic problem at the earliest.

held in Aizawl last month between representatives of the central and Mizoram Governments and tribal refugees.

"Both the Centre and the Mizoram Government rejected our major demands. We will not return to our homes unless our vital demands are fulfilled," said Chorkhy, who recently visited New Delhi to apprise the Central Government about the "terrible conditions" of Reang tribals in Mizoram. "The Mizoram Government's package for the home-bound refugees granted 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 of Mizoram — Mamit, Kolashib and Lunglei. We want compact rehabilitation of the tribals in two districts in western Mizoram," Chorkhy told IANS. (IANS)