

Fresh Exodus Deepens Bru Crisis

Ethnic violence in Mizoram

Silchar, Nov 18: With the rerun of ethnic violence in Mizoram following the killing of a Mizo youth identified as Zarzo Kima (18) by the nascent and obscure Bru Revolutionary Army (BRA) at Bungthum village in Mamit district on last Friday, the Bru crisis has further deepened. In retaliation to the killing, the Mizos attacked and torched around 400 Reang houses spread across Mamit and Kolasib districts of Mizoram. The worst affected villages are Lakhicherra, Kwartha, Kawnpui, Kahliang, Dampariang, Khinlung and other areas.

According to Mizoram Bru Displaced Peoples' Forum (MBDPF) president Elvis Chorkhy, more than 5,000 panic-stricken Brus have deserted their homes and sought shelter in the refugee camps of Kanchanpur in north Tripura and in Reang-dominated villages of Riflemara, Gutguti and Cheragi in the southern fringe of Assam in Hailakandi district.

The fresh exodus has further deepened the 12-year-long Bru crisis. It will be recalled that in the wake of violent disturbances in October 1997 in Mizoram, 35,000 Brus fled to Tripura and were accommodated in six relief camps at Dashda, Naisingpara, Khakchang, Ananda Bazar, Monpai and Ronga-para. Since then, these tribesmen have been languishing in the camps and there has been no sincere efforts from the Union Home Ministry and the Mizoram Government to give them shelter. In order to create a conducive atmosphere for amicable settlement, the armed outfits fighting for the cause of Brus - Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF) and Bru Liberation Front of Mizoram (BLFM) - laid down arms in 2005 and 2006 respectively.

The memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed between the Mizoram Government and the BNLF clearly stipulated that the refugees sheltered in relief camps would be taken back to their native villages in phases, and for their socio-economic development, a special development council would become functional. This apart, relief packages for their rehabilitation and employment with substantial central assistance would also be given effect to, the MoU stated.

The Central Government did come out with the funds of Rs28 crore for their rehabilitation and Rs.37 crore for the special development council. But for reasons best known to the Centre and the Mizoram Government, not even a single clause of the peace accord till date has been implemented. Rued Bruno Msha, an important functionary of MBDPF.

According to sources, disappointment and frustration has been pushing the surrendered BNLF and BLFM militants to opt for jungle life again, and they might be behind the floating of BRA.

Also, nothing concrete came out at the last tripartite meeting held in Aizawl on November 4 involving the representatives of the Centre, Mizoram Government and MBDPF on the question of repatriation of the 35,000 refugees.

Elvis Chorkhy said, “Brus will not return to their villages unless all our demands are met.”

The Coordination Committee of Mizoram NGOs comprising Young Mizo Association (YMA), Mizo Zirlawi Pawl (MZP), Mizo Hmeichhe Insulhkhawm Pawl (MNIP) and Mizoram Upa Pawl (MUP), on the other hand, took a tough stand on repatriation and said, “Refugees should not be taken back unless and until Brus shun violence.” Given the situation, the ethnic divide has once again caused concern among the peace-loving people of Mizoram.

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