Bru Agreement

Why in News?

An agreement was signed recently among the Bru leaders and the Governments of India, Tripura, and Mizoram.

What is in the Bru agreement?

- This agreement gives the Bru community their choice of living in either the state of Tripura or Mizoram.
- All Bru currently living in temporary relief camps in Tripura will be settled in the state, if they want to stay on.
- The Bru who returned to Mizoram in the eight phases of repatriation since 2009, cannot, however, come back to Tripura.
- To ascertain the numbers of those who will be settled, a fresh survey and physical verification of Bru families living in relief camps will be carried out.
- The Centre will implement a special development project for the resettled Bru; this will be in addition to the Rs 600 crore fund announced for the process, including benefits for the migrants.

What benefits will the Bru community get?

- Each resettled family will get 0.03 acre of land for building a home, Rs 1.5 lakh as housing assistance, and Rs 4 lakh as a one-time cash benefit for sustenance.
- They will also receive a monthly allowance of Rs 5,000, and free rations for 2 years from the date of resettlement.
- All cash assistance will be through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).
- The state government will expedite the opening of bank accounts and the issuance of Aadhaar, permanent residence certificates, ST certificates, and voter identity cards to the beneficiaries.
- All dwelling houses will be constructed and payments completed within 270 days of the signing of the agreement.

Where will the Bru be resettled?

- Revenue experts reckon 162 acres will be required. Tripura Chief Minister (CM) has said that the effort will be to choose government land.
- But since Tripura is a small state, this government would explore the

possibility of diverting forest lands, even reserve forest areas if necessary, to grant the new entitlements.
- However, diverting forest land for human settlements will need clearance from the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests, which is likely to take at least 3 months.

What is the condition of the migrants now?

- The Bru or Reang are a community indigenous to Northeast India, living mostly in Tripura, Mizoram, and Assam.
- In Tripura, they are recognised as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG).
- In October 1997, following ethnic clashes, nearly 37,000 Bru fled Mizoram to Tripura, where they were sheltered in relief camps. Of this,
    1. 5,000 people have returned to Mizoram in 9 phases of repatriation,
    2. 32,000 people still live in 6 relief camps in North Tripura.
- Under a relief package announced by the Centre, a daily ration of 600 g rice was provided to every adult Bru migrant and 300 g to every minor.
- They depended on the wild for vegetables, and some of them have been practising slash-and-burn (jhum) cultivation in the forests.
- They live in makeshift bamboo thatched huts, without permanent power supply and safe drinking water, with no access to proper healthcare services or schools.

How did the agreement come about?

- **June 2018** - Bru leaders signed an agreement with the Centre and the two state governments, providing for repatriation to Mizoram.
- However, most residents of the camps rejected the insufficient terms of the agreement.
- The camp residents said the package did not guarantee their safety in Mizoram, and that they feared a repeat of the violence that had forced them to flee.
- **November 2019** - A scion of Tripura's erstwhile royal family, wrote to Home Minister seeking the resettlement of the Bru in the state.
- After that, Tripura CM too, asked the Centre for permanent settlement of the Bru in Tripura.

How is this agreement different from the earlier initiatives taken for the Bru?

- Successive state and central governments had thus far stressed only on peacefully repatriating the Bru, even though the enduring fear of ethnic

violence remained a fundamental roadblock.

- The two other durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons suggested by the UN Refugee Agency - **local integration or assimilation, and resettlement** - were never explored.
- The Bru speak Kaubru, Kokborok and Bangla, the latter two are the most widely spoken languages of the tribal and non-tribal communities of Tripura, and have an easy connection with the state.
- Their long stay in Tripura, albeit in exile and in terrible conditions, has also acquainted them very well with the state's socio-political ecology.
- Home Minister who presided over the signing of the agreement, hailed the "historic" resolution of the Bru issue.

Source: Indian Express

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