

Chakmas and Hajongs

Why in news?

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A long-standing demand of the Chakma and Hajong refugee community for Indian citizenship may be met soon.

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Who are these people?

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- Chakmas and Hajongs were originally residents of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of erstwhile East Pakistan, who had to flee when their land was submerged by the Kaptai dam project in the 1960s.

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- The Chakmas, who are Buddhist, and Hajongs, who are Hindus, also faced religious persecution in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

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- Chakmas and Hajongs entered India through the then Lushai Hills district of Assam (now Mizoram).

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- Within the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the Chakmas are the largest ethnic group and make up half of the region's population.

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- The Chakma possess strong genetic affinities to Tibeto-Burman groups in Northeast India and to East Asian populations.

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- In Assam Chakma people have scheduled tribe status.

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- They also have high frequencies of mainland Indian genetic ancestry.

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- Hajong are the fourth largest ethnicity in Meghalaya.

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- Hajongs are predominantly rice farmers and have the status of a Scheduled Tribe in India (Assam and Meghalaya)

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- According to officials, the number of these refugees has increased from

about 5,000 in 1964-69 to 1,00,000.

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- While some stayed back with the Chakmas already in the district, the Indian government moved a majority of Chakmas and Hajong to the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), which is now Arunachal Pradesh.

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- At present, they do not possess citizenship and land rights, but are provided basic amenities by the state government.

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What is the issue about?

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- The Centre and the Arunachal Pradesh government are in talks to accord citizenship to them, though without extending the rights available to Scheduled Tribes in the state.

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- This is the third generation of the refugees who first settled in the region in the early 1960s.

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- The Supreme Court had given a three-month deadline in 2015 to the Centre to process the demand.

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- Only about 5,000 persons of the original 14,888 persons of 2,748 refugee families settled in Arunachal between 1964 to '69 are reportedly alive, which means most persons in the two communities were born in India and hence, qualify for Indian citizenship by birth.

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- Stiff opposition from the state government had stalled implementation of the SC directive.

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- The move, however, has political implications for Arunachal Pradesh.

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- Since the 1980s, the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) has spearheaded a mass movement against granting citizenship to Chakmas and Hajongs.

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- The AAPSU fears that the refugees could soon outnumber the indigenous population and influence electoral outcomes.

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Source: Indian Express

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