



Perils of Chakmas and Hajongs

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Why in News

The **Rights and Risks Analysis Group** has sought Indian Prime Minister's intervention in **ensuring food for the Chakma and Hajong communities** in **Arunachal Pradesh**.

Key Points

- Chakmas and Hajongs have allegedly not been included in the **Covid-19 Economic Relief Package** announced by the central government in the wake of the **coronavirus pandemic**.
 - Under the Relief Package, **as part of the PM Gareeb Kalyan Ann Yojana**: Each person who is covered under the **National Food Security Act** gets an additional five kg wheat or rice for free, in addition to the 5 kg of subsidised foodgrain already provided through the **Public Distribution System** (PDS).
 - One kg of pulse per household is also provided for free, according to regional preferences.
- Their **ration cards** were **illegally and arbitrarily seized by the state government** in October, **1991**. As a result, they are **forced to buy food items at normal or hiked prices** while other vulnerable sections are paying ₹5 per kg as per the economic package.
- Since the members of the communities have become **legal citizens of India**, **denial of food violates the Right to Life guaranteed under Article 21** of the Constitution.

Chakmas and Hajongs

- These are **ethnic people** who lived in the **Chittagong Hill Tracts**, most of which are located in **Bangladesh**.
 - **Chakmas** are predominantly **Buddhists**, while **Hajongs** are **Hindus**.
 - They are found in **northeast India, West Bengal, Bangladesh** and **Myanmar**.

- They **fled erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh)** in **1964-65** and came to India and **settled in Arunachal Pradesh. Reasons:**
 - **Chakmas lost their land** to the **development of the Kaptai Dam on the Karnaphuli River, Bangladesh.**
 - **Hajongs faced religious persecution** as they were **non-Muslims** and **did not speak Bengali.**
- In 2015, the **Supreme Court** directed the Centre to **grant citizenship** to Chakma and Hajongs who had migrated from Bangladesh in 1964-69.
 - The order was passed while **hearing a plea by the Committee for Citizenship Rights of the Chakmas.**
 - They did not directly come into the ambit of the **Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019** (CAA) because Arunachal Pradesh is among the **states exempted from the CAA** since it has an **inner line permit** to regulate entry of outsiders.
- Currently, Chakmas and Hajongs are **citizens by birth as per Section 3(1) of the Citizenship Act** and the eligible portion of their population **exercise the right to vote** as citizens of India (they were given **voting rights in 2004**).
However, **4,637 pleas of the survivors of migration during 1964-1969 are still pending with the Centre** even as some of the applicants have died.

Source: TH