

Arunachal CM urged not to 'perpetuate prejudices' against Chakma and Hajong people

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The Chakma Development Foundation of India (CDFI) has urged Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu not to "perpetuate prejudices" against the Chakma and Hajong communities by terming them ineligible for settlement in Arunachal Pradesh and proposing their relocation across India.

Addressing a National Panchayati Raj Day event in the State's capital Itanagar on April 24, the Chief Minister declared that after resolving the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh boundary dispute, he would settle the Chakma-Hajong problem by distributing them in different States of India. He also said that as refugees, the two communities cannot be permanently settled in the tribal State.

"The Chakmas and Hajongs were settled by the Union of India, the competent authority of the then North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA), from 1964 onwards and those born in the NEFA/Arunachal Pradesh are citizens of India by birth. There is no provision in the Constitution of India empowering any State or UT to declare a non-resident and therefore forcibly remove from its territorial jurisdiction," CDFI founder Suhas Chakma said in a statement on Tuesday.

"Most of those who had migrated during 1964-1969 are almost dead and those who are alive cannot be removed from the State as per the directions of the Supreme Court in its 1996 judgment in NHRC vs the State of Arunachal Pradesh. There is also no provision in the Constitution of India defining Arunachal Pradesh or any other State as a tribal State and in fact, Article 371(h) of the Constitution only gives special responsibility and powers to the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh," he said.

Terming Chakmas and Hajongs as refugees and claiming Arunachal Pradesh is a tribal State protected by the Constitution are thus incorrect and only perpetuate the prejudices against a section of Indian citizens, the CDFI said.

'Share the burden'

The CDFI warned that if Arunachal Pradesh expects other States to absorb a few thousand Chakmas and Hajongs, it could be asked to share the burden of 1.9 million people excluded from the National Register of Citizens in Assam considering that the population density of

Arunachal Pradesh in 2022 was 17 people per square km compared to the national average of 431 people.

“Furthermore, considering the claim of China on Arunachal Pradesh including the renaming of the Indian territories on April 6, 2022, and extremely low population density in the State, the demand for settlement of people from other parts of India to Arunachal Pradesh to counter the threats of China may arise in the near future,” the CDFI said.

“After all, many groups including ex-Assam Rifles, refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan, etc., were settled in the then NEFA to address security threat from China following the 1962 Indo-China war,” the organisation said.