

# Centre drafting law for resettling the displaced

It will help those affected by major developmental projects: Minister

Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI:** The Centre is in the process of drafting legislation for resettlement of the displaced people, particularly those affected by developmental projects, Union Rural Development Minister Raghuvansh Prasad Singh said on Wednesday.

Talking to reporters after a day-long conference of Revenue Secretaries of States and Union Territories here, Mr. Singh said the process of drafting the Bill had already started and the final document would be ready in two

or three months. This, he said, would help in the rehabilitation and resettlement of those displaced due to major developmental projects.

Citing the recent protest by Narmada dam oustees, led by Narmada Bachao Andolan leader Medha Patkar, in the capital, Mr. Singh said such controversies could be avoided if the Government had proper legislation.

## National policy

His Ministry had already formulated a National Policy on Rehabilitation and Resettlement

• **Take to land reforms, States told**

• **States should send figures of landless people**

for the Displaced Persons in 2004 that laid down broad guidelines for the rehabilitation of the displaced.

He said he had asked the State Governments to bring about speedy land reforms that would help in dealing with the naxalite problem also. The Centre had initiated a scheme of upgradation and modernisation of land records that would benefit the rural poor most.

There was also a comprehensive

scheme of computerisation of land records, which was being implemented on a pilot basis in one district in every State and Union Territory. Computerisation of land records would help in land reforms and subsequently the rehabilitation policy, besides distribution of land among the landless poor, at least for providing them shelter under the Indira Awas Yojana.

The Minister said Uttaranchal, West Bengal and Orissa had sent the figures of landless people that would enable the Centre to provide them assistance under various schemes. He asked the other States also to compile such figures and praised West Bengal and Kerala for their efforts in land reforms.

# Lanka refugees run, from army & war fear

M.R. VENKATESH

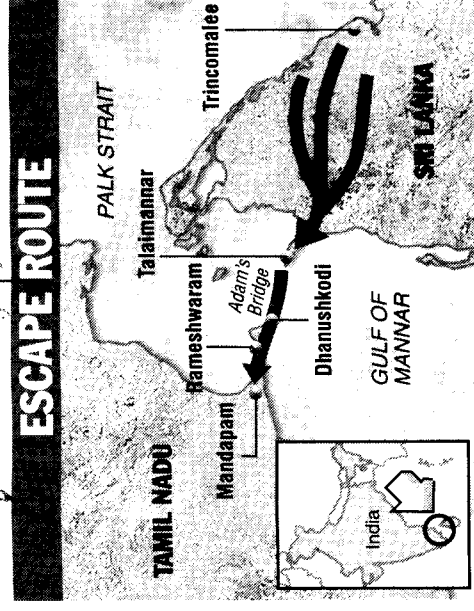
Rameshwaram, May 29: In Tamil folklore, the Adam's Bridge — the small islets of sand dunes off this island — are the remnants of the *sethu bandhan* Ram's monkey army built to Ravan's Lanka. To the Sri Lankan Tamils fleeing the "fortures" of the "Sinhalese army", it's turned a bridge of hope.

A four-week spurt in refugees taking the rough boat ride to Indian shores had swelled their number to almost 2,600 till Sunday.

"We simply can't live in the presence of the Lankan army," said fisherman Pushparaj at Dhanushkodi police station where his group was brought on Saturday. "Twenty days ago, a woman and her daughter from our village who had gone to a nearby town were hacked to death by the army. We don't know why."

"We can't go out fishing or do anything else," chipped in Dharmaraja, another refugee from Trincomalee, northern Sri Lanka. "So we left behind our home, my four boats, fishing nets and five engines and ran for our lives. The police and others here have been so kind to us."

About 20 km from here, Dhanushkodi, literally "land's end", where a once flourishing town was swept away by tidal waves in 1964, is now just a stretch of sand from where some fishermen launch their boats. Further east in the shallow seas, Arichalmunai is the



al in the camp, which is barred to the local population.

The refugees are not from the "rebel-controlled areas in the north and east" but mainly from Trincomalee further down, local officials said.

"The peace talks (between the rebels and Colombo) are supposed to be on, but looting and killing are rampant in our area," Pushparaj said.

Thyagarajan, a grocer, had returned home to Vavuniya hoping normality would return soon. He is back at the camp. "We fear another war between the rebels and the army," he said. "Trincomalee is the latest hotspot and people are fleeing amid reports that whole villages could be evacuated by the army."

"Just near my home is an army camp. I can't even stir out of my house as bombs keep going off on the road," said Robert Dishakaran Devaki.

Would they have had some protection if the Tamil Tigers were around in their area? "We don't really know," said Devaki.

inland refugee camp of Mandapam, about 20 km from here.

A month of "quarantine" follows, allowing a thorough check into each refugee's antecedents, especially for Tamil Tiger connections. Once cleared, they are officially admitted into the camp, allotted a

house — one for a family of six — handed a set of cooking utensils and issued ration cards. There is a school and a hospital

last of the small chain of islets within Indian waters.

It's on these islets that Lankan Tamil-owned boats drop off the refugees at the dead of night and hurry back to Talaimannar, just 18 nautical miles from Rameshwaram, for the next trip.

Local fishermen or sailors from the Indian Navy or the Coast Guard who spot the refugees inform any of the seven coastal police stations, including Dhanushkodi and Rameshwaram. The police bring them in for a preliminary investigation and luggage check.

At times, the small naval boats or the Coast Guard's hovercraft ferry the stranded men, women and children to Rameshwaram, Pamban or Dhanushkodi. Each family is photographed, handed serial numbers and, after the first search for explosives or smuggled goods, packed off to the ma-



Sri Lankan refugees wait at the Dhanushkodi police station. Telegraph picture

# Five Sri Lankan refugees drowned

Their boat capsized mid-sea on Friday night

Staff Reporter

**RAMESWARAM:** Five Sri Lankan refugees who were on their way to Tamil Nadu were drowned and five others went missing when their boat capsized mid-sea on Friday night.

An eyewitness said a group of 19 persons started from Paysalai in Sri Lanka on Friday evening towards Rameswaram. When they were about to reach one of the five sand dunes which come under the Indian territorial waters, rough weather toppled the overloaded boat. Only nine per-

sons, including a girl, managed to reach the second sand dune.

## Rescue

A naval helicopter on patrol spotted them on Saturday. They waved to the copter to rescue them. Navy commandos from Rameswaram and personnel of the Forward Operating Post reached the spot on a trawler and rescued them.

They also retrieved five bodies, which were found near the accident spot.

The victims were identified as Nivashini (21) daughter of Kan-

dasamy, Bhuvanawathi (40), wife of Mohan, Navamani (65), Govindasamy (75) and Rathusha (14).

There belong to two families hailing from Pallathottam and Pathamkuruchi in Trincomalee.

## Strong wind

"We fled away from our native places in Trincomalee following the harassment of Sri Lankan Navy and Sinhalese people. We stayed on Mannar coast to fix a boat to take refuge in Tamil Nadu. On Saturday we decided to board the boat despite of the fact

that the sea was rough, as we didn't want stay in Sri Lanka fearing death. But, the strong wind toppled not only our boat but also our future," said Kandasamy, who lost his daughter in the tragedy.

Area Commander of the Navy Subroto Mukherji said though the rough sea and darkness were said to be the cause of the tragedy, overload was also the reason. The fibre boat carried 19 persons against its capacity of eight. He said the commandos would continue to search for the missing persons.

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THE HINDU

# Reang refugees want security

Satyabrata Chakraborty  
in Agartala

Feb. 3. — While the Mizoram government, apparently under pressure from the Centre, now shows its readiness to initiate the process of the repatriation of Reang (BRU) evacuees, refugee leaders want the Union home ministry to persuade the authorities in Aizawl to sign an agreement before the tribesmen's return to their villages.

The Mizoram Reang (BRU) Tribe's Displaced People's Forum has, in a memorandum to the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh,

appealed for his intervention so the uprooted community's security is not undermined when it returns to Mizoram. Refugee leaders demand an agreement, endorsed by officials of the Union home ministry and the governments of Tripura and Mizoram, guaranteeing the evacuees' security and rehabilitation.

Copies of the memorandum were given to the Union home minister and the chief ministers of Tripura and Mizoram. The Reangs from Mizoram organised a rally in Kanchanpur of northern Tripura recently to call attention to their 16-point charter of demands,

including adequate compensation, implementation of development schemes in Mizoram, a census of the community, rehabilitation in a compact area and paramilitary forces for their security. Mr Elvis Chorkhy, president of the MRT-DPF, said that the Mizoram government had signed an agreement with the underground Reang Liberation Front, in April, 2005, following which the BRU's insurgents surrendered their arms. Mr Chorkhy complained that the Mizoram government had never consulted their leaders. Nor were they invited to peace negotia-

tions. "We want constitutional protection as an ethnic and religious minority in Mizoram," Mr Chorkhy said. "I sincerely do not believe Reangs will be included in voters' lists, once they return to Mizoram," said Mr Sahas Chakma, director of the Asian Centre for Human Rights. After his tour of Reang camps in northern Tripura, Mr Chakma said here, the agreement had failed to end BRU insurgency "as it does not address the problems of the displaced BRUs who constitute the overwhelming majority of the BRUS of Mizoram." The Mizoram government gets the Young Mizo Associa-

tion and the Mizo Zirlai Pawl to exclude minorities from the electoral list," Mr Chakma said. The Mizoram government has agreed to take back 17,000 of the 35,000 Reangs languishing in camps in northern Tripura. We will accept only the genuine citizens of Mizoram, the chief minister, Mr Zoramthanga, said. The Tripura chief minister, Mr Manik Sarkar, said: "Let the process begin. We shall want the Mizoram government to take back all the evacuees now huddled in camps in northern Tripura. "The Reang exodus began in September, 1997, following ethnic violence in Mizoram.

# Time for a global conversation about migrants

It is now a question of managing it better, with cooperation and understanding on all sides.

Kofi A. Annan

EVER SINCE national frontiers were invented, people have been crossing them — not just to visit foreign countries, but to live and work there. In doing so, they have almost always taken risks, driven by a determination to overcome adversity and to live a better life.

Those aspirations have always been the motors of human progress. Historically, migration has improved the well-being, not only of individual migrants, but of humanity as a whole.

And that is still true. In a report that I am presenting today to the U.N. General Assembly, I summarise research which shows that migration, at least in the best cases, benefits not only the migrants themselves but also the countries that receive them, and even the countries they have left. How so?

In receiving countries, incoming migrants do essential jobs which a country's established residents are reluctant to undertake. They provide many of the personal services on which societies depend. They care for children, the sick and the elderly, bring in the harvest, prepare the food, and clean the homes and offices.

And they are not engaged only in menial activities. Nearly half the increase in the number of migrants aged 25 or over in industrialised countries in the 1990s was made up of highly skilled people. Skilled or unskilled, many are entrepreneurs who start new businesses — from round-the-clock corner shops to Google. Yet others are artists, performers and writers, who help to make their new hometowns centres of creativity and culture.

Migrants also expand demand for goods and services, add to national production, and generally pay more to the state in taxes than they take out in welfare and other benefits.

And in regions like Europe, where populations are growing very slowly or not at all, younger workers arriving from abroad help to shore up under-funded pension systems.

All in all, countries that welcome migrants and succeed in integrating them into their societies are among the most dynamic — economically, socially and culturally — in the world.

Meanwhile, countries of origin benefit from the remittances that migrants send



**SEEKING GREENER PASTURES:** Would-be migrants rest in Nouadhibou, Mauritania, on May 23 while waiting to be expelled from the country.

— PHOTO: REUTERS

home, which totalled around \$232 billion last year, \$167 billion of which went to developing countries — greater in volume than current levels of official aid from all donor countries combined, though certainly not a substitute for it.

Not only the immediate recipients benefit from these remittances, but also those who supply the goods and services on which the money is spent. The effect is to raise national income and stimulate investment.

Families with one or more members working abroad spend more on education and healthcare at home. If they are poor — like the family in the classic Senegalese film,

*Le Mandat* — receiving remittances may introduce them to financial services, such as banks, credit unions and microfinance institutions.

## Wooing migrant citizens

Also, more and more governments understand that their citizens abroad can help development, and are strengthening ties with them. By allowing dual citizenship, permitting overseas voting, expanding consular services, and working with migrants to develop their home communities, governments are multiplying the benefits of migration. In some countries, migrant asso-

ciations are transforming their communities of origin by sending collective remittances to support small-scale development projects.

Successful migrants often become investors in their countries of origin, and encourage others to follow. Through the skills they acquire, they also help transfer technology and knowledge. India's software industry has emerged in large part from intensive networking among expatriates, returning migrants and Indian entrepreneurs both at home and abroad. After working in Greece, Albanians bring home new agricultural skills that allow them to increase production. And so on.

Yes, migration can have its downside — though ironically some of the worst effects arise from efforts to control it: it is irregular or undocumented migrants who are most vulnerable to smugglers, traffickers and other forms of exploitation.

Yes, there are tensions when established residents and migrants are adjusting to each other, especially when their beliefs, customs or level of education are very different. And yes, poor countries suffer when some of their people whose skills are most needed — for instance healthcare workers from southern Africa — are "drained" away by higher salaries and better conditions abroad.

But countries are learning to manage those problems, and they can do so better if they work together and learn from each other's experience.

That is the object of the "high-level dialogue" on migration and development that the General Assembly is holding this September. No country will be asked or expected to yield control of its borders or its policies to anyone else. But all countries and all governments can gain from discussion and exchange of ideas. That's why I hope the September dialogue will be a beginning, not an end.

As long as there are nations, there will be migrants. Much as some might wish it otherwise, migration is a fact of life. So it is not a question of stopping migration, but of managing it better, and with more cooperation and understanding on all sides. Far from being a zero-sum game, migration can be made to yield benefits for all. — (Courtesy: UNIC, New Delhi.)

(Kofi A. Annan is Secretary-General of the United Nations.)

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