

Why a repeat of NRC unthinkable

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We all know that the update process of the National Register of Citizenship (NRC), Assam, from 1951 to 2019 now, is an offshoot of the Assam Accord, 1985. A tripartite agreement between the AASU and the governments of India and Assam was signed in May 5, 2005 which recognized that the updating of the NRC 1951 will be the modality for detection of the illegal foreigners, and deletion of the names of all illegal foreigners from the voters list. What to do with these illegal foreigners is also specified in this agreement.

1971 as the cut-off year: The Union Home Minister has told the Rajya Sabha recently that the NRC will be taken up in all the other States of India with 1951 as the cut-off year. As there are no sizable illegal Bangladeshi in most States (except West Bengal and Tripura), the proposed NRCs, we can presume, will be documents for the future for these States. It is also a hint for change to 1951 for Assam.

But the NRC in Assam is a step for the present and later for the future. When the Assam Accord was signed in 1985, Assam was already saddled with lakhs of illegal immigrants, both Hindus and Muslims, entering Assam since 1951 and under this circumstance to fix 1971 as a cut-off year was a pragmatic step and most people of Assam accepted this decision. When the people of Assam accepted 1971 as a cut-off year, they showed maturity and magnanimity

to embrace the 1951-71 streams of immigrants, both Hindus and Muslims, to be regularized as Indian citizens. The Government made provision under Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955 to include these people as Indian citizens whose number now may be more than 30 lakhs. These people are now integral part of a greater Assamese society.

If the Government tries to revoke the citizenship of these people as granted by law or push them to uncertainty now, it will be an unbelievable act of transgress on the part of the Central Government, but it is probably not going to happen. But, if pushed for such a situation, Assam will also be pushed towards a period of turmoil.

A good framework: A total of 3.29 crore people applied for inclusion in the Assam NRC and 3.11 crores have made to the NRC list. Assam's Census population of 2011, as extended up to 2015, is 3.39 crores, i.e., nearly 10 lakh eligible people did not possibly apply. Because the number of applicants for NRC being less than the Census population of Assam, there cannot be much scope for any large-scale application by illegal immigrants for inclusion into NRC. Out of the 3.29 crore applicants, 3.11 crores are selected for inclusion in NRC, i.e., 19 lakhs have been rejected as for-

igners. This is the official position of the NRC.

The official number of illegal Bangladeshi as given under a starred question No. 332 in the Parliament has stated that the total number of illegal Bangladeshi in India is 1.20 crore, and 50 lakhs are in Assam on January 1, 2004, which if projected at all India growth rate to 2015 will be around 65 lakh. This can be taken as an official number of illegal Bangladeshi in Assam in 2015 on a conservative basis. But if

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projected from the voters' growth rate, this figure will be around 80 lakhs or more.

With the above background, as only 3.29 crores people applied for the NRC, it is obviously clear that most of the illegal Bangladeshi have not applied in the NRC process for fear of being detected and to be branded as illegal Bangladeshi. This is good news for the NRC, as their

names are automatically not there in the NRC resulting in an acceptable NRC. But their names are in the voter's list as it is a gospel truth that all illegal Bangladeshi enrol themselves in the voter's list!

The Assam NRC update was a huge operation and no one can predict that there will not be any omissions and commissions. Nearly 60,000 data entry operators have played a vital role in the NRC process. The same will be the process for any new NRC – software may

be different, but 50-60 thousand people will be needed to enter the data in the computers. Can the Government guarantee a foolproof 1951 NRC under such a set up, if it happens at all? Depressed census results of population for Assam indicate that house-to-house enumeration process is inaccurate in Assam for various reasons and cannot be adopted for a correct NRC process.

An area specific need: Catering to the area specific needs of the country in many areas is the duty of the Central Government. That is why we had Article 370 for Kashmir (now revoked), Article 371 for Nagaland and Article 371(F) for Sikkim, etc., to take care of regional needs. The National Development Council on recommendation of the Planning Commission has given special status to all the northeastern States and Uttarakhand on fund-

related issues. So, the area specific 2019 NRC has no conflict with a 1951 national NRC, if at all a 1951 NRC comes up.

A Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court is hearing a petition for 1951 as the cut-off year for any NRC for Assam. The court will certainly look into every aspect of the issue before giving a judgment.

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Though nothing concrete has been said yet, the hint and talk of our NRC based on a national cut-off of 1951 is very ominous and the people of Assam including the regularized 1951-71 streams must be vigilant and oppose any such move vehemently. NRC 2019 is not just a paper but a legal document based on the law of the land and compiled under the supervision of the Supreme Court.

For the above reasons, it is unthinkable for another NRC based on 1951, unless one has an agenda to derail the NRC process completely. The indigenous people of Assam have gone through the humiliation to 'apply' to establish their bona fide as the citizens of their own country. They swallowed their pride and did it for the sake of their motherland. They have gone through immense difficulties in procuring legacy data and other documents while applying for the NRC. A repeat is even unthinkable.