

MINISTRY AMENDS RULES FOR MINORITIES

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The contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016, is pending in Parliament, but the Union Home Ministry has notified amendments to the Citizenship Rules, 2009, to include a separate column in the citizenship form for applicants belonging to six minority communities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

Under the amendments, a separate entry in the form will ask the applicant: “Do you belong to one of the minority communities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan — Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis, Sikhs and Christians?” The Centre has made the changes under Section 18 of the Citizenship Act, 1955. New rules were notified on December 3.

A parliamentary committee has been examining the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016, that proposes citizenship to six persecuted minorities — Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Parsis, Christians and Buddhists — from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, who came to India before 2014. It has run into strong resistance in the BJP-ruled Assam because it will pave the way for giving citizenship mostly to illegal Hindu migrants from Bangladesh in Assam, who came after March 1971, in violation of the 1985 Assam Accord.

Excluded from NRC

Around 40 lakh people in Assam have been excluded from the final draft of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) published on July 30. Last month, the Home Ministry re-notified rules empowering 44 Collectors in seven States, except Assam, to accept online applications from those belonging to the six communities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

These rules were first notified in 2015.

Rajendra Agarwal, BJP MP, said the amended rules would benefit those who escaped persecution.

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