

## IMITATION REGISTRY: ON NAGALAND NRC

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Indian Constitution - Features & Significant Provisions related to The Preamble, Union & its Territories and The Citizenship

Nagaland is following on the footsteps of its western neighbour, Assam, in the task of setting up a Register of Indigenous Inhabitants of Nagaland (RIIN). This is a variant of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) that Assam has adopted with decidedly mixed results so far. Nagaland claims to have watched the process unfold in Assam, followed it closely, and it will now complete the task of identifying and registering indigenous inhabitants in less than five months, by December 10, 2019. This is more or less the kind of time-line that was followed by Assam, which is yet to publish its final NRC a year after the process began. In two months from July 10, Nagaland hopes to have a list of indigenous inhabitants, after which it will be published and time given till October 10 to file claims and objections, before finalisation. It sounds simple, and Nagaland is considerably less populated than Assam. But the Assam experience shows that in the complex demographics of the Northeastern States, it may not turn out that way. As many as 40 lakh people were left out of the NRC listing in Assam, which seemed aimed to filter out 'illegal immigrants'. Indeed, in Nagaland, various local attempts have been made to determine non-locals, non-tribals and non-Nagas, and identify what some people refer to as the 'Illegal Bangladeshi Immigrant'. Two years ago, a town not farther than 15 km from Dimapur, the largest city and the commercial capital of the State, passed a resolution to place curbs on IBIs and devised ways to prevent them from integrating, living or trading in the town. When such is the situation on the ground, in an already volatile region where the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act is routinely extended, it is best that Nagaland proceeds with caution in this enterprise. The RIIN should not ultimately become a vehicle to make outsiders of insiders.

The Assam experiment has no clear end-point. Bangladesh has repeatedly suggested that the process going on in Assam is "an internal matter" of India, implying that there is no deportation possibility here. Other than deepening the existing fault-lines in its own State and rendering the situation even more volatile, it is unclear what the Nagaland government hopes to achieve through the exercise. What happens to the people who are in the end found to be on the wrong side of the Nagaland list? The right to appeal and a humane hearing should be in-built in this exercise. The NRC experiment in Assam witnessed extremely divisive political posturing. Other Northeastern states are sure to be watching with keen interest what is unfolding in Assam and Nagaland. Emotive political issues cannot be allowed to drive the compiling of a registry of citizens.

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