

PUSH FOR CITIZENSHIP TO MINORITY MIGRANTS

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

A file photo of people checking their names on the final draft of Assam's NRC list.

Migrants belonging to six non-Muslim minority communities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh who came to India on valid documents before 2014 are eligible to apply online for citizenship from any part of the country, a senior government official said.

In March, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) wrote to all States, including Assam, sensitising them of the relevant provisions under the Citizenship Act, 1955 that could help the six communities- Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists and Parsis, who entered India before 2014 and are here on long term visa (LTV), expedite their citizenship application.

The official asserted that this particular awareness drive was not related to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA) that is intended to benefit undocumented (illegal migrants) from the six persecuted communities who entered India before December 31, 2014.

The CAA is yet to come into force as the rules that govern the law have not been notified by the Ministry yet.

"A survey was done and it was found that such migrants live in many parts of the country. The States have been made aware that provisions exist that could help the migrants in acquiring citizenship if they fulfil the criteria. This is to help the applicants who have applied online from any part of the country, as the verification is also done by the local police who have to send the report to the Home Ministry," said the official.

Assam NRC

Assam is the only State where a National Register of Citizens (NRC) has been compiled. More than 19 lakh of the 3.29 crore applicants in the State have been excluded from the final register. The State government has demanded reverification of the process as a large number of Hindus were left out. The excluded persons from the six communities, who are yet to be declared illegal migrants, will benefit from the CAA as and when it is implemented as legislation benefits such migrants from the three neighbouring countries who entered India illegally before 2014.

A day ago, leader of the Opposition in the Assam Assembly Debabrata Saikia said in a statement that just before the Assembly elections, the State government, on March 19, citing a letter from the Centre, instructed deputy commissioners, superintendents of police, Foreigners Registration Officers "to disseminate information regarding grant of citizenship to migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan who hold Long Term Visas."

Mr. Saikia alleged that since the CAA was introduced for migrants from these three specific countries, there was reason to suspect that the State government's latest instruction was nothing but a ploy to implement the Act in a roundabout way.

On May 28, The MHA empowered 13 more District Collectors in Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab to grant citizenship certificates to applicants belonging to the six communities under Section 5 (registration) and Section 6 (naturalisation) of the Citizenship Act, 1955. Earlier in 2016, 16 Collectors were granted such powers that was extended again in 2018.

Citizenship is a Home Ministry subject but it can delegate powers to States for specific objective.

Though the precise number of such migrants who availed the LTV and are eligible for citizenship is not known, officials estimate the number to be around two lakh.

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