

NRC EXERCISE ONLY TO UPDATE 1951 LIST, SAYS CJI

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The NRC 2019 is an attempt to end the vicious cycles of violence and agitations in Assam over the presence of illegal foreigners, Chief Justice Gogoi said.

He was speaking at the release of journalist Mrinal Talukdar's book, *Post Colonial Assam (1947 to 2019)*.

Over 19 lakh out of the 3.29 crore applicants in Assam were excluded from the final NRC list.

These people face uncertain days ahead trying to prove their Indian citizenship through appeals filed in foreigners' tribunals.

"The NRC is not a document of the moment. 19 lakh or 40 lakh is not the point... It is a base document for the future. A document on which we can determine future claims," Chief Justice Gogoi said.

Chief Justice Gogoi described Assam as an ancient land unrivalled in its beauty and endowed with diversity. "A meeting place of many races and ethnic groups. Each contributing to the rich tapestry of cultures, languages," the CJI said. While the children of Assam made their mark on the world stage, the State itself suffered from agrarian strikes, natural calamities such as persistent floods and widespread agitations and frequent violence which had deeply impacted socio-political life in the State, he said.

The CJI said the NRC had attempted to quell the enormous amount of guesswork about illegal immigration in the State. This "guesswork" had fuelled panic. Callous reporting by few media had worsened the situation, he added.

The Assam NRC list of 2019 attempted to give some degree of certainty on illegal influx, Chief Justice Gogoi explained. He agreed that the final NRC list was "not without contestations". But, he said, the "idea of NRC was neither new or a novel idea and it had found expression as early as 1951". "Current NRC is an attempt to update the 1951 NRC. Nothing more nothing less," the CJI said.

The NRC was only a manifestation of a peaceful exercise, Chief Justice Gogoi said and praised the magnanimity of the Assamese people in accepting the cut-off date for the NRC update.

"Assamese people have displayed great magnanimity to accept cut-off date. Humaneness is acceptance. Acceptance is the first step towards diversity... People who raise objections about cut-off dates are playing with fire... There is no place for fresh wounds or conundrums," he said.

Recently, certain sections in Assam have objected to 1971 being the cut-off date of the NRC update. They want the cut-off date to be revised to 1951 to detect illegal foreigners in the State.

The CJI lashed out at the national discourse about sensitive issues being dominated by "armchair commentators", who presented a distorted picture. Emergence of social media and tools had fuelled these "double-speaking commentators".

Severely criticising these commentators, Mr. Gogoi said they had launched tirades against

democratic institutions... “Armchair commentators with their vile intentions and rumour mills flourished. Assam and its development agenda had been victims of such commentators,” he said.

“Unrestrained mudslinging” and “personal attacks” against both institution and its members masqueraded as fair criticism in public interest. “It does not take long to bring down and institution, but takes long to build one,” the CJI pointed out.

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