

Dual Citizenship to SL Refugees

Why in News?

The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA) has triggered an ill-advised demand for dual citizenship to Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka.

What is CAA?

- The Act seeks to amend the definition of illegal immigrant for Hindu, Sikh, Parsi, Buddhist and Christian immigrants.
- These immigrants may be from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, who have lived in India without documentation.
- They will be granted fast track Indian citizenship in six years.
- So far 12 years of residence has been the standard eligibility requirement for naturalisation.

Does India provide dual citizenship?

- The constitutional and legal positions are clearly against the grant of dual citizenship.
- As on date, no Indian citizen holds the citizenship of any other country.
- The Citizenship Act was amended by the Centre in 2003 to introduce the Overseas Citizens of India scheme for sections of the Indian diaspora.
- Even during that time, all it provided was a limited version of 'dual citizenship' which came without political rights and with a bar on purchase of agricultural land.

When this issue was raised first time?

- In the run-up to the 2016 Assembly elections, the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu flagged the issue of dual citizenship.
- Since then, representations have been made regularly to the Centre.
- In February 2020, the government told the Rajya Sabha that neither the Constitution nor the CAA permitted dual citizenship.

Will the government provide a dual citizenship?

- It would defy logic, then, to seek dual citizenship for those who are not Indian nationals.

- The Centre has consistently favoured voluntary repatriation of Sri Lankan refugees.
- Given the possible effect on the demographic mix there, India is not in a mood to confer Indian citizenship on them.
- Although the Central and State governments do a lot to make the refugees' stay comfortable, most of them are regarded as illegal migrants.
- This is so as they arrived with no valid travel documents.

Why the SL refugees shouldn't be seen as illegal migrants?

- There is no law on refugees in India.
- The Sri Lankan refugees entered India with knowledge and approval of Indian authorities.
- There is also a need to treat the refugees in a humane manner.

What could be done?

- As for those who wish to remain in India for studies or to earn a livelihood, the authorities should tweak the OCI Cardholder scheme or offer an exclusive long-term visa.
- By this, the stay of around lakh refugees in Tamil Nadu will be regularised.
- India should lean on Sri Lanka to enable early return of those who are keen on returning home.
- Besides, the two countries should formulate a scheme of structured assistance to expedite voluntary repatriation, which is moving slow even a decade after the civil war ended.
- These steps can lead to a lasting resolution of issues concerning those who have been in India for over 30 years.

Source: The Hindu