

Updated NRC for Assam

Why in news?

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The first draft of an updated National Register of Citizens (NRC) for Assam was published recently by the Assam government.

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What is the significance?

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- Assam is the only State that had prepared an NRC in 1951.

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- It has also now become the first State to get the first draft of its own updated NRC.

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- The Register is meant to establish the credentials of a bona fide citizen as distinguished from a foreigner.

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- This is to detect Bangladeshi migrants who may have illegally entered Assam after the midnight of March 24, 1971.

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- This cut-off date was originally agreed to in the 1985 Assam Accord.

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What is the Assam Accord?

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- Assam witnessed a range of law and order problems and political turbulence driven by the anti-foreigners movement, in the early 1980s.

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- Responding to this, the Assam Accord (1985) was signed by the Centre and the All Assam Students' Union (AASU).

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- Accordingly, those foreigners who had entered Assam between 1951 and

1961 were to be given full citizenship, including the right to vote.

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- The entrants between 1961 and 1971 were to be denied voting rights for ten years but would enjoy all other rights of citizenship.

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- Anyone who entered the state without documents after March 24, 1971 will be declared a foreigner and were to be deported.

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- Besides, the Accord had a package for the economic development of Assam.

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- It also had assurance to provide safeguards to protect the cultural, social, and linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.

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What happened thereafter?

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- The successive governments in the State failed to effectively detect and deport foreigners as set out in the Assam Accord.

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- In 2005, another agreement was signed between the Centre, the Assam government and the AASU.

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- Accordingly, it was decided to update the NRC that was first published after the Census data of 1951.

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- The NRC update though started as a pilot project in some districts was stopped after violence broke out in some parts of the State.

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- In 2009, Assam Public Works (APW), an NGO filed a petition in the Supreme Court.

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- It called for identification of Bangladeshi foreigners in the State and deletion of their names from the voters' list.

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- The recent publication of updated NRC comes as a result of the Supreme Court order to complete the exercise by December 31, 2017.

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What challenges lie ahead?

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- **Claims** - The list published is the first draft, and with verification of the remaining applicants subsequent draft would be published.

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- However, if a citizen's name is missing, he/she can file an objection (with requisite documents) and request that the name be included.

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- Given the further claims, a security challenge could possibly emerge when the process of updating the NRC gets completed.

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- **Post marriage migration** - Nearly 29 lakh women, who have migrated after marriage, have claimed for residency status.

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- Their claim is supported by certificates issued by gram panchayat secretaries and executive magistrates.

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- The Supreme Court has clarified that while these documents could be allowed, it could by no means be taken as proof of citizenship.

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- The challenge lies in verifying the authenticity of the certificates for establishing the link between the claimant and the legacy person (who has to be a citizen).

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- **Citizenship Bill** - The Centre is pushing for the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016.

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- It seeks to grant citizenship to Hindu Bangladeshis who have entered Assam illegally post-1971.

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- Various groups have opposed identification of illegal migrants on the basis of religion.

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- This unresolved citizenship related issue could further pose a challenge for the positive outcome of the NRC, even if completed.

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Source: The Hindu

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