



NRC in Tripura

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The Supreme Court recently issued a notice to the centre and the Election Commission of India on a plea seeking that the National Register of Citizens (NRC) be updated to include Tripura.

- The petitioners pleaded for a direction from the court to authorities concerned to update the NRC. They also sought fencing of the Tripura-Bangladesh border to prevent influx of illegal immigrants.
- As per the petition influx amounted to “external aggression” and that they have turned the tribal people into a minority in their own native land.
- The NRC is a list of Indian citizens of Assam. It was prepared in 1951, following the census of that year.
- Currently Assam is the only state where NRC is being updated under the Citizenship Act, 1955, and according to the rules framed in the Assam Accord, to wean out illegal migrants from Bangladesh following a Supreme Court order of 2013.

Background

- Much of the migration into Tripura occurred before the creation of Bangladesh. The petition takes recourse to the 1993 tripartite accord signed by the Government of India with the All Tripura Tribal Force that asked for the repatriation of all Bangladeshi nationals who had come to Tripura after March 25, 1971 and are not in possession of valid documents authorising their presence in the State.
- The petitioners are now demanding that the cut-off date for the recognition of migrants should be made July 1948, based on **Article 6 of the Constitution**.

Brief History of Tripura

- The princely state of Tripura was ruled by the Manikya dynasty, belonging to the Tripuri community, from the late 13th century until the signing of Instrument of Accession with the Indian government on October 15, 1949.

- The Tripuris are largest tribal group and also considered the aboriginals as they migrated first. Other groups migrated at various times include Reang and Jamatia (via the Chittagong Hill Tracts from parts of Burma), Bhil, Orang and Santal (from parts of central India and Bengal) etc.
- According to Language Census 2011, Bengali was the mother tongue of 2/3rd of the total population of around 37 lakhs, and almost three times the speakers of Kokborok, a language of the Tibeto-Burman family and the mother tongue of the largest tribal groups.
- The dominance of Bengali, however, cannot be attributed to recent migration alone. It was the official court language of princely Tripura at a time when English was the official language of Bengal. Manikya kings promoted Bengali.

Way Forward

- As early as in 1979, after years of struggle, the tribal people of the State had gained special autonomy provisions, the institution of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council and recognition of their spoken language, among other assurances.
- Since then, the empowerment of the council and the protection of tribal rights have steadily eroded the significant tribal versus non-tribal differences that once existed in the State.
- The judicial-bureaucratic process of hearing a petition to seek the deportation of long-settled migrants is fraught with problems, similar to those already being faced in Assam.
- In spite of the fact that the NRC process in Assam has an overall popular legitimacy across most political parties, the deportation has remained unclear till now.
- NRC and its deep humanitarian impact should be taken into account before its implementation in a state like Tripura where there is no such unanimity of views on the NRC process.
- Before taking a final view on NRC, other provisions like the Citizenship Act, Foreigners Act and the Passport Act which exist to detect and deport illegal immigrants in the country should be considered.
- The Executive and Judiciary should consider the negative impact that the process can have on years of reconciliation between Bengali-speaking and tribal people before laying out the roadmap for another NRC.