

Throwing light on a nationwide NRC



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GUWAHATI, July 4, 2026 — An intriguing debate gained momentum soon after the Indian foreign ministry made a public statement that a passport alone cannot justify one's claim to be a citizen of India. The federal government had already clarified that neither Aadhaar- PAN-driving licence nor a voter identity card can be assumed as a solid proof of Indian citizenship. There are speculations and also demands that New Delhi plans to create a particular document, duly endorsed by the National Register of Citizens (NRC), so that the residents can claim citizenship in India. But the 1951 NRC is yet to be updated across the country except in Assam, which too embraced controversy and confusions.

Gauhati High Court, while recently upholding a 28 February 2019 order of the Foreigners' Tribunal (Kamrup-metropolitan), declared an Assam resident a foreigner. The individual submitted a number of documents including his PAN, voter identity, school certificates, land deals, etc to prove his citizenship but those were not acknowledged by the court. He also placed a computer-generated printout of the NRC containing the names of his father and grandparents, but it was again rejected by the court citing the reason of non-authentication under the Evidence Act, 1872.

Needless to mention, that the NRC updating process in Assam (between 2015 and 2019) mired into controversy from financial mishandling to accommodation of illegal migrants as original inhabitants. The disagreement started as soon as the Assam NRC's final draft was published in 2019, which is yet to be endorsed by the Registrar General of India. Later the sitting State NRC coordinator Hitesh Devsarma publicly claimed that his predecessor Prateek Hajela intentionally mishandled the process by tampered software with an aim to entertain a large number of illegal migrants (read Bangladeshi Muslim settlers). According to Devsarma, an important verification mechanism (Family Tree Matching) was also compromised by Hajela and his associates. So he demanded a credible probe into the irregularities and lodged

multiple complaints to the concerned authorities. Even the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) also pointed out indiscretion to the tune of Rs 260 crore during the NRC updating process. The highest national audit body also recommended legal actions against Hajela. Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma also admitted that the said NRC was faulty. Stating that Hajela prepared a flawed NRC, Sarma asserted it could jeopardise national security and also harm the indigenous people.

Lately, a writ petition forwarded by Devsarma praying for a comprehensive re-verification of the Assam NRC was accepted by the Supreme Court of India. Participating in a debate, hosted by journalist Dikshit Sarma and broadcast by Nation NE, Devsarma reiterated that a genuine review of the Assam NRC will help identify hundreds of thousands of illegal migrants who continue enjoying all government sponsored welfare benefits. Leaving aside a few exceptions, Assam media remains shy of reporting the financial malpractices taking place in the process. Majority of local media persons even spread misinformation (reasons best known to them only) that the NRC supplementary list was the final one and there was no space for authentication.

One Guwahati-based television host shamelessly lobbied for accepting it without verification. Later he was named and shamed for months on social media as a beneficiary of NRC updation scam, but the otherwise aggressive orator remained silent to those allegations (not done till date). He even authored a book praising Hajela's job as unparalleled, probably with a push for some national recognitions to the technocrat turned bureaucrat. Hence it's assumed that a genuine probe would unearth all misdeeds and identify guilty individuals, who wanted to cheat the nation for their selfish gains during the much hyped NRC updating exercise in Assam.

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