

BASELESS FEAR

The NRC doesn't want to establish an insular society

It's not the end of the road for the 40 lakh people in Assam who didn't find their names on the second and final draft of the National Register of Citizens. The document released on Tuesday wasn't the final list — a fact reiterated by both Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh and MoS Kiren Rijiju — since Opposition parties like the Trinamool Congress are playing politics with it. Dubbed as anti-linguistic and anti-minorities, the political opposition is trying to whip up a frenzy over the drive by calling it a tool of the state government that has set out to establish an exclusionary environment in Assam. Nothing could be further from the truth. The entire process of identifying the citizens of India through a national registry is monitored by the Supreme Court. Hence, there is no scope for favouritism or pandering to a certain ideology. Moreover, a registry of this kind was perhaps the only way to address the growing concerns in Assam about a demographic change induced by illegal migration from Bangladesh. The Congress, which had ruled Assam earlier, didn't want to initiate the process of tackling cross-border infiltration due to the fear of losing power. Illegal immigration had helped the former government in elections. But in the process, seeds of enmity, suspicion, fear and intolerance were sown in the hearts of the Assamese, who felt left out in their own state. While one is yet to hazard a guess about the number of illegal settlers, over the years, communal clashes in Assam became a regular phenomenon. It was also a fight over resources and livelihood in a state that has been neglected by the central government since Independence. Even then, the current BJP state government is opposed to herd people out of this country. It wants to give everyone, down to the last man, woman, and child, a fair shot at proving their citizenship. The process for making claims and objections will begin on August 30 and continue till September 28. Given the nature of the exercise — it's mammoth in scale — even the most-efficient state administration is likely to commit errors. And, it is willing to make amends. In the words of Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, genuine Indian citizens will get ample opportunity to establish their citizenship. The situation in Assam will most likely be a little tense because of the fear over the register. But that can't be an excuse to exploit the general paranoia to unleash widespread violence. Since all parties understand the dangers of illegal migration, they should actually help the government to deliver justice to the people of Assam. A ruckus by the TMC in Rajya Sabha was all about optics. It wanted to be seen and heard as the champions of the minority cause. The TMC is always tight-lipped about the influx of people through the porous India-Bangladesh border. Those crossing over to India are also provided ration card and voter ID proof, provided they know the right person. Let's not forget that the original inhabitants of Assam also have a right to their own state's resources.