

UPSC Civil Services Examination

UPSC Notes GS-III

Topic: National Register of Citizens (NRC)

Maintained by the Government of India, the National Register of Citizens (NRC) holds all the important information of the Indian citizens of Assam required for their identification. It was during a parliamentary session on 20th November 2019 when Home Minister Amit Shah declared an extension of NRC to the entire country. NRC was first introduced after the 1951 Census of India and Assam was the first in updating this NRC for including the names of the persons along with their descendants whose name was successfully registered in the NRC of 1951, or was found in any of the electoral rolls till the midnight of 24th March 1971. The main purpose for the introduction and updating of the NRC in Assam was the identification of the illegal immigrants in Assam who had migrated to Assam from Bangladesh during the 1971 war with Pakistan. This is a sensitive issue in Assam as many complain of mass infiltrations from the eastern border that are eroding the Assamese culture and changing the demographics of the region.

NRC in Assam

The objective behind the NRC update is the identification of the illegal migrants who migrated from Bangladesh after 24th March 1971 to Assam. It also aims at determining whether the citizens applying for their names in the NRC are the genuine citizens of Assam or not. One of the basic criteria for identification was that the names of the family members of the applicant should be present in the NRC prepared in 1951 or in the electoral rolls up till March 24, 1971.

A person also can present the following documents as proof of his/her citizenship:

- birth certificate
- LIC policy
- refugee registration certificate
- land and tenancy records
- citizenship certificate, passport, government-issued licence or certificate
- bank/post office accounts and permanent residential certificate
- Government employment certificate, educational certificate and court records.

Since the year 1950, due to the migrations taking place into Assam, there has been a fear of losing their cultural identity and the demography of the state in the minds of the original inhabitants. During the late seventies, the university students in Assam along with the All Assam Students' Union started a movement called the Assam Agitation which demanded the detection and deportation of illegal migrants in Assam. The agitation was aggressive and brought the whole state to a standstill.

Assam Accord, 1985

During the year 1985, the Assam Accord was signed between the All Assam Students Union (AASU), the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad and the then Central Government led by Rajiv Gandhi to bring stability in the state. The provisions of the Assam Accord were:

- Any foreigner will be given full citizenship including the right to vote if he/she had come to Assam between 1951 and 1961
- The foreigners who had migrated to Assam between 1961 and 1971 will be given all the rights of citizenship except the right to vote, which would be denied for a period of ten years and those who entered Assam after the year 1971 would be deported.

Many difficulties arose during the implementation of the Assam Accord as it led to massive law problems. Even many people were killed during a mob attack that took place in Barpeta at the office of the Deputy Commissioner.

A petition was filed in the Supreme Court in 2009 by an NGO called Assam Public Works demanding the identification and deportation of illegal Bangladeshis in Assam. They also demanded the deletion of their names from the voter's list.

In 2013, an order was passed by the Supreme Court for completion of the NRC update by December 31st, 2017. Currently, the Supreme Court is responsible for monitoring the entire process of NRC updation. The NRC is updated on the basis of the Citizenship Act, 1955 and The Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003.

Controversies of the National Register of Citizens (NRC)

With the introduction of final NRC on 31st August 2019 at 10 a.m. for the completion of the 1951 NRC update, a lot of controversies were created and even some law-makers openly came out for criticizing this document. As per the reports, an M.L.A of Assam belonging to the political party All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) was found out of the NRC. On this regard, he expressed that there are

thousands of genuine Indians, especially the Bengali Hindus are left out of the final NRC list whereas the illegal foreigners made an entry to the final list. Even re-verification of this draft list was rejected by the Supreme Court.

Eligibility Criteria for NRC

A person should fulfil the following criteria to be eligible for the NRC:

- Any persons whose names appeared in the NRC of 1972 or in any of the Electoral Rolls till the date of 24th March 1971 (midnight) as well as their descendants.
- Persons who had registered themselves as per the rules of the Central Government with the Foreigners Registration Regional Officer (FRRO) and are not considered illegal migrants or foreigners by any authority.
- Any person who had migrated to Assam on or after 1st January 1966 but before 25th March 1971.
- People who are original inhabitants of Assam and their children and descendants who are citizens of India provided their citizenship is ascertained beyond a reasonable doubt by the registering authority.
- Persons who can provide any one of the documents issued up to midnight of 24 March 1971 as mentioned in the list of documents admissible for citizenship.