

Citizen Amendment Bill is consistent with India's best interests



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In 1947, India and Pakistan were born — one as a secular country with fundamental rights for all its citizens, regardless of religion, and the other as an Islamic nation. It was clear from that day on that both nations will continue to have minority religions.

73 years on, it is obvious that in countries like Pakistan which had a prescribed official religion of Islam and Islamic Law, minorities like Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists etc lived in fear and danger and were victims of ethnic cleansing and persecution — often living a life that dodged life and death every day. This despite the infamous 1950 Nehru-Liaquat Act about protecting each others' minorities. The failure of this agreement — the costs of the historic blunder of Partition, that people are suffering from, even to this day. Minorities in India, in contrast, have grown and thrived despite the occasional communal riot.

And so as a consequence of a deliberate campaign of ethnic cleansing, forced conversions and violence, the percentage of minorities in all countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh has plunged — ethnically cleansed, living lives as persecuted and vulnerable citizens who are not protected by the laws of that country and subjected to vicious violence. Many have fled to India as the only safe haven

they know and trust. For years they have remained refugees in India — with no legal status and living lives of despair and vulnerability.

It is these people that the Citizens Amendment Bill addresses — by securing the future of these refugees who have no other country in the world they can call home — by making them citizens of India. Also the bill serves as a beacon of hope to those who continue to be in these three countries and are suffering. They can choose to come to India if they choose to do so.

It is a very simple proposition that should usually have the support of all political parties on humanitarian grounds. Why would any right-minded Indian oppose giving safe haven to those who are suffering as minorities under Islamic law?

But predictably, politics, particularly, the vote-bank politics of some political parties have tried to infect this effort too. The Congress in particular has run a particularly vicious and dangerous propaganda of this bill being anti-Muslim and discriminatory — possibly in its efforts to appear pro-Muslim, even if it's based on complete political lies. Amongst the points being trotted out is that it is anti-Muslim, anti-constitutional and discriminatory and that refugees from other countries should be also permitted entry.

The hollowness of these allegations becomes obvious if tested even a little bit.

Nothing in this bill impacts even the slightest right of any Indian citizen — Muslim or any other religion. There is no discrimination — it addresses ALL religious minorities of three Islamic states. And to the question why not cover refugees from other countries like Sri Lanka, Nepal, Burma — the answer is that these are not countries where there is a prescribed state religion and law based on religion like the three Islamic countries. On the charge that the bill is pro-Hindu, there are several thousand Hindu refugees from Sri Lanka that remain outside this bill.

Most telling in this entire debate was the fact that Rahul Gandhi and the Congress leaderships response to the bill was identical to that of Imran Khan's from across the border in Pakistan. Some in the Congress even made a bizarre argument made by some that Rohingyas should also be given sanctuary even when countries like Bangladesh are not willing to do so.

Embarrassingly for Congress, its current opposition to these refugees is in contradiction to its own positions — by its position in 1943 of seeking citizenship for "Non-Muslim" refugees. More recently in 2003, Dr Manmohan Singh pressed for similar citizenship for religious refugees from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. And so yet again, the political hypocrisy of Congress' sad efforts at trying to balance appeasement and political amnesia get exposed.

To be clear, this bill does not at all change the legal immigration

The percentage of minorities in all countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh has plunged. Many have fled to India as the only safe haven they know and trust. For years they have remained refugees in India — with no legal status and living lives of despair and vulnerability. It is these people that the Citizens Amendment Bill addresses — by securing the future of these refugees who have no other country in the world they can call home — by making them citizens of India. Also the bill serves as a beacon of hope to those who continue to be in these three countries and are suffering. They can choose to come to India if they choose to do so



process for all others who seek to migrate to India. This bill does not either encourage or discourage legal immigration. The laws for those seeking citizenship remain unaltered. Those who seek legitimate citizenship can continue to use the existing naturalization process, prescribed under the current citizenship act.

The violence in places like West Bengal and Assam are in large part being stoked by those who have thrived off illegal immigrants, politically and economically for decades and would like to continue to do so in the interests of its "vote-banks" and so are "inspiring" some of the violent protests against the bill.

On the other hand, anger in the NE is for a totally opposite reason — part of it because of lack of clear understanding on the bill but mostly it is directed at this large scale illegal migration over decades that has threatened their local culture and communities and is a desperate plea to stop illegal migration and demographic changes. In effect they are pleading for a nationwide NRC and verified citizenship. The Home Minister in

Parliament and PM Narendra Modi have assured the people of NE of full and complete protection to them from illegal migration, and their culture.

Over the last seven decades, illegal immigration has been allowed to grow unfettered into a huge problem to India — in terms of its deleterious effects on public finances, electoral demographics and national security. It has destroyed large swathes of indigenous culture and communities in our border states of Assam and West Bengal. For decades, political leaders in Congress have played political football with this issue and used it to further their narrow vote-bank politics. They have opposed the move for verified citizenship (NRC) simply because it doesn't suit their politics.

The Narendra Modi Government's approach to immigration especially illegal immigrants - is completely consistent with what is in the country's best interests. The BJP has been steadfast in its intentions on this in its various manifestos, in particular explicitly in 2019 Election Manifesto including on the NRC.

Its decision to provide safe haven for those who have suffered religious persecution is also consistent with what is right. There is no going back on its objective to take on the issue of Illegal immigrants that over decades was allowed to grow unchecked until it reached its present moment of crisis.

PM Modi does not believe in kicking a problem down the road or brushing it under the carpet. He believes in solving country's challenges today and NOW. And so it is that his Government is taking head-on, challenging and altering the 70 year status quo on this issue and both providing humanitarian intervention, support for those who have suffered as religious refugees for decades AND also protecting border states and people from scourge of illegal immigration by a nationwide NRC.

The Narendra Modi government has a clear commitment to nation's interest like no other government of the past and that is the reality of this New India.

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