

# Suspected migrants using forged documents to find place in Assam citizens' register

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The authorities in Assam working on a huge project to prepare a National Register of Citizens (NRC) to help weed out illegal migrants from Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries in the state have detected a sizeable number of cases of persons trying to use forged documents to establish their Indian citizenship. Most of the persons who submitted forged documents are suspected to be illegal migrants.

“The district authorities have so far registered 137 cases where people have used forged documents to prove their Indian citizenship and thus get themselves enlisted in the NRC. The highest number of such cases has been so far registered Nalbari (33) followed by Nagaon (14),” Prateek Hazela, state coordinator for the ambitious NRC project said here on Monday. The number of cases is likely to go up as the process of verifying documents is yet to be completed. The process for preparing the NRC has led to registration of 68.23 lakh applications from as many households from all over the state, with the total number of supporting documents submitted being more than 6.63 crore.

“While there are three stages of verification, we have almost completed 97 per cent of the field or door-to-door verification. The next stage that consists of verification of the documents in the

offices of the various issuing authorities is currently going on, and so also verification through the family tree mechanism,” Hazela, a senior IAS officer who heads the crucial project, said. Numerous issuing authorities ranging from those issuing birth certificates to land certificates, matriculation certificates and ration cards have been sent copies of these documents for verification. “While a large portion of this verification has been completed, leading to discovery of forged documents, most of the documents sent to authorities outside Assam are taking a lot of time,” he said.

Giving a break-up, Hazela said that while 64,547 documents were sent to different authorities in West Bengal, only 30 have been sent back after verification so far. “Likewise, Nagaland has verified only 542 out of 49,692, Meghalaya 493 out of 34,438, and Arunachal Pradesh 290 out of 33,486,” he said. While the Supreme Court, which is directly monitoring the exercise, had fixed January 2016 for publication of the final NRC, the process has been delayed due to various factors including slow response to documents verification from the other states.

The NRC authorities, however, have received no response at all from Bihar for the 31,380 documents sent to different authorities there, and this despite the Supreme Court and the Registrar General of India asking all state governments to cooperate in preparing of the citizens’ register in Assam. “Even the Delhi response has been poor. We have so far got back only four of the 3025 documents sent to different authorities under the Delhi government,” Hazela said.

The NRC preparation exercise, which is being undertaken in Assam since 2015, is a massive exercise that is more than an updation of the original NRC prepared in 1951 in the backdrop of large-scale migration of people from East Pakistan in the wake of the Partition. “We have made extensive use of state-of-the-art IT applications to ensure an error-free NRC, in which we have to also see that not a single Indian citizen is left out and the name of not a single non-citizen finds place in it,” Hazela said. The entire process is directly monitored by the Supreme Court on a periodic basis.

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