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BJP confident of Citizenship Bill passage

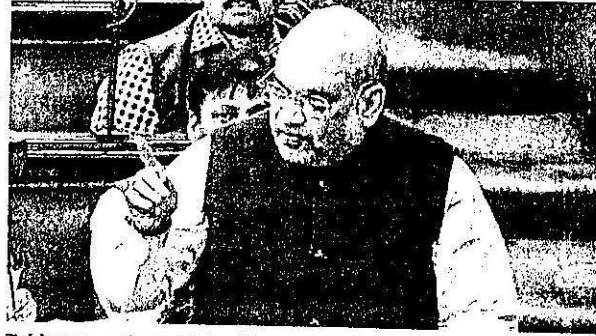
While it has majority in the Lok Sabha, the party appears to be sailing through in the Rajya Sabha too

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The Citizenship Amendment Bill cleared by the Union Cabinet on Wednesday is expected to be tabled in Parliament next week. While its fate in the Lok Sabha is a foregone conclusion, the government appears confident of clearing it in the Rajya Sabha too, where the numbers are tricky.

Those opposed to the Bill include the Congress (46 members), Trinamool Congress (15), Samajwadi Party (9), RJD (4), Left parties (6), DMK (5), AAP (3) and IUML, JD(S) and Kerala Congress (M) (one each), besides two Independent members and a nominated member.

It remains to be seen whether the Congress, which had walked out of the Lok Sabha in January when an earlier version of the Bill was presented, will vote against it in the Rajya Sabha. The party has so far maintained that the Bill is essen-



Taking questions: Union Home Minister Amit Shah speaking in the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday. •PTI

tially unconstitutional since it uses religion as a criterion to extend citizenship.

The BJP with 81 members is currently the biggest party in the Rajya Sabha. Its erstwhile ally Shiv Sena, which has three members in the House, has not so far made up its mind, though sources said the party saw no reason to change its earlier stand. The Shiv Sena had supported the Bill during its last outing in the Lok Sabha. "It's not a political issue for us. We

have no objections to the Bill, but we will decide once we read the Bill," Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut told *The Hindu*.

"As of 9.30 p.m. on Wednesday night, the Trinamool Parliamentary Party hasn't seen a copy of the Bill as passed by Union Cabinet," Trinamool's RS floor leader Derek O' Brien said. "From what is being reported in the media, BJP is bringing this Bill for cheap, narrow political gains. My party's position

will be shared on the floor of both Houses."

Abstentions likely

The AIADMK, which has 11 members, said that it has not so far decided its stand. "We have to obtain a copy of the Bill based on which we will consult our party before deciding," party leader A. Navaneethakrishnan said. AIADMK sources, however, said that while expressing reservation on the Bill, the party may abstain or walk out, indirectly helping the government.

The other key ally, Janata Dal (U), is conflicted on the contentious Bill in view of the upcoming Bihar Assembly election in November 2020. Sources indicated that the party may follow the AIADMK in either abstaining or walking out if it comes down to vote.

The Akali Dal, which has three members, is likely to support the Bill. "We are for the Bill primarily because

there are many Sikhs from Pakistan and Afghanistan who have been living in India for the past 25 years. This Bill will confer citizenship rights on them," party leader Naresh Gujral told *The Hindu*.

BSP leader Veer Singh told *The Hindu* that the party has not formulated its position and is waiting for the draft Bill to be circulated.

The Biju Janata Dal (7), TRS (6) and YSR Congress (2) are likely to support the Bill. "I think as of now we are planning to support the Bill, but we have to go into the details," TRS leader Keshava Rao said.

Biswajit Daimary of the Bodoland People's Front (1) and K.G. Kenye of the Naga People's Front (1) told *The Hindu* that they will support the Bill if Home Minister Amit Shah's commitment to protect areas that fall under sixth schedule of the Constitution and exempt Inner Line Permit States from the Act stands true.