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Contentious Citizenship Bill gets Cabinet approval

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Govt says concerns of NE addressed; Oppn says Bill targets Muslims

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

THE Union Cabinet on Wednesday cleared the contentious Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2019, which seeks to amend the 1955 law to facilitate granting citizenship to Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis and Christians from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who face persecution for their non-Islamic faith.

The development comes a day after Home Minister Amit Shah met various stakeholders from the north-eastern states to allay their concerns about the new Bill.

The government is likely to bring the legislation before Parliament next week.

While the government says it has addressed the concerns of the northeastern states, the Opposition is determined to oppose the Bill claiming it is not in sync with the secular character of the country.

The Congress, Trinamool Congress and Left parties have strongly criticised the Bill.



Congress, Trinamool and CPM have said they will oppose the Bill when it comes up in Parliament

According to the Congress, it violates the basic idea of India that religion can never be a reason for citizenship

It says the amended Bill is not in sync with the secular character of the country

Congress leader and ex-Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi said his party will move the Supreme Court against the Bill, which is 'unconstitutional' and 'divisive'

As reported by this newspaper on December 1, Inner-Line Permit (ILP) states and Sixth Schedule areas in the northeast have been exempt from the Bill. ILP is applicable in Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal

Pradesh, while the Sixth Schedule covers parts of Meghalaya, Assam, Tripura and Mizoram.

The main objective of ILP is to prevent settlement of other Indian nationals in the three states in order to protect the indigenous population.

Residents of northeastern states, especially Assam, have opposed the Bill saying it will nullify the provisions of the Assam Accord of 1985, which fixed March 24, 1971 as the cut-off date for deportation of all illegal immigrants irrespective of religion. The Bill cleared by the Cabinet has set December 31, 2014 as the cut-off date.

Unlike the 2016 law, the new Bill has a provision to give an OCI cardholder a hearing if she/he is found to have violated any other law.

"The Bill seeks to protect national interest," said I&B Minister Prakash Javadekar told reporters here on Wednesday.



Congress will move SC because we believe CAB is unconstitutional and against the spirit of secularism. It is divisive, and violates the constitutional provision - equality for all - Tarun Gogoi, ex-Assam CM