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# Citizenship Amendment bill: BJP's dilemma to do or not to do

## NDA ally National People's Party says it will oppose the bill in the present format

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**A**s BJP is rushing to fulfil one of the highly contentious promises made in its manifesto for 2014 Lok Sabha election, the party faces a roadblock again as not only its allies but also its own rank and file in the North East are

uncomfortable with it. The first sign of sparks came on Sunday when NDA ally National People's Party (NPP) announced it will oppose the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) in the present format. Earlier BJP MP from Manipur Rajkumar Ranjan Singh in Lok Sabha last week urged the Home Ministry to exempt the

state from the purview of the Citizenship Amendment Bill, bringing the Home Minister's attention to "a lot of hue and cry" in Manipur, where people are "apprehensive of this new citizenship law".

His was the lone public dissenting voice on the Bill as none of the 15 BJP MPs from North East signed a letter signed by 12 North East MPs from the Opposition parties that they wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on November 29.

While BJP's pitch for NRC, now already implemented in Assam, found a lot of resonance

in North East states for obvious reason of its promise to "drive out foreigners" and being in the interest of the indigenous people, its CAB pitch has not found support in NE even as the bill suits the larger Hindutva agenda of the BJP.

Last year, when the BJP was pushing for the passage of the Bill, several NDA allies in the North East vociferously opposed it. BJP was wary about how the Bill would electorally play out in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls in Northeast.

The CAB has now become all the more important after

the side-effect of NRC, which in the process of excluding 19 lakh from its list, ended up excluding a large number of Hindu Bengalis, an issue that resonated in the recently concluded West Bengal assembly by-poll.

The BJP, which had just months ago won 18 Lok Sabha seats, a nine-time jump from mere two seats in 2014 Lok Sabha, scored a zero with Trinamool Congress winning all three assembly seats. West Bengal, where BJP is betting high, goes to polls in 2021. The CAB which provides special amnesty to non-Muslim

asylum seekers from Pakistan and Bangladesh could do some damage control to the saffron party in West Bengal and other places. The Bill seeks to bring amendments in the Citizenship Act, 1955, to facilitate Indian nationality to Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians who come to India after facing religious persecution in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Accusing BJP of using Citizenship Amendment Bill as a political tool, Congress has threatened to build an alliance of parties against it.