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## Amit Shah allays fears over new Citizenship Bill

'Rights of indigenous people are safe'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday said the people of the northeast had nothing to fear from a fresh Citizenship (Amendment) Bill the Centre may push through.

The Centre's bid to pass such a Bill in January had triggered widespread protests across the northeastern States as it sought to legitimise the stay of allegedly persecuted non-Muslim migrants from India's neighbourhood.

Mr. Shah was addressing fears expressed by the Chief Ministers of the region and the "spillover effect" of Assam's National Register of Citizens (NRC)

at the fourth conclave of the North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA), a forum of anti-Congress parties helmed by the BJP.

'Article 371 intact'

"The Citizenship Bill will not violate Article 371 that is applicable in the north-east. It will not affect any rights of the indigenous people, nor will it affect the Inner-Line Permit," he said.

Any visitor to Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland need to possess the permit for temporary stay. Manipur and Meghalaya have been demanding such a permit.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

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Mr. Shah also pointed out that the proposed Bill had December 31, 2014, as the cut-off date and no one arriving after this date would be given citizenship. But he said the Centre would not let any illegal immigrants come in from neighbouring countries.

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma had earlier told him that the northeastern States feel the Citizenship Bill would threaten their existence and urged him to take all the political partners of the BJP into confidence before bringing in the legislation again.

Asking whether the Centre would bypass the States before reintroducing

the Bill, Mr. Sangma requested the Centre to invite all stakeholders to arrive at a consensus. "We are also worried by the exclusion of 19 lakh people from Assam's NRC. Meghalaya shares a long border with Assam, and there are fears many of them could sneak in," he said.

Mizoram Chief Minister Zoramthanga too opposed the Bill. He also said the regional parties that supported the Bill had committed "political suicide", insisting that the northeast should be excluded from its purview.

The Lok Sabha had passed the Bill on January 8 but it was not tabled in the Rajya Sabha.