

4. Assam Accord (1985) – Internal security

Recently, the Assam government has announced that a broad consensus has been reached on most of the recommendations made under Clause 6 of the Assam Accord, 1985

Origins of the Anti-Foreigner Movement (1979–1985)

Stemmed from widespread fears that large-scale illegal migration from erstwhile East Pakistan (later Bangladesh) was altering Assam's demographic balance. The influx was perceived as a threat to Assamese identity, language, culture, land ownership, and political representation. The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) spearheaded a six-year statewide agitation demanding detection, deletion from voter rolls, and deportation of illegal immigrants.

Triggers for the Movement – The 1979 discovery of a large number of "D" (doubtful) voters and suspected foreigners in electoral rolls. Growing pressure on land and resources, contributing to economic marginalization of indigenous communities. Rising fears of political disenfranchisement as migrant populations grew in several districts.

Signing of the Accord – Signed on August 15, 1985 between the Government of India, AASU, and AAGSP. Marked a historic compromise ending the prolonged agitation marked by strikes, mass mobilization, and social unrest. Formed the basis for subsequent political developments, including the formation of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) government in 1985.

Key Provisions of the Assam Accord

Cut-off Date for Citizenship Determination

Before January 1, 1966 – All persons who entered Assam were to be deemed Indian citizens. Their names would be restored to electoral rolls.

Between January 1, 1966 and March 24, 1971 – Classified as "foreigners" but allowed to remain in India after registering for a 10-year period. After 10 years of registration, they would gain full citizenship rights, including voting.

After March 24, 1971 – To be detected, deleted from electoral rolls, and deported. March 24, 1971 was chosen as it aligns with the start of the Bangladesh Liberation War.

Clause 6 – Cultural and Identity Safeguards

Promised constitutional, legislative, and administrative safeguards to protect –

1. Cultural identity
2. Social practices
3. Linguistic heritage
4. Land and employment rights of Assamese people

Intended to preserve the distinct ethno-linguistic character of Assam amid demographic changes.

Border Security Measures

Emphasized the need to secure the India–Bangladesh border through –

1. Physical fencing
2. Strengthened border patrolling
3. Surveillance systems

Aimed at preventing further illegal migration and stabilizing population dynamics.

Detection, Deletion, and Deportation Mechanism – Proposed creating a robust institutional mechanism to detect foreigners based on the cut-off date. Included steps for revision of electoral rolls and judicial verification. Provided a framework that later informed the exercise of updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

NRC Updating and Reforming Documentation – Accord laid the foundation for a modernized NRC to identify citizens and foreigners. Required strengthening institutions like Foreigner Tribunals for adjudication.

Implementation Challenges and Concerns

Unresolved Definition of 'Assamese People' for Clause 6 – No consensus exists on who qualifies as 'Assamese,' complicating implementation of safeguards. Competing claims exist among indigenous tribes, Assamese-speaking Hindus, ethnic minorities, and migrant-origin communities settled pre-1971. A high-level committee formed in 2019 submitted recommendations, but they remain unimplemented and contentious.

NRC Update (2019) and Its Complex Outcomes – The NRC update resulted in 1.9 million people being excluded, causing widespread uncertainty. Concerns include –

1. People with genuine documents left out
2. Fear of statelessness
3. Overburdened judicial processes in Foreigner Tribunals
4. Risk of detention without clarity on deportation

Critics argue the NRC process was bureaucratically complex and socially disruptive.

Impact of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019

CAA offers citizenship to non-Muslim immigrants (Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, Christians) from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Many in Assam argue this undermines the 1971 cut-off set by the Accord. Seen as violating the spirit of the Accord by potentially regularizing more immigrants. Triggered mass protests across Assam and the Northeast.

Border Management and Incomplete Fencing

Parts of the border along rivers and char areas remain unfenced due to terrain challenges. Porous riverine stretches facilitate continued informal migration. Coordination issues among central and state agencies hinder comprehensive surveillance.

Legal and Humanitarian Challenges

Deportation remains complicated due to lack of formal repatriation mechanisms with Bangladesh. Detention centers face overcrowding and poor infrastructure. Verification processes often disproportionately impact poor and marginalized groups.

Overall Significance of the Accord

Represents one of the most important political agreements addressing migration and identity in post-Independence India. Seeks to balance humanitarian considerations with protection of indigenous identity. Serves as a foundational document influencing Assam's politics, citizenship debates, and inter-community relations for decades. Highlights the complexity of demographic change, administrative capacity, and federal coordination in managing migration.

Source – <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/assam/consensus-on-most-recommendations-of-assam-accord-clause-6-state-govt/article70314345.ece>