

Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) comes into effect

India

What:

The BJP-led central government issued a notification for the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) on 11 March 2024. The CAA amends the Indian Citizenship Act to establish an accelerated pathway for citizenship for nationals of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh belonging to the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian communities if they migrated to India before December 31, 2014, to escape religious persecution.

Background:

- CAA's 2019 enactment triggered protests nationwide, beginning in Assam and quickly spreading to states like Delhi, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, and Tripura.
- Initial protests escalated into riots in Northeast Delhi, resulting in the loss of dozens of lives, including both civilians and security personnel, and numerous injuries.
- Protests, riots, and the 2020 Covid-19 outbreak collectively delayed the official notification of the CAA, reflecting a complex interplay of social unrest and administrative challenges.

Why: The opposition to CAA centres on two primary concerns

- Religious discrimination, particularly for excluding Muslims.
- There are apprehensions about the potential spillover effects on the now-delayed National Population Register (NPR), 2020, and the controversial proposal to prepare the National Register of Citizens (NRC) at either the state or national level.

So What:

- Security has been heightened in Delhi, especially in communally sensitive areas such as Shaheen Bagh and Jamia Nagar in northeast and southeast Delhi. The city police are expected to remain on high alert throughout the week. The cyber cell of the city has been instructed to increase vigilance on social media.
- A strike has been called by various groups and parties in Assam, while sporadic protests have been reported in some places. Heightened security and additional police deployment have been implemented throughout Assam. All police stations are on alert, along with check-posts on major routes across the state, including Guwahati.
- Prohibitory measures like the implementation of section 144 can be imposed to avoid escalation of protests. Travel disruptions can be expected in case of large protests and restrictions imposed by authorities.

Outlook:

The reaction to CAA in 2024 is anticipated to be different from that witnessed in 2019. The strategic timing of the CAA notification, just ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, could potentially mitigate the impact of anti-CAA protests. The engagement of various political parties in election campaigns may limit their capacity to organize prolonged protests against the controversial legislation. Recognizing the potential for the CAA to polarize voters along religious lines, opposition parties may be reluctant to allow such polarization, fearing it could favor the BJP. Unlike in 2019, it appears that the government has taken proactive measures by consulting with Muslim leaders before the CAA notification to counter potential misinformation that could lead to unrest. Several Muslim leaders have stepped forward to clarify that the CAA is not discriminatory against Muslims. While the likelihood of protests and unrest, particularly in Assam and West Bengal, cannot be dismissed, it seems improbable that the CAA in 2024 will elicit the same fervent reactions witnessed in 2019.

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