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# OUR TRYST WITH THE

# DARK AGES

## IN BRIEF

### Ayodhya hearing today

■ **NEW DELHI:** A five-judge constitution bench of the Supreme Court will on Thursday decide on a batch of review petitions challenging the November 9 Ayodhya verdict that granted the disputed land to Hindu claimants.

### Data bill

■ **NEW DELHI:** The Lok Sabha on Wednesday referred the Personal Data Protection Bill to a joint select committee amid protests by the Opposition, which said the bill breached personal privacy. **NATION P5**

### QUOTE

Don't convert this Indian Republic into a Jurassic republic, where there are two dinosaurs

KAPIL SIBAL

## RS passes bill, even BJP allies are fidgety

OUR BUREAU

**New Delhi:** The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill was cleared by Parliament on Wednesday with the government winning the numbers game in the Rajya Sabha in the face of a spirited effort by the Opposition to reject the religion-and-country-specific draft legislation about which even the BJP's allies had reservations.

The bill was supported by 125 members and opposed by 99 after a nearly nine-hour debate.

But the discomfort among the BJP's allies and those who supported the bill was evident as many, including the Shiromani Akali Dal, echoed the Opposition in urging the government to remove references to any religion from the body of the draft legislation. They also wanted the names of Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan to be replaced with "neighbouring countries".

Neither demand was accepted.

The only change in floor strategy came from the Shiv Sena, which chose to stay away from the voting to avoid risking its government in Maharashtra. The Congress apparently objected to a repeat of the Sena stand in the Lok Sabha on Monday, when the Maharashtra party had voted for the bill.

Compared to the Lok Sabha, the Opposition put up a better fight in the Rajya Sabha, managing to marshal all but 10 of its expected MPs across various parties. The government side had just three MPs missing from its expected strength of 128.

Several MPs referred to the ongoing protests in the Northeast over the bill and the fiasco over the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, where its biggest champion BJP now wants the exercise to be junked and redone.

Union home minister Amit Shah studiously avoided both issues in his hour-long reply.

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## Army deployed, curfew in Guwahati

ROKIBUZ ZAMAN,  
DEBANANDA MEDAK AND  
MOHSIN KHAIYAM

**Guwahati:** On a day Parliament passed the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, India witnessed the unusual sight of troops being rushed from Jammu and Kashmir to the Northeast as Guwahati erupted in protests rarely seen since the Assam Agitation over three decades ago.

No one had called for a shutdown on Wednesday but the streets of Guwahati heaved with thousands of seething students and many bonfires were lit in protest against the bill, prompting the administration to deploy the army in the evening for the first time in 11 years.

Two columns of the army were deployed in Tripura, too, where an indefinite strike against the bill stoked fears of sectarian strife. The strike was called off in Tripura on Wednesday night after chief minister and BJP leader Biplob Kumar Deb agreed to hold discussions with a joint forum spearheading the protests.

Assam and Tripura have become the main centres of protest after the Centre exempted most of the rest of the Northeast from the provisions of the bill. Many in Assam and Tripura, which have not been fully exempt from the bill, fear the legislation might upset the region's demographic balance and cultural influences.

In Guwahati, police conceded that the situation was turning uncontrollable because protesters were pouring in from all sides.

■ At 6pm, curfew was imposed in the city till at least 7am on Thursday when the security situation would be assessed afresh.

■ At 7pm, mobile Internet services of all carriers across 10 of the 33 districts in Assam were suspended for 24 hours through a notification on the fear that the protests might intensify and spread.



Protesters burn hoardings in Guwahati on Wednesday. (PTI)

## Persecution 'hole' in bill fuels theories

BASANT KUMAR  
MOHANTY

**New Delhi:** The draft of the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill that was circulated among MPs shows a "discrepancy" that had not been conclusively addressed even after the piece of legislation was passed in the Rajya Sabha.

The statement of objects and reasons attached to the draft mentions "persecution" but the bill itself does not.

It is not clear why the word has been omitted from the main body of the bill although an impression had been generated that the bill is aimed at helping those who had been persecuted in the Muslim-majority Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The vacuum of explanation has been filled by speculation. One view is that it would be difficult for anyone to prove after all these years that he or she had been persecuted. The cut-off of December 2014 means at least five years have passed since the migrant reached India.

Another theory is whether the omission was intended at accommodating non-Muslims who had been left out of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam.

Of the 19 lakh left out, as many as 12 lakh are thought to be Hindus. But it is not clear whether the absence of the word "persecution" alone is enough to cover them under the Citizenship Bill.

While applying for the NRC entry, all those omitted would naturally have claimed that they were already citizens of India. They might have been omitted because they were unable to back up the claim.

This raises the question whether they can — now that the Citizenship Bill has been passed — change their original claim and describe themselves as refugees or migrants from any of the three countries. If so, that will amount to the State condoning an incongruity.

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