



## GENOCIDE WATCH: ASSAM STATE, INDIA

On July 30, 2018, seven million people in Assam State, mostly Muslims of Bengali descent, may lose their Indian citizenship and risk imprisonment in special “foreigner detention centers.” A process is now underway to “verify” the citizenship of all 32 million inhabitants of Assam state, which requires each person to affirmatively prove that they are Indian and not an “illegal migrant.” Beginning in colonial times, millions of ethnically Bengali Muslims settled in Assam. The 2011 Indian census put their number at 10.6 million in Assam state.

At the urging of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Hindu nationalist central government, Assam is updating its master list of “citizens.” Those *classified* as Indian citizens will receive new Indian identity cards, *symbolizing* their *classification*. Anyone not on the final “citizen” list will be presumptively declared a “foreigner,” subject to statelessness and indefinite detention.

Assam’s Muslims are especially likely to be excluded from the “citizen” list as part of a decades-long pattern of *discrimination*. In advance of releasing the “citizen” list, the Assam state is constructing a new “foreigner” detention center to add to the six prisons already in existence. The word “foreigners” is a common term of *dehumanization* used to exclude targeted groups from citizenship and the exercise of their fundamental civil and human rights. Assam’s Chief Minister, Sarbananda Sonowal, has requested additional Indian government troops and police to arrest “foreigners.” This is the *organization* stage of the genocidal process. Propaganda against Muslims has *polarized* the Assam population.

Like the Rohingya of Rakhine State in Myanmar, Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam have faced constant discrimination. Assamese ethno-nationalist independence movements grew in the 1970s, culminating in 1983 with the Nellie massacre of between 1,800 and 3,000 ethnically Bengali Muslims.

At least 4.8 million citizenship applicants, mostly poor Muslims, do not have documentation -- which in many cases is missing after several generations. Another 2.9 million Muslim women can only provide a marriage certificate from their local government, which the authorities often dismiss as inadequate. Meanwhile the Citizenship Amendment Bill of 2016, expected to pass soon in the Indian Parliament, would offer relief to some “foreigners,” but not to Muslims, evidence of *discrimination* and *polarization*.

Anyone left off the “citizen” list will automatically be *classified* as an illegal “foreigner.” The Chief Minister of Assam declared in January that “[t]he people who are declared foreigners will be barred from all constitutional rights, including fundamental and electoral.”

Muslims classified as “illegal foreigners” can challenge their *classification* before Indian government administrators and, ultimately, special “foreigners’ tribunals” -- where they will be denied due process and will have no right to legal counsel. Those adjudged to be “foreigners” will be imprisoned – usually without trial -- in special “foreigner” detention centers, where they will be confined to their cells 24 hours per day, 7 days per week so they cannot mix with “citizen” prisoners. They will be denied recreation time, and no communication with their families on the outside will be allowed.

This is a classic case of denial of citizenship in order to deprive a minority ethnic and religious group of its rights. It could become a prelude to another genocide like Myanmar’s genocide against its Rohingya Muslims. The parallels to the Rohingya situation are shocking.

Genocide Watch is issuing this Genocide Alert as an Early Warning of potential genocide. In Genocide Watch’s Ten Stages of Genocide the situation of Bengali Muslims in India’s Assam State is now at Stage Seven: *Preparation*. When Bengali Muslims in Assam are imprisoned in “foreigner” detention centers, the situation will move to Stage Eight: *Persecution*, the stage immediately preceding full *genocide*.

Genocide Watch calls upon the UN Secretary General, the UN Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and key UN member states to warn India not to strip citizenship, imprison, and forcibly displace millions of Bengali Muslims who have lived their entire lives in Assam state.