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Statement

It is a matter of great concern that widespread complaints have arisen about a concerted campaign to harass religious and linguistic minorities during the NRC-related claims and objections process, which started recently. However, such a development does not come as a surprise to me. As far back as June, 2018 I had led a delegation to New Delhi in the capacity of leader of the Assam Congress Legislature Party and separately submitted memoranda to the Hon'ble President of India, the Hon'ble Union Home Minister and the Registrar General of India & Census Commissioner wherein we highlighted the harassment faced by religious and linguistic minorities due to the NRC process and the need for effective measures to arrest the trend.

Unfortunately, the BJP government which has scant regard for the Constitution of India and the Fundamental Rights of citizens, turned a deaf ear to our caution and suggestions alike. As a result, numerous innocent citizens are now facing emotional and financial distress. A nefarious force has conspired to intentionally register bulk complaints with the NRC authorities, questioning the citizenship of genuine citizens belonging to the minority communities. According to reports, this nefarious force collected signatures on blank papers from simple and unsuspecting folk in certain areas and subsequently used them to register false complaints with the NRC authorities. In fact, a complaint has been registered questioning the citizenship of several descendents of Late Osman Ali Sadagar, who was an MLA from the undivided Nagaon district in the pre-Independence era (1937-1946).

The noteworthy aspect is that these motivated complainants remain absent during NRC hearings pertaining to claims and objections. Even the NRC authorities are playing a dubious role when it comes to harassment of minority groups. Many people whose citizenship has been called into question have been summoned to far-flung NRC Seva Kendras despite the existence of Seva Kendras near their areas of residence. In some cases, one member of a certain

family has been summoned for hearing to Kokrajhar while another member has been summoned to Udalguri on the same day. This system is not only causing logistical difficulties but also causing financial hardship for impoverished families.

In such a scenario, it is the bounden duty of the government to provide succour to those who are suffering undue harassment. The Hon'ble Supreme Court has directed at today's NRC-related hearing that the authorities should exercise their discretion in accordance with the laws of the land while dealing with NRC-related cases wherein the objector remains absent from the hearing process. It is a legal axiom that 'justice delayed is justice denied'. Therefore, I demand that NRC-related complaints wherein the objector avoids the hearing process should be decided *ex-parte* and dismissed so as to prevent protracted harassment of the defendant. Moreover, the NRC authorities should take steps to ensure that those under the scanner are summoned to the nearest Seva Kendra, and not to far-flung places.



(DEBABRATA SAIKIA)

Enclosed:

1. Copy of memorandum submitted to the Register General of India & Census Commissioner.