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Over 300 people become Indian citizens under CAA

At least 14 people were handed over the certificates by Union Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla in Delhi at an interactive session

Updated - May 16, 2024 06:41 am IST Published - May 15, 2024 04:40 pm IST - New Delhi

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Union Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla hands over citizenship certificates to 14 people who applied for citizenship under CAA in Delhi. Director, Intelligence Bureau, Tapan Kumar Deka and Registrar-General of India, Mrityunjay Kumar Narayan were present at the event. Photo: Special Arrangement

The Union Government on Wednesday granted citizenship certificates to more than 300 people who applied under the **Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), 2019**, a senior government official said.

At least 14 people were handed their certificates by Union Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla in Delhi, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said in a statement.

The country of origin of the applicants was not disclosed by the government but a government source said that most applicants were Pakistani Hindus.

The 14 people who received the certificates in Delhi came from Pakistan in 2013.

The source said that as applications were being scrutinised and finalised, certificates were being sent by post to beneficiaries in other parts of the country. Most Pakistani Hindus who entered India legally are living in Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Punjab, and Delhi.

It was not known how many people from West Bengal, including Matuas and Namasudras, and those excluded from the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, had applied under the CAA. The citizenship portal requires applicants to declare the country of origin, and also submit at least one document tracing their roots to Bangladesh, Pakistan or Afghanistan.

Since the intended beneficiaries in West Bengal entered India without any documents, they are unable to apply under CAA.

The Hindu met the families who were granted citizenship in Delhi. They said it was the first time since coming to India on a tourist visa in 2013 that they had applied for citizenship.

Jhoola Ram, a resident of Majnu Ka Tila in north Delhi, said that a priest at a nearby temple had signed the eligibility certificate validating his religion. One of the documents required to apply under the CAA is an eligibility certificate issued by a "locally reputed community institution".

Another applicant, Seetal Das, said that a local NGO working with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) had signed the eligibility certificate.

“We will be able to get out of the *jhuggi* (slum) now. We have documents. I did not receive proper education, but now, my children will go to a better school. Citizenship means hope for us...,” Mr. Das said. He added that citizenship had brought relief because he had been living with his family in Delhi on a tourist visa. . “Getting extension of tourist visa was another hassle because, who listens to poor people? It costs ₹2,000-4,000 per person,” he added.

On March 11, days ahead of the announcement of the general election, the MHA notified the Citizenship Amendment Rules, 2024 that enabled the implementation of the CAA, more than four years after the legislation was passed by the Parliament in December 2019. The Citizenship Act, 1955 was amended to facilitate citizenship through registration and naturalisation under Section 6B of the CAA to undocumented migrants belonging to six non-Muslim communities — Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian — from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, who had entered India on or before December 31, 2014, and reduced the period to qualify for citizenship from the existing requirement of continuous stay of 11 years to continuous stay of five years.

However, Pakistani Hindus were anyway eligible for citizenship under Section 5 and Section 6 (1) of the Citizenship Act, 1955. The CAA only helped fast track the application process.

The Rules grant the final authority to accord citizenship to an empowered committee headed by the Director, Census Operations, while the scrutiny of applications filed online on the portal indiancitizenshiponline.nic.in was done by a district level committee (DLC) headed by Department of Post officials. On successful verification of documents, the DLCs administered the oath of allegiance to the applicants. The portal is said to have received over 25,000 applications so far.

While disbursing the certificates, Mr. Bhalla highlighted the salient features of the Rules. The Secretary, Posts; the Director, Intelligence Bureau; the Registrar General of India, and senior officers were also present during the interactive session.