Clause 6 of the Assam Accord

What is the issue?

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- Union Cabinet has cleared a proposal to set up a high-level committee to look into the implementation of Clause 6 of the Assam Accord of 1985.
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- It is imperative to understand the significance of Clause 6, especially in the context of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) for Assam and the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016.
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What is Clause 6 of the Assam Accord?

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- **Purpose** - Assam Accord came at the culmination of a movement against immigration from Bangladesh.
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- For recognition as citizens, the Accord sets March 24, 1971 as the cutoff date.
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- It was proposed that the immigrants up to the cutoff date would get all rights as Indian citizens.
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- So, Clause 6 was inserted to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the “Assamese people”.
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- It seeks to offer constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards to the Assamese people.
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- "**Assamese people**" - As agreed by most stakeholders, the NRC of 1951 was the basis for defining “Assamese people”.
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- The current NRC update is based on March 24, 1971, which defines citizenship.
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- On the other hand, Clause 6 relates to “Assamese people”.
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- If 1951 is accepted as the cutoff, it would imply that those who migrated between 1951 and 1971 would be Indian citizens.
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- However, they would not be eligible for safeguards meant for “Assamese people”.
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How has the implementation been?

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- AASU (All Assam Students Union) and the Assam government had submitted a number of proposals in furtherance of Clause 6.
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- Although some steps have been taken in this regard, the clause remains to be implemented fully.
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- The Assam government website, however, describes a number of steps as part of the implementation of Clause 6.
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- These include cultural centres and film studios, and financial assistance to historical monuments and xatras (Vaishnavite monasteries).
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- In 1998, the Home Ministry set up the sub-committee under G K Pillai.
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- In 2006, the state government set up a committee to help define “Assamese”.
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- In 2011, it constituted a Cabinet sub-committee to deal with Clause 6.
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What are the demands?

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- Former CM Prafulla Mahanta was one of the signatories to the 1985 Accord as the then AASU President.
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- Mahanta views “safeguards” as reservation of electoral seats, and land and political rights.
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- There are also demands that it should include rights over natural resources and protection of culture of the indigenous people.
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- It is also demanded that one needed to be a citizen in or prior to 1951 to purchase land, and similar laws for jobs too are called for.
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- E.g. Arunachal Pradesh entrusts rights over natural resources on the basis of ethnic community
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- Likewise, Manipur passed a Bill, last year, to define “Manipuri people” with 1951 as cutoff.
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What will the proposed committee do?

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- The committee would examine the effectiveness of actions since 1985 to implement Clause 6.
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- It would hold discussions and assess the quantum of reservation of seats in the Assembly and local bodies for Assamese people.
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- It will also assess the steps required to protect Assamese and other indigenous languages of Assam.
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- Besides, the committee will also look into the issue of reservation in state government jobs and other measures.
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What are the challenges?

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- The AASU has described it as an effort to mislead people before pushing the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016.
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- The Bill proposes to grant citizenship to non-Muslim immigrants from 3 countries including Bangladesh.

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- This has divided residents of Brahmaputra Valley (mostly anti-Bill) and Barak Valley (pro-Bill).
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- The government and the committee should thus take into account these concerns too while deciding on the safeguards.
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Source: The Indian Express

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