Concerns surrounding Tinsukia killings

Why in news?

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Five men were gunned down and one injured by suspected extremists in Assam's Tinsukia district recently.

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What is the aftermath?

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- According to the Assam Police, a group of assailants with sophisticated weapons came to the village near Dhola-Sadiya bridge and called out five-six people from their house.
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- They then opened indiscriminate fire upon those people before fleeing under the cover of darkness.
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- Police officers said they suspect the gunmen belonged to the Ulfa(Independent) faction as they were in battle fatigue.
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- However, the United Liberation Front of Asom (Independent) (Ulfa-I) has denied its involvement in the issue.
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What are the larger concerns?

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- The gunning down of **five Bengali men** is viewed as a part of periodic eruptions against non-Assamese people in the State, rather than an isolated act of violence.
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- The killings deepen the fault lines between the Assamese and Bengali communities because of two major reasons prevailing in the region.
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- The first one related to an ongoing exercise to update the National Register of Citizens(NRC) and the second related to the Centre's plan to secure parliamentary passage for the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016.
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- The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill make illegal migrants who are Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, eligible for citizenship.
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- The Bill makes illegal migrants eligible for citizenship on the basis of religion.
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- The Citizenship Bill grants protective cover to them on grounds of persecution in her country of origin.
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- The National Register of Citizens (NRC) is meant to identify a bona fide citizen and to detect Bangladeshi nationals who might have entered the State illegally after the midnight of March 24, 1971.
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- The date was decided in the 1985 Assam Accord, which was signed between the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the AASU.
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- The NRC was first published after the 1951 Census in the independent India when parts of Assam went to the East Pakistan, now Bangladesh.
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- The first draft of the updated list was concluded by December 31, 2017 and the second draft was released recently.
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- Four million people didn't make it to the second NRC draft and it raises concerns on the fate of those people.
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- While the final numbers will be known only when the elaborate process of claims, objections and verification draws to a close, there are certain known things at this point already.
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How will the Bill affect the updated NRC list?

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- While the Bill is designed to grant citizenship to non-Muslim refugees persecuted in neighbouring countries, NRC does not distinguish migrants on the basis of religion.
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- It will consider deporting anyone who has entered the State illegally post-March 24, 1971, irrespective of their religion.
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- Hence if the Bill becomes an Act, the non-Muslims need not go through any such process, meaning this will be clearly discriminating against Muslims identified as undocumented immigrants.
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- Also, the Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Bill does not explain the rationale behind differentiating between illegal migrants on the basis of the religion and hence they violate Article 14.
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- The ethnic Assamese nativist groups also advocating an even-handed approach in this issue.
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What should be done?

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- The politics ensuing over this issue has left the State polarised.
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- The issue has spilled over to civil society, with calls for a separate State and harassment of Bengali speakers in Lower Assam towns, including Guwahati.
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- While the ULFA (Independent) denies responsibility, investigations thus far suggest it was the group’s handiwork.
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- It had earlier claimed responsibility for a low-intensity bomb blast in Guwahati a month before, saying it was a warning to those who support the Citizenship Bill.
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- Hence the recent tragedy should serve as a grim warning to the powers that potentially darker times are ahead in the state if the surcharged rhetoric is left unchecked.
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- Meanwhile, the Supreme Court Bench that is monitoring the NRC exercise

signalled an accommodative stance by agreeing to allow the use of five more documents by those left out of the NRC final draft.
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- This spirit of accommodation by the judiciary, towards long-time residents, of whatever religion or ethnicity, needs to permeate the political leadership and civil society in Assam now.
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Source: The Hindu

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