Protest in Mizoram - Citizenship (Amendment) Bill and the Chakmas

What is the issue?

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- Among various Northeastern states protesting against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, Mizoram witnessed massive demonstrations. Click here to know more on the Bill.
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Why is the protest?

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- The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill amends the Citizenship Act, 1955.
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- It relaxes the citizenship eligibility rules for immigrants belonging to six minority (non-Muslim) religions from Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan.
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- Political parties and non-political groups in the Northeast (NE) have protested due to the potential impact on the region’s demography.
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- The Bill is also questioned for its constitutionality as it grants citizenship on the basis of religion.
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Why is Mizoram's case different in this regard?

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- For protesters in Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura, the concern is about Hindu immigrants from Bangladesh.
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- The Assam Accord lays down 1971 as the cutoff for acceptance as citizens.
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- The National Register of Citizens is being updated based on this cutoff, which does not differentiate on the basis of religion.
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- But in Mizoram, the concern is not about Hindu immigrants from Bangladesh but about Chakmas, a tribal and largely Buddhist group.
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- The Chakmas are present in parts of the Northeast, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh with which Mizoram shares an international border.
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- While Christians form 87% of Mizoram's 11 lakh population (2011), Chakmas number about 1 lakh.
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What is the concern with the Chakmas?

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- Chakmas are clearly identified as 'non-Mizo' by the Mizos, and there is no attempt at incorporating them as Mizo.
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- Notably, the Chakmas do not want to identify themselves as Mizo.
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- Certain sections in Mizoram blame Chakmas for illegal migration from Bangladesh, which the community denies.
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- Large-scale migrations are said to have taken place in 1964.
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- This was caused by inundation of their land due to the damming of the Karnaphuli river for a hydro-electric project in Bangladesh.
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- 1980-4 migrations were caused by insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts led by the Hills Peoples' Movement of Bangladesh.
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- In 1901, there were only 198 Chakmas in Mizoram and by 1991 it was over 80,000, as per census data.
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- The growth rate is far more than normally possible, proving that there has been influx from Bangladesh.
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- The state has seen ethnic violence, names of Chakmas being struck off

voters' lists, and denial of admission to Chakma students in college.
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- There are even calls to expel them from Mizoram.
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- Given these, if the Bill is passed, Chakmas who have illegally migrated from Bangladesh will become legal Indian citizens.
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- Also, in some time, possibly Mizos could become a minority in their own land.
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- The protests are serious because protesters, notably, displayed posters that proclaimed "Hello China, bye bye India".
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What is the Chakmas' stance?

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- The reliability of the Census figures between 1901 and 1941 cannot be ascertained as they are not available with the Census Directorate, Mizoram.
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- Chakma activists cite a 2015 report submitted by the government of Mizoram to the NHRC (National Human Rights Commission).
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- The report cites Census data that puts the Chakma population at around 15,000 in 1951 and 97,000 in 2011.
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- Reportedly, in the 1960s, Chakmas had migrated from the Chittagong Hill Tracts, but all of those people were settled in Arunachal Pradesh.
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- Chakmas deny any migrations into Mizoram citing the structural discrimination against them in Mizoram.
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Source: Indian Express

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