The Bane of Differentiated Passports

What is the issue?

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- The government recently announced the introduction of differentiated passports for persons requiring “Emigration Checks” and the rest.
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- While administrative convenience was said to have drove the move, many see it as an instance of institutionalising discrimination.
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What is the proposal about?

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- In what is a first of its kind in differentiation, new “Orange cover Passports” to citizens whose passports carry the “Emigration Check Required” stamp.
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- For the rest, it is proposed to retain the current dark blue passports.
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- ECR passport-holders are those who haven’t passed their matriculation examination and aren’t income tax assesses.
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- ECR stamping is done to enable better tracking in order to prevent the exploitation of such people, when they go to work abroad as labourers.
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- Notably, a majority in this category are likely to belong to a minority or marginalised communities.
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What are the problems involved?

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- The move stems from the belief that different jacketing colours would enable

easier recognition and improve airport efficiency.
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- This is but an admission to the failure to develop technology-based solutions to identify ECR passport-holders quickly.
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- Also, by issuing orange passports to the marginalised migrant workers, the administration would be highlighting its failure to educate people.
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- This will also create a citizenship document that will visibly identify some as members of economically and socially marginalised communities.
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What does history tell us?

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- The current move has a striking parallel with the South African “Domas Stamp”, that declared its emigrants eligible for specific jobs.
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- It proved to be stigmatising, serves as a reminder for our government to seriously reconsider this inherently bad move.
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- Notably, the “Bold J” that was stamped on passports held by German Jews in the 1940s, was also another instance where differentiation was used.
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Source: The Hindu

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