



Calming Arunachal

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The polity must foster a civic consciousness to allow equality of opportunity for all residents

- The Bharatiya Janata Party-led government in Itanagar has decided not to act on the recommendations of a Joint High Power Committee granting permanent resident certificates (PRCs) to non-Arunachal Pradesh Scheduled Tribes of Namsai and Changlang districts.
- This decision follows violence in Itanagar, which included arson attacks on the residence of the Deputy Chief Minister.
- The government took this step to de-escalate tensions despite the fact that both mainstream parties, the Congress and the BJP, were on the same page on the demand to grant the PRCs.
- The non-APSTs include the Deoris, Sonowal Kacharis, Morans, Mishings, Adivasis and ex-servicemen belonging to the Gorkha community.
- Successive governments and members of these communities have said PRCs are needed to avail of job and educational opportunities elsewhere in the country, and currently the 26 tribes and numerous sub-tribes who claim to be native to Arunachal Pradesh enjoy this privilege.
- Members of some of the non-APST communities have been long-time residents of the reconstituted State, and to term them as “outsiders” reflects a chauvinistic mindset that denies a just demand.
- The fact that the opposition to the demand took such a violent turn could be linked to a retaliation to attempts by the members of the non-APSTs to enforce an “economic blockade” of the State from the neighbouring parts of Assam last month.
- But these incidents suggest that barely any northeastern State is today free of the pattern of ethnic discord marked by some communities being branded “outsiders” and sought to be denied resident privileges.
- Arunachal Pradesh has otherwise remained a peaceful State, and it is incumbent on the government and the polity to foster a civic consciousness that allows equality of opportunity for all residents in the State.

- This is a difficult task as identity issues persist and fester when there is inadequate economic development – which is the real bane of the Northeast today.

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