Clause 6 of the Assam Accord

What is the issue?

- 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.
- 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.

What is Clause 6 of the Assam Accord?

- **Purpose** - Assam Accord came at the culmination of a movement against immigration from Bangladesh.
- For recognition as citizens, the Accord sets March 24, 1971 as the cutoff date.
- It was proposed that the immigrants up to the cutoff date would get all rights as Indian citizens.
- So, Clause 6 was inserted to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the "Assamese people".
- It seeks to offer constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards to the Assamese people.

- "**Assamese people**" - As agreed by most stakeholders, the NRC of 1951 was the basis for defining "Assamese people".
- The current NRC update is based on March 24, 1971, which defines citizenship.
- On the other hand, Clause 6 relates to "Assamese people".
- If 1951 is accepted as the cutoff, it would imply that those who migrated between 1951 and 1971 would be Indian citizens.
- However, they would not be eligible for safeguards meant for "Assamese people".

How has the implementation been?

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

What are the demands?

- Former CM Prafulla Mahanta was one of the signatories to the 1985 Accord as the then AASU President.
- Mahanta views "safeguards" as reservation of electoral seats, and land and political rights.
- There are also demands that it should include rights over natural resources and protection of culture of the indigenous people.
- 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.
- E.g. Arunachal Pradesh entrusts rights over natural resources on the basis of ethnic community
- Likewise, Manipur passed a Bill, last year, to define "Manipuri people" with 1951 as cutoff.

What will the proposed committee do?

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

What are the challenges?

- The AASU has described it as an effort to mislead people before pushing the

Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016.

- The Bill proposes to grant citizenship to non-Muslim immigrants from 3 countries including Bangladesh.

- This has divided residents of Brahmaputra Valley (mostly anti-Bill) and Barak Valley (pro-Bill).

- The government and the committee should thus take into account these concerns too while deciding on the safeguards.

Source: The Indian Express