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Centre Constitutes High-Level Committee on Demographic Changes (HLCDC) Under Justice Naolekar

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Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

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Centre Constitutes High-Level Committee on Demographic Changes (HLCDC) Under Justice Naolekar

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WHY IN NEWS:

The **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** notified the formation of the **High-Level Committee on Demographic Changes (HLCDC)** via resolution dated **May 26, 2026** (published this week). The committee is **chaired by Justice (Retd.) Prakash Prabhakar Naolekar**, former Supreme Court judge and former Chief Justice of the Gauhati High Court. It will assess **demographic shifts driven by illegal immigration and other “unnatural causes”** in **border areas, urban centres, industrial corridors and tribal belts**, and recommend a **time-bound action plan**. The committee operationalises **PM’s Independence Day announcement (August 15, 2025)** of a **“High-Powered Demography Mission”**.

COMPOSITION

ROLE	MEMBER
Chair	Justice (Retd.) Prakash Prabhakar Naolekar — Ex-SC judge; ex-CJ Gauhati HC
Member	M.K. Narayan — Census Commissioner
Member	Durga Shankar Mishra — Retd. IAS
Member	Balaji Srivastava — Retd. IPS
Member	Dr Shamika Ravi — Economist (Member, Economic Advisory Council to the PM, EAC-PM)
Member-Secretary	Joint Secretary (Foreigners-I), MHA

TERMS OF REFERENCE (INDICATIVE)

TOR	DETAIL
1	Map demographic changes in border areas (West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, UP, Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat, NE states)
2	Assess demographic shifts in urban centres, industrial corridors, mining belts
3	Examine impact on tribal belts (esp. NE, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh)
4	Identify causes – illegal immigration, internal migration, fertility differentials, religious conversions
5	Recommend a time-bound action plan covering legal, administrative, electoral and welfare measures

THE CONSTITUTIONAL / STATUTORY BACKDROP

LAW / PROVISION	ROLE
Citizenship Act, 1955	Defines citizenship by birth, descent, registration, naturalisation; basis for any citizenship determination
Foreigners Act, 1946	Authorises Centre to regulate entry, stay and departure of foreigners
Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920	Mandates valid travel documents for entry
Article 11	Empowers Parliament to make laws on citizenship
Article 14	Equality before law – any policy must satisfy this test
Article 21	Right to life and personal liberty – applies to citizens AND foreigners on Indian soil (per Maneka Gandhi)
Schedule VI	Tribal autonomous areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram

WHY NOW — THE POLITICAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC BACKDROP

1. PM's Independence Day 2025 Speech

PM Modi, on **August 15, 2025**, announced the formation of a **High-Powered Demography Mission**. The HLCDC operationalises that vision.

2. Demographic Sensitivities

- **NE border states** — Assam (NRC 2019), Tripura, Mizoram — historically affected by cross-border movement.
- **Communal demography** — fertility differential between religious communities flagged by **Justice Rajinder Sachar Committee (2006)** and **Total Fertility Rate (TFR) data**.
- **Bengal border** — concerns of demographic alteration in border districts.
- **Tribal belts** — Jharkhand and Northeast face concerns about land alienation.

3. NRC Architecture

- **Assam NRC (2019)** — the only operational state NRC; ~19 lakh excluded.
- **Centre’s position** — National-level NRC is a stated long-term goal under **Citizenship Act Section 14A**.
- **CAA + NRC linkage** — politically and legally distinct, often conflated.

THE CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT ACT (CAA), 2019 — ADJACENT CONTEXT

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Enacted	December 2019
Notified Rules	March 11, 2024
Beneficiaries	Religious minorities (Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, Christians) from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, who arrived in India on/before December 31, 2014
Excluded	Muslims; areas under Schedule VI; Inner Line Permit (ILP) areas
Constitutional challenge	Pending in Supreme Court

The HLCDC’s work will inevitably intersect with CAA + NRC debates — but is formally a **fact-finding and recommendation exercise**, not a citizenship-determination process.

INDIA'S DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT — WHY THIS IS RELEVANT NOW

INDICATOR	VALUE	SOURCE
Population (UN estimate, 2024)	~ 145 crore — world's largest	UN Population Division
Total Fertility Rate (TFR)	2.0 (just below replacement level of 2.1)	NFHS-5 (2019–21)
Working-age population (15–64)	~ 67% — peak of demographic dividend	UN/NSO
Sex ratio at birth	929 girls per 1,000 boys (NFHS-5) — improving but skewed	
Last Census	2011 — next conduct delayed; now scheduled 2026–27	
Ageing trajectory	India's 60+ share to rise from 10% (2021) to 21% (2050)	UNFPA 2023

The HLCDC will work without **fresh Census data** — a structural constraint.

COMPARATIVE REFERENCE — PAST DEMOGRAPHY COMMISSIONS

BODY	YEAR	OUTPUT/FOCUS
National Population Commission	2000	National Population Policy 2000
National Commission on Population (NCP)	2000 → revamped 2014	Demographic monitoring
Justice Sachar Committee	2005 (report 2006)	Socio-economic and educational condition of Muslims
Madhav Gadgil's Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel	2010	Different domain — but template for HLCDC-style work

WHAT HLCDC WILL LIKELY RECOMMEND

Based on past similar exercises and government signalling:

- **Strengthening border management** — Border Security Force (BSF), Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) infrastructure.

- **Document-based welfare gating** — Aadhaar + PAN + voter ID triangulation for scheme eligibility.
- **State-level Foreigner Tribunal capacity** — currently concentrated in Assam.
- **Electoral roll integration** — synchronised with the recent **SC SIR judgment (May 27, 2026)**.
- **Tribal land protection** — strengthening PESA, Forest Rights Act compliance.
- **Population stabilisation in high-TFR districts** — target-based.

CRITIQUE AND WATCHPOINTS

CONCERN	SUBSTANCE
Communal framing risk	Demographic-change discourse can drift toward majoritarian alarm; the committee must be evidence-led
Constitutional limits	Article 14, 15 (non-discrimination), Article 25–28 (religious freedom) must be respected
Data deficit	No Census 2021 data; reliance on NFHS/SRS/Voter rolls is partial
NE sensitivities	Schedule VI + Inner Line Permit + Bodoland Accord (2020) + Karbi Anglong Accord (2021) need careful navigation
Federalism	States have constitutional space (Concurrent List); committee must respect federal architecture

WIDER SIGNIFICANCE

- **Policy-research gap-filling** — first national-level structured look at demographic shifts since the Sachar Committee.
- **Linkage with electoral reform** — works alongside the ECI's SIR exercise.
- **Data-driven federalism** — the committee will need state cooperation for granular data.
- **Strategic angle** — demographic shifts in border districts have security implications (Northeast, Bengal, Rajasthan border).

WAY FORWARD

- **Public consultation** — committee should hold state-level hearings before finalising recommendations.
- **Constitutional safeguards** — explicit commitment to Articles 14, 15, 21, 25 in the final report.

- **Census 2026–27** integration — committee’s interim recommendations to be revisited with fresh data.
- **Federal cooperation** — buy-in from non-NDA states essential for credibility.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 1 — Indian Society:

- Population and associated issues.
- Effects of globalisation on Indian society.
- Communalism, regionalism & secularism.

GS Paper 2 — Polity & Governance:

- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors.
- Citizenship and related Acts.
- Centre-State relations.

Analytical hooks for Mains:

- Demographic change as a national-security issue.
- Balancing demographic concerns with constitutional secularism and non-discrimination.
- Federal architecture of citizenship and migration policy.

FACTS CORNER

HLCDC notified: May 26, 2026 (MHA resolution).

Chair: Justice (Retd.) Prakash Prabhakar Naolekar — Ex-SC judge; ex-CJ, Gauhati HC.

Member-Secretary: Joint Secretary (Foreigners-I), MHA.

Other members: M.K. Narayan (Census Commissioner), Durga Shankar Mishra (Retd. IAS), Balaji Srivastava (Retd. IPS), Dr Shamika Ravi (Economist).

Mandate origin: PM's Independence Day, August 15, 2025 announcement of a "High-Powered Demography Mission".

Relevant laws: Citizenship Act, 1955; Foreigners Act, 1946; Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920; Article 11, Schedule VI.

Assam NRC: Final list published August 31, 2019 — ~19 lakh excluded.

CAA, 2019: Rules notified March 11, 2024.

India population (UN 2024): ~145 crore — world's largest.

India TFR (NFHS-5): 2.0 (below replacement of 2.1).

India's working-age share: ~67% (peak demographic dividend).

Next Census: Scheduled conduct 2026–27 (results 2027–28).

Sources: MHA, The Statesman, Indian Express

Source: Centre Constitutes High-Level Committee on Demographic Changes (HLCDC) Under Justice Naolekar
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