**National Press Release**

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**Swarna Bharat Party rejects the anti-Muslim Citizenship Bill 2016 which also regularises illegal economic migrants**

Mr Pankaj Das, Swarna Bharat Party’s State Coordinator for Assam, issued a statement today rejecting the BJP government’s Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016 which seeks to make illegal migrants from Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian religions eligible for Indian citizenship after six years of residence.

SBP considers that the motivation regarding the Bill is best resolved by India ratifying the UNHCR Refugee Convention. India is one of the only democracies in the world not to have signed the Convention. This has led to inconsistent approaches in dealing with refugees and economic migrants. The Refugee Convention provides clear guidance on all refugees, including repatriating them voluntarily to home countries once conditions for such repatriation become feasible.

The major problem that SBP has with the Citizenship Bill is its blatantly unconstitutional nature. Our Constitution does not permit the government to discriminate against anyone on grounds of religion. India was led by Mahatma Gandhi who fought to make India a secular republic. India rejects the ideology of religious basis for nations. This Bill makes Muslims feel that they are not welcome in India even as refugees. India is not an anti-Muslim republic. We reject the Bill.

Mr Das mentioned a further problem with this Bill which regularises illegal economic migrants without having conducted due diligence for each case. SBP believes that India needs a points-based system for economic migrants who must only be allowed to enter India on merit.

This idea underpins the Assam Accord of 1985 which aimed to deport all illegal economic immigrants – irrespective of their religion – who entered Assam after 25th March, 1971. East Pakistan refugees from the wars of 1965 and 1971 were given Indian citizenship but all those who entered Assam illegally on economic grounds after that date were required to be deported. India needs a clear distinction between refugees and economic migrants.

Mr Das said that the government should publish a White Paper on citizenship and refugees. The Government needs a strong refugee management policy by which the Indian government disperses refugees across all parts of India to avoid any particular state from being overwhelmed. In doing so, there should be due regard to cultural aspects so that unnecessary disruption is avoided to the social fabric of any State. It should also be mandatory for all refugees to adopt the secular principles enshrined in India’s Constitution.

Mr Das said that the Joint Parliamentary Committee should visit all parts of the country since very significant constitutional issues are involved. It is necessary for the entire country to reiterate to the BJP government that India is a secular nation and abides by the international law for refugees.

**Notes for Editors**

SBP is India’s only liberal party, committed to defending liberty and promoting prosperity.

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