

DEMOGRAPHIC INFLUX AND SECURITY CHALLENGES IN INDIA'S NORTHEAST

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ABSTRACT

The Northeast has long grappled with the persistent challenge of large-scale illegal immigration from neighbouring countries. Driven by vote bank politics, inadequate regulatory mechanisms, and population pressure in Bangladesh, this influx has produced serious demographic imbalances and socio-economic strain on indigenous communities. The resulting tensions between locals and immigrants have frequently escalated into violent clashes, posing a recurring law and order problem for state governments. The marginalization of indigenous peoples has, in turn, fuelled protest movements and insurgencies in states like Assam and Tripura, thereby deepening internal security challenges. At the same time, the infiltration of extremist networks through these migration routes has posed grave external security concerns, with cross-border linkages amplifying the risks for India. India's foreign policy missteps in Tibet and East Pakistan further shaped the demographic and political trajectory of the region. While Tibetan refugees have remained largely non-disruptive, the continuous influx from Bangladesh constitutes a major security challenge. Illegal immigration, therefore, must be understood not only as a regional issue but as a national concern that threatens both the internal stability and external security of India.

Keywords: Illegal Immigration, Demographic Influx, Indigenous Communities, Internal Security, External Security and Insurgency



1. INTRODUCTION

India's Northeast region occupies a highly strategic position in the Indian sub-continent by virtue of its geo-political location. With the onset of globalization, the shifting focus of global politics towards the Asia-Pacific region has significantly enhanced the importance of the Northeast as a gateway to the East. The Northeast has also acquired new significance in the wake of India's much-hyped Look East Policy, now the Act East Policy, which was initiated around 1991. The evolving security situation also serves as a determining factor, making the Northeast of India a region that New Delhi cannot afford to overlook. Apart from this, the high voltage ethnic explosion in the Northeast and a horde of other problems culminating in the proliferation of various insurgent groups demanding independence from India have made the region a highly sensitive zone affecting the nerves of the Indian body politic. The unchecked and unregulated influx of immigrants into the region has long been a matter of concern, significantly complicating the country's security landscape. Given the emerging realities, it becomes essential to examine the security implications of this migration. This essay examines the security implications of illegal immigration in the Northeast.

1.1. A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF IMMIGRATION

A significant and often underestimated threat to the security of the Northeast stems from the large influx of outsiders, particularly immigrants from neighbouring Bangladesh and Nepal. This silent invasion, unlike open military aggression, poses an even greater challenge to India's sovereignty, regardless of whether New Delhi chooses to

acknowledge it or not. It is a serious problem with an international dimension that necessitates multilateral engagement to resolve. The real tragedy, however, is the Indian State's failure to acknowledge this as a national issue, even as it spares no effort in addressing cross-border infiltration in Kashmir. Scarcely any effort is spared to check the violation of the international boundary in the Northeast, thereby leaving the people to defend themselves against the onslaught of state-sponsored demographic invasion from across the border.

Sparsely populated, the Northeast became the most favourable destination in South Asia for the land-hungry refugees coming mainly from erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. Although all the states in the Northeast had experienced the brunt of illegal immigration, Assam and Tripura encountered the worst of their kind, with the indigenous population almost becoming minorities in their own homelands.

According to Atul Goswami and Jayanta Gogoi, there were four large-scale streams of migration (Abbi, 1984, pp. 60-80). The first stream of migration, which occurred in conjunction with the development of the plantation industry by British capitalists, consisted of tea garden labourers from Bihar, Chota Nagpur Central Province (present Madhya Pradesh) and Orissa. The migration of tea garden labourers began as early as 1853, although a large-scale exodus took place from the 1870s onward. The second stream consisted of Muslim peasants from the then East Bengal districts of Mymensingh, Pabna, Bogra, and Rangpur. This migration occurred roughly between 1901 and 1941, during which the Saadulla Ministry, under the guise of increasing agricultural production, facilitated the systematic settlement of Bengalis in Assam. The third stream involved a large-scale movement of people from Bengal to Assam following the Bengal Famine of 1943. Besides, there was a heavy influx of Bengali Hindu refugees from Sylhet District to Assam following the partition of India in 1947. Even after independence, the movement of population from across the international border did not stop. During this time, the region experienced a significant influx of migrants from other parts of India in search of economic opportunities. The fourth stream of migrants, largely overlooked, comprised Nepali pastoralists who moved with their cattle in a nomadic manner. They have been settling in the uncultivated and uninhabited hill slopes since the beginning of the twentieth century.

The influx of foreigners to the Northeast can be attributed to various factors, including a deep-rooted political conspiracy hatched across the border, and is simultaneously reinforced by domestic political compulsions. While it remains true that demographic shifts with large-scale immigration had already begun as early as the second half of the 19th century, a more systematic and planned immigration was initiated only with the dawn of the 20th century. The expansion of British administration, the development of means of communication and transportation and the establishment of plantations opened the Northeast to hordes of silent invaders from the then East Bengal. Driven by the pressure on land at home and attracted by the cheap and abundant availability of virgin land in Assam, the land-hungry peasants from East Bengal began to pour into Assam from the early part of the 20th century. Such an exodus was also exacerbated by the acute economic crisis in East Bengal, where an oppressive Zamindari system prevailed.

The partition of India also compelled a large number of Hindu Bengalis to migrate to West Bengal, Tripura, Assam and various parts of the neighbouring lands. Taking advantage of the presence of their own relatives or acquaintances in Assam, a great number of Hindu families, including Muslim farm-labourers, came to Assam illegally after partition. In fact, Hindu refugees arrived on the Indian side as a result of religious persecution and communal riots in East Bengal. Besides, Muslim farm labourers in East Pakistan were encouraged by the village landlord of Muslims "Muttabbar", residing in India, to engage them as cheap agricultural labourers in their farms. The warm reception they received from co-religious communities in the neighbouring districts of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Cachar, and Nowgong further encouraged their settlement in these areas. A striking reality is the Indian state's failure to acknowledge this large-scale influx.

A deeper introspection of demographic influx reveals a more sinister conspiracy behind the scenes. It is pertinent to recall that in 1906, when the Muslim League was about to be formed, Nawab Salim Ullah Khan of Dacca directed the Muslims of East Bengal to migrate to Assam (Shukla, 1980, p. 14). Following this, heavy immigration of Muslims from East Bengal to Assam and other parts of the Northeast took place. Any proposal to curb such illegal infiltration was opposed by M.A. Jinnah, who sought to include Assam in his envisioned scheme of Pakistan. Mention may be made about the remark of M.A. Jinnah to his private secretary on the eve of the Partition, wherein he stated that he would present Assam to him in ten years (Shukla, 1980, p. 18). In this context, it is worth noting that Sylhet had already been lost during partition because of large-scale Muslim infiltration through the referendum. The next target for the Pakistani intruders was naturally Cachar.

Meanwhile, there were claims of religious overtones in the migration moves (Shukla, 1980, p. 22). It was obvious to seek territorial expansion of East Pakistan to render it economically stronger, given the abundant forest and mineral resources, like coal and petroleum, endowed in the neighbouring Northeast India, while simultaneously reducing demographic pressure at home. As such, the rulers in Pakistan encouraged Muslim immigration from East Bengal to Assam with an ulterior motive of establishing pockets of influence in Assam. At this juncture, it will be relevant to recall the statement made by Z.A. Bhutto in his book *The Myth of Independence* (1969) wherein he ruled out Kashmir as the only dispute between India and Pakistan and asserted that Pakistan also had good claims over Assam and some districts of India adjacent to East Pakistan (Shukla, 1980, p. 22). The 1941 census report mentioned that the policy of colonisation of Assam by Muslims of Bengal had continued under the joint auspices of Sir Saadulla in Assam and Nazirmuddin in Bengal. Sir Saadulla, to serve his vested interests, had planned to settle more immigrant Muslims in Upper Assam under the pretext of the "Grow More Food" campaign. Lord Wavell, who remarked that the real objective of such a move was to "Grow More Muslims", turned down the plan (Kodanda, 2000).

Tripura is another state in the Northeast, which has experienced the onslaught of demographic invasion in the most horrible manner. The wave of immigration started rolling into Tripura in the 1950s and continued unabated. Persecution of Hindus in East Pakistan in the 1960s compelled many refugees to settle in Tripura. Certain sources recorded that about 600 persons fled to Tripura each day following the assaults. As India deliberately turned a blind eye to this massive exodus of Hindu immigrants, the stage was set for a literal population plantation in Tripura, where the Bengali immigrants soon outnumbered and overran the indigenous populace. The liberation war in erstwhile East Pakistan in 1971 also led a large number of Bangladeshis to move into Tripura, as a consequence of which the population of Tripura had doubled. After the liberation of Bangladesh, some of the refugees returned to their country, while a substantial number remained in Tripura. It may be noted that the indigenous population in 1947 accounted for 93% of Tripura's population of 6, 00,000. By 1981, the indigenous Tripuris had been reduced to a minority of 28.5% of a population of 2.06 million (Hazarika, 1994, pp. 123-124). Being unable to check the massive influx, the indigenous people of Tripura have already become a minority in their own homeland. And worse still, they had been forced to retreat to the remote interiors due to demographic pressure caused by urban settlement. The political power of the state has also today slipped into the hands of the immigrant Bengalis.

Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh, too, had experienced the brunt of large-scale immigration in the form of Chakma and Hajong refugees from Bangladesh. Originally settled in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of the erstwhile East Pakistan, they were forced to leave their ancestral land after being displaced by the Kaptai Hydel Project in the 1960s. Later in the 1970s, following the birth of Bangladesh, the Chakmas formed the Parbattya Chattogram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) to pursue autonomy for the CHT. The military Government of Bangladesh responded with a brutal military crackdown and simultaneously adopted the policy of settling Bengali Muslims in the CHT. Intense repressive measures, along with forcible state-sponsored eviction perpetrated by the Bengali Muslims, compelled the Chakmas and Hajongs to flee to Mizoram, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh.

The Chakma Buddhists population in the Lushai Hills, which was 10 in 1941 rose to 15937 in 1957 in the aftermath of these large-scale immigrations. After the 1971 war, the figure increased to 22393. The 1991 census recorded the Chakmas population to be 50,000. However, the Chakmas claimed that their actual population was 80,000 (Sibopada De, 2005, pp. 154-155). They began to demand a Union Territory in their quest for more autonomy. It eventually stirred the Mizo mind against the refugees. The Mizos harboured an apprehension that the Chakmas might raise the demand for an autonomous state within Mizoram. The fear is not unfounded, especially in view of the paternalistic attitude of the Central Government towards the Chakma Buddhists.

As far as the settlement of Chakma and Hajong refugees in the erstwhile NEFA goes, the Central Government played a significant role by launching 'Operation Karuna' (mercy) under which officers of the State Department, the Assam Rifles and the Border Security Forces guided and escorted the refugees to Aizawl and later rehabilitated them in the Lohit, Pabum Pare and Changlang areas of NEFA (De, 2005, pp. 156-157). They were made to settle in the NEFA for strategic and cultural reasons following the Chinese aggression of 1962. The presence of Buddhist population in the sparsely populated tracts of NEFA might have been considered a preventive measure against any Chinese incursion into the Indian Territory.

Meghalaya also did not escape the onslaught of foreign immigration, primarily due to its porous border with Bangladesh. Ever since the partition, East Pakistani nationals have made occasional infiltration into Meghalaya. The settlement of outsiders in Meghalaya could be traced to the colonial period, when Shillong was declared the provincial

capital. Several government employees, mainly Bengalis, Nepalis, and Marwari businessmen, gradually concentrated in the town. These outsiders did not confine themselves to the municipality areas but slowly spread their presence in the hills as well.

In the wake of military atrocities let loose by the Pakistani Army during the 1971 crisis, many Bengalis were compelled to take shelter in Meghalaya. After the war, Bengali refugees were repatriated, while some remained, integrating with the local Bengali community. In addition to Bengalis, Nepali immigrants formed a significant portion of the migrant population. Nepali migration to the Northeast increased markedly following the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950 and two similar agreements in 1951 and 1956, which granted them Indian citizenship (Das, 2002, p. 81). Today, Nepalese make up about 3% of Meghalaya's total population. According to the 1991 Census, the Nepali-speaking population in the Northeast was approximately 650,000. Many migrated during the 1980s and 1990s, primarily due to forced expulsion from Bhutan.

1.2. SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION

Apart from disturbing the delicate demographic balance existing in the region, the influx of foreigners and outsiders into the Northeast has created serious socio-economic and security problems. Conspicuous lack of political will, reinforced by opportunism, led to the unhindered flow of illegal immigrants in various parts of the region. Repeated calls for the detection and deletion of illegal immigrants from the electoral lists and the deportation of foreigners went unheeded despite a series of movements and agitations. The electoral politics in which the immigrants constitute a significant vote bank continues to pose a major obstacle in any effort to address the issue of influx, even as the Indian Government maintained a stoic silence in the face of a silent demographic invasion. Such an intransigent attitude of the Central and the State Governments is solely responsible for the prevailing state of affairs.

The heavy influx of foreign nationals and outsiders has exacerbated various socio-economic contradictions. The existence of the distinct cultural and ethnic identity of the indigenous people has been alarmingly threatened. Reluctance on the part of the immigrants to absorb themselves into the prevailing social system engenders serious cultural conflicts, giving rise to xenophobia. In the absence of a proper assimilation policy along with the cultural and racial difference, it has become increasingly difficult for the immigrants to be assimilated with the indigenous population, resulting in the emergence of various 'cultural colonies' that further attract new waves of immigration (Bhattacharya, 1984, p. 269). Experience in Assam and Tripura indicates that the immigrants not only ignored the language and culture of the local people but also made attempts to impose their own culture on the latter. The presence of foreigners has not only ignited the flames of communal conflict but also posed a great threat to the cultural identity of the indigenous peoples. Today, Bengali has become the dominant language in Assam and Tripura, prompting the local population to launch language movements. Informed sources reveal that the immigrant settlers have arranged schooling of their children in their own language, which hampers the process of integration. In the long run, it raises problems concerning the state language, the medium of higher education and other cultural issues.

The presence of foreign nationals in the Northeast, mainly in Assam, had encouraged incidents of crime and inter-group conflicts. The aggressive immigrants have created disturbance in the erstwhile peaceful countryside. It has been recorded that arson, theft and loss of lives and properties occurred only in areas where the immigrants constituted more than 70% of the population. An informed study reveals that major crimes, including thefts, murder and arson in the region are committed mostly by immigrants (Goswami, 1984, p. 40).

Economically more conscious and professionally more skilled, the migrant population gradually became dominant in the struggle for scarce resources in this underdeveloped region. Experts in the field have noted that immigrant settlers controlled a significant portion of trade and commerce, amassing considerable wealth (Saikia, 1984, p. 92). Consequently, the local population is forced to compete with these outsiders for the limited employment opportunities available. Manual labourers from outside have already captured the limited labour market of the Northeast, even as they constitute the bulk of the tea garden labourers. Given the scarcity of resources in the Northeast, the massive influx of immigrants from neighbouring countries and other parts of India poses a serious threat to the region.

The most alarming problem posed by immigrants is the problem of land alienation among the original inhabitants. In Assam and Tripura, the local people were pushed out of the heart of urban centres to the outskirts. A most common phenomenon in the region is the exclusive control of the urban trade centres and markets by outsiders. In the current scenario, the immigrants own most of the estates in these states. By the mid-1930s, most of the wastelands had been

occupied by the immigrants. However, after 1935, the new settlers started to occupy forestland and attempted to dispossess the original inhabitants through forceful occupation, purchase, or mortgage. With more economic power, the outsiders find it convenient to pursue an aggressive policy of settlement.

In Tripura, the indigenous population was forced to retreat to the interior of the forests. In Assam as well, districts such as Cachar and Lakhimpur had come to be dominated by Bengali settlers. The presence of illegal foreigners is not only a threat to the indigenous population of the Northeast but also a security risk for the country as a whole. Immigration on a large scale has created an environment conducive to the emergence of communal and linguistic problems. The threat became more visible during war, when the state came under imminent danger of external aggression. The issue of foreign influx, especially from Bangladesh and other countries, cannot be ignored under the prevailing fragile demographic context of the region.

2. INTERNAL SECURITY CONCERNS

Communal conflict, social tension and armed insurrections are inextricably related to the issue of migrant influx. It also poses a challenge to the existence of the indigenous people of the Northeast. Communal riots and the consequent law and order problems have become quite common following clashes between the immigrants and the local population. Anti-foreigner movements demanding the deportation of illegal immigrants often created internal disturbances. As years went by, immigrants not only began to resist any move to drive them out but also tried to assert their position as their numerical strength assumed significant electoral weight.

A heavy influx of Bengalis had created the Assamese-Bengali conflict in the early post-independence period when Bengal demanded the Goalpara district of Assam. In 1960, when the Assamese Language Bill was introduced, the Bengalis fiercely opposed it. Thereafter, many riots broke out between the Bengalis and the Assamese. On July 2, 1960, several Bengalis stopped a train at Mariani and assaulted many Assamese students, in which one was killed. They also entered a Cinema Hall on July 25, 1960 and compelled the manager to stop the screening of the Assamese film 'Puberun'. In 1962, the 0.9 million Hindu Bengalis' objection to the language bill resulted in widespread riots. The Bengalis demanded that Bengali, along with Assamese, should be made the official language of Assam or retain English. In this regard, it will be sarcastic to note that Pakistani flags were seen flying in Bengali-Muslim strongholds in Assam at the time of the Chinese invasion in 1962 (Das, 1982, p. 57).

In the Seventies and Eighties, violence broke out at various places in Assam. Mention may be made of the disturbance that broke out in Naharkatia when a shopkeeper murdered an Assamese school student. Many Assamese in Doom Dooma and Lumding had to flee, fearing reprisal by non-Assamese. Communal riots broke out in North Kamrup area of Lower Assam, where a mass orgy of violence, looting and arson followed after some students visiting the place for fundraising were assaulted. The Duliajan incident of January 18, 1980, claimed a heavy toll of life, which was why many described the police action as a second Jalianwala Bagh Massacre. Many villages were burnt, while many were rendered homeless in their own land. Attacks and counter-attacks continued for a long time.

From 1979 to 1985, the entire Assam remained embroiled in a state of anarchy, insecurity, and alienation, with President's Rule being imposed in Assam. The powerful All Assam Students' Union (AASU) under the leadership of Prafullo Kumar Mahanta spearheaded the anti-foreigners' movement demanding detection, deletion and deportation of illegal immigrants. On the other hand, the All Assam Minority Students' Union (AAMSU) organized a series of counter-rallies, wherein lakhs of foreigners participated. The Assam Movement came to an end only with the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985 between the AASU and the Union Government. Seen as a crucial turning point, radical elements within the anti-immigrant lobby formed the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) at Ranghar in Sibsagar district in 1979 (Gopalakrishnan, 1995, p. 165). The ULFA aims at the liberation of Assam through a sustained armed struggle. In this regard, it can be observed that the emergence of ULFA in Assam was an offshoot of the anti-foreigners' movement.

The exploitation of Tripuri tribes by the Bengalis led to the formation of Tripura Rajya Mukti Parishad in April 1948. It organized successful demonstrations on Independence Day, demanding the end of the Dewani rule and the formation of a popular government. The police firing in October 1948 compelled the Mukti Parishad to go underground. The tribals identified the Dewani administration with alien rule and felt that Congress was planning to hand Tripura over to Bengalis after assuming power. It was a spontaneous revolt of the peasants against oppressive moneylenders and Zamindars.

The increasing influx of Bengalis into Tripura had already caused social friction in the 1950s. The Swasti Samity, formed in the mid-1950s in North Tripura, consisting mainly of the Nath community from East Pakistan, began to forcibly

occupy a vast tract of land under the active patronage of the state government. Gradually, the land passed into the hands of the immigrants. The Tripuri tribes, despite their resistance against eviction from their homeland, were virtually marginalized. They had already been reduced to a minority status even in their own state. Tribal uprisings and peasants' movements against Bengali domination often met with violent and brutal repression. About 800 to 900 people reportedly died during the communist inspired disturbances in the early 1950s.

In November 1967, Tripura Tribal Sengrak Union, an armed outfit, surfaced through a leaflet directing the non-tribals to leave Tripura by November 25, 1967, without fail. It spread panic among the Bengalis throughout Tripura and gave the security forces many sleepless nights. This was in response to the exploitative nature of the local Bengali Zamindars, who terrorized the tribals with the help of the police.

The Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti (TUJS) was formed in May 1967 by the tribal youths of Tripura as a response to Bengali domination and exploitation. It drafted an 11-Point Charter, which inter alia included the demand for the introduction of the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution, adoption of Kokborok as the medium of instruction and restoration of illegally occupied lands from 1960 onwards. It strongly demanded an Inner Line Permit and immediate steps to check the influx of foreigners. The TUJS began to send batches of volunteers to East Pakistan clandestinely for training in weapons handling. Radical elements within the TUJS formed the Tripura National Volunteers (TNV) under Bijoykumar Hrangkhwal. The TNV resorted to a guerrilla campaign against the security forces as well as the Bengalis. On June 6, 1980, several tribals were massacred. As a response, many Bengalis faced a similar fate the next day. Tripura was burning with scores of incidents of attacks and counter-attacks. In fact, the tribals lost heavily in the riots as the Bengali-dominated administration provided tacit support to the Bengalis. The TNV carried on with its armed struggle till the signing of an Accord with the Central Government in 1988. Thus, Bengali immigration is the root cause of tribal insurgency in Tripura that has seriously undermined internal security.

The confrontation between tribals and Bengalis in Meghalaya is not a phenomenon of recent origin. The history of their interaction has been one of tension and conflict. The introduction of the Language Bill and the emergence of APHLC (All Party Hill Leaders' Conference) with a demand for a hill state led to the intensification of conflict between the tribal and non-tribal population, comprising mainly of migrants from Bangladesh. However, it was only in 1979 that the conflict took a violent form when a riot broke out on the alleged defiling of an idol of the Hindu goddess Kali. The trouble began on 22nd October in the aftermath of the Puja celebration and lingered for about two months. About 23 human lives were lost and 147 persons sustained injuries, while many were rendered homeless (Sarin, 1980, p. 74).

Since the late 1980s, Meghalaya has experienced a series of communal conflicts between the host communities and the Nepali migrants (Das, 2002, p. 82). The drive against Nepalese did not distinguish between the Indian Nepalis or Nepalis from Nepal. The anti-Nepali Riot of 1987 occurred following an agitation launched by the Khasi Students' Union (KSU) demanding the extension of the Inner Line Regulation to Meghalaya and reservation of all 60 Assembly seats for tribal people against the existing 55 seats. The agitation of 1987 against illegal immigrants witnessed a spate of arson, looting and communal riots. Another spate of violence took place between August 1992 and October 1992. The 1992 disturbances saw the massacre of 30 people belonging to both communities, while 148 persons were injured. Properties worth lakhs of rupees were damaged in the communal frenzy. The impact of the conflict was evident in the growing distance between the two communities. Even now, demands for Inner Line Permit and job reservations for tribals are being registered by the Khasi Students Union, thereby creating unrest in the hill state of Meghalaya.

The emergence of collusive networks of smugglers, organised criminal gangs and religious extremist groups operating in the Northeast has greatly accentuated the problems of illegal immigration (Lakshman et.al, 2003). Former Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, during a Conference of Chief Secretaries and Director Generals of Police in Delhi on January 7, 2003, had observed that Bangladeshis staying illegally in India posed a serious threat to the country's internal security. Similarly, K.P.S. Gill had also emphasised the "Demographic Bomb" exploding in Bangladesh as a more dangerous threat than terrorism. Apart from the problems of drug smuggling, human trafficking, gun running, etc., generally associated with cross-border immigration, another security concern is the infiltration of foreign intelligence agencies along with the hordes of immigrants that later engaged in espionage and other clandestine operations.

Highly placed sources in the security establishment in India have long maintained that ISI's basic objective in Bangladesh is the strategic encirclement of India (Lakshman et. al., 2003). Such an observation assumes critical proportion mainly in view of the refrain that there is an ISI blueprint to form an Islamic State in the Northeast. To this end, various Muslim organisations such as the madrasas and mosques are aiding the cause of ISI in carrying out its diabolical plan. Increasing mobilisation of Islamist groups in Bangladesh and especially among the Muslim immigrants

in bordering states created an opportunity for the ISI to foment subversion in the Northeastern region of India. Continued immigration from Bangladesh into the Northeast through the porous border to destabilise India constitutes one of the objectives of ISI to abet and facilitate immigration.

The post 9/11 global dynamics indicate a shifting security scenario with Bangladesh emerging as a new theatre of terrorist activities (Lakshman et. al. 2003). The Harkat-ul-Jehadi-e-Islam (HuJI-BD), which was created with direct help from Osama Bin Laden in 1992, has links with Pakistan-based terrorist groups such as Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT).

In this context, it is pertinent to recall that during the reign of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia had maintained close relations with Pakistan (Lakshman et. al., 2003). Their intelligence and military networks also shared co-operation on matters concerning operations undertaken against India. It is also worthwhile to note that the BNP Government had 17 elected members of the militant and pro-Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami and therefore, was soft towards the radical jihadi groups and their supporters.

Unfolding events have proved that there existed close collaboration between Pakistan and Bangladesh to create trouble in the strife-torn Northeastern region of India. Analysts have felt that Pakistan, at one point in time, had slowed down pushing terrorists into Jammu and Kashmir and instead turned its attention towards Northeast India through Bangladesh, which has turned into a hub for terrorist organisations. Assam alone is reported to have over 14 terrorist groups operating under an Islamist banner, and intelligence documents revealed the role of ISI in funding and arming these groups. This fact was already asserted by the former Chief Minister of Assam, Prafullo Kumar Mahanta, way back in 2000, in his report to the Assam Legislative Assembly. He further pointed out that ISI was actually involved in fomenting violence and terrorism in Assam by encouraging religious fundamentalism and Islamic Jihadism. In September 1999, Chief Minister of Tripura, Manik Sarkar, also claimed that the ISI had prepared a blueprint to form a Muslim state in India's Northeast.

Official sources reveal that the increasing trend of Islamist militancy in Assam owed its genesis to the unabated immigration from Bangladesh (Lakshman et. al., 2003). In fact, there seems to be a direct correlation between Bangladeshi immigration and the growth of Islamist insurgent groups in the state. It is also a fact that the migrant inhabited areas provided a steady recruitment ground for organizations like the Muslim United Liberation Tiger of Assam (MULTA) in Assam. The existence of 14 Islamist militant organisations in Assam is enough to cause destabilisation in the region. Thanks to New Delhi for its intransigent attitude towards the issue of foreigner influx.

Another key strategic location, which remains threatened due to excessive influx of immigrants, is the Siliguri Corridor, better known as the "Chicken Neck" of India. It is worthwhile to note the claim made by Mohammad Siddique, a Foreign Service Officer of Bangladesh, that India had received the Corridor at Siliguri, despite Bangladesh having better claims to the territory owing to its population characteristics. The concentration of Bangladesh immigrants in the Siliguri Corridor poses grave dangers for Northeast India. At present, the Siliguri Corridor faces significant risks in its surrounding areas, as immigrants are often exploited by criminal networks for their own gain.

3. IMPLICATIONS ON NATIONAL SECURITY

Following the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1950, a huge number of Tibetans started entering the Indian Territory, where they were accorded the status of political refugees. Their presence on Indian soil did not create any social tension as the Central Government took full responsibility for their rehabilitation on the one hand. On the other hand, they preferred to remain aloof from the host communities to preserve their cultural heritage. However, their sojourn in India had deep political implications on Sino-Indian relations, mainly in view of the clandestine support extended by the Indian Government to the Tibetans in their resistance against the Chinese Government.

Some reports indicate that Tibetan groups were trained and armed under the initiative of American intelligence agencies, with Indian intelligence occasionally mentioned in connection to these activities, allegedly aimed at countering China (Bhaumik, 1996, pp. 26-27). Tacit Indian support despite her official recognition of Tibet as a part of China caused serious problems in their bilateral relations. China squarely blamed India for allowing its territory to be used for anti-Chinese activities. Tibetan resistance acquired great momentum in the late 1950s with the increase in Indo-American aid to the Tibetan guerrilla campaign. But the Tibetan resistance was crushed ultimately, and this brought a large number of Chinese troops close to the Sino-Indian border. The Chinese Government charged the Indian troops with being in actual collusion with the Tibetan counter-revolutionaries. It did not, therefore, come as a surprise when China launched

an attack against India in 1962 as part of punitive measures. This episode seriously damaged India's image before the international community. It has been observed that India's stance on Tibet has contributed to the persistence of the Sino-Indian border dispute. The decision to host Tibetan refugees also brought long-term challenges for India in the decades that followed.

India's experience with the Tibetan issue was not an isolated case. Similar challenges emerged in its eastern frontier, where the displacement of communities and refugee inflows once again tested India's ability to balance humanitarian responsibilities with strategic imperatives. On being displaced by Kaptai Hydel Project, coupled with the atrocities meted out to them by the Bangladesh military, the Chakmas and Hajongs fled to India. The Muslim Bengalis were systematically made to settle in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) under the official patronage of the Bangladesh Government. The 1970s witnessed the autonomy movements in the CHT, spearheaded by the PCJSS and the Shanti Bahini, under the leadership of Larma Brothers. This, in turn, generated a stiff military response from the Bangladeshi Government. The military crackdown further increased the flow of Chakma and Hajong refugees to the Northeast. India rehabilitated them in the sparsely populated part of northern Arunachal Pradesh for strategic purposes. The presence of these refugees has already created social tension between the refugees and the host communities. The move of the Indian Government also aroused strong opposition from the local population, leading to a series of unrest with AAPSU becoming the vanguard of the anti-foreigners movement in Arunachal Pradesh.

Some accounts allege that the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), India's external intelligence agency, was involved in the organization, training, and arming of the Shanti Bahini in relation to Bangladesh (Bhaumik, 1996, p. 270). The Shanti Bahini infiltrated India and integrated with the Chakma population in Tripura, turning the state into a safe haven for the Chakma rebels. Tacit Indian support for the Shanti Bahini prompted Bangladesh to revive hostilities. Thus, Indian support to the Chakmas led to socio-political instability in the Northeast, while the national security of India remains threatened due to hostility between India and Bangladesh.

Another significant dimension of foreign infiltration, which created far-reaching security consequences, is the Bengali immigration. India's policy towards East Pakistan backfired, and consequently, India found itself entrapped in its own policy. The persisting threat to the territorial integrity of India in its Northeastern region posed by the Chinese and the Pakistani activities guided Indian policy makers to intervene in East Pakistan. India wanted to exploit the opportunity created by the Bengali revolt to break up Pakistan and create a friendly pro-Indian state in the region.

Informed sources reveal that Indian intelligence agencies had started cultivating leaders and subversive elements within the Awami League as early as 1969. As events unfolded, which have become history now, the military government of Pakistan, despite recognizing the popular verdict, responded with a heavy military crackdown against the Bengalis of East Pakistan, thereby committing one of the worst genocides in history in 1971. Following this, about 10 million Bengalis fled to India for safety. After the liberation of Bangladesh, the Bengali refugees were repatriated to their country, although a significant section stayed back in India and mingled with the local population. From this, it is clear that the Indian Government was to a large extent responsible for importing Bengali refugees to India. Even earlier, the Central Government had deliberately remained indifferent and insensitive to the issue of illegal Bengali infiltration. As far as the 1971 War is concerned, India secured a decisive military victory, yet the political consequences proved less favourable. Following the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1977, Bangladesh came under military rule, which led to a steady decline in its ties with India. Consequently, instead of reducing its adversaries, India found itself facing two hostile neighbours, a development that ultimately aggravated the security challenges of the Northeast and the country as a whole.

4. MANIPUR CASE: INDIGENOUS PEOPLE UNDER THREAT

The scenario in Manipur also appears increasingly alarming, as the state faces a total absence of regulation on immigration. The situation in Manipur is not far from the one prevailing in Assam or Tripura. The influx of outsiders into Manipur followed the merger of Manipur with India in 1949, although immigration had started much earlier during the British colonial period. The lifting of the Foreigners' Permit system in 1950 opened the floodgates of migrants to Manipur. The promulgation of the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Act 1958 also enabled the entry of thousands of Nepali immigrants into Manipur, as Section 1(3) of the said Act excluded the word 'Nepali' from the term 'foreigner.' Although Section 1(3) of the said Act was amended in 1978, the inflow of Nepalis could not be controlled. The emergence of

Bangladesh in 1971 and the installation of a military regime in Myanmar also led to the forced immigration of Bangladeshis and Myanmarese into Manipur.

Internal migration from the Indian Hindi heartland also constitutes the bulk of the non-Manipuri population. The immigrants from U.P. and Bihar mainly consist of the workforce who are engaging in manual jobs. The other groups consist of the Marwaris, Bengalis and Punjabis who control the business establishment in the state. The Tamils also settled in large numbers in the commercially strategic border town of Moreh. Apart from this, mention may also be made of the Keralites who have settled in Manipur, serving in various private schools.

The presence of a massive migrant population in Manipur has led to serious complications in the fragile economic, political and cultural life of the indigenous people. Manipur's underdeveloped economy is increasingly unable to sustain the additional burden of about seven lakh migrant population. The economic impact created by the influx of migrants can be visualised at two different levels. Firstly, the migrant workers with their cheaper wages and longer duration of work have already captured the labour market of Manipur. This adversely affects the livelihood of the local labourers. They have also started competing for the extremely limited jobs in the state government departments. Secondly, the Marwaris and Sikhs have acquired dominance in trade and commerce, exercising a monopoly in the fixation of the price of all essential commodities. This situation is made possible primarily because of their control over the Manipur Chamber of Commerce (MCC), which stands as clear evidence of Manipuri subordination to the migrant population in the economic domain. The tragedy, however, is the consequent capital flight exacerbated by the transfer of accumulated capital to their respective home states or other more prospective destinations for further investment (Sharma, 2005, p. 62). Moreover, the predominance of Tamils in the strategically important town of Moreh, where most border trade occurs, represents a significant economic loss for Manipur. This issue gains further importance in light of the forthcoming Indo-ASEAN trade, which is expected to become operational soon. Moreh is poised to play a key role in the state's economic development. In view of these challenges, it is reasonable to suggest that Manipur's economy functions as a captive market, heavily influenced by the substantial influx of immigrants.

The changing demographic profile of the state has produced certain problems with serious implications for the indigenous populace. The demographic pattern has undergone drastic changes to such an extent that the immigrants have acquired the capability of influencing the electoral politics in the state. Intensive surveys reveal that many constituencies, both in urban and rural areas, have a considerable number of outsiders getting enrolled in the electoral list (Sharma, 2005, p. 66). It has been reported that the Thangmeiband Constituency, located at the heart of Imphal, has 4000 non-Manipuri voters against the total electorate of 18,749. A more concerning situation is observed in the Jiribam Constituency, where outsiders make up one-third of the population. In the Sugnu Constituency, non-Manipuris, primarily Nepalis and Bengalis, have settled in large numbers, significantly influencing the electoral landscape. The majority of immigrants, particularly Nepalis, are concentrated in the Kangpokpi area, from which a Nepali candidate, Kishore Thapa, was elected in the mid-term election of 1974, highlighting the substantial impact of the migrant population on the state's electoral politics.

Another disastrous impact of the influx into Manipur can also be felt in the cultural sphere. Heavy influx of immigrants poses a challenge to the existence of the indigenous ethno-cultural identities of Manipur. Numerically smaller indigenous groups residing in Manipur since time immemorial have encountered a serious crisis as their identities have remained threatened by the influx. The possibility of the local culture getting submerged under the weight of migrant culture is apparently high, given the reluctance of the outsiders to assimilate into the local culture. Interesting evidence demonstrated the gradual adoption of Hindi as a medium of communication in commercial transactions taking place within the Imphal Market, which in turn gives an added advantage to immigrants in the bargaining process.

As a result, the state had, in recent years, witnessed a massive protest movement demanding the extension of the Inner Line Permit System in Manipur or the introduction of a similar legislation to regulate the influx of immigrants. The movement, which was spearheaded by the Joint Committee on Inner Line Permit System (JCILPS), had paralysed the state for many months. Ultimately, the state Assembly passed three bills to secure the protection of the indigenous people in the state. The three bills could not be transformed into Acts due to stiff opposition from the tribal population of the state. The State Assembly has also passed a new bill known as the Manipur People Bill, which is awaiting the President's assent. Currently, the valley regions of Manipur lack an effective regulatory mechanism to monitor and control the influx of migrants and immigrants into the state.

5. CONCLUSION

With the full-scale implementation of India's Look East Policy, the issue of illegal immigration in the Northeast will assume a serious dimension as the policy implies the opening of the border. If the history of migration in this region is any indication, there is a likelihood that another demographic catastrophe is impending. There will be unhindered demographic movement between countries once the development of the Trans-Asian Highway Networks is accomplished. Given the inability to check cross-border illegal immigration in the past as well as in the present, formalisation of trade relations with the neighbouring countries will only lead to further aggravation of the already tense situation, as it would be tantamount to legitimising the existing trend of immigration. It will become increasingly difficult for the indigenous peoples of the Northeastern region to resist the civilian aggression in view of the legal status that would be accorded to the immigrants. This apprehension finds strong justification in the context of the Citizenship Amendment Bill of 2016, which, if enacted, would grant citizenship to Hindu migrants from neighboring countries.

The unregulated influx of immigrants is a threat not only to the indigenous people of the Northeast but also to the country as a whole. The influx, as discussed in the preceding section, is a threat to India's national security. If the trend of illegal immigration is not checked in time, the Northeast region may one day become a part of Greater Bangladesh. Such a development would deal a serious setback to India's aspirations of emerging as a major power on the global stage. Therefore, the Government of India cannot remain a silent spectator to the silent demographic invasion taking place in the Northeast.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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