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Trans-border Identities

(A study on the impact of Bangladeshi and Nepali migration to India)

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Abstract

This paper deals with migration into India from adjoining neighbours and its impact on security and other issues of national interest. Unlike other studies on migration, it focuses on the ethnic identities of migrant populations which exclude a sense of 'belongingness' to India. The paper does not question conventional wisdom regarding the economic impact of migration on the countries of origin and destination, nor does it debate the magnitude of migration. Rather, it examines implications for India's national interest, especially when the migration is illegal and poses multi-layered challenges to the Indian state.

The paper restricts itself to only Nepali and Bangladeshi migrants. The nature of migration from these countries to India has been dissimilar. This is because of their different historical backgrounds, geographical variants, ethno-religious affinities, political systems and bilateral arrangements with India.

The paper looks at various policy options for the government to tackle migration-related issues. It concludes inter alia that, India's borders with Bangladesh and Nepal must be regulated and that resident migrants need to be strategically dealt with, keeping in mind age-old relationships with these countries and, more importantly, the nature and construct of our geography.

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Keywords: Migration, Security, Trans-border identities

Executive Summary

Migration is as old as human civilisation. Population movements have always played a vital role in the structural transformation of societies and economies. However, unlike in the past when migration involved establishment of new habitations in fertile and virgin lands, migration today is characterised by movement of populations to other countries with people and cultures of their own. It therefore raises issues regarding loyalty, identity, development and security.

This paper deals with migration into India from adjoining neighbours and its impact on security and other issues of national interest. Being the most developed of all South Asian countries, India has been the most sought after destination by immigrants from neighbouring countries. Migrant Bangladeshis are concentrated in West Bengal and Assam. India and Nepal share a 1900 km border that runs along Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Sikkim. Migration between Nepal and India has been easy due to an open, porous border and strong familial links. Geographical contiguity, socio-cultural affinity, the kinship factor and historical reasons have left the Indo-Bangladesh and Indo-Nepal borders vulnerable to migration.

Although we do not have the exact number of immigrants either from Bangladesh or Nepal, it is a fact that both Bangladeshi and Nepali migrants have sizeable presences in India. Unlike migration elsewhere, say to Europe or the United States, ethnic commonalities of Indians with Bangladeshi and Nepali migrants imbue migration with an ethnic dimension, both as concerns 'push' and 'pull' factors. Not surprisingly, the same ethnic dimension impinges on the migrant's choice of whether to co-opt an Indian identity or retain that of their country of origin; as also on associated issues, such as, social linkages, security, foreign policy and economic development of the adopted homeland.

Bangladeshi migrants to India consist of Muslim migrants and Hindu refugees, both categories having different sets of reasons to migrate. But the overriding consideration in both the cases is ethnic commonalties with Indian Bengalis. Although Bangladeshis have their national identity within the nation-state framework, they identify themselves as Bengalis and share a common ethno-cultural ethos and heritage with Bengalis across the border. However, the basis of a separate nation-state for many Bangladeshis is that they are Muslims and their culture, language and religion is different from that of the Bengali Hindus of West Bengal. The unfolding and enforcement of Bangladeshi nationalism, promoted by the Bangladeshi National Party, had its effects on Bangladeshi migrants to India, in the sense that they carried with them their new-found national identity. It has been difficult, particularly for Bangladeshi Muslims, therefore, to merge into the Indian mainstream.

The dynamics of Nepali migration to India is different from that of Bengali migration. The socio-cultural continuity between the two countries makes the Nepali entity very much a part of the Indian ethos and psyche. In the Indian context, Nepalis are not perceived as ‘alien’. They have become just like other Indian nationals within the broad framework of the Indian federation. It can therefore be argued that the Nepali identity already exists as a sub-stratum of the Indian identity.

However, problems arise when Nepalis in India try to assert their Nepali identity in exclusive terms vis-à-vis mainstream India. The Gorkha National Liberation Front [GNLF] in Darjeeling illustrates this tendency, even though it claims to protect the interests and rights of Indian Gorkhas only.

Given the ethnic and cultural similarities between India on one hand and Bangladesh and Nepal on the other, the ‘ethnic-cultural space’ of each intrudes into the ‘geographical-territorial space’ of the others. It is natural that ethno-cultural contiguity and continuity give opportunities and scope to immigrants to India to relate to their respective country of ‘origin’.

For the Indian state, the security implications of large-scale migration from both Bangladesh and Nepal are varied but inter-related, given the complex nature of migration and the multiple identities that migrants profess. They cover demographic changes, growth of radicalism, particularly Islamic fundamentalism, regionalism, and, more importantly, involvement and even encroachment of foreign powers on the country’s ‘sovereign space’. All these threats to territorial integrity, core values or socio-political practices of the Indian state interact, sometimes reinforcing each other.

The history of migrations from Bangladesh and Nepal to India makes it apparent that their pattern, nature and direction have been different. This could be because of their historical backgrounds, geographical variants, ethno-religious affinities, bilateral arrangements and political systems. Problems arise when the migration is illegal and poses multi-layered threats to the Indian state. Commonsense dictates that firstly, India’s borders with Bangladesh and Nepal must be regulated; and secondly, that resident migrants need to be strategically dealt with to reduce, if not eliminate, the level of ‘threats’ they pose. Based on these two premises, some broad policy recommendations may be made, keeping in mind the age-old relationship between the three countries and, more importantly, the very nature and construct of our geography.

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Trans-border Identities¹

(A study on the impact of Bangladeshi and Nepali migration to India)

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Migration is as old as human civilisation. Population movements have always played a vital role in the structural transformation of societies and economies. However, unlike in the past when migration involved establishment of new habitations in fertile and virgin lands, migration today is characterised by movement of populations to other countries with people and cultures of their own. In today's world, it therefore raises issues regarding loyalty, identity, development and security. Theorists sometimes label contemporary movement of peoples as the third wave of globalisation after the movement of goods (trade) and the movement of money (finance) in the last century.

This paper deals with migration into India from adjoining neighbours and its impact on security and other issues of national interest. Unlike other studies on migration, it focuses on ethnic identities of migrant populations and examines how the identities which exclude a sense of 'belongingness' to India operate against India's national interests. The paper does not question conventional wisdom on the economic implications of migration for both the countries of origin and the host. Nor does it debate the magnitude of migration. In other words, it accepts the migration issue as a 'given' and that some of its attendant results are too obvious to be discounted. The paper restricts itself to only Nepali and Bangladeshi migrants though it does not underestimate the criticality of migration flows from Pakistan, Bhutan and other countries. Finally, it is prescriptive, in the sense that it examines various options for the government to tackle migration-related issues.

I: Extent and Nature of Migration

India has a common border with Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, China and Pakistan. Being the most developed of all South Asian countries, India has been the most sought after destination by immigrants from neighbouring countries. According to a UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs report, India was projected to rank ninth in terms of the number of international migrants (5,436,012) in 2010 and to account for 2.5 per cent of all international migrants.³

¹ The paper was commissioned under the Strategic and Economic Capacity-building Programme (SECP). The research focus of the SECP is on economic-strategic issues of the future in the context of Asian peace and security.

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² Joint Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi.

³ Trends in International Migration Stock: The 2008 Revision, UN database (UN Department. Of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2009)

India has a 4097 km border with Bangladesh along West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura. Of this, only around 1500 km is fenced, leaving a major portion of the border porous and easy for in-migration. Migrant Bangladeshis are concentrated in West Bengal and Assam. Similarly, India and Nepal share an open and porous 1900 km border that runs along Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Sikkim. Geographical contiguity, socio-cultural affinity, the kinship factor and historical reasons have left the Indo-Bangladesh and Indo-Nepal borders vulnerable to migration.

Migration between Nepal and India has been easy due to an open, porous border and strong familial links. The Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950 allows Nepalis to freely reside, own property, find employment and carry on business in India. Article VI of the 1950 treaty states: "Each Government undertakes, in token of the neighbourly friendship between India and Nepal, to give to the nationals of the other, in its territory, national treatment with regard to participation in industrial and economic development of such territory and to the grant of concessions and contracts relating to such development." Article VII further adds: "The Governments of India and Nepal agree to grant, on a reciprocal basis, to the nationals of one country in the territories of the other the same privileges in the matter of residence, ownership of property, participation in trade and commerce, movement and other privileges of a similar nature."⁴ Because of the 1950 Treaty provisions, India generally does not treat Nepali immigrants as 'illegal'.

II: Confused Identity

Although we do not have the exact number of immigrants either from Bangladesh or Nepal, it is a fact that both Bangladeshi and Nepali migrants have sizeable presences in India. Their concentration is in the north-eastern states, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, with scattered presences over the rest of the country. Unlike migration elsewhere, say to Europe or the United States, ethnic commonalities of Indians with Bangladeshi and Nepali migrants imbue migration with an ethnic dimension, both as concerns 'push' and 'pull' factors. Not surprisingly, the same ethnic dimension impinges on the migrant's choice of whether to co-opt an Indian identity or retain that of their country of origin; as also on associated issues, such as, social linkages, security, foreign policy and economic development of the adopted homeland.

Bangladeshi migrants to India consist of Muslim migrants and Hindu refugees, both categories having different sets of reasons to migrate. But the overriding consideration in both the cases is ethnic commonalities with Indian Bengalis. It is mostly the Bengali language and cultural heritage that unite Bangladeshis with West Bengal and the Indian Bengali population as a whole.

⁴ Aytar Singh Bhasin (ed.), *Nepal-India; Nepal-China Relations- Documents 1947-June 2005*, Volume 1, (New Delhi, 2005)

The former province of Bengal was divided in 1947 into West Bengal, which went to India, and East Bengal, which went to Pakistan; later, East Bengal became the independent nation of Bangladesh in 1971. Although Bangladeshis have their national identity within the nation-state framework, they identify themselves as Bengalis and share a common ethno-cultural ethos and heritage with Bengalis across the border. However, as Lamia Karim points out, the basis of a separate nation-state for many Bangladeshis is that they are Muslims and their culture, language and religion is different from that of the Bengali Hindus of West Bengal.⁵ The unfolding and enforcement of Bangladeshi nationalism, promoted by the Bangladeshi National Party, had its effects on Bangladeshi migrants to India, in the sense that they carried with them their new-found national identity. It has been difficult, particularly for Bangladeshi Muslims, therefore, to merge into the Indian mainstream.

Yet, it is not that Muslim immigrants remain 'exclusive' among the indigenous population in India. In Assam, for example, many of them have joined the Assamese mainstream. According to Mishra, over the years, large segments of the immigrant Muslim population of the state have been sending their children to Assamese medium schools and claiming Assamese as their mother tongue.⁶ They were accepted first as 'Na Asamiya' or neo-Assamese and then simply as Assamese. Even the Asom Sahitya Sabha, which represents the cream of Assamese-speaking literary and cultural figures, emphasised the need to accept the immigrant Muslim population as part and parcel of Assamese society, and has been critical of those who still referred to Muslims as 'Mias' or 'Na Asamiya'.⁷ It may be pointed out here that Muslim immigrants, by claiming Assamese as their mother tongue, ensured the majority status of the Assamese and defeated attempts by Bengali Hindus to convert Assam into a bilingual state, with the Assamese in the Brahmaputra Valley and the Bengalis in the Barak Valley. According to Mishra, neo-Assamese immigrant Muslims did not take long to realise their importance as a balancing force in the state's socio-political scene and emerged as one of the major pillars of Assamese linguistic nationalism.⁸

The dynamics of Nepali migration to India is different from that of Bengali migration. The socio-cultural continuity between the two countries makes the Nepali entity very much a part of the Indian ethos and psyche. According to Baral, India-Nepal migration is a social inter-relationship hardly affected by other factors. Since peoples on both sides of the border share a common language, religion and ethnic identity, their relations transcend political considerations.⁹ Of course, the commonalties are more evident between the Tarai people of Nepal and Indians across the border. The

⁵ Lamia Karim, 'In search of an Identity: The Rise of Political Islam & Bangladeshi Nationalism,' available at A-Z Index of documents on Communalism/www.sacw.net.

⁶ Udayan Mishra (1999), "Immigration & Identity Transformation in Assam," *Economic & Political Weekly*, 22 May, 1999, pp. 1267-68.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ L.K.Baral (2001), "Nepali Migration to India; Nature, Pattern & Consequences," in Upreti & Ramakanta (eds.), op.cit., p. 71.

similarities between the Tarai people, called Madhesias, and Indians, reflected in linguistic commonality and practice of Hinduism, have given rise to misgivings in the minds of Nepali authorities about the loyalty and leanings of the Tarai people.

In the Indian context, Nepalis are not perceived as ‘alien’. They have become just like other Indian nationals within the broad framework of the Indian federation. Indian Nepalis have their own institutions, socio-cultural practices and have contributed substantively to the making of modern India and are treated as an important element in the country’s security system. ‘Gorkha’ is an honorific word from British days to denote all martial races of Nepal. However, it came to connote men of Nepali origin serving in the Indian Army. Also included are domiciled descendants of Amar Singh Thapa’s army at the time of the Anglo-Nepal War (1814-16). Starting with the Sugauli Treaty (1816) that ended the Anglo-Nepal War, recruitment into the British Army was the major trigger for Nepali migration to India. After 1947, India made separate arrangements to continue with the Army’s Gorkha recruitment. At present, there are approximately 30,000 Gorkhas in the Indian Army and over 1,00,000 Gorkha pensioners, who are Indian for all practical purposes. Gorkha bravery has been identified with Indian heroism for both domestic and overseas consumption. Currently Gorkhas are settled around the old Gorkha regimental centres such as Dharmsala, Bakloh in Himachal Pradesh, Dehradun, Darjeeling, Shillong, Assam and other north-eastern states.

Besides, a large number of them actively participated in India’s freedom struggle. The statue of Major Durga Malla, hanged by the British, at the Parliament House complex speaks volumes for the contributions made by Indian Gorkhas to the freedom struggle. The constant effort of Nepali-speaking Indians ensured the inclusion of Nepali in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution as one of India’s national languages. Indian Gorkhas keep a safe distance, politically and culturally from the migrant Nepali population and maintain an Indian identity and demand abrogation of the 1950 Treaty with Nepal. They feel that migrants under this Treaty have tended to dilute their Indian identity. There also exists historical links between the Nepali monarchy and the Indian royalty, especially of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. This is reflected in marital alliances between the Nepalese royal family and the Indian princely states, something which continues even today.

In Assam for instance, Nepalis have been historically treated as being identified with Asamiyas. Earlier generations of immigrant Nepalis have assimilated and integrated with the Asamiya nationality to such an extent that they prefer to identify themselves as ‘Nepali Asamiya’. With the beginning of the Assam agitation (1979-85), Nepali immigrants were viewed with some suspicion but have faced less hostility from the Assamese compared to Bangladeshi migrants because of their political-cultural assimilation, lower numbers, subordinate role, their identity as ‘Nepali Asamiya’ and, of course, the 1950 Treaty provisions. Perhaps because of these reasons the

demographic impact of Nepali immigrants on Assam has not been strongly articulated, and is ignored even in the S.K. Sinha Report of 1998 on Illegal Migration into Assam.

It can therefore be argued that the Nepali identity already exists as a sub-stratum of the Indian identity.

As A.C. Sinha points out, from the historical, cultural, religious and even geographical perspective, Nepal is an associate to the Indian core¹⁰ even though the core accords a peripheral rather than associate status to both Indian Nepalis and immigrants from Nepal. Perhaps that is why Nepali migration is not a major concern for India. Nepalis entering India enjoy both natural and other privileges arising from structural arrangements created by the two countries. However, problems arise when Nepalis in India try to assert their Nepali identity in exclusive terms vis-à-vis mainstream India. The Gorkha National Liberation Front [GNLF] in Darjeeling illustrates this tendency, even though it claims to protect the interests and rights of Indian Gorkhas only.

Overall, Bengalis and Nepalis are very much part of the Indian ethos and linguistic-cultural traditions. It was only when borders were redrawn following the partition of India that various solidarities were fragmented and the legality or otherwise of the movement of people across borders came into question.

III: Ethno-cultural Contiguity and Continuity

Given the ethnic and cultural similarities between India on one hand and Bangladesh and Nepal on the other, the 'ethnic-cultural space' of each intrudes into the 'geographical-territorial space' of the others. It is natural that ethno-cultural contiguity and continuity give opportunities and scope to immigrants to India to relate to their respective country of 'origin'. This subsection analyses the nature of the inter-relationships and implications for India.

Myron Weiner's model of the 'Macedonian Syndrome' helps us to understand better the transnational character of ethnic groups.¹¹ According to this model, countries having a contiguous border may have to share common ethnic groups but in at least one of these countries, such an ethnic group might be a minority. In that case, the group will be aware of its cultural distinctiveness in relation to the majority across the border and will also be conscious of the relationship. While the third assumption of this model - that one of the states will turn irredentist to incorporate ethnic minorities - does not seem to hold in the present context, the 'Macedonian Syndrome' explains the relation maintained by migrants with their homeland. Apart from this, links with the home country, and selective 'remembering' of its culture and tradition play an important role

¹⁰ A.C. Sinha (2003), "The Indian Northeast Frontier and the Nepali Immigrants," in Sinha and Subba (eds.), *The Nepalis in Northeast India*, New Delhi, p. 49.

¹¹ See, Myron Weiner, 'The Macedonian Syndrome: An Historical Model of International Relations and Political Development', *World Politics*, 23:4, July 1971, p. 668.

among migrant communities in inducing a sense of solidarity and an identity of their own. This, together with the 'given' identity that Bangladeshi and Nepali migrants carry with them, determines the nature and extent of their interaction and relations with the respective home country. So far, very few systematic or exhaustive studies have been done on this aspect of migration.

According to a study conducted by Sarkar, in the case of cross-border migration from Bangladesh, the 'social network' theory is the most relevant migration theory. It is the main determinant and the major pull factor that attracted Bangladeshi migrants to India.¹² The study reports that out of 100 households surveyed, 41 were found to have come first to the households of their relatives in India. Similarly, 76 households resided in localities in which their relatives, friends and acquaintances were already resident.¹³ In general, it has been seen that migrants continue to retain and nurture this network with their home country.

In the case of Nepal also, social inter-relationship is the major factor in migration. Ethnic and other forms of social links are more evident between the Tarai people and Indians across the border. The more ethnically sensitive areas of Eastern Nepal like Ilam, Panchthar, and Jhapa border Darjeeling and Sikkim and, since the border is open border, people move back and forth with ease for marriage, family occasions, work and even education.

Thus, the artificially made border becomes irrelevant and cross-border identity, together with social networks, transcends political considerations in migration from both Bangladesh and Nepal.

IV: Demographic Impact

The Human Development Report 2009 (UNDP) on Migration is essentially pro-migration in approach and applies a human development approach to the study of migration.¹⁴ When migrants integrate more and diffuse to a great degree within their adopted homeland, which in turn becomes more diverse, they have a better chance of being valued as enriching society and introducing complementary cultural traits.¹⁵ Ground realities in India, however, indicate that this has not happened and the influx of migrants from Bangladesh and Nepal has raised several concerns.

The sheer number of migrants from these two countries poses a demographic challenge. The S.K. Sinha Report on *Illegal Migration into Assam 1998* clearly brings out perceptible changes in the demographic character of the state. It suggests that the influx

¹² J.P. Sarkar, Bangladesh Migration to West Bengal: A Cause of Concern (unpublished paper, year not stated)

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ See, Human Development Report 2009 (UNDP, New York, 2009)

¹⁵ Ibid., p.92.

of migrants threatens to reduce the Assamese people to a minority in their own state.¹⁶ Sinha, in a forwarding letter to the President, stated, “Large-scale illegal migration from East Pakistan/Bangladesh over several decades has been altering the demographic complexion of this State. It poses a grave threat both to the identity of the Assamese people and to our national security.”¹⁷ Quoting Bangladesh census records, the report points out that there was a reduction of 39 lakh Hindus between 1971 and 1981 and another 36 lakh between 1981 and 1989; and contends that these 75 lakh Hindus have obviously come into India. **Table 1** provides the relative decadal percentage growth of the population of Assam vis-à-vis India and what is now Bangladesh.

Table 1: Decadal Percentage Growth of Population

Year	Assam	All India	Area Currently Bangladesh
1901-1911	16.99	5.75	9.1
1911-1921	20.48	-0.31	5.4
1921-1931	19.91	11.00	7.06
1931-1941	20.40	14.22	17.6
1941-1951	34.98	21.51	0.1
1951-1961	34.95	24.80	29.83
1971-1981	23.8	24.66	31.83
1981-1991	23.8	23.85	22.00

(Source: *The S.K. Sinha Report on Illegal Migration into Assam, 1998*)

The decadal population growth rate in Assam from 1951-1971 was higher as compared to the overall population growth rate in India and Bangladesh due to large-scale migration from Bangladesh. A look at community-wise population growth rates presents an even more revealing picture.

Table 2: Hindu and Muslim Population Growth Rates

Year	Assam		All India	
	Hindus	Muslims	Hindus	Muslims
1951-1961	33.71	38.35	20.29	25.61
1961-1971	37.17	30.99	23.72	30.85
1971-1991	41.89	77.42	48.38	55.04

Note: There was no census in Assam in 1981 because of the Assam agitation
(Source: *The S.K. Sinha Report on Illegal Migration into Assam, 1998*)

¹⁶ S.K. Sinha Report on Illegal Migration into Assam, submitted to the President of India, 1998

¹⁷ S.K. Sinha Report, op.cit.

Table 2 clearly shows the quantum jump in the Muslim population of Assam because the illegal migrants coming into India after 1971 have been almost exclusively Muslims.¹⁸

In another study by the Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA), Amarjeet Singh says that about 1.2 million Bangladeshis who entered India with valid travel documents have not returned home and that India managed to push back only 15,000 of them in 2005, 12,000 in 2006 and 11,500 in 2007.¹⁹ Some districts of Assam, such as Dhubri, Barpeta, Goalpara, Hailakandi and Karimganj, and several of West Bengal, such as Murshidabad, South and North 24 Parganas, Nadia, West Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and Siliguri in Darjeeling, have a large Bangladeshi immigrant population.

Nagaland is another destination favoured by immigrants and has recorded the highest rate of population growth in the country – 56.08 per cent during 1981-91 and 64.41 per cent during 1991-2001.²⁰ The migration has resulted in the emergence of a new community in Nagaland called the Sumias.²¹ Similar demographic changes can be seen in Tripura too. The state is being gradually reduced to a non-tribal state from a predominantly tribal one. Influx from across the border has reduced Tripura's tribal population to 31.1 per cent in the 2001 census from almost 50 per cent six decades earlier.²² This accounts for tribal insurgency in Tripura.

In the case of West Bengal too, the demographic impact of Bangladeshi migration is manifest. There are ten districts in West Bengal bordering Bangladesh - Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, East Dinajpur, West Dinajpur, Malda, Murshidabad, Nadia, North 24 Parganas and South 24 Parganas - whose population growth rate is much higher than that of the state as a whole. Census reports of 1981 and 1991 indicate that during the decade 1981-1991, the number of Hindus in West Bengal decreased by 2.27 per cent while Muslims increased by 2.06 per cent.²³ Even in Kolkata, the Muslim population rose in the same decade by 53.67 per cent whereas the Hindu population increased by 30.79 per cent only.²⁴

According to Pramanik, during the period 1951-2001, the contrast between a decline in the Hindu population and the extraordinary upswing in the Muslim population as a proportion of the total population is indeed remarkable in all districts of West Bengal; the growth rate of Hindus and Muslims were 198.54 per cent and 310.93 per cent

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ M. Amarjeet Singh, "Problems and Prospects of Illegal Migration in India," *Asia 2030: The Unfolding Future* (unpublished IDSA study, year not stated)

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ *Population Explosion in West Bengal: A Survey*, available at <http://voiceofdharma.org/books/tfst/appii1.htm>

²⁴ Ibid.

respectively.²⁵ This uneven population growth, affecting the demography of West Bengal, cannot but be attributed largely to illegal Bangladeshi migration to India. This is clearly brought out by the census reports and by many studies undertaken by different scholars like Pranati Datta, M. Amarjeet Singh, and Bimal Pramanik; though an additional factor might be high fertility rates among Muslims in states like West Bengal and Assam owing to low levels of female education and the resultant lack of awareness²⁶.

For the period 1981-91, Bangladesh census authorities have detected a unique phenomenon of 'missing population' and estimate the number at 8 million, which includes about 1.73 million Hindus.²⁷ It is plausible that much of the remainder, that is 6.27 million, might have migrated to various parts of India, notably West Bengal.

In yet another study, Chandan Nandy, on the basis of Bangladesh's census data, asserts that, during the decade 1981-91, the 'missing millions' in Bangladesh, estimated at between 7.24 million and 14.24 million, represent the quantum of migration from Bangladesh into India during that decade.²⁸ Here, the 'missing millions' refer to the difference in population data between the UNDP and Bangladesh government projections and the actual Bangladesh population census data for 1991. Nandy also shows the extent of migration into the border state of West Bengal by analysing the data from the 2001 census of India in respect of bordering districts.²⁹

Statistics about the number of Nepalis in India are assumptive as there is no documentation of Nepali migrants. At present, it is believed that, there are approximately 10-12 million Nepalis living in India, which includes both migrant Nepalis and Nepali-speaking Indian citizens. The latter, also known as Indian Nepalis or Indian Gorkhas, constitute a significant proportion of the population in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam, and other north-eastern states, as well as Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. According to the Refugee Review Tribunal, there are anywhere from 0.6 to 12 million Nepalis currently residing in India.³⁰ The counts given by different organisations and individual scholars fall within this range. According to the Census of India, 2001, the total number of migrants from Nepal stood at 596,696. Ranjit Devraj (2005) put the figure at more than 10 million³¹.

²⁵ Bimal Pramanik (2006), "Illegal Migration from Bangladesh: A Case Study of West Bengal," in B.B. Kumar (ed.), "Illegal Migration from Bangladesh", Concept, New Delhi p.140.

²⁶ S. Irudaya Rajan, "District level Fertility Estimates for Hindus and Muslims", *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 29, 2005, pp. 437-38.

²⁷ Population Explosion in West Bengal: A survey, op.cit.

²⁸ Chandan Nandy, "Illegal Immigration from Bangladesh to India: The Emerging Conflicts", SLIFKA programme in Inter-Communal Co-existence, Brandeis University, November 30, 2005, pp.154-55

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 155-57.

³⁰ Refugee Review Tribunal, Australia (RRT Research Response, March 2006)

³¹ Ranjit Devraj, "Nepali Maoists' Deal with Parties may Doom Monarchy" IPS Asia-Pacific, 16 March, 2005.

L.R. Baral estimated that there were about 4 million Nepalis living in India around 2001³².

Further, it is difficult to distinguish between different categories of migrants. According to Upreti, Nepali migration to India has been on a permanent, temporary or seasonal basis.³³ The 1991 census of Nepal recorded that the absentee population from Nepal which migrated to India constituted 89.2 per cent of total migrants while, according to the 2001 census of India, 68 per cent of the total emigrants from Nepal during the period 1991-2001 immigrated to India.³⁴

Unlike the migration from Bangladesh, the Nepali influx to India does not appear to have had any decisive impact on Indian demographic patterns, mostly because of the floating character of the migrants, the Hindu bond and social interrelationship, apart from natural privileges and structural arrangements provided by both governments. In this context, the comment by India's first PM Jawaharlal Nehru at a press conference in 1961 is significant. He said: "Indo-Nepal relations do not depend on any person's goodwill, on Nepal's goodwill, on that government or this government. They depend on geography and history which cannot be easily done away with".³⁵ Perhaps, this attitude or psychological make-up towards Nepali migration continues and hence, its demographic impact on India has not been studied seriously. Yet, Nepali migrants (as distinct from Nepali-speaking Indians) have a sizeable presence, particularly in the north-eastern states, West Bengal and Bihar.

There are some other important considerations that might have prompted India to not take the demographic impact of Nepali migration seriously. First, there is sizeable Indian migration to Nepal from the adjoining districts in India, particularly to its Tarai region. The 1991 census of Nepal revealed that the Indian-born population in Nepal was 2.4 per cent of the total while in the Tarai region, the figure was 4.4 per cent.³⁶ Interestingly, marriage is an important reason for migration resulting in the predominance of women among migrants in districts on the borders of the two countries. The immigrant Nepalis marry into local Indian families as do Indians settled in Nepali Tarai townships as traders and moneylenders. This has resulted in the cross-fertilisation of cultures, reinforcing commonalities between Indians and Nepalis.

V: Security Implications

Migration and security have a complex relationship and initial research on linkages concentrated mostly on analysing and assessing the range of possible security threats

³² See, L.R. Baral (2000), "Nepali Migration to India," in Upreti, B.C. & Ramakant (eds.), *India and Nepal: Aspects of Interdependent Relations*, Kalinga, New Delhi.

³³ B.C. Upreti, *The Marginal Migrants* (Delhi, 2006), p. 46.

³⁴ Raju Bhattarai, (2006) "Open Borders. Closed Citizenship: Nepali Labour Migrants in India" paper presented at the international seminar, the Netherlands.

³⁵ Vidya Bir Singh Kansakar, *Nepal-India Open Border: Prospects, Problems and Challenges, 2001*, available at www.nepaldemocracy.org/documents/treaties_agreements/nep_india_open_border, p.17

³⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

that could emanate from migration. The migration-security nexus was first forcefully emphasised and advocated by Weiner who, in contrast to the international political economy framework, provided a security-stability framework for the role of states in both creating and responding to international migration. For Weiner, 'security' is a social construct, having different meanings and connotations in different societies.³⁷ According to him, there are five broad categories of situations in which immigration comes to be perceived as a threat to the host country: 'political threat', security risk to the host country', 'cultural threat', 'socio-economic problem for the host country', and 'as hostages against the country of origin'.³⁸

Apart from Weiner, several other scholars like Teitelbaum and Cronin have also linked migration with security issues. This is how migration came to be securitised and gained more prominence after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The idea of securitisation of migrants has added a new dimension to the theoretical discourse on security since the 1990s. This has been mostly propounded by the Copenhagen School of Security Studies of Barry Buzan and his research team. Buzan, Waever and de Wilde define securitisation as 'the staging of existential issues in politics to lift them above politics. In security discourse, an issue is dramatised and presented as an issue of supreme priority; thus, by labelling it as security an agent claims the need for and a right to treat it by extraordinary means'.³⁹ Successful securitisation occurs when the securitised issue is shifted from the domain of 'normal' politics to 'emergency politics', thus forcing the government to take emergency measures. According to Josh Hammer, the securitisation process occurs when an issue is portrayed as an urgent, fundamental and profound risk to society, thus requiring special, decisive treatment by leaders of the government elite.⁴⁰

When migration is said to be securitised, it means that migration is identified as an existential threat, which requires emergency measures by the state. This enables the state to pursue policies that supposedly alleviate the ills arising out of migration. In the Indian context, migration from Bangladesh and Nepal, is presented as a security threat to the 'referent object' – the states of Assam and West Bengal, and the Northeast or to India as a whole.

In migration discourses, the concept of identity also plays an important role. The identity of the host population, which is seen as having been fragmented by the migrant population, is very often invoked as justifying securitisation and hence initiation of extraordinary measures. The security discourse always posits a 'national self' facing one or more threatening 'others' within a dichotomous framework.

³⁷ Myron Weiner, 'Security, Stability and International Migration,' *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 1992/93, p. 103.

³⁹ Barry Buzan, Ole Waever & J.de Wilde, *Security. A New Framework for Analysis* (London, 1998), p.26

⁴⁰ Josh Hammer, A Human Weapon: The Nexus of Immigration, Security & Terrorism, available on www.terrorism.foreignpolicyblogs.com/2009/10/02/a-human-weapon-the-nexus-immigr.

For the Indian state, the security implications of large-scale migration from both Bangladesh and Nepal are varied but inter-related, given the complex nature of migration and the multiple identities that migrants profess. They cover demographic changes, growth of radicalism, particularly Islamic fundamentalism, regionalism, and, more importantly, involvement and even encroachment of foreign powers on the country's 'sovereign space'. All these threats to territorial integrity, core values or socio-political practices of the Indian state interact, sometimes reinforcing each other.

Bangladesh

The demographic impact of large-scale migration from Bangladesh has given rise to two fears. One has been expressed most graphically in the S.K.Sinha report. The report says, "This silent and invidious demographic invasion of Assam may result in the loss of the geo-strategically vital districts of Lower Assam. The influx of these illegal migrants is turning these districts into a Muslim-majority region. It will then only be a matter of time when a demand for their merger with Bangladesh may be made."⁴¹

A corollary of such religion-based demographic changes in these areas is the growth of Islamic radicalism, often of the *jihadi* variant. There has been a rapid but quiet increase in the number of mosques and *madrasas* in the border areas, many set up with funds from the Jeddah-based Islamic Development Bank.⁴² During the late 1990s, there were 955 mosques and 445 *madrasas* in 22 districts of West Bengal whereas there were 976 mosques and 156 *madrasas* in 28 districts on the Bangladesh side.⁴³ Most *madrasas* had not obtained governmental approval and most mosques were illegally constructed during 1994-99.⁴⁴ In Assam too, there was an abnormal increase in the number of *madrasas*. By 2008, they numbered around 1466 of which 810 were registered. Along the Indo-Nepal border, there were 343 mosques and 367 *madrasas* in districts on the Indian side, and 291 mosques and 195 *madrasas* on the Nepali side.

Apprehensions have been expressed about the rapid spread of radical Islam in the area.⁴⁵ Given the level of literacy and religious beliefs among immigrant Muslims, they are susceptible to Islamic fundamentalism fuelled by religious institutions. According to West Bengal Intelligence, as many as 125 of the 208 *madrasas* situated in the border districts of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, North and South Dinajpur, Malda, Murshidabad, and North and South 24-Parganas encouraged terrorism.⁴⁶ There are suspicions that many mosques in West Bengal (including in Kolkata) might be safe havens for radical elements and even arms. These are worrisome possibilities, given the

⁴¹ S.K. Sinha Report, op.cit.

⁴² The Hindustan Times, 7 February 2002

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ J.K.Ray (2006), "Migration from (East Bengal/East Pakistan) Bangladesh to India," in B.B. Kumar (ed.), op.cit., p. 45.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Rajendra Chaddha, Mushrooming Madrasahs A Menace to Nation (3 March 2002), available at www.hvk.org/articles/0502/64.html.

changing demography in states like West Bengal and Assam. Concerns are particularly acute in the case of the Siliguri corridor, which is a crucial point in the strategic 'chicken neck' that links the North-Eastern region with the rest of India.

The security threat from Bangladeshi immigrants has escalated both as a perception and in real terms because of the rise of Islamic radicalism in Bangladesh and Pakistan and their cross-border impact on the Indian state. Pushpita Das quotes Director General, Border Security Force, as saying that the increasing influence of Islamic radicalism has resulted in the large-scale push into India of not only economic migrants but also foot soldiers of jihadi terrorism and pan-Islamic fundamentalism.⁴⁷

It is the reluctance of Bangladeshi migrants to give up their religious and ethnic identities that, according to Stephen Cohen, results in regionalism or regional separatism becoming easily internationalised.⁴⁸ Their maintenance of a separate identity even after being in India for years creates an enduring divide, first between the host and migrant communities; second; between identical hosts (i.e. Indian Muslims and migrants; and third, within the larger host communities on grounds like that of religion. In a state like Assam where the indigenous Muslim population is known as Gorias/Morias, migrant Muslims keep a distance from their co-religionists. This is particularly true after indigenous Muslims were attacked by Bangladeshi migrant Muslims⁴⁹ as reported during the clash between the Bodos and Muslims in the lower Assam districts in 2008.

The extent of radicalisation among immigrant Muslims can be gauged from the fact that there are a growing number of Islamist groups coming into existence in the North-East and the majority are based in Assam. According to Gopalkrishnan and Thomas, the aims and objectives of these groups range from countering Hindu fundamentalist organisations like RSS and VHP to defending immigrant settlers and infiltrators from attacks by indigenous tribal groups like the Bodo Security Force (Bd.S.F) and Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZIP) to, most ominously, carving out a sovereign republic from the territory of the North-Eastern region of India.⁵⁰ It is believed that the spread of Islamist groups was facilitated by the presence of large numbers of Muslim immigrants in the area. However, the rise of these groups has mostly been a reaction to the Assam agitation during 1979-85 over the issue of illegal migration from Bangladesh. Apart from the rise of Muslim terrorist organisations, there has been also an increase in Muslim fundamentalist groups in the region. Anand Kumar has mentioned the West Bengal Home Department listing of fundamentalist Muslim organisations working in

⁴⁷ Puspita Das (2006), "The India-Bangladesh Border: A Problem Area for Tomorrow", IDSA paper, New Delhi.

⁴⁸ Stephen P. Cohen, The Security of South Asia: Regional Conflicts and External Induction (Paper presented to the Wilson Centre Core Seminar Series in Washington D.C., 30 April, 1985)

⁴⁹ The Times of India, 8 October 2008.

⁵⁰ Gopalkrishnan and Thomas, 'Problems of Immigration in India's North-East: Aspects of Conflict Resolution', in B.B. Kumar (ed.), op.cit. p. 157.

West Bengal, which includes Jamait-e-Islami-e-Hind, Jamait Ahle Hadis, Students Islamic Organisation and Tablighi Jamaat.⁵¹

Securitisisation of Bangladeshi migration is prompted pre-eminently by the developing nexus between Muslim immigrants and thriving, separatist insurgent groups like the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and Islamic fundamentalist and terrorist groups like HUJI and others. According to a study, some Islamic fundamentalist outfits, like HUJI, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, Islamic Liberation Army of Assam, Islamic Sevak Sangha, Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam, Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam, United Reformation Protest of Assam, People's United Liberation Front and Muslim Volunteer Force have tried to establish their foothold in Assam. This has been possible due to the presence of a large number of Bangladeshi immigrants.⁵² The ULFA is a good example of a separatist organisation engaged in a struggle to establish a sovereign, independent Assam being mentored by Islamists in Bangladesh.⁵³ Former director of the Intelligence Bureau, Ajit Doval asserts that ULFA has been gradually so Islamised as to declare that East Bengali migrants are Assamese who could help ULFA attain its goal of an independent Assam.⁵⁴ The matter has been complicated by the creation of a Muslim political organisation in Assam called the Assam United Democratic Front (AUDF) which claims to be the guardian of Muslim interests in Assam. AUDF envisions itself as the political rallying point for Bangladeshi Muslims.⁵⁵ Hence, there is a hint at the dangerous idea of an Islamic Republic in the region. This needs examination vis-à-vis the concept of a Greater Bangladesh as it has grave security implications for India.

Immediately after the creation of independent Bangladesh in 1971, there was political instability in the country, marked by coups and counter-coups. This led to 'out-migration' from Bangladesh, which was facilitated by the issue of 'exit permits' by the Bangladeshi authorities. It was issued to people in Bangladesh allowing them to leave the country on the ground that they were actually Indian nationals who had come to Bangladesh soon after the liberation of Dhaka city but did not return to India. There is no doubt that the 'exit permit' was a well-calculated political design to push inside India a part of the Bangladeshi Muslim population.⁵⁶ Apart from countering the claims of the India's North-Eastern states that a large number of Bangladeshi immigrants reside in their territories and legalising the illegal entry of Bangladeshi nationals into India under the cover of the 'exit permit', Bangladeshi authorities also aimed to create

⁵¹ Anand Kumar (2010), "Illegal Bangladeshi Migration to India: Impact on Internal Security," IDSA Fellows Seminar Paper, New Delhi, p. 12.

⁵² Anand Kumar (2009), "Changing Nature of Insurgency in Northeast and Role of Bangladesh," IDSA Fellows Seminar paper, New Delhi, p. 4.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 16.

⁵⁴ Ajit Doval, *Impending Storm*, The Times of India, 25 January 2007.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Sibopada De (2005), *Illegal Migrations and the North-East*, New Delhi, p. 48.

an Islamic sphere of influence to provide a religious-cultural base for a separate Muslim state in India's North-East.⁵⁷

Greater Bangladesh

The Muslim League had originally visualised that Pakistan would consist of the Muslim majority provinces in the West and Bang-e-Islam, comprising Bengal and Assam in the East. The failure to get Assam and the whole of Bengal included in Pakistan perhaps remained a psychological scar with Bangladeshi leaders. Consequent to greater ethnicisation and ethnic polarisation of the North-Eastern region of India and West Bengal, separatist tendencies among Muslims seem to be growing. The S.K. Sinha Report (1998) says, "The long cherished design of Greater East Pakistan/Bangladesh, making inroads into the strategic land link of Assam with the rest of the country, can lead to severing the entire land mass of the north-east with all its rich resources, from the rest of the country, and this will have disastrous strategic and economic consequences."⁵⁸ Sinha's report traces how, from the days of India's Partition the Pakistani and East Bengal/Bangladeshi leaders have raised the issue of 'Greater Bangladesh', or 'Brihot Bangladesh' or 'Bangistan', either explicitly or as a hidden agenda.

Even though the concept may be in its infancy, there is no doubt that given the fast changing demographic profile in the North-East and West Bengal, a transnational Bangladeshi identity is brewing across the region. If their ethnic-nationalist aspirations, often fuelled by radical Islam back in Bangladesh, are not strategically dealt with, it could lead to the reassertion for a 'Brihot Bangladesh' in a more vocal way. In this connection, the cyber propaganda campaign for a 'Greater Bangladesh' may be cited. One particular website hosted by 'westbengalbelongstobangladesh' posts slogans like, 'Slumdog Indian State of West Bengal belongs to Greater Bangladesh', 'Slumdog Indian State of Assam also belongs to Greater Bangladesh', 'Bangladesh + West Bengal + Assam = Greater Bangladesh', 'We hate dirty and poverty stricken slumdog India', etc.⁵⁹ Another website, hosted by Bangladesh-cum-Discussion Forum, gives a call to fellow readers to create an independent greater Bengal by taking away West Bengal, where the only state religion will be Bengalism or 'Bengali National Socialism' with the new capital at Murshidabad, to be renamed as Aurobindabad!⁶⁰

Although all this rhetoric about Greater Bangladesh represents a lunatic fringe and anti-India obsession, it simply cannot be wished away as 'distorted thinking' by some individuals or groups who suffer from Bangladeshi jingoism. Before it is translated into

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 49.

⁵⁸ S.K. Sinha Report, op.cit.

⁵⁹ West Bengal Belongs to Greater Bangladesh, available at www.westbengalbelongstobangladesh.wordpress.com/

⁶⁰ Independent Greater Bengal, available at www.Bangladesh.com Discussion Forum.

a course of action, the Government of India needs to tackle it in a subtle but forthright manner.

Growth of Nativism and the Assam Agitation

Migration is often securitised by the host country to tackle its many-layered security threats. One of its most visible threats has been the negative impact on the societal structures of the host country in terms of the rights and privileges of indigenous populations. The influx from Bangladesh to India has evidently increased the level of human capital externality and burdened scarce public resources while diluting the available societal and demographic structures in host areas, leading to a rise in unemployment, societal disaffection, political instability, lawlessness and polarisation.⁶¹ The situation in the North-East, particularly before the Assam Agitation (1979-85), was already bad due to economic reasons that have been brought out by Lama in a study. In the context of Assam where, because of the tremendous influx of Bangladeshi migrants, feelings of 'nativism' had already developed, the economic deprivation and siphoning of resources added to already existing economic woes.⁶²

The Assam agitation, led by the powerful All Assam Students Union (AASU), was partly triggered by the revision of electoral rolls in Mangaldoi in April 1979, in which at least 45,000 illegal Bangladeshi migrants were detected out of a total electorate of 6,00,000. This immediately provided the ground for political parties to raise the spectre of illegal migration from Bangladesh. The AASU capitalised on the issue, and projected the foreigners issue on to the national agenda. The primary aim of the Assam agitation was the detection of illegal immigrants, their deletion from the voters list and finally, their deportation. In other words, the agitation aimed at maintaining Assamese cultural and linguistic identity safe from the invasion of alien traditions and ethos. However, it was marked by violence and, sometimes, communal riots.

It subsided with the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985 by the AASU, the central government and the state government of Assam. The Accord provided that all foreigners who came to Assam after March 25, 1971, would be detected and deported and their names deleted from the electoral rolls. The cut-off year was fixed as 1966; those who migrated to Assam between January 1, 1966, and March 25, 1971, were to stay in limbo for 10 years, after which they could apply for voting rights.

However, so far no government has been able to make any breakthrough in this exercise. No headway could be made even after the Asom Gana Parishad – the AASU-turned political party – came to power in Assam in December 1985. The AGP

⁶¹ P. Upadhyaya (2006), "Securitization Matrix in South Asia: Bangladeshi Migrants as Enemy Alien", in Caballero-Anthony, Emmers & Acharya (eds.), *Non-Traditional Security in Asia*, Hampshire, p. 25.

⁶² See, Mahendra P Lama (2003), "Poverty, Migration and Conflict: Challenges to Human security in South Asia", in P.R. Chari & Sonika Gupta (ed.) *Human Security in South Asia: Energy, Gender, Migration and Globalisation*, New Delhi.

government did not take up the border-fencing work nor could its successor, the Saikia-led Congress government, do much about this. The controversial Illegal Migration (Determination by Tribunals) Act (IMDT Act) did not achieve its objective of detection, determination and deportation of illegal immigrants. Rather, it polarised political and public opinion. Assam is a state in which the electoral success of a political party depends by and large on minority votes. It is, therefore, natural that political parties in Assam avoid measures that could hurt the sentiments of minorities. Commenting on the post-Assam Accord scenario, De writes, “In fact, major political parties in Assam did not like to incur the displeasure of the minority community for electoral reasons, and this attitude hindered the official process of identifying illegal immigrants”.⁶³

The movement against illegal migrants in Assam had a demonstrative effect on almost all neighbouring states as political elites started blaming Bangladeshi migrants for unsettling the demographic balance, cornering scarce resources and endangering their social and economic security.⁶⁴ Burning examples have been Tripura and Nagaland. In fact, as pointed out earlier, in Tripura, the proportion of tribal population in the total population of the state fell drastically. In Nagaland, there has been the emergence of a new community called Sumias. Both phenomena have been a direct fall-out of unabated migration from Bangladesh. The anti-migration agitation in the North-East had no shades of religion-based communalism in the beginning. However, gradually, rightist elements in Indian politics have tried to single out the Islamic character of the migration, making the discourse on migration and its resolution more complex. How national and regional political parties have differently perceived and constructed the theme of ‘migration’ to their own political advantage is beyond the scope of this paper. This is, however, important and relevant given the fact that during a critical phase of the Assam Agitation, it was led by a Muslim Vice-President of the AASU, Nural Hussain. There were also several instances where Assamese Muslims joined hands with Assamese Hindus in resisting attacks by Muslim immigrants.⁶⁵

Despite the Assam Accord, the migration problem in Assam still persists. Implementation of various clauses has been either hampered or slowed down due to lack of political will and determination. In 1983, the Illegal Migration (Determination by Tribunals) Act – the IMDT Act – was passed to tackle the migration issue. Only applicable to Assam, the Act provided for the establishment of tribunals to determine whether a person was an illegal migrant or not in order to enable government to expel illegal migrants from India. The Act proved ineffective. Its implementation was made cumbersome by the provision that the onus to prove citizenship of a person alleged to be an illegal migrant lay with the complainant and police, not with the accused. The number of deportees following the implementation of the IMDT Act fell sharply to just about 1501 in the 18 years after it came into force. This was against the 300000 illegal

⁶³ De, op.cit., p.78

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Udayan Mishra, ‘Immigration & Identity Transformation in Assam,’ op.cit., p. 1269.

migrants who were deported from Assam between 1962 and 1984 under the provisions of the Foreigners Act. The Act, in any case, was challenged because of its controversial nature and provisions. After a protracted legal battle, the Supreme Court struck it down and the Act was finally repealed in 2005. Since the influx of Bangladeshi migrants continues unabated, the ULFA, capitalising on the disappointment and frustration of the Assamese people, is carrying out its secessionist activities.

Situation in other States

The influx of illegal migrants has security implications for other North-Eastern states like Tripura and Nagaland. The Tripura Upajati Juba Samity (TUJS), formed by indigenous tribal youth in 1967 had been set up to oppose the large-scale settlement of Bangladeshi migrants in Tripura. There have been several others of which the most vocal anti-immigrant force has been the Tripura National Volunteers (TNV), floated in 1978.⁶⁶ It has been protesting violently against all immigrants and outsiders. Another insurgent group called the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), which was formed in 1990, had reportedly served notice to 'aliens' who crossed over to Tripura after 1949 (the year in which Tripura was politically merged with India), directing them either to leave the state or face consequences.⁶⁷ There is no doubt that the marginalisation of the tribal population in Tripura due to unabated migration from Bangladesh is one of the fundamental causes of inter-ethnic disturbances. Local tribals fear that as immigrants from Bangladesh have already put down new roots in Tripura, it was likely that the original inhabitants of Tripura would become rootless one day in their own land.⁶⁸

There is justification for such fear. Even though the decadal growth rate for Tripura during 1951-2001 shows a falling trend of 78, 36, 31, 34 and 16 per cent respectively, there is an aberration for the period 1981-91 with a 34.30 per cent growth rate.⁶⁹ This rise in the growth rate for the decade was due to Chakma refugees who have stayed on in Tripura since 1986, with 60,000 of them having been given shelter in the South District.⁷⁰

The influx of Chakma refugees and the Hajongs from the Chittagong Hill Tract (CHT) of Bangladesh has also led to ethnic disturbances in the states of Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. While the Mizos opposed demands by Chakmas for a centrally governed territory, the issue of their permanent residence in India became an issue in Arunachal Pradesh in the 1990s when the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union raised it. The issue soon became politicised and remains unresolved, despite the change in the state government.

⁶⁶ For details, see De, op.cit., pp.106-132

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.128

⁶⁹ Arunday Saha, 'Illegal Migration from Bangladesh to Tripura,' in B.B. Kumar(ed.), op.cit., p. 129.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

The agitation and secessionist movements like the ones in Assam and elsewhere in the North-East pose serious problems not only to national security but also to centre-state relations. Here lies the validity of securitisation of Bangladeshi migration to India.

Nepal

Nepali Identity and the Gorkha National Liberation Front

Nepali-speaking Indians have gradually become assertive not only in terms of asserting their ethnic identity but also in political terms. The Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) of Subhash Ghising, concentrated in the Darjeeling hill areas, demanded in the 1980s a separate Gorkha homeland within the Indian Federation. Ghising, making a distinction between the Nepalis of Nepal and Indian Nepalis, insisted that the latter are Gorkhas, their language is Gorkhali and their homeland Gorkhaland. He also wanted to replace the word 'Nepali' with 'Gorkha', in order to distinguish the Indian Nepalis from the people of Nepal. However, Ghising's logic had few takers. Ultimately, Ghising's demand for a separate homeland for the Indian Nepalis or Gorkhas was accommodated with the creation of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in West Bengal. The demand for statehood by Indian Nepalis got strong support from the Nepalis of the North-East, mainly because they see such a state as a possible sanctuary in the eventuality of their being evicted from their settlements.⁷¹

Although Ghising's demand was within the Indian Federation without any secessionist undertones, it still could have some security implications for India. Darjeeling district is the gateway to the entire North-East region and holds the key segment of the Chicken's Neck. This district also has common borders with Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal and even the Sino-Indian border is not very far. Any protracted disturbance in this area could lead to serious dislocation of communication and transport facilities between the North-Eastern region and the rest of India. It could make the entire region more volatile and vulnerable to all sorts of disturbances.

Similarly, Darjeeling's proximity to the ethnically sensitive areas of eastern Nepal might provide fertile ground for Nepali ethnicity to grow, giving rise to separatist tendencies. During the GNLF movement, Ghising linked the proposed Gorkhaland with Nepali territories, west of the Teesta River.⁷²

Greater Nepal

Ghising's demand for a separate Gorkhaland, which was temporarily settled with the creation of the autonomous Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council in 1988, may be indicative

⁷¹ A.C. Sinha, 'The Indians of Nepali Origin and Security of Northeast India', in Sinha & Subba (eds.), op.cit., p. 373.

⁷² L.R. Baral (2000), 'Nepali Migration to India: nature, Pattern and Consequences', in Upreti & Ramakant (eds.), op.cit., p. 73.

of the trends of greater ethnicisation and communalisation among the Nepalis living in the border. The protracted exploitation of the natural resources in Darjeeling district, continuing negligence by the Bengal government and, more importantly, the complete alienation of the hill population and the conscious induction of Bangladeshis in the plains of Darjeeling district have serious security ramifications. There are organisations like Bangla O Bangla Bhasa Samiti and Amra Bangali in the plains of Darjeeling district (Siliguri), which openly propagate communalism and linguistic jingoism.⁷³ Indian Bengalis have vociferously condemned these organisations. Both these organisations have a strong base among the illegal immigrants from Bangladesh who have changed the demographic pattern of the entire plain lands of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts. Bangladeshi immigrants are apprehensive that if Darjeeling is declared a separate state, the drive against detection and deportation of illegal migrants might be intensified. Consequently, they tend to ignite communal passions by labelling the entire hill people ‘foreigners’ and demanding their deportation. This could in fact lead to serious communal problems. Some indications of communal tension have already emerged.

An immediate corollary of such trends is the circulation of the idea of a ‘Greater Nepal’. Before the Anglo-Nepal War of 1814-15, imperial Nepal ruled over the entire central Himalayas; this is now identified with Greater Nepal. Though the concept of Greater Nepal has turned out to be wishful thinking on the part of some political activists and commentators, there is literature available on this theme.⁷⁴ Given the scattered Nepali diaspora in South Asia, some writers have observed that there may develop a ‘cultural Greater Nepal’ but it cannot evolve into a ‘political Greater Nepal’.⁷⁵

There have indeed been some attempts to create ‘Greater Nepal’. In July 1991, a Greater Nepal Committee was formed in Kathmandu with the aim of creating worldwide public opinion in its favour. The Committee demanded that India restore unconditionally to Nepal territories east of the River Mechi and west of the Mahakali.⁷⁶ However, all Nepali political parties, including the former Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, decried the demand.

A noted Nepali journalist, Kanak Mani Dixit, refutes the very idea of ‘Greater Nepal’ as an ‘improbability’ and a ‘whiff of political opportunism’. However, at the same time, he explains why the concept of Greater Nepal threatens India’s national and security interests. According to him, Greater Nepal, at its geographical widest, would be quite powerful, enveloping a swathe of the Himalayan rim land. It would control access to

⁷³ See reports, for example in the Telegraph (North Bengal edition), 21-22 October 2008, 22 December 2009, 23 January 2010 & 10 April 2010.

⁷⁴ See for example, Mahendra P Lama, “Kasko Ghoda ho Greater Nepal”, a fortnightly column known as “Serophero”, *Himal Khabar Patrika*, Kathmandu, 30 June 2003 (in Nepalese)

⁷⁵ Kanak Mani Dixit, ‘The Myth-Making of Greater Nepal’, in Sinha & Subba (eds.), op.cit., p.322

⁷⁶ A.C. Sinha, op.cit., p. 372.

Tibet with its as yet unexploited economic riches and command the water resources of the region and with it, the possibilities for hydropower generation, irrigation and flood control.⁷⁷ But he concludes that Nepali nationalism is Nepali citizen-specific and it does not extend to the outlying regions in India and 'Nepaliness' outside Nepal is a cultural marker that is too weak to give birth to militancy.⁷⁸

Assamese Response

During the Assam agitation (1979-85), though the primary target was the illegal Bangladeshi migrant, Nepali migrants were not spared either. The extent to which fourth to fifth generation Nepalis had been assimilated into the local community can be gauged from the fact that today there are several political leaders and intellectuals from the Nepali community in Assam, including the Speaker of the Assam Legislative Assembly, who play a critical role in the governance and decision making process. Despite their integration with the Asamiya nationality, they were later labelled as 'foreigners' and the 'Asamiya' mantle was lifted.⁷⁹ Like Bangladeshi migrants, they were also affected by the demand to strike the names of migrants from electoral rolls and to deport them. This certainly changed the existing relations between Nepalis and Asamiyas in Assam subsequent to the Assam agitation. Scholars like Lopita Nath believe that because of the changing relations, there was a sharpened consciousness of the traditional Nepali identity and the Gorkha past, Hindu traditionalism and the pan-Nepali solidarity movement. In other words, the 'submerged' identity of the Nepalis started re-manifesting itself. The Bodo movement, following the Assam agitation, also affected the Nepalis of Assam, who were subjected to an ethnic cleansing campaign.⁸⁰ Though the Assam Accord has not been fully implemented and the Bodo Movement has not been successful, these did succeed in making the Nepalis conscious of their communitarian identity, making them more vocal in their demand for rehabilitation and economic advantages.

Nevertheless, it must be conceded that in Assam, the Nepalis have not faced large-scale, intense hostility and violence by the Asamiyas. They have not been targeted like the Bangladeshi migrants. Perhaps, that is why Nath concludes that at no point in history have the Nepalis posed a threat, either demographically, socio-culturally or politically to the Asamiyas in their traditional homeland.⁸¹

Left-wing Extremism and Nepali Linkage

Though Greater Nepal may be an 'impossibility', it is likely to appear, particularly in the context of the spread of left-wing extremism in India and Nepal. It is reported that the Akhil Bharatiya Nepali Ekta Samaj (ABNES), an outfit of migrant Nepali residents

⁷⁷ Kanak Mani Dixit, op.cit., p. 332.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 337.

⁷⁹ Lopita Nath (2003), *The Nepalis in Assam*, Kolkata, p. 67.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 66.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 101.

in India, is working for the realisation of Greater Nepal. The ABNES, which was registered in Varanasi way back in 1979, had the stated objective of securing unity among immigrant Nepalis living in India and working for their welfare. But gradually, the organisation became involved in terrorism and conducted subversive activities. Ultimately, it started functioning as a front for Nepal's Maoist insurgents. The ABNES was banned by the Government of India under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) in July 2002. Yet, with a large cadre base and expanding membership, the ABNES has established an extensive network in India over the years, particularly in northern Bengal, the North-East, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where Nepalis are concentrated in large numbers.⁸² The Nepali Maoists' connection with migrant Nepalis in India stems from the support of a section of people of Nepali origin through outfits like ABNES.

Apart from this, the open border between India and Nepal has helped Nepali Maoists to establish linkages with India's Naxalite groups such as the People's War Group (PWG) and Maoist Communist Centre (MCC). It is believed that they have collaborated in laying a corridor, widely known as the Revolutionary Corridor (RC) or Compact Revolutionary Zone (CRZ), extending from Nepal across six Indian states, including Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh.⁸³ The purpose of the CRZ is to facilitate easy transportation of arms across their areas of influence and facilitate quick retreat to safe havens during times of intense security force operations in any part of the CRZ.

In the absence of any authentic documentation on the linkages between the Nepali Maoists and Indian Naxalites, it may be difficult to gauge the extent of influence of Nepali Maoists among Indian Nepalis and migrant Nepalis in India. Stray reports originating from different sources make it clear that they have already penetrated the rank and file of Nepali migrants in India, an example being the activities of ABNES. Recently, it has been reported that the Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (UCPN-M) has decided to express solidarity with Indian Maoists, who have now intensified their armed struggle against the state.⁸⁴

However, Indian Nepalis have always maintained a distance from these forces, though they speak the same language and have social and cultural affinities. Political parties and social and cultural organisations of Indian Nepalis have, in fact, very often warned Indian Nepalis to stay away from any move by organisations of Nepali immigrants.

Why Nepali Migration is not Securitised

Nepali migrants also pose security problems for India but there have been no political or security fallouts anywhere in India where Indian Nepalis are located, including in

⁸² Akhil Bharat Nepali Ekta Samaj (ABNES), available at www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/terroristoutfits/ABNES.htm.

⁸³ Nepal terrorist Groups- Maoist Insurgents, available at www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/nepal/terroristoutfits/index.html.

⁸⁴ 'Nepal Maoists say they will back Indian Maoists', The Indian Express, 27 June 2010.

Assam, West Bengal, Sikkim, Uttaranchal and Himachal Pradesh. True that during the heyday of the GNLF movement in the mid-1980s, many Indian Nepalis fled to Nepal in order to escape arrest or the hardships caused by the actions of police forces in Darjeeling district against the Gorkha militants. It was alleged there was a relationship between the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) of Darjeeling and the Nepalis of Nepal and that the former were being trained in camps in some districts of Nepal.⁸⁵ Similarly, when the Maoist movement was at its peak in Nepal during 2000-2006, a large number of supporters was suspected to be present among the migrant population in India. Because of similar ethnicity, Indian security officials started raiding and harassing Indian Nepalis who had nothing to do with the Maoist movement in Nepal. In fact, like in the past, the Indian Nepali maintained a clear distance from the migrant population during the entire course of the Maoist movement.

The security implications of Nepali migration to India have so far not been properly assessed nor have they been made an important part of the country's security discourse. Traditionally, the Indo- Nepal border has not been considered India's security perimeter as Indian concerns go beyond the geography of Nepal. Nepali migration is yet to be securitised. Even in some of dominant migration discourses like that of the S.K. Sinha Report, 1998, there is no mention of Nepali migrants, though it is well known that there is a substantial Nepali migrant population in Assam. One reason is the assimilation of Nepalis into mainstream India. A Nepali in Assam/India has a number of meaningful identities – a citizen and a soldier of the Indian armed forces, a Hindu, caste identity e.g. Chettri or Gurung, and one of the sub-nationalities in the Indian cultural commonwealth.⁸⁶ Secondly, the Indian Nepali population has become a major deterrent and a check on anti-Indian activities of migrant Nepalis because of the wariness with which Indian Nepalis view the possibility of being implicated in such activities. This is why even at the height of the Maoist movement, migrant Nepalis could not indulge in anti-Indian activities even in regions where Nepali- speaking people are in substantial numbers. Thirdly, Nepalis have not so far been linked to terrorist activities in India, unlike Bangladeshi migrants, who tend to get identified with jihadi terrorists because they are Muslims. Fourthly, since there are fewer permanent Nepali migrants to India's North-Eastern and northern states, they do not provoke a backlash among Indian citizens as they are not perceived as threatening Indian resources. In the general Indian psyche, migrant Nepalis are not viewed as security risks.

Despite the tendency to view Nepalis as part of the larger Indian culture and ethos, the rise of organisations like the ABNES indicates that migrant Nepalis are being communalised. The organisational strength of migrant Nepalis should not be ignored on emotional grounds as this could one day assume serious proportions and pose a security threat to India. Hence, at the government level, the pattern and nature of Nepali migration to India needs to be monitored and regulated.

⁸⁵ L.R.Baral (1990), *Regional Migrations, Ethnicity and Security*, Sterling, New Delhi, pp.100-101

⁸⁶ Lopita Nath, op.cit., p.81

VI: Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

The history of migrations from Bangladesh and Nepal to India makes it apparent that their pattern, nature and direction have been different. This could be because of their historical backgrounds, geographical variants, ethno-religious affinities, bilateral arrangements and political systems. Problems arise when the migration is illegal and poses multi-layered threats to the Indian state. Commonsense dictates that firstly, India's borders with Bangladesh and Nepal must be regulated; and secondly, that resident migrants need to be strategically dealt with to reduce, if not eliminate, the level of 'threats' they pose. Based on these two premises, some broad policy recommendations may be made, keeping in mind the age-old relationship between the three countries and, more importantly, the very nature and construct of our geography. These are enumerated below.

1. Both the Indo-Bangladesh and Indo-Nepal borders must be managed to India's best advantage. For this, the recommendations of the Group of Ministers on National Security (2001) and those of the National Security Advisory Board must be implemented.⁸⁷ A separate Department of Border Management needs to be created and made responsible for border management. Effective border management, including regulation of the porous and open border, border fencing, effective utilisation of border guarding forces and control by immigration check posts (ICPs) will check illegal migration from both Bangladesh and Nepal.
2. The porous and open nature of the Indo-Nepal border must be changed. There is no treaty or agreement to make the border between the two countries open and porous. The much talked-about 1950 Treaty does not contain any provision for such a system. On the other hand, such a system developed gradually to suit the needs of both countries. This is now increasingly proving to be a security risk, particularly for India. The existing state of affairs at the Indo-Nepal border needs to be changed, keeping in mind the recommendations of the Group of Ministers (2001).
3. Nepali migration to India has not been securitised. Given the state of affairs that exists today, it has to be securitised, particularly in the context of the growing Maoist threat to India and their cross-border linkages. The pattern and nature of Nepali migration to India needs to be monitored and regulated.
4. Although Bangladeshi migration has been securitised, action on the part of the government is lacking. Emotional considerations and petty political gains must not dictate policy making in India. The recommendations of the Group of Ministers (2001) include the following observation: "the massive illegal immigration poses a grave danger to our security, social harmony and economic wellbeing."⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Reforming the National Security System, Recommendations of the Group of Ministers, 2001, pp.58-96

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.60

5. It is a fact that migrants to India, both Bangladeshi and Nepali, continue to nurture their original national identity. This makes them attached to their home country. While India should not have any problem on this count, the government has to take adequate preventive as well as curative measures, so that their original 'identity', 'obligation', 'affiliation' and 'attachment' do not go against India's national interests. In other words, the immigrants have to be increasingly made a part of the Indian mainstream. This could be done through various constitutional means including a one-time offer of citizenship, if our resources and law permit.
6. One argument put forward is that in order to check migration from Bangladesh, India should assist in the economic development of that country. An enlarged aid package to Bangladesh is advocated. The logic is that with the economic development of Bangladesh, migration to India will decline.⁸⁹ However, 'social network' is the most important 'pull factor' that attracts Bangladeshi migrants to India. Second, the logic that India should contribute to the economic development of Bangladesh in order to check migration needs to be carefully examined.
7. In the case of Nepal, the 1950 Treaty needs to be revisited, particularly Articles VI and VII pertaining to reciprocal treatment meted to the nationals of one country in the territories of the other. This provision encourages and facilitates cross-border migration in an unregulated manner. If this is not in India's interests, it should be suitably amended to reflect present realities. It may be stated that the 1950 Treaty, as has been implemented, offers much greater benefits to Nepal than to India.
8. Finally, in order to control illegal migration that brings with it other problems like smuggling of narcotics, arms and weapons and cross-border terrorism, there should be compulsory registration of all citizens and non-citizens living in India. The Group of Ministers has already recommended that all citizens should be given a multi-purpose national identity card and that non-citizens should be issued identity cards of a different colour and design.⁹⁰ That the government has already started the process of issuing a unique identification number to its citizens is a step in the right direction.

⁸⁹ See, Mahendra P Lama (2006), "India's Aid Policy Towards Neighbours", in I.P Khosla (ed.) *Economic Diplomacy*, (New Delhi)

⁹⁰ Reforming the National Security System, op.cit., p. 85.

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