

Annexure 4

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Bangladeshi Infiltration Reaches New Territories

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(The views expressed by the author are his own)

After returning from the 28th India-Bangladesh Border Coordination Conference in Dhaka, the BSF chief A K Mitra disclosed that nearly 12 lakh Bangladeshis who had entered India on valid papers have disappeared between 1972 to 2005. He was quoting this figure from the intelligence reports of the West Bengal government. This is one of the few official figures about the illegal Bangladeshi immigrants whose number has been estimated to be around 20 million and growing by the day. Out of this number nearly 6 million illegal Bangladeshis are residing in Assam only, where they have turned five of the bordering districts into migrant majority areas. What is however, most concerning is that these illegal immigrants are now threatening to swamp tribal and rural areas of Assam and other parts of the country.

This development has been taking place under the nose of the authorities some of whom could not act because of the earlier Illegal Migrants' Determination by Tribunals (IMDT) Act. But even after this Act became defunct due to the Supreme Court judgment the deportation of Bangladeshis has not been taking place at a desired pace prompting the Guwahati High Court to say in a recent judgment on July 23, 2008 that the Bangladeshi migrants have become the kingmakers. The landmark judgment of the high court also observed that a strong political will to free Assam from illegal Bangladeshis was the need of the hour. The judgment was passed while disposing the petitions of 61 petitioners after they were pronounced as foreigners by the respective Foreigners' Tribunals.

One of these migrants, Md Kamaluddin was in possession of a Pakistani passport on which he had travelled to Bangladesh and subsequently reached Assam where he even filed a nomination during the 1996 Assembly polls. Chief minister Tarun Gogoi criticised the High Court judge's comment. However, the immediate reaction of Gogoi was nothing but an attempt to push the issue under the carpet. Earlier in 2005 an outgoing judge of IMDT Tribunal had made similar remarks.

The court remarks have prompted some political organizations like the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) to threaten another Assam Agitation to take the "oust-Bangladeshi mission." Their activists along with the Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chattra Parishad (AJYCP) rounded up hundreds of people, suspected to be Bangladeshis, from various parts of the state and later handed them over to the police.

The growing sentiment against illegal immigration has led to social tension in Assam. This led to a clash in northern Assam's Udalguri district during a 12-hour general strike enforced by a minority students' group. In these clashes two people were killed and six

others were injured.

Unfortunately, any move against the illegal immigrants soon takes communal colour. The Assam United Democratic Front (AUDF) led by Badruddin Ajmal in a statement said that it would not remain quiet if the religious sentiments of the minorities were hurt on the pretext of dealing with foreigners.

The AUDF working president Hafiz Rashid Choudhury even suggested that the government of India should try and persuade Bangladesh government to sign extradition treaty. The Indian government has been pursuing this matter with the Bangladeshi government but its effort has not succeeded. First for the Bangladesh government, the issue of illegal migration does not exist. Second this treaty would also necessitate that Bangladesh hands over insurgent leaders staying in that country. For that the government is not ready.

The problem of illegal migration is worsening by the day. The illegal migrants are now no longer limited to major cities and their suburbs. They are now entering into rural and tribal areas. In Assam the problem of illegal migration now threatens to swamp even the tribal areas. According to Stelin Ingti, president, Karbi Students' Union about one lakh illegal immigrants are staying in the Karbi Anglong district. With the problem of infiltration of Bangladeshi immigrants now spreading to tribal belts of Assam, the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) has joined hands with two tribal students' unions - the Karbi Students' Union (KSU) and All Dimasas Students' Union (ADSU) to fight the problem in an effective manner.

The increasing pressure on migrants in upper Assam make some of them move to the five immigrant-dominated districts of Dhubri, Goalpara, Kokrajhar, Morigaon and Nagoan in Lower Assam. This time a large number of immigrants trickled into Meghalaya plains. According to the Garo Students Union (GSU), the plains areas, especially Phulbari, Rajabala, Mahendraganj and Tikrikilla areas of the Garo hills, are a cause for concern as the Bangladeshis have made their homes in these border areas. There are instances when illegal Bangladeshi settlers have married residents in the border areas to claim rights and privileges from Meghalaya. To avoid an Assam like situation, the Garo Students Union (GSU) has threatened to launch an eviction drive against illegal Bangladeshi migrants.

Assam is now acting as a gateway through which illegal migrants are trickling in other states of northeast like Manipur, Nagaland and Meghalaya. Migrants move directly to Tripura because of contiguous porous border.

Central government has taken some steps to check the migration. The most important step has been fencing of the border. This fencing work is now nearing completion. Though the fencing has not completely stopped the illegal movement of Bangladeshis it has definitely put check. In case of Tripura out of 860 km porous border that it shares with Bangladesh, over 700 km have been fenced and the remaining portion would be fenced soon. This has also improved law and order situation in the bordering areas where predators from Bangladesh used to attack villages on Indian side.

India shares its longest border with Bangladesh. The India-Bangladesh border runs along 2,979 kilometers (1,851 miles) of land while 1,116 kilometers is riparian. Border patrolling

poses real challenge in riverine area. It has also been found that the earlier scheme of floating border posts have proved to be a non-starter. Hence in its place the BSF has decided to use speed boats to patrol. The government has also decided to raise two India Reserve Battalions (IRBs) and deploy for riverine policing.

The improved patrolling on the Indo-Bangladesh seems to have shown some result. The BSF chief recently stated that in 2007 only 807 illegal immigrants were arrested along the Indo-Bangla border in comparison to five years ago when thousands of such persons were apprehended by BSF.

However, the difficulty in crossing the land border has not deterred Bangladeshis from coming to India. Many of them are now taking sea route. They are now reaching newer states like Orissa through boats. A large number of Orissa districts are now infested with these migrants. Lakhs of Bangladeshi infiltrators are staying in Kendrapara, Nawarangpur, Malkangiri, Bhubaneswar, Puri, Chilika, Ganjam, Balasore, Keonjhar and several other places.

Bangladeshis are now moving into rural area of several states. In West Bengal illegal Bangladeshi migrants have trickled into parts of rural Bengal, including Nandigram, over the years, and settled down as sharecroppers with the help of local Left leaders. Several districts of Bihar are also similarly affected.

Our border guards can play their role only on the border, which is already very difficult because of the porous nature of this border. Unless, they get help from the civil administration, no effective check on the problem of illegal immigration can be exercised. In fact, often the civil administration rather than helping the BSF is found helping the illegal migrants. In a number of cases, the papers of these migrants are ready even before they have entered Indian territory. There are touts operating on the border who are providing all kinds of services for sums as little as 700 Rupees. Even when the BSF manages to catch some of these illegal migrants they face legal hassles and hostile local population as most of these bordering districts in Assam as well as West Bengal has become Bangladeshi dominant. FIRs are lodged implicating BSF officers. Bangladeshis are often helped in the effort by the local politicians.

The problem of of illegal immigration from Bangladesh has already become a threatening one. In the past, it affected the demography of several Indian states, but now it is posing serious internal security threat, as among these migrants a large number of them are Jihadi elements. They have been found to be involved in many of the recent bomb-blasts which took place in India. They also act as sleeper cells of terrorist groups like HUJI and LeT. Intelligence agencies like the ISI and the DGFI are also implementing their disruptive designs through them. It's high time that a coordinated effort is made to check this menace.

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