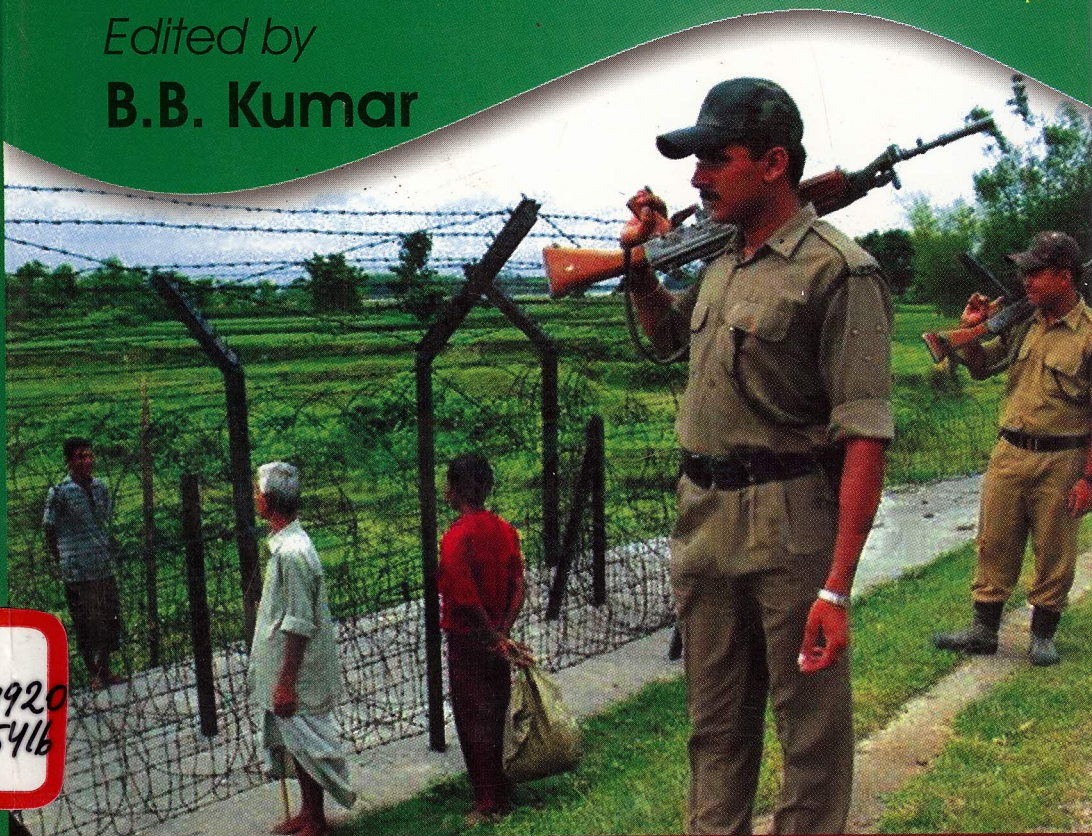


Illegal Migration from Bangladesh

Edited by
B.B. Kumar



Illegal Migration from

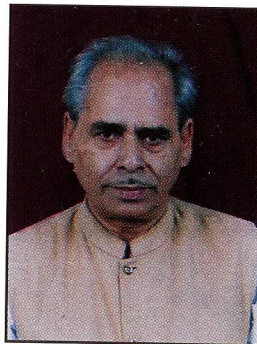
Bangladesh

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B.B. Kumar

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This compendium of twenty-three papers, presented at a national seminar, organised by Astha Bharati, Delhi, in association with the Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research, addresses a wide range of issues concerning the complex problem of illegal migration from Bangladesh.

Tracing the factors responsible for illegal migration, both historical and politico-economic, the contributors analyse its implications for India in general and the North Eastern states in particular—pushing high population growth, disturbing the demographic texture of population, threatening internal security, deteriorating economy and influencing electoral politics.



B.B. Kumar, M.A. (Hindi), M.Sc. (Chemistry), M.Sc., Ph.D. (Anthropology), is the Secretary, Astha Bharati, Delhi and the Editor of the quarterly journals, *Dialogue* and *Chintan Srijan*. He is Principal (Retd.)

of Science College, Kohima and Sao Chang Government College, Tuensang. He was member of the Academic Council, Executive Council, University Court, College Development Council, Examination Committee, School Board of Physical Sciences, Board of Undergraduate Studies in Chemistry and Board of Pre-University Studies of the North Eastern Hill University. He was Chairman of a Board of Studies and member of another one of Gandhigram Rural University.

Dr. Kumar is founder member of India Central Asia Foundation, New Delhi. He has written/edited/co-authored 136 books and more than 100 papers.

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Illegal Migration from Bangladesh

Editor

B.B. Kumar



ASTHA BHARATI, DELHI

About the Author

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Foreword

Insistence on excessive secrecy in all matters has been the hallmark of governance in India, irrespective of which political party is in power, whether at the centre or in the states. It may be pertinent to recall what Justice K.K. Mathew, quoting Justice Polak, stated in a Supreme Court case [1979 (3) SCC], "The secrecy system has become much less a means by which government protects national security than a means by which government safeguards its reputation, dissembles its purpose, buries its mistakes, manipulates its citizens, maximises its power and corrupts itself." The illegal migration from Bangladesh is one issue which brings out how true are these perceptive observations. Due to the conspiracy of silence of all political parties, in varying degrees, the issue, in spite of its serious social, political, economic, security, and law and order implications has not been permitted to come on the national agenda. If at all, it is viewed as a regional problem affecting the North-East and a few states. Against this background, the comprehensive discussion in this book of the various facets of this complex question needs to be widely and enthusiastically welcomed.

In analysing illegal migration from Bangladesh, it is necessary to take note of a few salient factors. The fact that there was considerable migration in Assam from erstwhile East Bengal, when it was a part of India, is important but cannot be a justification for the continuance of the same trend after independence. Illegal migration from East Pakistan and later Bangladesh, must be seen in the radically changed context of the partition of the country on the basis of the tenuous, totally mischievous and ill-conceived two-nation theory. Those in Bangladesh who are now advocating the spacious concept of *lebensraum* or living space ought to have paused and pondered on it before clamouring for creation of Pakistan. The fact that the Muslim League was making demands for other contiguous districts/parts of districts of Assam, Bengal and Bihar as a part of

East Pakistan can also hardly be lost sight of. The process of Islamisation being continued through illegal migration cannot be disassociated from this tragic history of the partition of the country. The mischievous ploy adopted by sham "secular" political parties in India to give a communal colour to the question, therefore, needs to be exposed as nothing less than anti-national.

There have been repeated allegations over the years that successive Congress(I) governments in Assam had actively encouraged migration from Bangladesh. The record of CPI(M) government in West Bengal has been no better. Some political parties have unabashedly stood in the way of deletion of names of illegal migrants from the voters' list. Not too long ago, there was practically a revolt in the Assam Cabinet over the deletion of such names. Unfortunately even the BJP, the so-called fascist Hindu party, did not have the courage to take a principled stand on the concerned issues when it came to power at the centre. This reluctance was amply evident from a number of significant pointers. **First**, though the Working Group on Border Management appointed by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government, of which I was the chairman, had made a recommendation that its report should be published to make the people aware of the critical issues pertaining to management of international borders, the report was not made public. **Second**, the government failed to issue an ordinance to repeal the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) (IMDT) Act, which was yet another major recommendation of the Working Group. In fact, the BJP, which was the main constituent of the government, had itself repeatedly advocated the repeal of the Act when it was in opposition, presumably as only a political rhetoric. It is true that the NDA government did not have a majority in the Rajya Sabha. But, as was done in the case of enactment of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), a joint session of both the Houses could have been called to convert the Ordinance for repeal of the IMDT Act into an Act. The security implications of IMDT Act were no less significant than in the case of POTA. But, perhaps, the BJP too was worried about the combined impact on the Muslims of enactment of POTA and repeal of the IMDT Act. How is BJP different then than the Congress (I) and the other so-called sham "secular" political parties? **Third**, the

concentration of *Madarsas* and mosques, set up with substantial foreign funding, in border areas whose demographic composition has undergone a radical change, is well documented. The NDA government failed to take any action to have this proliferation brought under close scrutiny of the concerned state and central agencies. No new law had to be passed for the purpose. The Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), which has been rampantly misused by the government to harass non-governmental organisations (NGOs), has remained a dead letter so far as foreign contribution for spread of fundamentalist, religious and terrorist ideology is concerned. It is true that most of these foreign funds are received through *havala* transactions but a close watch on such transactions through various agencies could have curtailed the flow to some extent. As recommended by the Working Group, it could have been made mandatory that approval of district authorities would be necessary before establishing any places of worship or *Madarsas* in the border belt of about 10 kilometres. The mainstreaming of *Madarsas* and having state level boards to oversee their activities, at least in so far as border areas are concerned, is long over-due. But due to apprehension of inviting the ire of Muslims, political parties are reluctant to even talk of such matters, leave aside taking any action thereon. Needless to say, the process of Arabisation of Muslims is a factor which can be overlooked only at the peril of national security.

Major recommendations of the Working Group on management of the Bangladesh border, which were accepted by the Group of Ministers (GOM) of the NDA government, have remained without any energetic and time-bound actions though nearly five years have elapsed since then. The first was the adoption of the principle of one border one Force. This was meant to make the concerned Force, whether the Border Security Force (BSF), the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) or the Assam Rifles, responsible and accountable squarely for their actions and inactions. Currently, since more than one Force is operating in the same area, there is often a tendency to pass the buck from one to the other. The second related recommendation, which too has been accepted by GOM, is to lay down clear and unambiguous criteria for judging the performance of each Force. This would enable, for example, making an assessment

as to how effective has been the BSF in preventing illegal migration from across the border. The Working Group had recommended to distinguish between the Border Guarding Forces which are to be used exclusively for deployment on the border and the other paramilitary and police forces, such as the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Railway Protection Force (RPF) and the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), which are to be used for internal security duties. The Working Group had recommended a clear-cut policy announcement that Border Guarding Forces will not be withdrawn from the border, except in exceptional circumstances, and within a defined period, of say five years, steps will be taken to adequately augment the strength of the state and central police forces for internal security duties. There is no evidence to show that such time-bound action programme is being implemented by the centre with any firm public commitment. Yet another important recommendation was to have a no-man's land all along the border which can be fully sensitised. Currently, the most unnatural, man-made border between India and Bangladesh, drawn by Radcliff, sitting in his office, in just a few weeks, often runs through houses and divides them between the two countries. The cultivation of land is right upto the border with often neighbours tilling each other's land, whether he is a Bangladeshi or Indian. In such a situation, it is impossible to stop illegal migration and border-crossing in any sense of the term. Unfortunately, there is no political will to implement this recommendation. Yet another recommendation was that, due to the peculiar geographical features and reverine conditions, the border fencing in several stretches of Bangladesh border can hardly be effective to prevent illegal migration. While in some areas, border fencing would be effective, in some others it is a futile and wasteful expenditure and to rely on such fencing will be fool-hardy. It is not clear what steps are being taken to review the present policy and guard against such contingencies by other suitable measures. The Working Group had made a strong recommendation to substantially augment the water wing of the BSF to enable BSF to address the problem effectively. The GOM had concurred in it but there is no indication of the concrete steps taken so far. These are only a few illustrative examples of how the policies have continued to drift over the years, including during the NDA regime in Delhi. Looking to the

pathological hatred of the constituents of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government for its predecessor, it will be a surprise if any of the major decisions of the NDA government on this subject are followed up vigorously.

A reference may be made to the efforts I made in my capacity as Union Home Secretary, way back in 1992, to bring this issue to the forefront and how they failed to make any headway. It was on 24 March 1992 that I convened the first ever meeting of the chief secretaries of the concerned states and the Union Territory of Delhi to discuss a package of measures which could be adopted on an all-India basis to deal with the frightening problem of illegal migration from Bangladesh. It came as a surprise to me that, even at the official level, there was reluctance on the part of some states, and particularly West Bengal and Bihar, to deal with the problem firmly. In spite of this, I pursued the matter further and persuaded the Union Home Minister to hold a meeting at his level. Accordingly, a meeting of the chief ministers was held on 28 September 1992 under the chairmanship of the Union Home Minister. The background note and the agenda prepared for the meeting were given wide publicity to create national awareness of the issues. The proposed programme of action included, among others, strengthening and modernisation of BSF, construction of border roads and fencing, strengthening of the Prevention of Infiltration of Foreigners (PIF) scheme and the Mobile Task Force (MTF) scheme, issue of identity cards to *bonafide* residents in border areas, organising a campaign from time to time for creating public awareness of the problem, keeping close watch on and plugging the avenues which provide protection to illegal migrants and ensuring punitive action thereon, safeguards against easy access to certain unintended benefits to illegal migrants, safeguards against the admission of illegal migrants or their wards into educational institutions, safeguards against their acquisition of immovable property, safeguards against inclusion of names in the voters' list, strict enforcement of protected area/restricted area orders, identifying villages prone to influx of illegal migrants, administrative and legal safeguards against employment of illegal migrants, and enactment of a central legislation for issue of identity cards. The major features of the proposed legislation were also circulated to the state governments for their comments. The

background note had emphasised that “the threat posed by the illegal migrants to the economy and socio-cultural and political fabric of the country requires a “multi-pronged strategy”. It is evident that “the problem of illegal migration needs to be tackled by formulating effective strategy jointly by the central and the state governments.” It can be seen that the comprehensive proposals placed before the chief ministers’ meeting were unexceptional and should have been readily endorsed by the chief ministers. But, I was in for another surprise. The chief ministers of West Bengal and Bihar were opposed to any such action plan being adopted at the meeting. The draft of the press note which was proposed to be issued did not meet with their approval. A great deal of persuasion was required on the part of the Union Home Minister to make them agree to the issue of the press note. He had to repeatedly urge that if a consensus on the subject was not arrived at, it will convey a very wrong message to the country on this very vital subject and weaken whatever efforts were being made at the time to contain the problem. Finally, reluctantly, the press communiqué was agreed upon for release but it was clear that the programme of action adopted at the meeting, for public consumption, would remain on paper. Nothing has changed over the last thirteen years since then and now the figure of illegal migrants from Bangladesh should be nearly 20 million.

As can be seen, the programme of action discussed as far back as 1992 included all the important elements that are crucial for tackling problem of illegal migration. They are being suggested all these years and also find a mention in the papers contained in this book. But, for want of political will, there has been no progress in respect of anyone of them so far. Neither has there been the pressure of public opinion which could have forced the governments to take the necessary steps. This is borne out by yet another significant pointer. The urgency of instituting a scheme for issue of identity cards to all *bonafide* residents is being talked about for years since independence. A pilot scheme for the issue of such cards was first sanctioned by the Central Government in 1986 for selected areas of the states of Gujarat and Rajasthan. Significantly, the North-Eastern states were not considered vulnerable enough to be covered in the pilot scheme. The objectives of the pilot scheme were to register *bonafide* residents, collect reliable information regarding the status

of residents and to check the movement of visitors staying for over 30 days in the areas covered under the scheme. Subsequently, the states of Punjab and J & K also decided to implement the scheme in their border areas. The scheme was reviewed by the Committee of Secretaries in 1990 when it was decided to extend it to the border areas of all border states, in the first instance. Accordingly, the scheme was sanctioned for the border areas of Assam, Mizoram and Tripura in March 1991. The fact that illegal migration has continued unabated in spite of this scheme shows that it has remained on paper. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has got at least two comprehensive studies done, during the last decade, by reputed institutions to examine the feasibility and workability of the implementation of the scheme on an all India basis. In spite of this, the central legislation for issue of identity cards has not made any headway. Neither has any political party insisted on it being passed expeditiously. If such a legislation had been in force, infructuous expenditure on schemes initiated by various authorities for issue of identity cards such as the voter’s identity card by the Election Commission of India, Permanent Account Number (PAN) by the income tax department, and Market Participant and Investor Identification Number (MAPIN) by SEBI (which has been held in abeyance pending further examination) could have been avoided.

Similar sad neglect is to be seen in respect of the preparation of the register of citizens. This scheme too has come up for discussion from time to time since independence but there has been no political will to implement it. If action had been taken on both these issues, India would not have found itself as helpless and vulnerable as at present. This shows the lack of foresight and resolve on the part of the political leadership of this country even in matters concerning national security.

The public interest litigation (PIL) praying for scrapping of the IMDT Act, which by any standard was a monstrosity and clearly undermined the interests of the country, could come up for final decision in the supreme court after a long delay of nearly five years. It is difficult to believe that such an ill-conceived and totally counter-productive legislation was a part of the Assam Accord which was supposed to address the problems faced by that state. This was yet another legislation which was passed by parliament without any

scrutiny or application of mind on the basis of a brute majority of the ruling political party and is an eloquent commentary on the capability of that institution to function as the highest law-making forum in the country. The fact that this law could remain on the statute book for over two decades speaks volumes of the efficacy of the democratic processes and institutions in the country. The affidavits filed by the successive state and central governments too show how certain political parties have continued to woo the Muslims blatantly at the cost of national interest. The final decision of the apex court scrapping the IMDT Act is a matter of some satisfaction but, looking to the lack of commitment of the political parties to address the issue, one wonders whether this by itself will take us far. It would be recalled that the Shiv Sena-BJP coalition government in Maharashtra took up in about 1997-98 a programme to identify the Bangladeshi nationals in Mumbai and to have them deported. All necessary legal procedures under the Foreigners Act were followed, cases were instituted in courts and, thereafter, with the orders of the courts, action to proceed with the deportation of the illegal migrants was taken. When the Maharashtra police escorted the foreigners to Calcutta on way to the Bangladesh border, they were attacked by hooligans and had to face demonstrations by left-leaning and so-called "secular" political parties. The West Bengal police declined to give any help. There was a clamour in the "secular" media against the move of the Government of Maharashtra to identify and deport illegal migrants. Finally, the illegal migrants could not even be taken up to the Bangladesh border and eventually returned to Mumbai to live happily ever after! This clearly shows that unless there is public awareness of the gravity of the issue, there is hardly any possibility of change in the present stance of the political parties.

The over-all public apathy in matters pertaining to national security has been evident in other recent instances as well. The clamour for abolition of the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Act (TADA) and later the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) on the ground that these legislations were against the Muslims was ludicrous, to say the least. The mere fact that more Muslims were arrested and charged under these enactments than non-Muslims did not mean that the Acts discriminated against them. During the

insurgency in Punjab, a number of Sikhs too were prosecuted under TADA. But, there was so much clamour by vested interests that the Congress (I) government led by P.V. Narasimha Rao permitted TADA to lapse. Immediately after coming to power, UPA government repealed the POTA, which was a much more toned down version of TADA, to prove its credentials to the Muslims. Another recent instance was of the circular re-issued by the MHA, a few years after it was originally issued, making it obligatory on a person, with whom a foreigner may be staying, to inform the police if the foreigner over-stayed beyond the visa period. These unexceptional instructions too had to be withdrawn due to clamour in the English media. And this is at the time when several other countries have passed draconian laws to meet the threats posed to their national security. It is amazing to see that though India has been a prime target of terrorist violence since 1990, there is total public apathy and disdain for matters concerning the security of the country.

It is a matter of regret that India has failed to raise the issue of illegal migration with the Government of Bangladesh in a serious and concerted manner over all these years. At one stage, it was believed that the settlement of *Tin Bigha* question will create the proper climate for finding a solution to this long standing issue. This has proved futile. Thereafter, it was believed that the settlement of sharing of Ganga waters will provide the opportunity to bring up this issue for an amicable bilateral resolution. This too has proved to be a non-starter. In fact, during his visit to Dacca for these negotiations, the then External Affairs Minister, I.K. Gujral, had stated that New Delhi had no plans to link water-sharing with any other outstanding issues between the two countries. On its part, the Government of Bangladesh has taken the extreme position that the problem of illegal migration is India's own creation and there is no migration from that country at all. The Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), which is a counter-part of BSF, has been most callous, unreasonable and unco-operative in its actions. There have been frequent instances of firing by BDR on the border. Against this background, it is difficult to believe that, soon after the creation of Bangladesh, an agreement was entered into by India and Bangladesh which envisaged close co-operation between the BSF and BDR, including joint operations by the two Forces, joint border posts and so on. These are the new realities of

relationship between India and Bangladesh. But, it would be impossible to find any long term and lasting solution to the problem of illegal migration without active co-operation and help from the Bangladesh Government.

Illegal migration from Bangladesh is no longer a regional problem which can be pushed under the carpet. These migrants are now spread in several states and in distant places such as Rajasthan, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and so on. They have become so much a part of the citizenry of the country that one of them was, in fact, appointed as a special executive magistrate in Mumbai! They exert considerable influence on election results, not only in several constituencies in Assam, West Bengal and Bihar but also in Delhi and some other states.

How to deal with millions of these illegal migrants is a question to which there are no easy answers, particularly if political parties in India consider protection of Bangladeshi migrant Muslims imperative for nursing their Muslim vote-banks. Taking recourse to legal action under the Foreigners Act and to put up and pursue cases against millions of illegal migrants in courts will be next to impossible. The easy way out, which is effectively being advocated by a number of political parties, will be to regularise their stay. But, this will encourage more and more Bangladeshis to infiltrate in India. And there would be reception committees of "secular" political parties at the border to receive them with open arms! Sooner than later, pressures will build up to give them Indian citizenship. A reference may be made in this context to the proliferation of slums in metropolitan cities such as Delhi and Mumbai and other large urban conglomerations. Regularisation of hutments, time and again, has encouraged more people to flock to the cities and encroach on public and private lands with impunity. Since such slums are vote-banks, at the time of each election for the state legislature and parliament, the year for regularisation of hutments is brought forward. This whole process has given rise to a new Mafia which has made millions of rupees by encroaching on vacant lands and public places with active partnership of concerned public functionaries and selling the plots for construction of hutments. The same thing will happen once we publicly adopt the policy of regularisation of the stay of illegal migrants. There is, therefore, no alternative to reversing the flow of

illegal migrants and sending them back. But the question is whether India is prepared to adopt such a firm policy. If the past experience is any guide, the unequivocal answer is No.

Illegal migration is due to both the pull and push factors. Foremost among these are the economic factors. Better employment opportunities in India act as a pull factor while the poverty, subsistence living, ravages caused by floods and other natural calamities in Bangladesh act as push factors. This has to be accepted as a ground reality. In the coming years, these factors will undoubtedly intensify. It must also be accepted that there are several menial, agricultural and other jobs which Indian citizens are reluctant to do. The emoluments on which Bangladeshi migrants (and illegal migrants in particular) are prepared to work are also much less than the Indians. Being unorganised, they can be exploited by their employers much more easily than the Indian labour. All these factors must not be lost sight of in evolving the future policy. One way to deal with these ground realities would be to institute a scheme of work permits by which Bangladeshi migrants can be permitted to work in India for a specified period. The Working Group had recommended adoption of such a policy. The other step, to which a reference was made earlier, would be to enact a law prohibiting employment of a Bangladeshi, other than one who has a work permit. Such laws are in operation in a number of Western countries and even in the Middle East. This suggestion was a part of the package proposed for the meeting of the chief ministers convened by the Union Home Minister way back in 1992. Unfortunately, as in the case of several other suggestions, this too has remained without any action.

Knowledgeable observers of the scene have expressed fears that it would not be surprising if the future chief minister of Assam is one of the illegal migrants. Constitution of India does not bar a person of foreign origin from holding even the highest constitutional position in the country once he acquires citizenship. As the things stand, anyone who enters India from Bangladesh, even illegally, becomes Indian citizen in no time. And with national leaders like Ramvilas Paswan who, after the elections to the Bihar Assembly in early 2005, was prepared for any compromise in the formation of a Ministry if the chief minister was to be a Muslim, this day will not be

far off. In any case, most present incumbents of high political offices in the country are taking the same stand on illegal migration as a chief minister, or for that matter a prime minister drawn from the ranks of illegal migrants, would take!

The above discussion brings out that it would be impossible to find a lasting solution to this gigantic problem unless pressure of public opinion is built up to exert influence on the political parties to address the underlying issues with urgency and a firm commitment. This would call for concerted action by the civil society including various pressure groups, NGOs, print and electronic media, and intellectuals and influential persons who are fearless and committed enough to lend their names for this national cause. The present tendency to stigmatise anyone, who speaks on this subject with some fervour and earnestness, as communal and Hindu fascist has been largely responsible for the neglect of this subject. It is high time persons from all walks of life, and primarily the Indian Muslims, come forward to espouse this cause. This will make all the difference to the perceptions and the attitudes of political parties. The first step in this direction should be to insist on the Central Government bringing out a white paper on the subject for national debate and discussion. I trust this book, which provides deep insights in and highlights many facets of this complex question, would go a long way in strengthening these efforts.

5 August 2005.

Dr. Madhav Godbole

Preface

Astha Bharati, Delhi organized a National Seminar on "Illegal Migration from Bangladesh" in Delhi on November 27-28, 2001 and a Repeat Seminar on the same topic in Guwahati on February 21-22, 2003. The first seminar was organised in association with the Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research (C-NES). The seminar was attended by senior scholars, members of Parliament, former senior officials, media specialists, non-government groups and others from the North East and other parts of the country. The opinions expressed are those of the eminent scholars who have deeply studied the problem or those who had the opportunity to handle it. This volume includes their papers and the writes-up based on the extempore deliberations. The reports of the seminars and their recommendations are included in the annexures of the book. The population data and other relevant information are also given in the annexures.

The illegal migration of the Bangladeshis is a serious problem the country is facing today. It is no more a regional problem, as they are spreading throughout the country now. Bangladesh is allowing its soil to be used by ISI against India and her citizens as ISI operatives and agents of fundamentalism. Their nexus with Indian terrorist groups is a well-known phenomenon. The aliens are posing grave problem for our internal and external security. The changing population texture is making Indo-Bangladesh border fluid. The aliens not only share the benefits of our development schemes, but also indulge in smuggling, drug trafficking, etc. A large number of Bangladeshis find place in the voters' lists and their grip over our electoral process is increasing day by day. Their growing hold in our national life is assuming worrisome proportion. Their nefarious design of greater Bangladesh and claim of *lebensraum* or living space in India adds new dimension to the problem. All this necessitates greater awareness among the Indian people about the

gravity of the problem. We hope that this publication may serve the purpose to some extent.

The publication of this edited volume is delayed due to unavoidable reasons. At this juncture, I remember and thank the organizers, resource persons and the participants of the two seminars. I specially thank Shri J.N. Roy, Treasurer, Astha Bharati whose efforts made two seminars, whose proceedings find place in this volume, successful. I also thank Sarvashri Sanjoy Hazarika, Mrinal Miri, Jayanta Madhab, D.N. Bezboruah, Prakash Singh, Kamaleshwar Bora, Naresh Chandra, N.N. Vohra, Professor J.K. Roy, Professor Udayan Misra, K.P.S. Gill, Dr. Kumar Suresh Singh, R.P. Joshi and all others who helped us in various ways in getting our endeavour succeed. Shri Madhav Godbole, former Home Secretary, Government of India has kindly written scholarly foreword for the book. I thank him for the same. I also thank Shri Ashok Kumar Mittal of Concept Publishing Company for publication of the book.

B.B. Kumar

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Introduction

B.B. KUMAR

The migrants from Bangladesh may be broadly categorised into: (i) Hindu refugees and (ii) illegal Muslim immigrants. The Hindu population in Bangladesh has grown by a bare two million in 40 years, from 9.2 million in 1951 to 11.1 million in 1991. There are a large number of people who are missing. A Bangladesh scholar, based on the growth rate of the population of that country, found the missing Hindu population of that country to be approximately five million. And where have these people gone? These traumatised, frightened and brutalised lot have come to India. These Hindus are not migrants, they are true refugees.¹ It needs mention that the percentage of Hindus and Buddhists in Bangladesh was 33.93 per cent in 1901. It decreased from 29.61 per cent in 1941 to 11.37 per cent in 1991.² The minority population is less than ten per cent in that country today.

Illegal Muslim migration from Bangladesh to India became well-known phenomenon a decade after the partition of the country. Initially, it was mostly restricted to the North-East, West Bengal and the eastern fringe of Bihar. Now, practically every part of the country is within their reach. The population growth rates of Bangladesh and its neighbouring states of India provide abundant evidence of large-scale infiltration from that country to India. The Census report of Bangladesh of 1991 was not compatible with its fertility rate of 4.5 per cent. The said report placed the annual PGR of that country during 1981-91 at 2.1 per cent, whereas United Nations Population Fund estimated it at 2.7 per cent. This disparity was due to infiltration from Bangladesh to India.³

The Census report of Bangladesh of 1991 talked of the unique phenomenon of missing population, estimated initially at ten million, and subsequently at eight million, comprising of 1.73 million Hindus and 6.27 million Muslims. There were two million missing voters

whose names have been deleted from the Voters' list of Bangladesh during 1991–95. These obviously point towards large-scale immigration from that country to India.⁴

The implications of large-scale immigration from Bangladesh to this country are going to be very grave. It is adversely effecting our economy and social environment; creating law and order problem wherever they are present in sizeable number. The illegal immigrants have become bold enough to commit robbery even in Delhi.

Some of the serious implications of the influx of the aliens need special mention:

- (i) The influx of the aliens is responsible for very high population growth in certain parts of the country, especially in the west Bengal, North-East, parts of Bihar and Jharkhand. Assam's population increased from 15 million to about 23 million during 1971–1991. The PGR of West Bengal during 1981–91 was as high as 24.55 per cent. It declined to 17.84 per cent during 1991–2001 but the PGR in the border districts of North 24-Pargana, Murshidabad and Malda was very high. It was 22.64 per cent, 23.7 per cent and 24.77 per cent respectively. The Growth of Muslim population in many districts of Assam and West Bengal during 1991–2001 was abnormally high. Karimganj and Nagaon districts became Muslim majority districts. Marigaon of Assam and Malda of West Bengal are just to follow. (See Annexure VIIIA).
- (ii) Infiltration is disturbing the demographic texture of the population. The PGR for the Hindus and the Muslims in West Bengal during 1981–91 was 24.73 per cent and 36.89 per cent respectively. The disparity in the PGR of even the districts far away from the border was also very high. The PGR of Hindus and Muslims in Midnapur district was 19.74 and 53.80 per cent respectively; and that in Bankura district was 14.33 and 38.71 per cent respectively. The situation in the North-East was in no way different. The non-Muslim population in Assam increased at the rate of 45.39 per cent during 1971–91, whereas the Muslim population increased during the same period at the rate of 77.42 per cent. The three border districts of Assam—Dhubri, Cachar and Karimganj—registered very high Muslim population growth during that period.

- (iii) Our border with Bangladesh has become fluid due to heavy influx and settlement of the aliens in the border areas. General (Retd.) Shankar Roy Chowdhury rightly told in the Rajya Sabha in April 2000 that on account of illegal migration, Bangladesh's demographic border intruded upon India's political border over a 10–20 km deep area.
- (iv) Practically every country of the world receives immigrants from other countries. But this case differs from others. The number of immigrants in this case is very large. The Home Ministry's Working Group on Border Management estimated the total number of Bangladeshis in India to be about one crore some thirteen years back. Madhav Godbole Committee Report of the Task Force on Border Management submitted to the Government of India in August 2000, estimated the number to be 1.5 crore with about three lakhs Bangladeshi immigrants entering India illegally every year. According to Balajit Rai (in his 'Demographic Aggression Against India', 1993) the total number of illegal immigrants in west Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bombay was 1,08,10,000.⁵ Apart from the fact that the number of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh is very large, another disturbing fact that needs mention is that they are unskilled labourers and a drain for the economy of this country.
- (v) Illegal immigration from Bangladesh is the greatest irritant in the relationship of India with that country. Unfortunately, the Bangladesh Government not only does not make any effort to stop it; it even denies their presence in this country. Some intellectuals of that country are even trying to legitimise the theory of 'lebensraum'—living space for the Bangladeshis in India. The views expressed by Sadeq Khan, a former diplomat of Bangladesh in early 1990s is worth quoting:

"All projections, however, clearly indicate that by the next decade, that is to say by the first decade of the 21st century, Bangladesh will face a serious crises of lebensraum...there is no reason why regional and international cooperation could not be worked out to plan and execute population movements and settlements to avoid critical demographic pressure in pockets of high concentration... The natural

trend of population overflow from Bangladesh is towards the sparsely populated lands in the South-East, in the Arakan side and of the North-East in the Seven Sisters' side of the Indian sub-continent.⁶

Many leading thinkers, economists and former diplomats of Bangladesh are articulating the idea of free movement of people across the international borders. According to professor Amena Mohsin of Dhaka University, "migration is a normal and natural phenomenon and can not be stopped, the need today is to evolve ways to legalise it."⁷

Thus it is clear that Bangladesh has design to push more and more people to this country to realise its plan of Greater Bangladesh.

- (vi) Illegal immigrants have become very powerful in India due to the competitive politics of vote bank. They have become voters and can "determines" the outcome of poll in 52 Assembly constituencies of West Bengal. The situation might have worsened further during the past few years as the above-mentioned findings are based on the study made a few years ago. The situation in the North-East, especially in Assam is no better. The aliens have become so powerful and our politicians so powerless and short-sighted that a chief Minister like Hiteswar Saikia had to withdraw his statement about them. The recent controversy about the statement of a Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Central Government points towards the same phenomena. The West Bengal Government stopped the trains carrying the aliens from Mumbai to the border some years ago. The controversial IMDT Act protects the infiltrators, is a well-known fact.

The danger due to on-going immigration is extensively known. Lt. Gen. (Retd.) S.K. Sinha, the then Governor of Assam, in a report submitted to the President of India in November 1998 wrote:

"As a result of population movement from Bangladesh, the spectre looms large of the indigenous people of Assam being reduced to a minority in their home state. Their cultural survival will be in jeopardy, their political control will be weakened and their employment opportunities will be undermined. This silent and

invidious demographic invasion of Assam may result in loss of the geostrategically vital districts of Lower Assam (on the border with Bangladesh). 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. The rapid growth of international Islamic fundamentalism may provide the driving force for this demand Loss of Lower Assam (the area close to the Bangladesh border) will sever the entire land mass of the North-East from the rest of India and the rich natural resources of the region will be lost to the Nation"⁸

T.V. Rajeswar, a former Director, Intelligence Bureau has also expressed similar opinion that "there is a distinct danger of another Muslim country, speaking Bengali predominantly, emerging in the eastern part of India in future."⁹ It needs mention that the fundamentalist elements in Bangladesh have been propagating that the borders defined at the time of Partition are no longer relevant and need to be changed, taking into account the recent demographic changes. The Jamaat-e-Islami of Bangladesh has also been talking about 'Swadhin Muslim Bangabhumi' in India. These developments in Bangladesh and the continuous ethnic cleansing of the minorities in that country amply prove that the fears expressed by Lt. Gen. (Retd.) S.K. Sinha and T.V. Rajeswar are not without basis.¹⁰

The factors responsible for illegal immigration from Bangladesh are the following:

- (i) Religious persecution of the Hindus and Buddhists forcing them to leave their homes.
- (ii) Islamic interests encouraging uncontrolled population growth and migration keeping in view the future expansion of the territory,
- (iii) Competitive politics of vote-bank and the patronage extended to them by political parties/vested political groups in India,
- (iv) Help rendered by organised groups of touts/anti-social elements,
- (v) Increasing pressure on land and mounting unemployment in Bangladesh due to uncontrolled steep rise in population,
- (vi) Un-natural partition based on two nation theory; difficulties of Regional Planning,

- (vii) Recurrent floods and cyclones uprooting large segments of population,
- (viii) Better economic opportunities across the border,
- (ix) Porous and easily negotiable Indo-Bangladesh border,
- (x) Dominance of fundamentalist agenda and fundamentalist groups in Bangladesh, and
- (xi) Presence of strong pro-Bangladesh lobby in India often creates myths and confuses Indians about the gravity of the problem.

Economic Factors

There are many in India who try to justify illegal migration on the plea that migration takes place due to economic crisis. Responsible news-papers, like *Times of India*, publish editorials like "The Bangla Bogey". Many suggest that India should help Bangladesh revive its economy. Some of the questions that arise and need to be answered are: (i) Is it India's responsibility to solve the problem created by demographic bomb explosion of irresponsible Bangladesh? (ii) Has India solved its own economic problems? (iii) Has India the capacity to develop neighbours like Bangladesh? (iv) Should India allow dilution of its electoral process by allowing the large scale voting by the aliens? (v) Should we allow undermining of our national security, cultural integrity and social harmony because the aliens' migration takes place due to economic reason also?

In a study made by National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) in 1995 on smuggling across West Bengal's border with Bangladesh, it was pointed out that essential articles of everyday use such as cycles, machine parts, livestock, vegetable oils, spices, etc. are smuggled in huge quantities from West Bengal side to our neighbouring country. As the supply from that side is insignificant, they smuggle arms, gold and narcotics from that side to this country. This is obviously facilitated by the linkage between infiltrators, smugglers and the terrorists.¹¹ There are items that our neighbour can supply, and we need it also, such as the fuel gas. Bangladesh may get huge money by allowing transit facility to our North-East. Obviously Bangladesh is not interested in trade balance. It needs mention that smuggling helps Bangladesh economically and weakens India too.

Where is the Big Brother?

India is often accused as 'big brother' in the context of its small neighbours? In reality, India is the sufferer. Take the case of the Ganga Water sharing at Farakka point. Ganga is mainly an Indian river. Only 0.73 per cent of its catchment area is within Bangladesh. But the country receives far excess of the share of water than it should get as per the Helsinki regulations. Both the Water Sharing Agreements of 1977 and 1996 have converted Ganga, an Indian river, into a Bangladesh river. Both Bangladesh and its collaborators in India talked about imaginary desertification of Bangladesh due to Farakka barrage. But the Study by the Food Action Plan (FAP) shows otherwise. Actually, the food production and the land under cultivation increased during the dry season as the crop during the period mostly uses underground water.¹² Thus Bangladesh raises the bogey of 'big brother', terrorises India and gets far more concessions than it deserves.

Pro-Bangladesh Lobby and the Myth-making

A myth was created and highly publicised, especially in Indian media and among Indian intellectuals that the creation of Bangladesh disproved the 'Two Nation Theory'. In reality, when the Hindus returned to Bangladesh after its liberation, they found their houses and properties occupied by the Muslims. Sheikh Mujib retained 'Enemy property Act' in one form or the other. In reality, Mujib himself lacked conviction about transforming his country into a secular democracy. At the same time, he had consciously allowed re-induction of pro-Pakistani and anti-liberation elements into politics, civil services and armed forces of Bangladesh.¹³ For Bangladesh, the 'Two Nation' theory never ceased to exist. The strong pro-Bangladesh lobby, directly or indirectly helps illegal immigrants by assigning economic reasons and thereby justifying their migration in India. They act as the spokesmen of Bangladesh ignoring our national interests.

Bangladesh continues to be a haven for militants. Indian Ultras continue to get shelter and training in that country. BSF submitted list of 195 terrorists camps in that country some times back.¹⁴ There is no let up in terrorist menace.¹⁵ Bangla ultra's plot to train NE

youths have been unearthed.¹⁶ A terror friendly regime,¹⁷ emerging Talibanization of that country,¹⁸ Bangla Bhai Syndrome,¹⁹ reported Al-Qaeda presence,²⁰ the largest arms seizure at Chittagong port²¹ and many other similar reports do not assure us about our future good neighbourly relationship. Bangladesh is sheltering ISI.²² Its minorities are constantly under attack.²³ After Taslima, now it is the turn of Salam Azad to pay the price for talking against the oppression of the minorities in that country. His book '*Bhanga Math*' has been banned.²⁴

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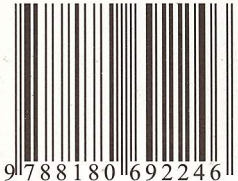
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