

Securitization Matrix in South Asia: Bangladeshi Migrants as Enemy Alien

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The political transferences witnessed in the past two decades have brought spectacular changes in the traditionally dominant notions of international and national security. The state-centric security notions predicated on military dimensions are being increasingly contested from a range of perspectives. Starting with critical theories, which draw on postmodernism and feminism and pose fundamental disagreements with the core categories of security studies; we also have "new thinking" within the mainstream security discourse which seeks to widen the security debate by incorporating societal threats that affect not only states but also groups and individuals and other non state actors. This "post-bipolar renaissance" in security studies is generally attributed to the surfacing of such new challenges as the violent upsurge of ethno-nationalism, collapsing states, large migrations across frontiers, transnational crimes and health hazards, human rights violations, gender and environmental concerns, food and water security etc.¹

This is not to say that the classical or traditional security study based on realism or neorealism has been substantially and decisively transformed. In fact, some advocates of traditional security studies insist that despite an initial contest in nineties "the debate about security studies has waned, while the traditional, or classical, security continues as if little has changed."² But it is difficult to overlook a growing shift in the mainstream security discourse with policy makers, civil society and scholars bestowing an unprecedented premium on nonmilitary and non-state aspects of security ranging from economic and environmental threats to issues of identity and culture. On balance one would agree with Peter J Katzenstein that: "Security Studies should not be narrowly restricted to states and questions of military security only. But neither should it be broadened so much that it comes to encompass all issues relating directly nor indirectly to the violence between individuals and collectivities. Broader security studies can add to the traditional analysis of national security if the actors and issues it studies have some demonstrable links to states and questions of military importance."³

1. Early rethinking on post-bipolar security was done among others by: Stephen M. Walt, "The Renaissance of Security Studies", *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 35, no.2, (June 1991), 211-39; Barry Buzan, "New Patterns of Global Security in the Twenty-First-Century" *International Affairs*, vol. 67, no.3, (1991), 431-51; Edward A. Kolodziej, "What is Security and Security Studies? Lessons from the Cold War", *Arms Control*, vol.13, no.1, (April 1992), 1-31.

2. Olav F. Knudsen, "Post-Copenhagen Security Studies: Desecuritizing Securitization", *Security Dialogue*, vol. 32, no .3, (2001), 355.

3. See Peter J. Katzenstein, "Conclusion: National Security in a Changing World" in Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 525.

Most notable of the recent efforts to broaden the scope of security studies has come from the Copenhagen School and its securitization theory.⁴ Propagated by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and their associates, the securitization theory is being hailed as “one of the most innovative, productive, and yet controversial avenues of research in contemporary security studies.”⁵ Despite its infancy, the Securitization theory has shown significant potentials to incorporate non-traditional security concerns within a viable framework of security studies. However many of its conceptual and analytical insights are exclusively predicated in the European context and refer scantily to other geopolitical regions..⁶

Evidently we need wider studies both at the conceptual and empirical level to explore how, if at all, securitisation /desecuritisation process operates in diverse situations. Who are the effective securitising and desecuritisation actors and what are their political and psychological aims and calculations? What are the referent issues in the securitization process and who are those actors that influence the securitisation process; its implements, mechanisms and indicators and how this process is accomplished? Indeed a better comprehension of how an issue is securitized or conversely desecuritized would be extremely rewarding for policy makers and analysts while dealing with nonmilitary challenges. Studies showcasing other non-European regions would be rather helpful to examine the worthiness of securitization frame. Such conceptual and empirical searching must admit the possibilities of expanding and redefining the analytical tools of securitization theory.

The paper seeks to analyse the problematic of illegal migration of Bangladeshi population to India using the securitization framework. The case study disentangles the matrix of securitisation of such non-traditional security issue as illegal migration - a perspective which is yet to be fully explored in the South Asian region. It brings in focus, the motivations and catalysts which encourage the political constellations to project the problematic in national security terms. It would be instructive to see how and to what an extent such securitization has been helpful or otherwise in managing the problem of illegal migration. And whether the desecuritization process could be a factor in developing problem solving strategies to pre-empt and manage large population flux in the region. The overall effort will be to analyse the generic causes of cross border population flow and suggest viable strategies through which the issue could be desecuritized and brought back to the realm of public constituencies. In Asia and Africa where the securitization process is often resorted for a short term political gains, it could be useful to mark the precise route of desecuritization. This would enrich the methodology of the desecuritisation as the long term political goal –something which is otherwise not so well delineated in the existing literature by the Copenhagen School.

4. Barry Buzan, “Re-thinking Security After the Cold War”, *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 32, no. 1, (March 1997), 5–28; Ole Wæver, “Securitization & Desecuritization” in Ronnie D Lipschutz (ed.), *On Security*, (New York: University Press, 1995) & Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver & Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1997).

5. Michael C. Williams, “Words, Images, Enemies: Securitization and International Politics”, *International Studies Quarterly*, vol.47, no.4, (2003), 511.

6. Ole Wæver, for instance, has done extensive exploration on the way the national identity has been accommodated by the process of European integration to avoid its securitization. See Ole Wæver, “Identity, Integration and Security: Solving the Sovereignty Puzzle in EU Studies” *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 48, No. 4, (1995), 389-431.

Securitization: A Dynamic Framework:

The Copenhagen School, while engaging realism (and neorealism) in its own territory, demystifies the traditional fixation upon the state as the sole referent object of security. It underlines the umbilical links between the “state security” and “societal security”, the later concerned with such issues as identity and culture.⁷ This in turn creates a multi-sectoral context to analyse the security compact consisting of the military, political, economic, societal and environmental dimensions. Metaphor of war is thus extended beyond the realm of national security and delineates all the five sectors of security identified by the Copenhagen School. As observes Ole Waever: ‘...the logic of war – of challenge-resistance (defense)-escalation-recognition/defeat – could be replayed metaphorically and extended to other sectors... When this happens, however, the structure of the game is still derived from the most classical of classical cases: war.’⁸ By contesting the exclusive monopoly of state machinery in the processing of threats and national security agenda, the securitization approach ensures the inclusion of non-traditional security issues within the existing security framework. ‘Security’ can thus be inscribed on a discourse on the basis of this underlying logic or what Barry Buzan has called a ‘specific rhetorical structure’.⁹ Such development has addressed a long felt need to bridge the hiatus between the state centric approach and the human security concerns. Echoing this imperative, a leading public figure in India has put it accurately that “(F)rontiers of a State are important but so are frontiers of human dignity”¹⁰ The Copenhagen School has responded well to the changing milieu of global aspirations by assigning a fair space to basic human needs within the existing security discourse.

The securitization approach does not construe “security” as an objective condition but as an outcome of a definite social process - an extreme version of politicization. Facilitating a social constructivist analysis of contemporary security practices, it offers a dynamic framework to unravel the way in which an issue is socially constructed in national security terms by the influential political and military constellations in accord with their own priorities and interests. Such conceptualisation elucidates the arbitrary nature of the “so called” existentialist threats and the route through which such security issues are accorded a sacrosanct appearance. The “securitising speech acts” raise the level of issues to “existentialist threats” warranting “emergency measures” and thus legitimize actions beyond the normal spectrum of political process.¹¹ The conceptualization of security as a “speech act” thus involves “a particular set of historical discourses and practices that rest upon institutionally shared

7. However it has been criticized for “freezing” the notions of “identity” and “society,” allegedly not giving due respect to the insight that identity “is not a fact of society,” but a process. Mathias Albert, “Security as Boundary Function: Changing Identities and Securitization in World Politics”, *The International Journal of Peace Studies*, vol. 13 (1) at http://www.gmu.edu/academic/ijps/vol3_1/Albert.htm. For a rejoinder see Buzan, Barry and Ole Waever, “Slippery? Contradictory? Sociologically Untenable? The Copenhagen School Replies.” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 2, (1997), 241-250.

8. Ole Waever, “Securitization and Desecuritization” in Ronnie D. Lipschutz (ed.), *On Security*, (New York: University Press, 1995) & <https://www.columbia.edu/sec/dlc/ciao/book/lipschutz/lipschutz13.html>.

9. Buzan, n.4, 14.

10. M.N.Venkatachaliah, Former Chief Justice of India, *Proceedings of World Congress on Human Rights*, Institute for World Congress on Human Rights, 21-22 November, 1997, India International Centre, New Delhi.

11. Buzan et. al., n. 4, 23-24.

understandings".¹² Waever thus, remarks: "By uttering "security" a state representative moves a particular development into a specific area, and thereby claims a special right to use whatever means are necessary to block it".¹³ The securitization framework hence creates possibilities of criticizing and transforming the act of securitization within the ambit of political argument and discursive legitimation. Accordingly, the desecuritization offers a panacea for the exclusionary, violence-prone 'society of security'. Highlighting its binary relation with securitization, Claudia Aradau finds that the term desecuritization has been "endowed with positive connotations, the good practice to be endorsed over the 'evil' securitizing one."¹⁴

Securitization : Postcolonial South Asia

In less stable postcolonial states, the domestic political concerns tend to be the lenses through which other (external) threats are judged; it is possible to hypothesise a two- way relationship between the speech act and threat perception.¹⁵ Accordingly the speech act may itself create a threat and conversely, the threat may also induce the speech act. Here the touch stone could be to ascertain if the threat is indeed existentialist or inter-subjective. For in the post –colonial states, it has been rather handy for elite to recurrently evoke "securitising speech acts" to hoist the spectre of an eternal threat. This is a common political trend in many Asian democracies and caters well to the domestic political constituencies for electoral gains. This practice may also serve as a diversionary method to manage the domestic unrest or to curtail the democratic rights and enhance the level of militarization on the name of national security. Against such scenarios, the "desecuritization process" could be an effective way to transfer the securitised issue from an emergency mode or "threat-defence sequence" to a normal political process.

Having resolved their internal security challenges through a long and arduous process of state building, the European nation-states understandably defined security exclusively in the context of a state's ability to counter external threats to its state's vital interests and core values. The state, as the exclusive referent object of security, was to guarantee the security of its "citizens."¹⁶ Unlike, the European nation-states, many post colonial states are still struggling with the task of building viable nation –states and instead of securing citizenry "the state itself is the site of conflict between different nation-building enterprises and power struggles between contending social groups and elites."¹⁷ This is so manifest in the in the South Asia region¹⁸ which is littered with majoritarian elites or the military producing tormented minorities and their mass

12. Krause, Keith and Michael C. Williams, "Broadening the Agenda of Security Studies: Politics and Methods" *Mershon International Studies Review*, vol. 40, no. 2,(1996), 243.

13. Ole Wæver, n. 6, 55.

14. Claudia Aradau, "Beyond Good and Evil: Ethics and Securitization /Desecuritization Techniques" at *Rubikon*, E-journal. (December 2001) <http://venus.ci.uw.edu.pl/~rubikon/forum/claudia2.htm>

15. Buzan et al, n. 4, 173-74.

16. Bhikhu Parekh expresses well the core assumption of the 'statist' approach: "Citizens are the exclusive responsibility of their state, and their state is entirely their own business." cited in Nicholas J. Wheeler and Alex J. Bellamy (eds), "Humanitarian Intervention and World Politics" in John Baylis & Steve Smith, *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 473.

17. Navnita Chadha Behera, *Discourses on Security: South Asian Perspectives*, Research Monographs, no 3, (Malaviya Centre for Peace Research, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, 2001), 3.

18. South Asia consists of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka ,Bhutan, Nepal and Maldives.

migration across borders. Their annals have been beset with episodes of violent partitions, divided communities and mangled people. Sankaran Krishna thus finds "the fiction of homogeneity or the homogenising impulse that underlies postcolonial nationalism is a recipe of partition that produces nothing but endless sectarian violence."¹⁹ This schema of state-building invariably puts a heavy premium on national unity and territorial borders. Conversely the people inhabiting within and around these borders become secondary or insignificant in comparison. Against this background the political and military constellations in South Asia, often find it expedient to seek an "enemy alien" threatening to disrupt the territorial integrity of the state.²⁰ Obviously for the South Asian states having fragile statehood it is harder than the stabilized western democracies to transcend these security anxieties. This results in greater inclination to securitize issues which could otherwise be resolved at the societal level.

Border Crossing in South Asia:

South Asia offers a typical example of forced migration getting embroiled in to the matrix of national security. Starting with the partition of the subcontinent, the cross border population flow has been a destabilizing feature in the region and has lately raised an entire range of security concerns which haunt scholars and practitioners alike. The state-centric analysis focusing primarily on national security implications tends to lose sight of the perspective 'how nations-state boundaries are drawn and subsequently made rigid, cutting into the parts erstwhile collective existence of the communities in the region.'²¹ Exemplifying many contradictions of the postcolonial third world, the region has the odious distinction of being the fourth largest concentration of refugees in the world, and equally large compact of stateless migrants and the internally displaced.²² Transborder population movement in this region is an ensemble of communal, economic, historical and environmental elements. The migration defined as illegal or "undocumented" has been intrinsic to the South Asian State structure. The political territoriality of states, determined during the British rule and after the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971, has rendered the region with porous boundaries having cross border ethno-linguistic and ethno-religious dispersions providing ready avenues of population movements across national borders. Millions of people have crossed borders both voluntarily or involuntarily in recent history. While many left their motherland in search of better prospects, others were forced to flee in order to save their lives amid violent civil conflicts. Environmental decay, natural disasters such as famine, floods, land degradation, desertification, water crisis, and deforestation also forces people to move out. Migrants are encouraged to migrate by the "push" or "pull" factors of possible origin / destination areas and to go to areas where previous streams have gone and created networks making the migration process easier.

19. Krishna Sankaran, *Postcolonial Insecurities: India, Sri Lanka and the Question of Nationhood*, (Oxford University Press, 1999), 242.

20. In the words of Finlay, Holsti, and Fagen, "... if they have not been readily available, we have created them... the role of the enemy is more fixed than those filling the role". Cited in Shoon K. Murray & Jason Meyers, "Do People Need Foreign Enemies? American Leaders Beliefs After the Soviet Demise", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 43 no. 5, (1999), 555-59.

21. Ranbir Samaddar, "Ethnicity, Fragmented Politics and Labour Market in South Asia-Issues in Transborder Migration" in Arun Kumar Banerji (ed), *Security Issues in South Asia : Domestic and External Sources of Threats to Security*, (Calcutta: Minerva Publications, 1998), 174.

22. See Tapan K. Bose and Rita Manchanda (eds.), *States, Citizens And Outsiders: the Uprooted Peoples of South Asia*, (South Asia Forum for Human Rights, Kathmandu, 1997).

The persons from both sides of the border having common lingual, religious and ethnic identity finds nothing odd in slipping into their familiar community across the border.²³ South Asian states do not have natural boundaries such as mountains and rivers. Nor do they have sufficient logistical capacity to control population entry from across the borders. While demarcating the boundaries between the Indian and Pakistani dominions, the boundary of East Bengal which was designated as East Pakistan on the one hand and West Bengal and Assam, on the other, was done in a manner which allocated some pockets to East Pakistan and others to the Indian states. However, the populations on both sides of the border had close economic and religious affinities. The whole phenomenon was described as territories in adverse possession or enclave, the future status of which was to be resolved by discussions between India and Pakistan. Both India and Bangladesh inherited this problem. With increasing episodes of civilian violence and natural disasters, the population displacement across borders has now become endemic. Moreover, the South Asian states do not have effective systems to identifying their own citizens. Birth registration is not compulsory and land owners and urban employers are not required to check on legal status of those they employ. Only recently has India initiated a system of registration of citizens.

No wonder that the flow of Bengali population from Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan) across the 4,096 kilometre long Indian border has endured in the subcontinental history.²⁴ Bangladeshi nationals have crossed borders with or without valid documents since the partition of the subcontinent.. Bangladesh crisis saw, nearly one billion Bangladeshi citizens to take refuge in India. Majority went back after the liberation, but a sizeable number stayed back eventually to become a part of Indian mainstream. The transborder population flow again resumed significantly soon after the assassination of Mujibur in August 1975 and continued during the regime of Ziaur Rahman (1975-81).²⁵ The political instability and communal tension affecting mainly Hindus were the conspicuous factors for the Hindu migration spurt. Demographic disproportion especially for Hindu minorities in Bangladesh having roughly a density of 780 per sq. km against half that number on Indian side of the border has been another push-factor for such migration.²⁶ The growing decline of Hindu population can be discerned on the basis of the average decadal growth in Bangladesh.²⁷

All this while and subsequently the migration flow continued also due to the abysmal impoverishment in Bangladesh. Labourers, persecuted Hindus, fleeing Muslim men and women in search of *better* life keep on moving across the border The border crossing is

23. There are instances wherein one part of the house is in India and the other one in Bangladesh, Barun Das Gupta, "Fencing No Hindrance to Intruders", *The Hindu*, (August 23,1999).

24. India shares 4096 km (Assam-262 Km, Tripura-856 Km, Mizoram-318 Km,Meghalaya-443 Km, West Bengal-2217 Km) long boundary with Bangladesh.

25. Pranati Datta, Swati Sadhu, B. N. Bhattarchaya and P. K. Majumdar, *Undocumented Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal*, *Population Studies Unit*, Article no. 1402, (Kolkata:Indian Statistical Institute, 4 June 2004) at www.ipcs.org/ipcs/militaryIndex.jsp?military=1012&status=article&mod=b

26. See Jyoti M. Pathania, *India & Bangladesh - Migration Matrix- Reactive and not Proactive* Paper no. 632,(South Asia Analysis Group, 2003) at

www.ipcs.org/ipcs/militaryIndex.jsp?military=1012&status=article&mod=b

27. According to a study: "If this (24 percent) decadal growth rate is to be applied in case of Bangladeshis, the Hindu population should have been approximately 14.7 million while it is 10.5 million as per the census. Obviously, these have illegally crossed through the porous borders and settled in India."

N.S. Jamwal, "Border Management: Dilemma of Guarding the India-Bangladesh Border", *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 28, no. 1, (Jan-Mar 2004), 12.

also done by women involved in smuggling due to death of main earning member of the family, the absence of earning male member and illness of husband. Most of them are either divorced or widow.²⁸ Economic depression, lack of industrialization, social insecurity, demographic explosion, political instability, the domination of religious fundamentalists in Bangladesh, cultural similarity, and homo-ethnic climate in West Bengal are the main motivating factors behind the migration phenomenon. Low literacy, high infant mortality, low status of women has led to the unmanageable surge in population which in turn has further aggravated the situation.²⁹ According to Human Development Report of 1994, the gross national product (GNP) per capita in Bangladesh was only 1.8 per cent in Bangladesh as compared to 3.1 per cent in India. In addition, the population growth, floods, and natural disasters tend to compel the deprived Bangladeshis to seek better prospects across the border.³⁰ The spectre of the rise of sea level through unremitting global warming is also likely to exacerbate the crunch of resources which drives the ecological migrants to cross borders.³¹

Anatomy of an Existential Threat

The spectre of colossus population flux from Bangladesh has been posed as an existentialist threat to the Indian state. Although there has not been any precise estimate of illegal immigrants actually living inside the Indian borders but the alarmists have often indulged in rhetoric to heightened the level of public insecurities. Referring to such speech acts, a noted scholar on Assam thus observed:

We are talking in terms of crores of people. I remember at the time of the Assam agitation, some were talking in terms of 2 crores or 4 crores people in the North East. The entire population in the North East today is 35 million i.e. 3.5 crores! This kind of situation is really so full of rhetoric. We must guard against rhetoric because it always misleads; it is divorced from reality.³²

According to a report prepared by the then Governor of Assam, in 1998, there were 5.4 million Bangladeshi migrants in West Bengal, 4 million in Assam, 0.8 million in Tripura, 0.5 million in Bihar, 0.5 million in Maharashtra, 0.5 million in Rajasthan and 0.3 million in Delhi.³³ Yet another official affidavit put up before the Supreme Court of India estimated that between 1972 to November 1998, a total number of 10,24,322 Bangladeshi nationals (Hindu 667500, Muslim 349738, others 7084) entered into Indian territory with valid documents but they did not return to Bangladesh and have overstayed. From 1972 to

28. Md. Jalal Uddin Sikder, "Women's Participation in Informal Cross-Border Trade, Proceedings, National Seminar on Women in Challenging Situations in Bangladesh, (Cirdap, Dhaka: Refugee and Migratory Movement Research Unit, 23-24 July 2003), 24-26.

29. See R Amin, J Chowdhury, et. Al., "Reproductive Change in Bangladesh: Evidence from Recent Data, *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, vol. 8, no 4, (1998), 39-58.

30 See Graem Hugo, "Illegal International Migration in Asia" in Robin Cohen (ed) *The Cambridge Survey of World Migration*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 397-402.

31 See N.J.Ericksen, Q.K. Ahmad and A.R. Chowdhury, " Socio-economic Implications of Climate Change for Bangladesh", in R. A. Warrick and Q.A. Ahmad (eds), *The Implication of Climate Change and Sea Level Rise in Bangladesh*, (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers), 205-87.

32. Sanjoy Hazarika, "Illegal Migration from Bangladesh: Problem and Long-term Perspective", *Dialogue*, vol. 3, No. 3, (2002), 29.

33. Governor of Assam, Report on *Illegal Migration into Assam*, Report submitted to the President of India by the Governor of Assam, (Guwahati: Raj Bhawan, 8 Nov 1998).

November 1998, a total number of 5, 73,334 Bangladeshi nationals including 1, 61,077 Hindus, 4, 08,349 Muslims and 3908 others had been detected for entering clandestinely and pushed back across borders.³⁴ While the Bangladesh government has consistently denied the influx of its citizens into Indian territory, its census report of 1991 talks of a unique phenomenon of the missing population, estimated initially at 10 million, and subsequently at 8 million, of whom 1.73 million are Hindus, and 6.27 million are Muslims.³⁵ Recently it was reported by the Indian Defence Ministry that on an average more than 100,000 illegal Bangladeshi immigrants are coming into India every month.³⁶

The response of Indian state to such migration has varied depending on its political and security objectives. For instance, in the post-partition era, the flux of Bengali population was taken in its stride by the Indian government but soon after the India–Pakistan War over Kashmir in 1965, it began to resist the population flow from the east. But the freedom struggle for Bangladesh, led to the opening of Indian borders for the coethnic Bengali refugees whose number swelled to a staggering 10 million mark. Indian policy again took a *volte face* soon after the killing of pro- Indian Mujibur Rehman in 1974. With Bangladesh drifting towards the path of Islamization, the Indian state increasingly became hostile to the presence of unauthorized Bangladeshi migrants on Indian soil. Moreover in the recent past has seen South Asian states a witness to an increasing international resistance to migration.³⁷ The spectre of terrorism has further undermined the democratic norms of dealing with the immigrants, more so after the tragic episode of 9/11. The illegal migrants are seen as a natural threat to national security and singled out for transnational crimes and illegal trafficking of arms, drugs etc. More and more countries are closing their borders to migrants.³⁸ The spectre of illegal migration has thus raised strident political debates and has become a favourite ploy of politicians and statesmen to evoke political apparition of an enemy alien.

The present phase of Indian resistance to Bangladeshi migrants relates back to the anti foreigner drive which led to the Assam movement in late seventies.³⁹ The revision of the electoral rolls in Assam in 1979 and the detection of thousands of Bangladesh nationals sent a shock wave to the entire northeast in India.⁴⁰ It provided a ready avenue for the political groups and parties to raise the spectre of illegal migrants to win over public constituencies for electoral purposes. The newly formed All Assam Students Union (AASU) effectively capitalized on the widely shared fear of the ethnic Assamese, of being reduced to a minority as a result of the incessant influx of foreigners from across the international borders. While the depleting resources and the growing crunch of

34. Supreme Court of India, Writ Petition (Civil) No 125 of 1998 In the Matter of AIFCL & Another.

35. See Jayanta Kumar Ray, "Migration from (East Bengal / East Pakistan) Bangladesh to India", *Dialogue*, Volume 3, No. 3, (2002).

36. Statement of Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes in Chandigarh on Sept 28, 2003, *Times of India*, (29 Sept. 2003).

37. The western alarmists like Robert D Kaplan and Zbigniew Breznesky find the border crossing population as an early symptom of incoming anarchy.

38. See Gil Loescher, "International Security and Population Movements", in Cohen, Robin (ed.), *The Cambridge Survey of World Migration*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1995; M. Weiner, (ed.), *International Migration and Security*, (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1993).

39. See Myron Weiner, "Rejected People and Unwanted Migrants in South Asia" *Economic and Political Weekly*, (August 21 1993), 1737-1746. Also see Sanjoy Hazarika, *Rites of Passage: Border Crossings, Imagine Homelands, India's East and Bangladesh*, (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000).

40. There is long history of Muslim migration to Assam which dates back to 13th Century. See Anup Saikia, "Global Processes and Local concerns: Bangladeshi Migrants in Assam", *Dialogue*, vol. 3, no 3, (2002), 100.

population added to the insecurities of the people, the uncertainties of globalisation creates a vision of Indian nation as a "conglomerate of minorities".⁴¹ The unending mob fury under the banner of All Assam Students Union (AASU) left the state in flames, villages destroyed and hundreds killed. The anti-foreigner drive saw a protracted agitation lasting for six years (1979-85) and ended with AASU capturing power in the 1985 election. These developments had a demonstration effect on almost all the neighbouring states. The political elite blamed Bangladesh migrants for unsettling the demographic balance, swiping off scarce resources and endangering the social and economic security. The authorities in the eastern Indian state of Nagaland also feared violent attacks on illegal Bangladeshi migrants by local tribal. The resentment over the influx of Bangladeshis into the state and their creeping control over land have raised a violent protest which could lead to the Assam kind of massacre.⁴² The insurgency in the adjoining state of Tripura also directed against the Bangladeshi migrants. In fact, Tripura's tribal population now comprise only 33 per cent of the population due to demographic change. The spread of Bangladeshis has not been confined only to Border States but has extended to various parts of northern India including New Delhi and to the far distant Mumbai.

There are also evidences of a collusive network between smugglers, a section of illegal migrants and terrorist groups operating in India's northeast. The Indian government is also concerned with the migrants becoming an instrument in the hands of Pakistan's external intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), for its larger design to destabilize India.⁴³ India's External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha in the BJP led government surmised the growth of anti-India activities terrorist activities inside Bangladesh and that "some al-Qaeda elements have taken shelter in Bangladesh. ... the foreign media has ... reported several such instances, our own sources have also confirmed many of these reports."⁴⁴ Indian insecurities also relate to the growing suggestions of radicalization of Bangladeshi society. Far Eastern Economic Review's report on recent transformation in Bangladesh epitomized Indian concerns thus : " Islamic fundamentalism, religious intolerance , militant Muslim groups with links to international terrorist groups, powerful military with ties to the militants, the mushrooming of Islamic schools churning out radical students, middle class apathy, poverty and lawlessness –all are combining to transform the nation."⁴⁵

Starting from the border states of northeast, the foreigner issue has now become a national issue with political parties joining the fray against Bangladeshi migrants.⁴⁶ This development also changed their nomenclature from migrants to invaders and infiltrators. In fact, for decades now this issue has been raised in Parliament, in newspapers and on the streets. President APJ Abdul Kalam voicing his concern over the problem at the joint sitting of parliament on 17 Feb. 2003, said " the problem of illegal migration from

41. .Samir Kumar Das, *Regionalism in Power: The Case of Asom Gana Parishad 1985-1990*, (Delhi: Omsons, 1997) 64-165.

42. Nitin Gogoi , "Nagaland may face brunt of illegal migration from Bangladesh", *Rediff on Net*, (March 27, 2001) at www.hvk.org/articles/0301/119.html

43. Prakash Singh, "Management of India's North-Eastern Borders", *Dialogue*, vol. 3, no. 3, (2002), 57-70.

44. Sanjay K. Jha, "Time for Dhaka to Come Clean", *Asia Times*, (Feb 6 2003). Also see Jaideep Saikia "The ISI Reaches East: Anatomy of a Conspiracy" *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 25 (2002), 185-197.

45. Cited in Sreeradha Datta, "Indo-Bangladesh Relations: An Overview of Limitations and Constraints", *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 26, no.3, (2002), 430.

46. Only BJP and ASSom ????

Bangladesh has assumed serious proportions and affects many states. The government is determined to take all necessary steps to check this problem".⁴⁷

There is no doubt that such migration has brought severe effects on receiving regions in India. It has evidently increased the level of human capital externality, and burdens on public coffer and scarce resources, while diluting the available social and demographic capital in host areas leading to rise in unemployment, societal disaffection, instability, lawlessness, and polarization. The non-assimilation of migrants often generates the feeling of "nativism" among the original inhabitants of the area, making the host region more conflict prone. Consequently indigenous population and migrants have become prone to build up strong group identities based on the precept of "us" against "them. These patterns of mutually contesting self-image have led to a series of conflicts in receiving regions in India's border states.

It is also true that successive governments in Dhaka have not been particularly keen to address the problem Bangladesh's foreign secretary, Shamsher M. Chowdhury, finds no evidence of any Bangladeshis living illegally in India, and called the fence unnecessary. Chowdhury accuses India of creating and supporting "the Bongo Bhumi [Independent Bengal] movement, which is threatening to dismember Bangladesh and create a separate state for Hindus living in Bangladesh . . . an act of extreme subversiveness."⁴⁸ As the reality stands, Bangladesh is experiencing a crunch of returning migrants from Pakistan and Gulf countries and many of them come to India in search of economic opportunities, given the demand for cheap labour by Indian households and employers.

Communal Anxieties or National Insecurity

Communalisation of Bangladeshi migrants has been one of the ways in which the dominant political constellation has successfully extended the insecurity syndrome across varied levels of national society. By creating a spectre of Islamization of India, it has unified the majority Hindu public opinion. The early protagonists of anti-foreigner movement in India's north-eastern states had not discriminated against migrants on religious grounds. But the rightist elements in Indian polity led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) singled out on the Islamic character of such population movement across Indian territory. Resistance to Islamic ideology and possible electoral gains motivated the BJP to launch a well-orchestrated propaganda against what they called a cultural and religious invasion from a neighbouring Islamic state. Other political parties too perceive these migrants as a threat to national security on socioeconomic terms but not on religious or cultural grounds. One of the leading spokesperson for BJP is of the opinion that the infiltration activities has assumed a scary significance in the light of the present "low key 'Talibanisation' of Bangladesh."⁴⁹

47. Jyoti M. Pathania, *India & Bangladesh - Migration Matrix- Reactive and not Proactive South Asia Analysis Group Paper no. 632* at www.saag.org/papers7/paper632.html

48. Jehangir Pocha, *India erecting a barrier along Bangladesh border: Targets terrorism, illegal migration*, (The Boston Globe, May 30, 2004) at www.boston.com/news/world/articles/2004/05/30/india

49. See the remarks of Balbir K Punj in Pathania, n. 47.

Historically the BJP along with its collaborative organizations like Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) has been making strident criticism of erstwhile official policy of accommodating the migrants from Bangladesh.⁵⁰ After successfully politicising the religious dispute in Ayodhya (1992), it unleashed a nation wide propaganda against the Muslim Bangladeshi migrants. Its ideologues published popular articles and full length books on the issue. In addition to a systematic speech campaign (speech acts!) against the threat from illegal migrations, the popular writings of its ideologues were greatly responsible for exacerbating national security anxieties.

The very caption of such writing such as "*Demographic Aggression Against India: Muslim Avalanche from Bangladesh*" and "*Is India Going Islamic*" both written by a leading BJP ideologue Baljit Rai sent a chill amongst the readers and played on common people's fear against the Bengali Muslim Infiltration.⁵¹ The speech acts along with polemical writings made a clear distinction between a Hindu 'refugee' and Muslim 'infiltrator' and circulated a speculative figure of more than 15 million Bangladeshi Muslims settled in various parts of India. It also warned against the "grim consequences of the exodus of Muslims from the Islamic and densely populated country called Bangladesh". And that "the pushing of millions of Bangladeshi Islamic morons into India is fraught with gravest threats to our very existence".⁵² The right wing ideologues cited extensively from select Bangladeshi media and scholars to caution against their demand of finding *lebensraum*, or living space for the burgeoning population of Bangladesh as *Muslim Bango Bhoomi* which will comprise large parts of West Bengal, Bihar and Assam and finally merge with Bangladesh. Baljit Rai quotes some preliminary reports from 1991 the Bangladesh census of 1991 to suggest that "some one crore (10 million) people are missing from the country". His hatred for Muslims is all too blatant when he says that "These millions of hungry Muslims are a shameless lot and resort to every conceivable stratagem to conceal their identity" or ... "the infiltration of Muslims from Bangladesh is cancerous".⁵³ In similar vein, Arun Shourie one of the most articulate opinion maker from BJP cites extensively from D.N. Bezboruah the editor of *Sentinal*, Guwahati on Bangladeshi people's aspirations of *lebensraum*. He charged both Congress and Left parties for their complicity in the settlement of illegal migrants in Indian soil.⁵⁴ By raising a fears psychosis, the BJP inspired media has been successful in raising the issue as that of prime national security.⁵⁵ The Hindi press regularly carried provocative news and articles raising the spectre of Muslim infiltration and its horrendous consequences. It

50. Gillan M., Refugees or Infiltrators? The Bharatiya Janata Party and 'Illegal' Migration from Bangladesh", *Asian Studies Review*, vol. 26, no. 1, (March 2002,) 73-95.(23)

51. Rai Baljit, *Demographic Aggression Against India: Muslim Avalanche from Bangladesh*, (Chandigarh: B.S. Publications,1993) and *Is India Going Islamic* in at

<http://www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/Bridge/9684/art1.htm>. Also see *How Bangladesh will Destroy India? Demographic Challenge!* at www.geocities.com/hsitah9/how_bangladesh_will_destroy_indi.htm

52. Id, 201.

53. Id, 218-19.

54. Arun Shourie, *A Secular Agenda: For Saving Our Country: For Welding It*, (New Delhi: ASA Publications, 1993), 219-23. Also see D.N. Bezboruah, "Illegal Migration from Bangladesh", *Dialogue*, Volume 3 No. 3, (January - March, 2002). Also see, Sadeq Khan, "The Question of Lebensraum", *Holiday*, (Dacca, October 18,1991).

55. See for instance, Onkareshwar Pandey, "ISI and New Wave of Islamic Militancy in the N.E.", *Dialogue*, vol. 3, no. 3, (January - March, 2002).

is not uncommon even to refer to the teasing of Hindu Women by the Bangladeshi migrants.⁵⁶

In addition the officials and statesmen too joined the fray. In November 1998, the Governor of Assam, Lt Gen (Retd) S.K. Sinha presented a 42 pages report official report to the President of India entitled 'Illegal Migration into Assam'.⁵⁷ The Report warned:

As a result of population movement from Bangladesh, the spectre looms large of 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.... It will be then 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 the demand"⁵⁸

The politicisation of religious identities also saw the inhabitants of border villages being sucked into the impulse of Hindu nationalism. What has lately complicated the picture in Assam is the stand taken by the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal to conduct surveys to find the number of illegal migrants in each district in Assam. This has further divided the religious communities. The mushrooming temples and mosques in the border villages denoting the possible shelter for the respective community is a case in point. The villages cohabited by both Hindu and Muslims are now separated by the constructed binary of "us" against "them" The growing mutual suspicion has led to the minorities to cross borders to be with their larger group. The Border Security Force (BSF) and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) actively encouraged such sanitization and homogeneity on the name of securing borders. What has followed is the heightened level of patriotic mobilization among the local populations on both sides in which the women and children of these villages are being evacuated and local men armed with sticks, swords, spears are being encouraged to thwart the incursions of illegal intruders with whatever arms are available to them. This brings back the memories of partition days. As succinctly put by Ranabir Samadhar:

"(I) n this reappearance of partition politics, cartographic, communal, and political lines are being replicated within the borders, creating new visible and invisible frontiers. The unique feature of these nouvelle frontiers being produced internally is that these are not vertical lines separating two spaces, but concentric circles continuously dividing and reassembling these divided spaces into the universe of the nation, law, citizenship, rights, obligation, morality, and habitation." ⁵⁹

While it is true that the BJP along with Asom Gana Parishad, the AASU has been at the forefront of securitizing the issue, other political parties too joined the fray in due course. Despite initial resistance which saw West Bengal providing shelters

56. Bhanu Pratap Shukla, "Deshghati Sabit Hogi Ghuspaith Ki Undekhi", *Dainik Jagaran*, (25 Sept. 1996).

57. The Sinha report sent a shock wave among the Muslim politicians belonging to different political parties, who called him a Hindu chauvinist. Wasbir Hussain, "Cross-Border Human Traffic in South Asia: Demographic Invasion, Anxiety and Anger in India's Northeast" in K.P.S. Gill & Ajai Sahni (eds), *Faultlines: Writings on Conflict & Resolution*, Vol 7, (Institute of Conflict Management, 2000), 115.

58. Report on *Illegal Migration into Assam*, n 33, 17-18.

59. Ranabir Samadhar, *The Marginal Nation: Transborder Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal*, (New Delhi: Sage, 1998), 47.

to fleeing Bangladesh immigrants during the height of Assam agitation, the communist regime fell in line with other border states in the drive against foreigners. Here the political will to accommodate Bengali co-ethnics was superseded by the economic pressures. According to a projection in West Bengal's 292 assembly constituencies, Bangladeshi migrants could ensure a result in 52 of them and influence the vote in 100 others.⁶⁰ While the ruling Communist Party of India (Marxist) had long reaped the political mileage by protecting these migrants, the increasing pressures from the local population and economic strains led to a policy reversal. For decades, it was ignored by the major political parties like the Congress (I) and the CPI(M) in West Bengal and the Northeast. It is alleged that these political parties treated the illegal migrants as a vote bank. According to one account, as many as 55 lakh ration-cards have been issued to Bangladeshis in West Bengal.⁶¹ Eventually the West Bengal government sought the help of central government to fence its 2,217 km border with Bangladesh.

Similarly till 1962, the Congress government remained indifferent to the illegal migration from East Pakistan but the Sino-Indian war and the subsequent fear of Sino-Pakistan collusion changed its outlook.⁶² Jawaharlal Nehru spoke about the infiltration from East Pakistan to Assam and felt that "...this infiltration should be stopped and effectively dealt with."⁶³ The Congress government drew a scheme known as Pakistani Infiltration Prevention (PIP) scheme which became operational in 1964 and was renamed as (Prevention of Foreigner (PIF) scheme after the making of Bangladesh. The creation of Border Security Force (BSF) in 1965 also reflected the growing concerns of Congress regime to meet the challenge of illegal migration..

Satgachi: Securitizing or Symbolic Politics?

The episode of 213 immigrants who were left high and dry on the "no man's land" between Bangladesh and India at Satgachi (West Bengal) in February 2003 has been symptomatic of the growing securitization of the issue. This is yet another example when an ordinary issue deserving humanitarian concern was deliberately distorted to reach such a point wherein it not only militarized the border villages but soon became a national security issue. At the end, however, it turned out to be just yet another episode of symbolic politics.

The truth is that the Bangladeshi immigrants have been crossing borders clandestinely and often bribing the Indian Border Security Force.⁶⁴ At the same time, it has also been a common practice with the BSF to randomly round up the illegal migrants and pushed them to the no-man's land. However this time the Bangladesh Rifles refused to let in the 213 gypsy snake charmers saying they are Indians, who stranded in no-man's land for three days. An overwhelming number of those stranded were children and old women yet they were kept in bitter cold and many of them became afflicted with

60. *Daily Telegraph* (Calcutta, 5 November, 2001).

61. T V R Sheno, "Don't ignore threat from other border", *The Pioneer*, (February 20, 2003) at www.bjp.org/Newspaper/feb-2003n

62. It was circulated that in some places like Darrang and Nagaon of Assam having a preponderant presence of Muslim immigrants, white flags were hoisted to avert possible Chinese attack Bhuyan, *Dialogue*, Volume 3 No. 3, (January - March, 2002), 89.

63. Wasbir Hussain, n 57, 1186.

64. "1,000 Bangladeshis infiltrating every day", *The Hindu*, (August 23,1999).

respiratory tract infection. As news of the talk's failure spread, hundreds of Bangladeshi youths marched towards borders with swords and shouting anti-India slogans. Fearing an attack, the stranded gypsies began crying for help. Soon, hundreds of villagers from the Indian side rushed towards the zero line armed with bamboo sticks and stones. The episode soon caught the national and international attention with media making headlines about the problem of illegal migrants.

To the relief of the two states, the "stranded people" vanished mysteriously on 6 February, 2003. The BSF claimed that Bangladesh had taken them back, succumbing to Indian pressure but without acknowledging the fact. On the other hand, Bangladesh government denied having taken them back and any knowledge of their whereabouts. Newspapers, which had been covering the incident for days with their headlines either focused on the security concerns or speculating the fate of the poor people, were left clueless.⁶⁵ Clearly the episode was used by both Indian and Bangladesh governments to securitize the issue essentially to legitimize their respective positions on the frontiers,

The most instructive was the comment of the Indian External Affairs Minister who said, "snake charmers cannot spoil our relations, we can get over these problems, if Bangladesh acknowledges the fact and decides to talk".⁶⁶ This event reveals one of the most bizarre ways in which a political statement was made by the interested parties with India insisting that Bangladesh owns the responsibility of illegal movements across borders and Bangladesh not obliging. But such crisis is crucial in sustaining the process of securitization as it involved inordinate national and international publicity to the issue of illegal migration and how Indian government sees it in national security terms. The Satgachi crisis clearly demonstrates that instead of seeking any sustainable solution with sensitivity and compassion, the issue of undocumented migration from Bangladesh has increasingly become more politicised. In a way the plight of 213 snake charmers unravelled the faultlines of modern nation-states and its notion of citizenry. These indigent people were disowned by their own states and could not claim any human rights as citizens because international obligations and regimes are easily set aside by the national states when their "so-called" national security is threatened.

However the securitization of illegal migrants has been continuing ceaselessly. The issue has been further complicated by the claims of 194 anti-India terrorist camps functioning inside Bangladesh borders⁶⁷ as also credible evidences of Pakistani ISI colluding with the migrants to stoke terrorist activities in Northeast.⁶⁸

Extraordinary Measures :

The growing securitization of the illegal Bangladeshi migrants has allowed the Indian state to evoke several extraordinary measures. Amid the anti-foreigner movement, the Indian Parliament enacted Illegal Migrants Determination Tribunals Act, 1983 (IMTD Act) to identify and deport such illegal migrants who entered into India on or after the 25 March 1971.⁶⁹ Although 16 such tribunals were set up to cover 23

65. *Times of India*, (February 2003).

66. *Chronicles of a No-Where People On the Indo-Bangladesh Border*, SAFHR Paper 14, (Kathmandu: South Asian Forum for Human Rights, June 2003)

67. "India, Bangladesh Differences on Immigration, Terror Campus Persist", *Press Trust of India*, (January 9, 2004)

68. Bhuyan, n. 62, 83-98.

69. The IMTD Act had put the onus of validating the proof regarding the suspected infiltrators lay on the complainants or the Police and not on the accused. This made the task of detection and deportation quite

Districts of Assam but they remained dormant.⁷⁰ This has been attributed to the cumbersome process involved in validating the credentials of the illegal migrants. For instance a complainant has to pay a fee to lodge a complaint against a suspected illegal migrant under the Act. It was often suggested that the Foreigners Act, 1946, which covers the rest of India should also be applied in Assam so that "the police can swing into action, issue notices to suspected Bangladeshi nationals or any other illegal migrant and gather thousands of such people of doubtful citizenship with proof."⁷¹ Eventually the BJP Government repealed the IMTD Act, 1983 so that the Foreigners Act, 1946 also becomes to operate in the State of Assam to expedite detection and deportation of illegal migrants.

In recent years the unrelenting securitization of the problem by the AASU compelled the Indian government to push back the cut-off date by 20 years by agreeing to define the 'indigenous people in Assam' as those whose names figured in the National Register of Citizens (NRC) 1951 or in the 1952 voter list and their descendents"⁷² This however generated a fresh bout of acrimony as threatened to disqualify the post-partition migrants and the riot affected people from other parts of Assam who had fled to East Pakistan and could not be registered in the NRC.⁷³ The Indian government has also taken a decision in 2000 to fence the entire 4,096 kilometre stretch of Indo-Bangladesh border spread over five States at a cost of Rs. 1,334 crores. Navtej Sarna, a spokesman for the Indian Foreign Ministry, cited the reasons for the Bangladesh fence as a combination of the same imperatives that have driven the United States and Israel to build barriers with Mexico and in the West Bank, respectively -- illegal immigration and terrorist infiltration⁷⁴ More recently on 24 July 2004, the chief of India's Border Security Force reported that the illegal migration from Bangladesh has come down by about 25 percent after half of the international border was fenced off.⁷⁵

The Indian government has recently announced that national identity cards would be issued to the people in 13 States in order to combat the "serious threat" to internal security caused by Bangladeshi and Pakistani immigrants. The States concerned are Jammu and Kashmir, Gujarat, Uttaranchal, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Tripura, Tamil Nadu, Goa, Pondicherry and Delhi. Again, India has reportedly drawn up a massive scheme for construction of barbed wire fencing along the 4,096-km-long Indo-Bangladesh border in West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. The scheme is meant to prevent the alleged influx of illegal migrants, entry and escape of ISI agents and militants from Bangladesh into India. Bangladesh has

cumbersome. This was in contrast to the provisions of Foreigners Act of 1946 operating in the rest of India wherein the burden of proof of citizenship lies on the accused foreigner.

70. Described as "toothless piece of legislation", the IMTD tribunals could only detect 1494 persons so far Prakash Singh, n. 43, 65. According to Indian Ministry of Home Affairs till mid-1999 the total enquiries initiated against suspected migrants numbered 3,02,554; out of which only 9,625 were declared illegal migrants by the IMTD tribunals and only 1,461 could be expelled. Ministry of Home Affairs, North-East Division, *Supplementary Status Report on Illegal Immigration of Bangladeshi Nationals*, (New Delhi: Government of India, n.d.)

71. Wasbir Hussain, *Of Land, People and Security*, Delhi Policy Group at www.delhipolicygroup.org/bulletin22.html

72. For the seven districts where such NRC is not available, the electoral role of 1952 were to be taken as the basic documents. Wasbir Hussain, n. 57, 116.

73. Id, 117-18.

74. Jehangir Pocha, n.48

75. www.washingtontimes.com/functions/print.php

always denied such infiltration through its border.⁷⁶ An increased mobilization to securitize the issue on India's eastern borders could be seen in light of post 11 September developments. With an increasing US pressure to defuse India –Pakistan border on the western front, the hardliners in India have found it necessary to seek the illegal Bangladeshi migrants as the new enemy alien which is threatening India's national security.⁷⁷ This has led to increasingly militarization of borders and a greater loss of lives. The number of people killed in BSF firing in South Bengal districts bordering Bangladesh more than doubled in recent months.

The militarization of borders has led to the evacuation (displacement!) of all women and children.. The men, baying for blood, have stayed behind for the "war" to "teach those Bangladeshis a lesson they won't forget in a hurry"⁷⁸ The Bangladesh media is also replete with news of BDR arming the people on the other side. Such mobilization has serious portents for further skirmishes between people and security forces. Indeed the two border forces need to have a "disturbed border" in order to get further reinforcement. Thus observed a study conducted by the civil society activists:

"We are well on our way to constructing illegal migrants from the east as enemy alien. Such constructions will no doubts be used to legitimise further the already burgeoning defence budget. But how much that will stop cross border migration is another question. As the snake charmers of Satgachi portrays threatened and hungry people will defy borders whether by braving bullets or by melting into the darkness."⁷⁹

Desecuritization: A Problem Solving Vision:

Intra-regional migration both voluntary and forced is going to remain a conflictual issue in the coming years in South Asia both because of the complex constructs of push and pull factors and also the asymmetries that exist in the region. Indeed the problem could be construed in two ways - as a chronic human problem of indigent people crossing borders in search of a decent livelihood or as a threat to national security. But given the dominance of state-centric paradigm, the illegal migrants are mostly seen as a challenge to the integrity and security of states and a source of intrastate tension. The surmise is that the transborder migration will exhaust the socioeconomic resources of the receiving states and also threaten the ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic composition of the population. The arguments discounting the spectre of illegal migration may not be politically correct in the contemporary inter-state system, the truth is that the "state-centric" vision undermines the vital concerns of human security. It is only recently that these concerns have been brought within the purview of security studies in the frame of non-traditional security. There is also a discernible transition from an exclusive state-

76. Sensitivity in Dhaka over India's repeated efforts to fence the borders runs high. The perception is that barbed wires are a manifestation of unfriendly relations as if the two neighbours were locked in hostility. Barbed wire has reportedly been used by India on the Pakistan side of the border.

77. See Ranabir Sammadar, *Preface*, n. 66

78. Editorial, *Refugee Watch*, no 18, (Calcutta, Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, April 2003), 1.

79. Paula Bannerjee *et al*, "Lives Delimited by Barbed Wires: Refugees from East", *Refugee Watch*, no 18, (Calcutta, Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, April 2003), 6.

centric approach to global concerns regarding welfare of the people irrespective of their nationalities. Desecuritisation thus marks a crucial break from previous approaches as it explores the possibilities of managing non-traditional security threats before they are transferred out of public constituencies to national security concerns. For this we need a mix of several policy formulae that can defuse the situation and be practicable enough to implement.

Our submission is that the illegal migration issue has to be approached through a comprehensive and problem-solving perspective.⁸⁰ There are alternative perspectives which may suggest the generic causes of such unwanted population flows as also remedial suggestions to ensure that such intractable illegal migration could be prevented from occurring in the first place and defused and resolved before they take an alarming magnitude. No body denies that the problem of illegal migrants from Bangladesh needs to be addressed and that too urgently. Differences arise not about the issue itself, but the manner in which it is to be addressed. Every now and again a government wakes up to politically exploit an essentially humanitarian issue that concerns the poorest of the poor in this world. And it is also not that the people of India and Bangladesh do not wish to solve the problem but the politico-military constellations within both societies are so deeply bonded with their limited vision that they would not go an extra mile to do so. One example of such inertia is that the two countries have yet to complete the demarcation of boundaries and negotiate the exchange of adverse possessions and enclaves to enable ratification of the Indo-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement, 1974. Instead of this happening the plight of the indigent nowhere people is often used as an electoral issue or to divert the attention of masses from the real development concerns.

Obviously there is no unilateral solution to the problem of illegal migration. In Bangladesh it is common for India to be referred to as a big neighbour with a small heart. In India there is generally an element of surprise when Bangladesh does not act like a submissive neighbour. The lack of consensus between the two neighbours results in such stalemates as occurred on the issue of snake charmers of Satgachi. Indeed it is also doubtful if Bangladesh would accept those identified as illegal migrants from that country as its citizens. This might lead to a vicious circle with India trying to push illegal migrants into Bangladesh and Bangladesh refusing to accept them. Fencing the entire border too, would not help alone. While detection is a possible solution, when it comes to Bangladeshi migrants their deportation is near-impossible. Issuing national identity cards to all residents in India and special work permits to fresh entrants from Bangladesh may be a workable solution. Such an exercise should, however, be sensitive to the ground reality that most Bangladeshi migrants are economic migrants and are also contributing to India's economy

One of the effective ways to tackle the national security concerns is to develop a dialogue at the regional level to tackle the problem of illegal migration. This could have far reaching impact on the emerging goals of regional integration among the seven countries of this region. But so far the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

80. See Haque Md.Shahidul, "Orderly and Human Migration: An Emerging Paradigm for Development", *BISS Journal*, vol. 23, no.1 (Bangladesh Institute of International & Strategic Studies, January 2002), 1-19.

(SAARC) has evaded such sensitive issues as population movement which could bring about fissures in the organization. In any case, the SAARC mired in India- Pakistan jostling does not evoke much hope at least for the present. So it is possible to seek an issue based regional collaboration may be informal if it is not possible to involve the states officially. One could also discern some initiatives in this direction whereby civil society-based research and action groups in both countries are collaborating informally to share strategies to tackle the issues relating to forced and unforced migration.

It is also important to recognize the umbilical chord between population flux and patterns of global/regional economy and order. Kuldeep Nayar a noted journalist and activist recently quoted a leading businessman from Bangladesh as saying "You make Bangladesh economically livable and the infiltration into your country will automatically stop."⁸¹ People are crossing borders risking their lives because of diminishing options: because they have to. While India must stop the illegal migration, it should not consider the issue only from the security point of view. There are also worthy suggestions to consider the possibility of an orderly migration whereby immigrants filling in forms to enter India legally to seek work, stay or pass through. Issuing national identity cards to all residents in India and special work permits to fresh entrants from Bangladesh may also be a workable solution. A more practical approach would perhaps be to plug the flow and pursue a policy of assimilation, as the former President of Asom Sahitya Sabha chief, Homen Borgohain, pushed for, by recognising the migrants who are already in as an integral part of the greater Assamese society.⁸²

In the case of illegal migration from Bangladesh, the securitization process has had varied ramifications. It surely helped the domestic agenda of the ruling elite to consolidate its "patriotic image" and to expand its political support especially amongst the majority community. The securitization of the issue also brought out the severity of the problem and the way it is impinging on India's precious resources. Of critical interest is the fact that the securitization acts also diminished the political differences on this issue. Once the issue was brought out as a national security threat, it was no more possible for the left and secular forces to brand it simply as a communal agenda.

But the securitization process also pre-empted a possibility of tackling this issue in the spirit of regional cooperation. The truth is that the problem of illegal migration *per se* is not a security problem. It is not an invasion of a country by the illegal migrants from another country. It is essentially a human problem caused by poverty-stricken people crossing borders in search of a decent livelihood. The traditional security perspectives do not offer much clues to understand the issue. What is most needed is a humanitarian approach to the problem of migration without which no long term solution would be possible. While respecting due rights to its own citizens, it is also important to offer humanitarian assistance to stateless people, available to them through a range of international regimes. The only way to pre-empt such non-traditional security issues as illegal migration from becoming a hard core national security issue therefore lies in a sustained drive for peace and human development and also in locating the problematic within a milieu of arbitrary and broken borders.

81. He also recalls that there was a proposal to issue work permits to the Bangladeshis seeking jobs in India which was endorsed by the then Home Minister L K Advani. Kuldeep Nayar Reaching out to Dhaka, Feb 23 2001 inhome.rediff.com/news/2001/feb/23nayar.htm

82. Wasbir Hussain, "Of land, People and Security", *The Hindu*, (July 01, 2003).