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# A Study on Illegal Immigration into North-East India: The Case of Nagaland

M Amarjeet Singh

Migration is a global phenomenon, and will continue to do so in the near future. Every country aspires to regulate migration according to their requirements. But, not all country is successful. Hence illegal (cross-border) immigration has been a cause of concern to them. Efforts to control and prevent illegal immigration remain highly inadequate in India; and likely to remain so in the coming years. But, the reality is that unabated illegal immigration has enormous demographic and social implications, capable of creating tensions and conflict between the immigrants and the natives; and more so among the natives. This is particularly worrisome in North-East India, which has been the victim of unabated illegal immigration from across the border in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, campaign against illegal immigration in India also divides its people on communal lines. Hence, the future tensions and conflict will be not only between the immigrants and the natives, but also among the natives. However, in the absence of a strong political will, illegal immigration would continue despite fully knowing its long term implications. Indeed, India has chosen to ignore illegal immigration for several decades; and it will be extremely difficult for her to resolve the 'ensuing conflict' arising out of unabated illegal immigration. If deportations continue at current levels it will take more than 1000 years for India to deport an estimated 15 million illegal immigrants. Hence, India needs to adapt realistic time-bound strategies to control and prevent cross-border illegal immigration. Nonetheless, the issue is much more serious than it seems.



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**M Amarjeet Singh**



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# INTRODUCTION

Migration is a global phenomenon; and it will continue to do so in the near future. All through human history, it has been a significant factor influencing population change. Migration involves the (more or less) permanent movement of individuals or groups across symbolic or political boundaries into new residential areas and communities.<sup>1</sup> In ancient times, migration usually took place in small groups, such as tribes or clans, whereas today, it is generally by individuals or families.

There are two forms of migration: (a) internal migration (movement of people from one area of a country to another for the purpose or with the aim of establishing a new residence); and (b) international migration (movement, either permanently or temporarily, of people from their country of origin or of habitual residence to another country). International migration can be: (a) emigration (people moving out of the country); and (b) immigration (people coming into the country).

According to the *'Human Development Report 2009'*, the overwhelming majority of people who move do so inside their own country. The Report estimated an approximately 740 million people are internal migrants, which is almost four times as many as those who have moved internationally. The Report further stated that among people who have moved across national borders, just over a third moved from a developing to a developed country. Further, most of the world's 200 million international migrants moved from one developing country to another or between developed countries.<sup>2</sup> There were an estimated 192 million international migrants in the world in 2005, accounting for 3 per cent of the world population, with the developed countries hosting 60 per cent (115 million) of them. In 2005, only about 77 million international migrants lived in developing countries.<sup>3</sup>

The factors influencing migration are two-fold: (a) those that exert a 'pull' on individuals because of attractions, like better employment avenues,

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<sup>1</sup> Marshal Gordon, "Dictionary of Sociology", OUP, Oxford and New York, 1998, p. 415.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Development Programme, "Human Development Report 2009", New York, 2009, p. 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, "International Migration Report 2006: A Global Assessment," New York, 2009.

political or religious freedom, etc., and (b) those that ‘push’ individuals or groups to move to another place due to economic or political or religious reasons. Pritchett identifies five driving forces that make the pressure for mobility across national boundaries: (a) gaps in unskilled wages; (b) differing demographic futures; (c) the globalisation of everything, but labour; (d) the rise of employment in low-skill, hard-core non-tradables; and (e) lagging growth in ‘ghost’ countries.<sup>4</sup>

Each country aspires to control migration to suit their domestic requirements. Unfortunately, not all country is successful. Hence illegal (unauthorised/unregulated) immigration has been a cause of concern to many countries. In recent years, the fight against illegal immigration has become a problem of growing scale for many countries. The situation is much more complex in the Indian context; and the country is yet to fully realise its long-term implications. So much so that measures to control illegal migration in India are also highly inadequate.

Illegal migration (both emigration and immigration) refers to inter-country movement of people not in accordance with national laws and regulations. In recent years, it has become a problem of growing scale in many countries. At the same time, accurate statistics on illegal migration are rarely available. Estimates or guesstimates on illegal migration are often influenced by the methodology utilised and sometimes by the agenda of those reporting.<sup>5</sup> Convention No. 143, adopted during the 1975 ILO conference, defines clandestine/illegal migration movements as those where migrants find themselves “during their journey, on arrival or during their period of residence and employment [in] conditions contravening relevant international multilateral or bilateral instruments or agreements, or national laws or regulations.” This definition places stress on the diverse aspects of irregularity: entry, residence in the host country and the undertaking of an occupation.<sup>6</sup>

Study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2008 estimated 11.9 million illegal immigrants in the US. The study revealed that they were evenly

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<sup>4</sup> Pritchett, L., “Let Their People Come: Breaking the Gridlock on Global Labour Mobility”, Center for Global Development, Washington D.C., 2006, pp. 5-7.

<sup>5</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), “World Migration 2008: Managing Labour Mobility in the Evolving Global Economy”, Geneva, 2008, p. 207.

<sup>6</sup> Tapinos Georges, “Clandestine Immigration: Economic and Political issues”, in Trends in International Migration”, OECD, Paris, 1999, p. 229.

spread across the country and their median household income was \$36,000, as against \$50,000 for an average American citizen. Open borders with Mexico, lack of border patrols and cheap labour for employers were identified as the major factors of illegal immigration. The study estimated that up to half of the illegal immigrants might have entered the country legally and overstayed their visa, while the rest had entered clandestinely. Mexico is not only the major country of origin of illegal migration, but also a transit country for illegal migration from Central and South America to the US.<sup>7</sup>

On the basis of the difference between the number of foreigners registered on the census lists and the number of residence permits issued, it was estimated that there were over one million illegal immigrants in Spain in 2003.<sup>8</sup> In 2005, nearly 700,000 of them applied under a major regularisation programme. Most of them held low-skilled jobs (32 per cent domestic workers, 21 per cent construction workers, 15 per cent agriculture workers, 10 per cent were in catering and 5 per cent in commerce).<sup>9</sup> In 2006, an estimated 500,000 illegal immigrants were living in Italy. Portugal and Greece rank after Spain and Italy as the two major recipients of illegal immigrants in southern Europe. Portugal had about 500,000 illegal immigrants in 2004 and Greece about 550,000 in 2006.<sup>10</sup> All western European countries are also host to a number of illegal immigrants, many of whom entered on a regular visa but then overstayed and worked without authorisation. In France, the then Minister of Interior and the present President, Nicolas Sarkozy, estimated in June 2006 that there were between 200,000 and 400,000 illegal immigrants. According to a study by London School of Economics, there were between 524,000 and 947,000 illegal immigrants in the UK in 2007, increasing from earlier estimates in 2001 of between 310,000 and 570,000. London is disproportionately affected, with an estimated 345,000 to 721,000 illegal immigrants in 2007. Only 111,265 illegal immigrants have been deported in 10 years since 1998. The report said that if deportations continue at these levels, it would take more

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<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, "A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States", Pew Research Center, Washington D.C., 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, n. 4, p. 210.

<sup>9</sup> Karaboytcheva, M.K, "An Evaluation of the Last Regularization Process of Foreign Workers in Spain (February-May 2005)", ERISS, Madrid, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, n. 4, p. 210.

than 60 years to deport 725,000 illegal immigrants.<sup>11</sup> In November 2006, the Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation estimated 10 million illegal immigrants in the country. The main factors influencing immigration in the Russian Federation are: (a) the more stable economic condition and higher standard of living; (b) the emergence of alternative employment; (c) laxity of Russian laws; (d) transparency of Russian borders; and (e) Russia's geographical location, which is favourable for transit from Asia to Europe.<sup>12</sup>

The smuggling of migrants is not a new phenomenon, but in recent years it has attracted increasing international attention. Each year, hundreds of thousands of migrants are moved illegally by organised trafficking groups, with the business of human trafficking being valued at several billion dollars a year. Migrants reportedly paid large sums to the traffickers, with Chinese migrants supposedly paying up to \$35,000 per capita to migrate to the US, and \$25,000 to migrate to the European Union. Migrants from Egypt paid \$5,000 and from Afghanistan paid \$10,000 to enter the European Union.<sup>13</sup> Crossing the Mediterranean is the main route for migrants to irregularly access southern Europe from Africa. Organised gangs charge between Euro 1,000 to 2,000 per person for the sea crossing from Libya to Italy.<sup>14</sup>

## INDIA

Migration from the erstwhile East Bengal/East Pakistan and the present day Bangladesh to eastern and north-eastern parts of India has been an ongoing phenomenon. Only after the partition of India in 1947, following which political boundaries changed, has this age-old tradition become 'illegal'. In the aftermath of partition, several lakh Hindus fled from East Pakistan for India to escape communal violence. This was also seen during the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971. In 1965, the then Chief Minister of Assam claimed that over one million "illegal Pakistani infiltrators" had entered eastern India between 1951 and 1961, and of which 220,961 were

<sup>11</sup> "Mayor condemns Government immigration failure", Press release by the Greater London Authority, London, March 9, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Eugene Krassinets, "Illegal migration and employment in Russia", ILO/Luxemburg Co-operation: 1998.

<sup>13</sup> Gail Edmondson and others, "Workers in Bondage", Business Week, November 27, 2000, pp. 56-67.

<sup>14</sup> Cited in International Organization for Migration, n. 4, p. 211.

in Assam, 459,494 in West Bengal, 297,857 in Bihar and 55,403 in Tripura.<sup>15</sup> Again, thousands of Chakmas and Hajongs fled to India following the construction of the Kaptai hydroelectric dam and the ethnic conflict in Chittagong Hill Tracts during the 1970s and 1980s. These were the three streams of 'forced migration' that occurred in response to specific incidents and have not continued after the incidents subsidised. However, illegal movement of people from Bangladesh to India continues. The issue has been one of the most complex and hotly debated issues between the two neighbours, and also within India.

This cross-border movement of people is due to a number of interrelated factors: economic, environmental, religious and political. Among them economic and environment factors have been the key drivers. Bangladesh is one of the most populous and poorest countries in the world. With 130.03 million persons in 2001, the country has one of the highest population density, 881 per sq. km. The World Bank had even estimated that unless the average fertility rate drops further, the country will be home to more than 180 million people in 2025 and to 208 million in 2050.<sup>16</sup> Mapping the poverty line by the direct calorie intake (DCI) method at less than 2122 kcal per person per day, altogether 44.3 per cent (or 55.9 million) of the country's population was 'absolute poor' in 2002.<sup>17</sup> Further, the country is also highly prone to natural calamities, such as floods, cyclone, drought, riverbank erosion and landslides.

Hence, Bangladesh is a major source of labour, but mainly of low-skilled and unskilled workers. Over the years, a large number of people have voluntarily migrated for both long and short-term employment, which is an important livelihood strategy for its large population. Most long-term emigration is to the industrialised countries, such as UK and North America. During the 1970s, labour markets in the Middle East offered a new scope for Bangladeshi migrant workers. Later, such migration also expanded to the newly industrialised countries of South-East Asia. From 1976 to 2002,

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Willem van Schendel, "The Bengal Borderland; Beyond State and Nation in South Asia", Anthem Press, London, 2005, p. 204.

<sup>16</sup> World Bank, "Poverty in Bangladesh: Building on Progress", Report No. 24299-BD, Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Sector Unit, South Asia Region, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, "Report of Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2000", Dhaka, 2002.

more than 3 million people migrated overseas for employment.<sup>18</sup> Above all, a large number of Bangladeshis have clandestinely migrated into India, a process that continues unabated.

Such continuing illegal immigration creates tensions between India and Bangladesh, particularly when India's Border Security Force (BSF) tries to push back illegal Bangladeshi immigrants. Most of these attempts are, however, thwarted by their Bangladeshi counterpart, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), on the grounds that the alleged illegal immigrants are 'Indian citizens'. In fact, Bangladesh authorities have been consistently maintaining that there are no Bangladeshis in India. As the then Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Morshed Khan, told at a press conference in Dhaka in 2003, "there is not a single Bangladeshi migrant in India."<sup>19</sup> Bangladesh even accused India of evicting Bengali-speaking Muslims by branding them as Bangladeshis. Following is an excerpt from the report of the 'Group of Ministers on National Security' of the Government of India in 2001:

"Illegal migration from across our borders has continued unabated for over five decades. We have yet to fully wake up to the implications of the unchecked immigration for the national security. Today, we have about 15 million Bangladeshis, 2.2 million Nepalese, 70,000 Sri Lankan Tamils and about one lakh Tibetan migrants living in India. Demographic changes have been brought about in the border belts of West Bengal, several districts in Bihar, Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya as a result of large-scale illegal migration. Even states like Delhi, Maharashtra and Rajasthan have been affected. Such large-scale migration has obvious social, economic, political and security implications. There is an all-round failure in India to come to grips with the problem of illegal immigration. Unfortunately, action on this subject invariably assumes communal overtones, with political parties taking positions to suit the interests of their vote banks. The massive illegal immigration poses a grave danger to our security, social harmony and economic well-being."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Siddiqui, T., "Transcending Boundaries: Labor Migration of Women from Bangladesh", University Press Ltd., Dhaka, 2001.

<sup>19</sup> T. V. Rajeswar, "Problem of Bangladeshi migrants: Politico-economic study in historical context", at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2003/20030217/edit.htm#3> (accessed June 2, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Government of India, "Report of the Group of Ministers on National Security", New Delhi, 2001, p. 60.

In 2003, the then Deputy Prime Minister, LK Advani, estimated that about 15 million Bangladeshis were in India. The ‘Task Force on Border Management’, which submitted its report to the Government of India in August 2000, also estimated 15 million Bangladeshis, with about three lakh entering India illegally every year. The largest concentrations of Bangladeshi immigrants are in Assam, West Bengal and Bihar. These states also share large land borders with Bangladesh. Several districts of West Bengal - Murshidabad, South and North 24 Parganas, Nadia and West Dinajpur - have a large proportion of Bangladeshi migrants, who have almost assimilated with the native population. The growth rates of Hindus and Muslims in West Bengal were 198.54 per cent and 310.93 per cent, respectively, during 1951-2001. The population share of Hindus and Muslims in 1951 was 78.45 per cent and 19.85 per cent, respectively, but during the last 50 years, the share of Hindus in West Bengal has come down to 72.47 per cent, whereas the share of Muslims has increased to 25.25 per cent.<sup>21</sup> Dhubri, Barpeta, Goalpara, Hailakandi and Karimganj districts of Assam have a similarly large concentration of Bangladeshi migrants. According to media reports, in 2003, their number in Delhi was estimated at 1.3 to 2.8 million; and in Mumbai at about five lakh.

In 2007, about 25,712 out of the five lakh Bangladeshis who came to India did not return after the expiry of their visas while in 2006 more than 24,000 went missing from the 4.84 lakh Bangladeshis who had entered India with valid travel documents. About 12 lakh Bangladeshis, who had entered India between 1972 and 2005 with valid documents, have not returned home. India has managed to push back only 15,000 of them in 2005, 12,000 in 2006 and 11,500 in 2007.<sup>22</sup>

## **NORTH-EAST INDIA**

Bounded by five countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Nepal), the North-East region of India, comprising eight states (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura) is connected with the rest of India by just a 22 km-long land

<sup>21</sup> Bimal Pramanik, “Present Bangladesh Scenario and its Impact on India’s Internal Security”, *Dialogue*, New Delhi, 9(4), April-June 2008, p. 142.

<sup>22</sup> “More than 70,000 Bangladeshis missing: India”, *Indian Express* (New Delhi), February 4, 2009.

corridor passing through Siliguri town in the eastern state of West Bengal. The region accounts for 8.06 per cent of the country's territory and 3.73 per cent of the total population (Census of India, 2001). Characterised by its extraordinary ethnic diversity, the region is inhabited by three distinct groups of people: the hill tribes, the plain tribes and the non-tribal population of the plains.



*Courtesy: Centre for Development and Peace Studies, Guwahati.*

**Table 1: North-East's Land Borders with Neighbouring Countries (in km)**

	Bangladesh	Bhutan	China	Myanmar	Nepal
Arunachal Pradesh	-	160	1080	440	-
Assam	263	262	-	-	-
Manipur	-	-	-	398	-
Meghalaya	443	-	-	-	-
Mizoram	318	-	-	480	-
Nagaland	-	-	-	215	-
Sikkim	-	30.90	220.35	-	07.80
Tripura	856	-	-	-	-
India	4096.7	699	3488	1643	1751

Further, most of these states are small in size and population, landlocked and hilly, and have poor communications and transportation infrastructure. Almost all consumer goods are imported from outside the region; and in all these states, non-government employment opportunities are minimal and hence the government is the principal employer. The region also lacks

in terms of key development indicators. The continued influx of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh has been of deep concern in the region, as some of these states have experienced a comparatively high growth rate of population in the post-Independence period, with illegal immigration widely perceived to be the key factor responsible.

The British occupation of Assam and subsequent expansion of power to surrounding areas brought massive changes in the society, polity and economy of the North-East region. With the development of the tea, oil and coal industries, the demand for migrant labour expanded and this attracted large-scale immigration from other parts of the country. Further, the availability of surplus land attracted a large number of cultivators from nearby East Bengal/East Pakistan. Only after the partition of India did immigration from what is Bangladesh today become ‘illegal’. However, as per the Assam Accord, those who came prior to 1971 are ‘Indian citizens’.

In 1998, the then Governor of Assam, SK Sinha, studied the impact of illegal migration in Assam and in his report to the President of India, he observed: “it is unfortunate that to this day after half-a-century of Independence; we have chosen to remain virtually oblivious to the grave danger to our national security arising from this unabated influx of illegal migrants”.<sup>23</sup>

The growth of population in Assam during 1951-2001 was 136.38 per cent against the national growth rate of 116.30 per cent. In 1951-61, there was a 34.98 per cent increase in the population of Assam as against 21.64 per cent nationally. It was 34.95 per cent in 1961-71 and 47.60 per cent in 1971-1991 (As no census could be taken in Assam in 1981, the population growth rate for 1981-91 was projected at 24.24 per cent).

The 1961 census estimated that approximately 750,000 East Pakistanis had migrated into Assam between 1951 and 1961. Apprehending drastic change in the demographic profile, Assamese anger erupted in 1978 when the All Assam Students’ Union (AASU) began a movement seeking the detection of illegal immigrants, their deletion from the voters’ list and their deportation. But the huge immigrant population could not be identified. The AASU noted that:

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<sup>23</sup> See ‘Report on Illegal Migration into Assam’, Raj Bhavan, Guwahati, 1998, p.17.

“The movement of the Muslim immigrants from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) to Assam commenced in the early decades of the last century. At first, the Muslim settlers occupied ‘Char’ land of Goalpara district and only a few migrated further inland into Kamrup and Nowgong districts. The tempo of this movement of population gradually increased by a combination of circumstances during the Independence and post-Independence days.”<sup>24</sup>

Fortunately, the decadal growth rate of population in Assam came down to 18.85 per cent during 1991-2001 as against 21.34 per cent for the country as a whole. This slowdown can be contributed to various factors, including: (a) escalation of insurgency in Assam; (b) impact of the Assam Movement and the vigilantism; (c) intensified patrolling along the border; and (d) Bangladeshis’ preference for other destinations.

Recently, the Supreme Court of India admitted a petition alleging the presence of 40 lakh illegal immigrants in the voter’s list in Assam and issued notices to the central and state governments, and the Election Commission of India. The petition filed by Assam Public Works (APW) seeks the deletion of the names of illegal immigrants from the voter’s lists and freezing of the list until names of the foreigners are deleted. The petitioner also demanded that Assembly polls, scheduled for 2011, be kept in abeyance until the voter’s list is corrected.<sup>25</sup>

From Assam, the immigrants are going to other states of the region. In recent times, Nagaland along with Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur has attracted a large number of immigrants.

Nagaland recorded the highest rate of population growth in India, from 56.08 per cent in 1981-1991 to 64.41 per cent in 1991-2001. While the population growth has not been uniform throughout the state, Dimapur and Wokha districts bordering Assam recorded an exceptionally high rate of population growth. Wokha district recorded a growth of 95.01 per cent between 1991 and 2001, the highest figure for any district in the

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<sup>24</sup> All Assam Students’ Union, “A Brief History of Illegal Immigration in Assam: An overview of the last hundred years”, Guwahati, February 11, 2005.

<sup>25</sup> “SC admits petition on illegal influx”, Assam Tribune (Guwahati), July 21, 2009.



### **A Border Guard Along the Border**

*A BSF jawan stands guard at Narayanpur in Tripura.<sup>26</sup>*

country. Evidently, the silent and unchecked influx of illegal immigrants in the state has played a crucial role in this abnormal growth.

In Mizoram, migration from Bangladesh and Myanmar has become a serious issue. The immigrants sneak in from across the state's border with Bangladesh or Myanmar, and also through

Cachar and Karimganj in Assam. The number of such immigrants in the state is estimated to be about 10,000.<sup>27</sup> They were mainly employed as manual labourers.

Meghalaya, which shares a 443-km-long border with Bangladesh, has also become another destination for the Bangladeshis. In Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur too, Bangladeshi immigrants has been reported. In February 2004, altogether 20 Bangladeshi nationals were arrested from a hotel in Imphal for entering Manipur without proper documents.<sup>28</sup> Earlier in Tripura, the influx from across the border has reduced the state's tribal population to a minority, making it the only state in the country that has been transformed from being a predominantly tribal to a non-tribal state. In the 2001 census, Scheduled Tribes (STs) constituted only 31.1 per cent of the state population of 3.2 million, while six decades earlier they comprised at least 50 per cent of the population. Anger over this demographic transformation led to tribal insurgency in the state. Keeping in mind the above discussion, the study will attempt an in-depth analysis of the illegal immigration in Nagaland.

<sup>26</sup> Telegraph (Kolkata), December 9, 2008.

<sup>27</sup> "Mizo govt to verify credentials", Telegraph (Kolkata), September 23, 2008.

<sup>28</sup> "Twenty Bangladeshi nationals arrested in Manipur", North East Tribune (Guwahati), February 24, 2004.

# ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION IN NAGALAND

With a total area of 16,579 sq. km, Nagaland had a population of 1,988,636 in 2001. The state is bounded by Assam on the west, Myanmar and Arunachal Pradesh on the east and by Manipur on the south. Nagaland is predominantly rural, where nearly 73 per cent of the population is engaged in agriculture sector. Its per capita income during 2000-01 was Rs 11,473 (at constant 1993-94 prices). The literacy rate was 67.11 per cent in 2001. The state is inhabited by 16 major tribes apart from several sub-tribes. Ao, Angami, Chang, Konyak, Lotha, Sumi, Chakhesang, Khiamniungam, Kachari, Phom, Rengma, Sangtam, Yimchungrü, Kuki, Zeliang and Pochury are the major tribes. Each tribe has distinct customs, language and attire.

## AIMS AND METHODS

No study is available in print on illegal immigration in Nagaland. Likewise, this phenomenon is also not well-documented in the media. Therefore, this study may be of some value in understanding the issue. Hence, this study is aimed at understanding the following objectives:

1. The nature and extent of illegal immigration in Nagaland;
2. The factors of immigration;
3. The local perception towards illegal immigration; and
4. The overall impact of illegal immigration.

The study has an exploratory-cum-descriptive design and is based on a host of primary as well as secondary information, gathered through extensive field surveys and media-coverage. A bulk of the information was gathered through personal discourse with several people across Nagaland, including journalists, academicians and student leaders, who have a wider understanding of the problem. The fieldwork covered important places like Kohima, Dimapur and Medziphema given the larger presence of the alleged illegal immigrants in these areas. However, the

fieldwork in Kohima town<sup>29</sup> had to be abandoned midway as this researcher was strongly advised by a student leader to seek prior permission from them in pursuance with their resolution restricting non-Nagas from conducting research work on any Naga issue. As a result, the fieldwork had to be mainly concentrated in and around Dimapur town. In all, 200 respondents (165 'common-men' and 35 'intelligentsia') were interviewed between 2005 and 2008.

Two sets of questionnaires were prepared after intensive evaluation of the limited literature available. However, I must admit that there is huge amount of literature on Assam. The first set of questionnaire was meant exclusively for the 'common-men' while the second one was for the 'intelligentsia' that included academicians, journalists and student leaders. The questionnaires contained both open-ended and closed-type questions. The open-ended questions made the respondents express their own views. The questionnaires attempted to capture the overall complexity of the subject and were administered both in the urban and semi-urban segments in Dimapur, Kohima and Medziphema. Adequate care was taken in the administration of the questionnaires; and additional comments were also solicited to better portray the problem.

The fieldwork yielded both the quantitative and qualitative information. The secondary source materials were mainly the collection of various newspapers clippings, given the dearth of printed literature on the subject.

Some of the limitations of the study are: (a) non-availability of reliable data; (b) clandestine nature of the immigrants, who identified themselves as the bona-fide residents of Assam; and (c) sensitivity of the issue.

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<sup>29</sup> Initially, we proposed to undertake fieldwork at Niuland in Dimapur district. But we were compelled to abandon it due to practical difficulties we encountered in the field due to the sensitiveness of the issue. However, I managed to collect some comments during frequent trips to Dimapur. Again in Kohima, we abandoned the fieldwork midway before reaching our set targets due to restriction imposed upon 'non-locals' from undertaking such sensitive study in Nagaland. An influential student leader whom we met in Kohima advised us to take prior permission from them, and advised us to submit a synopsis of the study. However, we felt not to seek the permission and continued the fieldwork elsewhere where there were not such restrictions.

## THE PROBLEM

Illegal immigration has been taking place in Nagaland, especially in areas bordering Assam, since the early 1970s or even earlier, but it has picked up since the 1980s. While immigration in Assam and Tripura are comparatively well-documented, it has not been done in Nagaland. Very recently, the issue has generated some attention among a section of the Naga society, who perceive it as a potential threat to their tribal identity.



*Courtesy: Centre for Development and Peace Studies, Guwahati.*

Like elsewhere, estimates about the total population of illegal immigrants in Nagaland are not forthcoming and these estimates vary from 100,000 to 300,000. In 1999, Thuingaleng Muivah, the general secretary of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM), estimated two lakh Bangladeshis in the Dimapur area.<sup>30</sup> But in 2000, the Union Home Ministry estimated about 75,000 illegal immigrants in the state. In 2003, the Nagaland government estimated approximately one lakh illegal immigrants who had settled in the foothills of the state bordering Assam.<sup>31</sup> Based on this estimates, we can assume there are at least 1 lakh illegal immigrants in the state.

<sup>30</sup> Kanchan Lakshman and Sanjay K. Jha, "India-Bangladesh: Restoring Sovereignty on Neglected Borders", *Faultlines: Writings on Conflict & Resolution*, Volume 14, Institute for Conflict Management, New Delhi, 2003, p. 124.

<sup>31</sup> Nishit Dholabhai, "Rio to warn Delhi on settlers with expose", *Telegraph (Kolkata)*, December 26, 2003.

Since Nagaland is not connected either by land and water with Bangladesh, immigrants have been coming via Assam after obtaining fraudulent documents, such as ration card, voter identity card and driving licence, from places like Karimganj, Nagaon, Golaghat and Sibsagar in Assam; and then settled along the foothills of Assam-Nagaland border as well as areas around Dimapur. Since the immigrants possessed these documents, the local police could do nothing despite suspecting their dubious nationality. Further, the cosmopolitan nature of Dimapur, the commercial hub of Nagaland, makes their identification and detection a highly arduous task. In 2003, the Nagaland chief minister, Neiphiu Rio, publicly acknowledged Assam as being the 'exporter' of illegal immigrants to Nagaland. *The Telegraph*, a Kolkata-based daily newspaper, also reported that certain officials of the Guwahati Municipal Corporation were issuing birth certificates for a paltry sum of Rs 200. Terming the report an 'eye-opener', Rio alleged that such rackets were endangering the entire North-East. He also alleged that when Bangladeshis were arrested by the Nagaland Police, they produced documents issued by the Assam government to prove their Indian citizenship.<sup>32</sup>

Prospects for better employment and the dislike of the locals for manual labour have significantly contributed to the influx of immigrants, with the immigrants easily finding work, be it in the agricultural fields, in homes, or as rickshaw pullers and manual labourers. As Nagaland faces a labour shortage, certain sections of Naga society also encouraged immigrants by providing them shelter, land for settlement and cultivation. Local contractors and businessmen also prefer to engage immigrants as they provide cheap and skilled labour.

Surprisingly, in the last two decades (1981-2001), Nagaland has recorded the highest rate of population growth in the entire country. Its population growth (Census of India 2001) recorded a sharp rise from 56.08 per cent in 1981-1991 to 64.41 per cent in 1991-2001. The population grew by 5.0 per cent per annum during 1971-81; 5.6 per cent per annum during 1981-91; and further increased to 6.4 per cent per annum during 1991-2001. Ironically, the population growth has not been uniform; it is concentrated in the plains adjoining Dimapur and districts bordering Assam. During

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, no. 33.

1991-2001, Wokha district registered a maximum growth rate of 95.01 per cent followed by Tuensang (78.1 per cent). Mokokchung district registered the lowest growth rate of 43.48 per cent during the period. Most observers attribute this phenomenal increase to illegal immigration. Interestingly, all this is happening when the state is supposed to be protected through an 'inner-line permit system', which restricts non-locals (Indian citizens from other states) access to most parts of the state.<sup>33</sup> My own impression is that the inner-line permit system has not been effective, because it has been severely misused by the local administration, taking small bribes for allowing non-locals to travel, mostly through the Dimapur-Kohima-Imphal section of National Highway No. 39.

**Table 2: District Profiles of Nagaland**

Districts	Area	Share of Total area (%)	Population 1991	Population 2001	Share in State population 2001 (%)	Decadal growth of population
Dimapur	927	5.59	*	308382	15.51	73.3
Kohima	4041	18.79	387561**	3,14,366	15.81	49.96
Mokokchung	1615	9.74	158374	227230	11.43	43.48
Mon	1786	10.77	149699	259604	12.05	73.42
Phek	2026	12.22	102156	148246	74.55	45.12
Tuensang	4228	25.5	232906	414801	20.86	78.1
Wokha	1628	9.82	82,612	1,61,098	8.10	95.01
Zunheboto	1255	7.57	96218	154909	7.78	61

Notes: \* Dimapur was a subdivision of Kohima district in 1991

\*\* includes the population of Dimapur Subdivision

Source: Nagaland State Human Development Report, 2004.

There are also reports of the intermarriages between the immigrants and natives. Some observers even accuse that immigrants are desirous of marrying natives to secure social sanction for their settlement, and this is particularly reported in areas bordering Assam. Concerned by these

<sup>33</sup> 'Outsiders' (Indian citizens from other states) are not allowed entry to Nagaland without obtaining an 'Inner-line permit' except in Dimapur town.

allegations, the Naga Students' Federation (NSF), an influential student body, even imposed restrictions on native girls marrying immigrants. Talking to the media in Guwahati on August 10, 2003, a student leader from Nagaland stated that the NSF had imposed a ban on Naga girls marrying immigrants from Bangladesh. He, however, clarified that the ban could not be strictly imposed.<sup>34</sup> On several occasions, several student organisations, including the NSF, have even gone to the extent of identifying and deporting suspected illegal immigrants. Unfortunately, they reportedly came back. In any event, such claims of 'deportation' have little meaning as they involve nothing more than dumping the illegal immigrants from one state to another. Nagaland has claimed to have deported about 20,000 immigrants between 1994 and 1997, but most of them are said to have returned.

As a result of rising intermarriage, a community called 'Sumias' has reportedly emerged in the state. Our investigations reveal that the term 'Sumias' was first reported in the late 1980s by a journalist who conducted an investigation at Niuland in Dimapur district.<sup>35</sup> The 'Sumias' are the children of intermarriage between the Sumi Naga tribe and immigrants. However, the alleged emergence of 'Sumias' remains very controversial and sensitive. Right or wrongly, it is even alleged that some Naga girls married immigrants on the impression that the immigrants were hard working.<sup>36</sup> On December 4, 2002, a local politician, Ato Yepthomi, told the media in Guwahati: "These Muslim immigrants settle along the border areas and are engaged in agricultural activities. They are employed in the paddy fields and after staying in the areas for a few years get married to local Sumi girls. And when their offspring are born, they name them after the Sumi tribe".<sup>37</sup> In the course of the field work, concerns have been raised about the possibility of the voters' list being doctored to include the 'Sumias' as well other immigrants. As an editorial in a Dimapur newspaper noted:

"There is no denying the fact, that in any Muslim religious day, at least half of the shops in Kohima and some 75 per cent in Dimapur

<sup>34</sup> See "NSF wages war on Bangla influx", *Assam Tribune* (Guwahati), August 11, 2003.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with a senior journalist (name withheld) at Dimapur, October 11, 2008.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with an intellectual (name withheld) in New Delhi, June 18, 2009.

<sup>37</sup> See "Illegal immigrants give birth to new Naga tribe", *Asian Age* (New Delhi), December 5, 2002.

remain closed. The point is that this is a clear indication of how much the migrants have been able to make an impact on trading.<sup>238</sup>

It is also a fact that immigrants, either legal or illegal, are fast gaining access to business establishments across the state. In a major survey conducted by the Department of Evaluation, Government of Nagaland in 2006 on the employment in the private/unorganised sector in three district headquarters of Kohima, Dimapur and Mokokchung, altogether 13,380 establishments/shops were surveyed. The total number of non-Naga<sup>39</sup> workforce earning their livelihood in these three sample districts was 45,815, with an annual income of Rs 450.60 crore. According to this survey, Dimapur had the largest non-Naga workforce of 32,700 persons, followed by Kohima (10,900) and Mokokchung (2,215). The survey covered 78 different trades ranging from agriculture, trading and manufacturing to the service sector. The annual income of non-Nagas in Dimapur was the highest at Rs 351.85 crore followed by Kohima at Rs 89.98 crore and Mokokchung at Rs 8.77 crore. The construction sector had the highest non-Naga workforce, employing 4,099 persons. This sector was followed by the loading and unloading sector in railway and bus stations and godowns. These service industries were dominated by non-Nagas. The third largest workforce of non-Nagas was in trading and entrepreneurial activity. Running of pan/gumti shops provides employment to 2,780 persons. This was followed by the grocery/ration shops and then by the service sector, with 2,514 persons engaged in plying handcarts and rickshaws. Catering/hotel and restaurant industry, which is also a service sector, had a workforce of 2,257 and was the sixth largest employer of non-Nagas.<sup>40</sup> Further, a survey conducted by the state Directorate of Agriculture in 2003 revealed that out of 23,777 business establishments, nearly 71.73 per cent were owned and run by non-Nagas, with the Nagas owning only 6,722 shops

<sup>38</sup> See “Silent invasion”, Nagaland Post (Dimapur), August 31, 2002.

<sup>39</sup> According to the NSF, there are two categories of non-Nagas in Nagaland. The first category constitutes the illegal immigrants (foreign nationals) like the Bangladeshis, Bhutanese, Nepalese (except those residing in Naga Hill District prior to 1940), etc. The second group comprises of non-Nagas of Indian origin (Indian citizens) who are under the purview of Inner Line Regulation. For details, see Naga Students’ Federation, *The Vanguard* (a monthly bulletin of the NSF), 1(1), May 1992, Kohima.

<sup>40</sup> Government of Nagaland, Directorate of Evaluation, “Evaluation Study on Employment Opportunities Forgone by Nagas and Employment of Non-Nagas in the State”, Publication No. 52, Kohima, July 2007.

(28.27 per cent).<sup>41</sup> In June 2009, the Angami Students Union (ASU) launched a verification drive of immigrants in Kohima, the capital of Nagaland, and to get their 'inner line permits' verified. In 2008, around 8,000 immigrants were registered in a similar drive undertaken by the union, though this number was far below the actual figures. The 8,000 immigrants were employed in 17 professions, such as business, labour, sales, carpentry, driving, tailoring, barbering, tea ferrying, mechanics, milkmen, cobblers, painters, paper hawkers, teachers, electricians, and masons.<sup>42</sup>

Immigrants not only provide cheap labour, but are more willing to take up jobs which native workers normally avoid. As a result, unemployment among unskilled and semi-skilled natives has also gone up. The presence of immigrants is increasingly being felt in the major marketing areas of Dimapur and control businesses that deal with second-hand clothes, bamboo, thatch, chicken, fish and vegetables. In the course of the fieldwork, it was often alleged that several business establishments bearing local names on the sign boards were actually owned and run by the immigrants. In 2003, the noted columnist, Patricia Mukhim, in an open letter to Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, cautioned:

“It may not be too long before somebody with the power of numbers (population) demands a Union Territorial status in Dimapur. Its market areas already look like a mini-Bangladesh, albeit more lucrative.”<sup>43</sup>

On their part, law enforcement agencies perceive the presence of illegal immigrants as a law and order problem, with their suspected involvement in various criminal acts like drug peddling, flesh trade and robbery. Some have charged that 'this population of desperate and homeless foreigners' was mainly responsible for the introduction of criminal and anti-social activities within Naga society.<sup>44</sup> With this background information it is important to ascertain public perception towards illegal immigration.

<sup>41</sup> See “Business survey shows outsiders control Nagaland”, *Asian Age* (New Delhi), September 6, 2003.

<sup>42</sup> “Angami Students’ Union to start verification drive”, *Nagaland Post* (Dimapur), June 15, 2009.

<sup>43</sup> See M Amarjeet Singh, “Countering floating population”, *Telegraph* (Kolkata), December 4, 2003.

<sup>44</sup> “ASU verification drive to check influx of illegal migrants”, *Morung Express* (Dimapur), June 16, 2009.

## PUBLIC PERCEPTION TOWARDS ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION

In this study, two-thirds of the intelligentsia identified: ‘economic opportunities in Nagaland’ and the ‘aversion of Nagas towards manual labour’ as the two key pull factors responsible for illegal immigration in the state. Other factors which they considered important are: ‘poverty in Bangladesh’, ‘lack of adequate laws’ and ‘presence of Bangladeshis in Assam’. Therefore, it is clear that several factors are responsible for illegal immigration in Nagaland. Besides these factors, some of them also argued that the tradition of tribal chieftainship also patronised immigration, as the self-proclaimed village chiefs adopted immigrants in order to establish new villages along the inter-state boundary with Assam.<sup>45</sup> A senior journalist in Dimapur remarked:

“Land is prestigious for the Nagas. However, inability of the locals to work in the field compelled us to depend on non-locals, many of them Bangladeshis, to tilt or plough. The hospitality of the Nagas coupled with the erosion of community-based values among the contemporary Naga society patronised immigrants to work for us. We are now increasingly dependent on them. In their absence, will the Nagas fill up the vacuum created?”<sup>46</sup>

As stated earlier, estimates on the population of illegal immigrants in Nagaland vary from between one and three lakh. In this study, we assume at least 1,00,000 illegal immigrants in Nagaland. In this context, we inquired about the magnitude of illegal immigration in the state. As much as 85.71 per cent of the intelligentsia as against 32.72 per cent common-men perceived the magnitude to be ‘high’. Thus, it can be said that the intelligentsia perceived more seriously than the common-men. Of the latter, 38.78 per cent perceived the magnitude to be ‘moderate’ as against 14.28 per cent of the intelligentsia. Moreover, one-fifth of the common-men were not aware of immigration.

<sup>45</sup> Author’s Interview with M. Jamir, an academician, at Dimapur, February 18, 2005.

<sup>46</sup> Author’s interview with Monalisa Changkija, Editor, Nagaland Page, at Dimapur, November 12, 2005.

**Table 3: Magnitude of Immigration in Nagaland**

Response	Common-men		Intelligentsia	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
High	54	32.72	30	85.71
Moderate	64	38.78	5	14.28
Low	14	8.48	-	-
No aware	33	20	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>99.98</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>99.99</b>

When asked about the presence of illegal immigrants in their own locality, the data presents a mixed response. The responses of common-men were worked out as: ‘high’ (21.21 per cent), ‘moderate’ (18.78 per cent), and ‘low’ (40.60 per cent), respectively. However, the 19.39 per cent were ‘not aware’. Majority of the respondents from Dimapur area stated that there was a large concentration of illegal immigrants in their district.

**Table 4: Presence of Immigrants in the locality**

AlternativeResponse	Common-men	
	Number	Per cent
High	35	21.21
Moderate	31	18.78
Low	67	40.60
Not aware	32	19.39
Total	165	99.98

When asked if any respondents had ever employed suspected illegal immigrants, either to work in their fields, in their homes, etc., around one-fifth of the common-men claimed to have employed them, while around 81.12 per cent denied doing so.

**Table 5: Employment of Immigrants**

Alternative Response	Common-men	
	Male	Per cent
Yes	31	18.78
No	134	81.21
Total	165	99.99

*Migrant labourers engaged in road construction work in Guwahati.<sup>47</sup>*

We were also interested in knowing the distinction between immigrant workers and local ones. Here, it was found that a majority of the respondents, 72.12 per cent of the common-men and 91.42 per cent of the intelligentsia felt that native workers were not readily available whereas immigrant workers were easily available. Almost all the respondents also felt that the immigrant workers could be hired at a cheaper rate as compared to native workers. Further, 35 per cent of the common-men as against 26 per cent of the intelligentsia felt that immigrant workers were more skilled than the native workers. However, around 44 per cent of the common-men and 40 per cent of the intelligentsia did not think so. Also, around 22 per cent common-men and 34 per cent intelligentsia did not respond on this issue.

<sup>47</sup> Frontline (Chennai), June 2-15, 2007.

Interestingly, 27.27 per cent common-men and 31.42 per cent intelligentsia found the immigrants more hardworking than the native workers. But another 49.09 per cent common-men as against 37.14 per cent intelligentsia did not think so. Despite our arduous efforts, around 22 per cent common-men and 31.42 per cent of the intelligentsia refused to comment on this subject. But it was clear illegal immigrants accepted the first job they were offered and usually at lower rates of wages as compared to native workers.

**Table 6: Comparison between immigrant and local labourers (in per cent)**

Statements	Common-men			Intelligentsia		
	Agree	Disagree	No Comment	Agree	Disagree	No Comment
Local labourers are scarce whereas immigrant labourers are easily available	72.12	8.34	19.39	91.42	5.71	2.85
Immigrants can be hired cheaply as compared to the local labourers	81.81	1.81	16.36	100	-	-
Immigrants are more skilled compared to local labourers	34.54	43.63	21.81	25.71	40	34.28
Immigrants are more hardworking than the locals	27.27	49.09	23.63	31.42	37.14	31.42
Immigrants can be easily handled as compared to local labourers	58.18	19.39	22.42	37.14	11.42	51.42

Further, at least 58.18 per cent common-men and 37.14 per cent of the intelligentsia felt that immigrant workers could be easily handled as compared to the native workers. But another 19.39 per cent common-men and 11.42 per cent intelligentsia did not think so. Here again, quite a good number, that constituted 22.42 per cent common-men and 51.42

per cent intelligentsia, preferred to remain mum. In this context, someone remarked: “If you employ native workers, you have to pay more. At the same time, the immigrants can be easily handled and are very loyal too.”<sup>48</sup>

**Table 7: Who to be blame for Illegal Immigration? (in per cent) (Intelligentsia)**

Alternate Response	High	Moderate	Low	No comment
Naga themselves	11.42	62.85	8.57	17.14
Politicians	82.85	17.14	-	-
Local contractors	91.42	5.71	-	2.85
Assam	45.71	37.14	8.57	8.57

Local contractors and politicians were also usually blamed for encouraging illegal immigration. The politicians were mostly blamed for not taking any initiative to tackle the problem. For local contractors, the blame is mainly for encouraging employment of immigrants. Those surveyed also blamed the Naga society for encouraging immigration. Assam too was criticised for the present situation in the state. “The advantages of illegal migration tend to be on the employers’ side. In that the migrant’s illegal status vis-à-vis his residence or employment places him in a situation of marked dependence, rendering him more willing to accept a very low wage, often below the legal minimum, the employer might expect to benefit.”<sup>49</sup>

**Table 8: Awareness of the campaign against illegal migration (in per cent)**

Organisations	Common-men		Intelligentsia	
	Aware	Not Aware	Aware	Not Aware
Students’ Organisations	31.51	68.48	91.42	8.57
Political parties	18.78	81.21	14.28	85.71
Media	32.32	67.67	97.14	2.85

<sup>48</sup> Author’s interview with a respondent at Dimapur, November 12, 2005.

<sup>49</sup> Tapinos Georges, ‘Clandestine Immigration: Economic and Political Issues’, in Trends in International Migration, OECD, 1999, p. 236.

Nonetheless, of late, the natives’ concern for illegal immigration has begun to grow. But so far only the students’ organisations have been largely credited with raising the issue in the state. As the data indicates, only 31.51 per cent of the common-men as against 91.42 per cent of the intelligentsia were aware of the campaigns launched by various students’ organisations. A large majority of the respondents had not even heard about any campaign launched by local political parties. In fact, no political parties in the state have ever seriously taken up the matter. However, 97.14 per cent intelligentsia, as against 32.12 per cent common-men, were aware of the efforts of the media, particularly local dailies to create awareness among the masses.

As outlined earlier, a section of the native population began to perceive illegal immigration as one of the most dramatic economic, demographic, social and political problems of the state. Their apprehension is that this may lead to loss of land and damage tribal culture. They are also equally worried that in due course of time the illegal immigrants might even become an ethnic group. Keeping this in mind, we were also interested in knowing the perceived threat on Nagaland due to illegal immigration. Accordingly, 32.12 per cent of the common-men perceived the impact of illegal migration on tribal economy to be ‘highly negative’, while more than one-fifth (22.42 per cent) of them considered the economic impact to be ‘moderately negative’. Altogether, 32.72 per cent of the common-men did not see any significant threat. Moreover, another 12.72 per cent common-men were not aware at all.

**Table 9: Impact of Immigration on Tribal Economy (in per cent)**

Response	Total
No significant impact	32.72
Moderately negative	22.42
Highly negative	32.12
Not aware	12.72

Altogether 30.29 per cent of the common-men felt that the illegal immigration is a potential security threat for Nagaland, whereas 21.81 per cent do not think so. This question was raised in the context of a possible conflict between immigrants and the natives in the near future. Such

assessment is particularly necessary in view of the sensitivities of the ethnic conflict in the North-East region. However, another 47.90 per cent were not aware of any threat. In this regard, a journalist cautioned: “Among the bulk of the illegal immigrants, many are rootless. Hence, life for them is not as precious, so they can go to any extent of committing any criminal act.”<sup>50</sup>

**Table 10: Security threat of Immigration (in per cent)**

Response	Total
Yes	30.29
No	21.81
Not aware	47.90

Again, 12.72 per cent of the common-men perceived that the demographic threat due to immigration was ‘high’ while another 31.51 per cent perceived a ‘moderate’ threat. Yet another 35.75 per cent perceived a ‘low’ threat. The remaining, 20 per cent, were not aware at all.

**Table 11: Demographic threat due to Immigration (in per cent)**

Alternate Response	Total
High	12.72
Moderate	31.51
Low	35.75
No response	20.00

When asked about the reports of intermarriage between the natives and the immigrants, only about one-fourth common-men claimed to have heard about this. According to them, one of the reasons for such marriages could also be the efforts of the immigrants to materialise their stay in the state. However, according to another one-fourth respondents, this was a baseless allegation.

We were also interested in knowing the perceptions of the intelligentsia on the impact of illegal migration. When asked about the economic impact,

<sup>50</sup> Interview with a journalist (name withheld) at Dimapur, November 11, 2008.

their response was ‘high’ (40 per cent), ‘moderate’ (48.57 per cent), and ‘low’ (5.71 per cent), respectively. On their apprehension regarding the shrinking of employment opportunities among the locals, the response was worked out as ‘high’ (42.85 per cent), ‘moderate’ (42.85 per cent), and ‘low’ (5.71 per cent), respectively. The overall impression was that immigrants’ foray into the local workforce would deprive the natives of low paid jobs, thus leading to unemployment amongst them.

**Table 12: Perceptions of the Intelligentsia on the Impact of Immigration (in per cent)**

Statements	High	Moderate	Low	No comment
Nagaland’s economy is affected	40	48.57	5.71	5.71
Employment opportunities of the locals are shrinking	42.85	42.85	5.71	8.57
Affects the demographic profile of the state	32.28	65.71	-	-
It is a threat to the security of Nagaland	22.85	51.42	-	25.71
Affects political and electoral process	8.57	31.42	11.42	48.57

Accordingly, 65.71 per cent intelligentsia felt that state’s demographic profile would be ‘moderately’ affected due to immigration, while another 28.57 per cent considered it to be ‘high’ in small tribal states like Nagaland. On the security front, 51.42 per cent of them perceived a ‘moderate’ security threat; another 17.14 per cent felt the threat to be ‘high’ as there would be constant tension between the immigrants and the natives. Illegal immigration, according to 31.42 per cent intelligentsia, would pose a ‘moderate’ threat on the state’s political and electoral process; another 8.57 per cent of them perceived the threat to be ‘high’. Many of them expressed the threat would be real in about 30 to 40 years from now. However, almost all the intelligentsia felt that the state government were unable to respond to the situation. Many of the respondents were actually worried of the demographic implication, if illegal immigration continued unabated.

**Table 13: Common-men' Perceptions towards the following Statements (in per cent)**

Statements	Agree	Disagree	No comment
Immigrants attempts to legalise their stay by marrying locales	47.67	3.09	49.09
Local politicians/influential people patronise immigrants in settling in the state	54.54	3.63	41.81
State government is indifferent	53.33	18.18	48.48
Naga themselves are to be blamed for immigration	49.59	7.27	43.03
Bangladeshi migrants also indulge in criminal acts	40	1.21	58.78

Less than one-half of the common-men agreed with the allegation of immigrants attempting to materialise their stay by marrying natives. However, the rest did not accept the allegations or were not aware. Half of them blamed local politicians and influential people for patronising immigration. At the same time, half of them also said that the Naga community was responsible. Someone remarked: "Almost everyone in Nagaland is against illegal immigration. However, we lack a united effort to tackle the menace."<sup>51</sup> Though the issue has generated some concerns in the recent past, but no concerted strategy has been evolved. This underscores the complexities of the issue. Hence, we were also interested in knowing the measures suggested by the respondents. As the data indicates, 80 per cent of the common-men and 57.14 per cent intelligentsia suggested 'forcible deportation' of the illegal immigrants. Almost all the respondents (86.06 per cent common-men and all the intelligentsia) felt that the existing laws were inadequate to deal with immigration and advocated the need for stricter laws. Only 4.09 per cent of the common-men, as against 57.14 per cent intelligentsia, felt that unless Assam cooperated illegal migration would continue in the state. However, 24.09

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with A. Lotha, a college student, in Dimapur, November 11, 2005.

per cent common-men and another 8.57 per cent intelligentsia found no logic in seeking the cooperation of another state.

The inability of the state government to act against illegal immigration was also strongly felt by almost all the respondents. It was seen that 79.18 per cent common-men and 94.28 per cent intelligentsia felt that the state government had failed to tackle the issue. On the idea of issuing work permits to the immigrants, 37.57 per cent common-men as against 60 per cent of the intelligentsia did not support the idea. Only some respondents favoured the idea of work permits to the immigrants.

**Table 14: Prevention of illegal migration (in per cent)**

Statements	Common-men			Intelligentsia		
	Agree	Disagree	No Comment	Agree	Disagree	No Comment
Forcibly deportation	80	10.30	9.69	57.14	34.28	8.57
Existing laws are inadequate	86.06	2.42	11.51	100	-	-
Strict laws are needed	90.90	-	9.09	100	-	-
Cooperation of Assam is essential	24.09	24.09	46.66	57.14	8.57	34.28
Government has failed	79.18	3.03	18.78	94.28	2.85	2.85
Work permit to immigrants	12.12	37.57	50.30	2.85	60	37.14

Only a small number of the respondents (1.21 per cent common-men and 2.85 per cent intelligentsia) thought that the issue had been politicised. However, 76.36 per cent common-men and another 97.14 per cent intelligentsia did not think so. However, my own impression is that the issue has not been as politicised in Nagaland as we it has been in neighbouring Assam. However, both the state government and the community-based organisations are clueless on how to deal with this problem.

**Table 15: Immigration is Politicised**

Response	Common-men	Intelligentsia
Yes	1.21	2.85
No	76.36	97.14
No Comment	22.42	-

On creating awareness among the people, 60 per cent of the intelligentsia and another 41.81 per cent common-men would like to see joint efforts of the state government, the central government and community-based organisations. But, 22.85 per cent of the intelligentsia as against 50.30 per cent of the common-men wanted community-based organisations to take main initiative. Their main argument was that in a tribal state like Nagaland, the community-based organisations have a very crucial role to play as there is more acceptability of their roles among the general population. Only 11.42 of the intelligentsia and 5.48 of the common-men wanted a joint initiative of the state government and the central government. The rest (5.71 per cent intelligentsia and 1.81 per cent common-men) favoured that the entire task should be handed over to the state government and the community-based organisations. In fact the community-based organisations are expected to play an active role, as Nagaland has a vibrant civil society which until now was focussing primarily on other societal issues, including insurgency. As the response of the respondents indicated majority of them were convinced that government alone won't be able to effectively handle illegal immigration. Hence, they advocated an active role for the community-based organisations.

**Table 16: Creating awareness on Illegal Immigration**

Agencies	Intelligentsia	Common-men
A. State government	-	0.60
B. Central government	-	-
C. Community-based Organizations	22.85	50.30
A+B+C	60	41.81
A+B	11.42	5.48
A+C	5.71	1.81

The study also sought to know the effectiveness of the Inner-Line Permit (ILP). The ILP is required for Indian citizens to enter Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram. It is issued under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873. An overwhelming majority of the intelligentsia (94.28 per cent) felt that the ILP had not been effective at all. On July 10, 2009, Nagaland Home Minister Imkong Inchen stated on the floor of the State Assembly in Kohima that a total of 75,807 ILPs were issued in 2008-09, and the total amount collected was Rs 2,024,690. In 2007-08, the number of permits issued was 76,268, with the total amount collected being Rs 2,157,345. However, he admitted that the state did not have any mechanism to check if people coming in through this permit ever left the state or not.<sup>52</sup>

**Table 17: Effectiveness of the Inner-Line Permit (Intelligentsia)**

Effectiveness of Inner-Line Permit	Per cent
Very high	-
High	-
Moderate	-
Low	5.71
Very low	94.28

<sup>52</sup> “Home minister on issue of ILPs”, Nagaland Post (Dimapur), July 11, 2009.

# SUMMARY OF THE FIELD-SURVEY, CONSTRAINTS AND IMPACTS

## SUMMARY

Estimates of the total population of illegal immigrants either in Nagaland or elsewhere in India is problematic due to the clandestine nature of the immigrants. This will continue to do so in the future too. However, despite the lack of precise figures, several estimates underscore its magnitude. Illegal immigration is getting recognised as one of the growing concerns in tribal-dominated Nagaland. However, there is a sense of helplessness and anxiety among the Nagas, fearing that their tribal identity is under threat.

Better economic prospects and aversion of Nagas towards manual labour are the key factors which attract immigrants to the state. These factors, coupled with ineffective laws and regulations; and the presence of illegal immigrants in neighbouring Assam, aid immigration to the state.

Once in Nagaland, the immigrants could easily find jobs, as domestic help, in the agricultural fields, rickshaw pulling, manual labourer and helpers. And, within a few months of getting gainful employment, they usually bring their family members and relatives.

There also exists clear distinction between the immigrant workers and native workers. Jobs that are generally unattractive to the natives were being taken up by the immigrants. And, the immigrant workers come at cheaper rates as compared to the local ones. In big towns, like Dimapur or Kohima, immigrant workers can be easily located and engaged unlike the local ones. This clearly shows the aversion of the Nagas towards manual work. This easy availability of immigrant workers also raises the question of who will fill the vacuum if the immigrants are deported? It is also usually assumed that the immigrant workers are more skilled than the local ones. In addition, they are more hardworking and can be easily handled. As they charge less, local contractors also prefer to employ them. Such scenarios pave the way for large-scale immigration. Moreover, the Nagas are becoming increasingly dependent on the immigrants.

At the same time, large sections of the Nagas are increasingly getting worried that unabated immigration will become a major economic, demographic and political problem. Their apprehension is that this may lead to loss of land and damage to tribal cultural identity. The study found the perception that immigration could bring adverse implications on the local economy, with the labour force gradually being captured by the immigrants. In major towns of the state, immigrants have already established control over most businesses. Further, the presence of immigrants is perceived as a law and order problem but also as a potential security threat. This apprehension is due to the prospect for future tensions between the immigrants and the natives. But as of now opinion is divided on this issue. Also, there is also the apprehension that immigrants are more involved in criminal acts, such as robbery, drug peddling and even flesh-trade, especially in and around Dimapur town.

The biggest dilemma before the law-enforcement agencies in identifying immigrants has been that most of the alleged illegal immigrants usually possess fraudulent voter identity cards, driving licences and ration cards. This made the task of investigation extremely difficult. As a policeman posted along the Assam-Nagaland border near Dimapur said:

“We also know that they are Bangladeshis. Many people in the state also suspect their dubious nationality. Every morning, many of them come to Dimapur from Assam to work and go back in the evening. Neither we [the Nagaland Police] nor they [the Assam Police] can really do anything because they all claimed to be bonafide residents of Assam. When insisted, they produce either voter identity cards or ration cards. We are really helpless.”<sup>53</sup>

In a small state like Nagaland, the presence of large number of immigrants is normally perceived as a potential demographic threat. Assuming that there are 1,00,000 illegal immigrants, several Naga tribes are less populous than the population of illegal immigrants. The unprecedented population growth, more particularly in areas bordering Assam, is believed to be due to their unabated influx. The study also confirmed media reports of inter-marriages between the immigrants and the natives. This can have significant

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<sup>53</sup> Author’s conversation with policemen along the Assam-Nagaland border on the night of November 11, 2008.

social impact. There is also suspicious about the real motives behind immigrants marrying natives. Worried by this development, the NSF had even imposed restrictions on local girls marrying immigrants. But the restriction could not be strictly enforced. As a result, a little known community called ‘Sumias’ has reportedly emerged in the state. In this regard, a student leader asserted:

“The children of the immigrants, who marry local girls, are often referred to as ‘Sumias’ ... These children are also confused about the religion they should adopt. In most cases, they are given Naga names. So, they cannot be detected by the authorities concerned when they apply for advantages like jobs, which are meant only for the indigenous people of Nagaland ...”<sup>54</sup>

Unfortunately, the emergence of ‘Sumias’ is a sensitive and hotly debated issue across the state. A section of the Naga community, particularly the Sema tribe, refuted it a ‘baseless allegation’. In the course of the fieldwork, most people were reluctant to speak about the ‘Sumias’. A respondent from Dimapur remarked: “You [this researcher] must not talk about ‘Sumias’. This is risky. Some tribes may accept this but some may treat it as an insult to the entire Naga society. So, be careful while carrying your research work.”<sup>55</sup> In 2002, the former Nagaland Chief Minister, SC Jamir, had even denied media reports that he had talked about the emergence of ‘Sumias’. He clarified: “I said illegal immigrants are mostly found in Dimapur and Niuland. Some Bangladeshis had married Naga women and vice-versa, thereby making the whole matter more complicated. The assumption that I am insulting a certain tribe is unfortunate and uncalled for.”<sup>56</sup> We, therefore, raised this issue in this study. Majority of the people whom we interacted during the course of the study have also heard of ‘Sumias’, but they were reluctant to speak out openly. Till now, the state government neither accept nor disapprove the alleged emergence of ‘Sumias’. But, it would be appropriate for the state government to verify

<sup>54</sup> See “Ticking Alien Bomb”, at <http://www.nenanews.com/NEE%20Aug.22%20-%20Sept.6,%2003/Cover%20Story.htm> (accessed June 10, 2009).

<sup>55</sup> A teacher (name withheld) said this to this author during the first phase of the field-work in Dimapur, November 14, 2005.

<sup>56</sup> “Jamir denies report on emergence of new tribe in Nagaland”, Sentinel (Guwahati), April 19, 2002.

the report; and inform its citizens accordingly. However, majority of the people view this intermarriage as a potential threat to tribal society and culture.

Illegal immigration in the state has just begun to attract public attention, mostly due to the interventions of the local student organisations. On some occasions, student activists have done what the local administration is supposed to be doing. Still the local administration is clueless on initiating preventive measures. At the same time, efforts of the student organisations remain localised. In a large town like Dimapur, their vigilantism has had little effect.

There is also strong apprehension of this issue snowballing into a political issue in the near future. The fear of voters' lists being doctored to include immigrants is often heard in and around Dimapur. A majority of the respondents blamed the state government for failing to take concrete measures against illegal immigration despite acknowledging the gravity of the threat perceptions. Apart from the student organisations, the local media too is doing a commendable job in this regard and their efforts have help in creating awareness among the people.

As expected, majority of the respondents in the study favoured stringent measures to curb the influx of illegal immigrants. They also questioned the effectiveness of the existing laws. Deportation is one of the options suggested. In this regard, Geoffrey Yaden, Editor of *Nagaland Post*, a Dimapur-based daily newspaper, said the detention and deportation of illegal immigrants would be the first step towards checking their influx. He said deportation of immigrants was not the ultimate solution and said that Naga themselves were to be blame for encouraging the influx of Bangladeshis by employing them as cheap labour. He said that due to certain flaws in the government machinery, detection of these immigrants had become almost impossible. He said that inner-line permit was effective only beyond the Chumukedima check gate, making Dimapur a safe heaven for these migrants.<sup>57</sup> The study also doubted the effectiveness of the ILP. Therefore, there is a need to evaluate its effectiveness. An overwhelming majority of the respondents felt that the existing laws, including the ILP,

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<sup>57</sup> "Bangladesh influx worry many Naga students", Sentinel (Guwahati), April 6, 2002.

were highly inadequate and there was a need for more strict laws. They were also concerned at the failure of the state administration to tackle the menace and wanted it to take the issue more seriously. Also, a majority of the respondents did not support the idea of issuing work permits to the immigrants.

### **CONSTRAINTS IN PREVENTING ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION**

In recent times, several studies have been conducted on illegal immigration analysing the overall societal impact. Nonetheless, some studies point out that the issue appears to have been grossly exaggerated in public debate. However, the general perception in the North-East region is that just as the tribes of Tripura were politically and numerically marginalised, the same fate could befall the other states unless preventive measures are not adopted. In 1983, Nari Rustomji wrote:

“The hopes and aspirations of the Assamese that they could absorb the hill districts of Assam within their own cultural stream were doomed from the very outset. The Assamese did not realise that people, however primitive, resent the imposition of alien culture. And so, one by one, the hill districts broke away from the parent state. The Assamese have since found themselves in their turn faced with the threat from cultural annihilation. Year after year, immigrants from Bangladesh have been infiltrating into Assam and getting themselves absorbed in the host state. But in getting themselves so absorbed, they have clung tenaciously to their own culture and made no attempt to assimilate with the Assamese. The Assamese have a legitimate fear that if the influx continues the time will not be far when they will be reduced to a minority in their own state and lose their cultural identity.”<sup>58</sup>

The Government of India has initiated several measures, such as construction of border fencing and roads, identification and detection, and deportation of illegal immigrants, with the aim of preventing cross-border migration into the North-East region. Unfortunately, each of these measures is subjected to numerous hurdles and hence has not been really

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<sup>58</sup> Rustomji Nari, ‘Imperiled Frontiers: India’s North-Eastern Borderlands’, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1983, p. 1.

effective. It is, therefore, important to revisit some of the key constraints in preventing cross-border migration.

**A. Inadequate policing along the border:** The India–Bangladesh border traverses through a range of natural and cultural landscapes. Since the terrains comprise forested hills, low-lying plains, riverline and human settlements, the task of effective border policing is extremely difficult. This is further compounded due to the absence of proper roads along this border. The government had initiated the construction of border roads and fencing. Nonetheless, fencing alone is not the ultimate solution because there are several areas along the border that cannot be fenced. But fencing has helped in minimising the burden of the border guards and, therefore, it is argued that border fencing, wherever possible, must be expedited at the earliest. There is also need for the creation of a second line of defence all along the international border to effectively safeguard the border.

Voicing their concern, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs in 2008 advised the Union Home Ministry that border surveillance must be strengthened by deployment of hi-tech surveillance equipment, and there should be strict patrolling and deployment of additional troops in adequate numbers. Currently, the Department of Border Management in the Union Home Ministry deals with issues relating to management of international land and coastal borders, strengthening of border policing, creation of infrastructure like roads, fencing and floodlighting of borders and implementation of the Border Area Development Programme (BADP). The fencing work in 2,649.74 km., out of the 3,436.56 km., of the total length of Indo-Bangladesh border has been completed and the work of remaining is under progress. There have been several challenges in the construction of fencing in certain stretches due to riverine/low lying areas, human settlements within 150 yards of the border, problem of land acquisition which has led to delay in completion of the project. In addition, 3,326.82 km. of border roads have also been constructed out of sanctioned length of 4,326.24 km. 277 km. of floodlighting has been completed in West Bengal as a pilot project. Government has decided to undertake floodlighting along a length of 2,840 km. in West Bengal, Meghalaya, Assam, Mizoram and Tripura along Indo-Bangladesh border. Unfortunately, most of the fencing constructed under the Phase-I in West Bengal, Assam and Meghalaya has been damaged. The Government has

sanctioned a project named Phase-III for erection of 861 km. of fencing replacing the entire fencing constructed under Phase-I. So far, 375 km. of fencing has been replaced. The works under Phase-III were originally scheduled to be completed by 2007-08. However, the dateline not be achieved due to the realignment of fencing in certain stretches, objections raised by Bangladesh Rifles for construction of fencing within 150 yards, limited working season, difficult topographical features, etc. The government is also planning to increase the number of border outposts along Indo-Bangladesh border.

**B. Demographic dynamics:** India-Bangladesh border is the longest international border India shares with any country. The demographic profile on both sides of the border has historical linkages; and share close ethnic and kinship affinities. Therefore, the political boundary that divides the two countries, after the partition of the sub-continent, is seen as irrelevant by the borderland people. As a result, they still hold the view that crossing the border is their birth right. Hence the task of differentiating between Indians and foreigners becomes extremely difficult.

**C. Indifferent attitude of Bangladesh:** Cross-border migration and the presence of Indian insurgents in Bangladesh are the two critical issues in India-Bangladesh relations. Bangladesh has all along denied the presence of their citizens in India or the presence of Indian insurgents on its soil. In January 1999, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed stated: “There are no Bangladeshi infiltrators in India. Why should a Bangladeshi national cross over and relocate in a foreign country?”<sup>59</sup> For instance, in 1992-93, the Indian authorities, in an action code named ‘Operation Pushback’ rounded up several hundreds suspected Bangladeshis and shipped them to the border. Bangladesh flatly refused to take them back arguing that they were ‘Indian citizens’. The ‘Operation Pushback’ was even branded as ‘Operation Push-In’ by them. This official position has had serious consequences on individual migrants. In this context, Willem van Schendel said:

“The desperate tenacity with which Bangladeshi officials clung to their discourse of denial was the result of an acute sense of vulnerability vis-à-vis their huge neighbour, India. Rooted in

<sup>59</sup> Arup Chanda, “Basu asks Hasina to curb infiltration”, Rediff.com, January 29, 1999.

Partition, this feeling was boosted by India's adoption of the discourse of infiltration. To the Bangladeshi state elite, acknowledging the unauthorised movement of Bangladesh citizens across the border would reveal the inability of their state to control this movement, or worse, suggest its complicity. In their anxiety to avoid owning up to the failure of their state's strategy of territoriality – and hence its claim to full statehood – the Bangladeshi authorities chose to disown their citizens in Indian territory".<sup>60</sup>

According to Willem van Schendel, Bangladeshis in India are 'truly transnational' in three ways. First, they are not accepted as Indian citizens and live the shadow existence of 'illegal' immigrants worldwide, a floating underclass who are in India, but not of it. Second, their motives of crossing the border have long stopped being related to nationalist ideologies. They have joined many migrants worldwide in pursuing the good life that is denied to them back home. And third, like their counterparts all over the world, they think transnationally, when they remit money and make occasional visits back home.<sup>61</sup> Schendel further added that it was not impossible for Bangladeshi opinion leaders to start portraying migrants to India as 'cultural heroes'; people who against enormous odds were able to rely on their own wits to survive and create new cultural and social forms of transnational Bangladeshi identity. Until that time, Bangladeshi discourse on migration to India is likely to be marked by denial, disdain and disinformation.<sup>62</sup>

**D. Lack of political will:** For the past several decades, the issue of illegal migration had acquired a distinction of being a highly politicised issue in India. Different political formations across several states have been taking up the issue differently to suit their political ends and hence there is no political consensus on this issue. One commentator rightly argued:

“The difficulties in identifying ‘aliens’, the continuing cross-border immigration, the duplicity shown by different political parties and judiciary’s interference in the revision of the electoral rolls came in the way of the implementation of the Assam Accord ... The

<sup>60</sup> Willem van Schendel, “The Bengal Borderland; Beyond State and Nation in South Asia”, Anthem Press, London, 2005, p. 199-200.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, n. 63, p. 200.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. n. 64, p. 200.

detection and deportation of infiltrators remains an insuperable problem, due to the patronage of local politicians, touts and government functionaries who enable infiltrators to procure ration cards for them and thus enlist as voters.”<sup>63</sup>

For instance, in Assam, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) have been accusing the Congress (I) for encouraging cross-border migration to build up its vote banks. On its part, the Congress (I) has accused BJP for communalising the issue. Even as each side seeks to score ‘political goals’, the central issue continues to be sidelined. Differences also often heard at the highest level of the state government. For instance, in May 2005, the then Governor of Assam, Ajai Singh, drafted a report on illegal migration into Assam. The said report provoked Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi into labelling it as “a worthless document based on hearsay rather than facts ... We would have examined the report had it contained facts.” Further, Gogoi told the press in Guwahati: “I had not given any importance to the report submitted to the centre [Government of India] by the previous Governor, SK Sinha, on the issue of infiltration and I am not according any importance to this report too.” He alleged that Ajai Singh’s report was creating confusion among the people. Tarun Gogoi also accused the BJP and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) for allegedly fuelling the oust-Bangladeshi campaign and creating a communal divide. “They are trying to create a Godhra-like situation in the state, but we will not allow this to happen in the land of Srimanta Sankardev and Ajan Fakir,” Gogoi said. The Chief Minister said insurgency was a bigger problem than infiltration.<sup>64</sup>

**E. Communal politics:** The issue of illegal immigration in India is becoming increasingly communalised. One of the outcomes of the campaigns launched by local vigilant groups, either in Assam or Nagaland, against illegal immigration is the escalation of the mistrust between communities – Muslims and non-Muslims. The minority Muslim community generally feels betrayed by such campaigns. A section of the society also accuses the Muslim community as being soft on immigration. This mistrust is bound to increase in the near future. We have the enough

<sup>63</sup> Upadhyay, Archana, “Assam: The ‘Infiltrator’ Issue”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 9, 2005.

<sup>64</sup> “Gogoi sees red over new migrant report”, *Telegraph* (Kolkata), May 20, 2005.

evidences of this nature in Assam. For instance, in May 2005, approximately 2,000 people were deported from Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Golaghat and Jorhat following a campaign launched by a local vigilant group warning the natives not to employ Bangladeshi migrants. The development provoked the All Assam Minorities Students' Union (AAMSU), which alleged that the minority communities were being targeted in the name of ousting Bangladeshi migrants. The Assam government also claimed the deportees were all 'Indian citizens', and apprehending trouble, the government alerted security across the state. Further, in July 2007, vigilant groups in Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland rounded up several suspected Bangladeshi migrants and deported them to Assam. The issue backfired when some vigilant groups of Assam began detaining those evicted from neighbouring states. In protest, Abdul Aziz, a leader of the AAMSU accused AASU and the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) of trying to label all Bengali-speaking Muslims as 'Bangladeshi infiltrators'. He even threatened to push out Assamese-speaking residents from the minority-dominated districts of Goalpara and Dhubri.<sup>65</sup> This comment provoked sharp reactions from several organisations in the state.

So far, the Indian state has also not been able of framing consensus legal measures against illegal immigration. Each of the measures have been taken differently by Muslim and non-Muslim groups. For instance, opinion was widely divided on the erstwhile Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act of 1983. Under the Assam Accord, all those who came to Assam after March 25, 1971, were to be detected and deported. Organisations representing the Muslim community supported the Act while the AGP and AASU vehemently opposed it. When the Supreme Court struck down the Act in 2005, the minority organisations reacted sharply. Following the Supreme Court judgment, the Union Government in 2006 passed an amendment to the Foreigners Order of 2006 (Tribunals for Assam), which placed the onus of proving a particular person as a foreigner on the complainant. In December 2006, the Supreme Court held that too unconstitutional. Again, the judgment evoked mixed reactions and was welcomed by AASU, AGP and the BJP. However, minority organisations expressed fears that in the absence of adequate legal protection, genuine

<sup>65</sup> "Now minority group threatens to expel locals", Indian Express (New Delhi), August 3, 2007.

Indian citizens may be harassed by the police in the name of detection and deportation of Bangladeshi migrants. The AASU, the AGP and the BJP objected to the Foreigners (Tribunals for Assam) Order, because it shifted the onus of proof back to the complainant and thus came in the way of detecting and deporting foreigners. The Assam United Democratic Front (AUDF), a minority political party, which was formed after IMDT Act was struck down, accused the state government of ‘deceiving the minorities’ in the name of protecting them. Minority organisations felt that the Foreigners Act gave the police enormous powers, which were often abused. The Char Chapori Sahitya Parishad, a minority organisation, claimed that before the promulgation of the IMDT Act, as many as 210,446 Muslims were driven out of Assam between 1952 and 1971 without trial and without any opportunity to defend their status. It also claimed that 192,339 people were deported from Assam between 1972 and 1983 in a similar manner.<sup>66</sup> Hence, there is a sharp division between the Muslim and non-Muslim groups on the legal measures to prevent illegal immigration.

**F. Corruption:** Along with the factors stated above, corruption at the level of the local administration is one of the biggest hurdles in preventing illegal immigration. It is often found that many of the alleged illegal immigrants are found to have acquired ration cards, driving licences, and voters’ identity cards. The possessions of such documents qualify them to be Indian citizens. There are narratives of local government officials issuing such identity certificates illegally for a small bribe. Otherwise, they must be doing this due to the pressure from their political bosses. Quoting a media report about the irregularities in issuing birth certificates by the Guwahati Municipal Corporation for a paltry sum of Rs 200, the Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio alleged that such rackets were endangering the entire North-East region.<sup>67</sup> As Willem van Schendel argues:

“It was clearly impossible for Indian state to handle the immigration of Bangladeshis administratively. Its main weakness was that it could not implement the laws and schemes that it devised because its

<sup>66</sup> Sushanta Talukdar, “Politics of migration”, *Frontline* (Chennai), 23(25), December 16-29, 2006.

<sup>67</sup> Nishit Dholabhai, “Rio to warn Delhi on settlers with exposé”, *Telegraph* (Kolkata), December 26, 2003.

registration of citizens was inadequate, it employed too few border guards to monitor the schemes, it could not trust those guards and other state personnel to put the interest of the state before their self-interest, and it failed to check Indian citizens who encouraged illegal immigration and registration.”<sup>68</sup>

Having discussed some of the constraints in preventing illegal immigration, it is also equally imperative to examine some of its long-term impacts.

### IMPACT OF ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION

**A. Demographic impact:** Although the demographic impact associated with unabated illegal immigration in North-East region is still debated upon, there has been widespread anxiety about its impact. There are also certain clinching evidences of the impact it has had. But, there is still lack of clarity due to the clandestine nature of the immigrants who always classified themselves as ‘Bengali speakers’. This is again compounded due to inability to accurately distinguish between indigenous Muslims and the immigrants who came after 1971. However, it would be appropriate to see the patterns of the growth of population in Assam and Nagaland which have experienced large scale influx of illegal immigrants.

The growth of population in Assam during 1951-2001 was 136.38 per cent against the national growth rate of 116.30 per cent. In 1951-61, there was a 34.98 per cent increase in the population of Assam as against 21.64 per cent nationally. It was 34.95 per cent in 1961-71 and 47.60 per cent in 1971-1991 (As no census could be taken in Assam in 1981, the population growth rate for 1981-91 was projected at 24.24 per cent). It fell to 18.85 per cent in 1991-2001. The slowdown of population growth during (1981-2001) is believed to be the impact of the Assam Movement, constant vigilantism and improved policing along the border. Therefore, the Bangladeshis started looking for other destinations.

As the 2001 Census indicates, the overall Hindu population in the state was 64.9 per cent down from 67.1 per cent in 1991, whereas the Muslim population increased to 30.9 per cent in 2001 from 28.4 per cent in 1991.

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<sup>68</sup> Willem van Schendel, “The Bengal Borderland; Beyond State and Nation in South Asia”, Anthem Press, New Delhi, 2005, p. 222.

Like Assam, Nagaland had also recorded an abnormal growth in population. This small tribal state recorded the highest rate of population growth in the country, from 56.08 per cent in 1981-1991 to 64.41 per cent in 1991-2001. Ironically, the growth has not been uniform and is concentrated in the plains adjoining Dimapur and districts bordering Assam. Wokha district, bordering Golaghat in Assam, recorded the highest population growth among all the districts of the state. During 1991–2001, Wokha district registered a maximum growth rate of 95.01 per cent, followed by Tuensang (78.1 per cent). Several observers attributed this abnormal increase mainly to immigration. The anxiety is further compounded with the emergence of the new community called ‘Sumias’.

**B. Political Impact:** Since 1970s, illegal immigration has been a prominent electoral issue in Assam, with different political formations taking different shades of opinion for their own political advantage. As a result, the issue is highly politicised today. The fact is that at least 57 of 126 Assembly constituencies in the state were found to have more than 20 per cent increase in the number of voters between 1994 and 1997 whereas the all-India average is just 7.4 per cent. There is widespread apprehension of the electoral rolls being manipulated to enrol persons of dubious nationality. Clinching evidence is Mohammad Kamaluddin, a Bangladeshi, who came to India illegally and even filed his nomination for the Jamunamukh Assembly constituency in Assam in 1996, but later withdrew for unknown reasons. He was finally arrested by the police in August 2008 and sent to the border for deportation by an order of Gauhati High Court. A native of Maulabibazar district in Bangladesh, he came to Assam in the late 1980s and married a woman from Lanka in Nagaon district in 1990. The father of three sons and three daughters, his eldest daughter is married to a gaon-burrah (village headman) in a nearby village.<sup>69</sup> Further, notable political fallout of immigration was the emergence of the Assam United Democratic Front (AUDF), a political party, which came into existence following the Supreme Court judgment against the IMDT Act in July 2005. AUDF probably detests what the BJP or the AGP call the politics of ‘minority appeasement’ or of ‘vote-banks’ on immigration. AUDF seeks to assert the rightful share of power for the minority Muslims. After the Assam

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<sup>69</sup> Samudra Gupta Kashyap, “Bangla infiltrator who contested Assam elections arrested”, Indian Express (New Delhi), August 4, 2008.

Accord was signed, two political parties had already emerged: the AGP, formed by student leaders of the Assam Movement, and the United Minorities Front (UMF), formed by major East Bengali Hindu and Muslim politicians who had been members of the Congress (I). If the implementation of the Assam Accord was the main thrust for the AGP, the UMF demanded that it be scrapped.

**C. Communal polarisation:** One of the outcomes of the campaign launched by local vigilant groups against illegal immigrants has only escalated the mistrust and tension between Muslims and non-Muslims. The former felt victimised by such vigilantism, and the accusation of favouring immigration. This mistrust is bound to have severe implications where several radical groups are waiting the opportunity to fish in the troubled water. This polarisation is bound to increase so long as vigilant groups continued their vigilantism against immigration.

**D. Security Impact:** As noted above, the issue of immigration has significantly escalated communal polarisation in several areas of the North-East region. Further, there is a strong connection between immigration and unrest in the region. Clinching evidences is the emergence of insurgency in Assam and Tripura. Some of the insurgent groups also utilised the issue of immigration to strengthen themselves. In the near future, there are possibilities of more insurgent groups coming up over the issue of immigration. Furthermore, the presence of a large number of foreign nationals has created a vulnerable constituency for exploitation by anti-India external forces, mostly notably the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), which is already using several insurgent groups of the region to its advantage. Therefore, immigration has direct as well indirect implications for the security of the region.

The emergence of United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) in Assam has strong connection with immigration. However, over the years, they have been visibly silent on the issue and have even maintained that that 'infiltration' from mainland India is more dangerous than the immigration from Bangladesh. This abdication of ideology is primarily because of the presence of ULFA leaders in Bangladesh. In the December 20, 2006, edition of its mouthpiece, *Freedom*, the ULFA stated: "Those who entered Assam from Bangladesh and Nepal must be identified and driven out, but before

that the illegal migrants from India must be expelled. The main illegal foreigners in the state [Assam] are the Indian rulers and the principal illegal occupational forces are the Indian Army who also must be driven out from the state ... Illegal migrants from the rest of the country have threatened the existence of the state, created a chaotic situation in the social fabric and have occupied the political and economic field at the cost of the indigenous people<sup>70</sup>. The presence of a large number foreign nationals coupled with ULFA-led insurgency has provided an added advantage for ISI to fish in the troubled waters of the region. There are unconfirmed reports of ULFA using Bangladeshi immigrants in its subversive activities. In November 2006, Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi publicly acknowledged that the ULFA and other insurgent groups were recruiting Bangladesh immigrants for subversive activities with the help of Jehadi groups.<sup>71</sup> The threat has been further compounded with the emergence of several radical Islamist groups, who will always try to exploit the alleged victimisation of Muslim community over the issue of immigration.

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<sup>70</sup> “ULFA wants immigrants “driven out”, Hindu (Chennai), December 21, 2006.

<sup>71</sup> “ULFA’s top leaders should sit for talks: Gogoi”, Zee News, November 23, 2006.

## CONCLUSIONS AND THE WAY OUT

Migration is a global phenomenon, and will continue to do so. Every country, including India, aspires to regulate migration according to their requirements. But, not all country is successful; and hence illegal cross-border migration has been a concern to them. By its very nature, illegal migration is extremely difficult to measure; and in the Indian context, it is far more complex in view of the ethnic ties that the migrants share with the native population. It will remain so in the near future.

Efforts to control illegal cross-border immigration remain highly inadequate in India; and will remain so in the absence of a political consensus on the issue. But, the reality is that unabated cross-border immigration has enormous demographic and social implications, capable of creating tensions and conflict between the immigrants and the natives; and more so among the natives. This is particularly worrisome in North-East India, which has been the victim of cross-border immigration for the last several decades. Campaign against such migration in India also divides its people on communal lines. Hence, the future tensions and conflict will be not only between the immigrants and the natives, but also among the natives.

Bangladeshi immigrants in the region are actually 'settlers' and thereby a competitor for space: land, water, services and jobs. Hence, their presence is perceived as a potential threat, capable of altering the demographic and political profile of the region. The natives often allege that the avenues for gainful employment among low-skilled Indian are shrinking due to continued influx of low-skilled workers from across the border. Hence, cross-border migration contributes to unemployment among the natives.

Further, illegal immigrants do have negative implications for states seeking to provide adequate education, health, and housing. At the domestic political level, there is increasing evidence of illegal migrants being included in the voters' lists. Therefore, we cannot just underestimate the social and demographic implications of the illegal migration and this will be particularly disastrous for small states of the region. Clinching evidence of this is the emergence of 'Sumias' in Nagaland and the emerging demographic shift in Assam, where there is fear of the getting Assamese

reduced to a minority in their own land as the tribes of Tripura have been done in Tripura. This demographic shift led to the emergence of insurgency movements in Tripura and Assam. As time passes, it turns into a biggest challenge to the security and development of the region.

Another aspect of illegal migration into India is that of the security aspect. The presence of a large number of foreign nationals has also created a vulnerable constituency for exploitation by hostile Bangladeshi and Pakistani Intelligence services. Some insurgent groups have now become close allies of ISI. The threat has been further compounded with the emergence of several Islamist extremist groups in the region. Islamic groups have been silent on the burning issue of illegal migration. ULFA no longer talk about migrant issue.

Certainly the 'transnational Bangladeshi identity' is likely to emerge in the region in the near future given the ethno-nationalist aspirations that are brewing.

Indeed, India had chosen to ignore cross-border immigration; and its ramifications. If deportations continue at current levels it will take more than 1000 years to deport an estimated 15 million illegal migrants. Therefore, India needs to adapt time-bound strategies to regulate cross-border migration.

Successive central government and state governments have taken little efforts to tackle the problem. Corruption in the local administration has further compounded the dilemma. In the meantime, vote-bank politics is fast becoming a serious challenge. However, there is need for creating people's awareness on the issue; and arrive at a national consensus.

Based on the above discussion, the study deserves to forecast few scenarios associated with immigration; and then revisit some of the remedial measures, which are necessary to be carried out at the national and local levels.

### **A. Future Scenarios**

**Scenario 1:** The deportation of illegal immigrants, who have already spent several years on the Indian soil, will remain a distant dream for India.

However, the 'oust Bangladeshi campaign' launched by local vigilant groups from time to time will further divide the native population along communal lines, thereby creating conflict not only between the immigrants and the natives; but also among the natives. Hence, this will strengthen the voices of the communal and radical forces. In this process, the genuine citizens of the country will become the soft target.

**Scenario 2:** The grievances arising out of the unabated illegal immigration shall emerge as a key challenge to peace and security of the North-East India. The situation will be exploited by external forces to promote anti-India sentiments.

**Scenario 3:** Illegal immigrants will continue to spread to new destinations or areas of the country. However, the scale of immigration from across the border will come down due to enhanced security along the border, and the constant vigilantism by local vigilant groups.

**Scenario 4:** The possibility of another phase of 'Assam Movement' is not ruled out. Even if that happen, the core issue shall remain the same, but the communal polarisation will be further strengthened. Hence, more radical groups will emerge.

## **B. Revisiting the remedial measures**

India must give up the hope of deporting a large population of immigrants who have been staying in the country for several numbers of years. So it must focus on strategies to control immigration in the future. Therefore, the following remedial measures must be simultaneously carried out, as all of them are inter-linked.

- 1. Strengthen border policing:** While India was focusing primarily on the western front, the eastern front had been ignored for several decades despite deserving equal attention. Only of late, the country has realised the importance of securing this front. Therefore it is important to speed up border fencing, floodlight and surveillance along the eastern front.
- 2. Introduction of 'national identity card':** It is a prerequisite for controlling immigration. This is particularly important in border states of the country.

- 3. Introduction of temporary work permit for immigrants:** There is need for such work permit. Such permit may not be useful for those who have already been in the country, but it will be helpful for future immigrants.
- 4. 'White Paper' on illegal immigration:** A White Paper on illegal immigration in the country is required. A committee of experts may be constituted under the Union Home Ministry to prepare the White Paper.
- 5. Sanitise local administration:** Officials of the state in the border areas must be imparted awareness about the impact of unabated immigration from across the border. This programme may be conducted by the Border Management Division of the Union Home Ministry in association with concerned states. The scope of the programme must focus on local police, border guards and local officials.
- 6. Encourage research on immigration:** The Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) must encourage fresh academic and policy-oriented research on immigration.
- 7. Nagaland-specific measures:**
  - A. Evaluation of the Inner-Line Permit:** An expert group may be constituted by the state government to study the effectiveness of the Inner Line Permit, which is currently in operation in most parts of the state.
  - B. Engage civil society:** The state government must seek the support of the civil society groups in creating awareness about immigration among the general population. This may not be a difficult task since Nagaland has a vibrant civil society.