

# India-Bangladesh Restoring Sovereignty on Neglected Borders

Kanchan Lakshman<sup>?</sup> & Sanjay K. Jha<sup>?</sup>

Linkages between India's internal security landscape and its external environment have made the issue of border management a critical component of national security strategy. While internal causes of terrorism and insurgencies are significant, a majority of these movements have survived and grown due to the encouragement and support they secure from neighbouring states.<sup>1</sup> These states and their intelligence agencies support, encourage, train, arm and often direct terrorists and criminal groups for their own geo-strategic ends.

Proxy wars have, consequently, thrown a number of challenges for enforcement and defence agencies in India, including several relating to existing border management

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<sup>?</sup> Dr. Kanchan Lakshman is Research Associate at the Institute for Conflict Management and Assistant Editor, *Faultlines: Writings on Conflict and Resolution*.

<sup>?</sup> Dr. Sanjay K. Jha is a Research Associate at the Institute for Conflict Management.

<sup>1</sup> See for instance, Ajai Sahni, "Survey of Conflict and Resolution in India's Northeast", *Faultlines: Writings on Conflict and Resolution*, vol. 12, May 2002, Delhi, p. 39-112; P V Ramana, "Networking the Northeast: Partners in Terror", *Faultlines: Writings on Conflict and Resolution*, vol. 11, April 2002, pp. 99-126.

practices. However, successive Indian Governments have remained tied to a narrow conception of border security, which envisages no more than the establishment of static border posts, regular patrols, ambushes and so on.<sup>2</sup> These practices evolved in situations where there was a clear physical demarcation of borders during peacetime. The ultimate responsibility of securing borders once war breaks out rests with the Army. During peacetime, border security includes the tasks of prevention of trans-border crimes, smuggling, infiltration, illegal migration, illegal movement of hostiles, and so on. Transgressions along the border were, in the past, often localized in nature and had no major security implications. Since the 1980s, however, with Pakistan's involvement in terrorist violence in India and the subsequent emergence of various countries abutting India's Northeast as safe havens for insurgents operating in India, the pattern of border crimes has changed. These are no longer localized in nature, and the intricate relationship between narcotics smuggling, small arms proliferation and terrorist activities now have far reaching implications for internal security.

The existence of an elaborate terrorist infrastructure in safe havens across the border; the growth and internationalization of organized criminal syndicates with powerful political influence and patronage; and a strengthening network of well funded institutions for the communal mobilization of the migrants – particularly through a growing complex of *madrassas* (seminaries) – are among the most dangerous trends along the India-Bangladesh border. These problems are further compounded by non-linear boundaries, borders that are poorly delimited, and intermingled ethnic groups along both sides of the border. The length of the border, difficult terrain and harsh climatic conditions present unique monitoring challenges in the region. The seamlessness of the movement of migrants, as Sanjoy Hazarika argues, gives it a critical, even dangerous, edge especially as such movements take place in an area already troubled by insurgencies.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Problems of Border Management: Need for Involving Local Population", *The Tribune*, Chandigarh, October 21, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Sanjoy Hazarika, *Rites of Passage: Border Crossings, Imagines Homelands, India's East and Bangladesh*, Delhi: Penguin, 2000, p. 15.

A rapidly changing internal security environment suggests that border management is not simply a matter of policing along the border. There is a growing realization, now, that border management must broadly include a comprehensive package which involves defending the border in times of war, securing the borders in times of peace, ensuring that there are no unauthorized movements of humans, taking steps against smuggling of arms, explosives, narcotics and other kinds of contraband items, using sophisticated technological devices to supplement human efforts to these ends, coordinating intelligence inputs from various agencies and ensuring the socio-economic development of the border areas.<sup>4</sup> The Group of Ministers on National Security also accepts such a broad view of border management: “The term border management must be interpreted in its widest sense and should imply co-ordination and concerted action by political leadership and administrative, diplomatic, security, intelligence, legal, regulatory and economic agencies of the country to secure our frontiers and sub serve the best interests of the country.”<sup>5</sup> Added to these should be a range of policies and initiatives directed at legitimate border populations intended to mobilize their support and cooperation to ensure that a free flow of intelligence on illegal movements and transactions is available, and that their economic, social and political interests are safeguarded and in opposition to those of those who seek to violate the integrity of our borders.

A careful examination of current border management policies and practices suggests that the mess on the border is to a large extent of our own making. Regrettably, policy options have not been adequately researched or assessed, because analysis of the India-Bangladesh border tends to unproblematically note that the region’s boundaries are all hardening and are increasingly

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<sup>4</sup> Prakash Singh, “Management of India’s Borders”, *Dialogue*, vol. no. 3, January-March 2002, Delhi, p. 59.

<sup>5</sup> Report of the Group of Ministers on National Security, 2001. The Prime Minister constituted a Group of Ministers (GOM) on April 17, 2000, to review the national security system in its entirety and in particular to consider the recommendations of the Kargil Review Committee (KRC) and formulate specific proposals for implementation. The KRC was set up on July 24, 1999, to review the events leading up to the Pakistani aggression in Kargil and to recommend such measures as are considered necessary to safeguard national security.

characterized by border patrols and barriers to easy movement. This paper attempts to explain to evaluate existing border management practices along the India-Bangladesh border by answering two related questions:

- ? what are the underlying issues that affect the border? and
- ? what are the alternative means to achieve a stable and secure boundary regime?

## Border Terrain

The Bangladesh border is the longest land border that India shares with any of its neighbours. It covers a length of 4,095 kilometers abutting the States of West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura.<sup>6</sup> The existing and emerging threats along this border are conditioned, to a large extent, by the terrain. The border, which was carved out by the Radcliffe Line, was not demarcated on the ground. As a result, the border cuts through the middle of several villages and in some cases, while one section of a house is one country, another is in the other. In West Bengal, for instance, there are more than 100 villages located right on the zero line, and in many villages there are houses where the front door is in India and the rear door opens into Bangladesh.<sup>7</sup>

Inadequate demarcation also created the problems of enclaves. There are 51 Bangladeshi enclaves, with a total area of 7,110 acres, in India and 111 Indian enclaves measuring 17, 158.1 acres in Bangladesh.<sup>8</sup> The population figures of these enclaves are

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<sup>6</sup> Prakash Singh, "Management of India's Borders", p. 59. Four of the North Eastern Indian States in all share a 1879 kilometer border with Bangladesh – Tripura, 856 km; Meghalaya, 443 km; Mizoram 318 km; and Assam, 262 km. West Bengal alone has a 2216 km long border with Bangladesh.

<sup>7</sup> E N Rammohan, "Uneasy Borders Distant Neighbours", *USI Journal*, Delhi, vol. C xxxii, no. 550, October-December 2002, p. 496. For instance, Hilli in the Malda district of West Bengal is located right on the border and a row of houses in this town have their front doors in India and their rear doors opening on to the railway platform of Hilli in Bangladesh.

<sup>8</sup> These enclaves are isolated strips of land or villages, which are surrounded on all sides by the neighbouring country. This problem came up due to the kings of two neighbouring princely states waging these small strips of land and even villages with each other. When the erstwhile princely state of Cooch Behar opted to join India, it created an anomalous situation wherein these enclaves were left surrounded by the neighbouring country.

not available, as no access to the Indian enclaves in Bangladeshi territory has been provided by Bangladesh for census operations.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, there are about 52 pieces of land, which actually belong to Bangladesh but are in the adverse possession of India and approximately 49 pieces of land belonging to India that are in the adverse possession of Bangladesh.<sup>10</sup> The Land Boundary Agreement between the two countries in 1974 laid down procedures for joint demarcation of boundaries. Although the survey authorities of the two countries have completed demarcation of over 4,000 kilometers of the India-Bangladesh boundary, they have not been able to resolve differences in demarcation of approximately 6.5 kilometers of land boundaries in the States of Tripura, West Bengal and Assam. The two countries have set up two Joint Boundary Working Groups to resolve all pending issues relating to the implementation of the Land Boundary Agreement of 1974, including exchange of enclaves.

Though the number of authorized transit points for goods and people are limited along the border, for all practical purposes it has remained open. People continue to cross the borders with consummate ease, and this has also encouraged large volumes of irregular or unofficial trade along the border. The ethno-cultural proximity of populations on both sides of the borders, and the absence of physical barriers and vigilance by security forces have facilitated such illegal border trade. The total volume of unofficial exports to Bangladesh is estimated at Rupees 11.65 billion annually, of which West Bengal accounts for as much as 96 per cent, Assam three percent and Tripura one percent.<sup>11</sup> An elaborate network of border agents and other stakeholders has come up along this border.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted by Union Minister of State for External Affairs, Vinod Khanna, in the *Rajya Sabha* (Upper House of Indian Parliament), Unstarred question, No 3660, April 24, 2003, <http://164.100.24.219/rsq/quest.asp?qref=80014>.

<sup>10</sup> Kulbir Krishan, "Policing the Indo-Bangladesh Border," *Strategic Analysis*, Delhi, vol. xxv, no. 5, August 2001, p. 665.

<sup>11</sup> Gurudas Das and R.K. Purkayastha, *Border Trade: North-East India and Neighbouring Countries*, Delhi: Akansha Publishing House, 2000, p. 39.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 58.

## Migration

Large-scale illegal migration of Bangladeshis into India is, arguably, the most serious problem along this border. Due to continuous migration, the entire complexion of populations in several districts and areas in the Northeastern States, Bihar and West Bengal has undergone a dramatic transformation. Even in Delhi, the composition of some constituencies for legislative and local bodies' elections has changed.<sup>13</sup> A statement issued by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs said that over 20 million illegal Bangladeshi immigrants are residing in the country, of which above 10 million are in Assam and West Bengal alone.<sup>14</sup>

Among the innumerable border crossing routes, Jhaukutty on the West Bengal side is mentioned as a major corridor.<sup>15</sup> Five rivers, including the Sunkosh, the Kaliganj and Tursha, divide the flat plains making travel extremely difficult and long. However, instead of crossing all the streams, Bangladeshis are reported to go through Jhaukutty, Satrassal and Agomoni from the Kuegam side of their border.<sup>16</sup> Bangladeshis also come to Mancachar for their weekly shopping. While river channels are the preferred route (there is no barbed wire fencing along the river border) to enter India, the laxity in the detection system in West Bengal has rendered crossovers to be a relatively simpler task. Truckloads of illegal goods move out on a daily basis from Dinhatra and Sahebgunj in Cooch Behar.<sup>17</sup> Illegal immigration also takes place along South Salmara, Kedar, Binnachorra, and Balabhoot.

E.N. Rammohan, a former Director General of the Border Security Force (BSF), notes that, over the years, continual illegal migration of both Hindus and Muslims from Bangladesh has completely changed the demography of the borders in South Bengal. Illegal settlers from Bangladesh now dominate the border belt in South 24 Parghanas, Nadia, Murshidabad, Malda and West

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<sup>13</sup> Gurudas Das, "Immigration into North-East India: The Security Dimension", in C. Joshua Thomas, ed., *Dimensions of Displaced People*, Delhi: Regency Publications 2002, p. 74.

<sup>14</sup> "India aims to deport 20 million Bangladeshis," [www.keralanext.com/news/index.asp?id=5604](http://www.keralanext.com/news/index.asp?id=5604).

<sup>15</sup> Hazarika, *Rites of Passage*, p. 141.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

Dinajpur, up to a varying depth of one to five kilometers.<sup>18</sup> Unsurprisingly, Hindus and Muslims, according to Rammohan, have invariably settled in homogenous and exclusionary groups in such areas. The Census report of 1991 observed that when the average density of population in the country rose by 51 persons per square kilometer over the 1981 level, West Bengal recorded a quantum increase at 151 persons per square kilometer. The Muslim presence is high in the eastern districts bordering Bangladesh. West Dinajpur, Malda, Birbhum and Murshidabad have a Muslim population of 36.75, 47.49, 33.06 and 61.39 per cent respectively.<sup>19</sup> Nadia and North and South 24-Parghanas districts below Murshidabad and bordering Khulna division of Bangladesh have a Muslim presence of 24.92, 24.17 and 29.94 per cent, respectively.<sup>20</sup> In a status paper on illegal immigration filed in January 1999 in the Supreme Court in response to a petition, the Government of West Bengal admitted that 1,240,000 Bangladeshis who entered the State with travel documents had simply melted away into the local population, while another 570,000 had been pushed back into Bangladesh between 1972 and 1998. The document stated that, till 1997, the intercepted infiltrators were summarily pushed back, but after 1997 this practice was discontinued.<sup>21</sup> Thus, according to Partha Ghosh, in some districts, the Bangladeshis in their desperate bid to seek refuge in India have even hijacked the legal procedure of immigration.<sup>22</sup>

In Assam, illegal migration over several decades has altered the demography of the State and has come to constitute a grave threat to the identity of locals, to the integrity of democratic processes and, increasingly, to national security. Just how alarming the demographic changes in Assam are, can be gauged from the former Election Commissioner S.L. Shankdher's, observation that "...a stage would be reached when that State [Assam] may have to reckon with the foreign nationals who may

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<sup>18</sup> Rammohan, "Uneasy Borders Distant Neighbours," p. 496.

<sup>19</sup> A P Joshi, M D Srinivas and J K Bajaj, eds., *Religious Demography of India*, Chennai: Centre for Policy Studies, 2003, p. 97.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Gurudas Das, "Immigration into North-East India," p. 87.

<sup>22</sup> See Partha S. Ghosh, *Migrants and Refugees in South Asia: Political and Security Dimension*, Shillong: North Eastern Hill University, 2001, p. 9.

in all probability constitute a sizable percentage if not the majority of population in the State”.<sup>23</sup> In November 1998, the then Governor of Assam, Lt. Gen. (Retd.) S.K. Sinha, submitted a report to the President of India, which estimated the total volume of this infiltration at six million. Most of this increase was concentrated in a few areas with a dramatic impact on the local demography and, hence, politics. According to the report, four districts of Assam – Dhubri, Goalpara, Barpeta and Hailakandi – had been transformed into Muslim majority districts by 1991 as a result of this mass infiltration. Another two districts – Nagaon and Karimganj – would have had a Muslim majority since 1998 and yet another district, Morigaon, was fast approaching this position.<sup>24</sup> The report noted, “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>25</sup>

In Tripura, the influx of Bengalis from the plains of Bangladesh has reduced the State’s tribal population to a minority. According to the 1991 Census of India, the Indigenous tribes of Tripura constituted only 28 percent of the State’s population of 2.76 million while three decades earlier, they comprised two-thirds of the population.<sup>26</sup>

The situation is becoming alarming in other States of the Northeast as well, particularly Nagaland and Meghalaya. During a meeting of the Chief Ministers of the Northeastern States with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in Shillong in February 2000, the then Chief Minister of Nagaland, S.C. Jamir had warned, “Unless steps are taken to prevent the entry of people of dubious nationality into our State, Nagaland may face the same problem as that of Assam...They have captured a large part of

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<sup>23</sup> Cited in Wasbir Hussain, “Bangladeshi Migrants in India: Towards a Practical Solution”, paper presented at the Regional Conference on “Missing Boundaries: Refugees, Migrants, Stateless and Internally Displaced Persons in South Asia”, organized by the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies and Japan Foundation Asia Centre on March 25-27, 2002, at India Habitat Centre, Delhi.

<sup>24</sup> Report on Illegal Migration into Assam, Submitted to the President of India by the Governor of Assam, Guwahati: Raj Bhavan, November 8, 1998, p. 17.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> Memorandum submitted by the Tripura Upjati Juba Samity (TUJS) to Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, March 27, 2000.



Assam. They can do the same with Nagaland.”<sup>27</sup> Thuingaleng Muivah, General Secretary of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland – Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM), the insurgent group currently negotiating a settlement with the Union Government, has observed, “Now there are 2 lakh Bangladeshis in Dimapur area... these immigrants are employed by the puppet leaders, who end up amassing a lot of wealth.”<sup>28</sup> Similarly in Meghalaya, illegal migration from Bangladesh has become a serious problem in Boldamgre, Kalaichar, Mahendraganj, Purakhasia, Ampati, Garobandh, Rajabala, Selsella, Phulbari and Tikrikilla, all in the West Garo Hills district, the presence of illegal migrants is increasingly noticeable. According to one report, an alley between two *dargahs* (Muslim shrine) of the same name on either side of the Indo-Bangladesh border in West Garo Hills district of Meghalaya is arguably the busiest infiltration route into India. This border area, called Mahendraganj, has reportedly become the hub of anti-India propaganda fuelled by some of the infiltrators who are backed by Islamist fundamentalists and militants. The area has also been witness to two major communal riots since 1992.<sup>29</sup> This problem is, moreover, no longer confined to India’s Northeast. The migrants have now spread in very significant numbers to States such as Bihar, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

It is useful to consider the economic factors that render border crossings lucrative. Pull factors like job avenues, access to India’s vast public distribution system in the region and elsewhere, free education, relatively unhindered acquisition of immovable property, enrolment in the electorate, as also a compatible socio-cultural arena, attract mass illegal migration into India. The pressure of population in Bangladesh is also a compelling ‘push factor’ for a large number of illegal immigrants crossing over to India. Bangladesh’s density of population per square kilometer is three time that of India. In terms of area,

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<sup>27</sup> “Nagaland may face brunt of illegal migration from Bangladesh”, <http://us.rediff.com/news/2001/mar/27assam.htm>.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Muivah, “Nagalim has never been a part of India”, [www.northeastvigil.com/issues/naga/exclu/exclu3.htm](http://www.northeastvigil.com/issues/naga/exclu/exclu3.htm).

<sup>29</sup> “Posing as pilgrims, Bangladeshis sneak into India”, *Hindustan Times*, Delhi, March 11, 2002.

Bangladesh is 1/25<sup>th</sup> India's size, but in population it is 1/7<sup>th</sup>. Bangladesh is the world's most densely populated country, with a density of 969 per square kilometer. A 2.2 per cent per annum growth rate of population, moreover, means that its population is growing at the rate of 2.8 million per year. Worse, each year, nearly one-third of the Bangladesh land mass is inundated by floods, displacing approximately 19 million people.<sup>30</sup> Some 15 billion dollars are reportedly earned annually by Bangladeshi migrants, significantly boosting the country's GDP.<sup>31</sup>

Is there a 'hidden agenda' of engineering large-scale migration of Bangladeshis into Assam in particular and the Northeast in general? While it is difficult to ascertain the parameters of any such stratagem, if it does exist, many analysts in South Asia derive this idea from past statements of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi leadership. Former Pakistani Premier Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in his *Myth of Independence* wrote, "It would be wrong to think that Kashmir is the only dispute that divides India and Pakistan, though undoubtedly it is the most significant. One at least is nearly as important as the Kashmir dispute, that of Assam and some districts of India adjacent to East Pakistan [now Bangladesh]. To these, Pakistan has very good claims..."<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Bangladesh's founding father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, had, at one time, held that, "Because Eastern Pakistan must have sufficient land for its expansion and because Assam has abundant forests and mineral resources, coal, petroleum, etc., Eastern Pakistan must include Assam to be financially and economically strong."<sup>33</sup> While making a case for *lebensraum* (living space) in the early 1990s, Sadeq Khan, a former Bangladesh diplomat stated, "All projections, however, clearly indicate that by the next decade, that is to say by the first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century, Bangladesh will face a serious crises of *lebensraum*... a natural overflow of population is very much on the cards and will not be restrainable by barbed wire or border

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<sup>30</sup> Report on Illegal Migration into Assam, p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> "India & Bangladesh - Migration Matrix- Reactive and not Proactive", [www.saag.org/papers7/paper632.html](http://www.saag.org/papers7/paper632.html)

<sup>32</sup> Cited in Hussain, "Bangladeshi Migrants in India: Towards a Practical Solution."

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

patrol measures. The natural trend of population overflow from Bangladesh is towards the sparsely populated lands in the South East, in the Arakan side and of the North East in the Seven Sisters side of the Indian sub-continent.”<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Amena Mohsin opines that, “Migration is a normal and natural phenomenon and can not be stopped. The need, today, is to evolve ways to legalise it... Erecting a barbed-wire fence, along the Indo-Bangladesh border to check migration of people can not serve anybody’s purpose.”<sup>35</sup> Moving a step ahead, Prof. Imtiaz Ahmed of the Dhaka University, in a dialogue organized by the Dhaka-based Bangladesh Institute of International Strategic Studies in August 2001, while describing the India-Bangladesh border as a “religious border”, called for a regime of “dual voting” so that people could vote in both the countries.<sup>36</sup>

## Migration and Security

The problem of illegal migration is compounded by the fact that there has emerged a collusive network of smugglers, organized criminal gangs and insurgent and Islamist extremist groups operating in the Northeast. On January 7, 2003, India’s Deputy Prime Minister, L K Advani, during a conference of Chief Secretaries and Directors General of Police in Delhi, observed that Bangladeshis staying illegally in India pose a serious threat to country’s internal security.<sup>37</sup> In a similar vein, K.P.S Gill has emphasized that more than terrorism, the major threat to India’s security is from the ‘demographic bomb’ exploding in Bangladesh.<sup>38</sup>

Migration takes place primarily through well-organized gangs with adequate support from the local administration, often including the police and security forces.<sup>39</sup> In many areas, illegal

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<sup>34</sup> *Holiday*, Dhaka, October 18, 1991.

<sup>35</sup> Cited in Hussain, “Bangladeshi Migrants in India: Towards a Practical Solution.”

<sup>36</sup> Cited in J N Roy, “Security Debate in India and Relations with Bangladesh”, *Dialogue*, vol.4, no.3, January-March 2003, Delhi, p. 125.

<sup>37</sup> “Overstaying Pak nationals pose threat to national security: Advani”, *The Indian Express*, Delhi, January 8, 2003.

<sup>38</sup> K P S. Gill as cited in Bharat Karnad, ed., *Future Imperiled: India’s Security in the 1990s and Beyond*, Delhi: Penguin Books, 1994, p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> S K Ghosh, *Unquiet Border*, Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1993, pp. ix-x.

migrants have carved out separate political interests with the active connivance of local politicians. Laxity in immigration enforcement has led to illegal migrants and terrorists manipulating the system to facilitate expansion of their illegal activities. S.K. Ghosh notes:

The importance of the problem lies in the fact that many of the infiltrators are smugglers and prone to crimes such as dacoity, cattle lifting, peddling of narcotic drugs, gun running, trafficking in women and girls and are actively helping terrorist activities in our bordering States. They also run missions of their intelligence agencies and many of them have been known to settle down as Hindus in India and are involved in espionage work for their countries. They have many relations in India, who derive benefits from their clandestine operations. For them border is the main business area. They not only provide shelter and food for infiltrators, but all help needed to remain unnoticed. The problem of untraced Bangladeshis and Pakistani nationals become serious as they merge with the local people and pass off as Indian citizens. They are also able to gain over local police and security forces by bribing them heavily.<sup>40</sup>

The mobilization of Islamist groups in Bangladesh as well as among Muslim migrants in bordering States has created an opportunity for Pakistan's external intelligence agency, the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), to foment subversion in the Eastern and Northeastern parts of India. Indian official sources have for long maintained that ISI's basic objective in Bangladesh is the strategic encirclement of India. It uses the strategy of supporting and fomenting insurgency in India's Northeast and makes direct use of Bangladeshi territory to infiltrate its agents and saboteurs across the border.<sup>41</sup> Of particular advantage to the ISI is the long and porous India-Bangladesh border, which makes crossings either way easy, particularly when there are elements all along it to facilitate the process.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Pakistan shifts proxy war to India's east, [www.atimes.com/ind-pak/DB06Df01.html](http://www.atimes.com/ind-pak/DB06Df01.html).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

Of late, there have been an increasing number of disclosures in regional and western media of Bangladesh emerging as a new theatre for the activities of the Al Qaeda and other Islamist fundamentalist groups.<sup>43</sup> The Harkat-ul-Jehadi-e-Islami, Bangladesh (HuJI-BD), was created with direct aid from Osama bin Laden in 1992. The group has linkages with Pakistan-based terrorist groups such as the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT). Though the current Bangladesh National Party (BNP)-led government has been insisting that it would not allow anti-India activities from its soil, Northeast Indian insurgent groups continue to enjoy safe haven on Bangladeshi soil, and the internal political situation in the country provides a favourable context for the Islamist groups to operate. Since the elections of October 2001 and the installation of the new right wing regime, backed by the fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), Islamist extremist mobilization has risen dramatically. The militant and pro-Pakistan JeI has 17 elected members in the Bangladesh Parliament and two Ministers in the Government. The current regime in Bangladesh, moreover, is regarded as being much 'closer' to Pakistan than its predecessor, and the linkages between the Bangladesh Army and intelligence apparatus, on the one hand, and their Pakistani counterparts, on the other, are known to be strong, and growing stronger. As one commentator has remarked, "...Bangladesh National Party (BNP) government of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia – described as mix of 'religious nationalists, militant fundamentalists and subdued communists – is either lending support or is 'soft' towards the radical *jehadi* groups and their supporters."<sup>44</sup>

In Assam alone, there are over 15 terrorist groups operating under an Islamist banner,<sup>45</sup> and the ISI's role in funding and

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<sup>43</sup> See for instance Bertil Lintner, "Bangladesh: A Cocoon of Terror", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Hong Kong, April 4, 2002, pp. 14-17; Alex Pery, "Deadly Cargo", *Time*, Hong Kong, vol. 160, no. 15, October 21, 2002.

<sup>44</sup> Wasbir Hussain, "Border Talks: A Forward Movement, but in Denial on Terror", *South Asia Intelligence Review*, vol. 1, no. 16, November 4, 2002, South Asia Terrorism Portal, [www.satp.org/satporstp/sair/Archives/1.16.htm](http://www.satp.org/satporstp/sair/Archives/1.16.htm).

<sup>45</sup> For a complete listing, see South Asia Terrorism Portal; India; States; Assam; Terrorist Outfits; [www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org).

arming these groups has now been fairly well documented.<sup>46</sup> The then Assam Chief Minister, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, on April 6, 2000, presented a report to the Assam Legislative Assembly, in which he pointed out that the ISI had been actively involved in fomenting violence and terrorism in Assam. The Chief Minister admitted to the growth of the Islamist militant groups in the inaccessible *char* (riverine) areas of the Muslim-dominated districts of central and lower Assam. The Chief Minister also noted that the Assam Police was in possession of sufficient evidence to show that the top leadership of ULFA has links with certain officials of the Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka.<sup>47</sup> On August 14, 2000, 242 ULFA terrorists, led by senior leader Lohit Deori surrendered and later claimed that the group's activities were being dictated by one or the other foreign agency such as the ISI of Pakistan and the Directorate General of Field Intelligence (DGFI) of Bangladesh.<sup>48</sup> In September 1999, Tripura Chief Minister, Manik Sarkar, claimed that the ISI had prepared a blueprint to form a Muslim State in India's Northeastern region. According to him, the Tripura government had definite information of an ISI plot to create instability in the State.<sup>49</sup> Recent reports have indicated that Kashmiri terrorists are shunning Nepal and instead crossing over from Bangladesh and Myanmar, taking advantage of the long and porous borders in the Eastern and Northeastern States.<sup>50</sup>

One of the major instrumentalities of subversion and exploitation of migrant population by Islamist group is the *madrassas*, and an extraordinary growth of such seminaries has been noticed in areas dominated by, or increasingly populated by, Bangladeshi migrants. The Government of India has admitted that there has been a rise in the number of *madrassas* in the bordering

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<sup>46</sup> ISI Activities in Assam: Statement laid on the table of the house of Assam Legislative Assembly under item no. 12 dated 6.4.2000 by Shri Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, Chief Minister, Assam. For full text see South Asia Terrorism Portal; India; States; Assam; Documents; ISI Activities in Assam; [www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Dinesh Kotwal, "The Contours of Assam Insurgency", *Strategic Analysis*, Delhi, vol. xxiv, no. 12, p. 2225.

<sup>49</sup> "ISI plans to make a Muslim state in NE: Sarkar", [www.nenanews.com/OT%20Sept%207-%20Sept.21.%2009/oh1.htm](http://www.nenanews.com/OT%20Sept%207-%20Sept.21.%2009/oh1.htm).

<sup>50</sup> "Militants eyeing N-E routes", *The Times of India*, Delhi, June 14, 2003.

districts of the Indo-Bangladesh border<sup>51</sup> with, according to one estimate, more than 1,000 *madrassas* having emerged all along its length.<sup>52</sup> According to a study conducted by the Border Security Force (BSF), the capital city of West Bengal, Kolkata, with a population of 14 million had only 131 seminaries and 67 mosques; by contrast, the small border town of Krishnanagar in Nadia district had 404 seminaries and 368 mosques.<sup>53</sup> The West Bengal Government has also admitted that some serious complaints have been received regarding the functioning of various *madrassas*. An investigation by the Intelligence Department revealed Saudi Arabia's connection in funding hundreds of *madrassas* in the Indo-Bangladesh border districts in West Bengal.<sup>54</sup> Most of these seminaries are reportedly unrecognized and students are 'taught fanaticism' and to 'fight for the cause of the Muslim fraternity against people of other religions', the intelligence report revealed. Police in Murshidabad district on February 1, 2002, cracked down on two such unauthorized *madrassas* in the border area of Barua village, where approximately 700 students, mostly Bangladeshis, attended regular classes under the supervision of two *maulvis* (priests) and 19 teachers. The police also discovered another such *madrassa*, "Al Madarsatus Salafia Dar-UI", in an isolated island on the Padma River near Rajsahi district of Bangladesh. On interrogation, the secretary of the local *madrassa* committee, Sheikh Nimuddin, reportedly admitted that a resident of Saudi Arabia, Mohammad Alafuddin, who has his ancestral house at Chandrapara village in Aurangabad, had funded the institution. The *madrassa* head, Mohammad Emdadul Hoque, while denying that anything anti-national was being taught to the students, added that many such seminaries were functioning in the district. After the terrorist attack at the American Centre in Kolkata on January

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<sup>51</sup> Union Minister of Home in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Vidyasagar Rao, *Rajya Sabha* (Upper House of Indian Parliament), Unstarred Question no. 700, March 6, 2002, <http://164.100.24.219/rsq/quest.asp?qref=62961>.

<sup>52</sup> "Over 1,000 madarsas on Indo-Bangladesh border", *Tribune*, March 7, 2002.

<sup>53</sup> "Madarsas being used to provide shelter to ultras", *The Pioneer*, Delhi, January 25, 2002.

<sup>54</sup> "S. Arabia 'funding' madarsas in Bengal", *Tribune*, February 3, 2002.

22, 2002, in which four security force personnel were killed,<sup>55</sup> Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya said that illegal Muslim seminaries were being used to provide sanctuary to terrorists at the behest of the ISI.<sup>56</sup> According to the State Minister for the Minority Commission, Mohammed Selim, over 1,300 unrecognized seminaries are functioning in West Bengal while the number of recognized *madrassas* is only 507. A majority of these *madrassas* are located in Murshidabad, Nadia, North 24-Parganas, Malda and West Dinajpur.<sup>57</sup>

Even as one acknowledges the legitimacy of such seminaries as part of the Muslim socio-economic fabric, their subversion and exploitation for illegal and anti-national activities needs greater attention. A system of proper checks and balances, including compulsory registration of *madrassas*, scrutiny of funding sources and patterns, and fixing of standards for non-religious educational curricula, is not inconsistent with the secular character of the Indian state, and must be brought into effective being within a clearly defined time frame.<sup>58</sup> The problem is also largely due to the fact that the subversive agenda of hostile neighbours has been met with conciliation again and again, and such subversion is, consequently, encouraged even further.<sup>59</sup> The insidious vote bank politics of the political parties both in the State and the Centre has been at least partially responsible. Political patronage and the demands of *realpolitik* have made the makeover from migrant status to 'legal citizens' of the State relatively uncomplicated and the political leadership has not only prevented the existing machinery from identifying and deporting aliens, but has legalized their presence through instrumentalities like the generous distribution of ration cards and even citizenship certificates.<sup>60</sup> Based on his experience in Assam, K.P.S. Gill

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<sup>55</sup> "Four killed, 17 injured in attack on USIS office", [www.rediff.com/news/2002/jan/22usis.htm](http://www.rediff.com/news/2002/jan/22usis.htm).

<sup>56</sup> "Madarsas being used to provide shelter to ultras", *Pioneer*, January 25, 2002.

<sup>57</sup> "S. Arabia 'funding' madarsas in Bengal", *Tribune*, February 3, 2002.

<sup>58</sup> K. P. S. Gill, "Approach Paper: Managing Internal Security Threats in India's Northeast," 2002, unpublished.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Bibhu Prasad Routray, "Assam: The IM (DT) Act- Of Aliens, Natives and Politics", *South Asia Intelligence Review*, vol. 1, no. 44, May 19, 2003, South Asia Terrorism Portal,



points out that corrupt land revenue officers would take money from settlers to place them on their records, and thus provide them the necessary sanction for enrolment in the voters' lists.<sup>61</sup>

## Porous Border and Thriving Insurgencies

While the internal causes of insurgencies in the Northeast can neither be denied nor ignored, the persistence and proliferation of such movements depends to a considerable extent on support from across the border. The Indian Government has, on a number of occasions, stated that the ISI makes direct use of Bangladeshi territory to infiltrate its agents and saboteurs across the border into India, and that it is assisted in this task by the Directorate General of Field Intelligence (DGFI) and other State agencies of Bangladesh. Speaking in the *Lok Sabha* (Lower House of Indian Parliament) on November 27, 2002, India's External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, explicitly stated that the Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka had become the nerve center of ISI activities in promoting terrorism and insurgency in India.<sup>62</sup> He also asserted that "Some Al Qaeda elements have taken shelter in Bangladesh... the foreign media has... reported several such instances, our own sources have also confirmed many of these reports." These activities continue under the cover of 'deniability', the practice of diplomatic falsification, and the broader lack of awareness in the 'international community' regarding conflicts in the South Asian Region.<sup>63</sup> Reports indicate that the ISI has been helping insurgent groups in purchase and transportation of arms consignment from abroad to the India's Northeast.<sup>64</sup>

During the Director General (DG)-level talks between India's BSF and the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) held between October 28

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[www.satp.org/satporctp/sair/Archives/1.44.htm](http://www.satp.org/satporctp/sair/Archives/1.44.htm).

<sup>61</sup> Hazarika, *Rites of Passage*, p. 61.

<sup>62</sup> "Sinha blames Pak. mission in Dhaka", *The Hindu*, Chennai, November 28, 2002.

<sup>63</sup> "Dhaka's aid to Northeast rebels: Time to nail the lie", *The Sentinel*, Guwahati, November 11, 2002.

<sup>64</sup> Union Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Vidyasagar Rao, *Rajya Sabha*, Unstarred Question no. 795, July 24, 2002, <http://164.100.24.219/rsq/quest.asp?qref=69500>.

and November 2, 2002, in New Delhi, the DG BSF had handed over a list of 99 training camps of insurgent groups operating in India's Northeast to the DG BDR requesting that action be taken against these.<sup>65</sup> The list included 25 camps of the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), 20 of the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), 18 of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak Muivah (NSCN-IM), 17 of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), 10 camps run by the People's Liberation Army (PLA), two by the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), two by the Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA), three by the Achik National Volunteer Council (ANVC) of Meghalaya, one by the Chakma National Liberation Front and one run by the Dima Halim Daogah (DHD). During the meeting, India also handed over a list of 86 Indian insurgents arrested by Bangladesh security agencies and police over various periods of time.<sup>66</sup>

At present, insurgent groups like the ULFA survive essentially due to the extended support structures they have developed in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh connection forced the ULFA to radically alter its traditional position vis-à-vis illegal Bangladeshi immigrants. The easy access from Bangladesh to Assam meant control over those routes to Sylhet, which were dominated by the immigrant Muslim population (Barak Valley/Cachar).<sup>67</sup> It is not surprising, consequently, that in August 1992, the ULFA through a 15-page 'policy document' declared that *settlers* had contributed to the productivity of Assam and in effect were part and parcel of a *Swadhin Asom* (sovereign Assam).<sup>68</sup>

The ULFA is currently fully entrenched in Bangladesh. Apart from running training camps, the group has set up several income

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<sup>65</sup> Union Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs, Digvijay Singh, *Rajya Sabha*, Unstarred Question no. 1701, December 5, 2002, <http://164.100.24.219/rsq/quest.asp?gref=73800>.

<sup>66</sup> Union Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs, Digvijay Singh, *Rajya Sabha*, Unstarred Question no. 999, February 27, 2002, <http://164.100.24.219/rsq/quest.asp?gref=77223>.

<sup>67</sup> Binalakshmi Nepam, *South Asia's Fractured Frontiers: Armed Conflict, Narcotics and Small Arms Proliferation in India's Northeast*, Delhi: Mittal Publication, 2002, p. 154.

<sup>68</sup> Tara Kartha, *Tools of Terror: Light Weapons and India's Security*, Delhi: Knowledge World, 1999, p. 258.

generating projects, including media consultancies and soft-drink manufacturing units, in Bangladesh. Its chief, Paresh Baruah, is reported to personally own or has controlling assets in several businesses in Bangladesh, including a tannery, a chain of departmental stores, garment factories, travel agencies, shrimp trawlers and transport and investment companies. Along the India-Bangladesh border, the ULFA has developed multiple entry and exit points, which constitutes a vital ingredient in its survival.<sup>69</sup> A number of recent reports have indicated that under pressure from the Bhutanese government, the ULFA and the NDFB may be shifting their bases to Bangladesh.<sup>70</sup> A number of arms seizures in the area and a spate of encounters have convinced authorities that this transfer of bases is occurring via Meghalaya.<sup>71</sup> On April 10, 2003, the West Garo Hills police shot dead a terrorist and recovered 96 rocket propelled grenades, a large amount of RDX and some arms and ammunition.<sup>72</sup> Meghalaya provides several routes, both for ULFA's operations as well as for the ferrying of arms and ammunition, especially from Bangladesh into Assam and even beyond.<sup>73</sup> Quoting a senior BSF official, a media report said, "Sophisticated weapons are placed in boats and river rafts, which flow downstream on the Brahmaputra and reach Dhubri. These are collected at Cachpara and carried through dense forests to different parts of the Garo Hills region."<sup>74</sup> In addition to West Garo Hills, pockets of the Jaintia Hills and the Khasi Hills are also used by the ULFA to move in and out of Bangladesh.<sup>75</sup> While the hostile geography of the region prevents a total surveillance of the border, lack of a coordinated action between various States in the Northeast is also part of the problem. Moreover, the police force in the border area

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<sup>69</sup> Bibhu Prasad Routray, "ULFA's Routes of Terror", *South Asia Intelligence Review*, vol. 1, no. 8, September 9, 2002, South Asia Terrorism Portal, [www.satp.org/satporstp/sair/Archives/1\\_8.htm](http://www.satp.org/satporstp/sair/Archives/1_8.htm).

<sup>70</sup> While ULFA's 'General Headquarters' is at Samdrup Jhonkhar in Bhutan, the NDFB has its headquarters in Southern Bhutan.

<sup>71</sup> "Militants using Meghalaya as transit point to Bangladesh," [www.rediff.com/news/2003/apr/15megha.htm](http://www.rediff.com/news/2003/apr/15megha.htm).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Routray, "ULFA's Routes of Terror."

<sup>74</sup> "Militants using Meghalaya as transit point to Bangladesh," [www.rediff.com/news/2003/apr/15megha.htm](http://www.rediff.com/news/2003/apr/15megha.htm).  
Routray, "ULFA's Routes of Terror."

is poorly equipped. For instance, police in the South Garo Hills district in Meghalaya have access to only three AK rifles and two Carbines.<sup>76</sup> This, in spite of the fact that the district is not only a hotbed of a local insurgency led by the Achik National Volunteers Council (ANVC), but also serves as a key transit route for the ULFA and NDFB, from and to their safe havens in Bangladesh. Mankachar, a small sub-divisional border town in the Dhubri district, is yet another focal point for the ULFA's traffic to Bangladesh. The alliance with the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) has also facilitated movement from Bangladesh into Bhutan and vice versa.

Outfits like the ULFA and NSCN-IM have exploited the porous border to procure arms and ammunition. Bangladesh also served as a place for currency conversion, and movement of finances out of the country.<sup>77</sup> During the 1990s, the NSCN-IM succeeded in securing fresh support from Pakistan's ISI. According to the confessions of a captured 'finance secretary' of the NSCN-IM, between 1993-1994, Pakistani diplomats handed over more than one million US dollars to the NSCN-IM. With these funds, the group has been able to purchase large quantities of Chinese rifles, machine guns, mortars and explosives from black markets in South East Asia and Bangladesh.<sup>78</sup>

The NLFT has also set up a number of camps in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Sylhet, Maulabi Bazaar, Habiganj and Comilla areas.<sup>79</sup> Its 'headquarters' is located at Sajak, a camp in the Khagrachari district of Bangladesh. This camp is also used by the NLFT to procure and store arms from the Cox's Bazaar port in southeastern Bangladesh. Most of the camps are located near the Tripura-Bangladesh border. For example, the Tailongbasti Transit Camp located in Maulabi Bazar district under the Kamalgunj police station limits is two kilometers northwest of the Indo-Bangladesh border in Kamalpur. The Niralapunji camp is located two kilometers southeast of the Indo-

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<sup>76</sup> Bibhu Prasad Routray, "Running Guns in India's Northeast", *South Asia Intelligence Review*, vol. 1, no. 17, November 11, 2002, South Asia Terrorism Portal, [www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/1\\_17.htm](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/1_17.htm).

<sup>77</sup> Nepam, *South Asia's Fractured Frontiers*, p. 155.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>79</sup> See South Asia Terrorism Portal; India; Tripura; Terrorist Outfits; NLFT; [www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org).

Bangladesh border in Kamalpur in Moulabibazar district under Kamalgunj police station and is used for operations in the Srimangal town. A transit house has been set up by NLFT in the Sripur area of Cox's Bazaar for procurement of arms from this port town.<sup>80</sup>

According to the Tripura government, the ATTF maintains eight base camps in Bangladesh with its headquarters located at Tarabon.<sup>81</sup> It also maintains a number of bases in the CHT. Ranjeet Debbarma, the ATTF chief, has taken refuge in Bangladesh.

In an interview in year 2000, the then Finance Minister of Tripura, Badal Choudhary said, "Outfits such as the NLFT are buying arms, ammunition and modern communication gadgets from South-East Asian countries such as Singapore and Thailand and collecting them in Bangkok before bringing them to Chittagong in Bangladesh. Cox's Bazaar is one of the major illegal arms centers in Bangladesh."<sup>82</sup> Identifying the route through which these illegal consignments are sent to Tripura, he said that consignments are loaded into either ships or trawlers in Chittagong, a border district of Bangladesh, and transported to Tripura, and they reach various parts of the Northeast via land routes through dense ravines, an indication that Tripura serves as a corridor for pushing arms into the Northeast.

Official sources in India maintain that insurgents are using the porous border between India and Bangladesh as a route for importing sophisticated weapons. Union Minister of State for Home, I.D. Swami, has said in the *Rajya Sabha* that Thailand, Myanmar and Bangladesh are the countries from and through which illegal flow of arms to the Northeastern States is occurring.<sup>83</sup> National Highway 39 has become a haven for many groups who forcibly collect 'patriotic tax' from the residents.<sup>84</sup> National Highway 36, which runs through Guwahati, Shillong

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Kalyan Chaudhury, "Terror in Tripura", *Frontline*, Chennai, vol. 17, no. 12, June 10-23, 2000.

<sup>83</sup> Minister of State in the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, I D Swami, *Rajya Sabha*, Unstarred Question no. 356, July 25, 2001.

<sup>84</sup> "What Lies Beneath?"

[www.manipuronline.com/Features/October2002/whatliesbeneath01\\_1.htm](http://www.manipuronline.com/Features/October2002/whatliesbeneath01_1.htm).

and Silchar, is also mostly controlled by the insurgents.<sup>85</sup> Available evidence suggests that many terrorist groups combine their movement with narcotics trafficking, which provides significant financiers for terrorism in parts of the Northeast.<sup>86</sup> These groups have also developed complex networks to sustain this trade. For example, in the State of Assam, the combination that is active in the Northeast comprises the insurgent groups, the Guwahati-based coal mafia, drug traders and middlemen.<sup>87</sup> The tri-junction of the Indian, Bangladeshi and Myanmar border near Lawangtlai in Southern Mizoram is a virtual free port for the biggest concentration of clandestine arms in South Asia.<sup>88</sup> Weapons from Russian Kalashnikovs to Chinese AK-47s, American M-16s to German HK-33s are easily available in this market. The place is important because of its proximity to Cox's Bazaar in Bangladesh, one of the biggest arms' markets in South Asia.

## **Border Management: Practices and Flaws**

The threat perception along the Bangladesh border, as enunciated above, underlines the need to evolve a comprehensive border management policy. Elements of such a policy would include the setting up of an effective mechanism to manage the trans-border movement of people, effective surveillance, a comprehensive and coordinated intelligence apparatus, the involvement of border populations and a greater role for the local administration and law enforcement agencies. The Government of India has responded to the issue of trans-border movement of illegal Bangladeshis and insurgents through a series of measures. These include raising of additional battalions of the BSF, reduction of gaps between the border outposts, intensification of patrolling both on land and the riverine border, increase in the number of outpost towers, provisions of surveillance equipments

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> "Easy drugs, easy money fuel insurgency", [www.tehelka.com/channels/investigations/2000/july/16/in071600narc.htm](http://www.tehelka.com/channels/investigations/2000/july/16/in071600narc.htm)

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> "The great triple-border arms bazaar" [www.tehelka.com/channels/investigations/2000/oct/24/printable/in102400ar\\_msbazaarpr.htm](http://www.tehelka.com/channels/investigations/2000/oct/24/printable/in102400ar_msbazaarpr.htm).

and an accelerated programme of construction of border roads and fencing.<sup>89</sup>

Would illegal migration decline if the trans-border movement of populations is made easier? A curious logic currently underlies a great deal of the literature on ‘managing’ the migration of people along the Indo-Bangladesh border, particularly in India’s Northeast, which suggests that the ‘opening up’ of the border to trade and the provision of identity cards to those who wish to enter India in order to work here would somehow curtail the flow of illegal migrants. But the easier a border is to cross, the greater the likelihood that the border will be a disputed border, says Vasquez.<sup>90</sup> Stephen Flynn notes: “how can border control measures be best adapted to achieve the twin objectives of lowering barriers for the legal transborder movement of peoples and goods and strengthening the capacity to filter the bad from the good in international travel and trade flows?”<sup>91</sup> No nation can afford a large underworld of illegal migrants. Not only is it unsafe – a natural haven for criminals to hide and thrive in – it also makes a mockery of democracy. While it is a truism that, in a globalized world, one cannot remain sealed off from the rest of humanity, it is both possible and necessary to regulate the flow. Crucial to border control is the process of clearly defining the groups of migrants that are welcome, and those that are not. Past experiences in this context have shown that this delineation process has been overwhelmingly exposed to considerations of expediency by the political and structural elite. The issue of migration has become a political question, and security and administrative considerations have been neglected. The Government of India launched a scheme called the Prevention of Infiltration of Pakistanis (PIP) scheme in Assam in 1960.<sup>92</sup> The

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<sup>89</sup> Minister of State in the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, I D Swami, *Rajya Sabha*, Starred Question no. 605, May 8, 2002, <http://164.100.24.219/rsq/quest.asp?gref=66415>.

<sup>90</sup> John A. Vasquez as cited in Harvey Starr and G. Dale Thomas, “The Nature of Borders and Conflict: Revisiting Hypotheses on Territory and War”, University of South Carolina, 2001, [www.cla.sc.edu/gint/psrw/starr092002.pdf](http://www.cla.sc.edu/gint/psrw/starr092002.pdf).

<sup>91</sup> Stephen E. Flynn, “Beyond Border Control”, *Foreign Affairs*, November-December 2000.

<sup>92</sup> The scheme was initiated under the supervision and control of the Deputy Inspector General of Police for surveillance and watching over the

scheme worked fairly well in Assam in the 1960's and a large number of illegal immigrant Muslims and Hindus were detected and deported. Gradually, however, political interference brought the detection of illegal migrants to a virtual standstill in Assam and West Bengal. In 1979-82, during the period of the foreigners' agitation,<sup>93</sup> there was no detection or deportation of immigrant Muslims. The task force set up in West Bengal was also reportedly told to go slow, and its existence virtually forgotten.<sup>94</sup> The Union Government has, on a number of occasions, decided to launch special drives to identify and deport illegal Bangladeshis. Recently, in January 2003, the Government proclaimed its determination to take immediate steps to deport Bangladeshis staying illegally in India and to this end, it delegated the powers to detect and deport illegal foreigners to the respective State governments. The Union Government is also reportedly preparing a National Register of Indian citizens and planning to issue them Multi-purpose National Identity cards. The identification and deportation of illegal foreigners once they have settled down is always difficult, and these measures are yet to make any significant headway.

Any regulatory scheme envisioned would need to be realistic, with a clear relation to the changing ground level realities of subversion and encirclement. Effective border management can be harnessed only through harmonious and serviceable legal instruments. In the arena under analysis, the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) [IM (DT)] Act of 1983 in the State of Assam provides a useful example to understand the interface between border management and legal instruments. The IM (DT)

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infiltration prone areas of Dhubri, Cachar and Karimganj Districts covering about 269 km of international boundary in addition to prevention of cross border smuggling, crimes and sabotage. In 1964, the PIP was renamed as PIF (Prevention of Infiltration of Foreigners) with the same objectives. For details, see <http://assampolice.com/departments/border/border.htm>.

<sup>93</sup> The Assam Agitation that rocked the State on the issue of detection, deletion and deportation of the immigrants from Bangladesh concluded with the signing of the Assam Accord on August 15, 1985, between the All Assam Students Union and the Union Government. According to the terms of the Accord, all foreigners who entered Assam on or after March 25, 1971, were to be detected and deported. For a full text of the Accord, see South Asia Terrorism Portal, India, Assam, Documents, [www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org).

<sup>94</sup> Rammohan, "Uneasy Borders Distant Neighbours".



Act was enacted in 1983 with the purported objective of the “establishment of Tribunals for the determination, in a fair manner, of the question whether a person is an illegal migrant to enable the Central Government to expel illegal migrants from India and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.”<sup>95</sup>

The basic flaw cited by critics of the Act is that the onus of furnishing the proof of a person’s citizenship rests with the complainant, and not the person whose citizenship is in doubt. Some of the requirements of the Act have proven discriminatory and appear biased in favour of illegal migrants. These include:

- ? Every application made against any person ‘shall be accompanied by affidavits sworn by not less than two persons residing within the jurisdiction of the same police station in which the person referred to in the application is found, or residing.’ (No authority can, consequently, take cognisance of an offence under the Act without such a complaint. Such complaints are rare, since people living close by may be intimidated or may not wish to antagonize neighbours of a community that is increasingly numerically stronger, and that is seen to enjoy substantial political patronage).
- ? The application shall be accompanied by a “fee, being not less than ten and not more than one hundred, rupees, (later fixed at Rupees Twenty-five) as may be prescribed.” (The provision of a fee is a further deterrent as people refrain from filing complaints to avoid personal expenditure).
- ? The onus of proof lies with the complainant.<sup>96</sup>

The IMDT Act has also been found to be highly impractical. Out of the 16 District Tribunals, only five are functioning, and the remaining 11 Tribunals have only one person each on the bench and as such are non-functional.<sup>97</sup> Considering the fact that the

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<sup>95</sup> The Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983. For full text of the Act, see South Asia Terrorism Portal; India; States; Assam; Documents; Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act; [www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org).

<sup>96</sup> Bibhu Prasad Routray, “Assam: The IM (DT) Act – Of Aliens, Natives and Politics”, *South Asia Intelligence Review*, vol. 1 no. 44, May 19, 2003, South Asia Terrorism Portal; [www.satp.org/satporgrp/sair/Archives/1\\_44.htm](http://www.satp.org/satporgrp/sair/Archives/1_44.htm).

<sup>97</sup> Report on Illegal Migration Into Assam, Submitted to the President of India by the Governor of Assam, Guwahati: Raj Bhavan, November 8, 1998, p. 32.

Foreigners' Act of 1946 is in force for the rest of India to detect illegal immigrants, IMDT, with its peculiar infirmities and biases, is also very discriminatory against the people of Assam. Official sources reveal that increasing trends to Islamist militancy in Assam owe their genesis to the unabated migration from Bangladesh and, even though few would risk asserting a direct co-relation between Bangladeshi migration and the growth of Islamist insurgent groups in the State, the fact remains that it is the migrant-inhabited areas that provide a steady recruitment ground for organisations such as the Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA) in Assam.<sup>98</sup> The existence of as many as 14 Islamist militant organisations in the State has significantly widened the options available to the forces of destabilisation in the region.<sup>99</sup>

Between 1983 and 2000, the sixteen tribunals in various districts functioned at far below their capacity and they located approximately 10,000 illegal residents of which a bare 1400 were deported.<sup>100</sup> A Guwahati-based English language newspaper, *The Sentinel*, in an editorial in the early 1990s, calculated that "at the rates the tribunals were going, it would take 200 years to identify all the foreigners illegally residing in Assam, even if there was increase in their (the tribunals') number." Only 1,501 illegal migrants had been deported by the tribunals set up under the

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Salaries and Travel Allowance bills of the staff are not paid on time. Essential facilities, like transport and telephone are lacking and funds are often not available to buy even postage stamps.

<sup>98</sup> Routray, "Assam: The IM (DT) Act - Of Aliens, Natives and Politics."

<sup>99</sup> The Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA) was founded sometime in the year 1996. MULTA is one among the approximately 14 Islamist terrorist outfits reportedly operating in the State of Assam. MULTA and the Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA) are also said to be part of the All Muslim United Liberation Forum of Assam (AMULFA), which was reportedly founded to coordinate the subversive activities of Islamist terrorist elements in the Northeast region of India. The then Chief Minister (CM) of Assam, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, in his statement on the floor of the Assam Legislative Assembly on ISI activities in the State, on April 6, 2000, said that the ISI was guiding the MULTA and MULFA. For details, see South Asia Terrorism Portal; India; States; Assam; Terrorist Groups; Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam; [www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org).

<sup>100</sup> Hazarika, *Rites of Passage*, p. 70.

IMDT Act over the past 16 years, even though an amount of Rupees 128,928,385 had been spent on these tribunals.<sup>101</sup>

It is evident that the IMDT Act has failed to secure its objectives. The total number of deportations under the Act is negligible, and the process of identification and deportation of foreigners has been virtually abandoned. The forging of more rational legal instruments for effective identification and deportation is now an imperative.

## Force Structure

The Border Security Force (BSF) is deployed all along the 4095.7 kilometres of borders that the States of West Bengal (2216.7 kilometres), Assam (262 kilometres), Meghalaya (443 kilometres), Tripura (856 kilometres and Mizoram 318 kilometres) share with Bangladesh.<sup>102</sup> At present, 37 battalions of the BSF man the border, and there are 714 BSF Border Outposts (BOPs) located along its length. The front wise average distance between BOPs is as follows:<sup>103</sup>

- ? South Bengal: 5.2 kilometres
- ? North Bengal: 5.9 kilometres
- ? Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur and Nagaland: 5.1 kilometres
- ? Tripura, Cachar and Mizoram: 6.1 kilometres

At each Observation Post, approximately 2-3 persons remain on duty on a shift basis of six-hour duration. The personnel are posted to battalions, which remains in one area/frontier for a period of 3-4 years. The companies of battalions manning the posts are normally rotated after every six-month period.<sup>104</sup> The inter-BOP distance is 5 to 7 kms. Consequently, each battalion

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<sup>101</sup> Figures quoted by the Minister-in-charge of Assam Accord Implementation, Pankaj Bora, in the State Legislative Assembly on March 13, 2003.

<sup>102</sup> Source: *BSF*, a Booklet prepared by the Public Relations Office, Border Security Force, New Delhi, 2000.

<sup>103</sup> I D Swami, Minister of State in the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, *Rajya Sabha*, Unstarred Question no. 2197, March 15, 2000, <http://164.100.24.219/rsq/quest.asp?qref=11324>.

<sup>104</sup> I D Swami, Minister of State in the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, *Rajya Sabha*, Unstarred Question, November 29, 2000, <http://164.100.24.219/rsq/quest.asp?qref=33078>.

has to look after a large segment of the border. For example, in West Bengal, where the problem of illegal migration is acute, each battalion of the BSF looks after more than 100 kilometres of the border. Similarly in Meghalaya, each battalion is covering up to 80 kms. The distance between two BOPs is excessive. According to the BSF Director General, Ajai Raj Sharma, “Ideally, the distance between one BOP and another should be 3.5 km. But at present, the distance is five to six km because we do not have the desired manpower.”<sup>105</sup> The BSF has sought complete fencing of the border and raising of the strength of the force by 25 percent for greater deployment on this stretch.<sup>106</sup>

One of the reasons for the inadequate strength of the BSF on the borders is their frequent deployment in counterinsurgency and other internal security duties. The Group of Minister’s Report thus notes: “The repeated withdrawal, in large numbers, of paramilitary forces from border guarding duties for internal security and counter insurgency duties has led to a neglect of borders. These forces have also been unable to perform optimally due to cannibalization of battalions and even companies.”<sup>107</sup> Apart from inadequate strength, however, there are other problems that hamper the BSF in the execution of its primary mandate. A closer examination of BSF operations reveals that it performs its duties under severe limitations, with operational procedure poorly defined and a significant overlapping of jurisdictions with other agencies. For example, the first role of the BSF is to provide a sense of security amongst people living in the border areas. But it is not clear how the BSF is to do this. The mere presence of a well-equipped force is not sufficient to provide a sense of security, especially when the BSF is perceived as an ‘outside force’. The level of interaction with the border population poor, often not very friendly, and a sense of mutual mistrust prevails. Clearly the State Government and the local administration have an important role to play in this regard, yet there is no institutional arrangement between the BSF and the

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<sup>105</sup> “Militants eyeing N-E routes,” <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/cms.dll/html/uncomp/articleshow?msid=22548>.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Report of the Group of Ministers on National Security, 2001.

State Governments to secure common goals. The prevention of trans-border crime, another major task, is not exclusive to the BSF. The civil police in the border districts are charged with the prevention of such crimes. Such an overlapping of jurisdiction creates problems of co-ordination. Prevention of crime in border areas also requires substantial intelligence inputs from the local population and a fair amount of co-ordination among the various law enforcement agencies. In the absence of formally laid down structures, individual initiatives and discretion often influence the interpretation of respective jurisdictions of various agencies, and operational coordination between them. Similarly, the prevention of smuggling requires a fair amount of co-ordination with custom officials and the officials of the Narcotics Control Bureau. The powers enjoyed by the BSF under the Customs Act are limited and as such BSF personnel on the borders have to maintain a close liaison with local custom officials, and there are frequent problems of coordination.

Due to a continuous rotation of BSF battalions, deployed forces have tended to lack the advantages that accrue to permanently located forces, such as the local police force, such as a proper knowledge of the terrain and people of the area. Before the creation of the BSF in 1965, State Police forces were in charge of the India-Bangladesh borders, and this arrangement would have facilitated the gathering of intelligence and securing the cooperation of the local people. Clearly, consequently, is need for the BSF to have specialized knowledge about the border and the people inhabiting such areas,<sup>108</sup> but its structure and operational norms inhibit the acquisition of such capabilities. Border policing can be improved significantly if the assistance of local people could be factored into the tasks of the security agencies manning the border, and such an option would be strongly in the interests of the locals as well, whose sentiments are also strongly against the ongoing illegal migration. The relative handicap of the BSF in terms of its knowledge regarding

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<sup>108</sup> Krishan, "Policing the Indo-Bangladesh Border", p. 672.

the terrain, people, language and local sensitivities also hampers operational capacities.<sup>109</sup>

Widespread corruption involving local politicians, security forces and the local police is another major problem. S.K. Ghosh notes in this context, “No single check post is free from the tentacles of touts and anti-social elements who operate from both sides of the border having close links between them. They decide who are to be allowed to cross the border and those who are to be pushed back. Bribery and corruption are rampant at check posts.”<sup>110</sup> Some personnel of the BSF (which was exclusively an Assam-based force at the time of its inception) are known to have colluded with the illegal migrants eventually altering the demographic profile of neighbouring areas of India.<sup>111</sup>

There is, moreover, an urgent need to examine the technology-manpower equation within the force. New technological inputs such as increased aerial surveillance and ground sensors are now in wide use internationally, and should be evaluated for their utility in India, and particularly along its troubled Northeastern confines. Above all, there is need for long term planning, as *ad hoc* responses to immediate threats provide only short-term relief, and are often counterproductive over the longer term.

## Fencing

During the 1980s, the Government of India decided to fence the 555 kilometre long stretch of the Punjab-Pakistan border. Punjab was also given enough battalions to achieve an inter BOP distance of 2.5 to 3 kilometres. Each battalion had a jurisdiction of just 25-30 kilometres. After such fencing levels, there was a substantial decrease in the smuggling.<sup>112</sup> The success of the fencing experience in Punjab influenced the Government’s decision to fence the entire India-Bangladesh border. The fencing

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<sup>109</sup> S S Chandel, “A Border Guards Organisation for Anti-Terrorist Operations”, August 28, 2001, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Delhi, [www.ipcs.org](http://www.ipcs.org).

<sup>110</sup> S K Ghosh, *Unquiet Border*, p. 10.

<sup>111</sup> T Anantachari, [www.ipcs.org/issues/articles/351-mi-achari.html](http://www.ipcs.org/issues/articles/351-mi-achari.html).

<sup>112</sup> EN Rammohan, “Uneasy Borders Distant Neighbours,” p. 500.

project was sanctioned in two phases: Phase I in 1987 and Phase II in 2000.<sup>113</sup> The approved project components include the construction of 2,784 kilometres of road, 23.8 kilometres of bridge and 896 kilometres of fencing along the Indo-Bangladesh border. An amount of Rupees 1.6 billion had been spent on fencing work till March 31, 2002 and as per the sanction, an additional 6.08 billion is estimated to be spent for completing the remaining portion of the fencing.<sup>114</sup> A total of 3662.88 kilometres of road length was approved for construction in both phases of the project and a total of 2565.2 kilometres has been completed. The remaining portion is scheduled for completion by year 2007.

The Government of India has also sanctioned the construction of border roads and fencing in two phases to facilitate border patrolling by the BSF and to check infiltration and cross border smuggling. Phase-I of the project, referred to as the ‘ongoing scheme’, started in 1989 and is in an advanced stage of completion covering a length of 857 kms of fencing in different States; Phase-II, referred to as ‘additional works’, was approved by the Government in June 2000 and contains a far greater component of fencing (2429 kms) in different States.

### **Details of Fencing Work on the Indo-Bangladesh Border<sup>115</sup>**

#### **PHASE-I**

Name of the State	Length of the border (in kms.)	Sanctioned length of the fencing (in kms.)	Work completed (in kms.)	Expenditure incurred so far (Rs. in million)
West Bengal	2216.7	507	505	921.1
Tripura	856	-	-	-
Assam	262	152	149	192.9

<sup>113</sup> Vidyasagar Rao, Minister of State in the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, *Rajya Sabha*, July 24, 2002, <http://164.100.24.219/rsg/quest.asp?qref=69525>.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> “Border Management”, Annual Report 2001-02, Ministry of Home Affairs, Delhi, Government of India, [www.mha.nic.in/annual%20report-3.htm#BM](http://www.mha.nic.in/annual%20report-3.htm#BM).

Meghalaya	443	198	198	283.9
Mizoram	318	-	-	-

PHASE-II

Name of the State	Length of the border (in kms.)	Sanctioned length of the fencing (in kms.)	Estimated Expenditure (Rs. in billion)	Expected year of completion
West Bengal	2216.7	1021	4.40	2006-07
Tripura	856	736	2.13	2006-07
Assam	262	71.5	0.25	2006-07
Meghalaya	443	201	0.58	2006-07
Mizoram	318	400*	1.11	2006-07

\*Length is more due to topographical factors.

The slow pace of fencing demonstrates both project flaws and a lack of intent. For instance, in West Bengal, the acquisition of land took years and even today, it is held up in litigation in several sections. In Assam, partial diversion of funds released for fencing work to other works by the Government of Assam has resulted in extraordinary delays of fencing work in that State.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, more than 200 villages, situated right on the borderline are opposed to the project, with people in these villages claiming that erecting a barbed wire along the border would make them refugees in their own land.<sup>117</sup>

Clearly, it will be necessary to remove settlements along the fencing and on the zero. Although there is a pending proposal to shift villages along the borders, this has not been accomplished thus far. In the stretch between Islampur in the Kishenganj district and Malda in West Bengal, while most Hindu villages along the border have reportedly shifted voluntarily, the Muslim villages

<sup>116</sup> Minister of State in the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, Maqbool Dar, *Rajya Sabha*, Unstarred Question, no. 2420, August 13, 1997, <http://164.100.24.219/rsq/quest.asp?gref=38901>.

<sup>117</sup> "Caught in the middle," *The Week*, Kochi, September 19, 1999.



have resisted relocation.<sup>118</sup> Proper compensation, where warranted, will have to be provided, and all such villages need be relocated within a clearly defined time frame.<sup>119</sup>

## Local Interface

Local law enforcement agencies and the civil administration will have to play a greater role in effective border management. Since local police officers routinely encounter illegal residents and have a steady flow of intelligence regarding their movements, it is viable to involve local security agencies in scrutinizing immigration violations. Regrettably, certain practical problems limit the degree to which State and local police authorities have been involved in combating the problem. First, the responsibility for border management lies in the Union Government's jurisdiction. Consequently, the State police, more often than not, are not clear regarding the extent of their authority concerning such violations. Also, lacking common data bases and an efficient interface with agencies directly involved in border security, the local police lack timely access to specific information regarding migrants who they could, otherwise, detect, detain or interdict. Further, there is the chronic constraint of limited resources in terms of available manpower and material resources, jail space,<sup>120</sup> and so on. There exists, moreover, a spectrum of opinion, which claims that involving State and local law enforcement agencies in border control would set up a 'police state', and this lobby has vigorously obstructed opinion building to sanction such an expanded role for the local agencies. It must be clear that this particular perspective is flawed, and it ignores the distinction between citizens and aliens, and the premise that aliens will naturally, and should, face greater scrutiny. As is the practice

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<sup>118</sup> K. P. S. Gill, "Approach Paper: Managing Internal Security Threats in India's Northeast," 2002, unpublished.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> At Ranbir Singh Pura in September 2002, Border Security Force handed over 162 illegal Bangladeshi immigrants to the local police. The police, however, refused to arrest them because the local police station had no space to house so many people. See, India-Bangladesh Migration Matrix-Reactive not Proactive", [www.saag.org/papers/papers7/paper632.html](http://www.saag.org/papers/papers7/paper632.html).

across the world, to preserve the liberty of citizens, the state must demand more from the 'foreigners within'.

Another factor in the interface with local processes is the integration of the border population. The experience in Jammu and Kashmir has shown that the recruitment of local youth as Special Police Officers (SPO) and the setting up of Village Defence Committees (VDC) has had a positive impact as far as border control and counter-terrorism operations are concerned.<sup>121</sup> According to Gurbachan Jagat, a former Director General of the BSF, counter-terrorist operations have been successful in the Doda district, Gool and Mahore areas of Udhampur district, Rajouri district and the International Border on the Jammu side, precisely due to such an interface with the local population and processes.<sup>122</sup> Jagat notes further that there are a few thousand VDCs in Jammu and Kashmir and there has been no case in which a village has been overrun where a VDC existed. The use of the local people in border control has certain inherent advantages if one considers the ease with which migrants flow in and out of the troubled region. For instance, Bangladeshis walk into Tripura everyday to work as rickshaw pullers or daily labourers; there are petty smugglers and traders too who come and conduct business during the day and go home by nightfall.<sup>123</sup> A former BSF official recalls cases when he allowed people to come across the border in Tripura because there were no cinema halls in that part of Bangladesh, "They would come and then melt away into the darkness as they went home".<sup>124</sup>

One of the novel means of involving the local citizenry in detecting illegal migrants was introduced by K.P.S. Gill, an Assam cadre Indian Police Service official. Gill recalls that the district police officers would go to Muslim village elders ('the old settlers') and explain to them that the new groups could turn against them and harm their interests.<sup>125</sup> The effort was to develop a process of voluntary disclosures under which police officials

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<sup>121</sup> "Problem of Border Management: Need for Involving Local Population", *Tribune*, October 21, 2002.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> Hazarika, *Rites of Passage*, p. 58.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59

would take down details of those who surrendered and further, these individuals were herded into the Jubilee Field at Nowgong (now Nagaon) before they were placed on trains headed to the East Pakistan border.<sup>126</sup> At the time, Pakistan border guards made no efforts to resist this pushback policy. Gill opines that the ‘surrender scheme’ was the best, since it actually worked and there were virtually no complaints against the police on grounds of harassment. However, such a policy would face serious opposition from Bangladesh in the current context, as has been borne out by various incidents of alleged ‘push back’ efforts.

A well-planned network of VDCs along the entire border, with components of SPOs and supervision by the local forces operating on those borders, would go a long way in strengthening not only the ranks of the armed men on the borders but also, more importantly, increase manifold the quality and quantity of local intelligence required.

There is, consequently, need for radical reevaluation of existing border management policies, practices and techniques. Border management, today, is a vital component of internal security management, and the role of the border guarding forces needs to be located within this broader framework. Vital components of a comprehensive border management policy would include a greater role for local law enforcement agencies and civil administration; greater emphasis on border area development; and integration of border populations into the mainstream.

A comprehensive and continuous process of the proper mapping and movement of populations in the region is another essential aspect of any effective border management policy.<sup>127</sup> Detailed population profiles of the border areas need to be created, documenting ethnicity, attitudes towards terrorist and separatist groups, levels of interaction with mainstream politics, engagement in illegal and subversive activities, and attitudes towards security forces. These are all critical inputs for effective border security planning and management. Furthermore, illegal

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Inputs in this paragraph have been enunciated in detail in K. P. S. Gill, “Approach Paper: Managing Internal Security Threats in India’s Northeast,” 2002, unpublished.

migrants must be denied all benefits flowing from the government, and their access to private sector employment, as well as acquisition of properties, must also be curtailed. A process of gradually disenfranchising the illegal migrants needs to be initiated. A solution to the problems of illegal migrants also needs to factor in the easy employment opportunities currently available to them. To this end, once an effective identification system is in place, employers should face strong penalties for employing illegal aliens. Legislative changes also need to be brought about, making any transaction of immovable properties with illegal aliens void. These measures are imperative if the flow of illegal immigrants is to be curtailed, and if the existing system of incentives for such migration is to be dismantled.

There is a need to evolve a strategy of area management of borders so that “we do not have to wait for them and then fight them on our own territory. We have to do away with this ‘Panipat syndrome’ that we have inherited, which allows the enemy to penetrate hundreds of miles into our territory before we decide to tackle him.”<sup>128</sup>

Even if all these suggestions are translated into action on the ground, they may not be enough to halt illegal immigration completely – and this cannot be the rational objective of such measures. They can, however, make the cost of illegal immigration much higher than it currently is, diminish the security and impunity with which our borders are violated, and diminish the current torrent of illegal immigration from Bangladesh to a trickle.

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<sup>128</sup> “Problem of Border Management”, *Tribune*, October 21, 2002. Panipat, 120 kilometres northwest of Delhi, in the present-day State of Haryana, was witness to three battles- 1526 AD, 1556 AD, 1761 AD. ‘Panipat syndrome’ is a tradition of not anticipating the threat in advance, not being prepared to meet it and to attempt to counter it after it has assumed serious proportions. It refers to the rulers of Delhi waiting till the enemy advanced to Panipat and then responding.