

Illegal Migration & Associated Issues

Mains: GS1 - population and associated issues

GS2 - Important aspects of governance

Why in News?

Recently, The Union Home Ministry in a counter-terror sweep, had directed states to identify and deport illegal migrants, especially those from Bangladesh and Myanmar.

What are the causes for the illegal migration?

- **Illegal migration** - It is cross-border movement without legal authorization, such as entering, residing, or overstaying in a country without valid documents or permits.

***Illegal migrants** are individuals who have entered or remained in a country without the legal authorization or documentation required by that country's immigration laws.*

- **Compulsion & requirements** - Migrants may be compelled by urgent needs, such as escaping conflict, persecution, disaster, poverty, or family separation, but lack access to legal channels or required documents.
- **Causes** - Economic hardship (poverty, joblessness)
 - Conflict or violence
 - Political instability or persecution
 - Restrictive migration policies
 - Desire for better living conditions or reunification with family.
- **Facilitating factors** - Porous borders and weak enforcement
 - Human smuggling networks or traffickers
 - Lack of legal migration pathways.
- **Risks & challenges** - Exposure to exploitation,
 - unsafe journeys,
 - criminalization and denial of rights or services in host countries.

***Migration** is a natural and necessary phenomenon in a country as diverse and dynamic as India. **Article 19** of the Constitution guarantees all citizens the right to move and reside freely within the country.*

What are the issues arising with enforcing guidelines?

- **Bypassing fair process** – Language, religion, and citizenship merged and considered as a mere mechanism of exclusion.
 - In this drive across several states such as Haryana, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Delhi, the security imperative has often resulted in forceful deportations of Bengali-speaking Muslims, who are Indian citizens.
- **Targeting of vulnerable communities** — In Gurgaon, blue-collar (manual labour like in construction) workers were rounded up and many allegedly despite official identity documents, and detained.
 - In Delhi's Jai Hind Camp, essential services were cut off to facilitate evictions.
 - In Odisha, over 400 Bengali migrants were detained on suspicion of being illegal Bangladeshis.
- **Weaponization of identity** - The repeated abuse and arbitrary detention of Bengali-speaking citizens undermines the Constitution's promise of equality, dignity, and due process.
- It still reflects a rising impulse toward majoritarian governance is more concerning.

Operation Push back in the early 1990s aimed to deport suspected Bangladeshi migrants. It was disorganized and many were sent back without proper procedures, often ignoring valid ID.

What are the regional responses associated to deportations in India?

- **Assam** - The state has its own history of exclusion is steeped in post-colonial anxieties.
- **Anti-Bengali sentiment** - Assam has roots in the mass migrations following Partition and the formation of Bangladesh in 1971.
- **Bongal Kheda movement** - In the 1960s solidified in the Assam Agitation (1979-1985) and the subsequent Assam Accord sought to protect indigenous identity
 - but it came often at the expense of long-settled Bengali-speaking communities.
- **The 2019 National Register of Citizens (NRC)** - This process is opaque, inconsistent, and flawed by bureaucratic hurdles, exclusion from welfare schemes, and a constant threat of statelessness.
 - Over 19 lakh people were excluded from the final list, most of them Bengali-speaking, and Muslim.
- **Recent move** - Invoking the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950 is allowing district collectors to deport individuals labelled as "foreigners" without the oversight of Foreigners Tribunals
- It raised pressing concerns about the erosion of institutional safeguards and the risk of communal profiling that could wrongfully implicate lawful residents alongside the undocumented.
- **West Bengal responses - Politicization issues** Referring to the Election Commission's plan to implement the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) nationwide, the Cm of West Bengal described the action as discriminatory.
 - West Bengal CM has accused the BJP-led Centre and the EC of attempting to introduce the NRC "through the backdoor" of linguistic profiling and

discrimination against minorities from the state.

- **Targeted assaults** – The Chief Minister has described the current spate of detentions in various parts of the country as targeted assault against vulnerable Bengali speakers.
- **Protest** – CM has launched a ***Bhasha Andolan*** (language movement) campaign an emotive issue among the community from Bolpur, the site of Rabindranath Tagore’s Visva Bharati university, this week.
- **Political Landscape Ahead of Elections** – With critical Assembly elections due in both Bengal and Assam next year, the thickening of identity politics can turn into a flashpoint.
 - In 2021, the TMC’s campaign slogan Bangla nijer meyekei chay (Bengal wants its own daughter) channeled regional pride in response to the BJP’s aggressive Hindutva push.
- **Rising questions on governance** – Now, amid corruption scandals and a spate of incidents of sexual violence raising questions over governance, the migrant issue has evidently given TMC a new platform.
- It has reoriented its campaign to focus on the rights of Bengali-speaking migrants an estimated 22.5 lakh Bengalis work outside West Bengal.
- **Rising security concerns** – In Pune a mob of around 60-odd people, several of them allegedly belonging to the Bajrang Dal barged into the home of a Kargil War veteran’s relative in Pune
- They demanded identity proofs from the family, calling them Bangladeshis.
- The police on site apparently acceded to the demands of the mob, carting the family off to the police station in the dead of the night.

What lies ahead?

- The rhetoric of “infiltrators” and “outsiders” may reap electoral dividends in the short term, but in the long run, it foments division, distrust, and a breakdown of order.
- When a system focuses on citizen vs infiltrator, us vs them i.e. then it erodes the nuanced, layered understanding of what it means to be Indian.
- The warning bells are loud and clear if identity continues to be weaponized, India risks further shrinking its civic space into something narrow, brittle, and unjust.

Reference

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