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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