

# Confusion over Assam

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**Assam's Congress Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi is quoted by a newspaper as saying: "My government will publish a white paper by the first week of October (2012) on steps taken to check influx and plan for the future"**

The exodus of the Boros (not Bodos as they are incorrectly called) and other Northeasterner's from Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai and other cities was extraordinary; as extraordinary as the exodus of Kashmiri Pundits from J&K. To understand the root cause of the unrest in Assam and its effect on the rest of the country, one needs to study three documents.

First is the report of Gen. S K Sinha, then Governor of Assam, to K.R. Narayanan, President of India, dated November 8, 1998. In the covering letter he states: "Large-scale illegal migration from East Pakistan/Bangladesh over several decades has been altering the demographic complexion of this State. It poses a grave threat both to the identity of the Assamese people and to our national security. It threatens to reduce the Assamese people to a minority in their own State, as happened in Tripura and Sikkim."

He also quotes from public sources: " (Mr.)Indrajit Gupta (CPM), the then Home Minister of India, stated in the Parliament on May 6, 1997, that there were 10 million illegal migrants residing in India. Quoting Home Ministry/Intelligence Bureau source, the 10 August 1998 issue of India Today has given the breakdown of these illegal migrants by States: West Bengal 5.4 millions, Assam 4 millions, Tripura 8 millions, Bihar 0.5 million, Maharashtra 0.5 million, Rajasthan 0.5 million and Delhi 0.3 million, making a total of 10.83 millions."

He sees this as a problem of electoral politics: "The 'secular' parties and the minorities do not see any danger from illegal migration. They believe that most of the so-called illegal migrants are Bengali-speaking Indian Muslims and this issue has been unnecessarily blown out of proportion. They fear that in the garb of deporting foreigners, Indian Muslims will be harassed. Thus they are for the continuance of IMDT Act in its present form.

"On the other hand, the majority community of Assam and the political parties dubbed as 'communal' by the 'secularists' have a diametrically opposite view- point. They are gravely concerned about the large influx of illegal migrants and want their ingress stopped. They also want that the highly discriminating IMDT Act be repealed forthwith".

The Governor himself felt that: "Be that as it may, the fact is that on the plea of protecting genuine Indian citizens the IMDT Act was formulated but in practice, it has been found to be primarily serving the interests of the illegal migrants."

According to the IMDT Act, the Government has to prove that a person residing in Assam is an illegal immigrant, whereas in the rest of the country the normal law of India requires the person to prove that he/she is an Indian citizen. The burden of proof is reversed for Assam.

He also outlined the political implications: "The minority community in Assam now comprises nearly 30% of the population and, with their tendency to vote as a bloc, they can hardly be considered a minority in real terms. They

have come to acquire a decisive role in Assam's democratic polity which the majority community, with its split votes, cannot match.”

About the Assam Accord and the fencing of the border, he said: “The decision to fence the border was taken in 1985 and reflected in Assam Accord but the work on fencing started seven years later in 1992; 13 years have elapsed since this Accord and fencing has not yet been completed. ...As against this, fencing in Punjab started in 1988 and was completed in 3 years by 1991.”

The next personage who has come on record is Mr. H S Bramha, IAS officer of the Andhra Pradesh cadre and now Election Commissioner of India. Writing in a newspaper on July 28, 2012, on “How to share Assam”, Bramha was his usual blunt and forthright self. On the recent clashes he says: “However, the clashes were not wholly unexpected.

The question that is generally asked is: why did it take a few decades (for them) to occur in the first place? Assam has been virtually sitting on a huge tinderbox. Any knowledgeable person in Assam knows well enough that migration into the State started during the late 1960s and early 1970s, when India fought two wars with Pakistan, in 1965 and 1971 respectively.”

On the illegal migration, Bramha writes: “Unless we use the latest technologies, as the Israelis have done, this problem is going to remain and illegal migration to the Northeast will continue. It has been alleged by knowledgeable persons that out of the 27 districts in Assam, 11 are going to be Muslim - majority districts once the 2011 census figures, religion-wise, are published by the census authorities. The present ethnic clashes between the two communities can be directly attributed to the aforementioned facts of illegal migration into Assam.”

With regard to land illegally acquired, Bramha says: “Since 1971, it has been noticed that, to a large extent, government land in the char areas and lands earmarked as grazing grounds have been systematically appropriated by illegal migrants, in collusion with the district and local administrations.

Today, most of the districts along the Indo-Bangladesh border are devoid of government lands or large grazing grounds, which were once an asset to the local communities and farmers. The systematic grabbing of government lands and the steady encroachment of denuded forest areas by illegal immigrants and non-indigenous communities, have created serious differences among the local indigenous populations.”

Bramha issued a warning: “Even the Election Commission of India is not immune to this problem. It has to tackle the problem of D-Voters (doubtful voters), numbering approximately 1.5 lakh, while preparing the electoral rolls of Assam. The subject matter is sub-judice. This also poses a very serious security threat to the country.

It is advisable that these pending cases lying in various courts and tribunals be disposed of quickly and within a definite timeframe. People who are found to be illegal migrants by these tribunals should be deported. Unless this basic issue of illegal migration into the country is resolved, the problem is bound to recur from time to time and in place after place.”

Assam's Congress Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi is quoted by a newspaper as saying: “My government will publish a white paper by the first week of October (2012) on steps taken to check influx and plan for the future. Let the BJP and the AGP also state the steps they have taken. I have done more than AGP and BJP to check influx....Nobody exactly knows how many illegal immigrants are there in Assam. There are currently 2.37 lakh cases pending with 36 tribunals.” So now it has become a slanging match between political parties while the Boros are on warpath.

MIM's MP Asaduddin Owaisi expressed the view that India may see a 'third wave' of radicalisation of Muslims following the ethnic riots in Assam. Unfortunately this wave of radicalization will also affect the Boros and most of Assamese and then things will go completely out of hand - for the issue of legal vs. illegal; Tribal vs. Non-tribal, Assamese vs. Bengali can very easily become Hindu vs. Muslim and spread to the rest of the country.

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