

**RADICALIZATION IN BANGLADESH AND SECURITY IMPLICATIONS ON INDIA**

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**Abstract**

*Radicalization of any type is dangerous and can destabilize social cohesion and integrity of any country. Bangladesh which got independence on the basis of cultural nationalism emerged as a young South Asian state but the same culture has undergone radical changes since then. India and Bangladesh share a historical, cultural and geographical relationship and therefore it is natural that any kind of change in one state would have its impact on the other. The radicalization in Bangladesh has serious security implications on internal security of India and particularly on North east region. The kind of religious radicalization which has taken place in Bangladesh has given rise to militant groups and subsequently these radical organizations have developed links with groups active in north east region.*

**Key Words:** security, neighbourhood, northeast, radicalization, illegal migration,

**India and her Troubled Neighbourhood**

The political, economic and social landscape in India's immediate neighbourhood has changed significantly especially after the end of Cold War. The bipolarity has given way to a non-polar world in which multiple-centers of power have emerged. The centre of gravity of power is significantly shifting towards the Asia Pacific. The simultaneous rise of India and China is a development of great significance which can have global implications. The traditional concept of national security is being broadened gradually to include human security and other vital concerns. Non-security issues like climate change, energy security, competition for scarce resources, food and water security, pandemics, migrations, etc., are getting securitized. Globalization, driven by technology, has created an unprecedented situation where borders are losing their relevance. People are able to connect with each other more easily and quickly in the present globalized world. At the same time, globalization has also fostered the assertion of ethnic and linguistic identities. These massive and decisive changes, which are likely to further accelerate in the next coming years, have also affected India and its neighbourhood<sup>1</sup>

One of the most striking things about the larger Asian strategic landscape is the arc of failing or troubled states around India. This geographical reality is India's most-glaring weaknesses—one that weighs it down regionally. Its neighbourhood is so troubled and disturbed that India confronts what can be called a tyranny of geography.<sup>2</sup> As a result, it faces serious external threats from virtually all directions. Ten year ago the Washington based Fund for Peace Index<sup>3</sup> for dysfunctional states listed six of India neighbours in the top twenty five of dysfunctional states or failed states in the world. The 2015 classification by the Fund for Peace puts Afghanistan (no.8), and Pakistan (no.13) on the High - alert List of Fragile States. One may argue with some of the parameters but the possibility of a failed state in the neighbourhood is a nightmare because fragility of nations further instability.<sup>4</sup>

India shares land and maritime boundaries with eight countries – Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Six neighbouring countries in India's immediate neighbourhood have been experiencing internal disturbances many years which has immeasurably threatened Indian security and integrity. India has close historical, religious, economic, ethnic and linguistic ties with all these neighbouring states. Not surprisingly, the complex and dovetailing ties linking up the South Asian subcontinent drive the countries to speak-optimistically of friendship as a “geographical imperative”.<sup>5</sup>

However it is practically unimaginable that India may be able to achieve powerful status without a peaceful neighbourhood. Raja Mohan understands that without peace in one's own neighbourhood, no nation can become a credible and convincing power on the global stage.<sup>6</sup> S D Muni believes that for India, “achieving the objective of becoming a major power in Asia will depend entirely on India's ability to manage its own immediate neighbourhood”.<sup>7</sup> One of India's leading geo-strategic

writers, V P Dutt debatably argued that a country's neighbourhood must enjoy primary importance in foreign policy making.<sup>8</sup> Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee stated that, "Friends can be changed but not neighbours".<sup>9</sup> More recently, Pranab Mukherjee, former President and Foreign Minister noted the importance of foreign policy providing the "facilitation of India's developmental processes", a relevant factor in a regional context.<sup>10</sup>

Ideally imagining, India would prefer a peaceful neighbourhood which will be cooperative and responsive to its own needs and wishes. But such ideal conditions are wishful thinking and are unlikely to prevail in the foreseeable future. Unlike the United States, or rising China and reemerging Russia, India is not a fully convincing hegemon within its own regional setup.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The issue of radicalization has gained a lot of significance the 9/11 attack on United States. South Asia at large has been the epicenter of radicalization because of the presence of multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural groups. South Asian has been facing many regional concerns as well which has exponentially grown over the period of time. India's has been surrounded by weak and fragile neighbourhood which has added to its neighborhood concerns. Bangladesh is facing serious radicalization concerns which have badly damaged its position and have weakened it internally. Since India and Bangladesh share more four thousand kilometers of border therefore emergence of any negative development could potentially pose a grave threat to India's internal security particularly in north eastern area. This paper will try to explore this question whether the radicalization in Bangladesh have any co-relation with Indian security concerns or not.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To understand the geo-strategic and political significance of North Eastern region.
- To Understand the process of radicalization in Bangladesh
- To understand the implication of radicalization in Bangladesh and its impact on North Eastern Security

### **Literature Review**

The book written by Anand Kumar *Return from the Precipice: Bangladesh's fight against Terrorism* assumed that Bangladesh being a moderate Muslim country was tarnished at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The country known for its Sufi culture witnessed a spurt of radicalism. While highlighting the threat posed by Islamic radicalism and by Indian insurgent groups to Northeast India, the book also highlight the sources of finance. The book also discusses the actions taken by the Sheikh Hasina led Awami League government to counter terrorism. But now as the Bangladesh government realizes the importance of cooperation, many aspects of the problem have become known. The book also makes an evaluation as to what extent Bangladeshi cooperation has helped counter-terrorism activities - especially in the Northeast of India.

Ali Riaz a well known writer of Bangladesh has written a book *Islamic Militancy in Bangladesh: A complex web* about growing Islamic radical forces. In an unprecedented show of force, organization and skill, two Islamist militant organizations exploded more than 450 bombs within a span of less than an hour throughout Bangladesh on 17 August 2005 sending a strong message that they were a force to be reckoned with. This disastrous event, followed by multiple suicide attacks, forced the then rightwing coalition government to acknowledge the existence of a network of militants and take action against this threat. Against this backdrop, this book was the first academic work on the rise of Islamist militancy in Bangladesh. It examines the significance and trajectories of militant Islamist groups in Bangladesh, unknitting the complex web of domestic, regional and international events and dynamics that have strengthened Islamist militancy in Bangladesh.

Sahab Anam Khan has written a book entitled *Problems in Understanding Religious radicalization in South Asia: Perspectives on Islam and Hinduism*. The book is published in collaboration with the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies in Sri Lanka. The study identifies that the term radicalization has often been used negatively when talking about security. The contemporary radicalization

discourse highlights the anxiety and discussions between the nations in terms of counter-terrorism and national security needs. This study further illustrates that radicalization does not appear to be an essential condition for terrorism. Finally, this study also highlights that it would be far too simplistic to say that radicalization is caused by the absence of democracy.

*Counter-Radicalization: Critical Perspectives* an edited book by Cristopher Baker-Beal, Charlotte Heath-Kelly and Lee Jarvis is very important work to understand the critical perspectives on Radicalization. This book offers a critical evaluation of current counter-radicalization policies, using case studies from several countries. The book critically analyses: (i) the co-relation between counter-radicalization and governmental policies and priorities relating to integration and community cohesion; (ii) the questionable dependence of counter-radicalization initiatives on discourses and assumptions about race, risk and vulnerability to extremism; and, (iii) the limitations of existing counter-radicalization mechanism for addressing fresh types of extremism including amongst 'right-wing' activists. Through examining these questions, the book highlights case studies from different countries like UK, Germany and Denmark and also some detailed of specific preventative initiatives in Australia and the United States. Conceptually, the chapters engage with a range of critical approaches, including discourse theory, auto ethnography. This book will be of much interest to students of radicalization, critical terrorism studies, counter-terrorism, sociology, security studies and IR in general.

### **Research Methodology**

Since the proposed research work necessitates the use of historical and analytical methods. The study shall be based on both the primary as well as the secondary data.

The primary source would include constitutional amendments, official documents of Indian Home Ministry and Foreign Ministry and manifesto of different political parties, official statements, parliamentary debates and judicial orders. The primary sources would also be collected from websites of the relevant parties and organizations. As far as the secondary sources are concerned there is no dearth of material on the area. However, the need is to subject them to critical analysis and the same shall be done. There are many reputed writers who have contributed a lot to radicalization in Bangladesh and impact on Indian security. The same will be dealt with critically as well as analytically.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **India's North East and Bangladesh**

India's north-east is where south and south-east Asia meet. The region is placed between Bangladesh, Tibet, Bhutan and Myanmar with a strategically significant Siliguri corridor linking it with the rest of India.<sup>11</sup> This region is connected to the mainland of India by rail and road communications, passing through the narrow land corridor between Kishanganj (Bihar) and Cooch Bihar (North Bengal). This corridor is very important to the survival of North-East India in peace, and it is essential in a war situation.<sup>12</sup>

Northeast India's Ninety eight percent (98%) borders are international borders; only two percent of the region is connected to India indicating the northeast's geo-political fragility. The region is characterized by extraordinary ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity and is also inhabited by three distinct groups of people-the hill tribes, the plain tribes and the non-tribal population of the plains.<sup>13</sup>

The ethnic diversity of the region, colonial legacy of exclusion of certain areas and the problems of lopsided economic development after the independence created suitable circumstances for ethnic conflict of various kinds. One of the responses of the Indian state to these conflicts was the creation of autonomous districts and autonomous regions through the constitutional mechanism of the sixth schedule.<sup>14</sup> George Verghese (2004) describes the uniqueness of the region by terming it as another India, which is to be seen as the most diverse part of a most diverse country, very different, relatively little known and certainly not too well understood.

The NER shares unique relationship with the Bangladesh emanating from cultural, emotional and historical heritage. India-Bangladesh share 4096 km long international border out of this almost 1880 km is with the NER, 1434 km is the land border and 446 km is river-based tract. Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram share international borders with Bangladesh. Out of these states, with the exception of Meghalaya, they share both land and river-based borders with Bangladesh. Tripura and Mizoram have the longest land and river-based borders with Bangladesh.

The statement that “Bangladesh is India-locked” and North-Eastern areas are “Bangladesh locked” indicates that these two South Asian neighbours are inextricably linked and hence Bangladesh factor has its due role in Indian Politics. Bangladesh’s geographical location and North East’s Bangladesh locked location constitutes a significant security weak point for India because the region shares border with China and that various insurgent elements are active within the region. In the backdrop of India-China 1962 war, the Indian defense analysts consider the chicken neck corridor to be inadequate and consider Bangladesh to be the safest and shortest route to transport military logistics to North East region in case of a military misadventure. This Siliguri corridor is also considered as an important to conduct sustained military operation against the insurgent elements in Northeast.<sup>15</sup> The corridor through Bangladesh has economic importance as well because it is the most cost effective route to connect North East with mainland of India for the transshipment of industrial goods to and from North Eastern states. Bangladesh, which is considered as a bridge between SAARC and ASEAN<sup>16</sup> also has huge geographic advantages for its closeness to Myanmar and other South East Asian states to promote interregional economic, political and security cooperation.<sup>17</sup> Once connected via Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway, the South and South East Asian nations will be using Bangladesh as the main transit point to increase economic interactions amongst themselves.

Bangladesh is the gateway to Bay of Bengal with its 45000 sq. miles of sea territory which carries important marine resources such as hydrocarbon, fisheries etc.<sup>18</sup> Its well developed sea ports offer both economic and military advantages because India can exploit the port facilities to increase trade with North-East region while other South and South East Asian states and China can use the same facilities to increase interregional economic relations.

Bangladesh is also strategically important because of the changing scenario that has evolved due to India’s strategic alliance with the U.S.A to contain China and its confrontation with Pakistan for regional hegemony. India has to be cautious because of the fact that Bangladesh has established military ties with China and partly restored her relations with Pakistan. So, the expected role of Bangladesh in case of a war either between China and India or between India and Pakistan could be a cause of concern for India.<sup>19</sup>

Most of the insurgent elements operating in Northeast India have sanctuaries; get supplies of weapons and ammunition from Bangladesh. The NSCN (IM), ULFA and Bodo militants have immensely exploited Bangladesh territory, to reorganize and equip themselves and subsequently to launch attacks on the Indian State. There are strong elements in Bangladesh, like the Jamaat-e-Islami and other militant elements which are hostile to India. Besides, there are elements in the Bangladesh Army and the Bangladesh Rifles which have pan-Islamic leanings and provide support to secessionist groups of India’s northeast.<sup>20</sup> As such, the role of Bangladesh in the insurgency movements in the Northeast does count. Any policy measure that aims to rein in or eliminate militancy in the Northeast should not lose sight of the crucial Bangladesh factor.

North east region is confronting security challenge from Bangladesh as it is slowly transforming into a fundamentalist Islamic state. Slogans like “Amra Hobo Taliban, Bangla Hobe Afghan” (We will be Taliban, Bangladesh will be Afghanistan) are raised in the countryside.<sup>21</sup> In the recent years, there has been an alarming increase of Islamic militancy in the Northeast. The phenomenon has gained momentum after the American interference in Afghanistan and Iraq. The combination of illegal Bangladeshi immigration and the rising Islamic militancy is an emerging phenomenon in North East, which has disturbing consequences for India. Therefore it is fair to assume that North East is facing serious security dilemmas from the Bangladesh radical elements.<sup>22</sup>

The emergences of these religion based radical elements have turned Bangladesh more radicalized. The triple threat of demographic invasion, assistance and shelter to religion based radical groups



from the North-East and the launching of radical militants from Pakistan through Bangladesh border have deep security implications on the region. India has largely been unconcerned towards Bangladesh not like that attention given to the western borders. Further this sort of negligence will be playing into the enemies hands. The clear nexus between Pakistan's ISI and the Bangladesh's DGFI indicates that there is now no distinction between the Pakistan and Bangladesh borders. In fact, because of the density of population on the Bangladesh borders, and its growing footprints in West Bengal, Assam and parts of Tripura, this border is much more difficult to guard than the western border.<sup>23</sup>

### **Bangladesh: A Land Bridge for Jihadis/Terrorists to Mainland India**

The leaders of Pakistan and later Bangladesh felt that part of Assam should have merged with Pakistan/Bangladesh because of demographical location. Two important statements made by two important public figures pre and post 1971 disclose the intentions to occupy or subvert this region. Even today, Pakistan intelligence agencies feel that this region should not be allowed to remain peaceful and that is the region the ISI never left even after 1971, and it continues to maintain its presence directly, or through proxies. Zulfkar Ali Bhutto, the former head of Pakistan, wrote in *The Myth of Independence*, 'Our confrontation with India is not on the problem of Kashmir only; there is the problem of Assam. In Assam, there are some Muslim majority districts which should have been given to Pakistan (at the time of the partition, these districts were wrongly included in India). This same sentiment was echoed by Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman towards Assam and he said that:

*The population of East Bengal (Bangladesh) is increasing at an alarming speed. The inhabitants of the area face acute shortage of land. The Bengalis need land, which can be given by Assam. Assam abounds in good forests and beautiful scenes of nature. If some inhabitants of Bangladesh migrate to Assam and settle there permanently, they will be very happy. Actually, Assam should have been included in East Pakistan.*<sup>24</sup>

The policy of pushing Muslims from Bangladesh into Assam and Bengal was a manifestation of the sentiments of the leadership of East Pakistan and Bangladesh. The worrying factor has been that for certain political gains some political parties chose to remain silent on this demographic invasion that took place in the region.

Bangladesh has strategic importance for the security and stability of whole of India. The geographic location of Bangladesh makes it safe haven for radical militant groups to use it as a 'corridor of peril' to destabilize northeast India through these proxies. It provides an access to arms for the terrorists and insurgents of the North-east and can link up with the Maoists. Therefore, the issue of the demographic inversion involves the deep-rooted intention to force a merger, either by causing instability or by changing the demographic pattern of the region so that Bangladeshi migrants can settle in these areas since Bangladesh is short of land and resources and cannot support such a large population. The involvement of Bangladesh and Pakistan has continued in some form or the other to destabilize the region, be it *jihadi* militant groups or even the indigenous insurgent groups. Bangladesh has also been supplying weapons and the narcotics trade that sustain these insurgency elements in the north-east. The current dispensation in Bangladesh has taken hard action against the terror groups operating within Bangladesh and even those who are active in India, *jihadi* and non-*jihadi*. The biggest problem in Bangladesh is the radicalization of a segment of Bangladeshi migrants, living in Europe, West and South-East Asian countries have been deeply influenced of *Jihadi* ideologies and programmes. Their objectives are to evolve an Islamic state in Bangladesh and make it part of the so-called Caliphate of the Islamic State (IS).<sup>25</sup> It must be understood that these intelligence agencies as well terrorist organizations like ISI, Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, Al Qaeda in the Subcontinent (AQIS) and IS are not looking at Bangladesh only but want to make inroads in north-east India, especially Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, Manipur, West Bengal, and right up to Bihar that has a sizeable Muslim population.

The ISI of Pakistan has been involved in promoting religious radicalization in the states of Northeast. When in 1956 Indian government directed the army to confront against Naga insurgents, Phizo crossed over to Pakistan where he was welcomed with open arms. After a long stay of three years in Dacca he finally went to United Kingdom and settled there. It is being thought that Phizo's purpose in going to East Pakistan was to seek arms and also to mobilize support for highlighting the Naga issue in multiple global forums. It is believed that from 1962-1968 at least 10 underground Naga groups crossed over to East Pakistan.<sup>26</sup> It is alleged that a total of 25000 Naga militant groups were trained in the camps of East Pakistan which were established at Rangamati, Ruma, Bandarban, Rangkhiam and Alikhadam close to the Indian borders in the CHT area.

The first group of 200 Naga militants led by Kaito Sema (C-in-C) of Naga Home Guards (as the underground Naga army was then called) went for training to East Pakistan in early 1962 through North Cachar Hills. The group then returned back to Nagaland in March 1963 and blow up the railway track near Rangapahar in May 1963. It is also fascinating to know that Naga insurgents groups during the India-China 1962 war did not create any nuisances and remained inactive.<sup>27</sup>

Another group of Naga militants/insurgents under the leadership of Duso Chakhesang went to Pakistan through the Chin Hills of Burma in October 1963 and returned back to Nagaland in May 1964. After the suspension of peace initiatives headed by Jayaprakash Narain, another big group of 1000 insurgents led by Zuheto Suma went to Pakistan in October 1964. At the peak of insurgency there were about 7000 men and women of Mizo National Army, most of them in East Pakistan. They were virtually given a free run well supplied with weapons and food by Pakistan.<sup>28</sup> Mowu Angami made an unsuccessful effort to take group via Myanmar which was intercepted by the Myanmar Army.

China has equally been involved in supporting these insurgent groups. In the middle of 1969 Sino-Pak tactic to train and organize the activities of North East rebels was developed. The training camps in East Pakistan were opened with Chinese directions to train Nagas, Mizos Meiteis and Kukis.

After the independence of Bangladesh till the assassination of Mujibur Rehman the bilateral relations were cordial. But, soon after his ruthless assassination the military of Bangladesh took over the reins and revived earlier policy of hoisting anti-India insurgents on Bangladesh soil.<sup>29</sup> Mizo insurgents again regained their lost ground in CHT and other areas.<sup>30</sup> The successive regimes in Bangladesh have constantly supported anti-Indian ultras.<sup>31</sup> The presence of anti-Indian elements in Bangladesh has been a major irritant in the bilateral relations. In his Memoirs India's former foreign secretary J N Dixit writes

*"we had credible inputs that ULFA and some Bodos were being provided sanctuary and bases by Bangladesh intelligence agencies who in turn were being guided by the ISI of Pakistan. We had enough details of the sources through which these separatist elements were being financed at Dhaka. I personally conveyed this information to the Bangladesh Foreign Secretary and Home Secretary during my two bilateral visits to Dhaka between the second half of 1992 and end of 1993. Their response were always non-committal and bland apart from proforma denials."*<sup>32</sup>

This all occurred within a given context of improved engagement between china and Bangladesh and revival of ISI networks. A report explains it further

*"China emergence as a defense supporter has been on the rise in South Asia, a region otherwise dominated by India. The emergence of anti-India elements in Bangladesh together with the rise of Islamic radicalization has prompted Bangladesh government to seek closer ties with China. In the past few years hundreds of Bangladeshi officers graduated from PLA educational institutions. China is currently the main supplier of weapons to its armed forces supplying it with frigates, fighter jets, tanks, armoured personnel carriers and other equipments sold at friendly prices"*<sup>33</sup>

A more comprehensive involvement of Bangladesh support to North East radical elements was disclosed in a 10 page press release on the occasion of Raising Day of the BSF in November 1995. It highlighted that most insurgent groups were getting weapons from Thailand with the active involvement of Bangladesh intelligence. It also highlighted the deep nexus between Pakistan's ISI and Bangladesh intelligence agencies. The then Home Minister of India Inderjit Gupta highlighted the same in his reply to a starred question in Lok Sabha on December 3, 1996.<sup>34</sup>

On December 21, 1997, Bangladesh immigration and security officials apprehended ULFA 'general secretary', Anup Chetia, from Dhaka's North Adabor locality. The arrest came in the backdrop of the illegal entry into Bangladesh, ownership of two forged Bangladeshi passports (Nos. 0964185 and 0227883), possession of an unauthorized satellite telephone and illegal possession of foreign currency of US, UK, Switzerland, Thailand, Philippines, Spain, Nepal, Bhutan, Belgium, Singapore and others.<sup>35</sup> Chetia's two other colleagues, Babul Sharma and Laxmi Prasad Goswami, were also apprehended along with him the same day. Dhaka often cites this arrest of ULFA leader to authenticate its claim that the country would not allow anti-India elements in Bangladesh.

In October 2001 parliamentary elections BNP-Jamaat-e-Islami coalition won a landslide victory in the eight and formed the government. In the background of this victory, NSCN (IM) established its tents at Maudaung, Naghalphum, Sumsong, Salopi, Pantmpara, villages Nandari and Po-Longia in the district of Maulve Bazaar and at Ujjainpara in Bandarban area.

ULFA re-opened its camps at Majidi, Mymensingh, Rangpur, Mohangaon, Bhairab Bazar, and Pulchari. It also re-established camps at Adampur, Banugashi, Jyantipur, Jayadevpur, Shrimangal and Cox's Bazaar.

The Tripura insurgent groups particularly ATTF and NLFT have preferred and established their camps in Bandarban and Khagrachari districts adjacent to Agartala. PLA settled for the small Manipur settlements scattered over Chittagong Hill Tracts and Sylhet. However this is not an exhaustive list, as the militants often shift to other unknown places to avoid the ire of the locals and sometimes at the bidding of patrons.

In January 2004, India had forwarded a list of 194 Indian insurgent camps located inside Bangladesh.<sup>36</sup> This took place between January 6 and 9, 2004 when Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) met in New Delhi.

In one of the incidents on January 2, the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) 'chief' Ranjit Debbarma's residence in Dhaka was attacked by rocket propelled grenades (RPG). Indian media reports said five ATTF cadres were killed in that attack and eight others, including Debbarma, were wounded. According to intelligence agency, the January 2 rocket attack took place in the Shamoli building, owned by a leading Bangladeshi political figure. The heads of the ATTF and ULFA groups were allegedly staying in this highly secured building. The local police after receiving the information about the presence of these militants raided the house and arrested everyone there. It was reported that some of the detained persons have been Bangladeshi intelligence operatives. However, later the police released all those detained. These intelligence reports disclosed that top officials of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) interfered to secure their release. It is claimed that many of those arrested were ULFA cadres, and that this is the same incident that the local media reports in Dhaka had talked about, when they mentioned the arrest of 34 ULFA cadres. It is denied the involvement of local police and claimed that members of a local mafia group called 'Seven Star' was behind the rocket attack. However, no confirmation of this incident was disclosed.<sup>37</sup>

However Dhaka maintained a diplomatic silence on the issue and only press note was released by the Home Ministry and it said that, "We would like to unconditionally state that the reports (about the ULFA rebels' capture) are concocted, false and baseless and have been fabricated to damage the friendly relations among the two neighbouring countries. No such incident took place in the city," it also highlighted that, "we would also like to reconfirm the well established position of the Government of Bangladesh that it has never allowed supported or assisted insurgent elements of any country".<sup>38</sup>

ULFA leaders especially Anup Chetia General Secretary) and Paresh Baruah (C-in-C) have established interests in Dhaka, Sylhet, Cox's Bazar and several other places. They have used

Bangladeshi passports to travel to other countries. Anup Chetia passport bears the name of John David Solamar. Another Passport in his possession identifies him as David Sulaiman. Paresh Baruah's travel documents describe him as Kamruzzaman Khan. The Naga militant leaders Isak Swu and Muivah are also identified to have carried Bangladeshi passports as Mohd Eshaq Ali and Muslimudeen.

Anup Chetia runs an NGO known as Manipuri Sanskritik Parishad and used it as a means to gain contact with several NGO's, human rights activists and lawyers. The amount of support enjoyed by Chetia can be gauged from the fact that Bangladesh Human Rights Commission and some lawyers associations objected his extradition to India. ULFA's owns huge business from hostel, hospital and a motor driving school to garment trade. One ULFA hostel is identified on the Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue in Dhaka; two other joints are at Mirpur and Mogobazar.

After May 2001 attack, Paresh had been provided security cover for all his movements in and out of Dhaka. Although he lived in Bangladesh but constantly would keep in touch with his contacts in Assam through a satellite phone.

Awami League after came to power showed resilience against these terrorist organizations and asked them to leave the country, however, there was no follow-up. The Bangladesh government also detained Anup Chetia (ULFA general Secretary) and slapped a court case for illegal stay, possession of foreign currency and forged documents of passport. However, extradition of Chetia was denied by Bangladesh on the pretext that no extradition treaty exists between two nations. Finally India was successful in extraditing in December 2015.

Bangladesh government till 2008 asserted that it has "never permitted or allowed insurgent elements of any country for acts against that country and this policy was being followed by the Government rigorously".<sup>39</sup> However, in reality policy of Bangladesh government was completely different. The shift took place during the second tenure of Sheikh Hasina in January 2009. Sheikh Hasina government since 2009 has assumed tuff stand against these radical elements has largely curbed and contained their movement across the borders as well.

### **Major Fundamentalist/Radical Organizations in Bangladesh**

The assassination of Mujibur Rehman radically changed the direction and nature of Bangladesh politics. This assassination provided an opportunity to the religious radical organizations to reemerge in Bangladesh. Jamaat-e-Islami, its student wing Islamic Chatra Shibir, Ahl-e-Hadith Movement Bangladesh and Al Badr and other movements created anti-India sentiments throughout Bangladesh. The Islamization process was undertaken by all these groups and all other secular and liberal forces were marginalized. This process was legitimized by some other external events which took place during this period particularly in Iran, Afghanistan. The DGFI, ISI and the CIA supported and mobilized recruitment of Jihadis from Bangladesh for fighting in Afghan jihad. More than 10000 Bangladeshis were trained by the ISI, Al Qaeda and Afghan tanzeems. Over 7000 among them returned to Bangladesh and they spread to the rural areas under cover of the JeI, HuJI, Ahl-e-Hadith, Al Hiqma and Hijbut Tahrir etc tanzeems and continued to receive financial support from the ISI, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain NGOs.

Between 1980 and 2000 these groups established more than 1000 Madrassas and 1500 mosques in rural areas and exploited the condition of the poor rural masses. The unemployed urban youths were also attracted as they were offered cash incentives for undertaking jihad.

The other dimension which facilitate these Islamist jihadist groups was their exploitation by the DGFI, NSI and the ISI for facilitating training, safe accommodation and arms supply to the Indian insurgents groups like the ULFA, UNLF, NSCN, Bodo rebel groups and the NLFT etc. Gradually these groups were encouraged by Pakistani tanzeems and the ISI/DGFI to open terrorist modules in the Indian states of Assam West Bengal, Bihar, Delhi, Utter Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat.

### **Arms Smuggling**

Bangladesh has also been supporting insurgent groups in the Northeast by providing arms. There were several instances when arms were seized particularly this happened in 2003. Huge amount of



arms were recovered from Chittagong and its other three districts; Bogra in north western Bangladesh and also from the capital city Dhaka. Cox Bazar in Bangladesh has emerged as a major supplier area of illegal arms and ammunition to Northeast insurgents.<sup>40</sup>

The Bangladesh police and coastguard seized the largest arms in the history of the country, when they searched the government-controlled Chittagong Urea Fertilizer Limited (CUFL) jetty on April 2, 2004.<sup>41</sup> This company was under the then Bangladesh's Industries Ministry, Matiur Rahman Nizami, Amir of the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, a partner in the coalition Government headed by Khaleda Zia of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. The arms were seized when the smugglers were unloading the weapons with the help of the local police.

The Awami League government after assuming power ordered investigations in the Chittagong arms seizure.<sup>42</sup> The investigation exposed the government functionaries and agencies involved in arms trafficking. The investigation further proved that the arms were meant for northeast insurgent groups.<sup>43</sup> The arrested smugglers after proper investigation revealed that political leaders along with civil and military intelligence chiefs of the then BNP government were involved in the case.<sup>44</sup> The Awami League government also indicted two former army generals, Major General Rezakul Haider Chowdhury and Brigadier General Abdur Rahim, who headed the National Security Intelligence (NSI).<sup>45</sup> They were prosecuted for helping the landing of Chinese arms and for trying to smuggle these arms into India. It is also exposed that Paresh Barua himself supervised the unloading of arms.<sup>46</sup> SM Mojibur Rahman of the Chittagong Metropolitan Special Tribunal-1 Judge sentenced 14 persons to death for their association in the smuggling of 10 truckloads of arms into Bangladesh.

Nizami and State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Babar in the same Government were then sentenced to death. Of those condemned, five were intelligence officers — Major-General (retd) Rezzakul Haider Chowdhury, a former Director-General of Forces Intelligence, Bangladesh's pre-eminent intelligence agency, a former Director-General of National Security Intelligence, Brig-Gen (retd) Abdur Rahim and a Deputy Director of the same organization, Major (retd) liakat Hossain. The others indicted were ex-NSI field officer, Akbar Hossain Khan, former CUFL general manager (admin), Enamul Hoque, ex-managing director of CUFL, Mohsin Talukder, former NSI director Wing Commander (retd) Shahab Uddin, smuggler and prime accused Hafizur Rahman, Abdus Sobhan and Deen Islam. Paresh Barua, UIFA's military commander and former Additional Secretary of Ministry of Industry, Nurul Amin, who received life terms besides death sentences, have been absconding since the recovery of the arms consignment. As the names and designations of some of those sentenced indicate, the Jamaat-BNP coalition Government was fully involved in the crime.

During Sheikh Hasina's first tenure as Prime Minister (1996-2001), Ms Khaled Zia as an opposition leader described North-East India's militant rebels as freedom-fighters who deserved every support. During her two terms as Prime Minister, Khaleda government had assisted these secessionist insurgent like the UIFA, National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isaac-Muivah), People's liberation Army of Manipur and National Democratic Front of Bodoland.

It was during the Army-backed caretaker Government which assumed power in 2007, that Chittagong Metropolitan Judge's court ordered further investigations on February 14, 2008. Maniruzzaman Chowdhury, senior assistant superintendent of Criminal Investigation Department and the fifth investigation officer of the cases, submitted two supplementary charge-sheets in June 2011, against 11 new suspects including Babar and Nizami. Paresh Barua, Brig Gen (retd.) Rahim, and Maj Gen (retd) Rezzakul Haider Chowdhury -who was later appointed as the DG of DGFI.

The Awami league Government under Sheikh Hasina's leadership ensured that the investigation did not relent and the guilty were brought to book, which was visible indication that she would not allow terrorists to use Bangladesh as a base for action against its neighbours.<sup>47</sup>

### **Illegal Migration from Bangladesh and Security Concerns**

After the end of British colonialism, north-east remained safe and was not affected by the communal riots during the partition. However, north-east region was unexpectedly surrounded by countries, each of which was competing for a share of geo-political space.<sup>48</sup> According to Professor Partha S.

Ghosh the illegal migration from Bangladesh is rooted in the system due to the border demarcation done by Redcliff because the terrains remain feeble and complex.

Partha Ghosh has divided illegal migration into three broad categories based on the phases. The first phase started immediately after the partition that was the outcome of security. The second phase started due to the resistance from East Pakistan People against imposition of Urdu Language. The third phase is connected with economic opportunities as East Pakistan was poor state as compared to West Pakistan. After the liberation war illegal migration started because of ethnic persecution and political situation.<sup>49</sup>

It was during the 1971 war which broke out between two Wings of Pakistan that migrants started to enter India. The immigration which was allowed by Indian government on humanitarian grounds during the war became illegal with the changed political boundaries and changed political realities after 1971 war. The unabated influx of illegal migration from Bangladesh into north east continues and has visibly reshaped and transformed the demographic, ethnic, linguistic and religious contours of the region. The outcome of this unabated phenomenon has generated host of destabilizing political, economic, ethnic and communal tensions in the region. There are some certain and substantial changes which have resulted because of the demographic changes in the states of north-east are discussed as under:

The immediate impact of this influx has been that the region has got radicalized and huge network of radical campaigns continues and have access to arms and easy connections to sanctuaries across a porous international border. The militant radicalization has begun to propagate in the region with an agenda of disturbance and division. From the geostrategic and geo-political perspective Bangladesh's emergence as proxy war base arises from the following factors:

- A. India shares more than 4000 km long but porous border and hence hard to keep under surveillance due to its riverine configuration and hilly terrain.
- B. The border configuration of Bangladesh hugely rests on Indian states of west Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram and this increases the vulnerability of India security. Bangladesh has huge strategic advantages given the geo-political significance of Siliguri corridor which is the only connecting link between North East and Mainland India.
- C. Illegal migrants from Bangladesh are also vulnerable to indoctrination from different anti-India forces. These anti-India forces recruit them for their own ventures.
- D. The evolution and emergence of anti-India politico-religious conditions and rise of religious radicalization in Bangladesh poses a serious challenge to the stability of region.

Illegal migration of Bangladeshis, particularly into the North East has been taking place because of better economic prospects, a shortage of local labour and the absence of well developed mechanism. BK Sharma, Guwahati High Court judge during one of his rulings commented that, "Bangladeshi infiltrators have not only intruded into every nook and corner of Assam, but have already become kingmakers." Justice Sharma directed the police to detain and deport 49 foreigners, among them a Pakistani citizen, who had appealed against the ruling of Foreign Tribunals. In Assam, state authorities have stepped up their drive to arrest and push back Bangladeshi immigrants and Assamese student groups are busy identifying suspected foreigners and handing them over to the police. Further, unabated illegal immigration of Bangladeshis into Nagaland is emerging as a major problem in the state. Despite their serious demographic, economic, security and political ramifications in the north-east, these developments continue to remain substantially outside the realm of the security discourse in the country. Meanwhile, the Bangladesh government claims that there is not even a single Bangladeshi migrant in India.

Group of Minister Report on National Security identified and highlighted that illegal migration has given rise to host of issues like political, social, economic, ethnic and communal tensions. Politically migrants manipulate and influence the electoral process in large number of constituencies in North East, economically pressure has immeasurably increased on land, resulting in depletion of forest wealth, decline in wages of unskilled jobs, forcible occupation of Government and host of other such issues.<sup>50</sup> Due to vote-bank politics, the motivation and urgency to block illegal migrants from Bangladesh is completely missing. The gravity and magnitude of the fallouts were highlighted by the

then Governor of Assam, Lt Gen S. K. Sinha in his report. The report mentioned that, “This silent and invidious demographic invasion of Assam may result in the loss of the geo-strategically vital districts of Lower Assam. The influx of these illegal migrants is turning these districts into a Muslim majority region. It will then only be a matter of time when a demand for their merger with Bangladesh may be made”.

It has been observed by imminent observers and experts that the rise of radical forces in Bangladesh threatens the region beyond if left unchallenged and unchecked. The combination of Islamic fundamentalism, religious intolerance, militant Muslim groups with links to international terrorist groups and a powerful military with ties to militants have transformed the once moderate secular and liberal state of Bangladesh.<sup>51</sup>

Even though illegal migrants are not directly involved in the terrorist incidents in India, their supportive and sympathetic role as host or courier has been reported. The rise of radicalization in Bangladesh by Wahhabi hardliners threatens the troubled northeast beyond imagination. Significant reports have highlighted that religious radical like Jamaat-e-Islami of Bangladesh have links with global Jihadi groups in Bangladeshis which is a cause of worry for Indian security. The mushroom growth of Madrassas in the bordering districts of Assam, West Bengal and some of the other north-eastern states are directly co-related to illegal immigration from Bangladesh. The Former West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya stated in 2003 that “some Madrassas are indulging in unlawful activities” is a case in point.<sup>52</sup> Another worry and a challenge to India’s national and societal security is that some Pakistan based groups support the radical groups in Bangladesh who in turn provide valuable information using their links with the settled illegal migrants in India. Pakistan’s ISI alleged involvement with fundamentalist Islamic parties in Bangladesh and the existence of a large number of Bangladeshi migrants in the Indian side apparently can be viewed as a boon for the above.<sup>53</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The paper has concluded that due to both Religious radicalization and political instability in Bangladesh, there are huge security implications on North East India. There is a direct correlation between the politico-religious radicalization in Bangladesh and the insecurity of North East India. Any kind of political and religious radicalization has spillover effect on the security of North East region.

The contemporary global politics is going through uncertainty, crisis and challenges. Indian state is not only facing a precarious and uncertain global political atmosphere but regional uncertainty has equally flared up from the past couple of years which has posed serious security challenges to the integrity and sovereignty of the nation. Radicalization has been a global phenomenon spread across communities and countries. Religious and political radicalization lately has engulfed the world with serious security implications. Since India has been a country with deep cultural ethnic and religious diversity therefore any kind dangerous religious and political radicalization in Bangladesh will have immense security implications.

In the light of these developments, the security challenges that India faces vis-à-vis Bangladesh are no mean matter. Besides the imperative to foil cross-border intelligence and terror operations from Bangladesh, India confronts major and serious long-term security implications. It is likely to get not only more economic refugees from Bangladesh, but also an influx of climate refugees. The ethnic expansion of Bangladesh beyond its political borders not only sets up enduring trans-border links but it also makes New Delhi’s already-complex task of border management more onerous. It is perhaps the first time in modern history that a country has expanded its ethnic frontiers without expanding its political borders.

## **End Notes**

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- <sup>11</sup> The Siliguri Corridor's dimensions extend lengthwise approximately 200 km with a width varying between 20 and 60 km. While every other part of India is joined integrally to the mainland, the north-east hangs on a narrow stretch of land between Nepal and Bangladesh
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