

# Illegal Migration in India

Posted at: 19/08/2025

## Illegal Migration in India : Security Imperatives and Human Rights Concerns

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### Context

The **Union Home Ministry** has recently directed States to **identify and deport illegal migrants**, especially those from **Bangladesh and Myanmar**, as part of a counter-terrorism sweep. This directive has sparked debates on the intersection of **migration, security, identity, and rights** within India.

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### Introduction

Illegal migration refers to the **movement across borders without legal authorization**, including entering, residing, or overstaying without valid documents. While **migration is a natural and necessary phenomenon** in a diverse and dynamic country like India, it becomes a **contested issue** when tied to questions of **national security, citizenship, and political identity**.

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### Causes of Illegal Migration

- **Economic hardship** arising from poverty and joblessness.
- **Conflict and violence** forcing people to escape persecution, disasters, or wars.
- **Political instability** and authoritarian regimes pushing people to migrate.
- **Restrictive migration policies** limiting access to legal migration.
- **Better opportunities and family reunification** acting as social drivers.

### Facilitating Factors

- **Porous borders** and weak enforcement mechanisms.
- Existence of **human smuggling networks and traffickers**.
- **Lack of structured legal migration pathways**.

### Risks and Challenges

- Exposure to **unsafe journeys and exploitation**.
- **Criminalization and denial of rights** in host societies.
- Risk of **statelessness and marginalization**.

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### Issues with Enforcing Deportation Guidelines

- **Bypassing due process** as language, religion, and citizenship are blurred into exclusionary practices.
- **Targeting of vulnerable groups** such as Bengali-speaking Muslims in states like Haryana, Delhi, and Odisha despite possessing valid identity documents.
- **Weaponization of identity** through arbitrary detentions undermining **equality, dignity, and due process** guaranteed by the Constitution.
- Historical precedent of **Operation Pushback (1990s)** where deportations ignored valid documents and procedures.

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### Regional Responses

#### Assam

- Migration anxieties trace back to **Partition (1947)** and the **Bangladesh Liberation War (1971)**.
- The **Bongal Kheda movement** and the **Assam Agitation (1979-1985)** culminated in the

**Assam Accord**, aimed at protecting indigenous identity.

- The **2019 NRC** excluded over **19 lakh people**, many of them Bengali-speaking Muslims.
- Recent invocation of the **Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950** allows deportations without oversight by Foreigners Tribunals, raising concerns of **communal profiling** and **erosion of safeguards**.

## West Bengal

- The Chief Minister has described the deportation measures as **discriminatory**, accusing the Centre of attempting to implement NRC “through the backdoor”.
- Launch of **Bhasha Andolan** to defend linguistic and cultural identity of Bengali speakers.
- Ahead of elections, the migrant issue has become a **political platform**, with slogans like *Bangla nijer meyekei chay* reinforcing **regional pride**.
- Approximately **22.5 lakh Bengalis work outside West Bengal**, making migrant rights a politically sensitive issue.

## Rising Security Concerns

- In Pune, a **mob allegedly linked to Bajrang Dal** targeted relatives of a **Kargil War veteran**, accusing them of being Bangladeshis.
- Local police reportedly acted under mob pressure, highlighting **law enforcement complicity** and the dangers of identity-based vigilantism.

## What Lies Ahead

- The rhetoric of “**citizen vs infiltrator**” may yield **short-term political gains**, but risks **long-term social divisions**.
- Weaponizing identity erodes **pluralism, constitutional guarantees, and civic trust**.
- Over-politicization of migration may weaken **social harmony, democratic institutions, and national unity**.

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## Conclusion

Illegal migration poses a **complex challenge** where **security imperatives** must be balanced with **constitutional values and humanitarian principles**. Without **due process, institutional safeguards, and cooperative regional frameworks**, the continued politicization of migration risks deepening divisions and undermining the inclusive foundations of Indian democracy.



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