

Migration that Matters

WHILE ILLEGAL MIGRATION IN America has acquired racial over-tone, in India it is communal. To be more specific it is 'Bangladeshi infiltration' that has been a staple food for Indian media for quite some time. If the saffron brigade has reasons to communalise cross-border migration that for all practical purposes threatens demographic balance in the border districts of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura, social democrats and secularists of all shades, too look too worried to dismiss the destabilising factor that emanates from continuing exodus from neighbouring countries.

The hard reality is that migration, more precisely labour migration, is taking place continually and it is taking place illegally, no doubt, by way of bribing security personnel on both sides of the fence, along the long virtually unmanageable Indo-Bangladesh border. But this migration in essence reflects desperation at home. They are actually fleeing poverty and in some cases prosecution. They think they could at least survive, even remaining undocumented in their new land of hope. But on many occasions their hope turns into nightmare.

The problem of cross-border migration and the hazards associated with it is universal. It is equally bone-chilling, if not degrading in central America and Africa. Even if someone has not been an undocumented immigrant from Central America making his dangerous way through Mexico only to face vigilante hate groups at the US border, he probably doesn't know what hell is. But the problem of migration is nowhere so acute as in Africa, albeit things are worsening very fast in South Asia.

Between January 1st and July 5th, 2006 11,155 undocumented African migrants left the coasts of Mauritania, Senegal and Gambia in derelict old boats arriving, hungry and exhausted, to the Canary Islands which belong to Spain. More than half, 6,033, arrived in Teneriffe and 2,520 in Gran Canaria. The total number of undocumented African migrants is now nearing 20,000, that number appears to be growing exponentially.

Owing to this rapidly worsening situation more than fifty countries participated in the Euro-African Summit on *Migration* held in Rabat, Morocco, in July 2006. The summit ended with a promise that the problem would be attacked at its source by means of a strategy of cooperation and development with the African countries from which the migrants originate. More specifically the topic of the migrants' remittances from Europe to their home countries was tackled, and it was decided that not only the high cost of the remittances should be reduced, but also they should be used productively by the financial institutions of the home countries - in the form of micro-credits, for example.

The Rabat summit was preceded, a month or so earlier, by an international conference in Dakar, Senegal, in which a 'Plan for Africa' was adopted to promote 'development, democracy, peace and human rights in sub-Saharan Africa'. 400 million Euros were pledged to fight against poverty. Critics have pointed out that 400 million Euros is a drop in the bucket, and that anyway much of the money

will go to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis, and the United Nations Emergency Fund. These are worthy causes, the critics acknowledge, but they do not attack the root causes of poverty, which are the lack of jobs and sufficient income to feed one's family.

As for India-Bangladesh stand off on the migration crisis, there is no serious proposal from any side to tackle the problem with all seriousness. All, not excluding official communists, are busy to communalise the issue which in turn further fuels communalism in its myriad forms. But migration in recent years, means extreme poverty, worsening inequalities, and humiliation of the powerless and the poor. ☞☞☞