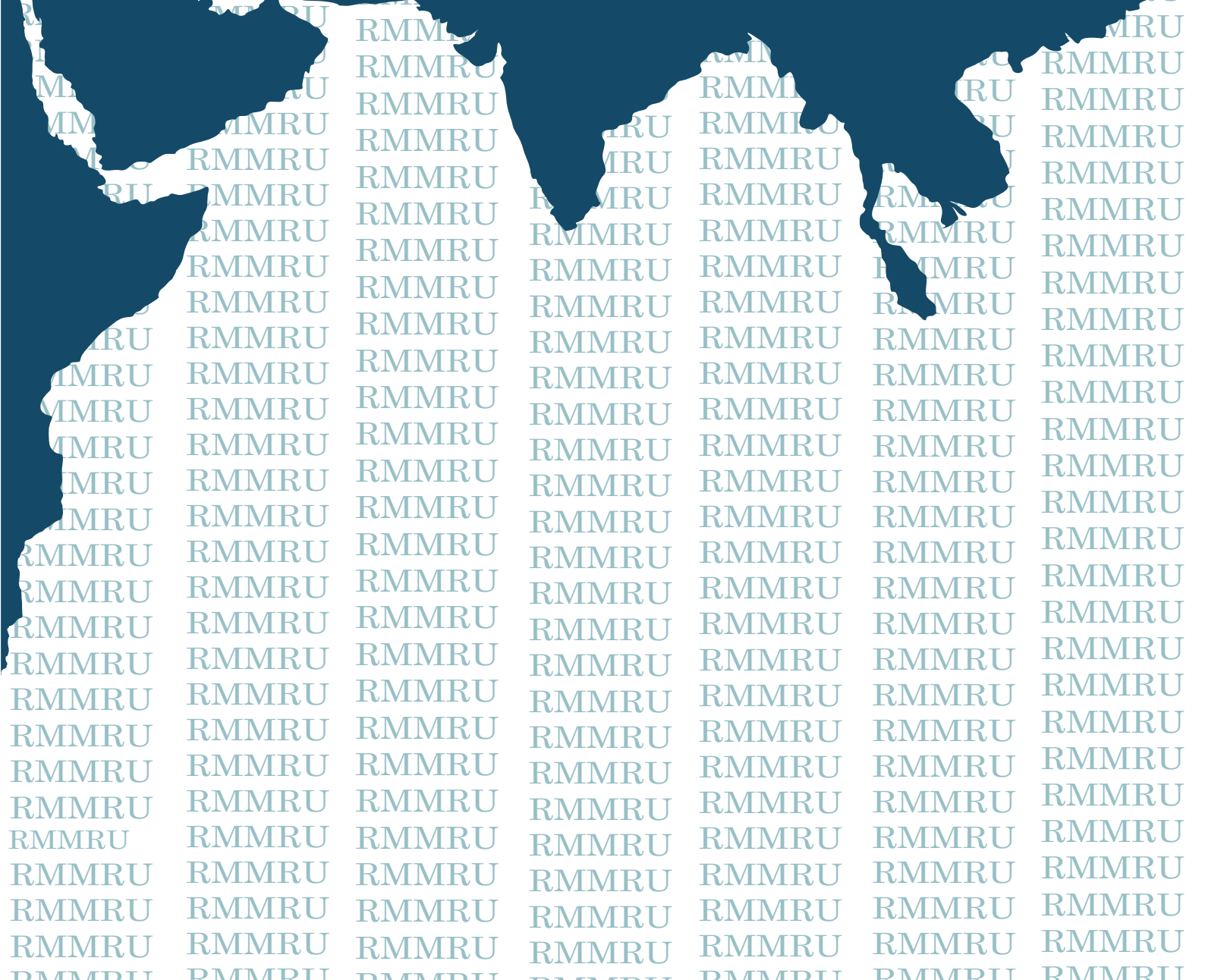




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Cross Border Forced and Voluntary Migration and Non-Traditional Security Discourse¹

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This paper focuses on securitization of cross border migration in the South Asian context. It deals with Rohingya population of Myanmar, Bengali population in Assam and migration of professionals and workers between India and Bangladesh. Issues dealt in this paper belong to the discourse of non-traditional security.

Conceptual frame work

Traditional and non-traditional security: Traditional security discourse has been dominated by realist understanding of international politics. It is about geo-politics, deterrence, power balancing and military strategy. The state and its defence from external military attacks is the exclusive focus of security policy. The state is the only referent object of security. Security confined to deliberate threats (primarily of a military nature) to physical security of state. Post Cold War era reduced justification for high military spending. This prompted security analysts to broaden the arena of security discourse and titled it Non-Traditional Security (NTS). It focuses primarily on non-military challenges to security. NTS incorporates the state as a primary referent object of security but also moves beyond by including other referent objects like human collectivities. Issues such as human security, economic security, climate change, HIV-AIDS and other diseases, ethnic conflicts, arms smuggling, migration, organised crimes (sea piracy, human and drug trafficking), religious conflicts, violent extremism etc. came under the purview of security discourse.

Common element between traditional and non-traditional security is that both are trans-national in character. Of course, issues of the latter belong more to political and socio-economic arena and the former in military arena. Again, non-traditional security threats are not new security concerns but intensified and spread by forces of globalization. Barry Buzan (1988) provided a concrete conceptual framework of securitization. He defined securitization as a deliberate action of purposeful actors who frame new or previously ignored challenges as existential threats to the survival and well being of people, state and international

¹Seminar on Non-Traditional Security Challenges in a Globalized World: A common Strategy for Developing Countries organised by NDC on 28 November, 2019

community. Interested actors through speech act create justification for requiring emergency measures and state actions outside the normal bounds of political process. Outcome of securitization are greater resource allocation, legal reform and militarization of the issue.

Buzan identified Government, political elite, military, and civil society as securitizing actors. These actors securitize an issue by articulating the existence of threat(s) to the survival of specific referent objects. They securitize an issue through speech act. Securitizing actors use the language of security (speech act) to convince a specific audience of the existential nature of the threat. The act of securitization is complete once the relevant audience is convinced of the existential threat to the referent object.

Approaches to securitization of migration: It is Teitelbaum (2002) who first systematically brought in migration in to security discourse. He argues, large scale population movements can effect the cohesion of societies and become source of inter-state and intra-state conflict. Myron Weiner as early as in 1990 (1990) discussed four types of situations where migration can be a threat. But he has not constructed his discussion in the frame work of non-traditional security. The four types of situations are - when a migrant community opposes the regime of their country of origin; when they are perceived as political threat to a particular regime of the receiving country; when they are viewed as threat to culture of receiving country and finally when they are perceived by the mainstream community as outsiders who are exerting pressure on social services and economic opportunities of the locals. Cronin (2003), Kerb and Levy (2001) are the hard-core academics who securitized migration. Cronin argues freer movements across boundaries are enabling terrorists to carry out attacks more easily. Kerb and Levy (2001) link illegal weapons smuggling, drug trafficking and other transnational criminal activities with migration. They identify migration as a source of existential threat and calls for action outside the normal bounds of political process. They argued for adoption of emergency measures to reduce migration. Buzan (1998) on the other hand, perceives migration as a threat to society's dominant identity. But he refrained from securitizing migration.

Following Buzan's broad definition of securitization, we can define securitization of migration as a process of construction of a security knowledge that links various day-to-day social threats like violent extremism, terrorism, arms smuggling, drug trafficking with immigrants. Governments, political elites, military, and civil society can all be securitizing actors by articulating an issue or identifying a particular migrant community as existential threat(s). Securitizing actors use the language of security (speech act) to convince a specific audience of the existential nature of the threat.

Recent South-Asian Experiences of Securitization of Cross Border Migration

Rohingya population of Myanmar: Rohingya population was considered as an integral part of Myanmar during its independence. Up to 1962, there were Rohingya parliamentarians and Radio Burma broadcasted Rohingya programmes. After the military takeover that year the securitization process of the Rohingyas began. The military junta recognized 135 national races that did not include Rohingyas. Rohingyas were identified as Sunni Muslim of Bengali ethnic race, not part of Myanmar.

In 1982, citizenship law was passed. It provided citizenship on the basis of place of birth. The new law categorized citizens in various groups: full citizen, associate citizen and naturalized citizen. The citizenship status that the Rohingyas enjoyed until then, was revoked and they were categorised as temporary residents. The first group of citizens are those from Buddhist race. They were provided full citizenship possessing pink card. The second group is referred to as associate citizens. Those who can produce conclusive evidence of entry before 1948 and know at least one Burmese language, or/and were born in the country before 1948 are associate citizens. They have been provided blue card. Third groups are constituted by naturalized citizens. They are issued green card. On the other Rohingyas were provided with temporary residence registration card (white card). It does not mention place of birth. They cannot claim citizenship. More importantly, the citizenship law does not recognize any national race called Rohingya.

The securitization of Rohingya community was completed after the promulgation of 1982 citizenship law. The manifestation of emergency actions of subsequent Burmese governments and the military include, arbitrary treatment, discriminatory policy, forced labour in military projects, forced re-location, imposition of condition to take permission to get married from NASACA (1990), to go from one village to another. In addition, Rohingyas' were subjected to various kinds of harassment and intimidation. Their farms were ransacked every now and then, men tortured, women raped and this resulted in persistent pregnancy to protect themselves from being raped. The series of persecution and often violence meted out to them resulted in them seeking refuge in Bangladesh 1978 (252,000); 1992 (270,000); 2012 (35,000) and 2017 (821,000). Persecution of Rohingyas reached its peak when an overwhelming segment had to flee the country and became refugees. Now 160,000 Rohingyas remain in Myanmar.

In the countries of their asylum the Rohingyas' are also subjected to securitization by particular section under different pretexts. In Bangladesh interested sections of civil society

activists identify them as national security threat by linking them with global Islamic militancy, deteriorating law and order in Cox's Bazar, deforestation, local unemployment, creating bad image of Bangladesh in the Middle-East etc. In Indonesia, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, at the out-break of COVID 19, Rohingyas are continuously in the discussions for spreading the virus.

Bengali Population in Assam: The second example explored in the paper highlights the securitization of Bengali population of Assam. Since early 1970s for a number of years the students of some of the north-eastern hill states of India was articulating their demands for due share from the overall economic development of India. They had genuine grievances against the union government for not being able to distribute the outcome of growth of India although the hill states have contributed significantly in such development.

Assam students were in the forefront of such demands. By late 1970 students of Assam started identifying migration on Bengali community as one of the problems behind their lacking in economic prosperity. Bengali migration to Assam was a natural phenomenon. However, the scale of such migration increased during the British colonial period as land of the peasants of Bengal was taken away for lucrative indigo plantation by the colonial rules. Thus, the issue of Bengali migration started being securitized. All Assam Students Union became the first securitizing actor. Later political parties have also securitized Bengali migration by accusing Bengalis for demographic invasion, destroying local indigenous jhum cultivation system etc. Subsequently, Bengali migrants of Hindu faith were accepted as refugees while Muslim Bengalis became the principal targets.

Situation reached a violent state and the federal government had to intervene. In 1981 the then Congress government signed the Assam Accord. Interestingly, the Accord bypassed the fundamental issue of ensuring growth of the hill districts, and concentrated more on citizenship issue. The subsequent amendment of the citizenship law (2004 citizenship act, citizenship rule) entailed three types of citizenship. This has been perceived by academics as the first step towards securitization of migration by the federal state actors. Recent steps of National Register of Citizens and Citizenship Amendment Act have completed the securitization process of the Bengalis/ Muslim Bengalis in India. After the amendment of citizenship act in 2020 now there are three types of citizenship in India - all who came before 1966 are citizens, those who from 1966 to 1971 have to wait for 10 years for gaining citizenship, those who came after 1971 are deemed as illegal migrants. 1955 citizenship act provided citizenship on the basis of place of birth, now the new amendment shifted it to citizenship by birth. Securitization of migration in India resulted in the fundamental shift from

the concept of citizenship espoused during independence of India. The country has moved from civil nationalism to ethno-religious nationalism.

As part of anti-Muslim securitization campaign in 2019 the union government has began preparing a National Register of Citizens (NRC) based on a court judgment of 2004. The aim has been to identify the so-called illegal Muslim Bengalis in Assam who presumably have migrated from Bangladesh. However, implementation of the NRC created new problem. In South Asia poor people hardly have documentation such as birth registration or passport etc. 4 million Assamese mostly indigenous population did not meet the criteria of citizenship to register. 3.6 million has already put a fresh claim. It is perceived by academics that around 2 million Assamese could be stateless due to this. The BJP government as well as its political allies started to issue statements that non-citizens will be deported to Bangladesh. However, the Indian Prime Minister assured the Prime Minister of Bangladesh that there will be no deportation. The Indian government also started constructing detention centers in different places of the country. Political and social activists perceive that putting persons in detention centres who cannot provide proof of their citizenship will create scope for treating these population as slave labourers. In India this may result in bonafide citizens become illegal migrants and illegal migrants into stateless persons.

Labour migration between India and Bangladesh: The geographical mobility of people in search of better life and livelihood in the territories that now constitute India and Bangladesh predates their existence as nation states. Since 1947, regimes for formal labour migration became almost non-existent. Migration flow for livelihood between these two countries is mostly irregular.

Over the years, particularly since 2000, informal labour migration from Bangladesh to India has become highly securitized. Successive governments of India and a section of the Indian civil society have identified migrants from Bangladesh as a threat to their state and societal security. The speech act include, involvement of migrants in 'subversive activities and terrorism', 'demographic invasion', and linking Bangladeshi migrants with crimes, petty theft to drug peddling, arms smuggling and human trafficking. They were also blamed from exerting pressure on civic facilities, robbing scarce jobs of the locals, posing a threat to social and cultural identity etc. The language of securitization also changed. The earlier term 'economic migrants' was replaced by a militaristic term, 'infiltrators from the East'.

A sizeable number of Indian migrants are also working in Bangladesh. There is no firm figure of their number; however, annually these migrants' remit around USD 5 billion to India. According to State Bank of India, in different years, Bangladesh is either 4th or 5th largest

remittance source country of India. Initially, the Indian migrants arrive in Bangladesh with regular visa. In many instances they continue stay and work even after their work permit expire, technically making them irregular. Migration of these workers, both professional as well as skilled, from India to Bangladesh has not been securitized by any actors of Bangladesh.

Conclusion

Based on the three cases presented in this paper I would also agree with Bary Buzan. Buzan suggested not to securitise migration. Securitization of migration does not ensure increased level of security of the referent object, the state. Rather it brings new threats to human security of those who migrate. It argues for the de-securitization of migration by addressing the challenges of migration through political process. In case of Myanmar de-securitisation may require, repeal/amend 1982 citizenship law, implementation of Article 7 of the Child Rights Convention, Article 9 of Convention on Discrimination against Women, respect to human right obligations; and making Myanmar accountable and create a path of protected return of Rohingyas to their protected homeland by the global community. For India to de-securitize, means to change the process of “othering”- “the other in India is wholly, historically and organically Indians” (Niraja Gopal); re-construct religion neutral civic nationalism replacing current trend of faith-based nationalism and bring back the concepts of pluralism and diversity. De-securitization of current trend of informal flow of unskilled workers from Bangladesh to India and formal as well as semi-documented migration from India to Bangladesh may require introduction of work permit system.