



Photo courtesy of MFI

Children of rural-urban migrants working in a brick kiln in Patna, Bihar.

INDIA

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Political and Economic Update

The US-led war in Iraq elicited divisive opinions between the Indian public and the government. The government refused to formally condemn the war, while the public held protests and rallies in opposition to the war. In state politics, Laloo Prasad Yadav, chief of the moderately progressive Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) party and former chief minister of Bihar, held a huge rally of *lathi*¹-wielding supporters in Patna and called

upon the Indian people to throw out the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) and for the US people to drive out President Bush from power. Such sentiments aided in persuading the government to refuse to send Indian troops to Iraq in July 2003. The government said it would only do so under a UN mandate. India kept its firm stance despite intense pressure from the US.

Pakistan-India relations improved during the year, culminating in November with India matching Pakistan's declaration of a ceasefire in Kashmir. Welcoming Prime Minister Vajpayee's offer of friendship, President Musharraf said in Islamabad that he was glad to receive "positive indications" from India; he expressed the hope that this could be pursued to a "greater interacting process". Contacts between the two countries picked up, with many social groups crossing the border from both sides.

Bilateral visits included a team of 13 parliamentarians from Pakistan, who entered Wagah on an unofficial visit to India. Pakistani opposition leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman, head of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam party, also visited India. Reciprocally, a group of Indian Parliamentarians, including L.P. Yadav, visited Pakistan. In December, the two countries reported an agreement to restart patrols of their international border, which had been suspended two years earlier. India and Pakistan also agreed to resume direct air links and to allow over flights.

In February, a clash along the Indian-Bangladeshi border over 213 Bangladeshi nationals trapped within five yards inside Indian territory along the Coochbehar district of West Bengal strained relations between India and Bangladesh. Indian Border Security Force (BSF) accused the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) of conspiring to push the 213 Bangladeshis across the border. BDR claimed, however, that the BSF had pushed back Bengali-speaking Indian Muslims into Bangladesh. The party reported that on sustained interrogation, a number of those arrested at Pushtinghta in North 24-Parganas district earlier had confessed to being Bangladeshi nationals and were forcibly pushed by the BDR at gunpoint. Relations between the two countries deteriorated significantly, but tensions eased when Bangladesh re-admitted the Bangladeshi nationals. The situation remained unresolved, however, with the Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani's statement that Bangladesh was giving shelter to the ISI sponsored terrorists and their camps. Border control remained a serious issue for both sides. On 16 February, the government decided to seal the Bangladeshi border with Assam to prevent Bangladeshis from crossing, and planned to install floodlights along the border and increase police presence along the waterway. In July, despite their differences, the border forces of the two countries agreed to start joint patrol along the 4,900-kilometer border.

It was believed that the stridency in the Indian Government's tone in dealing with Pakistan and Bangladesh was a part of the BJP's strategy to apply the Gujarat formula of exploiting and accentuating communal polarization to garner Hindu votes in the coming elections to the State Assemblies leading up to the general elections in 2004. This was seen as a

**TABLE 1:
EMIGRATION FOR EMPLOYMENT
DURING 1999 – 2003**

YEAR	No. of Workers
1999	199,552
2000	243,182
2001	278,664
2002	367,663
2003	466,456

Source: Ministry of Labour, Annual Report 2003-2004

cynical device to appeal to the Hindu voters by invoking the image of Musharraf on the west and the danger lurking on the eastern border with the predominantly Muslim Bangladesh. This theory had gained greater credibility with BJP Home Minister L.K. Advani's off-color accusations that Bangladesh was fostering extremists who committed terrorist acts on Indian soil.

In India's relations with other countries, Sino-India ties made a breakthrough in regard to their long-standing border dispute. India formally recognized Tibet as a Chinese territory, while China agreed to start border trade with India through the disputed area of Sikkim. China's move implied its acceptance of India's claims to Sikkim. In November, Indian Vice President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat made an official visit to Burma. During the visit, India reached an accord with Burma's military regime whereby both sides agreed to grant visa exemptions to holders of official and diplomatic passports.

On the domestic front, the year witnessed major high-level corruption scandals. The Supreme Court ordered a Central Bureau of Investigations (CBI) probe into the IDR175 crore² Taj Heritage Corridor scandal. The scandal, one of many 'rubber-stamp' scandals, involved the collusion of government officials and the building industry to profit from illegal large-scale construction.

Jammu Kashmir-based regional party National Conference, another ally of BJP, led National Democratic Alliance (NDA)³ coalitions to withdraw from the government amidst allegations of insensitivity to the situation of Kashmir and Gujarat. This year also witnessed the collapse of the coalition between the BJP and the progressive Bahujan Samal

2003**January**

(2) India and Pakistan exchange lists of nuclear installations and facilities as stipulated under a 1988 agreement.

(3) Six-day Asian Social Forum (ASF) begins with a call to fight the neo-liberal and imperialist agenda of globalization, besides communalism and war.

(5) India announces a set of political principles and administrative arrangements to manage its arsenal of atomic weapons, more than four-and-a-half years after declaring itself a nuclear weapon power.

(9) Talks with Pakistan only when terrorism ends, reiterates Vajpayee.

(10) The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, announces the Government's decision to permit "dual citizenship" for People of Indian Origin (PIO) "living in certain countries."

(12) The Election Commission announces Assembly elections to the four States of Himachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura to be held on February 26.

(19) India's Charge d' Affaires in Pakistan, Sudhir Vyas, is reportedly harassed by Pakistani intelligence agencies.

(23) Bilateral relations with Pakistan touch a new low with India expelling two diplomats and two staffers from the Pakistan High Commission. The move was aimed at conveying India's extreme displeasure at the harassment of its diplomats in Islamabad that has continued despite strong protests.

In a retaliatory move, Pakistan expels three diplomats and a staffer of the Indian High Commission, asking them to leave the country within 48 hours.

Bangladesh's Foreign Office summons India's Deputy High Commissioner in Dhaka and lodges a formal complaint of the "push in of Indian Muslims" into its territory.

(31) Delhi Police's drive to identify and evict illegal Bangladeshi migrants comes to a grinding halt after the Bangladesh authorities refuse to accept the migrants as their citizens.

February

(1) Border Security Force (BSF) accuses the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) of conspiring to push 213 Bangladeshis across the border in West Bengal's Coochbehar district. The Bangladeshis are trapped in West Bengal for a week while diplomatic tensions simmer; they are finally accepted back into Bangladesh on the 6th.

(8) Pakistan lodges a 'strong protest' with India over charges that Pakistan Acting High Commissioner in New Delhi, Jalil Abbas Jilani, provided money to representatives of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC).

(19) The Gujarat government invokes POTA against all 121 accused in the February 27, 2002 Godhra carnage.

(25) The President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, launches the National Social Security Number Scheme initiated by the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation, in New Delhi.

(26) Congress storms back to power in Himachal Pradesh and the Left front retains power in Tripura. Nagaland heads for a hung Assembly as the Congress loses the polls. Meghalaya too throws up a hung House.

March

(10) New Delhi lodges a strong protest with Malaysia regarding the treatment of 270 migrants of Indian nationals, mostly IT professionals, by the police in Kuala Lumpur.

(13) Declaration of assets, antecedents by candidates contesting polls a must, says an apex court Bench, striking down an amendment to the Representation of the People Act.

(24) Heavily-armed militants mow down 24 members of 11 Kashmiri Pandit families in Nadimarg village, 65 km from Srinagar.

April

(18) Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee extends a "hand of friendship" to Pakistan at a rally in Srinagar.

May

(6) Union Cabinet decides affirms dual citizenship law for persons of Indian origin residing in Australia, Canada, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Italy, UK and US.

(21) Public sector banks nationwide remain closed as employees join trade unions from the industrial sector to protest against the Central Government's anti-labour policies. Strike is called by various Indian trade unions, including AITUC, CITU, HMS, and AICCTU.

Events 2003 - June 2004

(26) India approves resumption of the suspended twice-a-week Delhi-Lahore bus service. Launched in February 1999, it was terminated following the December 13, 2001 attack on Parliament.

June

(23) India and China sign an accord on opening border trade through Sikkim. New Delhi terms Tibet as part of Chinese territory.

(25) India and China agree to act in concert on WTO issues.

July

(11) Lahore-bound Indian bus crosses over into Pakistan at the Wagah border reopening direct passenger transportation links while PTDC bus also resumes operation from Lahore to Delhi.

(12) The Jammu and Kashmir National Conference headed by Omar Abdullah formally severs its five-year-old relationship with National Democratic Alliance at the Centre.

(14) India decides not to send its troops to Iraq under the American and British command.

(16) 200 migrant labourers from Bihar and Nepal were killed in a flash flood in Kullu District of Himanchal Pradesh.

(20) Maulana Fazlur Rehman, chief of the Jamait Ulema-e-Islam in Pakistan, calls on Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, reinforcing the "peace initiative" process.

(26) Two years after the Agra summit, India and Pakistan renew contact, the new Pakistani High Commissioner, Aziz Ahmed Khan, calls on the External Affairs

Minister, Yashwant Sinha.

August

(5) India's Supreme Court ruled that government employees had no fundamental, statutory, equitable or moral right to strike.

(8) 41 migrant laborers are killed and 15 injured in flash floods near Solang in Kullu district of Himanchal Pradesh.

(12) Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf offers a conditional ceasefire along the Line of Control if India is willing to reciprocate.

October

(1) Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu survives landmine attack by People's War Naxalites on Tirumala Ghat road.

(20) India reports child sex ratio of 927 girls to 1000 boys in 2001 census, against a world average of 1045 women to 1000 men.

(29) Pakistan accepts many of 12 confidence-building measures (CBMs) proposed by India, while attaching riders to others.

November

(6) In North Bengal Tea Estate, 19 persons are hacked to death on the issues of recruitment of outsiders.

(25) India, Pakistan ceasefire comes into force.

December

(1) India and Pakistan agree to resume simultaneous air links and over flights from January 1, 2004 on a reciprocal

basis.

(15) The Royal Bhutan Army cracks down on anti-India militant outfits ULFA, NDFB, and KLO, which had set up and operated from a string of camps on its soil for the last 12 years.

(18) Rajya Sabha passes the Dual Citizenship Bill.

(18) Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf announces, "We have 'left aside' U. N. resolutions on Kashmir".

2004

January

(2) Historic first meeting between the Indian government and Kashmir separatists.

February

(24) Over a million government employees hold a one-day strike protesting the Supreme Court's August ruling that government workers had no right to strike.

May

(22) Manmohan Singh becomes India's 14th Prime Minister in upset victory.

(23) In the deadliest attack since Vajpayee's 2003 visit to Kashmir, a landmine explodes on a Kashmiri highway, killing several Indian soldiers traveling by bus.

This section was contributed by CEC.

Sources:

CEC, BBC News, Tribuneindia.com

Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh. Chief Minister Mayawati recommended for dissolution of the State Assembly, which was not accepted by the Governor. The trend of defections continues as usual in India's political scene; in many provincial legislative Assemblies this has been the norm, particularly in Uttar Pradesh and some of the northeast provinces.

The rights of workers and employees to strike suffered a setback when the Tamil Nadu government dismissed 2,222 striking employees by promulgating an ordinance. Further, in a subsequent decision, the Supreme Court also gave its verdict that government employees cannot strike. It became a big issue in the political parties and trade unions, who demanded that the Prime Minister clarify the government's stand on this issue.

Women's empowerment was not a priority of political leaders in 2003, as the Women's Reservation Bill, which provided a 33% reservation of legislative seats for women, was once again "deferred for the time being" in the face of stiff opposition by three NDA partners and a subsequent all-party meeting convened by Speaker Manohar Joshi which failed to forge a consensus. Although the Women's Reservation Bill was deferred in the Parliament, Delhi, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh received women Chief Ministers just after the Assembly elections.

In August of 2003, two bombs set off within five minutes of each other in Bombay killed at least 50 people and injured 150. The first explosion was set off at the Gateway of India, a remnant of India's colonial past, and the second exploded in a busy shopping district. The target, according to the *BBC News*, seems to have been a train transporting Hindu pilgrims to a religious festival. The Pakistani government issued several statements declaring the blasts as deplorable and condemning all terrorist acts. In September of 2003, the *New York Times* reported that the Indian police retaliated by killing Nasir, the supposed mastermind behind the attacks.

The year also saw an unresolved debate over religious tensions in the city of Ayodhya. The Babri mosque in Ayodhya was demolished in 1992 by Hindu nationalists. Fighting and religious hatred continues to this day, with various proposals rejected by both Hindu and Muslim communities. Vishwa Hindu Parishad ("World Hindu Council", VHP for short), the international mobilization wing of the

**TABLE 2:
DISTRIBUTION OF LABOUR
OUTFLOWS FROM INDIA
BY DESTINATION 2003**

Country	No. of Workers
U.A.E.	143,804
Saudi Arabia	121,431
Kuwait	54,434
Oman	36,816
Malaysia	26,898
Bahrain	24,778
Singapore	23,438
Qatar	14,251
Libya	2,796
Others	17,810
Total	466,456

Note:

The data provided in the table by the Labour Ministry is based on the criteria defined in the 1983 Act which has limited relevance in data collecting on migrant workers, as a large category of persons fall outside its ambit. At present, persons falling under 17 categories are exempted from obtaining emigration clearance. There is also no need for clearances for going to the United States and other Western countries. Data, therefore, is available only in respect to persons migrating primarily to the Gulf countries and within that, only for those who fall in the categories of unskilled, semi-skilled or skilled workers.

Source: Ministry of Labour

Hindu fundamentalist ideological group Rastriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), pressed its movement for the construction of the Rama Temple at the site of the Babri Mosque this year. The issue was also raised in Parliament. The opposition blocked the business of the Lower House of the Indian Parliament (Lok Sabha) for two consecutive days against the dropping of charge sheet of L.K. Advani, deputy Prime Minister and M. M. Joshi, HRD Minister in the Babri Mosque demolition case.

In 2003, India's GDP grew 8.1%,⁴ exceeding expectations. The growth recovery was accompanied by continued maintenance of the relative stability of prices. Inflation, as measured by the wholesale price index (WPI), averaged 5.5% with the manufacturing sector as the major contributor, accounting for nearly 80% of the inflation. Equity market return was 85%, the second highest in Asia. In January 2004, the Sensex crossed 6194 after remaining low through September 2003.

The downward trend in interest rates continued in 2003, and the RBI reduced its rates from 6.25% to 6% from the close of business on April 29, 2003. The weakening of the US dollar, caused mainly by widening US deficits, depreciated 1.5% in the previous year. A strong balance of payments (BOP) position has resulted in steady accumulation of foreign exchange reserves, and the level of reserves crossed the USD100 billion mark on December 19, 2003. The combined fiscal deficit of the Federal Government and Provincial Governments, which had decreased in the early nineties, worsened, comprising 9.4% of GDP in 2003.

The Budget for 2003 – 2004 undertook to provide a major thrust to infrastructure; however, expenditure on social services totaled only 1.9%. Food grains production increased from 174.2 million tons in 2002 to 210 million tons in 2003, and industrial production grew from 5.7% to 6.9% during the same period. According to NSSO data, 16 out of 1,000 households in rural areas, and three of every 1,000 in urban areas, still do not have enough food to eat every single month per year.⁵ According to the CIA Factbook, as of 2002, 25% of the population fell below the poverty line. Figures prove to be even more disconcerting as the UNDP Human Development Report reported that India had slipped three notches from its previous 124 ranking, to 127 in the index. This places India below Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Vietnam, and in the bottom half of the medium human development range.

MIGRATION UPDATE

Internally Displaced Persons

There are roughly 600,000 people that are internally displaced due to ethnic and religious conflict in the regions of Jammu, Kashmir, Gujarat, and in the northeast regions. There is no credible information yielding specific numbers of these displaced individuals, however. Talks between the governments of India and Pakistan have led to a ceasefire since November of 2003, although attacks by several militant and separatist groups still perpetuate the displacement of individuals from the regions of Jammu and Kashmir. Sources such as the Global IDP Project cite as many as 250,000-350,000 Kashmiri pandits that have been forced to flee the

region due to persecution and massacre. Many who have fled the border region are still awaiting reconstruction of their homes, villages, and communities. In Gujarat, 100,000 individuals found themselves displaced due to violence in 2002. In the Northeast regions, conflict between the Santhal and Bodo ethnic groups during the 1980s has still left many displaced. In 2003-2004, ethnic conflict in Assam forced thousands to leave their communities and homes. Exact figures of these individuals are difficult to obtain, due to a lack of reportage and survey by national authorities.

Internal Migration

Internal migration is a complicated situation to account for, as India does not require those that migrate to register at the place of origin, nor at the destination. This is not conducive to obtaining exact numbers and figures of seasonal or permanent migrants between the country's provinces. Economic and social issues are root causes of internal migration within the Indian context. Internal migrants face long working hours, deplorable working conditions, and complacency from the government and its policies. Seasonal internal migrants generally hold jobs in unorganized sectors, which further contributes to their susceptibility to unjust treatment by others.

Although policies such as the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, Contract Labour Act and the Minimum Wage Act, Equal Remuneration Act, and Child Labour (Abolition) Act are in place to regulate migrant working conditions, they are rarely implemented by local authorities. Seasonal migrants find themselves living in makeshift homes or even in the streets and open spaces, despite regulations set by the Contract Labour Act. The situation for the children of migrant laborers is also a serious issue, as many are deprived of education, health care services, clean water and a host of other basic needs, due to their transient status.

2003 witnessed ethnic conflict and internal strife as among the several problems faced by internal migrants. Militants in Assam targeted 80 Bihari migrants, in hopes of driving them out of the province. Flash floods in Himachal Pradesh brought the conditions of migrant workers to the forefront when over 200 workers from Bihar and Nepal were killed. Authorities were forced to face the conditions that migrant workers are subjected to, such as low-



Photo courtesy of MHI

Migrant workers and advocates attend a meeting on International Migrants' Day.

paying jobs and working in appalling conditions with little or no protection from the state. In 2003, the government drafted but failed to pass the Unorganized Sector Workers Bill which would have proved basic social security needs to workers. It could also regulate the conditions of employment and ensure the applicability of the Welfare Fund for the workers, among other provisions.

Cross-Border Migration

Indian Migrants Overseas

Statistics collected by the Indian government indicate that there are a large number of Indian migrant workers in the Gulf region. In 2003, data shows that 143,804 Indian migrants were deployed to the UAE; 121,431 to Saudi Arabia; 54,434 to Kuwait; and 36,816 in Oman. In Southeast Asia, Malaysia and Singapore were the most popular destinations, with 26,898 Indian migrant workers deployed to Malaysia and 23,438 to Singapore in 2003.

These migrants continue to face a host of problems, particularly those working in the Gulf

region, similar to those experienced by so many other migrants around the world. Delayed deployment or non-deployment, excessive agency fees, premature termination of job contracts, changing of job descriptions, delayed payment of wages, and underpayment are just a small sample of these problems.

In the UAE, an amnesty offer in 2003 led India to prepare for a predicted 50,000 returnees.⁶ The returnees, mostly from Kerala, may face challenges upon their return, as the unemployment rate is rather high in the region. Kerala is the main source of Indian migrants working in the Middle East.

In Malaysia, 270 IT professionals from India were rounded up and forced into detention under irregular visa allegations. Delhi strongly protested the treatment of its nationals, and finally received a public apology by the Malaysian government, followed by an investigation into the detentions. Only ten of the initial 270 were found to have problems with their visas.

Migrants in India

Deputy Prime Minister Advani stated earlier in the year that 11,500 Pakistani migrants who overstayed their visas must be deported. 20 million Bangladeshi migrants, settled in the regions of Assam and West Bengal, were also targeted for deportation.⁷ The deportations were conducted from April to June 2003. The border between Assam and Bangladesh was sealed off as of February 16 to prevent migration. The border-crossing dispute caused quite a controversy between the Indian and Bangladeshi governments. The Indian government has made statements justifying their actions on the basis that Bangladeshi migrants were seen as a threat to internal security. However, the estimate of 15-20 million Bangladeshis in India is impossible to verify. Advani also made statements alluding to Bangladesh sheltering ISI sponsored terrorist camps. Many believe the situation has been used for divisive purposes within India, whilst enhancing the insecurity of Indian Muslims. Bangladesh, however, retorted to India's response by refusing to admit the migrants as their own nationals. A trainload of the supposed irregular Bangladeshi migrants was sent back to Delhi from West Bengal. This incident dealt a major blow to Advani's previous comments about deporting all irregular migrants from India.

Undocumented Bangladeshi migrants came to the forefront of Indian politics once again, when a New Delhi lawyer accused 2.8 million of such migrant workers of taking government provisions intended for Indian citizens. By November, a New Delhi court had ordered local government officials to facilitate the deportation of undocumented Bangladeshis.

The Indian government provided support to the refugee camps and resettlement areas for Tibetan and Sri Lankan refugees. These groups were allowed to work and obtain education for their children. However, it refused to give the same assistance to Bangladeshis, saying that they were economic migrants and not refugees. In January, the UNHCR assisted in the return of 1,092 Sri Lankan refugees who were staying in a camp in Tamil Nadu, back to Sri Lanka.

India also has people in the country that are not formally recognized as refugees. These individuals come from such groups as Chakma permanent residents from Bangladesh, Afghans, Iraqis, and Iranians, none of whom possess national passports.

The Indian government has decided not to deport them, but will instead issue them renewable residence permits.

Nepali migrants have been coming to India for economic purposes for years due to the open border between the two regions. However, with the escalation of the government's conflict with the Maoist insurgents and increased military intervention, India has seen an influx of Nepali migrants seeking refuge from war-torn communities. Many Nepali people have been forced to flee their homes because of this ongoing turmoil, coined the "People's War" by the Maoists. Apart from migrating due to political and social oppression, the Nepalese seek to flee economic hardships as well. About 70% of families surveyed in Nepal have at least one relative working in India that sends money back home. These individuals tend to work in the service sectors holding positions such as security guards, restaurant employees, taxi drivers, gardeners, maintenance workers, or owning small businesses. The communities of Nepalese migrant workers need to collectively work together in India to have their voices heard and to improve their rights as migrants. Education and advocacy in areas such as banking, saving, health and culture will help to reduce certain disadvantages that they may have living and working in a foreign country.

Trafficking

Human trafficking is a problematic issue in India, as India is a source, transit and destination country for trafficking. Men, women and children are taken to the Middle East and into involuntary servitude. Internal trafficking consists of bonded labor, forced servitude, and sexual exploitation. Bangladeshi women are taken first to India on their way to Pakistan for forced labor and prostitution. The government has shown little interest in terms of policy or law in eliminating inter-state and transnational trafficking crimes. Laws such as the Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act are in place to criminalize selling, procuring and exploiting others for sexual prostitution, as well as prosecuting any act of solicitation for prostitution. This clause has been used to punish women and girls who are essentially victims of trafficking, however. In 2004, Mumbai courts prosecuted 53 individuals for trafficking, an increase from the previous year's convictions,

although this figure is still comparably low in light of the fact that Mumbai is India's largest sex trafficking location.⁸ Indian law enforcement is largely insufficient in relation to the magnitude of human trafficking. However, with the new Congress, the Indian government has made several efforts to prevent trafficking through the implementation of a Secretary for Women and Child Development, who is to serve as a nodal officer for anti-trafficking programs and policies. Changes as a result of these efforts were mostly in the cities of Mumbai, Chennai and also in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

Responses

Government

Labor laws regarding migrant workers are largely just on paper, and never seem to get implemented. The government policies that are mostly pro-poor also appear to exclude migrants. Migrants are not allowed to partake in village assemblies, and therefore are largely excluded from government provisioning of programs. Nonetheless, there are a few programs that benefit the migrants in certain regions of India. For example, Lok Jumbish was established in the state of Rajasthan as a program for migrant children to go to boarding schools. The government is currently implementing employment in watershed programs to the 150 poorest districts. This program was introduced as a way to combat distress migration in order to prevent those that could not find work at home from migrating. The proposed Employment Guarantee Act will provide for 100 days of wage salary for poor households. The issue of migration is just starting to appear in governmental policies.

The issue of AIDS brought about a greater interest when the realization that the rampant spread of the disease could be perpetuated through migration. This interest resulted in the National Aids Control Program, a collaboration between NGOs and the government.

To respond in part to some of the issues and needs of Indian migrants working in the Middle East, the government has proposed a welfare scheme to provide insurance for Non-resident Indians (NRIs) working in the Gulf region; the establishment of a broader welfare scheme is also envisioned. Further, the proposal includes seats for their children in Indian

educational institutions. Another section of the proposal is the establishment of an advisory committee to address other concerns of NRIs in the Gulf region.⁹

However, at the same time, the government has imposed a deposit on migrant workers leaving India. The cost of the deposit covers return ticket charges as well as an insurance fund to maintain social security benefits. The deposit ranges between approximately IDR13,000 to as much as IDR 30,000 depending on the destination of the migrant worker; for example, those going to the UAE are to pay IDR13,820, while the deposit is IDR29,680 for those going to Hong Kong. The laws took effect on November 22, 2003.¹⁰

The government has also introduced a new policy to allow Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) living abroad in over 100 countries to garner dual citizenship. The bill also specified measures to simplify the procedure for adult children of Indian nationals and former citizens to obtain Indian citizenship.

IGOs

From August to November 2003, ILO – SRO Delhi has undertaken a research on the issues regarding migration and the role of trade unions in the five countries of South Asia – Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. After completing the research, ILO organized a two-day “Trade Union Technical Consultation Meeting on Studies of Out – Migration” in Delhi during 1-2 December 2003. In the year 2004, ILO-SRO Delhi has published a book titled *Migrant Workers and Human Rights: Out Migration from South Asia*. ILO Delhi was also involved with migration issues at the Asia Social Forum in Hyderabad, India in January 2003, and the World Social Forum 2004 in Mumbai. ILO's focus continues to be on trade unions and NGOs in the process of migration to secure the rights and welfare of migrant workers.

UNIFEM has strongly encouraged anti-trafficking discourses and actions within India. Their focus lies within the areas of prevention, protection and prosecution. Their initiatives include a pilot program that will assess the needs of psychosocial counseling for victims of trafficking incidences. The program will also assess the qualifications of counselors in India, Bangladesh, and Nepal. UNIFEM has also implemented, with the aid of the

Indian National Rights Commission, anti-trafficking committees that provide advice and information for safe migration in transit areas, where cross-border migration is rampant. UNIFEM is also currently working on such initiatives as the "Reinventing India: Action for Empowerment and Elimination of Violence against Women". This project proposes to provide women with information on their rights and on applicable social services. The program also will advocate for the prevention of gender-based violence.

NGOs

NGOs are more vocal and active in pursuing political change concerning migrants. They actively work to improve wages, living and working conditions. They also attempt to educate and provide information and resources to migrants in order to make them aware of their rights. Local NGOs concerned with the plight of migrants within the broader Indian context are the South Asia Study Centre, situated in New Delhi, and the Migrant Nepalese Association (MINA). The South Asia Study Centre is currently conducting a training program to train Nepalese security guards on economic literacy, labor rights, and health education. The Migrant Nepalese Association, an organization of Nepalese living in India, provides assistance in cultural and economic issues pertaining to Nepalese workers.

In 2003, the Center for Education and Community Development (CEC), together with Migrant Forum India (MFI) and the Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA) network attended the World Social Forum in Mumbai, as well as the South Asia conference in December 2004. In 2003, CEC conducted a study on the conditions of Nepali migrants in Delhi. CEC also conducted strategy meetings with representatives of Nepali migrants' organizations in Delhi. The South Asia Study Centre is involved with organizing Nepali security guards and domestic workers in Delhi.

The Center for Agro-Ecology and Development has addressed several concerns within the Nepalese community working in India. They have attempted to vocalize the issue of seasonal migration to development discourses, as well as the media. The CAED has made connections with several Indian NGOs to establish a strong network of partners concerned with the Nepalese community in India.

CAED encourages the formulation of a workshop to be held in Nepal, that would bring together representatives from foreign affairs, labor ministry, planning commission, social welfare networks, and individuals from institutions already established in India. The workshop would help to facilitate the Nepalese plight as well as the concerns of the welfare whilst working abroad. Currently, CAED is working on research-based action concerning the people of Assam.

There are NGOs that are also concerned with internal migrants as well. In West Bengal, Krishak Sabha, in conjunction with local Panchayats (rural local communities), have aided in settling disputes between local laborers and migrant laborers. They have succeeded in resolving situations in which migrant laborers were paid less than locals, and those in which migrant wages do not undercut local wages and jobs. DISHA, an NGO in Ahmedabad, has formed a labor union for construction workers from the Panchmahals region of Gujarat. DISHA, with support from the government, provides shelters for workers that were previously living in deplorable living environments. Other organizations concerned with construction migrant workers are the Nirman Mazdoor Panchayat, the National Campaign Committee for Construction Labourers, and the National Federation of Construction Labourers. These organizations advocate for labor rights, help to improve wages and working conditions, and even provide day-care centers, also known as mobile crèches, for migrant children. Kimidi Multisectoral Development Society has helped to alleviate the adverse affects on women due to the influx of male-migration within the Saora tribe in Orissa. Activities include meetings and talks with the local women, and financial assistance to those under self-sufficiency programmes. The Gramin Vikas Trust has developed a strategy to deal with migration, by improving skills, awareness, providing information, and improving relations with potential employers and governmental organizations and service providers. Another strategy employed by GVT is to reduce the cost of migrating to the migrants themselves. This strategy includes improving communication to their families back home, providing identity cards, setting up care centers for their children and relatives, and developing support networks in their destination areas. GVT has partnered with DISHA, in Ahmedabad, to set up

resource centers in destination areas that will work to improve access to credit and shelters, accident insurance, and basic necessities as provisioned under state and central laws.

Endnotes

¹A *lathi* is a long, metal-tipped bamboo stick, traditionally used as a crowd-control weapon in India.

²A *crore* is an Indian unit of measurement, equating to ten million.

³The NDA is an example of the coalitions formed by smaller political parties who hold few seats in India's Parliament, in order to organize and vote more effectively on issues.

⁴Government of India, "Economic Survey, 2003-2004".

⁵Government of India, "NSSO 57th Round Survey".

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