



# Transnational Communities Programme



## Gulf States Workers

In December the United Arab Emirates increased measures to prevent illegal immigration by stepping up coastal patrols and raids. A raid on the industrial city of Musaffah picked up Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers. In 1996 UAE established an amnesty for illegal immigrants, during which 200,000 left the country, returning to South Asia, Afghanistan and the Philippines. Nearly 80 percent of UAE's 2.4 million residents and 90% of the workforce are foreigners. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain have also declared amnesties to encourage departure. UAE also introduced financial qualifications for resident foreigners wishing to bring over families intended to prevent low-wage workers settling.

In Bahrain, over 60% of the workforce is foreign. The government initiated a programme to train Bahraini nationals to replace foreign labour, including industrial and information technology training and English language classes. A campaign to increase the employment of Bahrainis in the 1980s failed because it did not provide such training. In 1996 the government required all companies to increase the number of Bahraini employees by 5% annually. Bahrain's oil reserves will soon run out, and the government recognises that the era of comfort will soon be over. The switch to a non-oil-based economy will require new skills and fewer expatriates. Complaints about unemployment run high among the country's Shiite Muslim community, among whom there are signs of unrest.

Most of the foreign workers in the Gulf states face restrictions on bring over family members, or voting or owning property. Two-thirds of Kuwait's population are foreigners, and they make up 82% of the labour force.

Seeking domestic peace in a post-oil economy, Mae Ghalwash, Los Angeles Times, 28.11.97; UAE steps up drive against illegal foreign workers, Nadim Kawash, Agence France Presse English Wire 1.12.97; In wealthy Kuwait, foreigners do dirty work, Colin Nickerson, Boston Globe 19.3.98

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## Non-Resident Indians

Indians in Abu Dhabi requested voting rights from the Indian government in January. Expatriate organisations including the India Social Centre, the Abu Dhabi Malayalam Samajam and the Kerala Social Centre have written to the Prime Minister. They were also trying to start a single umbrella organisation for all Non-Resident Indians in the Gulf states, reckoned at 3.5 million.

Non-Resident Indians complain that India does not acknowledge and help them enough. The Indian Entrepreneurs' Convention argues that the government is not doing enough to attract their investment. Dr Mukul G. Asher (National University of Singapore) estimates that the Indian diaspora numbers 15-20 million, with assets of \$300 million, roughly the size of India's GDP. Indian engineers, doctors and scientists are in demand throughout the world. But unlike China, where the overseas Chinese invest around \$70 billion in the country, NRIs have not been encouraged to invest back home. Obstacles include bureaucracy and uncertainty about government policy.

Investments by Indian diaspora rooted elsewhere, Business Line 27.1.98; Non-Resident Indians in Abu Dhabi want voting rights, Business Line, 30.1.98

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## Bangladesh and Pakistan discuss Biharis

In January Bangladesh called on Pakistan to 'take back' 240,000 Biharis who remained in the country following the 1971 war in which Bangladesh and Pakistan separated. The call was made while the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, was visiting Bangladesh for a summit which included the Indian Prime Minister, Inder Kumar Gujral. Bangladeshi human rights groups also demanded an apology for war atrocities from Pakistan.

Up to a quarter of a million Urdu-speaking Biharis remain

in Bangladesh, waiting in camps and declining to accept Bangladeshi citizenship. They came originally from the Indian state of Bihar, and moved to what was then East Pakistan after partition in 1947. They sided with Pakistan (then West Pakistan) during the 1971 war.

Chakma refugees from Tripura state in India continued to be repatriated to Bangladesh's Chittagong Hills region. They had fled sporadic fighting in the Hills since 1986. India and Bangladesh signed a joint agreement to resettle the Chakmas and provide economic assistance.

Bangladesh PM urges Pakistan to take back its stranded people, Agence France Presse English Wire, 16.1.98; More Chakma refugees return to Bangladesh, Xinhua News Agency, 16.1.98

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# Cajuns take on British Crown

A Louisiana lawyer, Warren A. Perrin, is suing the British government for its deportation of Acadians from Nova Scotia in 1755 and 1758. His demand is for an apology and a memorial.

The Canadian province of Acadia was founded by French settlers in 1605 and taken by Britain in 1710. The British then expelled some 8,000 Acadians. Many died at sea on their way to France and the American colonies, but 3,000 found their way to the Louisiana swamplands, where they developed a distinct Cajun culture. The colonists' petition for redress to Britain in 1763 was never fully dealt with. According to British statutes, Acadians are formally regarded as traitors, subject to penalty of death should they attempt to return to Nova Scotia. They were British subjects at the time of exile.

In order to pursue the case in the European Court of Human Rights, Perrin will have to find French citizens, descendants of the Acadians, willing to adopt the suit. Perrin has already met with French President Jacques Chirac at the meeting of Francophone countries in Vietnam. The 1999 summit will be held in New Brunswick, which Perrin regards as an appropriate occasion for restitution.

Cajuns' belated counter-attack, The Economist 31.1.98; Acadian Lawyer want apology from Britain, Agence France Presse English Wire 16.2.98

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# **Borders and gateways: Borneo, China/Myanmar and Xinjiang**

A brief monitor of three border regions in Asia.

In 1991 a land gateway was opened between the Malaysian state of Sarawak and the Indonesia state of West Kalimantan at Entekong, six hours' drive from its capital, Pontianak on the road to the Malaysian town of Tebedu. In seven years the border town has generated a small, thriving commercial centre. Clove cigarettes, batik cloth, garlic and durian fruit cross from Indonesia to Malaysia. Plywood, fish, pepper and nuts also cross the border in trade. In the first six months of 1996, almost 5,000 mainly Malaysian tourists came to Kalimantan through the gateway.

The border was opened to stop smuggling, although the decision was made in 1967 and not out into effect for many years. Under the arrangements, residents of West Kalimantan can cross without paying departure taxes. Non-border residents from both sides do not enjoy the same privileges. Even so, foreign tourists have crossed between the two countries via Entekong, which is part of the Dayak people's region.

The Chinese town of Ruili on the border with Myanmar has become a major centre of business within the space of ten years. Both governments agreed to open up the frontier to develop the region away from smuggling and opium-production in the 1980s. Travel restrictions were lifted by the Chinese in 1991 and cross-border traffic was made legal in 1992, and trade tripled within three years to \$346 million. Now, 60 percent of Ruili's population consist of Thais, Indians, Pakistanis and expatriate Chinese. Textiles, construction material and manufactured goods come from China. Timber, jade and agricultural goods cross from Burma.

The border between the Chinese far western province of Xinjiang and the Central Asian republics, although re-opened in the 1980s, is suffering as a result of ethnic unrest in the region. The province's large Muslim Uighur

population was opened up to radical Islamic ideas as well as commercial trade. Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran have invested in the area and aided its religious revival. Foreign investors in the Tarim Basin's oil industry appear to be deterred by the rioting and bombing in the area's cities. Border trade, which flourished for a few years, now seems to have abated.

Uighur separatist organisations operate in Kazakhstan (the United National Revolutionary Front of East Turkestan, UNAFRET) and Kyrgyzstan. In February, Uighurs were arrested in Bishkek for fomenting anti-Chinese sentiment and Islamic-inspired revolution, while other leading figures were arrested in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. More Uighur refugees are being held in the Russian city of Chita. The arrests in Bishkek coincided with a visit by Kyrgyzstan's President Akayev to Beijing. On the Chinese side of the border, there was also a crackdown on Uighurs and Wahhabis in February.

Restive Borderland, Charles Hutzler, Associated Press, 24.11.97; Repression of Uighurs in China's Xinjiang reported by emigre paper, BBC monitoring service 20.4.98; Borderline boom between China, Burma, Michael Hoffman, Mainichi Daily News, 22.1.98; Indonesia's lone land gateway to Malaysia cements ties, R. Masri Sareb Putra, The Jakarta Post, 25.2.98

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