A Report

Advisory Meeting
Justice, Security and Vulnerable Populations in South Asia
9 July 2025, Kolkata

Organised by Calcutta Research Group

The Calcutta Research Group (CRG) in collaboration with the Fund for Global Human Rights has been working on the two-year research programme "Justice, Security, and Vulnerable Populations of South Asia" in 2024-2025. CRG, while hosting the programme, engaged with project related activities such as mobilisation of networks, policy studies, workshops, dialogues, consultative meetings, webinars, public lectures, conferences, translations of relevant texts in non-English South Asian languages such as Bengali, Meiteilon, Hmar and Assamese, and publications. Engaging with practitioners from multiple backgrounds, ground level dialogues, dissemination, and in particular network building have been some of the adopted approaches. The focus has been around intersectionality of issues with security positioned at the crossroads of food, water, gender, land, other dimensions of security of life, climate security, digital security, public health and biosecurity, borders, borderlands, displacement, and marginalities, and conversely the militarization of society that causes insecurities all around, with the approach directed at the central theme of decolonizing the security question in South Asia.

The advisory meeting on 9 July 2025 was organised to plan and discuss the research activities for the year and the need for innovation in the work. This year the aim is to work on: (i) Research papers addressing the broad themes of – urban security, and caste, violence and insecurities. (ii) A workshop on the theme, "Cities, Migrants and Insecurities" - for researchers, academics, urban studies experts, legal activists, policy analysts, teachers in security and peace studies, economists, and other social activists like media activists working on issues of non-traditional security, digital democracy, and histories of peace accords and dialogues. (iii) Policy-briefs including legal briefs as campaign material on water security, neighbourhood policy and security, gender and insecurities, and global protection mechanisms for refugees. (iv) Publications (including edited volume, policy briefs, research papers, reports) – online and in print. (v) Policy dialogue, peace dialogue, local level public discussion, and public lecture by jurists/nontraditional security specialists on climate security, food security, etc. (one web-discussion and one lecture). (vi) Translations of relevant research output and policy briefs in some of the South Asian languages. (vii) A South Asian conference of legal experts and social leaders on security, protection, and justice. (viii) Creating a network of specialists and public activists on non-traditional security issues. (ix) Web-based activities, publicity, and resource material for public access. (x) Building up library resources for open use by scholar-activists on security and justice studies. (xi) Web-based publicity and resource material for public access.

Through the events, activities, and dialogues organised under the programme, CRG aims to bring the issue of security among rights activists, jurists, young representatives, and women activists in the conflict areas, encouraging and addressing the debate on "Whose Security?" The task is to work with a new understanding of security based on people's understanding of the issues as distinct from a top-down approach, its attainment and popularisation. CRG looks ahead to decolonise the traditional approaches to the security question and weave the question with interrogations on life, peace, justice, and security of food, water, land, and other resources.

Session I: Introductory Session

The advisory meeting commenced with the welcome address delivered by the Directior of CRG, Shyamalendu Majumdar, and brief introductory comments by Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury on the aims and objectives of the research programme in 2025. The introductory session outlined the structure and segments of the past year's activities and research as well as the larger scope for 2025, with an overview of the translations, lectures, webinars, workshop, conference, dialogues, including research papers and policy briefs.

Discussion on Proposed Edited Volume "New Thinking on Security"

Sucharita Sengupta detailed out the themes and sub-themes that the proposed edited volume on "New Thinking on Security" to be edited by Samir Kumar Das and Sucharita Sengupta, would encase by putting together the primary focus areas of the research papers. It was proposed that the volume would aim to bring together critical scholarship to chart a framework for understanding security not as the defensive armature of the state, but as an emancipatory promise grounded in human experience, precarity, and collective action. Across the themes of digital insecurity, human security, people's peace, migration governance, and an overall South Asian neighbourhood situation—the volume will interrogate how security can no longer be understood as a monolithic or state-administered domain. Instead, they propose that security is now a dispersed, multi-scalar, and contested field shaped by neoliberalism, biopolitics, climate change, digital platforms, and social movements. the key contributions of these texts, identify the intellectual shifts they champion, and articulate a coherent vision for "new thinking"; that the volume plans to inaugurate. Sucharita mentioned the proposed themes of book segments as 'From State Security to Human Security', 'The Paradox of Social Security in the Digital Age', 'Peace as People's Security', 'Intersecting Insecurities: Migration, Law, and the Market', 'South Asian Regionalism and the Structural Limits of Collective Security', 'Toward a New Episteme of Security', 'Conclusion: Security as a Commons'. She discussed the layers and intersecting sections of the insecurities in the continuum of risks and governance, at the crossroads of pandemic driven changes. The cluster on South Asian regionalism and global scenario would refer to local instances while broadening the horizon to include South Asian perspective adding also a global dimension. Stark difference between camp governance and global governance, while cities offer refuge, they are also sites of discrimination.

Sumona DasGupta suggested that the micro and macro security issues explored in the former collaborative work with WISCOMP as part of the publication *Migration and Circles of Insecurities*, including pandemic, and cyber security, could be looked into. The gaze may also include dismantling of camps, line of control, life, livelihoods, dignity, justice come through in case of conflict-induced internal displacements. Nasreen Chowdhury mentioned a revisit of security vis-à-vis insecurity from below, including the State notion and debunking it, and non-traditional entities' role in vulnerability and justice. Arup Sen added that 'biopolitics from below' and 'politics of life' as envisaged in the work of Ranabir Samaddar would help connect the sections of the volume theoretically, with a request to Ranabir Samaddar to write the foreword or introduction. New ideas on security diverging from the binary of security and insecurity, consciousness of justice could be included. Participants also highlighted aspects such as legal framework and rights' discourse and the use of ethics of care and the different notions of care, security of commons and the instruments that work or otherwise, situations of contestations, popular rights.

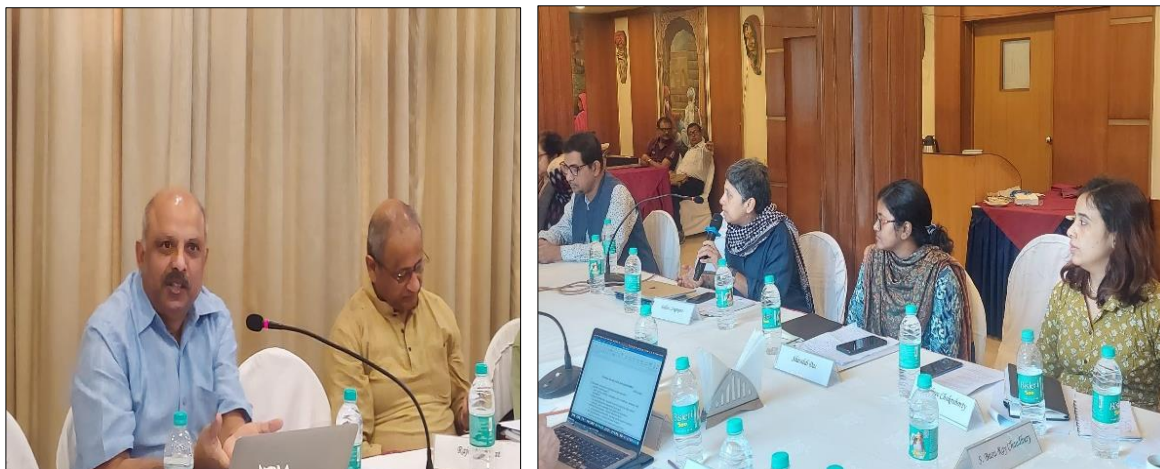**Session I: Introductory Session**

Session II: Discussion on Research Papers

Amit Prakash discussed his proposed research titled "On Urban Security and its Inversions in Delhi" and underscored how urban centres have always had complex characters, with their centrality rooted in political power can barely be overstated, while overlapping and contradictory narrations and expressions give urban centres multi-layered features. He emphasised that alongside political centralisation came the necessity of economic control by urban centres rooted in its increasing distance from processes of production, physical as well as ownership of the means from production. Amit Prakash explained that his research paper will aim at propounding and elaborating in the background of the first quarter of the twenty-first century five interlocking but heuristically discrete features such as (i) security and securitisation, (ii) marginality and exclusion, (iii) discipline and surveillance, (iv) capital accumulation and inequity, and (v) political populism and liberalism as container frame; the paper aims to examine such patterns of contemporary urban security with the help of select examples from Delhi.

Debashree Chakraborty and Shatabdi Das discussed their joint-paper on "Climate, Epidemiological Insecurities and the City", planned as one of the module papers for the Tenth Annual Research and Orientation Workshop in November 2025. They discussed the impacts of the recent Covid-19 pandemic on cities, their massive population and infrastructural and municipal requirements, during which time cities bore heavy costs of life with epidemiological crises. The onslaught of vector borne diseases, outbreak of infections, with growing challenges of climate change, not only add to the complications and limitations of medical facilities on offer, but also challenge and even change the functional rubrics of the city in times of disasters. In this research paper, the co-authors would attempt to see how the city changes itself or may be, reveals itself, in the face of epidemiological crises. A part of the paper will aim at exploring how the cultural terrains of cities transform as outcomes of epidemiological crises and in turn how these changes are mapped across cultural artifacts, thus, making them into testaments of spatio-temporal changes.

Sohini Sengupta while chairing the session pointed out two prominent aspects that the two presentations brought out – city as an entity (as a centre of accummulation), and the chief characteristics of a city as a centre of crisis. She commented on the traits of a city in retribution where people shift for accumulation and end up in crisis. Urban areas as places of control are also in rupture, while tensions between epidemiology as a social phenomenon and the diseases continue. Other participants joined in the discussion by focusing on social

inequalities in human healthcare aggravated by climate issues considering city as a base, while also questioning the differences of security and insecurities among various cities.

Session II: Discussion on Research Papers

Session III: Discussion on Policy Briefs

The presentation by Gopal Krishna was titled "Diverse Notions of Water Security: A Preliminary Inquiry into Notions of Justice in Himalayan River Basin's Nuclear Ecosystem". The proposed policy brief mentioned that the idea of security was limited to arms race, weapons of mass destruction till the 1990s, after which the protection of natural resources became an international agenda; water became one of the resources for protection regime. The policy brief, according to Gopal Krishna would also propose the prohibition of nuclear reactors for assurance of access to safe water. The policy brief would concentrate on the potential threats in the Ganga river basins where contamination or scarcity of water affects fertility of land. The brief would review the existing acts (Atomic Energy Act 1962 and Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act 2010) and explore the possible solutions to for water safety.

Mouleshri Vyas's proposal, tentatively titled as "Gender and Insecurity" was focused on gender based discriminations among marginalised workforce, especially women, along with other discriminations in the family and society. Considered as one of the largest workforce in the informal economy, women workers in India has been deprived by their employers. They receive lower scales of salaries and have been forced to work in discriminatory work ambience. Apart from discrimination in payments, women workers have also faced sexual harassments and lack of safety in workplaces. Based on case studies, the proposed work would discuss the deprivation of this workforce through the larger lens of gender and insecurity and recommend policy provisions to overcome the crisis.

Priya Singh's proposal for a policy brief tentatively titled "India's Neighbourhood Policy and Non-Traditional Security Reframing Regional Priorities through Justice and Resilience", attempted to look into non-traditional security apart from the traditional ideas of security. This included climate challenges, pervasive digital surveillance and vulnerability of people living in the border areas. Multilateral cooperation is required for fighting these challenges, however, at times the concerns are limited to national stability. As a result, sensitive problems at times become distant and multilateral trade agreements continue with different dimensions of newer cooperations, such as BBIN, BIMSTEC, etc. These new collaborations, according to the proposed brief, divert focus required for crucial concerns like labour mobility, refugee recognition and climate induced migration. The proposed policy brief suggested an alternative

mechanism and cooperation focusing on justice, resilience and protection of rights through new regional cooperation.

Niloy Biswas' proposal tentatively titled "Understanding 'Agency' of Stateless Persons in Framing their Resilience: State vs the Global Protection Mechanism for Stateless Rohingyas", talked about the challenges of rehabilitation of displaced Rohingyas, considered as potential threat for host states, as well as global refugee protection regime. The proposed policy brief questions the idea of resilience, whether the strategy of resilience would be the best possible method to protect the Rohingyas, or it could accommodate them as stateless people. The larger goal of the proposed policy brief will be to investigate the dialectical relationship between agency and resilience, through the examination of the position of Rohingyas in Bangladesh, their livelihood opportunities and the role of advocacy networks. Through the study on Rohingyas the proposed policy brief would attempt to cover the role of ensuring justice and security in the politics of exclusion and structural marginalisation.

The proposed policy briefs were discussed by the chair of the session Rajesh Kharat, who began by stating that the policy brief on water security, may require more focus on the condition of water contamination due to nuclear waste in South Asia and China. He added that along with the focus on the dangers of nuclear waste and nuclear power plants, the role of regional cooperation should also be discussed. Sohini Sengupta suggested the inclusion of current challenges in protest against nuclear energy as it has been considered among the cleanest energy forms, safer than thermal power, in which case privatisation of nuclear energy plays a crucial part. Amit Prakash mentioned the sources of alternative energy apart from nuclear energy which are also contaminator of water or create water crisis. Arup Sen commented on the connection between the protection of the Himalayan river basins as well as the larger dangers of nuclear power and their impacts on the environment. Nasreen Chowdhory suggested that the policy brief attempt to focus on the crisis in terms of securing water as a vital resource. Debashree Chakraborty asked whether continuous growth of tourism would affect water security.

Commenting on the proposal for policy brief by Mouleshri Vyas, Nasreen Chowdhory mentioned that the larger notions of gender insecurity should be one of the components of the brief, and thoughts were shared regarding the case studies, on domestic workers and wage labourers. Rajesh Kharat suggested that the title of the proposed policy brief should be specific, as to which area of study it considers. Participants also commented on the complexities of transboundary politics, regional cooperation on security, as well as the complex bilateral relations within India and between other South Asian countries, can be taken into consideration while Priya Singh develops the policy brief. Others suggested that Niloy Biswas' proposal for preparation of a policy brief may aim at focusing on the role of State as an agency in the protection of stateless and this regard, consultation and reference of existing CRG literature on protection and statelessness would be helpful.

Session III: Discussion on Policy Briefs

Session IV: Dialogues, Webinars and Network Building

The fourth session had two speakers, Sumona DasGupta and Samata Biswas. Both the speakers discussed the future roadmap of the events that would take place in the academic year 2025 as part of the project. Sumona DasGupta, who had organised a dialogue at Guwahati in February 2025, proposed to carry forward the endeavour. Naming the dialogue series as the "Guwahati Dialogues", DasGupta noted that while the first dialogue focussed on internal displacement in North East India in general, and had a panel on Kuki and Meitei IDPs of Manipur, a second dialogue could be organised in which the IDPs of both the communities could be brought together and made to engage in "listening circles" by means of "proximate peacebuilding". Following the previous dialogue, DasGupta proposed a two-day dialogue that will take into account following up on the first on a *Policy framework for IDPs* from Manipur based on the lived experiences of the IDPs themselves and drawing on some of the testimonies presented at the first consultative meeting of CRG in February 2025. Some of the questions that the dialogue could address were:
(i) To what extent do the 30 principles of the guiding policy on IDPs, now translated into two
languages of Manipur through a CRG initiative, resonate for the people?
(ii) What are the primary sources of insecurity at the camp site that need clear redress and how
might this be done?
(iii) What has been the role of the committee on IDPs set up in Manipur? Which of these insecurities have they identified and prioritized in their rehabilitation plan?
(iv) How has the right to return and the right to a secure life been balanced for the IDP community
in Manipur who left their homes as a result of a conflict that is not yet over even if levels of
direct violence is down?
(v) If indeed the camps are shut down as part of the policy for bringing back free movement that
has ground to a halt in this state how will the needs of this vulnerable population be addressed?
(vi) How will the justice issue be addressed in view of the large-scale violence that has taken place? What lies ahead for those who have suffered direct violence and had family members killed and what are the ways forward towards listening, dialogue and restoration of inter community relations that are being envisioned?

The two-day dialogue proposes to bring bureaucrats, academics, government and non-government representatives in conversation with representatives of the IDP community from both the valley and the hills. This will include young people from the camps who are now forming part of listening and healing circles. In the case of Manipur undoubtedly it is the IDPs who are the most visible casualty of the conflict in. By providing an opportunity to bring them in direct conversation with policy makers CRG can help create a unique opportunity for a conversation that might never happen of its own accord and at an opportune time when this is the need of the hour given the recent developments.

Samata Biswas gave a summary of the webinars that were organised in the previous academic year and proposed that the themes around which the webinars were held

be carried forward and explored along the lines of security questions that are crucial to Indian society. These included questions of caste, food, water, climate and also digital security. She proposed that webinars and media dialogues to be organised by roping in experts from considered fields. She also spoke about the blog series Security Speaks that has in a way expanded CRG's network and has helped and extended CRG's network building.

Session IV: Dialogues, Webinars and Network Building

Session V: Concluding Session: Discussion on Translation, Public Lectures and A South Asia Conference

The concluding session titled "Discussion on Translation, Public Lectures and A South Asia Conference" was chaired by Byasdeb Dasgupta. This session briefly outlined the work that has already been done with regard to the translation projects that CRG has engaged in. Debashree Chakraborty gave a summary of the translations that have been done already.

Migration and Circles of Insecurity by Ranabir Samaddar and Paula Banerjee has been translated to Bengali and Assamese and both translation work are now in press the process of printing.

The UN Document on IDPs has been translated into Hmar and Meiteilon languages.

Apart from these, Policy Briefs published in 2024 will be translated to Bengali and Hindi and translators have already been commissioned. Regarding a Public Lecture/Conversation designed as a roundtable, Dunu Roy, a veteran on Land Security in India, will be invited to speak at CRG. Further, a roadmap to organising a South Asian Conference around "Justice, Protection and Security" was discussed.

Nasreen Chowdhory gave the closing remarks and summarised that security may be seen beyond the binary of security and insecurity, and include concrete discussion on justice. She abridged the key takeaways from the whole day programme and asserted that the focus of the research studies should go beyond India-centric approach and look into strategies and regional cooperation, and in this process of enquiry, CRG's rich repository of work should be incorporated, referenced and taken ahead. It was also added that listening groups and their role in dialoguing would be immensely helpful. An essay or review could be prepared that includes CRG's previous research on security issues and their multipronged dimensions. The advisory meeting came to a close with the formal vote of thanks delivered by Debashree Chakraborty.