Union Home Minister Amit Shah during his address at the National Security Strategies Conference on Friday called upon the state police chiefs to monitor changes in border area demography besides taking recourse to effective use of latest technologies to streamline vigilance and related services. This assumes significance for Assam in particular and the North East in general – a region sharing several international boundaries.

Students’ union AASU on Monday alleged that a large stretch of the India-Bangladesh border in Assam’s Dhubri district has remained “unfenced” even after 37 years of signing of the historic Assam Accord.

How cross-border infiltration from Bangladesh has already effected noticeable and disturbing demographic changes in Assam is too well known to merit any reiteration. Now, with growing jihadi activities from Bangladesh-based outfits which are eyeing Assam to expand their hold, it is all the more imperative to put in place a foolproof border vigilance and protection mechanism at the earliest. Indeed, the porous Assam-Bangladesh border has – aside from triggering large-scale cross-border illegal migration – also created a conducive situation for all sorts of illegal and criminal activities to flourish. Smuggling of arms, contraband and cattle, too, is a known feature of the illegalities being perpetrated in many border areas.

Equipping the police and BSF with latest technologies to ensure foolproof vigilance is also warranted by the difficult riverine terrain

along stretches where having a physical barrier in the form of fencing is not possible. Nor is it possible to ensure year-round physical presence of the border sentinels or put up outposts due to the same geographical constraints.

The riverine border warrants round-the-clock vigil in the form of river patrolling, floating outposts, CCTV cameras, etc. Sadly, securing the Indo-Bangladesh border has never really received due attention from successive Central Govts despite Assam bearing the brunt of the shocking lapse.

Any laxity by the government authorities mandated to man the border is tantamount to serious dereliction of duty which would have a bearing on national security itself. No less an authority than the Supreme Court of India had taken cognizance of the gravity of the situation in Assam long back when it equated the infiltration with a silent invasion on India’s sovereignty and security.

Sadly, our governments have proven themselves to be too thick-skinned to be moved into action by the castigation from the apex court. Not just infiltration which has now effected disturbing demographic changes in Assam, the unprotected border areas are also notorious for being thriving conduits of smuggling and various criminal activities.

The government while tightening its hold over the border, would also do well to expedite the development process in the border regions to address these concerns. The border areas urgently need infrastructure

like roads, bridges, power, telecommunication, schools, hospitals, etc. A roadmap for development of these areas with
thrust on time-bound execution of projects is a dire need as
is the need to ensure security in these remote areas.

Flagging concerns about demographic changes in districts along the international border with Nepal and Bangladesh, at the annual police meet last year, the Uttar Pradesh Police and the Assam Police highlighted an increase in number of mosques, seminaries and a high decadal growth in population in these areas. The annual Director General of Police conference held from November 19-21, 2021 was presided over by the Prime Minister.

As the decadal census exercise is on an indefinite hold, this is the latest consolidated data on the “demographic changes” in border areas in the two States.

The Assam Police paper on demographic changes in bordering areas said that at 31.45%, the decadal growth in population — from 2011 to 2021, within 10 km of Bangladesh border is higher than the projected national and State average of 12.5% and 13.54% respectively.