



Issues and Challenges of Borderland: A Case Study of Border Areas of India-Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The India-Bangladesh border is over 4,096 kilometers long and is one of the longest and most sensitive international boundaries. This area of the border is characterized by security challenges, underdevelopment and irregular migrations. Thematic focus the paper analyses how traditional and non-traditional security issues interact with development challenges affecting populations living in borderlands. **Methodology:** This article uses a qualitative case study as a design, including secondary sources such as official reports, policy papers, literature, and media. The India-Bangladesh border is examined through thematic analysis of history, politics, and social-economics, focusing on policy tools such as the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) and the Coordinated Border Management Plan (CBMP). **Results:** The area reportedly remains susceptible to human smuggling, cross-border smuggling (in particular of livestock, gold, and drugs), and irregular migration. These problems are compounded by lack of access to roads and poor law enforcement and further fueled by socio-political tension, particularly around religious identity. Mutual efforts have made some progress in the joint governance of border, yet, difficulties remain given structural patterns of asymmetries as well as selective policies. **Conclusion:** We need an all-of-people approach to overcoming the interlocking problems of insecurity and underdevelopment. The paper advocates consolidated bilateral cooperation and the construction of border economic zones and investment in infrastructure, education and healthcare. Only such measures can turn the border from an area of confrontation to a corridor of conciliation and shared prosperity.

Keywords: *India-Bangladesh border, Illegal Immigration, Cross-Border Smuggling, Human Trafficking, Security, Development*

INTRODUCTION

Borderlands involve more than just a line between two countries. Academics see them as changing areas where closeness and shared rule cause special social, political, and economic situations. Instead of being hard barriers, borderlands are places of ongoing talks and interactions. People living there are touched by government actions, security issues, culture, business, and sometimes unclear laws. So, a borderland is a key area where the government meets people's daily lives in direct and often debated ways.

The India-Bangladesh boundary illustrates this complexity. At around 4,096 kilometers, it represents India's longest international border, contacting five Indian states: West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram. This line, created by the Radcliffe Line when British India was split in 1947, resulted from colonial mapping efforts that separated families, ethnic groups, and joint business areas. The border passes through different landscapes such as river areas in West Bengal and Assam, wooded hills in Meghalaya and Mizoram, and crowded plains in Tripura. Its detailed geography, along with continuous history, culture, and language across the divide, makes the area open and subject to lawful and unlawful movement across the border.

The India-Bangladesh border region faces several ongoing problems, even with cooperation between the two countries. The main problems in this area relate to security, economic advancement, and movement of people.

Security issues come in both expected and unexpected forms. Expected issues include keeping borders safe and stopping rebels from crossing them, which is a worry in Northeast India. In this area, rebel groups used to work from safe places in Bangladesh. Even though talks between countries and teamwork on security have helped reduce this issue, people still worry that rebels may regroup, weapons may be moved illegally, and people may cross the border illegally. Unexpected threats are more widespread and include moving people illegally, smuggling drugs, cows, fake money, and gold. These illegal activities across borders weaken local areas, hurt law enforcement, and create distrust between the two countries.

Secondly, Development problems exist in border areas on both sides. These regions, though strategically important, often have poor infrastructure, few healthcare and education options, and not enough jobs. Border fencing and increased military presence, while improving surveillance, have limited access to farming land and hurt local economies. The absence of inclusive growth has left border communities feeling marginalized and overlooked by central governments. The disconnect between state-focused security strategies and the developmental needs of the population has further exacerbated this issue.

Thirdly, Cross-border migration, both authorized and unauthorized, remains a disputed and sensitive matter. Migration across the India-Bangladesh border stems from the partition, religious conflicts, economic disparities, and environmental displacement, especially river erosion and floods. As time passes, migration has mixed with identity politics, communal stories, and talks of national security. The faith of migrants significantly influences public and political perceptions. Hindu migrants are often regarded as refugees fleeing persecution, typically garnering legal and political support. In contrast, Muslim migrants are frequently stereotyped as illegal immigrants, facing stigma, discrimination, and social exclusion. This religious bias poses major challenges to establishing equitable and inclusive migration policies.

Some structures and measures of governance to ensure better management of borders have been put into place. The 2015 Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) is case in point as it benefitted by way of exchange of territories and resolution of land disputes. The 2011 Coordinated Border Management Plan (CBMP) promotes joint patrols and intelligence sharing. Secondly, Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) on border should facilitate easier trade and immigration. While these measures have helped to better control the border and diplomacy, they don't completely address the daily problems and safety concerns that local people confront.

At its core, the research question driving this study is the ways in which historical and contemporary security threats, accompanying developmental marginalization and politicized migration impact the lived realities of ordinary people resident in the India-Bangladesh borderland. The prevailing academic and policy literature largely sees the border as either a security or state diplomatic gaze. We require a more

contextualized understanding – from the ground up – of the social and political effects of border management practices and their unequal effects across the various segments of the border population.

This research is significant in that it seeks to break down the artificial divide between state-centric border policy and human-centric concerns. While India's assertiveness in geopolitics through the 'Act East' policy means that the eastern border regions- especially those sharing borders with Bangladesh- become more relevant. Yet to approach the India-Bangladesh borderland not just as a battleground, but also a zone of possibility, dialogue, and metamorphosis is critical if we are to make policies that ensure both security of nation and dignity of flesh. Finally, in an era of growing regional and global interest in migration governance, human trafficking, and cross-border economic integration, this study offers important lessons to scholars and policy-makers working on borderland studies and international organizations.

In sum, this article argues that the India-Bangladesh borderland is a complex interplay of geography, politics, and history, where issues of security, development, and migration interplay with each other. Border management and security must be balanced with a more human and comprehensive approach that moves beyond security and surveillance." It deserves a framework that not only stops criminal conduct but supports: inclusive development, cultural awareness, economic partnership. The objective of this paper, therefore, is to severely interrogate the complex challenges of the India-Bangladesh borderland and recommend an even-handed policy, which fuses security imperatives with developmental and humanitarian considerations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Md. Shofiqul Islam Nahid (2023) *India-Bangladesh borderland: Voices of the tortured people of the border areas of Bangladesh*

The literature on the India-Bangladesh border examines the historical, political, and human aspects that shape one of the world's most complex boundaries. The border, which stretches over 4096.7 kilometers, is the longest land boundary for both nations. It is also a place of ongoing tension, violence, and human suffering, especially for communities in Bangladesh. The border's demarcation, originally the Radcliffe Line, resulted from the colonial partition of 1947. This division split communities, families, and economies along religious lines. The creation of Bangladesh in 1971 did little to solve these deep-rooted issues. The border remained a source of conflict, migration, and unresolved matters. Agreements like the Nehru-Noon Accord (1958) and the Indo-Bangladesh Agreement (1974) tried to address some disputes, but the legacy of partition continues to impact the lives of those living in border areas. The literature shows how the border changed from a permeable, socially integrated space to a heavily guarded and militarized zone. India has built an extensive border fence, often electrified and extending over 3406 kilometers. This structure acts as both a physical barrier and a symbol of India's focus on security at the border. This mindset is based on the idea of protecting against perceived threats like illegal immigration, smuggling, and terrorism. Unfortunately, these actions often come at the cost of the everyday rights and lives of local residents. Scholars like Brunet-Jailly (2005) and Sur (2013) argue for a layered approach to studying borderlands. They recommend considering state-level security issues alongside the agency, culture, and socioeconomic conditions of border communities. The border is viewed as a social space, shaped by common languages, cultural ties, and economic dependencies. However, hard security measures and nationalistic policies have fractured this unity. Human rights groups and academic research document alarming patterns of violence and abuse along the border, particularly by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF). Reports show that between 2000 and 2010, Indian border guards killed over 932 Bangladeshis, many of whom were small-scale traders or innocent civilians. The literature highlights that the BSF's

actions, including shootings, torture, and abductions, often break international laws and conventions. This has resulted in the India-Bangladesh border being labeled as one of the deadliest in the world. These actions have strained relations between the two countries and have caused significant psychological and socioeconomic harm to border residents, disrupting livelihoods, family connections, and access to markets and farmland. The literature also compares the India-Bangladesh border with other international borders, such as those between the US and Mexico and between Saudi Arabia and Yemen, to highlight the trend of securitizing borders in response to cross-border threats. However, the India-Bangladesh border is unique due to its dense population, historical ties, and the level of violence faced by civilians. Recent political events, including high-level diplomatic visits and bilateral agreements, have aimed to improve cooperation and security management. Still, the literature points to an imbalance of power and perspectives between India and Bangladesh. Many Bangladeshis often see India as both a historical ally and a source of ongoing difficulties due to tough border policies.

Pyone Myat Thu (2022) Sur, Malini. 2021. *Jungle Passports: Fences, Mobility, and Citizenship at the Northeast India-Bangladesh Border*

Malini Sur's "Jungle Passports" provides a detailed look at the Northeast India-Bangladesh border. It highlights the complex relationship between state security, historical changes in territory, and the everyday lives of border communities. The discussions about this borderland show how colonial and postcolonial state-building efforts have created artificial boundaries in a region with strong social, cultural, and economic ties. Sur's work fits into this wider academic context, using theories like Massey's "power geometries" and Malkki's exploration of identity tied to territory, to show how the border both separates and links people. The book reveals that political forces and ecological factors shape the borderland. For instance, changing river courses generate and erase chars (river islands), disrupting farming and complicating attempts to establish clear national borders. This ecological instability has caused migration and resettlement waves, with groups like Assamese, Bengali Muslim peasants, and indigenous Garos and Hajongs facing state suspicion, land evictions, and ethnic persecution. Sur's narrative explains how the state's attempts to define identities and territories often conflict with the fluid, cross-border connections and livelihoods of local people, resulting in discrimination, exclusion, and displacement for those who do not fit dominant religious, ethnic, or national identities. Economic activities such as rice farming and cattle smuggling are vital for the borderland's economy. The literature points out how these practices become politicized and criminalized by the government. Sur outlines the intricate networks that support the illegal cattle trade, which depends on the cooperation of both Indian and Bangladeshi government officials and is influenced by Hindu nationalist narratives that target Muslim traders. This criminalization leads to more military presence and surveillance, even as state agents often end up enabling the very activities they are supposed to stop, blurring the lines between what is legal and illegal. Gender plays a significant role in mobility and trade in Sur's analysis. The "jungle passports"—local methods for secret cross-border movement—are used by Garo matrilineal clans to keep family and economic connections intact, often with unspoken support from border officials. While trades like cattle smuggling, which are commonly run by men, face heavy policing, Garo Christian women traders find different opportunities and challenges. This mirrors findings from other Asian border regions about how women adapt in militarized settings. Since 2007, the building of fortified border infrastructure marks a key shift in the literature. New security measures physically and socially divide the borderland, displacing people, disrupting livelihoods, and fostering distrust. Sur uses Foucault's idea of the panoptic state to explain how surveillance and fear of violence influence border residents, with the border fence symbolizing the tightening of state control and the breakdown of local cooperation and support. In the final chapters, the book examines how bureaucratic processes create citizenship and statelessness, focusing on Assam's Foreigners Tribunals. Sur highlights

the arbitrary and gendered nature of citizenship decisions, where aspects like socioeconomic status, gender, and even the appearance of documents affect whether people are recognized as citizens or labeled as "illegal Bangladeshis." This ties into broader critiques in the field about how legal and administrative systems can reinforce systemic injustice and marginalization, particularly for women and minority groups.

Md Jaynal Abedin (2021) INDIA-BANGLADESH BORDER: AN ANALYSIS OF SECURITY ISSUES

The literature on the India-Bangladesh border (IBB) is extensive. It reflects the complex and ongoing security challenges that have influenced the relationship between the two countries since the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. The border stretches over 4,095 kilometers and includes both land and river sections. It is one of the longest borders in the world and has a dense population, fertile agricultural land, and many enclaves and disputed areas. The historical context of the IBB comes from the quick and often random drawing of boundaries by the British. This led to the division of communities and the creation of enclaves, resulting in ongoing disputes over sovereignty and territorial issues. The formation of Bangladesh as an independent state in 1971, after a violent liberation war with significant Indian involvement, initially created friendly relations. However, these soon worsened due to ongoing border-related problems. Academic and policy literature commonly highlights several major security issues along the IBB. These include border killings, smuggling (especially of cattle and drugs), human trafficking, illegal migration, and occasional terrorist activities. Human rights organizations like Odhikar and MASUM have reported widespread abuses. Between 2000 and 2010, reports show that the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) was involved in the deaths of at least 924 Bangladeshi nationals, often in controversial situations linked to alleged cross-border crimes. These events have led to the IBB being known as one of the world's bloodiest borders, drawing international criticism and straining diplomatic relations. The literature also examines the socio-economic factors contributing to border insecurity. Widespread poverty affects communities on both sides of the border, making local populations vulnerable to recruitment by smuggling networks. These groups take advantage of weak border sections and the complicity of corrupt officials. The West Bengal border alone has 68 corridors and 149 villages often used for illegal activities, showing the scope of the issue. India's construction of a border fence, which spans about 2,500 kilometers with barbed wire and concrete barriers, aims to reduce illegal migration and smuggling. However, scholars and rights groups argue this strategy disrupts traditional livelihoods and social connections. It has also led to more militarization and violence, with the BSF implementing controversial measures such as the shoot-on-sight policy. The literature mostly uses realist frameworks to understand the security dynamics of the IBB. Realism focuses on state sovereignty, power politics, and the chaotic nature of the international system. It helps explain India's assertive border management and its "big brother" role. India's actions are often seen as efforts to maintain regional dominance and protect its borders from perceived threats like unauthorized migration and cross-border terrorism. Bangladesh is highlighted as a strategic point, with its government trying to balance sovereignty concerns with the need to tackle transnational issues together. Despite the emphasis on realist views, the literature also points out the shortcomings of state-focused approaches, especially regarding the human costs of border security measures. The experiences of border communities, who suffer from violence, displacement, and economic hardship, are often overlooked in policy discussions. Scholars call for a deeper understanding that includes human security, cross-border cooperation, and the social realities of the region. Recommendations often include legalizing cattle trade, improving bilateral systems for resolving disputes, and showing greater awareness of the rights and well-being of border residents.

Objectives

1. To study the conventional and non-conventional security issues across India- Bangladesh border, comprising illegal migration, insurgency, cross-border trade etc.
2. To ascertain and study development disparities in borderland areas encompassing infrastructure, education, health and other livelihood issues.
3. To analyze how bilateral agreements and mechanisms, primarily LBA and CBMP, contribute to enhanced border management and cooperation.
4. To suggest a people-oriented policy framework which reconciles national security with inclusive development, human rights and cross-border cooperation.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach to explore the various issues related to the India-Bangladesh border, focusing on security, development, and migration challenges. The study relies on secondary sources, including government reports, academic articles, policy documents, news reports, and historical records to build a clear understanding of the topic. A case study method has been used, with the India-Bangladesh border as the focal point to investigate themes of traditional and non-traditional security, human development, and cross-border cooperation. The research combines thematic and contextual analysis to examine patterns of illegal immigration, human trafficking, and smuggling, along with the socio-political treatment of migrants based on their religious identity. Important policy initiatives like the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) and the Coordinated Border Management Plan (CBMP) are reviewed to assess how they impact border governance and bilateral relations. Through descriptive analysis and critical interpretation of events, policies, and institutional responses, the study aims to identify gaps in current border management practices and suggest ways for inclusive and secure development in border areas.

Historical Context

The formation of Bangladesh, previously known as East Pakistan, was a struggle for a series of historic events that were characterized by the sequence of increasing unhappiness with the oppressive administration of West Pakistan. The Bengali Language Movement in 1950s demanding that Bengali be accepted as a state language was the first indication of the region's need for more autonomy. [Hoque, \(n.d.\)](#) Cyclone Bhola, which struck East Pakistan in November 1970, was one of the deadliest tropical cyclones on record, causing an estimated 300,000 to 500,000 deaths and highlighting the inadequate response by the central government in West Pakistan. This disaster intensified regional grievances and exposed the neglect faced by East Pakistan ([Fritz & Blount, 2007](#)). 1970 elections brought the Awami League under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman that garnered a landslide victory by bagging 167 out of 169 seats assigned to East Pakistan in the National Assembly. Nevertheless, the refusal of the government of West Pakistan to hand over power only added fuel to the fire. The issue which was turning into a dispute between the two parts of Pakistan has now reached its peak in the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, the date of the declaration of independence of Bangladesh being 6th December 1971 and thus the end of its subjugation under West Pakistan. Due to the inability of the West Pakistani government to solve the problem of East Pakistan and the increase of the conflict, a humanitarian crisis occurred and there was a call for intervention. As the condition got worse, India took a very important place in the liberation of East Pakistan. India gave a lot of support to the Mukti Bahini (Liberation Army) and also launched Operation Searchlight so that the local Bengali people would not suffer due to the growing refugee crisis in case of

conflict. The beginning of 1971 is when the Indian armed forces came into action which was very important in the rapid and peaceful end of the conflict. The 1971 War, which was fought by India and its allies on one hand and Pakistan on the other, ended with the surrender of the Pakistani forces in Dhaka on December 16, 1971 ([Hassan, 2000](#)). This action was the key in resolving the nine-month conflict in Bangladesh and obtaining the country's independence. Support from India was thus a military movement as well as diplomatic efforts to gain backing from other countries for the liberation, which ended with the recognition of Bangladesh as an independent nation.

Indo-Bangladesh Border Agreement:

The Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) between India and Bangladesh, which was made in 1974, led to the two countries exchanging the enclaves. The enclaves, that were the small pockets of land, surrounded by the territory, of the other country, were the main cause of administrative and logistical issues for the two nations. The exchange of enclaves was intended to make the international border clearer and to get rid of the complicated issues that were the result of the governance and administration of the enclaves. With this, 111 Indian enclaves were handed over to Bangladesh, which constitute an area of the 17,160.63 acres. At the same time, 51 Bangladeshi enclaves, which cover the area of about 7,110.02 acres, were handed over to India. The exchange of the enclaves was a major move towards the peace as the clear and defined boundaries were thus created and the regions could be governed and administered as well as developed.

Besides that, the LBA has also dealt with the problem of possession of the past which has traditionally been bad for the two countries where they have come to an agreement and thus exchanged territories that were under adverse possession. This exchange was along the lines of approximately 2,777.038 acres of land that were handed over from India to Bangladesh and also approximately 2,267.682 acres of land from Bangladesh to India. The LBA's execution and the swapping of the enclaves and the adverses have profoundly affected the territorial integrity and the diplomatic relations between India and Bangladesh (Land Boundary Agreement, 2011). The accord has been instrumental in building better understanding, partnership, and peaceful cohabitation between the two neighborly countries.

Recent Development:

In recent times, through ongoing discussions and agreements, India and Bangladesh have untiringly endeavored to augment their borderland collaboration for the resolution of the pressing problems and for the reinforcement of mutual security. The Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) can be mentioned as a milestone that enabled the transfer of 162 enclaves to which 111 in India and 51 in Bangladesh affecting approximately 51,000 people. The LBA is the success which directly responded to the problems between the countries that were left after the partition of 1947, thus, the handing over of 17,160 acres of land to Bangladesh and 7,110 acres to India. The agreement not only provided the clear border but also facilitated the situation as it gave voting rights to the inhabitants of the enclaves, who before, due to their living in quiet areas, had been deprived of these rights.

Relying on the result of the LBA, these two states are still holding meetings and are discussing problems that might occur at the border and how to prevent them such as smuggling, undocumented immigration, and trafficking in persons. In 2019, India and Bangladesh have signed a Memorandum of Understanding, that is to say, a Pacto de Concertación, the latter being an instrument that confirms and strengthens the relationship of the States parties to it, the India and Bangladesh signed the Coordinated Border Management Plan (CBMP). The CBMP is a plan that foresees the effort to fight against the actual and continuous presence of cross-border crimes and the implementation of preventive measures such as joint

patrols, intelligence sharing, and setting up of border infrastructure that may facilitate in the reduction of illegal activities at the border. The plan mentions that those who are caught during the handover will be treated well and their freedom will not be violated, thus, this is a confirmation of the respect of the various human rights that the treating party commits itself to respect ([Ministry of Home Affairs, 2025](#)), and on top of that in 2020, India and Bangladesh opened a new Integrated Check Post (ICP) at Dawki, Meghalaya, which was meant to make their trade and immigration processes more efficient. This ICP is a component of an even greater plan that aims at setting up more such posts all along the border, thereby deepening economic relations and making the movement across the border more lawful and easier.

Even though these are very good signs of progress in the bilateral relations, they also expose the difficulties that come with managing a border that is not only porous but also quite dynamic. The issue of illegal migration from Bangladesh is still there, it is just that now it is more hidden and the society and politics are the sources of it. Illegal migration from Bangladesh to India has become a source of controversy again in the last few years. However, it has been gradually taking on a more communal character. It is estimated that more than 15 million immigrant Bangladeshi people are residing in India without a legal permit and a major movement happened after the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War ([Moirangthem & Jha, 2023](#)). Also, the treatment and public perception of these migrants varies by their religious identity.

Muslim migrants out of Bangladesh report to be at the receiving end of sharp criticism and discrimination. Political players and the media have for great lengths reported on what they term “inflow” of Muslims which they present as a threat to national security and to the demographic makeup of some areas. For instance, in the 2019 Indian general election campaign Home Minister of India Amit Shah referred to Bangladeshi Muslim migrants as “termites” which he said would be eliminated. [Thakur, \(2019\)](#). This type of rhetoric has contributed to an increasingly hostile environment for Muslim migrants, who are often associated with terrorism, crime, and illegal activities.

Conversely what we see is that Hindu migrants from Bangladesh do not face the same level of scrutiny. The Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019 which puts forth a case for citizenship for non-Muslims from adjacent countries which includes Bangladesh ([Amnesty International, 2024](#)) also plays into this. The Act which many saw as a piece of legislation which practices religious discrimination did in fact leave out the issue of Muslim migrants. Mainstream media has tended to report on the issue of illegal Hindu migrants less so instead reporting what they present as these people’s case as refugees which they claim are fleeing from religious persecution in Bangladesh.

This issue of different treatment brings out that which religion one practices plays a key role in the public and political discussion of illegal migration in India. What we see is that which laws are applied selectively and media reports which are partial create a setting in which the religious identity of the migrant determines if they are accepted or rejected by Indian society.

RESULTS

Borderland Development: Issues of Border of India-Bangladesh

The border between Bangladesh and India is a complex issue which plays out in many dimensions and which in turn greatly affects the socio economic and political climate of the area. It is more than what we see as a simple division. Due to their strategic setting, history, and the socio-economic conditions of the people living along the frontiers border areas present a different set of problems. These issues are not purely regional in nature; they also play out to affect the security, stability and economic growth of Bangladesh and India as a whole. These issues have been at the heart of border region for a while now in

particular border smuggling, human trafficking and illegal immigration. These are key issues which also affect the growth and wellbeing of border towns and at the same time present a security and stability threat to the area. To foster a safe and prosperous borderland which is of great importance to the better picture of India and Bangladesh' bilateral relations we must identify and put forward solutions to these problems.

(i) Cross-Border Smuggling:

(a) Cattle Smuggling

The regions along the India-Bangladesh border are well-known for smuggling activities involving cattle, gold, drugs, medicines, fish, and eggs. Among these, cattle smuggling is a particularly serious problem. The smuggling network operates with great organization, moving old cattle from several Indian states, including Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, and Orissa. These cattle are collected in local markets, or cattle haats, in Bengal and then smuggled into Bangladesh by well-coordinated groups. The cattle haats are positioned just behind the 3 km line from the International Border, where the Border Security Force has limited authority. This situation allows smuggling gangs to take advantage of gaps in the fencing near villages close to the border. The BSF and these gangs have nightly confrontations, with the gangs using these gaps to transport the cattle across the border. Once in Bangladesh, the cattle are gathered and taken to Customs post pounds, where they are auctioned. Smuggler gangs then buy these cattle back at low prices and repeat the smuggling cycle. (Rammohan, 2011). Allegations have emerged about the involvement of BSF personnel in these operations. The Enforcement Directorate's chargesheet states that BSF officer Md. Enamul Haque were involved in buying seized cattle at low prices and helping with their illegal transport across the border (Krishna, 2024).

Table 1: Number of Cattle Seized

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total number of cattle seized	1,68,801	1,19,299	63,716	77,410	46,809

Source: <https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1703788>

(b) Gold

Gold smuggling along the India-Bangladesh border has increased significantly. The volume of gold seized has gone up, with the South Bengal Frontier confiscating about 114 kilograms in 2022. This amount jumped to around 156 kilograms later on. This trend shows that smuggling networks in the area are growing. Along with gold, the smuggling of fake Indian currency notes (FICN) has also risen. This increase highlights the broader problem of cross-border crime. The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) report shows that a significant 73% of the seized gold was trafficked through Myanmar and Bangladesh (Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, 2022), illustrating the complex international routes used by smuggling groups. The rising seizure statistics highlight the challenges border security forces face in dealing with the increase of smuggled goods. Moreover, according to the India-Bangladesh Border Security Cooperation Report (2024), the value of gold seized in smuggling operations has risen by 50% over the past two years. This trend shows the growing scale of illegal activities in border areas (Singh, 2023). The increased smuggling activities affect the local economy and create serious security concerns.

(c) Drug Smuggling

The smuggling of drugs across the India-Bangladesh border is a major problem, with various substances being trafficked. Phensedyl, a cough syrup that includes codeine phosphate, ephedrine hydrochloride, and promethazine, stands out as a key example. It was originally used for its medicinal benefits, but in Bangladesh, Phensedyl has turned into a common drug of abuse because of its mind-altering effects and the country's ban on alcohol. Smugglers frequently use fake documents and hide the syrup in trucks or buses among other goods to avoid getting caught ([United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime UNODC, 2010](#)). Another pressing issue is the trafficking of Yaba tablets, a synthetic drug known for its stimulant effects. It is often called the "madness drug" or "Nazi speed." As Bangladesh tightens security on traditional smuggling routes from Myanmar, traffickers have shifted to new paths through North Eastern India. These routes involve transporting Yaba from Myanmar through states like Tripura, Mizoram, and Assam into Bangladesh. The Border Security Force (BSF) situated in Tripura has recently made significant seizures, including 13176.240 kg of ganja, 16.000 kg Hemp, and 0.027 kg of Heroin ([Ministry of Home Affairs, 2023](#)). The rise in drug smuggling is worsened by the involvement of organized crime groups and local gangs. This involvement makes it harder to control the trafficking and distribution of these illegal substances.

(ii) Human-Trafficking:

Human trafficking is a major problem along the India-Bangladesh border. Both countries face serious consequences from this illegal activity. A UNICEF report states that around 400 women and children from Bangladesh are trafficked each month. This shows how serious the issue is. In the last ten years, about 300,000 Bangladeshi women and children aged 12 to 30 have been trafficked into India. This highlights the widespread nature of this illegal trade ([United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime UNODC, 2009](#)). Bangladesh is primarily seen as a source and transit country for human trafficking ([United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime UNODC, 2014](#)). A 2008 report showed that Bangladesh and Nepal play major roles in trafficking into India, making up 2.17% and 2.6% of the total, respectively. To highlight the issue further, a report by Justice and Care, along with the Border Security Force (BSF), stated that over 500,000 Bangladeshi women and children aged 12 to 30 were trafficked into India over the last decade. The BSF estimates that between 20,000 and 50,000 women and children are trafficked to India each year. This means about 200,000 women have been trafficked from Bangladesh in the past ten years. This problem worsens due to high poverty levels in Bangladesh. Currently, 27 million people are experiencing extreme poverty, and 31% live in chronic poverty in less developed areas. This situation makes individuals more vulnerable to trafficking ([Requena & Murga, 2022](#)).

(iii) Illegal Immigrants:

Illegal immigration from Bangladesh to India is a significant and complicated issue, with precise numbers hard to find. Assam, in particular, has been greatly impacted by this problem, resulting in the Assam Accord signed between AASU, AAGSP, and the Central and State ([Government Assam Accord, n.d.](#)) on the foreigner problem issue which categorizes immigration into three distinct periods:

- (1) before January 1, 1966, when immigrants were considered Indian citizens.
- (2) between January 1, 1966, and March 25, 1971, when immigrants could be registered as Indians if they met certain conditions; and
- (3) after March 25, 1971, when immigrants are deemed illegal and subject to deportation ([Vora & Kohli, 2023](#)).

Following the release of the final list of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, more than 1.9 million people were identified as illegal migrants. There is a lack of national data on illegal Bangladeshi immigrants ([Punathil, 2024](#)). However, The Railway Protection Force (RPF) has successfully restrained 916 individualities, including 586 Bangladeshi citizens and 318 Rohingya, since 2021, reflecting its sustained commitment to safeguard public security. In June and July 2024 alone, the RPF interdicted 88 Bangladeshi and Rohingya settlers within areas under the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR). Some of these individualities admitted to having entered India immorally and were restrained while traveling by train to destinations similar as Kolkata ([Ministry of Railways, 2025](#)).

Security Concern

For both countries, the security of the border between Bangladesh and India has been a long-standing concern. Security issues are complex and involve both traditional and non-traditional factors due to the specific physical, demographic, and social conditions of this border region. Traditional security issues usually relate to state-centered challenges that threaten national sovereignty, such as military incursions, territorial disputes, and armed conflicts. In contrast, non-traditional security risks are broader and include problems like human trafficking, illegal immigration, cross-border smuggling, and environmental issues that put the stability and well-being of border areas at risk.

Traditional

Traditional security concerns along the India-Bangladesh border focus mainly on threats to national sovereignty and territorial integrity. One major issue is the porous nature of the border, which allows for unauthorized crossings, territorial encroachments, and the movement of insurgent groups. Despite building border fences and increasing surveillance, significant challenges continue. For instance, recent reports indicate that the CPWD and NBCC are working on constructing 13.38 km of border fencing. However, gaps in the fencing still exist, especially in tough terrain and densely populated areas ([Government of Assam International Border Areas, n.d.](#)). Another major concern is the presence of insurgent groups, like the People's Liberation Army (PLA), in the northeastern region of India. Some of these groups use the open border to find refuge in Bangladesh, where they get support and training. The PLA, among others, has historically operated from bases in Bangladesh, carrying out missions in India's northeastern states. This cross-border insurgency is a serious security issue that needs joint counter-insurgency actions and intelligence sharing between India and Bangladesh. In response, both countries have stepped up joint patrols and coordinated actions, especially in areas prone to insurgency. While traditional security issues focus on military and territory, the changing nature of these threats shows the need for ongoing vigilance and flexible strategies.

Non-Traditional

Unlike traditional threats, which often focus on military conflict and territorial disputes, non-traditional threats are more widespread and involve issues like illegal immigration, human trafficking, cross-border smuggling, and organized crime. These challenges, while less directly violent than traditional threats, can destabilize border regions and strain relationships between countries. One of the most urgent non-traditional security concerns is illegal immigration. As mentioned before, the porous border allows for significant illegal movement from Bangladesh into India. The lack of exact figures makes it hard to tackle this issue. However, the Assam Accord and the following implementation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) show how serious the problem is in areas like Assam. Social and political tensions have increased because of perceived changes in demographics. Moreover, the different ways migrants are treated based on their religious identity worsen communal tensions and reveal the socio-political aspects

of this security challenge. Human trafficking is another pressing non-traditional security issue. Border regions in states like West Bengal and Assam have become routes for trafficking networks that take advantage of poverty and weak border control to smuggle women, children, and young men across the border. Reports suggest that hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshi women and children have been trafficked into India over the last decade, creating a regional humanitarian crisis. These trafficking routes often connect with organized crime groups, making them hard to disrupt. Cross-border smuggling also brings serious security risks. The illegal trade in cattle, gold, drugs, and other goods fuels organized crime and harms economic stability in border areas. For example, the BSF and other agencies have noted more seizures of smuggled cattle and gold, showing the extent of this illegal trade. Smuggling networks are complex and have changed to avoid law enforcement actions, creating a lasting threat to both India and Bangladesh. Together, these non-traditional threats require a broad approach that goes beyond standard border security measures. Tackling these problems needs teamwork in law enforcement, socio-economic growth, and regional collaboration. As the border region keeps changing, non-traditional security issues will stay central to discussions about managing the India-Bangladesh border.

DISCUSSION

Recent cross-border structure initiative between India and Bangladesh reflects a strategic shift toward fostering indigenous connectivity, profitable integration, and inclusive development in the borders. The induction of the Maitri Setu ground in 2021, linking Tripura with Bangladesh, stands as a corner achievement in strengthening bilateral ties. By significantly reducing trip time and perfecting availability, the ground not only facilitates trade and transport but also reinforces people to people connections that have long been hindered by restrictive border administrations (Kaur & Singha, 2024). also, the Agartala-Akhaura road link, the first of its kind between India's Northeast and Bangladesh, marks a critical corner in international structure development. Funded concertedly by Indian government bodies and executed through agencies similar as IRCON and Bangladesh Railroads, the design is designed to enhance connectivity, streamline trade routes, and unleash new profitable openings for historically underserved regions ([Ministry of Development of North-East Region, 2023](#)). resemblant to these developments, the reanimation and expansion of border haats informal daily requests set up along the border demonstrate how grassroots profitable enterprise can promote stability and collective benefit. Since the first haat opened in 2011 at Kalaichar in Meghalaya, five similar requests have come functional, with plans for sixteen further ([Taneja et al., 2023](#)). These haats have played a pivotal part in standardizing original trade, creating livelihood openings, and drawing informal dealers, especially women, into the structured frugality. They not only reduce reliance on illegal trade but also serve as platforms for artistic exchange and cooperation among border communities. Together, these initiatives emphasize a growing recognition that border security and development need not be oppositional through sustained investment in structure and people- centric trade mechanisms, the India- Bangladesh border can be converted from a queried space into a zone of collaboration, substance, and collective trust.

Limitations

This study mainly uses secondary data sources, including government reports, academic articles, and media accounts. While these sources are valuable, they may not fully capture the lived experiences in the India-Bangladesh border area. The lack of primary fieldwork, like interviews or surveys with local communities, limits the ability to show the complex human perspectives on border-related issues. Additionally, the research focuses on selected Indian states that border Bangladesh. As a result, it might miss local variations or dynamics happening in other parts of the border. The changing political and diplomatic situation, especially concerning immigration laws and bilateral relations, also means that some

findings could quickly become outdated, so continuous updates are necessary. Finally, the sensitive nature of border security and migration might lead to underreported or biased data, particularly on topics such as human trafficking and religious discrimination.

Future Scope

The future of this study involves expanding research by collecting primary data. This could include interviews with residents living near the border, law enforcement officials, and policymakers. The goal is to gain a clearer picture of how current border management policies affect people's lives.

Further comparison of India's borders with neighboring countries like Nepal, Myanmar, and China may provide valuable insights into different border dynamics and management strategies. Additionally, the roles of new technologies like smart surveillance, integrated border management systems, and digital identity verification deserve focused investigation to understand their effects on security and civil rights. Future studies might also examine the potential of border economic zones (BEZs), educational partnerships, and cross-border health initiatives. These efforts could help turn borders into zones of cooperation instead of conflict. Finally, an approach that combines security studies, development economics, and human rights perspectives could deepen academic discussions and lead to more balanced, people-focused policy frameworks.

CONCLUSION

While tackling security issues is important, we need to go beyond just a security-focused approach when managing the India-Bangladesh border. The border is not simply a dividing line; it is a shared area where people, cultures, and histories come together. Therefore, we need a well-rounded strategy. This strategy should include building strong diplomatic ties, promoting cultural exchange, and supporting economic cooperation to ensure mutual growth and stability.

A key element is diplomatic engagement and building trust. Regular dialogue at different levels of government can prevent misunderstandings and promote cooperation on shared issues, such as border management, trade, and environmental challenges. Diplomatic channels can also reduce tensions from local disputes and illegal activities. Building on this foundation, promoting exchanges between people and cultures can significantly improve bilateral relations. Given the strong cultural and historical ties between India and Bangladesh, supporting cross-border projects in art, literature, festivals, and education can encourage mutual understanding and goodwill. For example, youth exchanges, cultural programs, and cross-border tourism can help bridge divides and strengthen social connections. Economic cooperation is another important part of shifting the focus beyond security concerns. By encouraging trade, investment, and joint ventures, both countries can strengthen local economies and lessen the economic factors that drive illegal activities. Creating special economic zones (SEZs) and integrated development programs along the border can lead to steady growth for both nations. Building infrastructure is also important, not only for security but also for supporting legal movement and improving regional connectivity. Projects like roads and railways, combined with integrated check posts (ICPs), are essential in this regard. Initially launched in 1991 as the Look East policy, this initiative has now become a more proactive Act East strategy. It emphasizes the border's importance in regional geopolitics. Given these economic initiatives, environmental cooperation provides another reason to create a stable border region. India and Bangladesh share important ecosystems. Joint efforts in managing rivers, conserving forests, and adapting to climate

change are essential for long-term regional stability. This teamwork can lower the risks linked to environmental damage, which often worsens border tensions. Educational and research collaborations can strengthen the social and economic fabric of border communities. Creating cross-border institutions or joint academic programs in areas like agriculture, technology, and sustainable development would promote knowledge sharing and support regional growth. These initiatives would also offer local people opportunities that decrease the appeal of illegal activities. Humanitarian cooperation is equally important. Tackling shared issues like natural disasters and health crises through joint disaster management and health programs builds resilience on both sides of the border. By collaborating on these urgent matters, India and Bangladesh can show the real benefits of working together, which will help create a more stable and prosperous region. While security is still a major concern, the development challenges along the India-Bangladesh border need a broader strategy. By focusing on diplomacy, cultural exchange, economic growth, and regional cooperation, both countries can turn the border from a line of division into a bridge of opportunity. As India looks eastward under its Act East policy, adopting this holistic approach will be crucial for achieving lasting peace and prosperity in the area. Moreover, the importance of managing borders goes beyond just physical security. It also affects the social and economic development of border communities. In this context, "human security" becomes vital. Human security means protecting individuals from threats related to their economy, food, health, environment, personal safety, community, and politics. In the India-Bangladesh border area, focusing on human security could lead to more sustainable and inclusive growth. This approach needs a strategy that not only deals with immediate security issues but also tackles the underlying causes of insecurity, like poverty, lack of education, and poor healthcare.

The border region often experiences economic challenges because of its remote location. Historically, these areas have received little attention for infrastructure development and investment. This neglect has resulted in higher poverty rates and lower human development scores compared to other parts of the country. Therefore, targeted economic policies that aim to integrate these border areas into the national and regional economy are essential. For instance, creating cross-border trade hubs can boost economic activity and generate jobs in these regions. These hubs could focus on local products, agriculture, and handicrafts, which are usually the main sources of income for border communities. By providing a market for these goods, we could help lessen the economic gaps that lead to illegal activities. Furthermore, the creation of border economic zones (BEZs) could be a significant step for trade hubs. BEZs would help develop infrastructure that supports security and economic activity, including roads, telecommunications, and energy projects. These zones could attract investment from both public and private sectors, offering incentives for industries vital to regional growth, such as agro-processing, textiles, and tourism. By focusing on sustainable industries, BEZs could bring long-term economic stability to border regions. This would make them less dependent on illegal trade and more connected to the legal economy. Education is another important area that can help develop the border region. Cross-border educational programs, like student exchange initiatives, joint research projects, and shared institutions, can create a sense of common identity and mutual respect between the two countries. These educational exchanges can also reduce stereotypes and build a more informed and empathetic population that values cooperation instead of conflict. Additionally, investing in local education resources, such as schools and vocational training centers, would equip young people in border communities with the skills necessary to take part in the regional economy. This investment can also lower their risk of exploitation by criminal organizations.

Health security is important in border regions, where access to quality healthcare is often limited. Joint healthcare initiatives, like mobile clinics, telemedicine, and cross-border health programs, can meet the healthcare needs of these communities. The spread of communicable diseases across borders, such as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, and more recently, COVID-19, highlights the need for coordinated health responses. By setting up a strong cross-border health surveillance and response system, both countries can lower the risks of disease outbreaks and protect the health of their border populations. Additionally, health education campaigns that focus on preventive care can help reduce the incidence of diseases and promote healthier communities.

Environmental sustainability is an important part of development that needs attention in the border regions. The shared ecosystems between India and Bangladesh, including the Sundarbans, rivers like the Ganges and Brahmaputra, and the mangrove forests, are vital for the ecological balance of the area. Working together on environmental conservation, such as reforestation projects, sustainable farming practices, and water management initiatives, can help protect these ecosystems. Both countries also face the threat of climate change, which can increase environmental damage and lead to natural disasters like floods and cyclones. Collaborative disaster management strategies, such as early warning systems, joint relief efforts, and stronger infrastructure, are crucial for reducing the impact of these disasters on border communities.

Cultural diplomacy plays a significant role in overcoming security concerns. Cultural exchanges, like art exhibitions, music festivals, and literary collaborations, can promote mutual understanding and respect between the people of India and Bangladesh. These interactions can also showcase the shared heritage of both countries, which is often hidden by political and security issues. By encouraging cultural diplomacy, both nations can create stronger ties between their people. These connections are vital for long-term peace and stability. Additionally, promoting cross-border tourism can both boost the economy and facilitate cultural exchange. Shared cultural and historical sites, such as temples, mosques, and colonial-era landmarks, can draw tourists from both sides of the border. This, in turn, can support economic growth and foster cultural appreciation. And lastly, we cannot overlook the role of civil society in border management. Civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can serve as mediators and facilitators in cross-border cooperation. They help connect government policies with the needs of local communities. These organizations can advocate for the rights and interests of border populations, making sure that development initiatives are inclusive and fair. CSOs can also play a key role in monitoring human rights issues, providing humanitarian aid, and supporting conflict resolution efforts in the border regions. By involving civil society in the development process, both India and Bangladesh can make their border policies more responsive to the needs of the people living in these areas.

Conflict Of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author is extremely thankful to Dr. Khalid Ansari, Faculty, Centre for Federal Studies, Jamia Hamdard for his invaluable help and academic assistance at various stages of the preparation of this paper. Thanks, are also due the academics, journalists, and organizations whose work and insights have fueled the research. The author also thanks the Beneficial comments from the editors of the Journal.

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