

A STUDY ON BORDER MANAGEMENT AND ITS IMPORTANCE OF SECURITY IN BORDER MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: *This article endeavours to provide an extensive understanding of the circumstances that have sculptured India's perspective towards its international boundary with Bangladesh and the framework it has developed to better manage its borders. Securing the nation's boundary against hostile interests and putting in place mechanisms that would enable deterring such elements while facilitating legitimate trade and commerce are among the principal objectives of border management. India and Bangladesh share a common boundary, which has been a site of cross-border trade and commerce for centuries. Over the years, both nations have made significant efforts to enhance their trade relationship, which has been reflected in the growing volume of bilateral trade. In this article, we will analyse the current state of trade and commerce between India and Bangladesh, with a focus on the cross-border interactions that exist along the India-Bangladesh border. This article concentrates on various factors and prospects of effective Border Management and the importance of security in border management. The study tries to analyse the security issues in border management at the India-Bangladesh border and the prospects of bilateral trade after adopting remedial measures based on the recommendations in the study*

Keywords: *International Boundary, Border Management, Indo-Bangladesh Border, Trade & Commerce, Bilateral Trade.*

1. Introduction:

India's border management is an integral part of the country's security and commerce. India shares land borders with countries- Pakistan, Bangladesh, China, Nepal, Bhutan, and Myanmar. The India-Bangladesh international boundary passes across the States of West Bengal (2,216.7 km), Assam (263 km), Meghalaya (443 km), Tripura (856 km) and Mizoram (318 km). The 'India-Bangladesh International Boundary' is the longest land border that India shares among its neighbours. It covers a length of 4,096.7 kilometres abutting five out of six Bangladeshi divisions. The Indo-Bangladesh border is also a unique border because of its history of origin and creation. India's land borders in general and Indo-Bangladesh border in particular is a different kind in nature whereas peoples of both sides of the border are similar in nature, similar by their socio-cultural and religious practices/matters with very strong family and even marital relationships but only divided by a political boundary. The entire boundary line comprises plains, riverine belts, marshes, hills, and thick jungles with hardly any natural geographical obstacles. The border area is highly populated and lands are generally cultivated right up to the border on both sides. The entire border region is characterized by high levels of porosity and curbing illegal cross-

border activities through such borders is a major challenge. The main problems are illegal migration from Bangladesh into India and cattle smuggling from India to Bangladesh. Despite these trans-border crimes, aiding illegal immigrants/ infiltrations, illegal trade and river water disputes (Teesta River water sharing) Bangladesh occupies a key place in India's Neighbourhood First policy. India's links with Bangladesh are civilizational, cultural, social and economic. Based on the information available in the public domain, so far India has exported almost \$16.15 billion in FY-2022. There has been an increase of almost 66% from \$9.69 billion in the previous year, and this means Bangladesh is the fourth largest destination for India's exports.

2. Objective of the study:

The objective of the study is to scrutinize factors affecting Border Management and its limitations, the impact of limitations, security issues, challenges and recommendations for overcoming the complications for an effective Border Management strategy.

The main objective of the study is to analyse the various aspects of effective border management in the India–Bangladesh border and the importance of security at the border areas.

To ascertain reformative measures to encourage bilateral trade and local production for the prosperity of border people and to minimize trans-border crimes and illegal activity in the border belt.

3. Methodology:

The research article discusses the various factors and prospects of the current state of bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh. The study attempts to explore the importance of security along with the possibilities and extent of improvement of bilateral trade and commerce at the border areas between the two countries.

The secondary data is collected from various related articles, websites and available data in the public domain along with the news report and related journals. The primary data is derived from the experience of personnel, interviews, discussions with the border population like local traders from border areas etc. The study is descriptive in nature and based on the aforementioned primary and secondary data sources.

4. Interpretation & Discussion

• India-Bangladesh Economic Ties:

Geographical contiguity and kindred socio cultural factors of Bangladesh to India have made Bangladesh one of the largest trading partners. Bangladesh is the 6th largest trade partner of India. Bangladesh is being provided with the duty free quota- free access on all tariff lines except Alcohol and Tobacco products under South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) since 2011. The bilateral trade between the two countries has jumped to USD 18.2 billion in 2021-22 as compared to USD 10.8 billion in 2020-21. The India–Bangladesh border Hats, a Haat or trading post on the Indo-Bangladesh Border 'a rough-and-ready market' allowing local people of both sides to trade in locally-grown agricultural and manufactured items along the border. Currently, there are five border Haats being organised and run along the India-Bangladesh border. It is not only a market

for locals for purchasing daily commodities but also a reunion spot for families living on both sides of the international border. India and Bangladesh have sanctioned the establishment of six more border Haats. Prospects for establishing a few more Haats are being considered.

- **Current State of Bilateral Trade:**

The trajectory of Indo-Bangladesh bilateral trade shows how the two countries have accrued mutual benefits due to close bilateral ties between the two countries. In recent years, bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh has shown significant growth. According to data from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, India's exports to Bangladesh have increased by 15.6% in 2020-21, while Bangladesh's exports to India have increased by 6.9% in the same period. Bangladesh mainly exports to India readymade garments, jute and jute-processed products, leather-processed products, plastic products, fish, soft drinks, copper and edible oil. It imports rice, raw cotton, onion, motor vehicles, boilers, machinery, milk, dairy products, electronic products and iron.

There is still huge potential to increase the trade volume. In the first seven months of FY22, exports to Bangladesh grew 81% over the same period in the preceding year to \$7.7 billion. This makes it India's fourth-largest export market behind the US, the UAE and China. Bangladesh is India's biggest trade partner in South Asia and India is the second biggest trade partner of Bangladesh. Exports from Bangladesh have tripled over the last decade to cross \$1 billion in 2018-19. In FY 2019-20, Indian exports to Bangladesh were \$8.2 billion and imports were \$1.26 billion. According to a Business Standard news report published on December 23, 2022, on the topic "*India-Bangladesh: Other issues that were discussed were the removal of non-tariff barriers and the re-opening of border haats*", cited that a joint feasibility study on a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) was carried out after the two countries agreed to develop a free trade agreement (FTA) soon to significantly reduce or eliminate customs duties on maximum numbers of goods traded between them. Besides, easing norms for promoting trade in services and attracting investments.

- **Cross-Border Trade and Commerce:**

Cross-border trade and commerce between India and Bangladesh take place through several land ports and river routes. Some of the major land ports include Petrapole-Benapole, Dawki-Tamabil, and Agartala-Akhaura. River trade takes place through the riverine routes of the Brahmaputra and the Ganges. In recent years, the Indian and Bangladeshi governments have taken several measures to streamline cross-border trade, such as simplifying customs procedures, reducing unnecessary delays, and providing infrastructure support.

Proper management on the country's Eastern border is equally important for national security as Western theatre. There are so many challenges being experienced like coordination between sister agencies, administrative & diplomatic issues, intelligence etc. The security

agencies are facing hardship in upholding harmony on the border due to the involvement of the border population in various types of smuggling activities/ trans-border crimes to meet their needs for day-to-day life. Unemployment, poverty, and pathetic living conditions due to limited avenues of health, education, economics etc. are the main reasons. In many areas electricity and road connectivity are still not available. Therefore, they are indulged in smuggling to earn for their day-to-day life.

Local bodies should look into improving their livelihood by generating employment/basic needs by developing infrastructures, upgrading education and medical facilities etc. in bordering areas. Moreover, by establishing processing units of crops like pineapples, paddy, Jutes& vegetables etc., establishing more Haats/markets on the border, using/ educating modern technology in fishing and agriculture, handcrafts of bamboo, full use of natural resources etc. so that bordering people may get beneficial and turn into mainstream.

- **Border Management:**

Underdeveloped border areas leave the fringe population deprived of basic amenities such as basic infrastructure, communication, market, education etc. Securing borders against hostile interests to the country and at the same time putting in place systems that can prohibit such elements while motivating genuine trade and commerce are the principles of effective border management. Currently, most of the areas of the Indo-Bangladesh border are underdeveloped in terms of communication and infrastructure.

- The border is porous and people residing on both sides have similar language, customs, and cultures that are fairly compatible. This encourages the involvement of border people in petty trans-border crimes.
- Though various developmental projects, justified from both development and security points of view, have been undertaken by the Government, still extended hands of development schemes find it difficult to reach border areas and fringe populations as civil administration's approach is constricted in border areas.
- Where the BSF is the only agency that is located and deployed in border areas all the time – 24 X 7. The benefits of development schemes that are well planned and chalked out for the development of the border areas and border people, if religiously and systematically reach the end-users then border management will be considered successful.

Limitations:

Though the Government has undertaken numerous development projects, still there are many aspects that limit the ambits of such development programmes and projects such as local crimes, involvement of youth in trans-border crimes, non-availability of employment, involvement

in trivial crimes like smuggling of cattle and other household items for earning easy money, lack of proper policy on trade, etc.

Impacts of limitations:

Due to the non-availability of employment, the youths of bordering areas tend to lean on smuggling and petty trans-border crimes to earn easy money. Which eventually affects the market and socioeconomic status of border areas? Mass involvement of border people in trans-border crime and smuggling apparently affects the legal trades and is a major cause of loss of revenue and unorganised retail market in border areas. The involvement of local youths in trans-border crimes also invites a potential threat to the security of the country with which anti-national elements may venture into the country.

- **Recommendations for overcoming limitations:**

- **Empowering the BSF:** The delegation of more powers to the Border Security Force is essential in view of circumstances like the terrain, population composition, and crime pattern besides the low presence, limited accessibility and effectiveness of other State security agencies in border areas. The circumstances varying with area based on topography and demographic profile. Since the BSF is present and deployed throughout the border, it is of utmost requirement that empowering the BSF is necessary in view of security and effective border management.

- **Modernisation of BSF:** The efforts to induct technology in border guarding have yielded limited results but are insufficient to match with the requirements. The knowledge of the latest technological gadgets among the troops is still lacking. New technologies also bring new opportunities for criminals. In the present era, criminals and smugglers gain considerable benefits from exploiting new technologies. As such an extensive modernization of BSF is needed to ensure optimum utilization of force-multipliers. Such technical gadgets should be focused on amplifying the efficiency of these forces by improving working conditions by reducing stress on overstretched troops.

- **Synergy with sister agencies:** As the BSF is an executive department, not an investigating agency, there should be synergy between the BSF, State Civil and police agencies, Customs and other law enforcement agencies along the borders for effective border management of the border necessary for intelligence sharing, carrying out joint operations, early disposal of cases and implementing development schemes for bordering areas.

Setting up of Police Stations and customs offices in the near vicinity of the border to ensure early disposal of cases.

- **Non-Lethal Strategy:** Crime on the eastern borders such as cattle smuggling, other petty smuggling and illegal & inadvertent crossing the border are everyday matters. BSF was under the adverse target of human rights activists in India and Bangladesh, every incident of firing by BSF

was termed as excessive use of force and a violation of human rights. In the year 2011, India and Bangladesh signed a series of agreements to manage borders in which in the month of March 2011, an agreement on the non-use of lethal weapons by BSF was signed for abbreviating cases of killing incidents along the border. From the beginning of the last decade, BSF also has taken some significant measures on its own to address this issue of killing by implementing "non-lethal or rather less-lethal tactics" since the beginning of the last decade.

In this context, it is also to be acknowledged that a BSF patrol party comprise of two to three personnel faces a life-threatening situation while facing hordes of cattle smugglers or miscreants armed with sharp weapons who would not hesitate to attack the patrolling party. As such, BSF personnel are sometimes compelled to fire lethal weapons following their right of private defence.

- **Framing of Policies:** To control the unorganised market and revenue loss due to illegal trade, a clear, well-researched trade policy is to be chalked out and implemented for easing cross-border trade in the India-Bangladesh border without compromising any border security issues and arrangements. Amendments in existing policy to be undertaken to facilitate, and encourage legal trade including local produce by reducing any sort of complications.

Impacts after overcoming limitations:

Once the border is safe with effective border domination, trade policies are simplified and aimed to encourage legal cross-border trade, stabilized and organised market on both sides after strict implementation of policies of both countries, trade can be planned in two countries without compromising the security.

- **Recommendations for curbing trans-border crimes & Encourage local markets:**
 - **More Border Haats (Rural market):** Establishment of more border Haats to promote and encourage local produce, farmers, producers and markets. Border Haats play an important role in remote border areas. It is not just a marketplace where people are selling and buying local produced and essential items, it also has cast a positive impact on the standards of living of the local people by providing opportunities for income generation and growth for them. With limited access to a 1 Km belt (500 Mtr on both sides) and with a limit of 500 people. These Haats will play an important role in awakening the local markets and locally produced commodities without compromising the security of the country.
 - **Revision of the auction rates:** Cattle trade in border areas is the biggest issue where smuggling of cattle is rampant all along the India-Bangladesh border. Due to proper market and lack of reforms, profit margin falls for the locals. Local people, for earning easy money, tend to lean on the illegal cattle trade and smuggling. For instance, the average value of one cattle in India is Rs. 50000/-(approx.) whereas the auction rate for one cattle is Rs 12500/- in India and the approximate rate of the same cattle in Bangladesh is 1,20,000/- Tk (Equivalent to Rs 1 lac).

As such, a smuggling syndicate has chance of minimum 4 attempts to get a handsome profit from the trade of cattle smuggling. After the failed attempts and seizure of cattle, the same syndicate purchase the cattle from the auction at the prescribed auction rates and tries to smuggle again. The difference between rates are so high that even after failing in multiple attempts, the syndicate still have margin of profit after re-purchasing from the auction at the reduced rates and smuggling of the same cattle.

Value→ Attempt ↓	In India (Rs)	In Bangladesh(Tk) (Equivalent value)	Profit in Rs.	% of Profit
First	50000	1,00,000	50000	100%
Second	62,500	1,00,000	37,500	75%
Third	75000	1,00,000	25,000	50%
Fourth	87500	1,00,000	12,500	25%
Fifth	1,00,000	1,00,000	00	00

The fixed/ reduced rate of cattle encourages smugglers to continue and involve in cattle smuggling even after failing multiple times. It is necessary that these issues required to be well thought out and policy needs to be formulated to set the revised auction rate for the seized cattle from cattle smuggling.

- **Security issues:**

The India-Bangladesh border is probably one of the most complex borders in the world. The long stretch of this border has been a hub for illegal immigration, human trafficking, cattle smuggling, drug smuggling, gold, weapons and essential supplies in the last three decades. Comparative census figures show that the population of six border districts of West Bengal has changed dramatically due to illegal immigration which is also a grave security concern. This also causes a change in border areas in terms of demography. The insurgents of North-East were also benefited from their cross-border connections. Earlier Bangladesh was a safe haven to several insurgent groups active in Northeast India, such as the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) etc., from where several of their top leaders operated for a long time. The positioning of Bangladesh is such that it is surrounded three sides by India and one side by the sea. Further, it makes a chicken neck with India which is a strategically important region that also shares border with Nepal and Bhutan. This narrow stretch measures approximately 170x60 Km, and at its narrowest, approximately 20–22 Km is of extraordinary geopolitical importance as an important link connecting the north-east with the rest of the country by major national highways, rail lines, pipelines, optical fibers and much more.

- **Managing the border and the importance of Security**

Border management is not just deploying border guarding forces on the border. Managing such a porous border, by maintaining the interests of both parties and encouraging legal cross-border trade, where citizens of both sides live and farm in large numbers right up to the boundary line is still a challenge for effective border management. Unorganised market in border areas

“Good border management, therefore, serves a dual purpose, helping to balance States’ interests in both facilitating cross-border movements and maintaining security. Achieving this balance depends upon border management policies and interventions focused on four areas of work: 1) Identity management, 2) Border Management Information Systems (BMIS), 3) Integrated Border Management (IBM) 1 and 4) Humanitarian Border Management (HBM)”

(Source: https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1486/files/our_work/ODG/GCM/IOM-Thematic-Paper-Border-Management.pdf)

Some of the current major issues of concern that may deteriorate the bilateral trade & relationship between India and Bangladesh and also matters of concern for the national security of India.

- Illegal immigration from Bangladesh to India, which includes both refugees and economic migrants, continues unabated.

The massive influx of such migrants across the border has created serious socio-political problems with grave implications for the people's wealth and national security of the Indian states bordering Bangladesh. The issue would be more complicated with Rohingya refugees, originally from Myanmar, will start infiltrating India through Bangladesh.

- There are constant incidents of drug, fake currency, gold and cattle smuggling at the border along with many cases of human trafficking, especially of children and women have been observed in previous decades.
- There is always a possibility of terrorists infiltrating the border. A number of outfits are trying to spread their tentacles across India, such as Jamaat-ulMujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). In the last year, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) apprehended at least 6 JMB outfits and a charge sheet was filed in a special court in Bhopal.

(Source: <https://www.nia.gov.in/case-detail.htm?441>)

The limited resources are available to fulfil the requirement of basic amenities and facilities of the people. The poverty and unemployment with non-availability of other avenues to earn their livelihood and further the option to earn easy money from smuggling push the locals for getting involved in these border crimes. These attributes contributed in the growth of border crimes with the increase in fundamentalism and radicalism in border areas in the last decade.

- Border violence by border-guarding forces refers to the exchange of fire on the border by Border-Guarding Forces, and the detention and torture of civilians from one country by the other country's border guards.

According to the memorandum of understanding and related agreements signed between India and Bangladesh, if the citizens of any of these two countries illegally cross the border, though it will be considered a crime but the civilians have to be tried by the civil authorities of the country as per the existing law.

Though BSF troops are instructed to exercise restraint and emphasise on use of non-lethal strategy. It is noticed that smugglers and miscreants, when prevented from smuggling and border crimes use lethal force against BSF troops with the intention to kill or harm troops. In recent times, it has been observed that the miscreants in border areas formed groups and violently attacked the BSF personnel with sharp weapons and instigated the villagers to surround the BSF troops to cause harm. Only in such life-threatening situations, the personnel have to use lethal force in order to protect themselves in self-defence.

- **Challenges and Opportunities:**

Despite the efforts made by both governments, cross-border trade and commerce between India and Bangladesh still face several challenges. These include issues related to connectivity, border management, and customs procedures. On the other hand, the development of cross-border trade and commerce provides several opportunities for both nations. For example, it can boost economic growth, create new job opportunities, and increase regional integration.

- More local border Haats need to be considered for people on both sides which will provide legal, formal and local arrangements of trade between local communities of the two countries for locally grown crops, vegetables and provincially made items which presently have limited access to large markets due to long distance and customs restrictions.

- People on both sides of the international boundary are engaged in Cattle smuggling, it is an easymoney-makingtrade. The majority in Bangladesh prefer to eat beef and the rates of cattle are three to four times than prices in India. Local estimates say the cost of a cow jumps from Rs 50,000 to Rs 1,00,000(up to 1,50,000 in festive times) after it crosses the border which remains a big incentive for them to indulge in cattle smuggling.

“BSF’s shoot-to-kill policy can’t stop Bangladesh cow traffickers. Trade legalisation must”

“The Hynniewtrep Integrated Territorial Organization, an ethnic-nationalist political organisation in Meghalaya, has been demanding the legalisation of cattle exports to Bangladesh, arguing both the state government and local communities would benefit.”

*(Quoted in a Report published in The Print news on 8 February, 2023)
(theprint.in/opinion/bsfs-shoot-to-kill-policy-cant-stop-bangladesh-cow-traffickers-trade-legalisation-must/1361555/)*

According to some experts, the ban on cow slaughter in many Indian states has made enough animals available for smuggling in one way or another. On the other hand, preventive actions by BSF could be lethal for those smugglers and thus make things worse for such illegal trade and bilateral relationships between the two countries. In such a way the concept of legalizing this trade comes into place which is presently being advocated by some scholars.

Bangladesh is not only an important part of the "Neighbourhood First Policy", but also essential to India's "Act East Policy", which is aimed to bolster ties between India and Southeast Asia. The significance of India's relationship with Bangladesh in view of security and bilateral trade from the perspective of India's "Act East policy" is immense. Efforts to improve capacity across waterways, roadways and railways have been undertaken under the policy in the last couple of years. Under the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWT&T) North-Eastern states of India are being connected with eastern parts of India through river Brahmaputra (NW-2) and river Barak (NW-16), Ganga-Bhagirathi-Hooghli river system (NW-1) and via Sundarbans (NW-97). India is also assisting Bangladesh in exploring the feasibility of waterways for intra and inter-border connectivity of Bangladesh. Moreover, Bangladesh's offer to use the Chittagong and Mongla ports for the movement of goods from India will also strengthen India's "Act East Policy".

The geopolitical significance of India-Bangladesh relations which will visibly impact the areas in the near future are:

- A friendly Bangladesh would never let their soil be used for anti-Indian activities and their action resulted in the arrest of insurgent leaders of ULFA and NDFB in the recent past.
- Bangladesh is a crucial and strong link for the success of India's "Act East Policy". It would act as a bridge for building economic and political affinity with countries of South-East Asia and beyond.
- The North-Eastern states of India are only connected through the "Chickens Neck" which greatly increases the travel time. Traders have to travel more than 1600 Km from Agartala to Kolkata to access and use Kolkata port. Bangladesh's offer to use the Chittagong port will reduce travel time and distance to a great extent. Now traders can travel less than 600 Km to reach the Chittagong port via sea route. Transit agreement with Bangladesh will propel socio-economic development and integration of North-East India.

(India-Bangladesh Ties: How Chittagong Port Will Strengthen 'Act East' Policy—The Quint, 3 May, 2022)

(www.thequint.com/voices/opinion/india-bangladesh-ties-how-chittagong-port-will-strengthen-act-east-policy)

5. Conclusion:

From having similar historical, social, and cultural affinities co-acting towards fulfilling common interests, India-Bangladesh ties have always been marked by the salient values of openness, mutual trust, cooperation, and mutual respect. In conclusion, the trade and commerce relationship between India and Bangladesh is growing, with cross-border interactions playing a significant role. While challenges still need to be addressed, the potential benefits of enhanced trade and commerce between the two nations are immense. As such, both governments should continue to work together to create a more conducive environment for cross-border trade and commerce and to reap the full benefits of this relationship. For promoting trade steps should be taken by both Governments to encourage investments from investors and work together for economic cooperation along with managing borders effectively. Measures are to be taken to minimize tariffs and facilitate trade through airways, waterways, railways and roadways. The building of modern infrastructure and connectivity up to the border belt on both sides will help bilateral trade and encourage and facilitate locals and border populations to turn away from smuggling and border-related illegal activities, in the long run, to bring prosperity to both countries.

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