

Bangladesh-India Land Border Odds and Measures to Way Forward

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Abstract

Bangladesh and India share one of the most porous borders in the world. The faulty demarcation of the border was addressed since the independence of Bangladesh, and with the elapse of time a lot of progress is made to solve many border related issues. At the same time some odd happenings along the border are putting the management in challenge like informal trade; drug, arms and human trafficking; killing of Bangladeshi citizens etc. To address the situation many measures have already been taken by both the countries unilaterally as well as unitedly, and outcome is also positive. On the contrary, certain hypothetical understanding on migration and cross border terrorism at times act as barrier to make joint decision for both the countries and hinder the upliftment of the deprived bordering area people. The present research attempts to find out the better border management measures. To accomplish this study, focus group discussion, interviews and survey method have been applied for collecting data. Total sample size is 176. Creation of job opportunities, use of non-lethal weapons, restriction on drug production, simplification of visa system with modification on some minor issues are very much essential for better border management. Hence, policy and decision makers' research-based concept, wisdom and sympathetic consideration of eradication of odds likely to be the appropriate measures in this regard.

Keywords: Porous border, Informal trade, Border management, Migration, Remittance

1. Introduction

The two neighbouring countries Bangladesh and India have a shared history, common heritage, linguistic and cultural bonding. Both the countries have a familiar record of struggle for freedom and liberation. These commonalities could not overcome the long inherited problem of border issues – one of the most contentious troubles afflicting the bilateral relations. The border relations and associated crimes of both the countries are multidimensional and shaped by dynamics of internal politics. Bangladesh shares 4156 kilometres (km) border with India (Border Guard Bangladesh Headquarters, 2018) out of which approximately 4096 km are land border and that is one of the most porous borders in the world. Bangladesh inherited faulty border with India, which was hurriedly drawn under the overall plan of Lord Mountbatten. During the Pakistan era in 1958, a treaty was signed which is known as Nehru-Noon Agreement to resolve the issue of disputed border though could not be implemented. In 1974, Mujib-Indira Agreement was signed to solve all border related issues between Bangladesh and India, which took 41 years to be ratified by Indian parliament. However, after having

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continuous effort a lot of progress is made to solve many border related issues. Exchange of enclaves, adversely possessed land, dispute of land demarcation are apparently negotiated and implemented by both the countries but yet to systematize the difficulties of border management. Some odd happenings along the border put the management in challenge like informal trade/smuggling, drug, arms and human trafficking, killing and torturing of Bangladeshi citizens etc.

To soothe the situation many measures have already been taken by both the countries unilaterally as well as unitedly. The joint and integrated border management policy has brought better results where both the countries coherent and calibrated response is reflected. Success bloomed after implementation of some decisions taken especially unitedly by both the countries like exchange of enclaves. Increase of Border Outpost (BOP), erection of barbed wire fence, using modern gadgets, well equipped patrol vehicles, movement identifying floodlights may not bring the desired result of border management unless the basic needs of the locals are met. Odds of the border are to be addressed with sympathy, finding the genesis and present problems. Arrangements of fulfilling basic needs of the bordering people to get top priority to maintain peaceful border. Creation of job opportunities, use of non-lethal weapons by BSF, restriction on drug production, simplification of visa system, providing scope to maintain centuries long familial relations across the border with some minor issues' sympathetic attention are very much essential. Bangladeshi citizens' possibility of seeking migration to India and illegal border crossing affecting the Indian demographic pattern at times seems to be a hypothetical understanding. Bangladesh hosts huge number of Indian circular migrants which is reflected by Indian's annual remittance earning from Bangladesh that amounts to 8.32 billion as per the statistics of 2016 (Bangladesh GDP, 2016). Hence, policy and wisdom of the decision makers in eradicating the odds based on research may play the appropriate role. The objective of the research is to ascertain Bangladesh – India land border management challenges and explore a way out for better management.

2. Literature Review

There is no dearth of literatures on Bangladesh-India land border predicament, issues, concern, management, etc. However, dimensions are different and not exactly addressed the intended objectives. Authors' perspectives are different from each other. Premeditated questions are also not adequately answered, which lead to the birth of a new research. Some related literatures are reviewed below:

The research paper titled "Indo-Bangladesh Informal Trade Nexus: India's Security Predicament" (Chakraborty, 2009) deals with the illegal trade along the Bangladesh-India border, migration, politico-security aspect, porous border and Indo-Bangladesh relations. The paper also mentions about the socio-economic condition of the bordering people and role of the BSF. The author of the paper emphasises on the infrastructural development in the bordering area and having better ties concerning formal and informal trade relations. However, the paper does not cover management system of few burning issues of present time like land dispute, border

fencing, incidents of killing by BSF.

Das (2011) has also done an elaborate research titled “Securing India’s Borders: Challenges and Policy Options”. In his research, the writer discussed about the historical evolution of the border security system, military protection options of the borders, border area development programme, peacetime border security and border policing. The researcher also argued about fencing and flood lighting of borders. The author also deliberately talked about border-guarding forces. However, the author has not mentioned about the cross border illegal activities, smuggling, land dispute and incidents of killing by BSF. The author has also not concluded with any solution leading to appropriate border management.

An edited volume titled “Four Decades of India Bangladesh Relations: Historical Imperatives and Future Direction” (Pattanaik et. al., 2012) addressed perspectives from Bangladesh and India on various important issues of bilateral cooperation. The book has thirteen chapters on major bilateral issues and nine annexes. The authors have dealt not only with problems but also have suggested various measures to take the bilateral relations forward. However, only five chapters are related with Bangladesh-India Border and written by five different authors. None of the researches addressed the issue of Bangladesh – India border management aptly.

Some chapters on border problems are included in an edited book titled “Bangladesh – India Dialogue: Vision of Young Leaders” (Sobhan et al., 2006). The book contains eight different chapters written by seven writers. The edited chapters reflect vivid differences in style, approach and perceptions of various authors.

Border management, as a concept, has evolved over time and is no more confined to merely policing of the border. Traditionally, most of the literatures attempted to analyse the border problems between the two countries based on the narrow interpretation of border management. These literatures often recommended more stringent controlling measures or an early resolution of the border disputes as a way forward to achieve amity. Analysts tend to view specific border issues in isolation, resulting in a fragmented perspective of problems arising out of poor border management. Therefore, this study is designed to address the better border management measures to fill these voids.

3. Methodology

Analytical, historical and case study methods have been used for the research. Textual scrutiny of both primary and secondary sources of related information to arrive at deductive explanation has been the main focus of the paper. Source materials like the Government documents/reports in the public domain have been comprehensively used for the study. Editorials and news of leading dailies have also been consulted and incorporated appropriately. In addition, all relevant books found available have been consulted. While undertaking research, maximum use of the Internet has also been made to access sources of information.

Interviews with personnel of border securing agencies and people from different strata

of bordering area have also been incorporated for bringing a perspective of the ground realities to complement the secondary source materials and add importance to the research output. In addition, discussions and consultations with the officials of Foreign and Home Ministries have been incalculably beneficial for understanding and synthesising the perspective of the border management. Impressions and first-hand knowledge gained through visits to the bordering area have facilitated further comprehension of the ground realities and problems in management of the Bangladesh – India border.

A multiple instrumental approaches have been adopted for this study. Primary data are collected through questionnaire, Semi-structured Interview (SI), Key Informant Interview (KII) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guidelines. The selected areas were four bordering Upazilas of four districts of Bangladesh namely Meherpur Upazila of Meherpur district, Chaugachha Upazila of Jessore district, Chuadanga Upazila of Chuadanga district and Daulatpur Upazila of Kustia district. The populations of this study are: locals involved in smuggling directly or indirectly, the community members of the area, the community leaders (Chairman and Members of Union Parishad), members of Boarder Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and Police, teachers of colleges and schools, businessmen (Business based on both Bangladeshi and Indian goods).

The sample categories are:

A total number of eight smugglers were selected conveniently for conducting SI. Four smugglers from each Upazila agreed for SI with the precondition to remain anonymous. SI was conducted in two groups (four members in each group).

A total number of 80 community members were selected randomly for conducting FGD. Specifically 20 community members were selected from each Upazila in two groups (10 members in each group).

A total number of 16 community leaders (Chairman and Members of Union Parishad) were selected purposively from selected Upazilas (One Chairman and three members from each Upazila).

A total number of eight members of BGB and Police were selected purposively from selected Upazilas (One BGB officer and Officer in charge/one Sub Inspector of police from each Upazila) to collect their opinion through in-depth interview.

A total number of 40 college and school teachers were selected randomly from selected Upazilas (10 teachers from each Upazila consisting both from college and school) for conducting FGD to collect their opinion.

A total number of 16 businessmen were selected randomly from selected Upazilas (eight businessmen from each Upazilas) for conducting FGD to collect their opinion.

The survey findings are incorporated in the study to recommend likely way out.

4. Odds in the Border

Bangladesh is surrounded by India from three sides with 4096 km land border which is improperly managed. The following figure 1 shows the border area between two countries:



Figure 1: "Map Showing the Border Area between Bangladesh and India"

Source: <http://0.tqn.com/d/geography/1/0/w/bg-150.gif>, accessed on 14 August 2013.

The entire area consists of plain, riverain, hilly, jungle and without any major natural obstacles. The area is also heavily populated, and the people of both the sides use almost each inch of bordering area land in different form. Peoples' language and culture of both the countries along the border are indistinguishable and difficult to be differentiated. The porous and complicity of border area vis-à-vis poverty, necessity and illiteracy of the people make a very difficult proposition for management. Radcliffe's irrational and faulty demarcation further vitiated the century's long relations of bordering area people by manmade fence. Poverty stricken people, continuously struggling for meeting their basic needs indulge themselves in different odd activities despite of dire consequences. Some of those are appended below:

4.1 Informal Trade / Smuggling

The Indian sub-continent borders are infested with smuggling or informal trade but in different magnitude. Bangladesh – India border is not exception to this phenomenon. The informal trade along Bangladesh–India border has become a part of life of the bordering people and that is the easiest way to earn livelihood. Smugglers smuggle goods in any sides where they find some bit of profit. The quantity and quality of smuggling commodities also depends on demand-supply theory. The informal trade is not the outcome of present time rather it started much before in the form of exchange of goods between family members and relatives while meeting each other. With the elapse of time, it has increased to a greater level even after preventive measures were taken at different strata.

The most smuggled item along this border is cattle. The issue of Bangladeshi citizens frequently being killed and harassed by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) mainly centered on cow smuggling. The demand-supply theory with other associated affairs like porous border, ban on cattle export by India, prohibition of cow slaughtering in India except West Bengal, Kerala, and parts of the North-East, high-price differences of cows in two countries etc remain as main reasons of huge quantity of smuggling. Smugglers of both the countries have developed different tactics and techniques to have smooth sailing in their business including payment system. In the process, apprehension, harassment and killing of Bangladeshi cow handlers by BSF have become common phenomenon but the kingpins of both the countries remain out of reach. Since 2013 to August 2018, more than eight million cattle have been smuggled into Bangladesh (BGB Headquarters, 2018) which is having very negative effect on establishment and growth of cattle farm in Bangladesh.

4.2 Drugs, Arms and Human Trafficking

Drugs, arms and human trafficking are also common phenomenon along Bangladesh-India land border besides informal trade. This generates terrorist activities and illegal border crossing. Human trafficking, smuggling and drug peddling across the border are issues of mutual concern. Phensedyl production is prohibited according to Bangladesh's pharmaceutical rule since 1982, whereas the same rule is not applicable for India. Many people specially the young generation in Bangladesh are addicted to this drug. Not only phensedyl but also other drugs are smuggled through the border like heroin, yaba tablet, weed, narcotics liquor etc. Lack of monitoring over the long and porous border coupled with sloppy border management promote trafficking. Moreover, the significant portion of this long border areas is open and out of control of border security forces. This weak and vulnerable borderline along with poverty is one of the causes of trafficking. The determination of occurrences of trafficking is difficult because the distinction between trafficking and illegal border crossing is not always clear. This trafficking includes – men, women and children mainly for labour and forced prostitution.

4.3 Torturing and Killing

BSF's Killing of Bangladeshi people in the border area sparks huge criticism in Bangladesh as well as around the world. Continued killing of over a thousand unarmed Bangladeshis by Indian BSF is a negation of the most elementary norms of inter-state behaviour and unheard of in modern inter-state relations between two supposedly friendly countries having normal political, commercial, cultural and historical relations. A total of 1112 Bangladeshi citizens were killed and 1027 citizens were injured within 2000 to 2017 in the border area (Help Stop Killing, 2014). There must have been many unreported killings and injuries as well. According to Human Rights Watch, most of them were killed when they crossed into Indian territory for indulging in cattle smuggling or other similar activities (Tewari, 2019).

4.4 Prevailing Misconception

Some possess misconception mainly with regard to possibilities of Bangladeshi citizens' migration to India. Development of this fallacy basically started from 1947 during the time of border demarcation which was mainly based on religion. Many people opted to migrate as per the given option due to fear of unknown. Many also did not leave the ancestral land and continued the legacy. Again, during the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971, many people took shelter in the adjacent bordering area of India. These two recognized phases of migration has brought some demographic changes in the neighbouring Indian states: West Bengal, Meghalaya, Assam and Tripura. The changed statistics of demography at times leads to develop different concepts. Changed demography has direct effect on the political election in those states. Indian politicians also at times take this issue for politics. So far, neither India nor Bangladesh carried any organized survey to identify the illegal migrants. It is also very critical in nature as people of both sides' language and culture are same. They also look identical. On the contrary, now-a-days it is also vividly exposed to the fact of hosting of Indian migrants in Bangladesh. India earns fourth largest remittance from Bangladesh amounting USD 8.32 billion (Remittance to India, 03 Jul 2018).

It may be more than the officially projected statistics. Without any confusion or debate it can be asserted that there are a large number of Indian migrants in Bangladesh. The estimation varies from 0.5 million to 1 million.

National security concern is another important perceived issue. Trans-border terrorism, separatist activities and other associated cross-border illegal happenings are main alleged apprehensions. Perceived threat and reality are different at least in last one decade's statistics. Both the countries are very much committed to each other's security affairs and their cooperation in curbing terrorism is also reflected in their actions. Handing over of the founder of United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) by Bangladesh is a glaring example of cooperation on perceived security issue. Due to good cooperation and understanding many bilateral issues are already negotiated and solved. These include exchange of enclaves, border demarcation, resolving the sea border dispute peacefully etc. Therefore, both the countries are projecting good neighbourly attitude and zero tolerance on harboring terrorist in any of the countries. In

this pretext, sealing the border and depriving the basic rights of general people of the bordering area in the plea of national security deserve reassessment.

5. Findings of Survey- Reasons of Smuggling

The reasons of smuggling are as follows:

Poverty: Most of the people of the selected areas are poor and to earn daily livelihood some people choose smuggling, where they fall into the nexus of smugglers of both the countries. At times, they adopt the technique of involving influential personalities and agencies.

Joblessness: Remoteness of job opportunity in the bordering area is one of the greatest challenges to stop smuggling in the selected areas. Many people do not have adequate land to farm. Moreover, the density of population is too high than the arable land. Bordering area is also devoid of any kind of industry where people may work.

Influence: Some people are influenced by the rich people and find it as easier way to earn money. Thereby, they act as courier of the smugglers getting oral assurance of money and security.

Homogeneousness: People of both the countries look alike, use same language, know the people and area across the border. Even relatives of many families are also living across the border. These all act as catalyst to indulge an individual to involve in smuggling for earning livelihood.

Illiteracy: Most of the people do not have adequate educational qualification to get a job in the urban area. Due to the illiteracy, they are unable to understand the consequences of immoral activities and fall prey to the greedy businesspersons.

Lacuna in Justice System: Arrestees of smuggling get released easily from the court due to lack of witness. This phenomenon does not help smugglers refrain from smuggling.

6. Findings of Survey–Means to Lessen Odds

A few challenges of Bangladesh – India border management system are discussed earlier and lacunas are highlighted. Some of those are common with other countries but some of them are unique. Before inception of Bangladesh and till today many policies are outlined, measures are adopted but desirable solutions are far away to benefit people. A survey is conducted in the bordering area to get the ground based opinion for finding out probable measures, adoption of which are likely to enhance better border management.

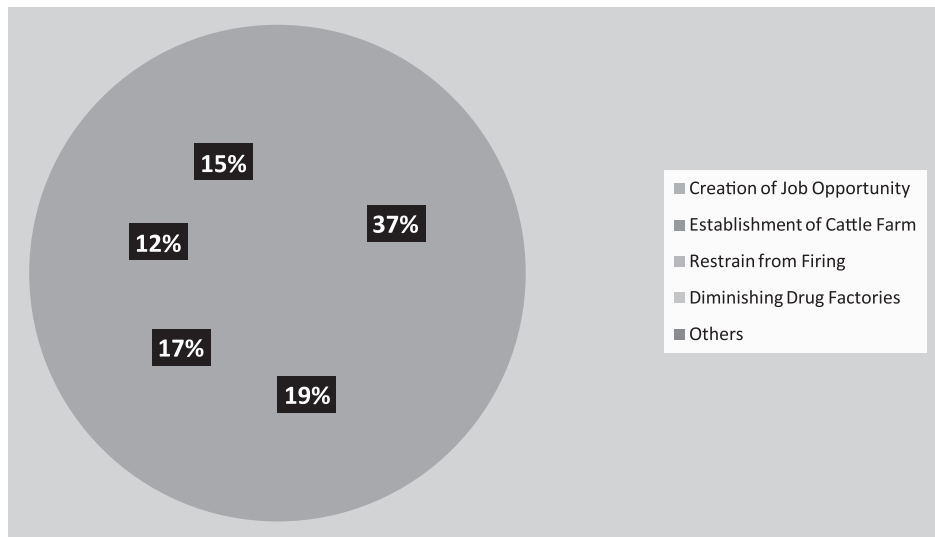


Figure 2: Means to Manage the Border

Source: Field Survey Report - 2017

The figure 2 depicts that creation of job opportunities get top most priority for better border management. Besides, establishing cattle farms and diminishing drug factories along the border also demand adequate attention.

6.1 Creation of Job Opportunities

Poverty seems to be the most dangerous reason for indulging poor and jobless people in smuggling. Their job opportunities also remain shrunk due to their illiteracy. Inadequacy of farming land vis-à-vis high density of population poses extreme difficulties to earn daily livelihood. To commit the bordering area people, both the Governments should make some mega income-generating projects and thereby ensure earning of minimum possible wage by the people to meet the basic needs and live peacefully with their family members. It will help them to refrain themselves from illegal activities in the bordering area. Therefore, both governments should initiate development policies, which can help them to earn basic needs at the poverty stricken bordering regions. Moreover, for ensuring social security and better life of the border area people, steps may be taken like construction/maintenance of roads, water supply, education, health facilities, sports, development of infrastructure etc.

6.2 Establishment of Cattle Farm

Bangladeshi citizens are killed mainly during smuggling of cattle. Demand of cattle is more in Bangladesh. On the contrary, India has surplus where slaughtering of cattle is prohibited also in most of the provinces of India. Moreover, selling of cows is also a religious taboo in India which restricts her to export officially into Bangladesh. To

overcome this, Bangladesh government may establish huge number of dairy farm all over the country which will create job opportunities vis-à-vis nation will be able to meet up its requirement of beef and dairy products. These farms may be established in the bordering area on priority basis which are likely to absorb jobless people and smugglers so that they do not fall into prey of greedy people. Therefore, the demand of cows from India will fall sharply which will have direct bearing on reduction of smuggling within a timeframe automatically. If the project is planned and materialized with a far-reaching goal, smuggling of cows will come to an end. However, it needs elaborate planning and meticulous implementation by concerned departments of the government. Simultaneously, other similar projects like fisheries, poultry farm including other livestock farm may be planned to create job opportunities along the border. Before the implementation of the project a detail in-depth study is required by the experts. The study should include areas, magnitude, involvement, monitoring system, beneficiaries, stakeholders etc.

6.3 Restrain from Using Lethal Weapon

People involved in illegal activities across the border must be taken into custody for justice. Firing of unarmed civilians in the bordering area is simply inhuman in the present-day civilized world, which strongly demands alternative means. Restriction on using fire arms/lethal weapon by BSF against unarmed civilians will play a positive role to stop or reduce killing in the border area.

6.4 Diminishing Drug Factories

India has many drug factories mainly phensedyl along Bangladesh-India Border. On the contrary, production and use of this drug is prohibited in Bangladesh. Indian businessmen in coordination with Bangladeshi counterpart smuggle drug specially phensedyl into Bangladesh. They recruit jobless needy people living in the bordering areas. More than 7,00,000 Bangladeshi people specially youths are addicted to this drug having huge demand in different parts of Bangladesh (bdnews24.com, 03 May 2019). Annually 32 types drug costing approximately 25 billion taka smuggled into Bangladesh (SOMOY TV, News bulletin 02 June 2018). Phensedyl and yaba dominate over other drugs, and sources of these two types are respectively India and Myanmar. India should close phensedyl factories located along the border which are involved in supplying into Bangladesh. These factories may also be used for production of other items instead of drugs which are harmful for both the countries. Bangladesh should also take drastic action against the drug trafficking nexus to save the young generation as well as stop draining out of huge amount of currency.

6.5 Easing Visa System

Every year a huge number of Bangladeshi citizens visit India only for medical treatment. To meet up the requirement of so many applicants, visa process gets delayed at Indian Embassy in Bangladesh. Fearing the deterioration of the patients' criticality some people adopt to cross the border illegally. Steps may be taken to ease up the visa process and thereby lessen the number of illegal border crossing. Simultaneously,

Bangladesh government should make an endeavour to make the treatment facilities effective for its citizens. Confidence building of the citizens about the medical facilities in the country is also an important issue.

6.6 Reshaping of Psyche

Many opine and fear about migration of Bangladeshi citizens to India, if border is not controlled and fenced. Generally, people migrate based on a few probabilities such as to have a quality life, to escape from war (refugee), better job opportunity, gain citizenship, escape religious persecution etc. Bangladesh is a secular peaceful country which has ascended in the rank of lower middle income country. The GDP per capita of Bangladesh has reached \$1,677 in June 2018 according to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). On the contrary, India's GDP per capita is \$1974.76 in 2018. The gross domestic product of Bangladesh from 2013 to 2016 grew at a rate of 12.9%, whereas India had 5.6% (Internet, 03 July 2018). If Bangladesh maintains the same growth gap in Gross National Income (GNI) and GDP with India, the country will overtake India in terms of per capita income by 2020. Bangladesh has already outperformed India in social indicators such as child mortality rate, gender equality, and life expectancy. So the possibility of migration from Bangladesh to India is unlikely. Moreover, Bangladesh government officially send skilled and unskilled manpower to many countries such as KSA, UAE, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, Malaysia, Singapore, Italy, USA etc. India does not offer any lucrative migration related facilities to Bangladeshi citizens. Both the countries still maintain some parts of the border which is neither fenced nor guarded. Migration seekers may cross the border if they desire with some difficulties but that is not occurring. So, the possibility of migration and its magnitude may be at present a hypothetical assumption. Moreover, as per the statistics, in 2016 Indian workers earned \$62.744 billion remittances from other countries. On the contrary, foreign workers in India took away \$5.685 billion remittances from India to their home countries.

On the contrary, remittance earned by Bangladeshis from India is not even mentionable in comparison to other countries. There is a long controversy and concern about entry of Bangladeshis in India without any concrete statistics and evidences. Even then, some Indian politicians as well as academicians enthusiastically take part in the support of erecting border wire fence. Bangladesh always strongly disagrees with the Indian statistics and statements. Thus, illegal migrants from Bangladesh to India remain as an unsettled debated issue. On the contrary, huge earning of remittance by India from Bangladesh clearly signifies that Bangladesh hosts a huge number of Indian citizens as circular migrants. Thus, Bangladesh offers a conducive environment for Indian citizens to work here. In this perspective, India may also offer opportunities for Bangladeshi citizens to work in India and thereby grow together. Instead of fencing the border, an alternative modus operandi may be worked out which will be beneficial for both the nations.

7. Conclusion

The existing Bangladesh – India border odds inherited by Bangladesh are mainly due to inappropriate attention to the issue. It was initiated from Radcliffe’s irrational and faulty demarcation of the border. With the elapse of time, population in the bordering area has increased to a greater extent vis-à-vis arable land which has shriveled. Joblessness, illiteracy and poverty engulfed bordering area people and forced them to indulge with different types of odd activities for meeting their livelihoods. Informal trades and cattle lifting dominates over other odds along the border where people from both the sides are involved.

Bangladesh is a lower middle income country and maintaining upward economic growth with peaceful conducive community security environment. Skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled people from Bangladesh are regularly sent officially to Middle-Eastern countries, Malaysia, Singapore etc. with better job opportunities and lucrative offer. Whereas, job market for Bangladeshi people in India is not at all conducive as well as attractive. On the contrary, India earns 4th largest remittance from Bangladesh through huge number of circular migrants. Therefore, possibility of migration from Bangladesh to India and its magnitude is likely to be a hypothetical assumption. Instead of debating on an imaginary issue both the countries should concentrate for the development of the bordering area people. Man made border policy must not be prioritized over humanity, rather deep and profound philosophy of kindness should get importance. Political goodwill of both the countries can curb all border related problems including death on the borderline which will help manage the border in a better and desirable way. Above all, besides workable neighbouring relations and environment border management should ensure public safety and security with economic development.

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