

## Bangladesh - India Land Border Management: A Study on Border Haats

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### Abstract

*As a significant part of border management, the contribution of Border Haats (localized cross-border market places) in Border Area Development Plan and Neighbourhood Policy is noteworthy. The present research attempts to find out the better Border Haats trade management measures. To accomplish this study, focused group discussion, interviews and survey method have been applied for collecting data. Total sample size is 150. It has been found that opening of border trade routes through Border Haats brings economic prosperity and acts as a harbinger of change for the people living in remote border areas and has an encouraging impact on their psychology and emotional well-being and offers them with a natural environment for better economic collaborations. The study puts forward some recommendations which should be implemented to enhance the performance of Border Haats that will in turn contribute in further strengthening the bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India.*

**Keywords:** India-Bangladesh land border management, Border trade, Border haat, Bilateral relations, Border management

### 1. Introduction

International boundaries commonly known as borders are demarcated to designate an area united by a typical political/lawful system. Borders define the nationality as well as the independence of a country. They outline the extent of economic rules and regulations encompassing money, tariffs and duties. Although there appear to be definitive political boundaries between countries on large-scale geopolitical maps, it should be understood that in most circumstances, borders are essentially virtual. Efforts to demarcate borders through fences, walls, demarcation pillars, outposts, etc. have not resulted in perfect barriers to persons wishing to cross borders in either direction. In some cases, the very definition of land borders has been the cause of conflicts between countries. There were no boundaries in South Asia before 1947 and the countries in this region were under the form of Indian Subcontinent. People and goods often moved freely from one part to the another without much hindrance. When the British rulers left Indian subcontinent in 1947, boundaries were hastily drawn mostly following the fault lines of religion, language and ethnicity ignoring other important demographic factors. Therefore, the development of border within the Indian subcontinent has a prolonged past inheritance, which repeatedly has been a root of anxiety and dispute (Das, 2010). The then East Pakistan (present Bangladesh) map was drawn within the pockets of India without considering the socio-cultural and ground reality perspective. Thus, after the border demarcation, it was found that at some locations, parts of the same household lie on opposite side of the border. In course of time, the villages

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have also expanded, disregarding the borderline depicted by widely spaced border pillars. Interstate relations are governed by many factors such as: diplomacy, security, economy, culture and geopolitics. These factors in many ways are influenced and/or affected by the multifarious aspects of 'Border Management'.

Statistically Bangladesh shares 4096 km land boundary with India. Border management among India-Bangladesh can be made more effective. Border management is one of the key state functions because of many important cross border exchanges like: trade, investment, migration, tourism and sharing of natural resources. An effectively managed border can bring dividends to the government and foster inter-state relations. Unfortunately, both Bangladesh and India failed to gain economic benefits due to poor border management system (Aniszewski, 2009). Bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh affects the economies that survive around the border areas. Due to healthy business atmosphere around the border area there has been an improvement in the economic situation of local people. This has benefitted an array of groups performing different roles through backward and forward linkages to trade related economic activities. The rationale for trade through 'Border Haat' arises from two main factors. The first factor is the remoteness of the border areas, which does not allow access of the local people to commercial centres to sell their products and buy items of daily necessity within the national borders. The second is the traditional socio-cultural ties and economic complementarity that these people share across the border, provides them with a natural milieu for greater economic interactions. Keeping these factors in mind, such trade is allowed so that the residents can trade their surplus products in exchange of essential commodities from across the international borders. Such type of trade is based on mutual trust developed over a period of time through sustained interactions between traders residing on both sides of the border. Such border trade forms a part of border management and border area development plan as it provides an alternate means of livelihood to the border residents in the economically depressed areas. With this backdrop, this study aims to analyze Bangladesh-India land border management system including border trade with special focus on Border Haats with a view to enhance bilateral relations.

## **2. Significance of the Study**

The very geostrategic location offers Bangladesh to become a communication hub between South and Southeast Asia on communication, economic, cultural and political issues with her bordering countries which make her borders important to neighbours. Thus, the issues and problems related to borders may not always be seen through the security lenses only, as has been the case in the past. The problems of border management between Bangladesh and India have strategic significance from many points of view. India shares her longest border with Bangladesh, yet this boundary is not carefully managed. Moreover, border management and border related problems are grave problems the solution of which are not readily available and dependent on many complex internal, regional and international interests, both conflicting and complimentary (Kamrul, 2013).

Border trade with the neighbouring country specially India has resulted in significant tangible as well as intangible gains both to the bilateral relations as well as people residing along various borders. The successful conduct of the trade and the positive changes that it

has brought about in the lives of the people have induced a number of border communities as well as governments to demand/request the reopening of additional trade routes. Therefore, every effort must be given to solve the border management related issues within which having special focus on Border Haat can contribute positively in India-Bangladesh relation and foster interstate relation.

### **3. Literature Review**

Evidently it was hard to find reference materials on research conducted specifically on the subject. By and large, there was a scarcity of single-authored comprehensive study of the nuances of managing the Indo-Bangladesh border, particularly study on Border Haats in the context of their overall bilateral relationship. Most of the literature that has attempted analysis or prescription of the border problems between the two countries has been based on the narrow interpretation of border management, often recommending more stringent control measures or an early resolution of the border disputes as a way forward to achieve amity. However, all related and associated available materials including books/papers/documents etc. were consulted to have an in depth understanding of the issues are enumerated below:

According to Willem van Schendel (2004), 'The Bengal Borderland' comprises the focus of division of British India. But during the formation of multinational border amongst Bangladesh, Pakistan, India and Burma (the 'Bengal Borderland'), there has been a crucial matter in partitions which has been mostly overlooked by historians. Delwar Hussain (2013) also mentions about India-Bangladesh geopolitics, a high fence, trans-border coal mining, neoliberalism and eunuchs have in common. Mariya Polner (2011) recognizes that in a globalized world where interconnectedness and integration are crucial dynamics impelling economic growth and social advancement, policy makers progressively perceive the demand for increased cross-border regulatory reform to eliminate unnecessary obstacle and liabilities on trade. Puspita Das (2008) in her research deduced that ignoring the importance of economics of movement of people and goods for the sake of security would not be positive. Thus, she recommended having a realistic and peopling centric border management. Shakhawat (2015) identified that a holistic systemic approach is needed to deal with the challenges of border management. Puspita Das (2008) in her strategic analysis concluded that border trade refers to the trade of local products of inadequate value by the people residing near the international border. Even though the impact of this trade in a country's economy is insignificant, it has important effect on its relations with its neighbours and on the people residing near the border. At the bilateral level, it is a major confidence building measure (CBM) as it reduces trust shortfalls, encourages positive engagements, stabilizes the borders by minimizing conflicts and gives a legal basis to the disputed international borders (Das, 2014).

The rationale for border trade arises from two main factors. The first factor is the remoteness of the border areas, which does not allow access of the local people to commercial centres to sell their products and buy items of daily necessity within the national borders. The second is the traditional socio-cultural ties and economic complementarity that these people share across the border, provides them with a natural milieu for greater economic interactions. Keeping these factors in mind, border trade is allowed so that the residents can trade their surplus products in exchange of essential commodities from across the international borders.

Such type of trade is barter in nature as it is based on mutual trust developed over a period of time through sustained interactions between traders residing on both sides of the border. Border trade forms a part of border area development plan as it provides an alternate means of livelihood to the border residents in the economically depressed areas. Successful conduct of border trade also curbs smuggling in essential items as it provides legitimacy to traditional exchange of commodities. (Das, 2014)

From the review of the literatures mentioned above, it is evident that border and its management are important for interstate relations. But, how and in which way effective land border management, particularly through effective operation of the Border Haats can help strengthen the relationship between Bangladesh and India, have not been clearly discussed in any of the literatures. Therefore, this study is designed to fill these voids.

#### **4. Objectives**

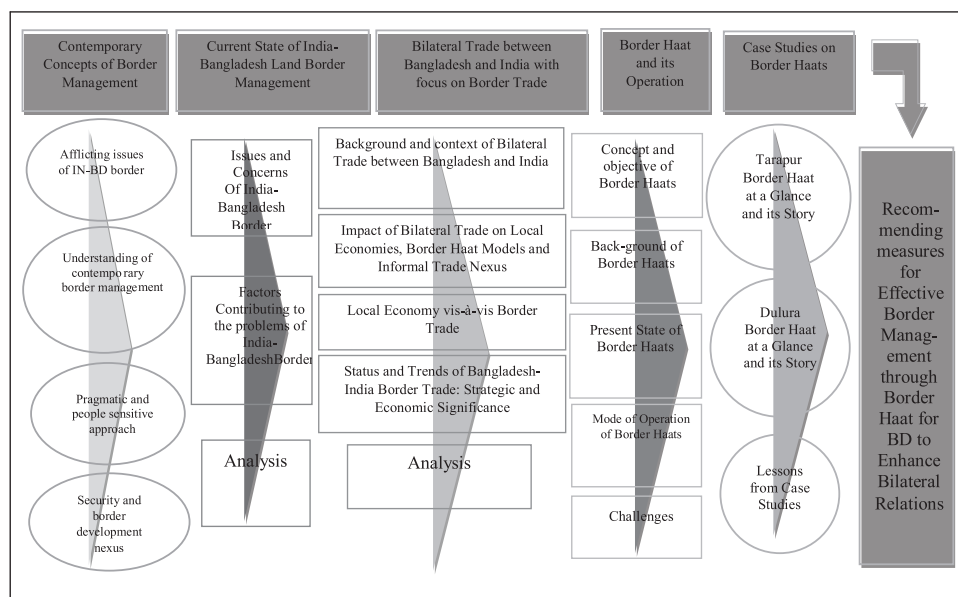
This research deals with the following objectives:

- To analyze Bangladesh-India land border management system including border trade with special focus on Border Haat.
- To analyse and find out the current trends and significance (strategic, human and economic development) of border trade between Bangladesh and India highlighting the issues and concerns about border haats.
- To suggest measures/strategies to enhance the functioning of Border Haats with the fundamental aim of improving Bangladesh-India bilateral relations.

#### **5. Research Methodology**

The main source of evidence used in this study is qualitative data collected via semi-structured interviews. The study depends on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data has been collected through interviews and interactions with important personalities and experts in the relevant field. Hence, data for this study were collected from 150 respondents. This study used the convenience sampling technique for smooth data collection from the executives. Director General (DG) of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), one Region Commander, two Sector Commanders of BGB, two Border out post (BOP) Commanders, officials of local administration, customs, immigration, common people and other stake holders involved in Border Haat have been interviewed to develop a correct and current perspective of the ground realities to substantiate information gained from secondary sources. Under the content analysis, literature review has been conducted on the already published documents such as books, articles, newspaper articles, research reports and statistical sources on the existing border management issues. Secondary data has been collected from related books, journals, periodicals, daily newspapers and other related documents/materials. Researcher's own experience of commanding as the Region Commander of the North-West region, Sector Commander of Mymensingh and Guimara sectors, Battalion Commander of Naogaon and Commandant of Border Guard Training Centre & School of the BGB was also useful for the entire research. This study is enriched with the help of all materials available in library and internet. The findings of the study are presented mostly in qualitative manner. The interviews are not only used as complement to the information but also to visualize the issues discussed. Qualitative data have been

processed and analyzed manually. All the data and findings of the study are described and analyzed in detail according to the theoretical framework. An attempt was also made to have discussions with the concerned officials of Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and Ministry of Commerce to understand the perspective of the government on border management, border haat and other related issues. Effective coordination at the functional level to facilitate movement of legitimate people and goods across the border including use of Border Haat may be achieved through adopting and implementing a well-coordinated border management strategy. A conceptual framework of the research is given below:

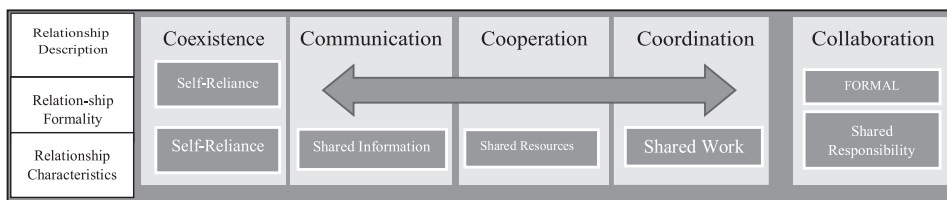


**Figure 1:** Conceptual Flow Chart of Research Work

## 5. Contemporary Concepts of Border Management

Globalization has led the world to emphasize on trade and economic growth and thus the policy makers seem to be understanding the demand of escalated cross-border regulatory reforms to eliminate unnecessary obstacles and liabilities on trade and mobility. Since mid-1990s, there has been an increasing demand to coordinate effort of various agencies at border to expedite trade. Different institutes started evolving a concept that is presently known as Coordinated Border Management (CBM). By meaning, CBM is point of interest to non-customs border agencies, international organizations and policymakers. In general, Figure 2 provides guidelines on different ways of working together: from informal, including almost no sharing of information and resources, to formal, where staff members work as one team. According to this continuum of inter-governmental integration, there are different degrees of relationships between the governmental agencies.

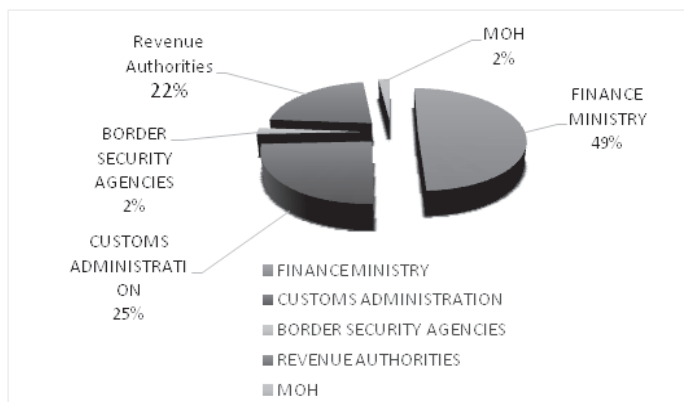




Source: Institute of Policy Studies, 2008

**Figure 2:** Continuum of Inter-governmental Integration

Various border agencies are working under different institutional arrangements to coordinate the activities of various border agencies or even to merge them under one roof, thus reducing the number of agencies at the border. Approximately 50% of 177 World Customs Organization (WCO) member country’s border agencies are within the Ministries of Finance (MOF) in the form of an administration, (General) Directorate or Department, while 25% countries have independent custom administrations which do not form part of any ministry. Approximately 22% country’s customs and tax administrations are integrated into revenue authorities. These three types of agencies, those within MOF, independent customs and revenue authorities, sometimes have a partial or no delegation of border functions as example, the control over people crossing the border is still performed by border guards, police or an immigration authority (Figure 3).



Source: World Customs Journal, 2010, Volume 5, Number 2

**Figure 3:** Border Management System of Different Countries

From concepts and theories of various model like OSBPs (One-Stop-Border-Posts), OCOS (One Country Office Strategy) or CBM, it cannot be quickly deduced which concept or model is best suited for Indo-Bangladesh border. But undeniably there is an urgent need to follow a realistic OSBP/OCOS concept that will accelerate the economy of not only India and Bangladesh but as a whole the entire region. It is also well understood that before finding a suitable way for border management, the issues and concerns related to specific borders have to be discussed and critically analyzed to find effective solutions.

## **6. Current State of India-Bangladesh Land Border Management**

Bangladesh-India border is defined as a 'problem area of future'. Though India-Bangladesh border is the third largest in the world, it is not attentively managed. But there are other geo-political and geo-strategic factors that make border management in this region complicated. Indo-Bangladesh border is densely populated specially in the Southwest part of Bangladesh. Moreover, the border is highly circuitous and does not follow any natural barrier which meanders through agricultural lands, villages and rivers. All these make the border tremendously porous. Porosity of border causes multiple problems, ranging from smuggling, drugs, illegal migration and human trafficking to free movement of insurgents, terrorists, gun running and criminals alongside frequent clashes between Border Security Forces. Recent Assam's Citizenship issue related to NRC (National Register of Citizens) is another problem. These problems create challenges to security, development and peace.

## **7. Significance of India-Bangladesh Land Border Management**

Bangladesh, being an important country at least geographically, in South Asia has to play a significant role in the perspectives of geo-politics, geo-economics and geo-strategy for the overall security and development of the region. Issues and disputes related to borders in this region have put the countries in contrasting roles, rather than being complimentary to each other's interest(s). The people living along the region of porous borders need to be included in the development process with the mainstream people of the country and they should be engaged more and more in the socio-economic activities of the country. In this regard, establishment of more border posts, Border Haats and ICPs are likely to make positive impacts on the life of people living close to the borders (Kamrul, 2014). India being the country aspiring to be the economic power hub of the world in near future has to take lead role in the border management and evidently it is moving in right direction. For India it is important now to march ahead together with the neighbouring countries. Considering the divergence of problems and state of existing relations among India-Bangladesh, stakeholders at the borders are intensifying efforts for improving external coordination. (Kamrul, 2014). Recently, Bangladesh and India have decided to work together to combat border smuggling and strengthen cooperation to make border management more effective. Significant outcome of the cooperative framework was the signing of the Coordinated Border Management Plan on July 30, 2011. The aim of this plan is to "enhance quality of border management as well as ensure cross-border security" by addressing challenges to the peace and sanctity of the border posed by human and drug trafficking, gun running and cross border crimes. Under the Plan, India and Bangladesh have agreed to conduct joint coordinated patrols in areas susceptible to trafficking and other crimes based on shared intelligence inputs. Rampant smuggling along the border is yet another border management challenge which both countries are seeking to curb by agreeing to reopen border haats (market places). Till 1971, people residing on either side of the border used to trade their surplus products in return for essential items. But these haats were shut down during Bangladesh's war of liberation, which not only led to economic hardship for the people but also fuelled widespread smuggling across the border. Realising the need for border haats, India and Bangladesh decided to re-open two such haats as part of a pilot project. The first of these opened at Kalaichar-Baliyamari (West Garo Hills-Kurigram) on July 23, 2011.

It will be held once a week every Wednesday from 10 am to 4 pm. It was counted that trade in this haat alone will total US\$ 30 million a year (Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses (IDSA) Report-2015). After the success of Border Haat project, more such haats were opened. The border haat operates on good faith among its regular attendees. Because of dual currency and barter exchange being a norm, a deep layer of trust is established. There is a great demand for Bangladeshi and Indian goods at the border haats.

**Table 1:** Demand for Bangladeshi and Indian goods at the Border Haats

<b>The Sweet Taste of Profit</b>	
Bangladeshi buyers want	Indian cosmetics, saris, fruits, betel nut, sandals
Indian buyers want	plastic buckets, plastic chairs, plastic jars, melamine crockeries, readymade garments, chips, biscuits, dry cake, fruit juices

Source: bdnews24.com (2017)

According to bdnews24.com (2017), Dhaka has proposed introduction of cattle trade at the Bangladesh-India border haats (markets), a move that is likely to face opposition from India where some of the states have banned cow slaughter. The neighbours are yet to formally discuss the sensitive matter as cow is sacred in Hindu-dominated India. This initiative may stop cattle smuggling in border areas. An estimated two million cows are smuggled into Bangladesh from India annually (Source: <https://bdnews24.com/business/2015/08/16/bangladesh-proposes-including-cattle-trade-at-the-border-haats>). According to Reuters report (2017), until July 2017, the BSF seized 140,000 cattle and caught 600 Indian and Bangladeshi smugglers. The ban in India, world's largest beef exporter and fifth-biggest consumer, has pushed up meat prices in Bangladesh and put the leather industry in a crunch. It has also brought down beef prices in India and is threatening the livelihood of thousands involved with the trade. A Times of India report in April 2018 said plugging cattle smuggling would cost India Rs 510 billion or roughly Tk 588 billion annually.

### 8. Border Trade Between Bangladesh and India

Bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh affects the economies that survive around the border areas. The impact of this trade on local economy has its own rewards and damages. Due to healthy business atmosphere around the border area, there has been an improvement in the economic situation of local people. The main constraint to trade competitiveness and growth for sectors from both countries is poor transport and business-to-business connectivity. Another weakness in trade between both countries is lack of diversification of their respective trade baskets. Bangladesh's exports to India are dominated by labour-intensive manufacturing and its imports from India are dominated by primary commodities (CUTS Report, 2012). Three types of bilateral border trade occurred between Bangladesh and India. These are formal, informal and quasi formal border trade. For examples, cross-border 'informal trade', mostly with India and Bangladesh, in agricultural products which is highly dominated by cattle trade. Coal import from India is an example of 'formal



border trade'. Goods like vegetables, textiles, automobile parts, jewellery, cosmetics, medicines, tobacco, herbal products, spices and herbs are the goods in question in Bangladesh India border region. Because these goods involve Informal Procedures which have influence on Quasi-Formal Cross-Border Trade between Bangladesh and India. For India, enhancing trade with Bangladesh would address numerous worries of economic segregation of its retrogressive north eastern provinces and create new market open doors for little scale traders from the backward hinterlands of eastern provinces. For Bangladesh, broader-regions of cooperation, investment as well as allied development prospects will be available with further trade opportunities with India. It is notable that various non-tariff hindrances have made this trade expensive, rendering many high potential items infeasible.

India and Bangladesh have effectively employed the mechanism of border trade for positively engaging each other and bring resemblance of normalcy to conflict prone borders. Trade across border has enabled improved socio-cultural as well as economic collaborations between partitioned families of border regions and performed as major CBM between two countries. Border trade is not only the foremost stepping-stone for deepening mutual relationship but also is a tool for improved border management by allowing informal trade. Bringing economic affluence, border trade has also played important role in impoverished border areas. The positive experience of border haats has prompted and developed the relation between two countries. Border Haats are boosting the local economy, creating opportunities for haat participants by:

- Increasing the income of vendors.
- Opening up new business opportunities for buyers who source from the haats and sell locally.
- Creating opportunities for transporters who operate more trips on haat days and for small businesses like food joints and vehicle repair shops set up outside the premises.
- Border Haats have helped empowering women.
- Cross border relations have improved through more people-to-people contacts.
- Goods earlier exchanged informally across the border are now sold at the haats, thus reducing informal trade.

As far as the India-Bangladesh border is concerned, Indo-Bangladesh border is densely populated specially in the Southwest part of Bangladesh. Moreover, the border is highly circuitous and does not follow any natural barrier but meanders through villages, agricultural lands and rivers. All these make the border extremely porous. And porosity of border causes a multitude of problems, ranging from illegal migration, smuggling, and drug and human trafficking to gun running, the free movement of insurgents, terrorists, and criminals besides frequent clashes between the Border Security Forces of the two countries (Das, 2010). These problems pose serious challenges to peace, development and security.

### **9. Border Haat and Its Operation**

The Border Haats (localized cross-border market places) have been established with the objective of helping in promoting the prosperity of border people of both nations by creating traditional marketing system for local products to be exchanged in local currency and/or barter basis through native markets. Importance of trade exchange through haats lies at different levels; at international diplomatic level, it is a “high visibility- low cost” image creating exercise, which promotes regional peace. At bilateral level, it is a significant confidence building measure (CBM) as it lessens trust shortfalls, inspires positive engagements and soothes borders by minimizing the conflicts. At local level, it fetches economic benefits to far-flung border people and brings encouraging impact on peoples’ emotive well-being. The lead responsibility is undertaken by the Commerce Ministry of both nations to keep up border haats. The justification for Border Haat trade originates mainly from two main aspects. The primary factor is remoteness of border regions, which does not enable access for native people to business centres to vend their items and purchase things of daily needs inside national boundary. The second is the age old socio-cultural bonds as well as economic complementarity which are shared by the border people and offers them with natural environment for greater economic collaborations. Such kind of trade exchange depends on reciprocal trust created over some stretch of time through continued collaborations between traders living on two sides of boundary. Such a trade forms part of border area development plan and border management.

It can be mentioned here that, Border Haat started its journey in 2010 and already there are four border haats functional. Out of these first one was at Balamari in Kurigram District corresponding to Kalaichar in West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya, second one was at Dulura in Sunamganj District corresponding to Balat in East Khasi Hills of Meghalaya. Other two Border Haats are at Tarapur of Kasba in Brahmanbaria District corresponding to Kamlasagar in West Tripura and at Takia Mazar of Chhoighoria in Feni District, Bangladesh corresponding to Srinagar, Purbo Madhyagram, Tripura. But the three years term of border haats has already expired. Now there is a new proposal of agreement. In that the term of border haats have been proposed to be increased upto five years. Also, number of vendors have been proposed to be increased upto 50 from 25. Ceiling of buying items from border haats have been increased upto \$200 from \$100. Six more haats around different part of the border including Juri and Kamolgonj of Moulvi Bazar are in the process i.e. two Border Haats opposite to Tripura and four Border Haats opposite to Meghalaya of India. Six more haats around different parts of the border are also going to be processed subsequently. At present, high officials of Bangladesh and India have agreed in principle to set up more border haats (markets) along common points in the future considering local demand.



\*Legend:

- ▲ - Existing Border Haats
- - Existing LCS

**Figure 4:** Map Showing the Existing Border Haats and LCs

## 10. Challenges Faced by Border Haats

Though the Border Haats are raised with good objectives and intension, they have multifarious challenges which are enumerated below:

- It was found that similar consumption pattern along with the interdependence of needs between the two sides of the political boundaries has given rise to informal channels of trade in goods and services. Bootleg smuggling and technical smuggling are the two facets of informal trade that are taking place between India and Bangladesh. Trade of goods in small quantities carried out by large number of people through illegal means is known as bootleg smuggling. Technical smuggling involves trade of goods in large quantities, generally through

truckloads and formal custom channels, yet it involves illicit activities like under-invoicing, obfuscation and bribery to the officials. As a result, Red-Tapism including undue influences affects the desired management of Border Haat. Local common people of the border area feel and understand the real/actual necessities related to border haat, but local leaders, administration, other departments and ministry do not feel and understand it in that way.

- No survey is carried out by the ministry concerned to find out the things/items that are needed to be exchanged in Border Haats. The quality of product exported from India to Bangladesh is being hampered due to specific restrictions on the technical standards of products (vice versa). All outgoing products from Indian market to Bangladesh are required to go for a quality test in centres located in Calcutta or Guwahati and the entire process often takes at least 15-25 days to get the quality report (Islam, 2011).
- Perspective/long term planning is absent which often creates hindrance in attaining desired objective and good border haat management.
- It was found that the local economy in all the localities around LCS is almost entirely dependent on the trade and allied activities. Some of the local people are misusing this opportunity as a business and even many businessmen come from Dhaka and others cities/developed towns which goes against the noble objective of the Border Haat.
- Another restriction forbids the movement of motor vehicles of both the countries from crossing the 'no man's land' thus creating unnecessary hassles in the transshipment of goods across the border. This is not only time-consuming, but also adds to the price of the goods. The costs pertaining to loading/unloading and warehousing are no less substantial and ultimately add to the product cost. Timely actions are not being taken by the authority concerned to ensure good management of Border Haat.
- There are certain regulations laid by India and Bangladesh for the transit of goods through the ports along the borders. Some of these regulations have a detrimental impact on the growth and diversification activities that are taking place around the local economies. India and Bangladesh have imposed certain restrictions on the movements of Bangladeshi citizens inside Indian cities (vice-versa) for the purpose of business/investment. A plethora of legal formalities by the respective governments have squeezed out the profit potential of the local market in these countries. Bangladeshi citizens are restricted to travel to certain northeast states like Mizoram and Nagaland. They also face problems in renting apartments for accommodations and are subject to police reporting on a weekly basis. Visa procedures adopted by the Indian authority for Bangladesh travelers are also not encouraging for good business interactions between the two countries. For that reasons, management including local administration of border haat is not perfect as good teamwork is absent.

- Poor connectivity in terms of transportation and communication links in the border regions is the main hurdle in conducting border trade. Almost all the trading posts along the borders are characterized by poor domestic as well as cross border road links. Recurrent landslides which destroy roads links to the passes and beyond has led to frequent delays or/and at times suspension of border trade. For examples, access route to Dulura-Balat border haat along India-Bangladesh border is also in poor condition. The road is not only narrow but is poorly maintained. As a result, travel time to the haat increases by manifold.
- A combination of factors such as difficult terrain, low population threshold and security concerns make it difficult to operationalize telecommunication services along the border areas. Along India-Bangladesh borders, communication across the border has been barred because of security reasons. Mobile phone services are not available in Dulura of Sunamgonj District corresponding to Balat of East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya, India and Baliamari of Kurigram District corresponding to Kalaichar of West Garo Hills, Meghalaya, India.
- Trading period along the borders gets restricted because of inclement weather, political unrests, strikes, etc. Trading season becomes further restricted when roads get damaged because of heavy rains and landslide, a problem which is common to all the borders. Political unrests, both domestic and bilateral, also adversely affects cross-border trade. Trade gets suspended whenever the security situation at the borders deteriorates. Disputes between traders and custom officials over the abolition of duties on commodities and strikes over the demand of expansion of trading list and better facilities have resulted in frequent suspension of cross-Border Trade.

## **11. Recommendations**

Basing on the challenges faced by Border Haats, the following aspects are recommended:

- Replication of Border Haat models at new areas would profit all the more little scale makers of border areas. Present Border Haats at Meghalaya-Bangladesh outskirts apropos exhibited that haats can produce genuinely necessary economic as well as welfare benefits for individuals living in peripheral regions of two nations. Expanded number of haats will likewise help in seizing informal trade, especially little-time casual exchange and 'contraband smuggling'.
- There is a need to improve the existing management system of Border Haats. All concerned stake holders should be informed by timely information and event analysis to enhance decision making. Timely actions should be taken by the authority concerned to ensure good management of Border Haats. Focusing on that point of view, authority concerned should form a 'Team' including local admin, customs, BGB and other stakeholders with clear instructions to ensure perfect management. A Border Haat Cell under the Ministry of Commerce should be created in coordination with MOHA and MOFA as early as possible to promptly deal with all border haat related issues.



- The infrastructure of existing Border Haats should be improved immediately including the widening of the haat area, construction of new sheds etc. Steps should be also taken to develop parking and limited warehouse/storage facilities adjacent to Border Haat.
- Survey should be conducted by the Ministry of Commerce as to which things/items are needed in which border haat. There is also the need to ensure consultation of trade bodies periodically before finalizing/reviewing the trading list. Need for regular multi-stakeholder consultations for informing/reviewing policies towards long term growth/sustainability of Border Haats.
- It is needed to improve procedural efficiencies at Border Haats. Authority concerned should upsurge more activities to improve and regulate Border Haat trade and associated services. Arrangement of limited mobile/remote banking with facilities of money exchange should be introduced.
- Steps should be taken to prepare and implement “Perspective/Long Term Planning” to ensure sustainable socio-economic development of the people of border areas. Both the countries should increase socio-economic development activities of border areas with joint collaboration.
- Beside the far-flung areas, there are number of communication centers in and around the border. New Border Haats should be made in and around those places taking their location advantage which will facilitate further connectivity and the overall socio-economic development of those remote areas. More Border Haats in important places should be opened which will contribute to future regional connectivity.
- Steps should be taken to improve BSF and BGB relation. Accordingly, structural and institutional/organizational development activities are also needed in border areas.
- Steps should be taken to arrange events in haat areas like; cultural programmes on festivals (e.g. ‘Bangla Nobo Borsho’, Eid, Puja etc.) and at a suitable interval regularly, ‘small scale exhibitions/carnival/Melas/Fair’ etc. should be arranged too. This would enhance people to people relationship between both the countries.

## **12. Conclusion**

Border management issues being trans-national in nature, a holistic systemic approach is needed to deal with the challenges of border management. Therefore, both countries (India and Bangladesh) need to evolve integrated national border management concept to synchronise and de-conflict the role and functions of a large number of agencies involved in various border related activities. An efficiently managed border will benefit the government and foster inter-state relations. Unfortunately, both Bangladesh and India failed to gain economic benefits due to poor border management system. The very geo-strategic location offers Bangladesh to become a communication hub between South and Southeast Asia on communication, economic, cultural and political issues with her bordering countries

which make her borders important to neighbours. Bangladesh shares its longest border with India (Kamrul, 2013). Strong border management is vital for national and regional stability - as well as for economic growth.

Though India-Bangladesh border is the third largest in the world, but this border is not attentively managed, as Das argued. But there are other geo-political and geo-strategic factors that make the border management in this region complicated. The India-Bangladesh border traverses along a range of natural and cultural landscapes, which pose a challenge to its effective management. The balance of trade is enormously adverse against Bangladesh. For India, increment in trade exchange with Bangladesh would address numerous worries of financial disengagement of its retrogressive north eastern states and create new market open doors for little scale producers from the impoverished hinterlands of eastern states. For Bangladesh, more extensive areas of collaboration, investment and common development prospects will be more noteworthy trade exchange openness with India. In addition, India and Bangladesh has long-standing obligation to regional economic collaboration in South Asia, of which their reciprocal trade exchange is an important part.

Therefore, the people living along the region of porous borders need to be included in the development process with the mainstream people of the country and they should be engaged more and more in the socio-economic activities of the country. In this regard, establishment of more number of Border Posts, ICPs, Border Haats are likely to make positive impacts on the life of people living close to the borders. The Border Haat experience was really positive and it seems to be generating a lot of immediate economic benefits to people living in the border areas without too much effort or investment on part of the governments on either side. It seems that Border Haats will really be the harbinger of change for the people in border areas. 'Border Haat' as an important part/effort of coordinated border management approach have multifarious challenges/issues/concerns which if identified and addressed will result in enhancement of Border Haat performance towards greater contribution for strengthening bilateral relations between India and Bangladesh.

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